THE NORMALIZATION OF “SUPPORT THE TROOPS”

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THE NORMALIZATION OF “SUPPORT THE TROOPS”

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ABSTRACT

Today, the standard behavior, or norm, of the American public toward the military and soldiers is “Support the Troops.” This attitude conveys an understood separation of soldiers from policy in the minds of the American public and helps to express our gratitude toward those who serve – even in wars of which we disapprove.

Such esteem for the military is a recent phenomenon. Throughout American history, even the founding, there has been distrust of the military. Between a liberal society and its values of freedom and individuality and the military’s values of discipline and obedience, a certain antagonistic separation, or what civil-military relations theorists call the civil-military gap, is to be expected.

The progression of civilian society’s attitude toward the military is examined using Carl May’s and Tracy Finch’s Normalization Process Theory. This theory proposes that practices become routinely embedded in social
contexts as the result of people working, individually and collectively, to implement them.

Initially, the work of Vietnam veterans to rectify their status against the backlash of the Vietnam War led to the first conception of Support the Troops. Next, the formal Veterans Movement solidified their rights and entitlements, and along with the ideal patriotism promoted by President Reagan, Support the Troops took on political overtones during the Cold War. Then, with victory in the first Gulf War, Support the Troops became the proven baseline for civic responsibility while the nation goes to war.

During the Global War on Terror, renewed concerns for the civil-military gap have been prompted by the minimal impact of the decade’s two simultaneous, international wars on civilian life while unprecedented burdens have been placed on the military. Evaluations of the gap, including direct and indirect appraisal on civilian attitudes toward the military, is the last stage in the normalization process.

Appraisal of the gap reveals that Support the Troops functions to perpetuate the divide between civilian and military societies. It sustains a military caste in American society and absolves civilians of active civic responsibility in the defense and security of the nation. It was born out of guilt
over the Vietnam experience, but has actually made it easier to send troops into harm’s way.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On Memorial Day 2012, President Obama addressed thousands who gathered at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The President’s speech, which launched the national commemoration of the Vietnam War’s 50th Anniversary, acknowledged that the country’s treatment of Vietnam veterans was a “national shame.” The President spoke directly to them:

You were often blamed for a war you didn’t start, when you should have been commended for serving your country with valor. . . . You came home and were sometimes denigrated, when you should have been celebrated . . . . And that’s why here today we resolve that it will not happen again.¹

Today, the denigration of post-9/11 soldiers and veterans is hard to imagine. The new standard of behavior for American civilians is to “Support the Troops.” This practice conveys an understood separation of soldiers from policy in the minds of the American public and helps to express our gratitude toward those who serve – even in wars of which we disapprove.

Such admiration for the military is a recent phenomenon. Throughout American history, even the founding, there has been distrust of the military. Between a liberal society and its values of freedom and individuality and the

military’s values of discipline and obedience, a certain antagonism is to be expected.²

Several modern events help to account for this change of American hearts and minds. The Veterans Movement of the late 1970s and 1980s led to more pro-veteran legislation and a better understanding of the effects of combat on soldiers. The end of the draft in 1973 and the reconfiguration of the military into an “All-Volunteer Force” have played a role. Also, the established military build-up and current war “aesthetic” has arguably created an America on a permanent state of readiness and willingness to utilize its military.³ These developments have helped to incorporate a new facet of contemporary civil-military relations – that of professed high regard for the military institution and pride in the troops.

When a new idea, practice, or standard of behavior becomes routine, it is considered normalized. A recent model of the normalization process is the Normalization Process Theory of how new practices become embedded in formalized social settings.


Cambridge sociologists Carl May and Tracy Finch originally developed the Normalization Process Theory to understand how innovations in healthcare become, or do not become, routine procedures. This theory “is concerned with the social organization of the work (implementation), of making practices routine elements of everyday life (embedding), and of sustaining embedded practices in their social contexts (integration).”

The model expanded into a “middle-range theory” applicable to “social processes through which new or modified practices of thinking, enacting, and organizing work are operationalized in . . . institutional settings.” May and Finch described:

Practices become routinely embedded in social contexts as the result of people working, individually and collectively, to implement them. The work of implementation is operationalized through four generative mechanisms (coherence; cognitive participation; collective action; reflexive monitoring). The production and reproduction of a practice requires continuous investment by agents in ensembles of action . . .

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5 Raymond Boudon, “What middle-range theories are,” Contemporary Sociology 20, no. 4 (July 1991), 520.


Normalization Process Theory (NPT) is used as the analytical framework for this discussion of the Support the Troops norm – examining its normalization from original concept, through to its operationalization (or implementation), to its becoming routine (or embedded) and then sustained (or integrated) as the standard governing the attitude of civilians toward the military in the public sphere today.

The four “generative mechanisms” or implementation stages vital to the normalization process (coherence, cognitive participation, collective action, and reflexive monitoring) are the main components of NPT. The focus of each stage is “purposeful social action” taken by individuals and groups, i.e., different types of “work.”

According to NPT, the normalization process is “dynamic and contingent; activities in all four domains [of coherence, cognitive participation, collective action, and reflexive monitoring] may occur concurrently, and their production and reproduction over time [are] emergent.” While May and Finch stress that the process need not be linear, discussion of the norm here follows its logical progression during recent decades distinguished by the Vietnam War, the Cold

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8 Ibid., 539.

9 Ibid., 542.
War, Operation Desert Storm, and finally the current Global War on Terror with some overlap of the NPT components during each.

NPT’s first component, coherence, is the “sense-making work.”10 Here, the norm is conceptualized as indicated by actors individually and collectively investing meaning in the new practice. The coherence of Support the Troops was achieved by the initial work of Vietnam veterans to redefine their identity amidst the backlash against the Vietnam War.

Cognitive participation is the second component of NPT. This stage consists of the “relational work,” as conveyed by actors working to “build a community” around the practice.11 The cognitive participation of Support the Troops is demonstrated by the formal Veterans Movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The movement centered around two primary issues: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Agent Orange.

Cognitive participation also occurred when the notion of veterans support expanded into the symbolic realm applicable to all soldiers and veterans. At the height of the Cold War, taking pride in American soldiers became an emblem of

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patriotism invoked frequently by President Reagan to garner public support for increased defense spending and his aggressive foreign policy.

The next component of NPT toward implementing a norm is collective action. This stage consists of the “operational work that people do to enact a practice.” Support the Troops was put into practice through the work of the massive military build-up and modernization of the 1980s culminating in Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

Reflexive monitoring, or the “appraisal work,” is the final component of NPT. Reflexive monitoring consists of work done by individuals and groups to “assess and understand how a new practice affects them and others around them.” Changes in the norm may result from its re-evaluation by the actors engaged with it during this stage. Reflexive monitoring of Support the Troops occurs now as seen in the renewed concern for the civil-military “gap” during the Global War on Terror.

In the post-9/11 era, the public professes World War II-level esteem for the military yet is largely unengaged with policy that put the troops in harm’s way.

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

The public also experiences little impact from this century’s wars: Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom. How the Support the Troops norm operates within this dichotomy is important to consider.

In modern civil-military relations study, the increasing separation between the military and the society it serves is alarming. Civil-military theorists long concerned with cultural gap between civilians and the military surmise that a civil-military gap too wide leads to an ineffective military and one that eventually may not respond to civilian control.

Support the Troops norm functions to perpetuate the divide between citizens and soldiers. It sustains a “military caste” in American society by allowing the demands and sacrifices of combat to be placed on a small segment of the population while absolving civilians of active civic responsibility in the defense and security of the nation. Support Our Troops offers the public an easy fix to the wrongs incurred by the soldiers of Vietnam era, but ultimately reveals a new sub-standard patriotism alive in the nation today.

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CHAPTER II

VIETNAM AND THE COHERENCE OF SUPPORT THE TROOPS

The Vietnam era was a tumultuous time in American history. The 1970s were marked by an upheaval of traditional American values and societal roles. The war “was the primary catalyst of a breakdown” in American foreign policy and, along with Watergate, the public’s confidence in American political institutions.¹

The United States aided South Vietnam against the 1959 invasion by communist North Vietnam as part of its early Cold War strategy of containment. By the late 1960s, America had failed to subdue the North Vietnamese forces despite escalation to over half a million troops while dissent at home grew beyond college campuses to the middle class and Capitol Hill.²

The Johnson Administration assured victory; however, the Tet Offensive covered extensively by U.S. media in 1968, showed an alternate reality of the “losing” side waging powerful strikes against South Vietnamese cities and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Around this time the My Lai Massacre, the murder of


² Ibid.
200 unarmed North Vietnamese civilians by American soldiers was reported in the press as well.

The war basically prevented President Johnson from running for re-election. The office went to Richard Nixon who promised to end the war. Over the next few years, President Nixon did bring troops home at intervals and announced plans to end the draft. Simultaneously, he approved U.S. invasions of Cambodia and Laos, and massive bombing campaigns over Hanoi. These tactics were met with explosive protests at home in the early 1970s, including the shooting deaths of four protesting Kent State University students by the National Guard.³

Even veterans of the Vietnam War became anti-war demonstrators. Never before had American veterans taken a stand against an ongoing war.⁴ Six Vietnam veterans, who helped lead an anti-war march from Central Park to the United Nations building in 1967, formed Vietnam Veterans Against the War later


that year. They sought the immediate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam.\(^5\)

The main tactic of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) was actually to bring attention to war “atrocities.” During anti-war demonstrations and marches VVAW recreated scenes of combat and “search and destroy” missions. Dressed in fatigues and carrying mock M-16 rifles, members of VVAW would “terrorize” private citizens and homes in staged reenactments. They passed around leaflets that proclaimed, “If you had been Vietnamese, we might have burned your house, shot you and your dog, raped your wife and daughter, burned the town, and tortured its citizens.”\(^6\)

Like most of the public by 1968, VVAW believed the war in which they had fought was unwinnable and questioned the reasons for U.S. involvement in the first place. Focusing on the brutal nature of modern combat against an insurgency in a foreign land was VVAW’s way of criticizing American military policy.

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Their “guerilla theater” received fair attention in the national press but failed to convey the message that the war was wrong; instead the dramatizations cast doubt on those fighting the war, “[stirring] the sentiment that many Vietnam veterans themselves were worthy of contempt.”\textsuperscript{7} As a witness to a VVAW march to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania stated, “If these are the kind of soldiers we have in Vietnam, then we’d better give up now.”\textsuperscript{8}

The war had become synonymous among the American public with a losing strategy, a less-than truthful government, atrocities committed by American soldiers, and turmoil at home. The public’s perception of Vietnam and the Vietnam veteran’s perception of his own identity were “tainted:”

Vietnam was the first war brought into American living rooms by televised news. Though geographically distant, Americans had a startlingly frank and intimate look at life in the combat zone. Images of Vietnam as ‘the dirty war’ were inescapable; they tainted American involvement in Vietnam with moral ambiguity. Robbed of his ‘just cause’ by rancorous debate over the rightness of American policy, and by the anarchic climate of the counterculture and antiwar movements, even the most gung-ho G.I. found it difficult to successfully present himself as an all-American youth serving God and country.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{7} Scott, \textit{Vietnam Veterans Since the War}, 13-19.

\textsuperscript{8} Robert Sullivan, “War Protestors Meet Opposition.”

\textsuperscript{9} Scott, \textit{Vietnam Veterans Since the War}, 2.
Upon official withdrawal in 1973, Vietnam veterans encountered a less than supportive public at home. They faced readjustment problems unique among veterans of the nation’s previous wars, probably due in part to their vilified status.\(^\text{10}\) They were branded “murderers,” “monsters,” and “baby-killers.” The public literally spit on them.

Psychiatrist Robert Lifton, who helped run group therapy sessions for Vietnam veterans known as “rap groups,” described that being spit on was “an experience referred to so often by veterans as to become a kind of mythic representation of a feeling shared by the American public.”\(^\text{11}\)

The Veterans Administration (now the Department of Veterans Affairs) was unprepared to handle the express needs of Vietnam veterans. Indeed, the country as a whole was not yet ready to cope with the ramifications of its Vietnam experience; thus, the initial work of veterans support fell to the anti-war veterans.

In NPT, the first “generative mechanism,” or implementation stage in the normalization process is coherence. “Coherence means that a practice – an


\(^{11}\) Lifton, Home from the War, 99.
ensemble of beliefs, behaviors, and acts that manipulate or organize objects and others – is made possible by a set of ideas about its meaning, uses, and utility; and by socially defined and organized competencies.”¹² Like each NPT mechanism, coherence is made up of four elements: differentiation, individual and communal specification, and internationalization.¹³

The first conception of Support the Troops, that veterans are not to be blamed for misguided military policy, was made possible by the work that Vietnam veterans did to rectify their status and define the Vietnam War’s place in American history. They made sense of their service by differentiating themselves from World War II veterans. They defined themselves as individuals and as a community, and internalized their new identity as a political force.

**Differentiation**

The first component of coherence is differentiation. This component is the work that people do toward “understanding how a practice and its objects are unique from alternate or previous practices.”¹⁴ It was not difficult for Vietnam

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veterans to understand the differences in status and in the treatment afforded
them compared to World War II veterans. The latter came home heroes and true
liberators. Upon return World War II veterans were met with victory parades
and homecoming celebrations.

Their return to civilian life was made smoother by the Servicemen’s
Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill. This legislation provided
veterans benefits not only for education but for purchasing a home, or starting a
business, as well as up to one year of unemployment assistance.¹⁵

Readjustment was also easier for WWII veterans since the war was a
common experience for most Americans. “Personal connections to the military
permeated society regardless of class, race, or gender.”¹⁶ Even if they did not
serve in the military, civilians were called upon to contribute to the war effort
and often had family members who served.

In contrast, Vietnam veterans reminded Americans of the country’s
embarrassing first loss. There were no welcome home celebrations or ceremonies
to mark the end of the Vietnam War. While the G.I. Bill was still available, it had

October 25, 2012).

¹⁶ Christian G. Appy, Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam (Chapel
considerably less “purchasing power” than in 1944. Also, the Selective Service System created a fighting force mostly from the working class, while universal conscription of World War II drafted “able-bodied” men from across the population.

Soldiers who served in Vietnam were, in general, much younger than World War II soldiers making readjustment even more difficult. Soldiers in Vietnam were also subject to individual tours of duty, versus unit tours of duty. This date of expected return from overseas system, or DEROS, “undermined the factors that ordinarily buffer the ill effects of combat – unit morale, cohesion and identification.” And, after service in Vietnam, there were a greater number of veterans who survived serious injuries, producing “an influx of younger veterans requiring treatment, rehabilitation, and compensation for service-connected, war-related conditions and injuries.”

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17 Scott, Vietnam Veterans Since the War, 83-84.
18 Appy, Working Class War, 18; 28-38.
19 Scott, Vietnam Veterans Since the War, 56-57.
20 Ibid., 51-52.
21 Ibid., 5-9.
The psychological readjustment needs of Vietnam veterans were not well understood and often dismissed by the Veterans Administration (VA). Many Vietnam veterans’ claims for readjustment assistance were denied due to the absence of diagnostic nomenclature for war-related psychological trauma and the “idealistic notions of America at war.”

These notions – of soldiers charged with an honorable mission and stoic veterans in no need of readjustment assistance – were remnants of World War II and soldiers from the “Greatest Generation.” Subsequently Vietnam veterans found themselves trying to maneuver a system “tailor-made to serve the needs of the previous generation.”

As these differences in identity and needs were recognized by Vietnam veterans seeking assistance and their sympathizers, “Vietnam veterans lacked a national organization dedicated to their interests and had no effective advocate in Congress.” The powerful veterans’ organizations at the time, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans were made up of veterans from previous wars. The most powerful veterans group within

22 Ibid., 15

23 Ibid., 8.

24 Ibid., 8.
Congress, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, also consisted of the previous generation’s veterans.

Together these groups formed the “Iron Triangle.” They were suspect of any proposed legislation to aid Vietnam veterans. Until 1983, the Iron Triangle opposed all major legislation targeting Vietnam veterans for fear it would threaten funding and support for their own benefits. Again, Vietnam veterans found themselves on the other side of a cultural and generational gap even within the veteran community.25

Vietnam veterans had been stripped of the entitled status usually handed to veterans by the public and by other veterans. After the war ended, many anti-war veterans “turned their attention, individually or through collective initiatives, to the considerable readjustment problems that lay ahead . . . .”26

**Individual and Communal Specification**

In NPT, individual and communal specification are the next components coherence. In individual and communal specification, “participants work as individuals to understand their specific tasks and responsibilities, and together

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25 Ibid., 7-8.

26 Ibid., 24.
to build a shared understanding of the aims, objectives, and expected benefits” of a new practice.27

As individuals and as newly formed-groups Vietnam veterans took responsibility for their own support. They developed their own methods for coping; worked to implement new VA outreach programs; helped to develop the diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; created their own advocacy group; and organized the first commemorations of their service.

In 1971, the first Vietnam veteran joined the staff of the VA hospital in Los Angeles. Shad Meshad, a clinical social worker and medical service officer during the war who suffered extensive head and back injuries, spearheaded the Vietnam Veteran Resocialization Unit. It was his “life’s work” to help lift the status of “demoralized” Vietnam veterans.28

Meshad called the VA’s services for treating Vietnam veterans “useless.”29 Since there was no clinical diagnosis for war-related psychological trauma, the

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29 Ibid.
VA was essentially forced to look for “character disorders” that caused conditions such as depression and anxiety in Vietnam veterans.\(^30\)

In developing his method, Meshad considered his own experience returning and recovering from Vietnam more so than traditional psychiatry. He gave veterans “the opportunity to articulate and make sense of their combat experiences.”\(^31\) He also provided employment assistance to reintegrate them back into society. To reach as many veterans as possible, Meshad extended this treatment to locations in the community, away from the VA.

In 1976, President Carter appointed Max Cleland as the director of the VA. Cleland was a triple amputee from his service in Vietnam. Previously, Cleland had testified before Congress on the VA’s insufficient care for Vietnam veterans and worked on veteran issues for Governor Jimmy Carter in Georgia. As its new director, Cleland made readjustment counseling for Vietnam veterans one of the VA’s top priorities.\(^32\)

Upon learning of Meshad’s work, Cleland wanted to institute it nationally. It would take several years and many political negotiations, but in

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 63.
1979 the VA launched the Vietnam Veterans Outreach Program. The program established “a nationwide network of [137] ‘vet centers’ each modeled” after Meshad’s resocialization units located away from VA hospitals.33

In the late 1960s, the New York chapter of VVAW recognized the need to develop a form of therapy external to the VA as well. They started informal “rap groups” to put their service into perspective and help each other recover. The national president of VVAW, Jan Crumb, invited well-known anti-war psychiatrist Robert Lifton and professor Chaim Shatan to help “formalize the rap sessions . . . not as group therapists, but coequals” based on their mutual opposition to the war.34

Lifton and Shatan recognized from their participation in the rap groups what Shatan called in his May 6, 1972, New York Times op-ed, “a post-Vietnam syndrome;” veterans across the country were working to overcome feelings of “guilt, rage, being scapegoated, psychic numbness, and alienation” through

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33 Ibid., 69-71.

34 Ibid., 14-15.
local, informal means because they could not get sufficient treatment from the VA. This syndrome warranted a formal diagnosis for war-related trauma.

Together with members of the rap groups, Lifton and Shatan decided to organize the dispersed veterans’ efforts, along with their contacts in the psychiatric and osteopathic communities and universities, into a grassroots movement to confront the readjustment problems of Vietnam veterans. Their collective effort led to the diagnostic definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

With help from the National Council of Churches, the National Veterans Resource Project (NVRP) was created in 1973. Jack Smith, a participant in the first formalized New York City Rap Group, was elected its director. The first priority of the NVRP was to “conduct an empirical study of the consequences of Vietnam service and the needs of Vietnam veterans.”

Shatan and Smith received a grant in 1975 from the American Orthopsychiatry Association to write a diagnosis for combat-related stress. They then started the Vietnam Veterans Working Group to publicize the issue to a

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wider audience in the public arena. The working group collected case histories of Vietnam veterans, made numerous appearances at professional meetings and roundtable discussions, and published several works on the topic.37

Eventually the American Psychiatric Association (APA) created the Committee on Reactive Disorders to determine the validity of inserting a war-related stress diagnosis into the next Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. They even invited Jack Smith to participate.

The working group presented their proposal for the diagnosis of what they termed “catastrophic stress disorder” to the APA annual meeting in May 1977, and to the Committee on Reactive Disorders for decision in January 1978. The committee voted to enter the diagnosis as “post-traumatic stress disorder,” or PTSD. It appeared much as the working group recommended in the third Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980.38

While the NRVP worked toward the PTSD diagnosis, Paul Reutershan was denied his claim for compensation from the VA for abdominal cancer he believed was caused by exposure to the defoliant Agent Orange in Vietnam. Knowing of other veterans in similar situations, Reutershan filed suit against the

37 Ibid., 59-66.

38 Ibid.
manufacturers and founded Agent Orange Victims International in 1978. Reutershan died late that same year but his organization pursued his case via a class-action lawsuit on behalf of all Vietnam veterans for damages estimated as high as $4 billion.39

Also in 1978, Vietnam veteran Bobby Muller and civil-servant Stuart Feldman founded the Council of Vietnam Veterans. The group’s mission was “first, to lobby for congressional legislation on behalf of Vietnam veterans, and second, to address the larger meaning of the Vietnam experience.”40

Muller had been featured in a 1970 \textit{Life} article as one of the patients in a decrepit VA hospital ward in the Bronx. From there he went on to do Vietnam veterans’ advocacy work with Paralyzed Veterans of America. Feldman had long been a proponent of G.I. Bill reforms. Together, they worked to unite “the scatterings of small, autonomous groupings of Vietnam veterans in cities across the nation.”41 The Council of Vietnam Veterans, later changed to Vietnam

\begin{footnotes}
\item [39] Ibid., 89-91.
\item [40] Ibid., 76.
\item [41] Ibid., 92.
\end{footnotes}
Veterans of America, would become “the largest and the most successful organization devoted solely to Vietnam veterans.”

**Internalization**

The development of the Agent Orange Victims International lawsuit and the creation of Vietnam Veterans of America marked “the politicization and [re]emergence of Vietnam veterans in the post-war era.” Here, the meaning behind the Vietnam veterans’ movement was internalized by veterans and their sympathizers.

Internalization is the final component of coherence, or the sense-making work toward implementing a new norm. “Internalization involves the work of understanding the value, benefits, and importance” of a practice. Vietnam veterans would not accept their demoralized status or the lack of closure to the war. They also wanted to prevent the denigration of future veterans. They were ready “to mobilize into a political force, and simultaneously . . . challenge the system in the work of veterans’ politics.”

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42 Ibid., 75.

43 Ibid., 76.


45 Scott, *Vietnam Veterans Since the War*, 94.
In 1979, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and the twelve Vietnam veteran congressmen comprising the recently formed group, Vietnam Veterans in Congress, proposed an official honorary week wherein cities across the nation would hold events and celebrations for Vietnam veterans. The bill was passed and for the first time, celebrations in honor of Vietnam veterans were held from late May through early June.

During events in New York City, VVA Director Muller gave a passionate speech to a “sparse crowd” in Central Park wherein he announced that five of the other eight patients from the VA hospital ward featured in Life “had since committed suicide.”46 He spoke of the negative stereotypes of Vietnam veterans. He accused the country of neglecting them:

You people really ran a number on us. Your guilt, your hang-ups, your uneasiness, made it socially unacceptable to mention the fact that we were Vietnam veterans. Whenever we brought it up, you walked away from the conversation. . . . If you turn your back now on the Vietnam veteran, you turn your back on the principles of this country.47

The crowd was awed. Mayor Ed Koch visibly “shaken” as ad-libbed a conclusion to the week’s proclamation that Vietnam veterans would not have to

46 Scott, Vietnam Veterans Since the War, 96.

carry the burden by themselves any longer: “if the United States did a number on Vietnam veterans, we have to correct it, and forthwith.” 48

The status of Vietnam veterans began to change. Vietnam veterans differentiated themselves from World War II veterans; they took responsibility as individuals and a community to build their own network of support; and began a social movement. The coherence of supporting the troops, that veterans are not to be blamed for war policy or outcomes, was established. The next phase of implementation ushered in: cognitive participation.

48 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

THE COLD WAR AND THE COGNITIVE PARTICIPATION OF SUPPORT THE TROOPS

A few months after the first Vietnam Veterans’ week in 1979, America was gripped by a new international crisis: the hostage taking of 52 American citizens at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution to overthrow the Shah. The crisis, like the Vietnam War, shook America’s confidence in its standing as the leader of nations. President Jimmy Carter’s inability to facilitate a speedy release was seen as symptomatic of weakness and led to his loss to Ronald Reagan in November 1980.

The final release of the hostages, days after President Reagan’s inauguration in January 1981, set the tone toward national rapprochement over the Vietnam War. Reagan took advantage of the reconciliatory atmosphere to use Vietnam and the status of soldiers symbolically for political ends. He deftly conscripted American civilians to exhibit patriotism, via support for the military and the men and women serving, and in turn helped create a favorable political climate for his emphasis on national defense.

Meanwhile, the work of Vietnam veterans to elevate their status in the late 1970s, became the formal Veterans Movement of the 1980s. They continued to cement their rights and enrolled others from various professional and technical
fields to create a network of support and momentum for accomplishing their goals. The movement, centered on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Agent Orange, brought about a new public attitude toward veterans and the war itself.

The Veterans Movement and Reagan’s ideal patriotism of the 1980s played significant roles in NPT’s cognitive participation of Support the Troops. Cognitive participation is the second component of NPT toward implementing a norm within its social context. It concerns the “relational work that people do to build and sustain a community . . .” around an innovation, and consists of four elements: initiation, enrollment, legitimation, and activation.”

**Initiation**

The first component of cognitive participation is initiation. Initiation involves the work “that brings a practice forth [and] requires that actors are enrolled across social and socio-technical networks.” In the case of Support the Troops, initiation is best demonstrated by the work to build a national memorial to the Vietnam War.

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During a planning session for the first Vietnam Veterans week in New York City, Vietnam veteran Jan Scruggs presented his idea for a national memorial to honor those who died in Vietnam. The names of every American killed would be listed. All funding would come from private donations – no government funding whatsoever. Although he encountered skepticism from his fellow veterans, Scruggs was advised to form a non-profit corporation to accomplish his vision.³

On May 28, 1979, Scruggs “held a press conference at the National Press Club to announce the formation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.”⁴ The organization hoped to dedicate the memorial on Veterans’ Day 1982, just over two years away – an ambitious goal for any project of its scope even without “the lingering vestiges of the anti-war movement and the Washington, D.C. bureaucracy.”⁵ Building the memorial this quickly required the efforts of many within and beyond the network of Vietnam veterans to drive it forward.

Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland reached out to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) organizers with a site on the Mall near the Lincoln


⁴ Scott, Vietnam Veterans Since the War, 97.

⁵ Ibid., 122.
Memorial. An opponent of the Vietnam War, Senator Mathias viewed the memorial as a “symbol of reconciliation.”\(^6\) By offering neither condemnation nor glorification of the war, the memorial would bring the country together through remembrance.

There were several stakeholders of the memorial to accommodate: supporters of the war, anti-war veterans, and family members of soldiers killed or still missing, veterans organizations and politicians, and of course, it would need to be aesthetically pleasing to all. VVMF decided to hold a design contest. The selection committee was made up of prominent professional artists screened for sufficient sensitivity to the war to ensure the artistic merit of the memorial as well as its symbolism of reparation.\(^7\)

At first fundraising for the memorial was piecemeal. The Fund received modest support from veterans organizations and a few token celebrities but most contributions were in the amounts of $5 to $10. It wasn’t until after the release of the U.S. hostages in Iran that support and fundraising for the memorial substantially increased.\(^8\)

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid., 131-132.

\(^8\) Ibid., 135-137.
The hostages release put perspective on Vietnam. It renewed a spirit of unity and patriotism in the country and “stood in stark contrast with [Vietnam veterans’] homecoming experiences.”9 The hostages were greeted by displays of welcoming yellow ribbons; the status of hero placed upon each. Vietnam veterans asked openly why there had been no welcome for them.

The incident triggered national recognition that Vietnam veterans deserved a homecoming as well. VVA Director Bobby Muller described the change as “dramatic. . . . there was this response by the public to do justice for the Vietnam veteran.”10 The response also included an exponential increase in the donations to the VVMF.

Still, the memorial was not completed without some controversy. Opponents raised objections over its design, calling it a “mass grave,” and “a wailing wall.”11 Others were offended by the unanimous winner of the design contest in April 1981: Maya Lin, a twenty-one year old student of architecture at Yale University who happened to be a woman of Chinese descent.

In late 1981, opponents of the Memorial were outnumbered but powerful and outspoken. Twenty-seven Republican Congressmen signed a letter to

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 140-147.
President Reagan requesting that the Department of the Interior deny the memorial its building permit on the Mall. Supporters of a memorial but who disliked Lin’s design, including Virginia Senator and Vietnam veteran Jim Webb, H. Ross Perot who had financed the design competition, and original steering committee member Tom Carhart, encouraged others from President Reagan’s inner circle to withdraw their support. The memorial still had no building permit and the scheduled dedication was less than a year away.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Enrollment}

When the controversies threatened to derail the project, the seminal veterans’ organizations, for the first time, stood in solidarity with Vietnam veterans. They publicly supported the Memorial against adversaries who disliked the design or lack of message about the war. Their support lent credence to Lin’s design and secured its funding.

Right before Christmas in 1981, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) held a press conference to deliver $180,000 to the memorial’s steering committee in a public show of support. Early the next year, “the American Legion made the single largest donation to the Memorial Fund by pledging $1 million.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 148.
The veterans’ organizations empathized with the desire to honor those who died in combat – no matter the war. The joining together of the cross-generational veterans organizations signifies enrollment, the next stage in cognitive participation where “actors work together and organize themselves to participate in a new practice.”

The backing of VFW and the American Legion provided the impetus needed to move forward with Lin’s design. Their enrollment into what had been a grassroots movement changed it into a national cause that opposition could not successfully block, though they were able to obtain a compromise. The additions to “the Wall” of an inscription, the American flag, and a realistic statue of three soldiers in Vietnam satisfied those wishing for a clear statement in honor of the war and a more traditional sculpture.

In early 1982, President Reagan’s new Department of the Interior Secretary informally approved of the modified design but “sat on the construction permit until plans for the flagpole, statue and inscription” were finalized and approved by Washington, D.C.’s Planning and Fine Arts Commissions. He still did not issue the permit after both Commissions signed


15 Ibid., 149.
off on the plans. The permit was finally granted apparently at the order of the White House in March 1982.16

“The Wall” was completed as scheduled and dedicated on Veterans Day 1982. The celebration lasted four days, featured a parade, an over-flight of fighter jets and a crowd of 150,000. Jan Scruggs said, “All of us can now say we are proud to be Vietnam veterans [and] know that our country appreciates our service.”17 Today the memorial is one of the most visited sites on the Mall and is continually praised for its moving evocation of war, loss and redemption.18

In part, VFW and the American Legion were prompted to join ranks with VVA and VVMF to strengthen their own organizations but the fellowship galvanized both generations of veterans and proved vital for the next battle.

16 Ibid., 150.


18 Scott, Vietnam Veterans Since the War, 265.
Wilbur Scott described:

The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars needed many more members from the Vietnam generation of veterans if they were going to survive. The building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial had provided the first step toward reconciliation. Unlike other concerns previously raised by Vietnam veterans, the desire to commemorate those who died in battle struck a chord with the VFW and American Legion leadership. They stanchly backed the memorial. . . . In the process, the two organizations discovered Vietnam veterans and a surge of Vietnam veterans responded to them. They were now ready to address Agent Orange together.19

**Legitimation**

The collective work to gain “service-connection” from the VA for illnesses associated with exposure to Agent Orange demonstrates the third component of NPT’s cognitive participation. Legitimation is the relational work where “participants believe it is right for them to be involved and [work to] make a valid contribution to [a practice].”20

Approximately eleven million gallons of an herbicide known as Agent Orange were sprayed over Vietnam to defoliate the jungle terrain. In 1971, the herbicide was banned after a study found cancer in lab animals exposed to trace amounts of dioxin, an unintended by-product of the herbicide manufacture.21

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19 Scott, *Vietnam Veterans Since the War*, 177.


21 Scott, *Vietnam Veterans Since the War*, 75-82.
In 1977, the VA received some of the first claims for compensation and treatment for illnesses, mainly cancer and birth defects, associated with exposure to the herbicide in Vietnam. The VA denied them because claims for compensation due to injuries or illnesses incurred during service, which entitles claimants to treatment and benefits from the VA, had to be submitted within one year of discharge. Also, the VA cited a lack of causal evidence between exposure and illnesses in humans despite numerous studies to the contrary on non-human specimens.22

Work to change the VA’s position on Agent Orange started simply: a sympathetic VA caseworker named Maude deVictor began her own informal study of Agent Orange claims when one of her claimants died shortly after being denied. She collected files on approximately two dozen Agent Orange claimants. When her supervisor directed her to halt, she turned the files over to a reporter at CBS in Chicago, named Bill Kurtis.23

On the evening of March 28, 1978, Kurtis’ documentary, Agent Orange: Vietnam’s Deadly Fog aired on local television. He also sent his congressmen videotapes of the documentary beforehand. The outcome of the documentary

22 Ibid., 91.

23 Ibid., 87-88.
was a public awareness, a flood of inquiries into the VA, and eventually an epidemiological study ordered by the Environmental Protection Agency.24

By 1979, Agent Orange was a prominent issue in the public sphere. The VVA seized upon the controversy to generate support for its overall agenda and mobilize into a membership-driven organization. VVA viewed Agent Orange as a “social, political problem;” thus, they sought legislative remedy.25

The first Congressional hearing on Agent Orange and Vietnam veterans was held in May 1979. The testimony revealed that the VA had not taken steps to study the veterans’ claims from exposure. The House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation accused the VA of “ducking the Agent Orange problem.”26 The hearing resulted in the VA’s mandate “to provide medical treatment to Vietnam veterans claiming exposure to Agent Orange and to conduct an epidemiological study of veterans exposed to it.”27

The VA never conducted the study. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) took over in October 1982, after the VA had yet to even create a protocol. In May

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 120-121.

26 Ibid., 110.

27 Ibid.
1983, a leading health specialist from CDC, Dr. Vernon Houk, testified before the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of a believed link between exposure to dioxin and cancer.\textsuperscript{28}

There were an estimated fifty-five Agent Orange studies receiving funding from the federal government at this time.\textsuperscript{29} Still, the VA did not grant presumed service-connection between illnesses and exposure to Agent Orange. Criticism of the VA’s position helped pressure the head of the VA at the time into resigning. A World War II veteran appointed by President Reagan, Director Robert Nimmo had been quoted calling Vietnam veterans in need of “preferential coddling.”\textsuperscript{30}

The American Legion urged President Reagan to select a Vietnam veteran to lead the VA. Instead, a West Point graduate who had entered the private sector in 1963 was appointed. Sensing that the struggle over Agent Orange within the VA would continue, Vietnam Veterans in Congress’ South Dakota Representative Tom Daschle proposed new legislation. The bill granted service-connection to veterans who served in the areas where Agent Orange was sprayed.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 191.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 166.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 175.
The major veterans organizations who had previously opposed legislation targeting Vietnam veterans, backed the bill. First, the VFW endorsed the bill after polling its membership. Then, after having passed a resolution supporting Agent Orange claimants at its national convention in March 1983, the American Legion also endorsed it. However, the VA opposed the bill citing “insufficient evidence,” and the risk the cost of the bill posed to the agency’s entire compensation program.\(^\text{31}\) The bill failed in the Senate.

Meanwhile, Agent Orange Victims International (AOVI) and its team of lawyers pursued Reutershan’s 1979 lawsuit against Agent Orange manufacturers begun. In May 1984, a settlement was reached. The manufacturers admitted neither guilt nor harm caused by the chemical. They simply agreed to create a fund of up to $180 million to compensate claimants.\(^\text{32}\)

Research continued to establish a definitive connection between dioxin and medical illnesses in humans. After spending $65 million, CDC called off the Agent Orange study due to a lack of enough veterans “significantly exposed” to validate the study’s results.\(^\text{33}\) Other numerous studies on the herbicide and on

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 176-177.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 187.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 200.
Vietnam veterans’ mortality rates could not convince the VA to grant service-
connection.

The VVA, along with the National Veterans Law Center decided to try a
different tactic. They sued the VA in a California district court for using a “too-
strictly defined standard of proof” to decide the 33,727 Agent Orange claims (all
but five were denied); in May 1989, the judge found in favor of the VVA and
ordered the VA to “void all [respective] benefit decisions made . . . .” for
reconsideration in light of the court’s decision.\(^{34}\)

The case prompted a Congressional inquiry into the VA’s procedures
regarding Agent Orange and a thorough review of all related scientific literature.

By this time, George H.W. Bush was President. He appointed Edward
Derwinski, a World War II veteran and member of VFA and the American
Legion, as Director of the VA. Director Derwinski created the VA’s Advisory
Committee on the Health-Related Effects of Herbicides to recommend Agent
Orange policy.

The advisory committee ruled that exposure to dioxin “more likely than
not” causes a greater risk of cancer. On May 19, 1990, Director Derwinski
ordered “a presumption of service-connection to Vietnam veterans having

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 207-208.
suffered from non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma . . . and soft-tissue sarcomas [i.e. cancer].”

Over a decade after the first claims were submitted, the legal rights of veterans exposed to Agent Orange were acknowledged, further legitimizing the entitled status of all veterans in the country.

**Activation**

The final component of cognitive participation overlaps with legitimation. In NPT, legitimation must occur in order for a practice to be activated. During legitimation, “actors work together to decide the procedures by which [a practice] is to be enacted and how engagement with it is defined. This decision-making work leads to the activation of a practice, bringing forth the materials and means by which . . . [the practice] is effectively operationalized . . . .”

The Veteran’s Movement enrolled Vietnam veterans, the seminal veterans organizations, Congress and members of the general public in various professional fields into the work of legitimating Vietnam veteran entitlements through the legal and political system, and finally within the VA itself; thus, the activation of the Support the Troops norm occurred with the decision to grant service-connection to veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Here, the norm carried

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35 Ibid., 222-223.

with it the notion that veterans should not be blamed for unpopular war, and that all veterans have earned an entitled status wholly separate from war policy and regardless of war outcomes.

Upon activation, the Veterans Movement winded down but veterans causes were kept very much alive. The VVA split into two organizations in 1990: the VVA, to focus on foreign policy issues, and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, to focus on immediate concerns of veterans such as Agent Orange and POW/MIA issues.37

Activation of Support the Troops also occurred in the public sphere in a more symbolic way yet no less powerful in terms of NPT’s “collectively defining the actions and procedures needed to sustain a practice . . . .”38 This activation ensued from President’s Reagan’s redefining the Vietnam War into a “noble cause,” and his heralding of patriotism as pride in American soldiers. By imploring the nation to support soldiers, Reagan also secured the public’s favor for his interventionist foreign policy.39

37 Scott, Vietnam Veterans Since the War, 226.


Reagan’s presidential campaign was based largely on “the restoration of American military superiority;” first on his agenda as President was “to change the poisonous civil-military climate that had evolved out of Vietnam.”

In his inaugural address, made on the west side of the Capitol Building facing Arlington National Cemetery, Reagan championed the soldiers who died in battles from “Omaha Beach . . . to a hundred rice paddies and jungles in a place called Vietnam.” Shortly after his inauguration, he presented the Medal of Honor to a Vietnam veteran in effort to show soldiers, as his Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger put it, “. . . that not only did the President and the Department of Defense care about their welfare, but the American people as a whole, also respected, honored, and appreciated [them].”

Reagan was so eager to embody respect for the military that he began the unprecedented tradition of Presidents saluting soldiers. This deference was


43 Maddow, Drift, 37.
unwavering throughout his Presidency. Neoconservative Norman Podhoretz described in *Foreign Affairs*:

[Reagan] made free and frequent use of patriotic language and engaged in an unembarrassed manipulation of patriotic symbols; he lost no opportunity to praise the armed forces, to heighten their morale, to restore their popular prestige . . . he also helped restore confidence here in the utility of military force as an instrument of worthy political purposes.44

Indeed, “. . . the prevailing attitudes toward the armed services underwent a sea-change during the Reagan era.”45 President Reagan articulated the new standard for civilian behavior toward the military in his 1983 address to the nation after the invasion of Grenada and the bombing of the marine barracks in Lebanon:

In these last few days, I’ve been more sure than I’ve ever been that we Americans of today will keep freedom and maintain peace. I’ve been made to feel that by the magnificent spirit of our young men and women in uniform and by something here in our nation’s capital. In this city, where political strife is so much a part of our lives, I’ve seen Democratic leaders in the Congress join their Republican colleagues, send a message to the world that we’re all Americans before we’re anything else, and when our country is threatened, we stand shoulder to shoulder in support of our men and women in the Armed Forces.46

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By the end of the 1980s, the cognitive participation, or the “symbolic and real enrollments and engagements of human actors” in Support the Troops was achieved. The Veterans Movement defined the Vietnam War in America’s history and legitimized the rights of Vietnam veterans within the infrastructure of veterans support. President Reagan, “by implication, established support for ‘the troops’ – as opposed to actual service with them – as the new standard of civic responsibility.”

“Soldiers – now set apart from [their] fellow citizens . . . “ and civilians, given a passive role, would put Support the Troops to the test during Operation Desert Storm, and the next normalization stage, collective action.


48 Ibid., 109.
In the coherence stage of the Support the Troops normalization, Vietnam veterans worked to spread the belief that soldiers should not be blamed for misbegotten military policy. During the cognitive participation stage, the work of the formal Veterans Movement and President Reagan’s rhetorical patriotism led to the elevated status of all soldiers in the public sphere. In the next stage of the normalization process, collective action, the military establishment and the public worked to establish American military superiority. Here, Support the Troops manifested as the desire to erase the legacy of the Vietnam War.

As the new President in 1981 Reagan was determined “reverse the anti-military climate of post-Vietnam and . . . implement a more confrontational posture toward the Soviet Union.”¹ Following through on this agenda, Reagan laid the foundation for the modern understanding of war in the United States.²

In cases like the invasion of Grenada and the Iran-Contra scandal, Reagan set the precedent of an autonomous Executive with the power to direct forceful


intervention into foreign affairs without consulting Congress. He dissuaded public debate about his foreign policy. He oversaw unprecedented peace-time defense spending. Under his leadership a massive military stockpile accrued and an American military presence was established around the world.³

The military establishment also was determined to remove doubts caused by Vietnam. The civilian non-veteran elite, the civilian foreign policy-makers, strategists and politicians, argued for more effective uses of force. The military elite, the military planners and leaders at the highest ranks of the officer corps, initiated a major internal transformation dedicated to recruiting and training its now “All-Volunteer Force;” preserving the professionalism of the officer corps; and achieving technological advancements.

By the time the Communist threat toppled in the early 1990s, the nation lacked any major adversaries worthy of its immense and modern military – at least until the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This event begged display of American superiority as the leader of nations and protector of freedom around the world. It provided the opportunity to erase the legacy of Vietnam and proved to be the operative testing ground for Support the Troops.

NPT’s collective action is the “operational work that people do to enact [a new practice].” The collective action of Support the Troops is demonstrated by the massive military build-up and modernization of the 1980s, culminating in Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

The focus of collective action is on four qualities of the operational work: interactional and skill set workability, and relational and contextual integration. The extent to which the work to establish a practice exhibits (or does not exhibit) these qualities is considered to promote (or inhibit) the implementation of a practice on its way toward becoming embedded.

**Interactional Workability**

The first quality considered in collective action is interactional workability. Interactional workability “refers to the interactional work that people do with each other, with artifacts, and with other elements of a [practice] when they seek to operationalize [it] in everyday settings.” The interactional workability of Support the Troops is demonstrated by the efforts to modernize
the military between the civilian non-veteran elite and the military elite at the acquiescence of the public.

In politics, the norm easily transferred over to an extraordinary increase in spending for the military and national defense. President Reagan’s first defense appropriations submission to Congress in 1981 sought to raise defense spending by twenty percent – an unprecedented increase without troops actively deployed. The request was coupled by the Administration’s announcement that it would seek “to double the defense budget in the next five years.” 7 They succeeded: “in Reagan’s eight years in office, military expenditure doubled from around $150 billion to $300 billion a year, until it represented nearly thirty percent of [the] annual budget and more than six percent of GDP.” 8

The Administration’s justification for the increase was to build a defense-capability superior to that of the Soviet Union. While the danger touted by the Reagan Administration has been criticized as exaggerated, it nonetheless helped to create the public perception a looming Soviet attack. 9 Convinced of the need to provide ample resources to the military, the public largely approved of the

7 Maddow, Drift, 52.

8 Ibid., 64.

9 Ibid., 66-69.
defense priority by virtue of their popular support for the President and his policies.

In terms of strategy, the work of the civilian non-veteran elite to refine the “limited war” theory also exemplifies the interactional workability of the Support the Troops. The theory of limited war grew out of deterrence, the strategy to avert war rather than win it, which fueled the U.S. and Soviet Union arms race during the Cold War. The limited but drawn-out campaign during the Vietnam War was largely based on this theory but it failed.

Instead of abandoning the theory, key “defense intellectuals” such as Albert Wohlsetter, a nuclear strategist at the RAND Corporation, turned their attention to “devising more effective ways of actually using force.” Wohlsetter argued for an even more offensive position against the threat of nuclear war by developing the capability of “precise attacks.”

As a member the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Integrated Long Term Strategy, Wohlsetter wrote in January 1988 that through “technological advances . . . extremely accurate long-range weapons, and improved targeting and communications . . .” the United States would eventually be able “to bring

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11 Ibid., 161.
force to bear effectively, with discrimination and in time to thwart any of a wide range of plausible aggressions.”

The threat of nuclear attack and the revised limited war theory provided political and strategic justification for allocating ample resources in support of the military’s modernization. Both justifications reinforced interactions among the civilian non-veteran elite, the military elite, and the public to prove false the implications of Vietnam and reassert the utility of force.

**Skill Set Workability**

The military elite also were eager to refute their operational failure in Vietnam. Their efforts to modernize demonstrate the second quality of work considered in the collective action phase: skill set workability, or “allocation work.” Skill set workability describes how well “the conduct of work is distributed” over existing skill sets and may inform how skills are defined.

The military elite made use of the political and strategic justifications for modernization to develop a new standard of “operational excellence.” They

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12 Ibid., 162.


14 May and Finch, “Implementing, Embedding, and Integrating Practices.”

focused on “sustained innovation on a massive scale: new doctrine, sophisticated new weapons, more rigorous approaches to training and the development of leaders, [and] large-scale changes to [units] and tactics . . .”\textsuperscript{16}

Along with the modernization of its weaponry and approach to training, the military implemented a new business model and honed a contemporary image. The end of conscription “forced the military to compete for ‘employees’ like any other employer.”\textsuperscript{17} Recruitment became dependent upon the skill of marketing the military to individuals as a means toward self-improvement and career advancement, not a duty to serve.

The military’s work to appeal to individuals showed in its contemporary ad campaigns. The “action ads featured airborne jumps, attack helicopters, tanks with laser-guided firing systems and the latest computers.”\textsuperscript{18} The emphasis on individual achievement was encapsulated in the “Be All that You Can Be,” U.S. Army slogan.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{18} Maddow, Drift, 51-52.
The skill set workability of Support the Troops is further demonstrated by the norm’s influence on the “work” of the public and its infiltration into popular culture. Movies such as *Top Gun*, *The Hunt for Red October*, and *Rambo* depicted the modern military in contrast to earlier Vietnam War movies like *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*.

These blockbusters of the 1980s portrayed modern warfare as clean, swift, technological and unfettered by moral ambiguity.19 The military was presented as individual heroes symbolic of American spirit and valor. The popularity of these movies reinforced patriotic notions of a military in which the public could feel confident, at the same time “responding to the changing mood [of the public toward the military] that Reagan had promoted.”20

The workability of Support the Troops, seen in its applicability to the work of the civilian non-veteran elite, the military elite, and the public to restore confidence in American military power, propelled the modernization of the military in the 1980s. Here, the norm justified the allocation of many resources, material and symbolic, to the military and promoted a militaristic vision of America.

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20 Ibid., 117.
Relational Integration

The third quality of work considered during collective action is relational integration. Relational integration “refers to the knowledge work that people do to build accountability and maintain confidence in a [practice] and each other [as they use it].”21 The relational integration of Support the Troops can be seen in the military elite’s work to re-establish the pre-Vietnam professional status of the officer corps.

During Vietnam, Administration officials, notably Johnson’s Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, dictated the war’s fighting strategy at times counter to the military commanders’ advice. The military-elite believed that the Vietnam War was lost due in large part to this subordination.

For example, President Johnson’s decision not to call up the reserves until late in the conflict was one of the “canonical” mistakes of Vietnam.22 Johnson did not want to bring the public’s attention to the military intervention; however, without the reserves, the deployed troops were debilitated by inadequate support and resources to win the war.23

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23 Maddow, Drift, 15-16.
To prevent members of the civilian non-veteran elite from attempting to keep the public disengaged from military interventions again, General Creighton Abrams, commander of the U.S. forces in Vietnam from 1968 until he became the Army Chief of Staff in 1972, restructured the military. He made “the active army operationally dependent on the reserves, placing into [them] the functions without which the conduct of a major campaign was . . . impossible.”

The result of Abram’s restructuring of the war-time military into a “Total Force,” was that “no president could opt for war on a significant scale without first taking the politically sensitive and economically costly step of calling up America’s ‘weekend warriors.’” This doctrine was Abram’s calculated effort to reassert the dominance of the officer corps as the experts in the “application of violence.”

After the adoption of Abram’s policy, the military elite continued to shift “the balance of civil-military authority on decisions relating to war and its conduct” back in favor of the officer corps. This work required a prescription

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25 Ibid.


for modern warfare better suited to preventing another Vietnam; in other words, it required defining winnable war.  

This definition, considered the next iteration of the Total Force policy established definitive criteria for waging war: “restricted to matters of vital interest; [with] specified concrete and achievable objectives, both political and military; with secured assurances of popular and congressional support; fought to win; and only as a last resort.”

This doctrine, known as the Weinberger Doctrine and sanctioned by the civilian non-veteran elite via its announcement by Reagan’s Secretary of Defense in November 1984, established that “. . . war once again . . . fell exclusively within the purview of [the military elite].”

**Contextual Integration**

The final quality of work considered during NPT’s collective action is contextual integration. Contextual integration is the “realization of materials and symbolic resources” to implement a new practice. The success of the first war in

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28 Ibid., 48.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 42.

the Gulf, in what came to be known as the Powell Doctrine of overwhelming force and through the public’s reception of the Gulf War veterans, demonstrates the contextual integration of Support the Troops.

The then Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, did not believe that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait met the criteria set forth in the Weinberger Doctrine.32 On the other hand, President George H.W. Bush saw it as an opportunity to build a new world order and display the fruits of the military’s modernization.33

Like his predecessor, he created a political climate that made force seem the only option. He created a mythic enemy out of Saddam Hussein, likening him to Hitler.34 He also dissuaded public debate on the prospect of military intervention and avoided putting it to vote in Congress.35

The political stakes were very high for President Bush though and he did not want another Vietnam. In order to get his war and ensure victory, Bush heeded General Powell and the commander of U.S forces in Kuwait, General


33 Maddow, *Drift*, 129.

34 Ibid., 130.

Norman Schwarzkopf. They stressed the need for “overwhelming, decisive use of force to meet American military objectives clearly and quickly.”

To meet their demands, the largest mobilization of reserves since World War II was ordered. Naval power in the form of multiple aircraft carriers were sent to the Persian Gulf, and two-thirds of the U.S. Marines. “By the time the offensive capability was in place, [there were] almost 500,000 American troops in the Middle East – nearly as many as at the height of the Vietnam War.”

Unlike Vietnam, Operation Desert Storm was a “resounding success.” Less than a month after the operation began on January 16, 1991, Kuwait was liberated and the troops were brought home before the end of March. There were relatively few American casualties and the war was relatively cheap, costing the United States an estimated $8 billion.

Also, seventy percent of the public supported the war before it even commenced; once the fighting began, Americans were “dazzled. . . . [They] and

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36 Ibid., 133.


38 Maddow, Drift, 133-134.


40 Maddow, Drift, 169-170.
much of the world [watched] a Technicolor air-strike extravaganza every night.” 41 Images of the “dirty” Vietnam War which seemed clandestinely captured and divulged to the American public on the nightly news, were replaced with “images of precision bombs heading unerringly to their targets and Patriot missiles (ostensibly) intercepting incoming [Iraqi] Scuds” like from a video game. 42

Operation Desert Storm became the model for U.S. victory on the battlefield as articulated by the Powell Doctrine. The war was executed in accordance with the policy of Total Force and even if it did not completely satisfy the Weinberger Doctrine, it was supported by the public and directed by the military elite. General Powell simply added overwhelming force and an exit strategy to the criteria already established.

The rationale for the military build-up during the Cold War was now replaced by a new understanding of America’s role in the world. Historically, America had not maintained a large force during peacetime.43 Plans to drawdown the military build-up after the Cold War were set aside when the

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41 Ibid., 130; 169-170.
43 Maddow, Drift, 10-11.
“liberation of tiny Kuwait eclipsed” the fall of the Soviet Union later the same year.44

Historian Andrew Bacevich wrote:

[Operation Desert Storm] showed that with the end of the Cold War, the responsibilities of global leadership were greater than ever. Those responsibilities meant that the United States could [neither] relinquish the global military presence that it had acquired . . . [nor] the global power projection capabilities that it had perfected after Vietnam.45

The contextual integration of Support the Troops was achieved in the first war in the Gulf; the utility of force, once questioned after Vietnam, “was proven useful, even essential.”46 Ample material and symbolic resources were provided by the civilian non-veteran elite and the public to the military to ensure victory with which the vision of a militant and superior American was realized.

After victory, Support the Troops continued to operate in the public sphere and within the infrastructure of veterans support. As victors, the latest generation of veterans encountered an entirely different public than those of Vietnam; their return was more comparable to that of World War II veterans. The yellow ribbons displayed prominently during the Iran Hostage crisis became


45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.
bumper stickers emblazoned with the mantra “Support Our Troops.” Soldiers in uniform were greeted by civilians with “Thank you for your service.”

Readjustment for veterans of the first Gulf War was less problematic than that of Vietnam veterans. The rate of PTSD was much lower and those that did seek assistance and compensation encountered a VA where the “identification, treatment, and study of PTSD [was] commonplace.”47 The VA and other government agencies were also more “proactive” in administering treatment and providing benefits to veterans that claimed service-connection illnesses due to exposure of Desert Storm hazards such as chemical and biological weapons, oil well fires, and vaccines.48

Support the Troops was now fully implemented in the public sphere. It had been applicable and easily integrated throughout the work of the civilian non-veteran elite, the military elite and the public toward restoring American military power and reasserting the United States as the leader of nations. Upon victory, soldiers took on iconic status, civilians took on a passive role, and America became the protector of freedom and democracy around the world.


48 Ibid.
CHAPTER V

THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR AND THE REFLEXIVE MONITORING OF SUPPORT THE TROOPS

Under the Clinton Administration, force became integral to foreign policy. The Powell Doctrine of overwhelming force used as a last resort in matters vital to national security was abandoned. Smaller, rapidly-deployable and specialized military units were deployed in regional contingencies on varied missions: humanitarian, peace-keeping, offerings of force protection, and coercive diplomacy in places like Haiti, Somalia, and Kosovo.¹

Meanwhile, the general public took little notice. There was little awareness, let alone, public debate about militarized interventions around the world. The public became largely disengaged from foreign affairs, turning more attention to domestic matters while America’s standing in the world seemed unthreatened.²

When the terrorist attacks of 9/11 occurred, force was such an unfettered recourse that the public not only rallied around retaliation against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. President George W. Bush was able to declare the ad hoc third


world war. He portrayed America faced with the threat of ideological annihilation and the freedom-seeking peoples of the world in need of U.S. protection from tyrannical governments in Iran, Iraq and North Korea and their “terrorist allies.”

The two main operations of the Global War on Terror, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom, have played out very differently from Operation Desert Storm. Neither one has provided a decisive victory. They have placed on the military the burden of two simultaneous, long and unconventional wars overseas.

In many ways, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) is reminiscent of the Vietnam War. It has become mired in scandals such as Abu Ghraib, the Battle of Fallujah, images of American soldiers posing with and otherwise defiling Taliban corpses, and the murder of seventeen unarmed Afghan civilians by an American soldier. It has been criticized as miss-managed by the civilian non-veteran elite in subordination of the professionalism of the officer corps.

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In contrast to Vietnam is the general civilian response. The public professes unwavering support for the troops even as public approval for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan abruptly dropped.\textsuperscript{5} There is wide recognition that GWOT veterans are entitled to readjustment assistance. Also unlike during the aftermath of Vietnam, the utility of force has yet to come under scrutiny as a foreign policy tool – all of which adheres to the Support the Troops norm in the public sphere and is congruent with statistical evidence of the American public’s insulation from war.

Renewed concerns for the civil-military gap have been prompted by the minimal impact of the decade’s two simultaneous, international wars on civilian life while unprecedented burdens have been placed on the military. Recent studies of the civil-military gap are significant to the next implementation stage of the Support the Troops normalization process: reflexive monitoring.

Reflexive monitoring is the “appraisal work that people do to assess and understand the ways that a new [practice] affects them and others around

them.”6 This stage is made up of systemization, communal and individual appraisal, and reconfiguration. During reflexive monitoring, a norm may be redefined or modified based on criticisms by those engaged with it.7

Systemization

The first component of reflexive monitoring is systemization. Systemization involves “judgments about the utility and effectiveness of a new practice . . . made with reference to socially patterned and institutionally shared beliefs.”8 In the United States, judgments about civil-military relations are made with reference to America’s unique tradition and cultural belief in a civilian-controlled military made up of “citizen-soldiers.”9

Civilian authority over the military was inspired by the colonial experience of British “occupation” leading to the Revolutionary War. “Standing armies” were viewed by the authors of the Constitution as tempting tools at the

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disposal of the federal government, increasing its predisposition to wage war
and in turn threaten personal liberty. Alexander Hamilton wrote in *The Federalist*:

> The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual
effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel
nations the most attached to liberty to resort for repose and security to
[standing armies] which have a tendency to destroy their civil and
political rights. To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the
risk of being less free.¹⁰

To diminish this predilection to war, the constitutional authority to
declare war was vested in the Legislative as a check on the President. The
Commander-in-Chief, as President, was accountable to the people. During war,
civilians comprising the earliest versions of the reserves were called upon to
supplement the small early American military. By this, the country could not
carry out war without the participation and indirect authorization of the
citizenry.¹¹

After World War II, two schools of thought developed in the study of U.S.
civil-military relations. Both schools examined the effectiveness of the civilian-
controlled military separate from, but in service of, the liberal society from which

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it springs. One viewed this separation, or “gap,” through an institutional “lens,” the other, cultural.12

The institutional lens looks at the role of “the military as an organization within the institutional framework” of the U.S. government.13 In 1957, Samuel Huntington attempted to reconcile the “ideological divide between the generally conservative officer corps and a liberal and individualistic society.”14 In The Soldier and the State he argued, in favor of a gap, that the professionalism of the military elite would be jeopardized if civilian society did not respect “the conservative values that animate military culture” and make it effective.15

The cultural lens examines the broader implications of military culture functioning in liberal society, such as “the role of individuals and [protected classes] in the military . . . the relationship between military service and citizenship (including the civic republican tradition); [and] the nature of military service (occupation, profession, etc.) . . . .”16


13 Ibid.


15 Ibid.
In 1960, Morris Janowitz argued in *The Professional Soldier* that “in a democracy, military culture should adapt to changes in civilian society” to minimize the gap:

If the gap were allowed to remain too large the military would become unresponsive to civilian control, and civilians would therefore stop providing the support needed to maintain an adequate or effective military posture. [Furthermore,] civilian government would be unlikely or unable to trust the advice and reporting of a military whose value-system was so markedly different from the civilian mainstream.\(^\text{17}\)

The reflexive monitoring of Support the Troops, as an embedded norm in the public sphere governing civilian attitude toward the military, follows the Janowitz tradition within the canon or “system” of U.S. civil-military relations theory. The norm is indicative of the cultural gap between civilians and the military; thus appraisal of the norm will elucidate on current understandings of civic responsibility and military service as perceived by the citizenry.

**Communal Appraisal**

During reflexive monitoring evaluation of the norm occurs first through communal appraisal. Communal appraisal of the practice is done through “highly structured, and formal mechanisms of institutional production and


interpretation.”

Recent studies by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies and the Pew Research Center offer communal appraisal of the cultural civil-military gap significant to the Support the Troops norm.

In late 1998, professors Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn conducted the “Project on the Gap Between the Military and Civilian Society” sponsored by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) in North Carolina. The project surveyed segments of the civilian non-veteran elite, the military elite and the public for their opinions on the “nature of the gap, the factors that shape it” and its significance. Analyses of the survey were presented in 2001, as a collection of essays entitled, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*.

The survey showed that “the military as an institution received very positive evaluations from all groups of respondents.” However, members of the

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20 Ole R. Holsti, “Of Chasms and Convergences: Attitudes and Beliefs of Civilians and Military Elites at the Start of a New Millennium,” in *Soldiers and Civilians*, 94.
military had doubts about civilian society’s level of respect for and its “understanding of the sacrifices made by the military.”

Analysis of these results revealed that “public expressions of confidence in the military . . . should not be taken as conclusive evidence that the military is not alienated from civilian society. . . . In short, public confidence in the military masks latent distrust and a deeper divide in civil-military relations.”

Gronke and Feaver wrote:

The conventional wisdom that there is a widespread public support for the military is misleading, and that in fact there is real cause for concern about an undercurrent of alienation in the relationship. . . . The less an individual has contact with the military culture, either through friends and acquaintances, or through military service, the less inclined is that person to support important aspects of military culture.

The TISS commissioned further study to determine the impact of the civil-military gap on the use of force. This analysis, presented in 2005 by professors Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi in Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-

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21 Paul Gronke and Peter D. Feaver, “Uncertain Confidence: Civilian and Military Attitudes about Civil-Military Relations,” in Soldiers and Civilians, 143.

22 Ibid., 159-161.

23 Ibid., 132.
Military Relations and the Use of Force, found systematic differences of opinion between civilians and the military over “when and how force should be used.”

They found that the civilian non-veteran elite are “more interventionist with regard to the range of issues” they believe justify force. The military elite, on the other hand, “reserve the use of force for interstate issues that represent a substantial threat to national security.”

The significance of this “opinion gap” was especially evident when Feaver and Gelpi examined the impact of veteran experience in the Legislative and Executive Branches as it corresponded to “the propensity to initiate and to escalate militarized interstate disputes between 1816 and 1992.” The authors found “that as the percentage of veterans . . . increases, the probability that the United States will initiate militarized disputes declines [substantially].”

Feaver and Gelpi also presented evidence contrary to the long-held assumption of civilian non-veteran and military elites that the public is “casualty-phobic (meaning that public support for a mission will evaporate at the

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25 Ibid., 5-6.

26 Ibid., 64-83.

27 Ibid., 7.
first sign of casualties).” 28 They found that casualty tolerance among civilians and the military follows the same gap pattern between them on the use of force; civilians appear to be more tolerant of casualties from interventionist missions while the military are less so. Both civilians and the military indicate similar tolerance levels for casualties of “realpolitik” missions involving matters of national security. 29

Civilians may actually be “defeat-phobic; a substantial proportion of the public is willing to support a military operation despite U.S. casualties if the operation appears to be succeeding. If the operation is not successful however, the American public is – understandably – much less tolerant of casualties.” 30

This misassumption over casualty aversion is an important aspect of the cultural civil-military gap. As Feaver and Gelpi pointed out, recent wars have been fought “to minimize casualties.” 31 This strategy and “resulting constraints

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 115-116.
30 Ibid., 136; 144.
31 Ibid., 146.
and half measures [may] undermine the prospects for victory;” thus, rendering
the military ineffective.32

A final communal appraisal important to the Support the Troops norm is
the Pew Research Center’s “War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era.” This study
surveyed veterans and the general public in the summer of 2011 for indications
of a cultural gap. The results echo those of the original 1998 TISS survey that a
disconcerting gap between civilian and military society exists despite the
admiration professed by civilians.

32 Ibid.
The Pew study also indicates that civilian lives are largely unaffected by the nation’s longest war:

Only about one half of one percent of the U.S. population has been on active military duty at any given time during the past decade of sustained warfare. Some 84% of the post-9/11 veterans say the public does not understand the problems faced by those in the military or their families. The public agrees, though by a less lop-sided majority – 71%.

Some 83% of all adults say that military personnel and their families have had to make a lot of sacrifices since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks; 43% say the same about the American people. However, even among those who acknowledge this gap in burden-sharing, only 26% describe it as unfair. Seven-in-ten (70%) consider it “just part of being in the military.”

The public makes a sharp distinction in its view of military service members and the wars they have been fighting. More than nine-in-ten express pride in the troops and three-quarters say they thanked someone in the military. But a 45% plurality say neither of the post-9/11 wars has been worth the cost and only a quarter say they are following news of the wars closely. And half of the public say the wars have made little difference in their lives.

At a time when the public’s confidence in most key national institutions has sagged, confidence in the military is at or near its highest level in many decades. However, just 58% believe that the military operates efficiently. Among veterans of all eras, 66% say the military runs efficiently.33

The communal appraisal of Support the Troops, via the TISS’ and Pew Research Center’s studies of the cultural civil-military gap, confirms a very high

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level of professed support and admiration from civilians toward the military. On its surface, this finding would seem reflective of an insignificant civil-military gap.

Further analysis reveals that there is a large gulf in the civilian understanding of the sacrifices made by the military and that civilian expressions of admiration for the military are “misleading.” There is a significant “opinion gap” on the use of force between civilians and the military and the tolerance of casualties. Also, war has little impact on civilian life and civilians are not engaged with the conduct or the underlying policies of war. In sum, communal appraisal exposes that Support the Troops is illusory. When it comes to the reality of war, troops are very much on their own.

**Individual Appraisal**

The second method of evaluation during NPT’s reflexive monitoring is individual appraisal. Individual appraisal is “informal or experiential judgments of a practice done by individuals to assess the practice’s effects on them and the contexts in which [it] is set.”

Important individual appraisal of the cultural civil-military gap in light of the Support the Troops norm is prevalent today in

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the media; in considerations of modern civic responsibility; within foreign and public policy discussions; and from veterans on the receiving end of it.

Not long after the U.S. invasion of Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein, during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, reports appeared about the minimal impact of two wars on civilian life. Comparisons were made between the civilian contributions to the war effort during World War II: war bonds, gasoline rationing, blood drives, scrap metal collections, and the spirit represented by Rosie the Riveter; and today: “. . . we say support the troops, affix yellow ribbons to the bumpers of our cars and move on . . . .”35

In response to this comparison, noted military sociologist Charles Moskos said, “The public reflects patriotism-lite. Nobody’s sacrificing anything.”36 And no one is asking them to. He continued: “. . . political leaders are afraid to ask the public for any real sacrifice, [like a draft or higher taxes] which doesn’t speak too highly of the citizenry.”37


Criticism in the “patriotism-lite” vein continued during the Occupy Wall Street protest. Mark Thompson wrote in *Time*, “The “Other 1%:"

Over the past generation, the world’s lone superpower has created – and grown accustomed to – a permanent military caste, increasingly disconnected from U.S. society, waging decade-long wars in its name, no longer representative of or drawn from the citizenry as a whole. Think of the U.S. military as the Other 1% – some 2.4 million troops have fought in and around Afghanistan and Iraq since 9/11, exactly 1% of the 240 million Americans over 18 [years of age].^38

Thompson wrote about the military’s regional and cultural isolation: soldiers predominantly are from and live in southern and rural areas, come from lower socioeconomic strata, and already have or have had a family member in the service. They live on self-sufficient military communities or, “megabases with no need to leave.”^39 They more often identify as Republican and are more “conservative than the nation as a whole.”^40

Thompson continued, “thanking our troops for their service has become almost reflexive in the United States, in part because of memories of Vietnam. . . . But the sentiment reflects the problem: the public has scant idea of just how

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^38 Thompson, “The Other 1%,” *Time*.

^39 Ibid.

^40 Ibid.
much the military has given since 9/11 beyond a vague sense that [many] have died.”  

Soldiers are aware of this contradiction. The most direct commentary on the Support the Troops norm is the individual appraisal by those on the receiving end of it: Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom veterans.

An Iraqi Freedom veteran suffering from PTSD and severe foot injuries told Thompson, “. . . people don’t know – and don’t want to know – what [I’ve] been through. . . . It’s hard not think of my war as a bizarre camping trip that no one else went on.” 42 A brigadier general and Iraq veteran said, “[It’s] just not enough. . . . There has to be more, he added, saying that the absence of a call for broader national sacrifice in a time of war has become a near constant topic of discussion among officers and enlisted personnel.” 43

An Enduring Freedom veteran, commenting on its tenth anniversary and the death toll reaching 2,000, said that he and his fellow soldiers “laugh about how no one really cares. All the ‘support the troops’ stuff is bumper sticker

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

deep.” Phillip Carter, a veteran of Iraq and founder of Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans of America, wrote in a late 2011 Washington Post editorial of his initial reaction to hearing strangers thanking him for his service in Los Angeles: “I resented [them]. I suspected that they were just trying to ease their guilt for not serving.”

Individual appraisal of the cultural civil-military gap reveals that among the general population, contemporary notions of citizenship and civic responsibility connote no obligation to contribute to or participate in the war effort – forget service in the military. Direct commentary on the attitude of civilians reveals that for all its suggestion of admiration and pride, Support the Troops rings hollow to soldiers and veterans. It may actually contribute to their feelings of alienation and perpetuate the cultural civil-military divide.

**Reconfiguration**

The final component of NPT’s reflexive monitoring is reconfiguration. During this final increment in the normalization process, “appraisal work by

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individuals or groups may lead to attempts to redefine procedures or modify practices – and even change the shape of the norm itself.”

There has been mention of reinstituting the draft to relieve some of the burden on the military and to lessen the civil-military gap although the idea is also widely considered unrealistic and unwise. Scholars of civil-military theory suggest that simply increasing contact between civilians and the military would lessen the civil-military gap. Since the TISS Project showed that “social contact ‘accounts’ for otherwise statistically significant civil-military gaps . . . efforts to promote civil-military interactions may well shape the de facto civil-military gaps over time.”

In “Patriotism-Lite Meets the Citizen Soldier,” Moskos urged military recruitment of the college population. Service by more “privileged young Americans” would engage more segments of the population in the use of force. Also, he called for the creation of a national youth service for homeland security

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48 Feaver and Gelpi, Choosing Your Battles, 34-35.

49 Charles Moskos, “Patriotism-Lite Meets the Citizen Soldier,” in United We Serve, 33-42.
akin to President Bush’s Freedom Corps that “emphasizes the responsibilities of citizenship.”\(^{50}\)

Not all assessment of Support the Troops is entirely critical. Phillip Carter went on to say that the expressions of gratitude do make readjustment less difficult, in comparison to the difficulties faced by Vietnam veterans.\(^{51}\) But there is an emerging sense among civilians that Support the Troops does not fulfill the civic responsibility owed to the nation or the debt owed to the military.

At the Georgetown University’s student-veteran group’s second annual “Free Beer and War Stories” night, Mark Wise, an Afghanistan veteran, presented a slideshow of his war experience. It included an IED explosion that severely wounded him and killed another member of his platoon. Afterwards an audience member approached him, “determined to say something other than ‘Thank you for your service,’ something not fleeting, not sentimental, not sanitized. ‘It must be difficult for you to tell your story,’ he said.”\(^{52}\)

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Phillip Carter, “For Veterans, Is Thank You For Your Service Enough?”

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This year Veterans Day is on the ninety-third anniversary of the First World War’s armistice. The President lays a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Ceremony. Cities hold parades and celebrations in honor of all veterans. Businesses offer military discounts. Some in uniform may receive a bump to first class seating and the like. Around the country they hear, “Thank you for your service.”

Support the Troops, like covering one’s heart before the colors, is the expected, if not obligatory, attitude of civilians toward the military today. Expressing pride in the military, thanking those who serve is the standard behavior among the general public. It is spontaneous, automatic and has become routine, or embedded in the public sphere. The military once inspired distrust, then hostility during Vietnam. Since then, the civilian response has progressed and undergone a process of normalization.

The model of the normalization process applied to this analysis of Support the Troops is Carl May and Tracy Finch’s Normalization Process Theory (NPT). This theory “provides an explanatory framework for investigating the
routine embedding of material practices in their social contexts.”¹ It “proposes that material practices become routinely embedded in social contexts as the result of people working, individually and collectively, to implement them.”² There are four stages of the implementation work: coherence, cognitive participation, collective action and reflexive monitoring. The coherence, or the “sense-making work” of Support the Troops, was performed by Vietnam veterans to rectify their status and define the Vietnam War’s place in American history. Vietnam veterans made sense of their service by differentiating themselves from World War II veterans. They redefined themselves as individuals and as a community, and internalized their new identity as a political force. This led to the initial conception of Support the Troops, that veterans are not to be blamed for misguided military policy.

The second implementation stage, cognitive participation, is the “relational work.” Here, Vietnam veterans developed and contributed to the formal Veterans Movement. They continued to cement their rights and enrolled others from various professional and technical fields to create a network of support and momentum for accomplishing their goals. This work centered on


² Ibid., 540.
the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and gaining VA service-connection for illnesses caused by exposure to Agent Orange.

Cognitive participation of Support the Troops also ensued from President Reagan and his symbolic use of soldiers for political ends during the Cold War. He conscripted American civilians to exhibit patriotism, via support for the military and the men and women serving, and in turn helped create a favorable political climate for his emphasis on national defense.

Together, the Veterans Movement and Reagan’s ideal patriotism of the 1980s led to the “elevation of the soldier to the status of national icon, the apotheosis of all that is great and good about contemporary America.”3 From this work Support the Troops became not only the cognitive separation of soldiers from policy but the belief that American superiority is best displayed through military might.

The next mechanism toward the implementation of Support the Troops is collective action, or the “operational work.” During this stage, the norm manifested as the desire to erase the legacy of Vietnam. The military establishment, made up of civilian non-veteran elite and military elite, worked to

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prove the utility of force through modernization. This work culminated in Operation Desert Storm. Upon victory, supporting the troops became the proven baseline for civic responsibility; the path was laid for force to become integral to foreign policy; and war became abstract, a “spectator sport.”

The final implementation stage is reflexive monitoring, or the “appraisal work.” Like Vietnam, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) renewed considerations of civil-military relations theory in the context of America’s unique tradition of a civilian-controlled military made up of citizen-soldiers. Studies of the cultural civil-military gap show that Support the Troops is misleading and disguises a disconcerting divide between soldiers and civilians. According to Janowitz, such a gap is dangerous because it leads to an unresponsive civilian population unable, or unwilling, to provide the symbolic and material resources needed for an effective military.

It is apparent that the stress of the GWOT is over-burdening the military. To populate the forces of simultaneous wars, tours of duty have been extended and 800,000 of the 2.3 million soldiers who served in Iraq or Afghanistan have been redeployed multiple times.5

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4 Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (New York: Picador), 110.

More soldiers are suffering traumatic brain injury (TBI) and PTSD than ever before with at least “126,000 cases of TBI and 70,000 diagnosed cases of PTSD” as of January 2012; also increasing are the rates of domestic violence, child abuse, violent sex crimes, and the rate of suicide – “epidemic.” As of June 2012, an active-duty soldier had committed suicide each day since the year began. “In fact, the number of U.S. soldiers who have died by their own hand is now estimated to be greater than the number who died in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq.” And among the veteran community, the risk of becoming unemployed or homeless is greater than in the civilian population.

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8 Swofford, “Anthony Swofford on the Epidemic of Military Suicides.”

As yet, civilians are unwilling, or perhaps not asked, to share the burdens and truly sacrifice for the sake of being the “shining city on the hill.”¹⁰ Service in the military “is [considered] a matter of individual choice,” not a duty to serve.¹¹ For many of a certain segment of the population, joining the military is not so much a choice as the lack of alternate options. Do civilians “love the troops because we don’t have to be them?”¹²

After Vietnam, many civil-military theorists “lamented” that the end of conscription would lead to a widening of the cultural civil-military gap; specifically, the nation “ignorant of and unsympathetic to the military’s needs, would not elect officials with military savvy who could make prudent [foreign policy] decisions.”¹³ This worry has come to fruition.

Today “the number of elected officials who have served has plummeted to its lowest point since World War II. Only twenty percent of U.S. Representatives


and Senators have served . . .” compared to seventy percent in 1975.\textsuperscript{14} This year’s presidential election is “the first one since 1944 where neither of the presidential candidates has served in the military, and the first one since 1932 where neither major-party ticket has a veteran on it.”\textsuperscript{15} Civilians “now don’t seem to feel that military service makes someone more qualified for public office. In fact, they often resent the implication that it does.”\textsuperscript{16} Apparently, professed admiration of the military no longer equates with influence.\textsuperscript{17}

Better representation of the military experience is needed in politics today. More veterans in public office would help to bridge the civil-military gap, leading to a more effective military with more members drawn from across the population, possibly more public confidence in government and less reliance on force in foreign policy.

More veterans as public servants would also promote the needed re-evaluation of American civic responsibility, or what it means to truly serve one’s

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\textsuperscript{15} Morrison, “Armed Services Members MIA in Presidential Debates, Campaign.”


\textsuperscript{17} Bacevich, \textit{The New American Militarism}, 63.
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country. “The ideal relationship between the armed forces and a democratic society is a symbiotic one . . . [where] the ongoing incorporation of citizens into the ranks renews the army, while the return to civilian life of discharged veterans, understanding at first hand the meaning of service, renews civic life.”18

Getting more of those who have served in public office will require the work of veterans and their supporters much like the grassroots efforts of Vietnam veterans in the 1970s. An example of this budding movement is Veterans Campaign, a non-profit organization dedicated to “encouraging and preparing veterans to continue their legacy of public service as elected officials.”19

The group was started in September 2009, as a student organization at Princeton University by former U.S. Marine Corps Officers Seth Lynn and Michael Hunzeker. Now based out of George Washington University, the interest group focuses on “training veterans to run for public office through workshops, distinguished speaker series, research and analysis, online training, and is currently developing a fellowship program for student veterans.”20

18 Ibid., 219.


20 Ibid.
The group’s philosophy is that veterans offer a “valuable yet untapped resource” for improved government. “Veterans possess outstanding leadership experience . . . a familiarity with a broad cross-section of American society, and an intimate understanding of the human consequences of Washington’s foreign policy decisions.”21

Economist Joseph Stiglitz noted how the current lack of veterans in government leadership positions affects foreign policy:

Virtually all U.S. senators, and most of the representatives in the House, are members of the top 1% [of earners]. . . . By and large, the key executive-branch policymakers on trade and economic policy also come from the top 1%. . . . Inequality massively distorts our foreign policy. The top 1% rarely serve in the military . . . . Foreign policy, by definition, is about the balancing of national interests and national resources. With the top 1% in charge, and paying no price, the notion of balance and restraint goes out the window.22

The country’s interests and resources are off-balance. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is desperate to handle the number of incoming claims for benefits and assistance. At the congressional hearing for the VA’s proposed $140 billion budget for 2013, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said that

21 Ibid.

22 Joseph Stiglitz, “Of the 1%, By the 1%, For the 1%,” *Vanity Fair*, May 2011, 129.
“in the next five years, more than one million veterans are expected to leave
military service, a generation relying on the VA at unprecedented levels.”\textsuperscript{23}

As of August 2012, there were almost one million benefits claims awaiting
adjudication at the VA which can take from a couple of months to as long as a
year.\textsuperscript{24} And like during Vietnam, there are more soldiers surviving traumatic
injuries that are severely debilitating and will necessitate complex medical care
for the rest of their lives.\textsuperscript{25}

Discretionary spending for medical costs associated with treating veterans
of overseas contingency operations is estimated to be between $40 and $55 billion
over the next ten years.\textsuperscript{26} Entitlement spending toward veterans’ income security
benefits totaled $71 billion in 2011 alone.\textsuperscript{27}


\textsuperscript{24} Aaron Glantz, “Veterans Waiting Even Longer for Benefits, Especially in Big Cities,”
\textit{TheDailyBeast.com}, August 29, 2012, \texttt{http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/08/29/veterans-

\textsuperscript{25} David Wood, \textit{Beyond the Battlefield: The War Goes on for the Severely-Wounded} (New York:

\textsuperscript{26} Congressional Budget Office, \textit{Potential Costs of Healthcare for Veterans of Recent and
Ongoing U.S. Military Operations, Testimony before the Committee on Veterans Affairs, U.S.Senate (July
\texttt{http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/123xx/doc12315/07-27-
va_healthcare.pdf} (October 24, 2012).

\textsuperscript{27} Jonathan Schwabish and Courtney Griffith, “The U.S. Federal Budget: A Closer Look at
Mandatory Spending,” Congressional Budget Office,
In 2011, defense expenditures of $718 billion made up twenty percent of total government spending and over half of discretionary spending. The U.S. spends more on war and defense than every other country in the world combined; with the national debt increasing to over $16 trillion, in large part to fund this decade’s simultaneous wars, a reassessment of the nation’s priorities is in order.

America may be war-weary at the moment yet the propensity to use force is virtually unchecked. It remains a viable option in dealing with the current instability in the Middle East and Iran’s emerging nuclear capability. Foreign policy is still equated to military policy while America’s standing in the world

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becomes threatened by the emerging economies and geopolitical power of China, Brazil and India.\textsuperscript{31}

Unfortunately, Support the Troops is indicative of a political apathy across the American population, a feeling of powerlessness to affect the country’s future course. As we have been insulated from war’s impact, the norm has carried with it neither an obligation to actively contribute to war efforts in support of foreign policy endeavors, nor a duty to demand that the government reconsider its foreign policy objectives or its means toward accomplishing them.

“In public life today, paying homage to those in uniform has become obligatory and the one unforgiveable sin is to be found guilty of failing to ‘support the troops.’”\textsuperscript{32} By normalizing the support owed to veterans and soldiers, sending them to war has become easier.

Support the Troops has given civilians a passive role to play in the administration of the nation. The norm functions to provide the comforting


illusion that soldiers are appreciated, not disparaged, while keeping war and subsequently, them, “at a safe distance.”33

The attitude was born out of guilt over Vietnam experience – the way in which those veterans were scorned by the nation and the seeming futility of those who did not return. Today, supporting the troops makes amends for the treatment of Vietnam veterans and works to give meaning to all deaths in battle. Through it we demonstrate that we have progressed from the time that soldiers were blamed for not winning, while we remain unaccountable in defeat.

33 Ibid., 28.
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