

CIVILIAN CONTROL: THE PENTAGON EXPERIENCE



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Today, at the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the principle of democratic civilian control over the military is a widely accepted norm of defence management, which does not require much detailed substantiation, as may have been necessary 10-15 years ago. However, recent global developments in the field of defence have expedited the next priority of civilian control – from merely establishing democratic civilian control (i.e., assuming civilian responsibility for national defence and security) to providing truly effective democratic civilian control.

Necessity – in the previous decade – for the US military to adapt better to changes in the post-Cold War geostrategic environment, exacerbated – in this decade – by the stress resulting from two simultaneous military operations, in Iraq and Afghanistan, naturally catalysed the search for new ways and techniques of providing for organisation, support and control of troops going into battle. Some results of this search were widely publicised by the media, like the rapid introduction of unmanned warfare, widespread use of civilian contractors in the combat zone, the growing role of ready reserves, etc.

Meanwhile, efforts by Americans to increase the effectiveness of civilian management in the Pentagon have been less publicised. These efforts also were very energetic, resolute, and sometimes controversial, but they had no less profound a significance, than, for instance, the broad introduction of “robotisation” or “contractisation”. The gist of these efforts has been to provide for better motivation of about 700,000 of the Pentagon’s civilian workforce, and to organise more effectively their professional development – first of all, of those 2,000 or so senior executives who, at the very top of the hierarchy, define the quality of civilian control.

Such efforts stand in contrast to the situation in Ukraine’s Ministry of Defence (MOD), where modernisation of military equipment, as well as the establishment of a viable democratic civilian control system, are still lagging behind the world’s best practices. Presented below are some thoughts on the current measures to strengthen civilian control in the US Department of Defence (DoD), and the applicability of this experience to Ukraine.¹

Indeed, since the time (October 2000) of publication of the Razumkov Centre’s background study “Democratic Civilian Control over the Military in Ukraine: The Path from Form to Substance”, the attention of both the general public and the expert community in Ukraine has somewhat shifted from the wider issues of troop readiness and the establishment of democratic civilian control towards the more specific projects of professionalisation, NATO accession, weapons modernisation, disposal of obsolete ammunition, housing, and other problems.

Nevertheless, the passage of time has proved again that some “basics” of democratic civilian control should always be remembered. The creation of civilian defence

ministries in post-communist countries marked not only a formal tribute to the standards of modern democratic governance. First and foremost, it carried the key function of democratic civilian control over the military. Democracy, in its true sense, means (among other things) public accountability. In other words, it expects individual governmental officials and structures to function legally and effectively, and to be transparent to parliamentary, media and society control. This is in contrast to an authoritarian or a totalitarian regime, where the head of the defence ministry in most cases is a uniformed general responding directly and solely to the leader of the state, who also very often either wears the uniform or has some type of military background.

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Democratic civilian control also means that civilian authorities within the MOD assume responsibility for the state of the country's defences and for the state of military institutional (i.e., Armed Forces) readiness, equipment and morale. This responsibility is delegated to them by the people (*demoi*) through the mechanism of democratic elections. For the viability of civilian control, civilians are supposed to maintain close ties to, but still remain outside of, the corporative military ranks and provide for the appropriate spending of resources in the interest of defence, effective personnel policies, and other managerial tasks. The civilian leadership of the MOD is expected to implement major policy development, administrative control, legal support, procurement and budgetary functions, leaving for the uniformed military their proper tasks of training troops, operations planning, and conduct of operations.

The above truism holds for all democracies, be it the USA or Ukraine. Effective civilian leadership, or lack of it, predetermines the degree of success or failure in all areas of development of the national defence. But the definition of effectiveness for civilians in the MOD in many respects has a meaning rather similar to what constitutes effectiveness for the military in the General Staff with whom they work. Apart from specific communications, managerial and political skills, being effective for civilians in the MOD (or in the Pentagon) means having effective selection and motivation systems, and acquiring of necessary skills and practices through individual experience and through the formal system of civilian professional education and development.

US DoD Civil Service: the search for better performance

The US system of civilian control, with its decades-long tradition of development and practice, might seem quite mature – from the perspective of Ukraine, where even after a decade democratic civilian control was still at the stage of introduction. Nevertheless, some American experts like, for instance, Ashton Carter, have subjected it to criticism.²

Ashton Carter has insisted that there were significant security issues in the US requiring repair. For instance, he has insisted on a greater involvement by the president in the management of defence: *“One need not look far to find signs that the next president must start paying attention to his role as a manager of means, not just a definer of ends.”*³

His fundamental thesis was that institutions that support and complement the combat forces do not correspond to present-day and future requirements. He identified a general human resource problem of security governance that: *“Top-flight people refuse to serve at all levels of government, from high political posts to the civilian and uniformed services, because the conditions of public service are often demeaning and frustrating. Good people already in government are leaving, and those who remain often feel that their potential for creative leadership is stifled.”*

For the Pentagon in particular, Ashton Carter suggested that: *“The DOD's civilian personnel system needs even more fundamental reform. Unlike the uniformed system,*



the civilian system has not had the edge in quality for some time. This system is out of touch with the labor market and the changing needs of the DOD. Worse, it stifles professional development and innovation in its workforce.”

As a true expert, Ashton Carter suggested his vision of building a more effective and flexible civilian personnel system: *“The new system would have more flexible pay and hiring rules, portable pensions, and other provisions that allow people to enter, leave, and reenter government service. The civilian system should tie compensation to performance ... And it should provide for professional training ...”*

It should be noted that the Pentagon leadership under Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, especially after the events of 9 September 2001, which occurred soon after the critique by Ashton Carter was published, indeed undertook to implement a number of the suggested measures and even more.

In order to provide for better motivation of senior DoD executives (SES Corps – senior executive service)⁴, the Congress supported the Pentagon in introducing the “pay-for-performance” system, which with time was supposed to spread over the entire civilian governmental workforce. This allowed a much greater financial stimulus both for career civil servants, and for political appointees, and permitted more flexibility for the supervisors in the application of these stimuli (up to the salary level for the Under Secretary of Defence). A special provision was adopted to allow a number (as many as 300) of much needed talents to be hired at a salary reaching the level of the Vice-President's.

Certainly, not all senior executives were happy, and many complaints were lodged with Congress. The Congress, in turn addressed the Secretary of Defence (Donald Rumsfeld and later Robert Gates) with requests for clarifications and demands for reviews and revisions of certain particular practices. By the time President Barack Obama's administration came into office, it became obvious, that some amendments indeed might be necessary in order to reduce subjectivity on the part of managers in applying criteria for “pay-for-performance” application. But the flexible approach itself, which links pay to performance, will probably remain in place, since it is unlikely that the salary system will fully revert to the previous generally non-stimulating bureaucratic state.

² Ashton Carter was former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy during President Bill Clinton's first term. On March 18, 2009, nominated by President Barack Obama as Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics.

³ It may be noted that Ashton Carter visited Razumkov Centre in late February 2000, with a delegation headed by former Secretary of Defense, William Perry. (See picture in *NS&D* #2, 2000, p.39). Issues of democratic civilian control were discussed during the meeting.

⁴ A.Catrer hereinafter quoted from: Ashton B. Carter. *Keeping America's Military Edge*. – Foreign Affairs, vol.80, no.1, January/February 2001, pp.90105.

⁵ The total number of the Pentagon's senior executive service (SES) employees stands at over 1,200. In this case, SES employees roughly correspond to military general officers. Their Ukrainian equivalents (since Ukraine still doesn't have the rank of “brigadier general”), would approximate all civilian state servant positions from section head/deputy head of directorate (kerivnyk viddilu/zastupnyk kerivnyka upravlinnia) and above.



On another point, in cases when there was urgent need for quality civilian experts, but not enough availability of qualified civil servants, the Pentagon greatly expanded the hiring of private defence contractors. In order to fill vacant positions of governmental employees at the middle and lower levels quickly and effectively and maintain a high level of collective performance, the Pentagon allowed a much deeper penetration of contractors into areas of sensitive authority, like, for instance, intelligence or acquisitions. With time, the mixing of public and private roles became so deep that in 2008 the US Government Accountability Office expressed concern over a situation when in the US Army contractors often replaced governmental employees in the decision-making process, which they were not fully authorised to do. *“The line separating contractor from government employee is blurry, and we found situations in which contractor employees were not clearly identified as such to the general public and cases where they were listed as the government’s point of contact on contract documents. In situations such as these, contractor employees may appear to be speaking for the government, a situation that could create the impression in the general public that they are government employees.”*⁵

In this case, the DoD decided to reverse the increased reliance on the private sector and revert more attention back to governmental employees. Such a shift was already suggested by Secretary Gates in the 2010 DoD budget proposal to the Congress. According to some observers, *“The budget would reverse a contracting boom, beginning after the 2001 terrorist attacks, in which the proportion of private contractors grew to 39 percent of the Pentagon’s workforce. Gates said he wants to reduce that percentage to a pre-Sept. 11 level of 26 percent. The government said it would hire as many as 13,000 civil servants to replace contractors in the coming year and up to 39,000 over the next five years.”*⁶

It would appear from the above two cases, that despite the fact that these reforms in civilian management in the Pentagon provided urgently needed short-term answers, they also proved that not every quick and decisive solution for issues of motivation and flexibility of civilian employees would easily pass the test for longer term requirements for a stable working environment.

However, in the third major effort to increase the effectiveness of civilian control, i.e., in strengthening the system of civilian professional training, the Pentagon has seemingly managed to find the appropriate solution. In the search for the most appropriate model, improvements resulted from such efforts as increasing the civil servants’ general knowledge of national security environment; providing mid-level executive leadership with more exposure to the joint war-fighting and interagency perspective; and, most importantly, bringing senior civilian leader development programs up to the level of those for senior professional military programs.

IMPROVEMENT OF SENIOR CIVILIAN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Formally, programs for mid-level executive leader development (ELDP – Executive Leader Development Program) and senior civilian leader development

(DLAMP – Defence Leadership and Management Program) already existed when Ashton Carter published his critique. However, senior civilian career advancement depended on the professional education qualifications to a much lesser degree, than in the military. As a result, the previous approach to SES professional development – rather less effectual and less connected to criteria of career advancement – was viewed more and more as a liability in efforts to create a true Total Force.⁷

As was noted in a May 2006 DoD Defence Business Board report: *“We found in our interviews that the concept of “executive development” for SES Corps within the Department is virtually non-existent. Executive development is under funded, undervalued, and underutilised. Those who participate in development activities are either self-nominated or sent by their organisation because they can be spared. This is quite unlike the officer Corps where development opportunities are either mandated or a prerequisite for advancement, with prioritisation given to those with the highest potential. This must change if the SES Corps is to reach its potential as equal partners with the military in helping the Department achieve mission objectives. The need is most acute in developing the general management capabilities of those with the potential and aspiration to advance to higher levels of responsibility.”*⁸

This observation simply confirmed the already evident necessity of reform. Attempts to modify senior civilian leader development program DLAMP started during President George W. Bush’s first administration and continued through his second term. These attempts led to making DLAMP more inclusive (involving more participants from lower grades), longer term (about five years in total duration), and more encompassing (requirement for senior level professional military education (PME) course, courses in national security studies and business management courses).

In the middle of the decade, at any given moment the program included hundreds of senior participants in three different tracks (see the DLAMP chart), which evidently made it difficult to manage. And lacking still was a significant enough link between education under DLAMP and career advancement.

However, in 2007, after the transition of DoD leadership from Rumsfeld to Gates, DLAMP was modified again, this time in order to become shorter in time (two years, reduced from five years in DLAMP), more straightforward (two tracks, reduced from the three tracks in DLAMP), but more rigorous. The successor program was named the Defence Senior Leadership Development Program (DSLDP). The new program envisioned about 100 participants selected from among 120 nominees.

Candidates, among other things, should display senior leader competence and exceptional performance, possess a minimum of one year (preferably more) of significant supervisory experience, and provide supervisory recommendation. They should occupy service positions at the two governmental levels (of GS-14 or GS-15 – approximately equivalent to the military ranks of Lieutenant-Colonel and Colonel) – proceeding to the SES level (civilian equivalents of the military ranks of general officers), and

⁵ Government Accountability Office. “Defence Contracting: Army Case Study Delineates Concerns with Use of Contractors as Contract Specialists.” GAO-08-360, March 2008, www.gao.gov/new.items/d08360.pdf

⁶ Dana Hedgpeth. “Contracting Boom Could Fizzle Out: Jobs Would Return to Pentagon.” *Washington Post*, April 7, 2009.

⁷ In general, the concept of Total Force means that all DoD components (Active Troops, National Guard, Reserves, civilian governmental employees and contractors) meet equally high performance standards.

⁸ Defence Business Board. Report to the Secretary of Defence: Shaping and Utilizing the SES Corps Task Group. Recommendations regarding better utilisation and overall executive selection, development, performance pay, and retention of the Senior Executive Service (SES) in the Department of Defence, May 2006, p.16.



obtain a Top Secret clearance. Additionally, they had to sign a Continuing Service Agreement, meant to provide for mobility of the employee and service up to “three times the length of the program after completing their studies.”

During the two years, they would have to study together with senior military officers (in the rank of lieutenant-colonel, colonel, brigadier general) in a 10-month course at one of the five top-level military colleges (Army War College, College of Naval Warfare, Air War College, National War College, or Industrial College of the Armed Forces) and take part in selected leadership seminars. They would also be required to commit to individual development (i.e., to complete the IDP – Individual Development Program). For instance, the progression model for the future DSLDP Class of 2010 is shown below.

With regard to the DSLDP seminars (#1 – Joint Leadership; #2 – Interagency Leadership; #3 – Multinational Leadership; #4 – Capstone), these would be held at one specific location (unless specified otherwise). Typically, participants would have to come to the Center four times for 3-5 days’ “real-world” seminar to address the issues facing the Department today.

It is indicated in the DSLDP that formally, the successful completion of the program does not “guarantee” promotion. However, it is stated that DSLDP graduates will be “highly competitive” for responsible positions. In any case, it is evident that apart from the purely “civilian” (in contrast to military) specifics of age, uniform, less demanding requirements for length of service in a position, or fewer requirements for the level of physical fitness, the other professional qualifications for civilian executives at the DoD (education, mobility, operational experience) very closely approximate those for the active military leadership.

The state of affairs in Ukraine

In Ukraine, more-or-less substantive progress in introducing a system of democratic civilian control appeared only in 2002, when Ukraine’s political leadership took a decision to declare Ukraine’s course towards accession to NATO. At about the same time, the first attempts were made to organise professional education and development for MOD civil servants. The governmental decision was made⁹ to provide for a 10-month resident professional military education course (18 months by correspondence) at the National Defence Academy (since 2008 – University).¹⁰

Soon after, in 2003 – 2004, a Strategic Defence Review was conducted for the first time in Ukraine, with support of NATO international staff experts. This review stressed the importance of development of a viable system of democratic civilian control over the military in Ukraine. The first practical results at that stage were the transformation of the MOD main directorates controlled by military personnel into departments controlled by civilian personnel. The leadership of the MOD became mostly civilian, and a key structure of the civilian MOD (Department of Policy and Planning) was created. However, transformations at this stage were mostly structural; there was still a significant shortage of qualified civilian personnel to manage MOD functions and a lack of developed procedures and techniques, especially in the areas of policy development and strategic planning, defence diplomacy, budgeting and resource management.

The arrival in February 2005, after the Orange Revolution, to the MOD of a new team under the leadership of the Minister, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, allowed the beginning of the first systemic transformations. In fact, during 2005, the creation of the new civilian-run Ministry of Defence was completed. The practice of appointing civilian officials as minister and deputy ministers of defence was approved, and standards for all important functions of a civilian MOD were established.

However, new structures with new functions required new people, especially for the civil service. Earlier existing opportunities to train civilian specialists at the National Academy of State Administration (under the Secretariat of the President), at the National Defence University of Ukraine (under the MOD), and in the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany) were not utilised to their existing capacity and thus did not produce the necessary numbers of professional civil servants, and were not flexible enough to support the growing needs of the MOD and other security structures.

To assist Ukraine meet its needs, in October 2005, NATO initiated the Professional Development Program providing funds and training opportunities for Ukrainian civilian security personnel (and in some cases also military). Under the supervision of the Head of NATO Liaison Office, the NATO-national Program Manager, and the UK Special Defence Advisor (representing the lead nation), together with representatives of the respective Ukrainian authorities, a matrix of requirements was developed and assistance in the civil servants’ selection, training abroad and placement processes was organised. As a result, by the period 2007-2008, the most urgent needs in civilian personnel, capable to exercise effectively the day-to-day functions of democratic control over the military were satisfied.

CONCLUSIONS

At the moment, three major Pentagon reform efforts at civilian control, which have practical value for Ukraine, can be distinguished: a more substantial differentiation of civilian pay dependent on the assessment of their performance; broad introduction of private defence contractors to make up for the gaps in expertise in some urgent cases; and, finally and most importantly, the strengthening of the system of professional development for civil servants, in the first instance from the senior echelon.

With time, in the MOD of Ukraine, the pool of retired military personnel with necessary education and experience still willing to contribute to the country’s defence in a civilian capacity after retirement from active service, will naturally shrink. The cost of an effective professional military will definitely grow. So, while the pool of educated retired military officers will get smaller, more efforts will be needed to provide for effective senior civilian defence management. In other words, more efforts will be needed to make the system of development of career defence and security civilian force operational.

The recent experience of the Pentagon in improving its civilian management could prove useful to Ukraine. This experience could help to attract attention to similar Ukrainian needs and to put the system of civilian professional development on the right track. ■

⁹ See: Resolution by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine #1749, November 11, 2002.

¹⁰ Budgetary constraints on the one hand, and a still abundant number of educated retired officers willing to continue their work at the MOD in a civilian capacity on the other, make this provision yet to be fully implemented and pending to be included in a more systemic national civilian development program.