

2009 FALL SYMPOSIUM
Soldiers & Citizens
Military and Civic Culture in America
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Robsham Theater, Boston College

SESSION 3: Cultural Influences: The Military, Politics and Society in 21st Century
America

Panelists: Rick Atkinson, American Academy in Berlin
Andrew Bacevich, Boston University
Sarah Sewall, Kennedy School of Government
Rachel Maddow, MSNBC

LEFF: Welcome back to the third and last section of the symposium. I'm Susan Leff, and I'm Vice Chair of Mass Humanities. Thank you for coming today. Session three, as you know, is about cultural influences, "The Military, Politics, and Society in 21st century America". The gap between military and civilian cultures in America is not new. In his classic study of the theory of politics of military-civilian relations in America, *The Soldier and the State*, Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington observed that, throughout most of our history, the armed forces have had the outlook of an estranged minority. Thirty years later, the journalist Arthur Hadley extended the metaphor, and described the relationship as the great divorce.

The ensuing 20 years have seen the end of the Cold War, the election of two Baby Boomer Presidents who famously, as we've just discussed, avoided the draft and the war in Vietnam, and far-reaching changes in both the military and society that have served to further separate the two cultures. When Larry told his anecdote about Dick Cheney, it made me think that, as one of the 78 million Baby Boomers out there, my college years were completely colored and shaped in every way by the Vietnam War. However, having said that, I never knew one person who actually served in Vietnam at that time, nor did I know anyone who was a direct relative of anyone who served, or was injured, or died until much, much later in my career. And it was only when I went to visit the Vietnam Memorial in Washington that I really felt the full magnitude of those 55,000 people who died in that war. And I'm sure many of my generation share that.

We all had had fathers who had served in World War II, and that's part of this disconnect, I think, that we're talking about today. What do civilians need to understand about the military? What constructive steps can be taken to bridge the gap between the military and civic culture in the United States? Whose responsibility is it to begin bridging that gap? What should a 21st century American military establishment look like? Here to moderate, and to help us answer those questions, is Rachel Maddow, and I'd like to introduce her briefly. I'm sure you all know who she is, and you have a longer biography in your program. She hosts *The Rachel Maddow Show* on MSNBC and Air America. She holds a PhD in political science from Oxford University, where she was a Rhodes scholar. A rising star in cable news television – do you really want me to say this about you? A rising star? I think you've already risen. A risen star. (laughter)

MADDOW: I left my body long ago. (laughter)

LEFF: But the most important thing to those of us involved with Mass Humanities is that she got her start at WRSI in Northampton, which is our headquarters and our home. And with that, Rachel, thank you for coming, and welcome.

MADDOW: Thank you very, very much. (applause) I will say that it is a humbling experience to be able to moderate this panel and introduce this very impressive group, given that I am a TV show host. Our subject is the military and politics in society, military culture and civilian culture, and whether the twain shall ever meet. And our panelists, I will introduce them alphabetically, because that's the only fair thing to do. Our panelists are Rick Atkinson, who won his first Pulitzer Prize in 1982 when he was approximately four years old. (laughter) Then – rounding to the nearest four – he then won another in 1999, then he won another in 2003, by which time people started accusing him of hoarding. He is the son of an Army officer. He grew up on military bases. He has reported from numerous war zones. He has written acclaimed books on the Army, on the first Gulf War, on the Iraq War, and of course his epic and acclaimed trilogy on World War II.



We're also joined by Boston University professor of International Relations and History, Andrew Bacevich. He is a graduate of West Point. He is a veteran. He has emerged as one of our time's most respected and sober critics of the meta-mission creep of military force in America's way in the world, and a made-up word/phrase like meta-mission creep is an indignity to which Professor Bacevich would not stoop, so blame me for that, not him. His books include *The Limits of Power*, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*, and we are honored to have him here today. And finally, we're joined by Sarah Sewall, of whom everyone wants to know, why is she not in Washington? She was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance in the Clinton administration. She led the Obama transition's National Security Agency review process.

She's now at a little-known college across town here that you probably have not heard of, Harvard, where she directs the program on national security and human rights, and she teaches international relations. I should also mention that Sarah wrote the foreword to the Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, which is the only Army and Marine Corps field manual you will ever see on the desks of cable news producers. This is the third panel of the day. This has been a long and intense and awesome day, and it's sunny outside, and it's really nice of you all to be here, and so I'm going to try to start, I think, in the middle rather than at the beginning. And if any of you are uncomfortable with the ilk of my questions, let's fight about that as much as with each other. A recent Pew survey indicated that not only do American civilians continue to have a very high view, a very positive view of American military leadership, but it's sort of spiking. Why is that?

ATKINSON: Well, I'll take a first crack at it. I think it's partly they're so disgusted with all the other professions. (laughter) I say that somewhat facetiously, having been a journalist for a long time, and that is going in the opposite direction. I think people

are looking for – they’re looking for pole stars. They’re looking for guiding lights. And in part because they don’t know the military very well. We’ve got 308 million Americans. As you’ve heard today, about 1.4 million of them are active-duty military. That contrasts with 136 million during World War II, when we had 16 million who served in uniform in World War II. So 1.4 million out of 308 million is a very, very small percentage of our national population, and the rest of the country really doesn’t know the military very well at all.

And so it has something of a caricatured view of the military, I think, who they are. There’s not a recognition that the military’s as diverse as it is. And because the military is generally recognized as being about selfless service, I think that that is something that is resonant within the country, because there’s so little of it elsewhere. And consequently, you see the esteem toward those who embody selfless service somehow continue to rise. And I would be surprised if it doesn’t continue to rise until the military does something that causes us to believe that they’re not worthy of that kind of adulation

MADDOW: I wonder if, in the way that civilians talk about the military, because of that esteem, and what you describe, I think, as a caricatured view of the military – which I think I agree with – I wonder if we are unwilling to face up to the military’s failures, because we don’t want to interrupt our own experience of hero worship about the military. I’m thinking in particular about a series of articles, very moving, very well-researched, I think unimpeachable articles that were written recently by a journalist named Mark Benjamin, published at salon.com, and they got no pickup anywhere else. And they were about massive, horrible failures at Arlington. There are graves that contain remains at Arlington that are not supposed to be unknown soldiers that are unknown soldiers because of clerical errors.

And it’s a shocking story that hasn’t been picked up, and that I haven’t put on my television show, even though I’ve been reading them, in part because I don’t quite know how to calibrate to the American public, as a journalist, a story that is that disappointing, and really gross, about just the way the military works in an everyday way.

BACEVICH: I think that the public in general is either unwilling or unable to discriminate between the troops and the leadership. And we have this kind of quasi-religious imperative in American society that says that we’re all supposed to support the troops. I think, in many respects, the intensity of that feeling still reflects an overhang from the Vietnam era, when there was, in retrospect, the perception that American society failed to support the troops. It would be a great thing if we could, A, support the troops, and B, view senior military leadership with a critical eye. But we can’t pull that off. Moreover, to the extent that there is a recent uptick in this notion of senior military leaders being especially effective, I think it reflects the extent to which the propagandistic portrayal of the surge has worked.



I mean, quite frankly, by anybody’s measure, the performance of American military leaders, the senior most leaders, since 2001 has been, at best, mediocre, and I think it would not be unfair to say it’s been quite unsatisfactory. I mean, if we look at the planning for the Iraq war, for which General Tommy Franks was responsible, and if

we look at the management of the Iraq war in its first phase by Lt. General Sanchez, if we look at the performance of people like Generals Abizaid, Casey, when he was in Baghdad, a whole series of leaders in Afghanistan, they have not done well at all. But the story that we choose to buy is the story that Petraeus writes this manual and takes the manual to Baghdad, implements it through the surge, and saves the day, and now the Petraeus effect is that we forget the rather dubious performance of a whole series of other general officers, and see in Petraeus an affirmation of what we want to believe, which is that this institution and its leaders stand apart from the rest of society in terms of their effectiveness.

MADDOW: Sarah, do you agree with that?

SEWALL: Well, I agree very much with Andy's indictment of recent military leadership, particularly in the context of the Bush administration and the Iraq war. I think there will be dereliction of duty, too, written about that phase of leadership, and we will look on the uniformed military as having failed to exercise their fundamental responsibilities to speak truth to power, in the form of providing strong and clear and untainted advice that reflects independent political judgment. So I agree with that. And I also agree that we tend to reify the uniform in ways that reflect our own ignorance; that we have – it's not a study ignorance, because that would give us too much credit as a nation. But it is an inability – it is part of – it is the corollary of the estrangement from direct personal experience with the military that we reify this uniform, and we attribute to it a bunch of attributes that, I think, as Rick said very aptly, are missing from most professions in American society.



But we have – we do tend to give the benefit of the doubt, and let the uniform blind us, let the medals blind us, instead of thinking in as critical and bright a light about the military leadership as we do about other forms of leadership. And that's partly because we lack the tools to judge military leadership, until a Walter Reed comes up, until the Air Force flies a nuclear weapon across the country, right? And then we go, oops, right? And we get rid of those guys. But there was a broader and more endemic set of failures that had to do with the really fundamental responsibilities around which American lives revolved, and we took a pass on that. And I think part of that is, frankly, that people feel more vulnerable and more indebted to the military than they ever did before, and feel more grateful for/guilty for having avoided the service and sacrifice that men and women in uniform provide on a daily basis.

BACEVICH: Can I just follow up on that very quickly, because it's a great point, that the failures – when I was making – offering my indictment, it was an indictment that focused on the management of the two specific conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. I'm supposed to face out. (laughter) But there is a much broader and deeper indictment, which really focuses prior to 9/11, and that is the extent to which the senior military leadership was complicit in buying into a conception of warfare that was utterly detached from all historical experience, and completely false. And if you want to put a label on it, the label is Shock and Awe. In other words, this whole notion that information technology, if properly mobilized and deployed, could permit the United States to use force in virtually any circumstance anywhere in the world with an almost total guarantee of achieving a decisive victory in short order

very economically. That idea didn't entirely come from within the officer corps, but the officer corps bought into it hook, line, and sinker, and it was that type of thinking that then makes President Bush's global war on terror/freedom agenda seem plausible. And that's a monumental failure that deserves to be laid at the feet of the military profession.

MADDOW: Rick, following on that, is it possible that that error, what Professor Bacevich describes as an error, that belief in the almost magical efficacy of military force, is a product of the way that we have understood World War II, and the way that America effectively projected force, the way that we were able to supply our troops in ways that other countries couldn't, the way that we were able to marshal American power of every stripe toward military victory in World War II, that what we've told ourselves is the history of that war led, over a generation or two, to the belief that we could do anything militarily?

ATKINSON: I do think there's something to that. I do think that we come out of World War II nationally with an overestimation of where military power can take you, and the extent to which military power solves your ailments. And I think that there is a reluctance within the officer corps specifically, and certainly within the nation as a whole, to recognize that global warming, or some of the other issues that are facing us, have a threat to our national way of life and our sovereignty that is stupendously greater than anything Al-Qaeda can do to us. But it's difficult if you've got a mindset where you're thinking of marching to Berlin to defeat the Axis and firebombing Tokyo, to take on issues that clearly have no military solution. So I think there's something to that. And I think that it's been difficult for the military to think in these larger terms that transcend military thought, actually.



MADDOW: Getting back to the issue of the distance between politics and military, and the relationship of political leadership to military leadership. Sarah, you raised the issue of whether it was a dereliction of duty to not have senior military officers speaking truth to power, and pushing back on what civilians wanted to do with the military in the lead-up to the Iraq war. You've also been very critical of what's been called the generals' revolt, which was, in the absence of active-duty military standing up to civilian leadership who were making arguably bad decisions about what to do with the military, retired generals did so. And in 2006 in particular, we saw retired flag-rank officers come out and say, Donald Rumsfeld has to go, these decisions have been wrong, the military's being poorly served and the country needs to stop it. If it's not going to happen at active duty level, we'll do it from here. You've been critical of that. Why?

SEWALL: Because it has a long-term negative effect on the division of roles that's critical for maintaining balance in civil-military decision-making, and I want to explain that, and then I want to put in larger context what I think the right solution would be. Washington is so politicized now that, increasingly, you see civilians looking at the military as another arm of civilian power, of political power, and treating them as though they're part of the team, and expecting them to be part of the team. And you saw that, in the Bush administration, begin to permeate a bunch of ways in which we had typically respected boundaries, a really good example being the promotion process, where we began to blur the distinctions between what

constituted a sphere of professional military separateness and what constituted the sphere of political, civilian decision-making. You saw that blurring.

The problem with having retired military people become partisan actors, whether it's calling for the resignation of a sitting Secretary or whether it's calling for the election of a particular Presidential candidate, is that it actually gives very good reason for the civilians to treat the military currently serving as partisan political figures, both in terms of suspecting that's what they're thinking all along in their thought bubble, and in terms of expecting what they will do when they go out. You think about Colin Powell as he was busy launching op-eds that basically criticized potential policy choices that his Commander-in-Chief might want to make, i.e. Bosnia, and then saying within a year, and I might be running for office. That's not helpful. That is going to make it more likely that we blur this notion of the military stays out of politics, the civilians are elected political representatives, they make those decisions.

But having said that, the nub of the problem in terms of the dereliction of duty in the case of the invasion of Iraq is multifaceted, and it would take too long, and I'm not going to go into it. But I will say that a big piece of it had to do with civilian failures. So I don't want to just point a finger at the military. You did not have a Congress asking tough questions. If the system of civil/military affairs were working the way it should, Congress would have been, in a balance-of-power role, inquisitorially asking, in a public forum, of the members of the military leadership, what do you think about this? What does this require?

Well, the one place they did that was Shinseki, and he got slammed down. You had Congress not asking the right questions, and you had a culture that slammed the ability of the military to serve its function, which is to provide advice, not just to the Secretary of Defense or the President, but also to the Congress, and in that route, in an open forum, to the American people. Those pieces were all interrelated, and many failures – it was an all-front failure.

MADDOW: I don't want to stay on this point for too long, though, but I do want to press you. If retired flag-rank officers feel like something is happening in the country that military leadership ought to be speaking out about internally and it's not happening, are they condemned to shut up for the rest of their life because they're –

SEWALL: No, they can talk about policy, but they don't call for the resignation of political figures, right? So they can criticize the war all they want. That's in the realm of what I consider to be providing professional judgment and advice in an ongoing way, in a nonpartisan fashion. But it's the calling for the resignation, I think, that puts them in a position that is really uncomfortable in terms of what it does for the people that wear that uniform inside the building.

BACEVICH: I probably disagree with Sarah a little bit there. I would be – I would say senior military officers, who obviously are citizens and have the right to free speech, would do well to choose to shut up, because however honest and nonpartisan their intentions when they speak out on controversial issues, the effect, I think, is to call into question whether or not the profession really is – functions as a disinterested

servant of the state. Almost inevitably, when retired four-star Admiral Smith goes on TV to articulate a point of view, the assumption is that this – in some degree or another, retired Admiral Smith is speaking on behalf of the officer corps. And I would prefer to see the officer corps stay out of public debates. Again, I emphasize, I believe retired officers should choose to stay out, in order to try to maintain the reputation of the military profession as objective servants of the state. And quite frankly, I can't think of any of these guys who are possessed of such wisdom that, if we don't hear from them, that suddenly the foundations of the Republic are going to be eroding.

MADDOW: Also Paul's earlier point, too, that the wars, the sort of asymmetric wars being fought now in Iraq and Afghanistan are being led, in a technical sense, by people at the sort of squad leader level. To be not hearing from those folks, but to be hearing from retired generals and admirals all the time, is also skewing, I think, the way that the American public thinks about military leadership.

ATKINSON: I don't know. There's a long tradition – I'm queasy about it, as you are, when I see people that I admire a lot, like John Batiste, a retired Major General, get up and slam the Secretary of Defense. But there's a long tradition of military officers, after their tour of duty, leaving and becoming politically active, back to Zachary Taylor, not to mention Eisenhower, and it extends to other democracies also, Ariel Sharon being a classic example for the Israelis. So theoretically, yes, I suppose, but practically, are you going to say that we're shutting ourselves off from any participation in the political process by retired military officers?

BACEVICH: Well, I mean, I guess I would come back at that in this way. First of all, if we look at the history of the Republic up to World War II, when we had any number of military heroes and former generals who became President – not too many of them performed notably in that capacity, but nonetheless, there's a tradition of electing military heroes to high office. And that was in an era when, other than in discrete emergencies – the Mexican War, the Civil War – military institutions did not play a large part in American life. The purpose of the Republic was not to project military power around the globe. Like it or not, we now – I don't like it – like it or not, we now live in a time when there's a general assumption in Washington, and I think across the country, that we need to remain militarily preeminent in perpetuity, and that the function of our military is not to defend the United States of America, but in some way or another is to act as kind of an imperial police force. So the place of military power in our politics has been radically transformed. And in that sense, it seems to me, the – whether or not we should be welcoming these former military figures into the center of our politics, just kind of the calculus seems to me is different now.

MADDOW: Bringing it back to the – not the senior leader level, but the individual soldier level, one of the things, as you said in your opening remarks, Rick, the idea that in World War II, we had 130 million population and 8½ million people in the Army, now with over 300 million, we've got an army closer to a million, to have – And we're in the middle of two hot wars right now, by the way, with that size of a military. What do we – how do we factor in the experience of combat itself to how we think about veterans, and how we think about troops? It is true, I think, and we've been talking about it, that civilians do admire the idea of selfless service that's

embodied in military service. And we do hero-worship the military. I think it's also true that we are afraid of people who have had the experience of combat.

I think that civilians, when civilians talk about PTSD, it's almost like we're talking about people with the scarlet letter, and that there is a sort of Rambo stigma that came back with troops from Vietnam, came back with troops from every war that we've been in in modern times, and right now, when it's such a small proportion of our population that's been subject to so many tours of duty, with these two ongoing wars that we've got, are we making the division between civilian and military harder to cross than ever, because of the experience of combat being felt by such a large proportion of the number of people in the military.

ATKINSON: You know, Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was badly wounded at Antietam, among other battles that he fought in, said that the fact that he had experienced combat forever slightly separated him from those who had not. So yeah, there's some psychological distance, I suppose. Those who've seen the elephant, to use the Civil War phrase for seeing combat, from those who've not. There tends to be a natural reverence for soldiers, which I think comes largely out of guilt. They're doing those multiple tours, it's their families that are paying the burden, and we have tended to transfer that into a kind of blanket esteem for them. And that, I think, is complicated by the fact that we are forever separated from those who have not, in the sense that some have seen combat repeatedly now. It's a different culture as a consequence.

I think a bigger issue – and this wasn't really touched on specifically earlier – some of the polls indicate that the officer corps of the Army now tends to be 8:1 Republican. That is a bigger distance from the rest of the body politic than anybody who's seen combat. That separates them from us in a way that I think is much more profound, and potentially disturbing.

MADDOW: How do you think it got that way?

ATKINSON: Well, Andy can speak to this personally, but part of it is that it is a self-selecting culture. It is a naturally conservative culture. It is a culture, as we heard earlier, that has nourished Evangelicals, to a highly disproportionate degree. It got that way bit by bit by virtue of the fact that we no longer have an Army that is drawn from the larger Republic. We have an Army that is drawn from people who want to be there, and they want to be there in part because they want to be part of that culture and what they think it embodies. And it's been going on now for 35 years.

MADDOW: Sarah, you served in the Defense Department in the Clinton Administration, and you were part of the Obama transition. In thinking about Democratic administrations and the modern military, is there a sense in Washington, when those discussions are happening, that it is a red versus blue divide between civilian leadership and military leadership?

SEWALL: It's a complicated question. I think that culturally, the differences are many, and the political aspect of the cultural difference, by and large, among the officer corps, and certainly at the level at which they're serving in the Pentagon, sort of the

05, 06, lieutenant colonel, colonel level, which is mainly the action officer rank, you are aware of the fact that the folks who serve on the Joint Staff, the folks who are embedded in the civilian offices, come from, by and large, a different culture that includes a very different politics. However, I think that – and I haven't spent too much time in the building since President Obama became our President – but my sense from the time that I have spent there is that it's very different today, for a couple different reasons.

First of all, you have a very different Commander-in-Chief persona. And I think one of the things I always found doing campaign work and surrogate work for Obama during the campaign was that his personal values, his patriotism, his sense of appreciation for what this country had given him, his strong commitment to his family, went a far piece toward resonating culturally with people in uniform, particularly within the enlisted ranks. And I think that was an useful antidote to some of the assumptions that had built up around political leaders generally and Democratic political leaders specifically, and Bill Clinton personally, that were different in this go round.

But I also think that the eight years of the Bush administration, in which there were many of us who said about the military, be careful what you ask for, because you got President Bush, and you got massive deployments to wars of choice, and a steady erosion of the strength of a military that had been carefully preserved and husbanded since Vietnam. And so I think when you – when the Obama administration team deals with the military in the Pentagon, they deal with a chastened cultural entity. They deal with a cultural entity that has, for the last eight years, been trying to understand how the guys who were supposed to love them, and be their protectors, and share their political views, could have done this to their services, is the subtext.

And so I think there has been a decrease – and in part, Gates' continuity from the Bush administration to the Obama administration accentuates this. I think there has been a decrease in the sense of the Republicans are the good guys and the Democrats are the bad guys, and there is more of a temperance about the individual leadership choices that are made rather than the party affiliations. So I think it's declined in terms of its salience. But I do think that, as a cultural matter, it's always there. And it's there at the level of high politics, and it's there at the level of personal relations, and what you can and can't say. Can you say Merry Christmas? You can say it – people in the military make a point, say, Merry Christmas! Like, I can say it here. This is a safe space. I can say, Merry Christmas! And it's always with you.

MADDOW: And atheist soldiers, be damned. They know to expect it. (laughter)

SEWALL: There aren't any atheist soldiers, right?

MADDOW: Yeah, right. Let me ask one other question about military culture, and decisions made to instill military culture that have since been questioned, and Andy, I know that you have raised some hard questions about the utility of the service academies. Rick, you – obviously, one of your bestsellers, *The Long Gray Line*, about a particular class of officers graduating from West Point and their careers and their effect on the country and the military. If, say, we closed West Point. Let's say

we closed West Point, let's say we closed all the service academies, and officers in the United States military, if they did college degrees in civilian institutions. And maybe civilian institutions were asked to provide some sort of specialist training to those who would be in the military, and be officers coming out, but there weren't service academies any more. What would be the cost to the country? What would we lose of importance if the academies were no longer there?

BACEVICH: Well, I think we lose nothing. (laughter) I mean, this discussion falls in the same category of what would be the result of resuming conscription. It ain't going to happen. But let's pretend. I mean, my argument – I mean, what we have right now is, there's three streams from which we draw officers. One's the service academy, one's ROTC, one's one form or another of officer candidate school. For ROTC, we are identifying 17-year-olds in high school and saying, yeah, that person has the potential to be an officer, let's offer that 17-year-old a scholarship that pays for four years at Boston College. Frankly, that's not necessarily the right way to – what I would prefer is that we identify the people with potential and interest in serving probably somewhere in their second or third year at Boston College, and at other colleges around the country, and that we give them a minimal amount of introduction to military life, and then after they graduate from BC, they get shipped off to West Point or Annapolis or Colorado Springs for a year of what is not education, but what is, in a sense, socialization into the profession.



So that every Army officer would be a West Pointer, every naval officer would be a graduate of Annapolis, every officer on active duty would be someone whose undergraduate education was gained in an atmosphere where they were sitting next to, dining next to their fellow citizens. And my view is that that would give us an officer corps that was more deeply rooted in the society from which they drew. And it ain't never going to happen.

MADDOW: Rick or Sarah, would either of you see dangerous costs to some plan like that?

ATKINSON: Well, he's certainly right. It's not ever going to happen. There are too many political hurdles to even begin to talk about abolishing the military academies or resuming the draft. I'd be willing to try it. I do think – I was up at West Point last week. There is something about the place that's both disturbing and endearing, and I've been there many, many times. What's disturbing is that there is a sense of, we are special. We are West Point. And the other academies have the same attitude, that we are keepers of the faith, that we are as – at Trophy Point, which is a central location at West Point, there are benches around the flagpole there, and each bench is inscribed with a different virtue – discipline, courage, loyalty. And sometimes West Point can evince the attitude that they are the repository of those deeply held virtues. I think that that's problematic, because they're not.

What's endearing is that you have 4,000 cadets who have a sense of cohesion, they have a sense of purpose. Now a relatively small percentage of them are going to go beyond their obligation of five years' service to the country after they graduate, but they spend four years up there thinking about the profession of arms, thinking about duty, honor, country, pondering what it means to be a junior officer. It's not that

you can't get that anywhere else, clearly. But I think that there is some utility served by having these institutions where their primary goal is to get 22-year-olds to think about what it means to take 40 men, and now women, into combat.

MADDOW: Sarah?

SEWALL: I know that if I had gone to a service academy and I'm a conservative, small c, person, and I know that if I had gone to a service academy, I would have loved it, and I would argue that it should be the sine qua non of becoming an officer, that I would defend it to its death. However, I will say, as someone who teaches at a non-service academy, and who so enjoys the military folks that are part of the graduate program that I teach at, that I am constantly amazed by how important it is to have people with military experience, and in a uniform sometimes, in the classroom, in civilian classrooms. And so this is a little bit different than the question you asked, Rachel, which is, you know, abolish the academies, put them through a civilian system. I don't know, because I haven't done that. I don't know exactly what you give up. I can imagine it would feel like you were giving up a lot.



But I can tell you that when you're able to find ways to mix the two communities of the people who have been leavened by this military experience, by this military bonding, by this military vocabulary and sensibility, and bring it to its own uneasy peace and interchange with civilian kids who are interested in the latest album or whatever, amazing things happen. I cannot tell you how many students at the Kennedy School, where I teach, have never met someone who has served in the military. And there, the scales fall from their eyes, because they meet these men and women, and they're bright, and they're questioning, and they're irreverent, and they break just so many stereotypes in the interaction. But you require that level of interaction.

So there's – I think there are enormous gains to be had that don't just reside in the military people who come through – or someone who may have a military profession coming through a non-military learning institution, but the reverse, and that interchange, I think, is incredibly valuable. So if we can't get rid of the service academies, I'd love to find more ways to not cabin off the higher level educational – not have it stove piped for the military, and instead find more ways to cross-fertilize in those communities. I think they're very valuable.

MADDOW: If you guys want to start – if you have questions, we will take questions. I'm struck by a totally juvenile metaphor in explaining the relationship between civilian and military, which is typical of me, which – I sort of feel like what we're hinting at is the idea that the civilian world has a crush on the military world, and the military world is not all that interested, and our crush is not all that realistic. (laughter) And so civilians are both in love with and chasing after and want more access to the military, but also completely unwilling and unable to see faults, and unable to articulate them constructively.

BACEVICH: No, I actually don't think so. I think it's a little bit different. In other words, the civilians are not chasing after the military because they want to get a big hug or something. It's more that the civilians who, again, really don't know much

about what the soldiers are all about are keen to admire at a distance, and to put the soldier on a pedestal way over there – don't come near my kid, but go forth to Afghanistan and do good things. We love you.

MADDOW: It's more of a *Teen Beat* experience.

BACEVICH: But don't want to get too close.

MADDOW: We've come to an agreement. Thank you in advance for sticking it out, and thank you for your questions. We'll start here.

Q: Thank you. Thank you for the panel. I just want to say, I got here this afternoon, and I now feel like a pinball in a pinball machine. I'm going back and forth over what's been said. The first panel started off with the issue of diversity, and how we can bring what I guess you might call outsiders closer into the military, much of which I absolutely agreed with. The second panel talked about the draft, a term I don't like. I think you should call it compulsory service, because you're being forced to do it, and it's something I don't agree with, but it brought up a lot of good points. And then we come to this panel and realize, listening to this panel, in the end, what was really bothering me throughout this, and it's the sign, Soldiers and Citizens. I know it's not the intent, but it feels like this sign should really be, soldiers, and then maybe another sign over here that says citizens.

And as a National Guardsman, someone who can cross into both worlds, I like to tell people that I'm half civilian on my mother's side. (laughter) There's a definite divide, that somehow as an experienced war fighter – I have four tours – I can never be a citizen again. I will always be a soldier. And a lot of money is thrown at me, GI Bill money, reenlistment money is thrown at young people of all ranks, all services, to stay in. And it's almost like, in my opinion, hush money, to keep things quiet. But my question is, what I want to get at, my question is less for Dr. Bacevich, but for the rest of you. And I take this – I'll address this from my civilian side. I have a doctorate in history. I'm an enlisted man in the Army, an E7 infantry guy. I have a doctorate in history. Returning from my last tour, I applied for a lot of teaching jobs in nice New England colleges, and in every single interview, save one, the question that was asked is, well, how can you explain the years that you've wasted in your life?

To which I say, wait a minute, how come you're not asking me, what about my experience establishing the first PRT in Afghanistan? Why aren't you asking me how many foreign languages I can speak? Why aren't you asking me what it was like to help Hamid Karzai get into Afghanistan, or what it was like in the initial invasion of Iraq, and what went wrong, and what went right? Why are you asking me that I wasted my life? And so my question would be to the panel, primarily, but to everyone else to think about is – to get back to the source of the whole question – what are you going to do to close this gap, to allow me to be a citizen of this country again, and not be – whatever, a warrior, or a war fighter, or a separate citizen? Thank you.

MADDOW: Thank you for the question. Thank you. (applause) Anybody want to shoot?

SEWALL: I'll talk briefly about what I do. I mean, I think you've asked – maybe you are asking the wrong people, because I think we actually have answers. (laughter) But most of what I do is about bridging that gap. I live a civilian life, I'm a girl, and I've served as a political appointee and worked very closely with people in uniform for most of the past 15 years, and have enormous respect for them, and close personal relationships with them. So I work at a level of me, myself, personally bridging the gap. But more importantly, in the work that I do on the academic side, it's about bringing together people who wear uniforms, or who used to wear uniforms, with people who think they may not like or trust people who wear uniforms. So I work on bridging the gap.

I think your question has more to do with academia, and don't get me started on that. (laughter) In all seriousness, I think your example is perhaps not relevant to the broader point that you make, so I'd just like to reframe the broader point that you make, which is that, for – if we have fundamentally different notions, if people who – this is part of where the – this is where, I think, the panels come around. If the first panel is about how Huntington was right, to some degree, and we now have a self-selected military that has cabined itself off in its political beliefs and its social beliefs, to some degree, from mainstream American society, then the question may not be, how do the citizens welcome back those in uniform, and the question may not be whether or not you've been in Afghanistan, and been on a PRT.

The question may be whether there is a diversity – there is sufficient liberalism, in the truest sense, of willingness to accept a diversity of those in the country, and a diversity of views about the process by which we adjudicate our domestic affairs and our foreign policy, such that the military that falls into that minority category can live in the larger American world. So I actually want to try to rephrase your question, because I think there is a bigger, deeper question. But if the premise is that we have a self-selected subset that holds itself apart, and that thinks of itself as being superior in some way, shape, or form, it's going to abut that messy, nasty, diverse, yelling, screaming, chaotic political culture that doesn't necessarily agree with it. And so it requires work on both sides, quite apart from me or you doing our thing.

BACEVICH: I don't know if it's a stated or unstated premise of this event, that the gap is a bad thing, and ought to be somehow closed. And I was thinking as I was listening particularly to the last panel, it seems to me we should sort of confront the truth as to why the gap exists. And I would posit that this civilian-military gap exists because it serves the interests of the great majority of the American people, and simultaneously serves the interests of the national security elite. It serves the – maybe not the people in this auditorium, but it serves the interests of the American people in the sense that, I would argue, the principal manifestation of our culture at the present moment is that we should each be allowed to exercise individual choice with minimal constraint. And that's what the all-volunteer force allows us to do. This guy can say, I want to serve, and this guy says, I don't want to serve. That's OK, that's OK. No moral judgments implied. So culturally, the all-volunteer force makes all the sense in the world.

From the point of view of the national security elite, we are engaged, we have been engaged for a period of decades, and I think we have been notably engaged since the

end of 9/11, in attempting to use military force as the principal instrument to manifest American global leadership. We are an imperial country, and in order to be an empire, we need to have an imperial army. We need to have an army in which people can be sent to Afghanistan and Iraq for four or five times, and they will put up with that kind of abuse while the country basically says, not my concern. So again, the gap didn't come into existence just because nobody was paying attention. The gap is an expression of our culture. The gap is an expression of our foreign policy. (applause)

SUTTON: Thank you. My name is Jack Sutton (sp?) and I've been mesmerized by your comments, so I want to begin by thanking you very much for being here. My question is about McChrystal and his behavior. A couple months ago, all of a sudden, in the news, I read about a report that he had written that was destined for the President. And then, all of a sudden, he's on *60 Minutes*. And then, he's giving a speech in England. This seemed to cross the line for me, but I'd enjoy hearing your comments, particularly in reference to previous comments you made earlier in this symposium.

MADDOW: Thank you. General McChrystal and his public appearances.

BACEVICH: Well, please tell us who leaked the report?

ATKINSON: Yeah, who leaked the report? I'm sorry, I can't tell you. (laughter) The report you're talking about was the one that Bob Woodward published in the *Washington Post* six weeks or so ago that indicated McChrystal's virtual demand for a substantial increase in troop levels in Afghanistan. I don't know who leaked that report, but I guarantee you it wasn't some lieutenant colonel somewhere. That was a very carefully calculated, highly placed leak that had purposes that we'll only understand when Bob's next book comes out. (laughter) I don't have a problem with McChrystal doing *60 Minutes*, or giving a speech in London. I assume that this was cleared. I'd be amazed if it was not. He seemed to go beyond his writ, as I understand it, in the Q&A at one point, and that's been somewhat controversial.



But I don't think it's problematic for serving senior officers to be engaged in public outreach, however they do it – speeches, television, Rachel's show. I think that's part of what we want. We want to hear from them. There was an effort in World War II to put a human face on all those generals who very, very quickly became famous household names, and who before 1941 were unknown to anyone outside of the small brotherhood of the Army. And they were encouraged, and have been encouraged in the 60 years since then, really, to show who they are, because if you've got a son in Afghanistan or a daughter in Iraq, you want to have some sense for who their commanding officer is. You want to size them up. And so what you saw in Sicily in 1943 was a reporter named Ernie Pyle going to an unknown major general named Omar Bradley and making the argument, how many men have you got in your corps, and Bradley said, about 70,000.

And Pyle said, for those 70,000, you've got a father, a mother, grandparents, siblings at home, wondering who this guy with the Arab first name is that my son is serving with, and is he worthy of my son's service? And so I think that having that

kind of an opportunity to size up General McChrystal, General Petraeus, General Odierno, all of them, down to wanting to know more about who your son's squad leader is, is perfectly fine. And I don't see any problem.

MADDOW: May I inflect the question a little bit, not just about General McChrystal, but I wonder if there is an overt campaign to sell counterinsurgency theory to the American public as a way to make us understand the expectations of our troops, but also the expectations of these engagements that we're in. Is there – I mean, why'd you write the foreword to the manual, and why did they ask – and what do you think the effect was of having a civilian do the foreword?

SEWALL: Well, you'll have to ask the University of Chicago editorial board that was trying to decide whether to publish it, why they asked me to write the foreword. I wrote it because I was extremely proud of the process that produced it. But I wrote it, for those of you who didn't notice, with a sense of irony, because it is – counterinsurgency is a complicated matter, and there's really no better example than the two wars that we're fighting now about problems with the legitimacy of the regimes, and what you can and can't do with military power, let alone the question that was raised earlier about where are all the non-military instruments of power. And so the – I wrote it because I thought it was extraordinarily important in the maturation that it showed on the part of the armed forces for the limits of military power, and for the need to think about the application of force, and its second- and third-order effects, in a humanistic, holistic way.

And so that's why I wrote it, because I was very proud of what they had done. But I didn't want people to fall in love with the doctrine, and think that it was the cookie-cutter solution. And, oh, by the way, parenthetically, even McChrystal's high-end option ain't counterinsurgency by the ratios that the doctrine calls for. So his high end is low-end compared to what this recipe – so this recipe, in some way, is very unrealistic, and it comes with a whole host of assumptions about nonmilitary commitments of resources and capabilities, and strength of the host nation government to begin with, that may or may not be apposite for its given application. But the decisions for those don't reside within the military. So I wrote the foreword as way to both applaud what I thought was extraordinarily brave in many ways, extraordinarily brave evolution of military doctrine, but nest it within a broader sense of civilian responsibility for ensuring that, if you were going to go down that route, you had properly scoped the broader aspects of it –

BACEVICH: Yeah, but the answer –

SEWALL: Those subtleties may be lost in the broader debate that's occurring now.

MADDOW: Well, I would just say that I think the most underappreciated aspect of counterinsurgency, as a lot of civilians and a lot of reporters have fallen in love with it, is the fact that the starting place is, don't do it. Don't try to do this. This is very, very, very hard to do, especially if you don't have 90 things in place, 89 of which we don't have in place.

BACEVICH: Yes, but there is an effort to sell it. I mean, it's not – I don't believe that the officer corps is at the forefront of the effort to sell counterinsurgency. I think,

rather, there's a – the people – this is a broad brush attack. The people who promoted the Iraq War as the means to advance George Bush's freedom agenda, whereby we were going to transform the greater Middle East, faced with the failure of that enterprise, now view counterinsurgency as the default position. When you go home tonight, I want you to Google global counterinsurgency, or even Google GCOIN, and take a look at the number of hits that come up, and you start to look at some of those. Because I think the idea of the moment, the emerging "strategy" is that we are to embark upon a global counterinsurgency in order to deal with the threat of violent jihadism. And it's a preposterous idea, but it is, in a sense, one of the reasons why people are so gung-ho to go back into Afghanistan is because Afghanistan becomes, in a sense, a second opportunity, from the point of view of these people, to demonstrate the feasibility of counterinsurgency.

SEWALL: I would just take a little bit of issue with that, because I think you're tying it up too neatly, Andy. I mean, I think these guys – the folks who led us into Iraq had no interest in counterinsurgency. In fact, the second coming of counterinsurgency, for them, is completely antithetical to the whole transformation agenda that they were trying to push before they launched the Iraq war, so –

BACEVICH: I disagree with you, because, from my point of view is, this is their last desperate effort to cling to a transformation agenda.

SEWALL: I think this is their last desperate effort to try to make it seem like it wasn't as bad an idea as we've all concluded it might have been. But I think that's different. I think that's tactical, as opposed to strategic. So I just wanted to say that, for the record.

MADDOW: I've never been happier in my whole life than I am right now. (laughter) (applause) I'm sorry. I knew it was showing, so I just wanted to say it.

Q: I guess this comment is directed mainly at the journalists on the panel. First, I should say that I served in the –

ATKINSON: I consider myself a recovering journalist though. (laughter)

Q: Let me say first that I served in the Marine Corps some 40-odd years ago now as an enlisted grunt, an experience that left me utterly alienated from my society. And I did take advantage of the GI Bill, and now I teach American foreign policy at UMass Boston, very critically, I might add. If there's any truth to the idea that troops serve selflessly, then their selflessness is being colossally betrayed today, for so many reasons, I couldn't really list them all. But what's been troubling me lately is a recent *New York Times* bombshell about the symbiotic relationship between the CIA and the planet's biggest drug lord. And this should be a scandal of the first order, and yet the story has dropped like a stone to the bottom of the sea. What it means is that American soldiers are dying to prop up a colossally corrupt regime. The drug epidemic kills far many more Americans than Al-Qaeda has ever managed to. Talk about threat to national security. What has happened to this story, and why? And what does it say about this gulf between society and –

MADDOW: Thank you for the question. The story, if anybody might not be familiar with it, was a *New York Times* story that broke a couple of weeks ago that the CIA has, for eight years, had on its payroll the brother of Hamid Karzai, whose name is Ahmed Wali Karzai, and who is thought of as the shorthand for corruption and narco trafficking in Afghanistan. I don't know how much of it he controls, and I don't know how many of the things that are said about him are true, but he's thought of as – he's the person that's described as The Problem in Afghanistan in terms of the legitimacy of the government there. Where has that story gone? I'll let you guys handle that.

ATKINSON: Well, I can't speak for the *New York Times*, which we refer to at the *Washington Post* as Brand X. (laughter) So I don't know. I'm not involved in the reporting or editing at that level any more. Your question begs a larger question, and that is, where's the reporting in general in this country? As you well know, the mainstream media in general, newspapers specifically but not only newspapers, are involved in an existential crisis of the first order. It's not entirely clear to me there's going to be a *New York Times* as we know and love it, or *Washington Post*. There's clearly not – a number of other newspapers already, that did great journalism, and now do either no journalism or shabby journalism. And this isn't good for the Republic.

We collectively let down the country in not asking the appropriate hard questions – I include myself in the indictment – before the invasion of Iraq in 2003. There was a – people were sort of swept up in the rhetoric and the lies. And it's only worse now, because even in those six years, the resources necessary to ask the kind of difficult, penetrating, querulous questions that are absolutely vital when it comes to the most essential questions of war and peace, those resources are now much diminished, even in six years. And so you have a *Washington Post* which, 10 years ago, had 900 people in the newsroom, now it's closer to 600. And you can do 1/3 less with 600 people, and that 1/3 could be as critical as understanding clearly what's going on when we're dealing with the most fundamental questions of war and peace. So you begged a good question, and I don't have a solution to it, other than to fret.

Q: I wanted to ask about a specific, I guess, convergence of military and civic culture, what it says up there. Maybe it's military and civilian culture. And that is the drones. This seems an extreme form of video games, war as video game, and the head of the lab, whatever it is that controls the drones from Las Vegas, or somewhere out West, was on *60 Minutes*, and when asked how this compares to actual warfare, he claimed that it was just as exciting and just as heroic. And to me it sounds like institutionalized cowardice. And I wondered how it looks to people on the ground, and also whether anybody has thought about, what if some other country gets this technology and uses it on us? So anybody? Mr. Bacevich?

MADDOW: Thank you for the very cogent question. Andy, do you want to start?

BACEVICH: Well, it would be unfair if they did it to us, so – (laughter) (applause)

Q: Don't forget the presence of IEDs. It is the low-end technical equivalent, if you want to call it cowardice, which I don't, but cowardice is a cross multiplier.

BACEVICH: OK, all right –

Q: You can't say that.

BACEVICH: We didn't say that. First of all, there's – technology has always played a role in warfare, and good technology wisely used can have a very beneficial effect, mostly at the tactical level. So in one sense, this is no big deal. This is simply a continuation of technological evolution as applied to warfare. On the other hand, there is something very troubling whenever the availability of technology distances either warriors or policymakers from the reality of combat, and the human consequences. And one of the things that I think would bother me about the use of drones is just that, that it can make killing too easy. Killing needs to be hard. And if it's hard, then it seems to me it's more likely that one will entertain the moral questions about whether killing is purposeful, whether killing is indeed necessary.

ATKINSON: There's a terrific piece by Jane Mayer in *The New Yorker* in the last couple weeks on the whole issue of drones, and she looks at some of the thorny questions that you imply in your question. Killing should be hard. I don't know that the use of drones today is any different than the 11,000 airplanes we had flying over German-occupied Europe, and then Germany itself, during World War II. Killing from 30,000 feet can seem pretty antiseptic. It's very dangerous, obviously. Thousands of planes and tens of thousands of crewmen who died. So it's not painless by any means, but it is a somewhat antiseptic way of obliterating cities. My feeling about it is, there's an implication in your question that this should be a fair fight somehow, and that drones are not fair, that there's some violation a mano-a-mano ethic, and I think that's wrong.

The argument has been made off and on for 60 years, that whenever an American battalion and a German battalion faced one another in Europe, the Germans tended to be better, that they were tactically superior, and the implication was that in a fair fight, the Germans were the superior force. A fair fight? If he's talking about a fair fight, it's World War II. It's existential. And so if you decided as a nation that you've got an existential issue here, then you're going to use your technology and leverage it to the max. And having watched drones – I was with the 101st Airborne during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 when drone technology was relatively new compared to how it's grown since then – and if you can have a UAV up, and it is doing surveillance that allows you to not put a rifle squad into Karbala, then I don't have a problem with that.

Or fire a Hellfire missile so that you don't have to take an A10 in close and put him in harm's way, I don't have a problem with that either. So I'm not quite sure what the issue is, why drones trip some threshold into an area where somehow it's not ethically cricket.

MADDOW: We are out of time, which means I'm going to cheat by allowing one further question, and by accident of which aisle you stood in, you get the last question.



Q: Thank you. I'm a former naval officer, and I would like to ask, in the particular context of Boston, Massachusetts, the question that appears on page

two of the program, which is, what steps can be taken to foster an open and respectful relationship between the military and the society that it protects? I think Sarah has mentioned a very interesting example at the Kennedy School, where military officers engage in seminar participation with civilians. I think it's particularly difficult to accomplish that in Boston, because, like many other towns, this is not one in which the military is visible. We have active-duty who are deployed, we have National Guard and reservists who are our neighbors, but we don't see them in uniform except on occasion. And there are heroic examples of individuals who reach out.

I'm mindful of a lieutenant colonel in the Army Judge Advocate General Corps who went to the Boston Bar Association and said he was responsible for 3500 troops who were going to deploy from Massachusetts next year, and could the city's lawyers be mobilized to help them with their pre-mobilization and stand down when they went and came back. I'm mindful of District Attorney Bill Keating, who has developed a program on PTSD to train first responders like police and EMTs and emergency room personnel to recognize PTSD, and take those individuals and put them into pretrial diversion rather than into the criminal justice system. But those are very rare instances, and I think when you have such an engaged audience here, who of course can go out and be missionaries to all their friends, what are the specific steps in Boston that might be taken to close the gap which we all know exists and is substantial?

MADDOW: Thank you for that last question. (laughter) The area code on my cell phone is 413. I don't know for Boston. (laughter)

BACEVICH: Well, I mean, again, my view is that if we are honest with ourselves, we don't want to close the gap. The gap suits our culture, and the gap suits the foreign policy preferences of the national security elite. Set that aside, that we don't really want to fix the problem, I think that – I mean, here at Boston College, I am told that, whereas the new Webb-Hagel GI Bill will pay full fare at any public institution, a veteran to go full fare, I believe here at Boston College the administration has waived the differential between what it costs to go to BC and what it would cost to go to UMass. That is a way, it seems to me, for a distinguished private institution to welcome veterans into the ranks of Boston College undergraduates. I would say that's a tangible, practical, and tremendously admirable thing to do. (applause)

As much as, of course, we all admire and kowtow to Harvard, I have to say that that's not the only institution in the Boston area that welcomes military officers. At my own modest institution, Boston University, we always have military officers, usually Army officers in the Foreign Area Officer program who are studying for a master's degree in international relations. Last night, here at BC, I met a young Army captain who's enrolled as a graduate student here, getting a master's degree in English en route to teaching in the English Department at West Point. So I think that there are things going on. I would tell you that – I'll bet you that Boston University – I don't mean to speak for my president – Boston University will accept as many military officers as graduate students, assuming they are qualified, as the Department of Defense would wish to fund, because we'd love to have all that tuition money. (laughter)

SEWALL: If you think about the things that you can do in your own personal life – I’m not going to say anything that you don’t already know, but I feel that we can’t leave without any kind of an answer – but if you live near Hanscom Air Force Base, if you go to church with people who serve in the military, if you are looking for volunteer opportunities, whether it’s – my little Girl Scout troop delivers cookies to bases. We have women who serve in the military come and talk to our Girl Scout troop about their service to inspire the younger girls. My daughter Maddie, (sp?) one day that we went by a house that had a Welcome Home, Daddy sign, and my daughter decided that she wanted to draw a little picture and thank this guy for his service, and she made me, the next time we went to BJ’s, stop at the house and let her get off and knock at the door, and I’ll be darned if this Marine doesn’t come to his door and look at this little girl holding this little thank you sign.

And, I mean, all those little things are ways that you can interact with people who otherwise you wouldn’t interact with. And some of them will start, perhaps, on the adulation side, but can build. And so cross-institutional embedding of interaction, I think it begins at a personal level, and it grows into an institution, you know, Girl Scout troops doing things together. And then it goes from there. I mean, if we want, as people, and as a society, to reach across, there are ways to do it. I think Andy’s really asking, do we want to? And if you want to, you just need to look around in your neighborhood, and there are ways.

MADDOW: Thank you to our panelists. Thank you all. (applause)

END OF SESSION 3

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