**The Paradox of War & Politics:**

*An Investigation of the Relationship Between the State, the Soldier, and War*



Senior Political Science Capstone

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*“War is both timeless and ever changing”*

*-*Warfighting: The United States Marine Corps Book of Strategy

The state, the soldier, and their connection in war have profound and intimate relationships. While warfare, tactics, and weapon systems have evolved throughout history, certain necessary dynamics between the state, the soldier, and war have remained constant.

Throughout history, there are three crucial themes that have reoccurred between these entities. They include: 1.) The necessity of a *loved* state that inspires soldiers’ service, 2.) The purpose of war must be to achieve some political interest of the state, and 3.) Soldiers must disregard their individual political views while at war and remain concerned only with the mission of the state. An analysis of these three principles uncovers a paradox between war and politics. The counterintuitive reality is that while war is a means to achieve some political end, the individual agents actually engaged in warfare must put their individual political perspectives aside in order to be effective warfighters. This paradox yields significant implications as well. The result of this contradiction provides a greater understanding of civil-military relations in contemporary American society as it highlights the differing values of both cultures. The distinction between civic republicanism and liberal individualism is evident through the comparison of the military culture and civilian culture.

Scholars have scrutinized the conceptions of the state, the soldier, and war given their essential political and historical implications. My argument examines common or ‘old ideas’ of political science. However, it drives these concepts further and connects them in an original fashion. My argument identifies the three timeless themes evident in the relationship between the state, the soldier, and war through the exegesis of ancient and contemporary literature. My studies cast a wide net of research, as I investigate a plethora of diverse literature. My argument examines notorious theoretical works from scholars such as Sun Tzu and Carl Von Clausewitz, as well as personal accounts from Nathaniel Fick and other contemporary pieces of United States Marine Corps Doctrine.

My argument is divided into three parts as I discuss the three timeless dynamics individually. Following my discussion of the three themes and the resulting paradox, I conclude my paper by discussing the significant implications of the paradox between war and politics.

In Part I, I highlight the conception of a *loved* state, which is a timeless necessity that compels soldiers to serve [and possibly sacrifice their lives for] the state. This section studies Thucydides’ work *Pericles’ Funeral Oration* in order to convey the ancient soldier’s inspiration to serve their home. Accordingly, Part I also compares this ancient dynamic with Nathaniel Fick’s modern piece *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer.* Fick’s book is a personal account of his military service in the United States Marine Corps. Through his perspective as an Iraq combat veteran and Marine Infantry Officer, Fick’s work addresses questions of service, patriotism, and war. Moreover, Fick’s language parallels Thucydides’ in regards to serving ones’ state for the love and appreciation of such a great home as he continuously connects the ‘new’ to the ‘old.’

After an investigation of the relationship between the soldier and the state in Part I, Part II of my argument shifts focus to the second timeless necessity: the purpose of war. I argue in Part II that the purpose of war is (always) to achieve some political end of the state. In regards to the study of warfare, Carl Von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu are known for championing this focus of theory. Clausewitz and Sun Tzu are to the study of war as Adam Smith is to the study of economics. Thus, I appropriately open Part II with an investigation of Clausewitz’s *On War* and Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*. Next, I relate my findings to the contemporary work *Warfighting: The United States Marine Corps Book of Strategy.* I incorporate Thucydides’ *Melian Dialogue* in order to address the counterargument of morality. The exploration of these texts reveals the inseparable entanglement between warfare and politics. This cohesive bond between war and politics sets up the beginning of the paradox.

Part III of my argument addresses the last timeless necessity for soldiers to disregard their personal political views while engaged in warfare. This notion, which draws upon Fick’s work, unveils the great paradox of war and politics. I conclude Part III by analyzing the result of the paradox and its insight into contemporary American civil-military relations in regards to civic republicanism and liberal individualism.

While my examination of modern literature focuses on the United States Marine Corps, my examination of the contemporary military coincides with all U.S. branches of various countries’ militaries. I focus on the United States Marine Corps for two reasons: first, because of the culture of the Marine Corps and secondly, because of my increased knowledge of the branch’s history, and method of operation compared to others. Since its establishment on November 10, 1775, the Marine Corps has had two missions: making Marines and winning battles. The culture of the Marine Corps has an increased relevance to my argument compared to other branches. This increased relevance stems from the fact that the Marine Corps (compared to other U.S. branches of the armed forces) has the greatest focus on warfighting. Unlike other U.S. branches of service, the Marine Corps exhibits the ideology that “every Marine is a rifleman” and thus, every Marine is well versed in the language of the application of violence. Every Marine receives extensive training in both weaponry tactics and hand-to-hand combat. It is an undeniable fact that out of all the United States’ branches of armed services, the Marine Corps is America’s ‘Warfighting Branch’ and widely regarded as the Nation’s first responders or “tip of the spear.”

**I.) A *Loved* State**

*“A true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”*

*-*G. K. Chesterton

Unfortunately, warfare is inherent in history. The study of warfare and its relation to the state is a common focus in the field of political science. However, the inclusion of the role of the soldier in this relationship is less studied. Despite this, a theoretical analysis of the soldier is absolutely imperative given the fact that they are the actual agents who wage war. A study of warfare omitting the study of the soldier seems incomplete. Many aspects of the soldier have changed throughout history in relation to the state; weaponry and tactics have evolved, medical technology has advanced, and societies’ attitudes towards soldiers have also varied throughout history. Nevertheless, some dynamics have remained constant: “No degree of technological development or scientific calculation will overcome the human dimension in war.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Perhaps the most blatant implication of military service (at least on the front lines) is the possibility of loosing one’s life in the line of duty. Given this reality, soldiers fighting on the front lines have always needed some sort of inspiration or reason to serve their state. Consequently, the question arises ‘why do soldiers serve the state?’ The timeless answer to this question is the conception of a *loved* state*.*

Before delving into the notion of a *loved* state as a source of inspiration, it is necessary to first make some distinctions between a state, a nation, and a nation-state. A state is “a legal territory entity composed of a stable population and a government; it possesses a monopoly over the legitimate use of force.”[[2]](#footnote-2) A nation is “A community of people who share a common sense of identity, which may be derived from language, culture, or ethnicity.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Finally, a nation-state is “A political community in which the state claims the legitimacy on the grounds that it represents the nation.”[[4]](#footnote-4) In short, a nation centrally is a cultural entity, a state is a political and geographic entity, and a nation-state assumes the combination of both. Some may argue that the idea of a *loved* state excludes warfare among the other entities. Therefore, because warfare has been utilized amongst all three entities throughout history, for our purposes we will use the term ‘state’ for the sake of simplicity. But, in terms of political theory, we truly mean the nation-state, as it is all encompassing and best encapsulates the relationship with the soldier and war.

It is also necessary to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. Given both the offensive and defensive capacities in warfare, some may argue that the conception of a *loved* state can only stem from service when on the defensive side in order to protect the ‘homeland.’ Accordingly, instances of imperialism would seem to counter the notion of a *loved* state. In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. John Lukacs portrays this distinction successfully in *Democracy and Populism: Fear & Hatred*:  “Patriotism is defensive; nationalism is aggressive. Patriotism is the love of a particular land, with its particular traditions; nationalism is the love of something less tangible, of the myth of a “people,” a political and ideological substitute for religion. Patriotism is old-fashioned; nationalism is modern and populist.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Thus, Patriotism preceded nationalism. While some may argue that nationalist attitudes may give way to imperialistic military campaigns merely concentrated on the offensive, they are missing the point. The sense of nationalism arises from patriotism’s desire to protect the state. Indeed there is no denying the frequent instances in history of imperial campaigns, yet for the individual soldier, they are merely concerned with patriotism in regards to the duty to protect their state. Soldiers do not get to choose their wars, they only choose whether or not to serve their country as a soldier. In terms of military strategy, often times the best defense is to be on the offensive. Regardless of the strategy, their military service arises out of a desire to protect their home (this will be examined in much greater detail later on). Therefore, while many soldiers may hold nationalist attitudes, their choice to serve their state as a warrior stems from their patriotism. Now that these important distinctions have been made, we may examine the conceptions of a *loved* state.

The notion of a *loved* statemay seem relatively superficial, however it is an extremely profound conception and can manifest itself in different ways. It is first necessary to understand the *loved* stateas a source of inspiration before addressing the various ways in which it manifests itself for a soldier. A *loved* state*,* therefore, is a state that reflects the values of its’ citizens and provides a way of life that the citizens cherish. Indeed, no state is perfect, nor is any state able to reflect the views of all of its citizens. Yet, a *loved* state must represent its people and act in accordance with the populaces’ values or interests ‘enough’ for some citizens to be compelled protect it at all costs. Moreover, a *loved* state may not only exhibit values that coincide with the values of its citizens, it may also provide the opportunity for a way of life that is worth protecting. Thus, whether it be the common way of life and prerogatives that a state provides, or the values in which the state abides by, a state may be ‘loved’ in various ways. If a state is capable of functioning in such a way, some citizens will feel compelled to serve the state out of their “love for it.” These citizens are the warrior class.

This conception of a *loved* state is evident throughout history, spanning from the Athenian Army to the modern United States Marine. In his *Pericles’ Funeral Oration*, Thucydides captures the citizens’ and soldiers’ love for Athens. While Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* was a critical historical investigation of Athens’ imperial campaign and ethical character, his projection of *Pericles’ Funeral Oration* encapsulates a *loved* state nonetheless (as he portrays the praise for Athens that was common amongst Athenians at the time). Thus, whether Thucydides himself was critical of the war or not, his work still coincides with the first timeless necessity between the state and the soldier.

Whether on the offensive or defensive in war, soldiers are compelled to serve due to their love for their state, and their ultimate desire to protect it. Thucydides articulates exactly this in *Pericles’ Funeral Oration*: “This then, is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, nobly fought and nobly died… they gave to her the best contribution that they could. They gave her their lives.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The soldier must love the state and believe in protecting the way of life it provides and accordingly, the soldier must be ready to die for that sake.

A soldier’s love for their state is something that must be earned. The true soldier must choose to serve his state: “There are certain advantages, I think, in our way of meeting danger voluntarily, with an easy mind, instead of with laborious training, with natural rather than with state-induced courage.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Thucydides encapsulates that during his era, this affection for the state comes from within the hearts and minds of the citizens. Moreover his comparison of the natural Athenian courage with Sparta’s ‘state-induced courage’ emphasizes the Athenians’ agency in serving. While it is possible to argue that the Athenian military was not completely voluntary (as it was conscript for two years), it is perhaps the closest resemblance of volunteer service of the time period. The ancient Hellenic expectation to serve during that period (in all states) was the norm. When compared to Sparta (in which males were required to serve from ages 7 – 30 and possibly up to age 60 in the standing army), Athens’ service comprised of the citizen soldier’s hardly seems compulsory as many also chose to leave their civilian occupations to take up arms.[[8]](#footnote-8) Thus, this type of Athenian military service is telling of the quality of the state they choose to serve, and the highest testament to their city. This notion also holds true in contemporary times.

In his *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*, Nathaniel Fick demonstrates his choice to serve his country. While enrolled at Dartmouth College, Fick discusses the usual paths of Ivy League graduates whom go off to medical school or graduate school. Contrarily, Fick demonstrates his alternate route: “None of it appealed to me, I wanted to serve my country... In Athens or Sparta, my decision would have been easy.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Fick illuminates not only his initiative and desire to serve his country; he reaffirms this timeless call of duty through his comparison to Ancient Greece. His notions serve as examples of how the soldier, whether ancient or modern, chooses to serve his home. He also posits that contemporary society is moving away from military service. Regardless if relatively less citizens today feel this calling of service, Fick as well as Pericles share a common purpose: “not to let ‘them’ destroy our way of life.”[[10]](#footnote-10) This common motive amongst soldiers to protect their way of life originates through their love of country. Thus, the love of a state comes from the style of life that they or the average citizen are able to enjoy. States that foster such lifestyles for their citizens are clearly concerned with the interests of their citizens. Fick as well as Pericles, cherish their ways of life that their country provides, and this is their motive.

Moreover, Fick also demonstrates the shared acceptance of sacrifice amongst infantrymen throughout history. In the United Sates Military each individual may choose (or be assigned) a Military Occupational Specialty, or MOS. Some may argue that there are countless reasons to join the military, especially in contemporary times. An individual may want to travel and “see the world,” or they may want the benefits that come with military service. In a time with seemingly crippling student loan debt some may join the military in order to pay off their student loans thanks to the GI Bill. However, there is a distinction between serving in the military and being an actual soldier. There are countless MOS’s in the military that do not remotely involve combat. The service of those who choose these positions are just as admirable as those who choose to fight on the front lines. But it is imperative to recognize the distinction between these billets and recognize the difference between serving in the military and being an actual warrior.

While all Marines receive extensive infantry training due to the Corps’ emphasis on warfighting, Fick could have chosen a ‘safer’ job rather than infantry. However, he states “I sensed a continuity with other infantrymen stretching back to Thermopylae... the part of me that felt I’d been born too late was drawn to the infantry, where courage still counts.”[[11]](#footnote-11) His choice to be a ‘grunt’ or Infantry Officer conveys that while many aspects of warfare have changed throughout time, the soldier on the front line today shares the same courage and the same sacrifice that soldiers always have. Fick’s courage parallels the courage of those praised by Pericles who died in the Peloponnesian War. It is imperative to recognize the human dimension in war and the soldier’s individual choice of possible sacrifice, not for honor or glory, but to manifest one’s love for the state. As previously stated, while many dynamics of war have changed, the human dimension has remained constant. Fick’s courageous decision to choose the most dangerous job is a testament to his love for the United States and parallels Pericles’ argument. This profound vocation is often talked about, but only a few truly understand it. The common perception of soldiers is for them to be aggressive ‘alpha males’ given the nature of the job. While soldiers must be willing to endure and live through the absolute worst of humanity, there is a bright motive beneath it all. This bright motive for soldiers to endure and employ such wretched acts stems from the love of their state. Fick demonstrates this truly profound dynamic of soldiers: “I was learning that most Marines, behind the tough-talking façade, are idealists.”[[12]](#footnote-12) This may be hard for many to understand, ‘the call of duty’ is truly a calling. For some citizens it just makes sense yet it is hard to explain to others. Endless interviews of soldiers support this reality.[[13]](#footnote-13)

While Thucydides and Fick are concerned with voluntary service of the state, some may make the argument that required military service makes the argument of a *loved* state moot. In other words, governmental policies such as required service or conscription also create armies. While there have been examples of this throughout history and even today (Russia, South Korea…), required service creates a less effective, less dedicated soldier. If required, citizens may reluctantly serve the state in the military however, when it comes to combat, these soldiers will be of a lessor caliber if they are not willing to sacrifice themselves for their state as they may be more timid or even abandon their post in fear of their life. Admittedly, superior training may also go a long way and has at times in history seemed to surpass volunteer armies. For example, WWI demonstrated that a well-trained conscript Germany Army could sufficiently defeat a volunteer British Army. Thus, history has shown exceptions to the necessity of a loved state and volunteer service. Yet the effective soldier, the true soldier, is one who chooses to serve their state. Theoretical arguments are always subject outliers, yet this does not negate the theoretical relationship between the soldier and the state. Conscription may yield soldiers in terms of ‘bodies’ and some forced to serve may find their vocation along the way. Nevertheless, without a true belief in one’s service for the sake of their state, an individual will not be an effective soldier. This two-way relationship is one of “give-and-take.” In order for the soldier to give himself, the state must give the opportunities and prerogatives previously discussed for a truly effective and sustainable force.

Another possible counterargument to the notion of a *loved* state is that once in combat, soldiers fight for their “brothers in arms.” Especially in the United States Marine Corps, the purpose of fighting to protect your fellow Marines is ingrained in the warrior ethos of the institution. This is a common theme depicted in countless interviews and historical accounts of war as well. However, this argument mischaracterizes the timeline of our compulsory argument. Indeed once in combat, soldiers often form unbreakable bonds with their comrades, yet this bond and purpose for serving arises after the soldiers have already made the decision to join the military in the first place. Thus, while soldiers may commonly fight for their ‘brothers in arms’ in battle, it is not what originally compelled them to join the military. That initial choice originates from their love for their state.

Thus, the first timeless necessity between the state, the soldier, and war is soldiers must be compelled to serve their country via a *loved* state. All of histories’ martyrs have had a purpose. For a soldier, the state is that purpose. Now that we have examined the relationship between the state and the soldier, it is imperative to investigate the second timeless theme amongst the state, the soldier, and war.

II.) The Purpose: War & Politics

*“Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed”*

-Mao Zedong

The first necessity in the relationship between the state, the soldier, and war, primarily focused on the soldier’s relation to the state (the motive for service). Contrarily, the second timeless theme amongst these three entities is concerned with the link between the state and war. The connection between the state and war lies in politics. War and politics have a cohesive and inseparable relationship. The first statement in Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* is “The art of war is of vital importance to the state.”[[14]](#footnote-14) The fact that Sun Tzu chose to begin his masterpiece with this notion is critical. While *The Art of War* focuses on the actual strategy of warfare – as opposed to the theory of warfare – Sun Tzu’s recognition of the vitality of war for the state confirms the necessity for a state to be adequately prepared for warfare. But why is war so crucial for the state? The answer to this question lies in war’s purpose: policy.

In short, the second necessity is that the purpose is to achieve some sort of political interest of the state. Clausewitz championed the codification of the purpose of war in his doctrine *On War*. He establishes that war “is a mere continuation of policy by other means… for the political view is the object, war is the means, and the means must always include the object in our conception.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Clausewitz’s assertion here not only determines that war is a means to achieve some policy objective (the ends), it specifies that the means cannot exist without the ends. *Warfighting*: *The United States Marine Corps Book of Strategy* reaffirms Clausewitz’s contention: “war does not exist for its own sake. It is an extension of policy with military force.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Hence, we see the undeniable reality of the relationship between war and politics; they are inseparable.

This dynamic can be further demonstrated through the questions of ‘who, what, and why?’ Considering only the theoretical and disregarding all other realities, the state is the ‘who,’ war is the ‘what,’ and politics is the ‘why.’ Throughout history, war has always been a means or an instrument used by the state in an attempt to obtain some political end. Regardless of what the end may be, or whether a state chooses to use the instrument of war as a first or last resort, war is a means to a political end nonetheless.

But some may object to the contention that the purpose of war is policy. Some may argue that the purpose of war is to extract wealth from a region or objectify a civilization. Whatever the argument may be, it is a political end nevertheless. While war is certainly not the ideal way of achieving political interests and it *should* be a last resort, it is still a political instrument. One may disagree with the state’s policy or deem it to be unjust or immoral, but all war serves some political interests regardless. When considering the theory of war, it is easy to get caught up in the issue of morality and justice regarding the reason for waging war. Indeed, each political goal has moral implications and these two dynamics can seem inseparable. But the questions of ‘right verses wrong’ are separate questions than ‘does this war serve a political interest of the state?’ History is riddled with occurrences of wars waged for unjust reasons (though a subjective determination), yet they have all served some political end, however wretched those reasons are.

Thucydides’ *Melian Dialogue* serves as an example to this distinction between the political and moral facets of war and supports the contention that the purpose of war is policy. In his *Melian Dialogue,* Thucydides explores the Peloponnesian War (431 – 404 BC, between the Athenian Empire and Sparta’s Peloponnesian League) further. As previously noted, Thucydides was significantly skeptical and critical of Athens during this war. In the *Melian Dialogue*, Thucydides articulates that Athens deployed its military forces to the small island of Melos in their expansive campaign. The Dialogue depicts a discussion between the Athenian and Melian ambassadors prior to any military engagements. Despite the fact that Melos was a colony of Sparta, they claimed to be neutral with respect to the opposing wills of Athens and Sparta. There is complete certainty that the Athenian military machine is far superior to the minute force of Melos. The Athenians present the Melians with a choice: either “give way to the greatest city in Hellas when she is offering you such reasonable terms – alliance on a tribute-paying basis and liberty to enjoy your own property” or be destroyed.[[17]](#footnote-17) Although Thucydides is Athenian, his work is actually a criticism of his empire as it underscores the clash between political realism (Athenians) and political idealism (Melians). Thucydides’ portrayal of Athens is much more pessimistic than in *Pericles’ Funeral Oration*. Given this, he conveys the unjust action of the Athenians. Considering the extreme military superiority of the Athenians, the dialogue boils down to the reality that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.[[18]](#footnote-18) Despite their aspirations to remain neutral, the Melians are presented with a Scylla and Charybdis. The Melians attempt to appeal to the moral appetite of the Athenians and convey that their threat of force is completely unjust. However, the Athenians disregard these pleas and stay the course: “This is no fair fight, with honour on one side and shame on the other. It is rather a question of saving your lives and not resisting those who are far too strong for you.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Yet, the Melians place their faith in the gods and refuse to surrender to the Athenians. Consequently, the Melian men of military age are slaughtered and the women and children are enslaved.

Returning back to the necessity of war to exist as a means for a political end, the *Melian Dialogue* presents a relatively clear case of unjust imperial expansion (though it can be argued that at the time, this the Athenian action was somewhat moderate). As the Melians struggle to demonstrate, the threat of Athenian force is unjust because of Melos’ neutrality. If this conflict were to occur in the modern international arena, it would clearly contravene international norms. Returning to the purpose of war and the distinction between morality and politics, the Athenians’ use of military force was still a means to a political end. In other words, despite the arguably great injustice of slaughtering the Melians (the means of warfare), the choice to invade Melos was a political goal nonetheless. The Athenians illustrate that waging war on Melos served the political objective: “So that by conquering you we shall increase not only the size but the security of our empire.”[[20]](#footnote-20) The debate of injustice remains separate from the political objective of the Athenians. This distinction between issues of morality with political views will be revisited in Part IV.

Now that the distinction between policy and morality has been illuminated, we turn to the levels of war and its implications on policy. War is *usually* not the means for nominal policy objectives; it is often the reason for the state’s existence: “The protection of the country is the primary object for which the military force exists” (as seen in Melos).[[21]](#footnote-21) Therefore, the imperative political goals of war are to establish and preserve the state. This is why Sun Tzu opens *The Art of War* (a work centrally focused on military strategy) with the notion of war’s importance to the state.

There are also different levels of war and these levels are dependent upon the policy objective. *The Marine Corps Book of Strategy* illustrates the implications of differing levels: “as the policy aims of war may vary from resistance against aggression to complete annihilation of the enemy, so must the application of violence vary in accordance with those aims.”[[22]](#footnote-22) The severity and aim of different policy objectives will dictate the amount and type of military capabilities utilized. Yet these levels are not fixed. Once warfare is carried out and troops are mobilized, the only certainty is uncertainty. The Marine Corps refers to the chaos and ambiguity of war as the ‘fog of war.’[[23]](#footnote-23) The fog of war characterizes the reality that because war is unpredictably unfolding, the political implications are as well. Regardless of the policy objectives or their degree of severity, war serves to achieve the interests of the state. Thus, not only are war and politics theoretically intertwined, they are inseparable in their uncertainty as well.

To finalize this bond between war and politics, it is necessary to explore the two strategies involved. In any and every war, a state has both a *national strategy* and a *military strategy*.[[24]](#footnote-24) A national strategy “coordinates and focuses all the components of national power to attain the policy objective,” whereas military strategy “is the application of military force to secure the policy objective.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Military strategy is solely concerned with the tactics of warfare and use of force needed to obtain the state’s interests. National strategy embodies a broader perspective of all of the state’s powers including economical and diplomatic pressures. For the sake of simplicity, national strategy may be regarded as ‘political strategy.’ These two perspectives of warfare convey two significant points. First, the separation of war into these two strategies admits one can scrutinize war in different ways (in being solely concerned with military tactics versus the entire picture of the conflict). Nevertheless, the second result is that while the strategies are different, they are cohesive and each is dependent upon the other. The military strategy is contingent upon the national strategy and vise versa. Politics and war are inseparable just as the two strategies of war are. Finally, *The Marine Corps Book of Strategy* recognizes that while these perspectives are distinguishable, “military strategy thus is subordinate to national strategy.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Because the United States Marine Corps (an institution solely focused on military strategy) recognizes that national strategy is paramount, it confirms the notion that politics is the sole purpose for war. The timeless conclusion is that war and politics are profoundly connected.

III.) The Paradox & Its Implications

*“Y'know what I think? It don't really matter what I think. Once that first bullet goes past your head, politics and all that shit just goes right out the window.”[[27]](#footnote-27)*

We have examined the timeless themes between the soldier and the state, the state and war, now we turn to the last relationship among the three entities: the soldier and war. The last necessity (between soldiers and war) is for soldiers to disregard their personal political views while deployed in combat. This is not to say that soldiers must disregard their moral compass in regards to their obligation to carry out orders; once again, there is a distinction between politics and morality. Furthermore, this is also not to say that soldier’s must neglect the overall political objective of the state. Thus, in order to conceptualize the last timeless theme, we must make two distinctions: 1.) Between politics at an individual level and at the state level, and 2.) Between the political and the moral dynamics of waging war.

As previously examined, the purpose of war is to serve as a means to achieve some political end. However, the individual agents actually engaged in warfare (soldiers) must be concerned only with their mission. In order to successfully focus on the mission, the soldier must not dwell upon their individual political perspective of the state’s policy objective. In other words, whether or not the soldier agrees with the policy objective of the state (why he is deployed in combat) is simply irrelevant. Thus, it is imperative for the soldier to distinguish between the politics at the individual level (their personal view of why they are deployed) and politics at the state level (the political objective of the state). When engaged in warfare, the soldier must focus on the mission and in doing so, must disregard the former notion of politics but can still keep the latter in mind when in combat.

In order to understand this distinction between the individual and state levels of politics, consider the example of the Iraq War. This conflict was and remains today a highly controversial deployment of American troops. Accordingly, American soldiers deployed also had differing individual opinions of the war. However once deployed to Iraq, the soldiers’ individual political views of the war are irrelevant; a soldier on patrol in Fallujah whose task is to go ‘house-to-house’ clearing structures for insurgents must not be distracted by why the United States deployed troops. Soldiers do not choose their wars and hence, their individual perspectives of why they are there (whether it be for locating and securing Weapons of Mass Destruction, pursuing interests in oil, or attempting to establish stability in the region) does not matter once deployed. Fick demonstrates this throughout his work as well. One notable example is when Fick meets his new translator (‘Hammed’) in Iraq:

“Upon learning that I was the patrol leader, Hammed walked up as I studied my map and launched into a harangue against American culture and the war in Iraq. “You should not have done this. Saddam was a bad man, but America should have waited for the Iraqi people to overthrow him themselves. In time, we would have crushed him.” “Hammed, I’m just a lieutenant,” I said. “I lead patrols. I don’t make policy.””[[28]](#footnote-28)

Fick encapsulates the necessity for a soldier to disregard their personal political views in combat. He recognizes the futility and irrelevance of his own political perspectives in this interaction with his translator. Thus, the soldier must disregard their individual political perspectives in this sense. On the other hand, they may still be concerned with politics at the state level.  
 As discussed in Part II, politics and war are intrinsically intertwined and dependent upon one another. Therefore, the actions of one individual soldier may have the potential to drastically alter the political situation. In this sense, the soldier may still consider the political implications of his actions (at the state level). Take for instance the incidents that occurred in 2003 in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. In this unfortunate occurrence, U.S. soldiers committed human rights violations against detainees in the Abu Ghraib Prison (taking degrading photographs of the detainees and treating detainees in inhumane ways).[[29]](#footnote-29) Here, the soldier’s individual political views of the national strategy were irrelevant (again why the state deployed them in the first place). However, they also failed to recognize in this case the political implications at the state-level of their actions (aside from the obvious moral issues). The soldiers failed to realize that part of the national strategy (state-level politics) is to ‘win hearts and minds’ and gain the trust of the local populace. Hence, besides obvious moral issues with their treatment of the detainees, their failure to keep the national strategy of the state at hand in this case resulted in drastic political implications. Thus, soldiers must be concerned only with the politics at the state-level, not the individual-level. Now that we have made the distinction between the two political levels involved with the soldier, we must turn to the second distinction.

Soldiers disregarding their personal political views does not mean following orders blindly without a moral compass. Some may argue that if soldiers disregard their personal political views it would mean that they would blindly follow orders and have a lack of accountability for carrying out their orders. However, this counterargument mistakes their political views for their moral views. Soldiers must consult their moral compass to an extent and remain accountable for their actions. They take responsibility for their actions, and the excuse of “I was only following orders!” for committing immoral acts does not remove their moral obligation when choosing whether or not to follow individual orders.

An example of this distinction is evident in the “rules of engagement” or (ROE). When deployed in combat, soldiers today have an ROE for each mission. This dictates whether or not the use of deadly force is authorized and to what extent. If for whatever reason, a soldier were instructed that there are no rules of engagement (meaning any individual is technically an enemy target), this would not give them an excuse to commit murder of innocent life and kill indiscriminately. This moral dilemma of the ROE is a separate question from the soldier’s individual political views. Fick codifies this distinction as well:

“The theme was rules of engagement… First, commanders had an inherent obligation— not merely a right, but a legal and ethical obligation— to defend their Marines. Second, when the enemy used human shields or put legitimate targets next to mosques and hospitals, he, not we, endangered those innocents. Third, a commander would be held responsible not for the facts as they emerged from an investigation, but for the facts as they appeared to him in good faith at the time— at night, in a sandstorm, with bullets in the air. His fourth and final point distilled the rules of engagement to their essence. He called it Wilhelm’s Law, a tribute to General Charles Wilhelm: if the enemy started the shooting, our concern should be proportionality— responding with adequate, but not excessive, force. If we started the shooting, the concern should be collateral damage… I couldn’t control the justice of the declaration of war, but I could control the justice of its conduct within my tiny sphere of influence. Doing right, I thought, wasn’t only a moral imperative but also the most expedient way to lead the platoon. The rules of engagement would be for the Marines’ minds what armor was for their bodies.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

Fick exudes moral leadership and conveys the distinction between the moral and the political. He highlights that he cannot control the “justice of the declaration of war” but only his immediate sphere. He omits any of his personal political views of the war (whether or not he thinks that Americans should be deployed in the first place), yet he recognizes his moral obligation to lead his men in a ‘just’ fashion and remain accountable for his actions. Therefore, this is a direct example of a soldier’s ability to disregard their personal political views while simultaneously making moral judgments.

As demonstrated, soldiers must remove their individual political views in order to be effective warriors. There is a difference between such views and the soldier’s obligation to review their orders based on their moral consequences. Soldiers must only be concerned with the politics of the state while at war. Given these distinctions, there is a paradox between war and politics. While war and politics are inherently cohesive at the state level in terms of the purpose of war (as discussed in Part II), the counterintuitive reality is that the individual agents actually engaged in war must disregard their personal view of politics in order to remain an effective soldier, unencumbered by political distractions of their own. Thus, the paradoxical nature between war and politics is evident through the state’s concern with them and the individual’s concern with them. In other words, (in the broad scheme) at the state level, war and politics are completely intertwined. Contrarily, for those actually engaged in warfare at the individual level (the soldiers) politics are completely irrelevant (in regards to their own views). Thus depending on the perspective (either from the state or individual level), war and politics can be either inseparable or completely independent entities.

This conclusion is extremely significant as civilians often misunderstand it. The dissection of the contradiction sheds light on contemporary civil-military relations in America. Perhaps for many civilians in modern American society, it seems odd for soldiers to have to disregard their personal political views as they are the individuals actually risking their lives *for the sake of the of the political end* that the war attempts to achieve. The progressive movement in modern American civil-society places an emphasis on the individual. Civilians in contemporary society are increasingly concerned with individual liberties and rights. This focus on the individual is evident on both sides of the political aisle and is constantly discussed in media and especially the current Presidential Election. This emphasis on the individual is known as liberal individualism. This philosophy deems that various individual rights are imperative and may not be contravened by the government.[[31]](#footnote-31) With this emphasis in civil-society on the individual, it is not surprising that many American civilians would be reluctant to disregard their personal political views if they were to join the military. However, the United States Military is predominantly conservative.[[32]](#footnote-32) Accordingly, the majority of soldiers in the military have conservative values. Civic republicanism is an alternative political philosophy to liberal individualism. In short, civic republicanism values society over the individual and is characterized by “public-spirited citizens [who] preserve civic virtue by participating in local politics… [And also] values military strength while condemning dependency.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Therefore, while it may seem ironic and even foolish to civilians for soldiers to disregard their individual political views while at war, this perspective fails to fully distinguish the different values of each culture. Returning to the paradox, the fact that soldiers must disregard their personal views, when stripped down to its theoretical core, highlights that in doing so soldiers are placing the interests of the state above their own. Moreover, this emphasis characteristic of republicanism that places the society above the individual is also evident in their choice to serve in the military. Thus, in choosing to serve the state as a soldier and disregarding one’s individual political views makes complete sense under civic republicanism. It is imperative to note that these political philosophies are broad theories and separate from party politics (red versus blue). This is not to say that either political philosophy is superior to another, but it is important to recognize the difference of values in the civilian world and in the military world.

This difference in philosophies is also the source of misunderstandings in civil-military relations. Civil society was vastly against the unpopular war in Vietnam. Many civilians made their animosity towards the war known at countless protests across the country. However, there were many occurrences of protestors not only voicing their disapproval of the war, they also voiced their disapproval to the soldiers as they returned home from war. At the same time other civilians that applauded the homecoming. Nevertheless, American civil-society as a whole failed to make the distinction of the paradox and this caused tension between the military and civilians. Civilians could not understand why soldiers would be a part of what was widely viewed as an unjust and unnecessary war. On the other hand, soldiers returning home were frustrated in much of civil-society’s failure to make the distinction of their choice to serve the country as a whole (or being compelled through conscription), and their individual view of the Vietnam War. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative to make these distinctions and recognize the paradox of war and politics. It is critical to remember that soldiers do not get to choose their wars (unless they join during a conflict that they wish to be a part of); they simply answer the call of their state, wherever and for whatever reason. Fortunately American civil society has begun to make these distinctions as soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan received a much warmer welcome, regardless of society’s view of the war.

Conclusion

Unfortunately war is a reoccurring reality throughout history: “ideals are peaceful, history is violent.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Soldiers have found inspiration to endure the worst of humanity in order to protect in their view, the very best of humanity: their home. War is a drastic means used to achieve a political end, yet it is a means used too often. The individuals who have answered the call of duty have selflessly done so with the state’s political interests above their own political views and even above their own life. Regardless if the soldier or civil-society agrees with the political end of the state, their needs to be soldiers willing to serve the state on the front lines. The paradox of war and politics is critical for all to understand, because regardless of any individual’s views of war, a soldier is someone who wrote a blank check made payable to their state for an amount of ‘up to and including their life.’

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