
Defense Report

AUSA



Which Should We Have—Non-Political Warriors or Soldier Statesmen?

There are two schools of thought about the proper role to be played by the military leaders of the United States. One school would have our generals and admirals restrained from anything except pure military leadership. They would be warriors, not policy makers or even advisors. The second school is convinced that military leaders should participate with political leaders in arriving at policies and making decisions. It is this second position which, thankfully, prevails at the moment.

Over the past 202 years there have been a few instances in which military men, like McClellan, Fremont, and MacArthur, have reacted to professional frustration or overwhelming ego by trying to move into the political arena but, for a variety of reasons, the system rejected them as political participants. We have had Presidents who gained public approval as military leaders but, in each case, their political life was clearly separated from their military career.

Our military education system is designed to produce leaders who can think beyond pure military necessity, who can put military requirements into political, economic and philosophic perspective. In a year spent at a service war college, for example, an officer spends relatively little time learning how to make war.

In most instances the individuals elected to high public office have had little military experience. They may be lawyers, economists or experts in a wide variety of fields but they need help when considering military programs. At the highest level the Joints Chiefs of Staff are the interface between civilian and military leadership. As military professionals they are responsible to argue for a course of action that will best suit the nation's interests as they see them. As citizen-soldiers they are bound by their oath of service to support the decisions of their civilian leaders, even when they run contrary to their military judgment. A military leader does not have the inherent right to continue the argument past the decision point. If he cannot live with it he has just one professionally acceptable option—to leave the service.

This does not mean they are always wrong—history proved General Billy Mitchell to be very right—it simply means they have run out of alternatives under our system.

Civilians are often surprised at the lack of sympathy in the military ranks for military men who cannot abide by the system but among professionals there are just two ways to do things—the wrong way and the professional way.