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I recently heard from an anti-war student I met while I was speaking at a college in northern Vermont. The e-mail included the following query:

“I told you about how I wanted to build a career around social activism and making a difference. You told me that one of the most important things was to make myself reputable and give people a reason to listen to you. I think this is some of the best advice I’ve received. My issue however is that you mentioned joining the military as a way to do this and mentioned how that is how you fell into it. ... We talked extensively about all of our criticisms of the military currently and our foreign policy. ... What I don’t understand is, how can you [advise] someone who wants to make a difference with the flawed system, to join that flawed system?”

The question is a valid one. Throughout my travels in the United States, where I interact with people from progressive anti-war groups, I am often confronted with the seeming contradiction of my position. I rail against the war in Iraq (and the potential of war with Iran) and yet embrace, at times enthusiastically, the notion of military service. It gets even more difficult to absorb, at least on the surface, when I simultaneously advocate counter-recruitment as well as support for those who seek to join the armed services.

The notion that the military and citizens of conscience should be at odds is a critical problem for our nation. That confrontation only exacerbates the problems of the soldier and the citizen, and must be properly understood if it is to be defeated. Let us start by constructing a framework in which my positions can be better assessed.

First and foremost, I do not view military service as an obligation of citizenship. I do view military service as an act of good citizenship, but it can under no circumstance be used as a litmus test for patriotism. There are many ways in which one can serve his or her nation; the military is but one. I am a big believer in the all-volunteer military. For one thing, the professional fighting force is far more effective and efficient than any conscript force could ever be.

There are those who argue that a draft would level the playing field, spreading the burdens and responsibilities associated with a standing military force more evenly among the population. Those citizens whose lives would be impacted through war (namely those of draft age and their immediate relatives) would presumably be less inclined to support war.

Conversely, the argument goes, with an all-volunteer professional force, the burden of sacrifice is limited to that segment of society which is engaged in the fighting, real or potential. Two points emerge: First, the majority of society not immediately impacted by the sacrifices of conflict will remain distant from the reality of war. Second, even when the costs of conflict become discernable to the withdrawn population, the fact that the sacrifice is being absorbed by those who willingly volunteered somehow lessens any moral outcry.

I will submit that these are valid observations, and indeed have been borne out in America’s response to the Iraq war tragedy. However, simply because something exists doesn’t make it right. The collective response to the Iraq war on the part of the American people is not a result of there not being a draft, but rather poor citizenship. An engaged citizenry would not only find sufficient qualified volunteers to fill the ranks of our military, but would also personally identify with all those who served so that the loss of one was felt by all. The fact that many Americans today view the all-volunteer force not so much as an extension of themselves, but more along the lines of a “legion” of professionals removed from society, illustrates the yawning gap that exists between *we the people* and those we ask to defend us.

Narrowing this gap is not something that can be accomplished simply through legislation. Reinstating the draft is illusory in this regard. There is a more fundamental obstacle to the reunion of our society and those who take an oath in the military to uphold and defend the Constitution.

Void of this bond, the inherent differences of civilian and military life will serve to drive a wedge between the two, regardless of whether the military force is drafted or volunteer.

Lacking a common understanding of the foundational principles upon which the nation was built, a citizenry will grow to view military service as an imposition, as opposed to an obligation. Simply put, one cannot willingly defend that which one does not know and understand. The fundamental ignorance that exists in America today about the Constitution creates the conditions which foster the divide between citizen and soldier that permeates society today. America must take ownership of its military, not simply by footing the bill, but by assuming a moral responsibility for every aspect of military service. The vehicle for doing this has been well established through the Constitution: the legislative branch of government, the Congress, which serves to represent the will of the people.

Congress, especially the House of Representatives, was never conceived of as separate and distinct from the people, but rather as one with the people, directly derived from their collective will via the electoral process. Unfortunately today, few Americans identify with Congress. An “us versus them” mentality pervades. This mentality creates the crack in the moral and social contract which exists regarding a citizenry and its military. Congress is responsible for maintaining the military. Congress is the branch of government mandated with the responsibility for declaring war. When the bond is strained between the people and Congress, the bond between citizen and soldier is broken. Congress, left to its own devices, will begin to view the military not as an extension of its constituents, but rather as a commodity to be traded and used in a highly politicized fashion.

This is the reality we find ourselves in today (and indeed which has existed for some time). The 2006 midterm elections highlight this reality, where a strong anti-war sentiment upon the part of the voters resulted in a Democratic majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Having assumed the mantle of legislative power, however, those who were elected on the coattails of anti-war sentiment were able to shun their anti-war constituents. They did so by taking full advantage of the reality that the anti-war movement was in fact not a movement at all, but rather a concept pushed forward by a disparate mass without much political viability.

Where anti-war sentiment did in fact cross over from the ranks of the progressive left and into the mainstream of American society, it was quickly quashed through the dishonest logic that if one truly supported the troops (as most red-blooded Americans swear they do), then one must by extension support the mission. This flawed connectivity empowered Congress to sidestep the issue of withdrawing American forces from Iraq, and enabled it to continue rubber-stamping funding for a war which long ago lost any connection, perceived or otherwise, to the general security of the American people.

And so U.S. service members continue to fight and die in Iraq, a conflict which grows more unpopular with the American people each passing day. The question thus emerges: What is the appropriate response on the part of the American citizenry? While we insulate ourselves from political duplicity, the soldiers ultimately pay the price for the cowardice of those whom we elect to represent us in higher office. This seems to be the path taken by most Americans, who have grown numbly indifferent to the incessant stream of disappointment over the continued failure of Congress to truly represent the will of the people. We have therefore built a wall which separates *we the people* from the one aspect of republican governance which is, by design, supposed to give us voice.

In doing so, we likewise create a buffer between citizen and soldier, as those who are constitutionally mandated to fund the care, equipping and utilization of the military now operate in ambiguity created by the vacuum of citizen apathy. Thus liberated from the moral compass provided by the people, Congress has lost its ability to defend its own role in governance, and over time has demeaned its constitutional mandate by transferring powers inherent to the legislative branch to an executive branch which has assumed the role of caretaker of the military. By vesting absolute power in the hands of the executive, Congress has all but assured that America has become a nation no longer governed by the rule of law, but rather the rule of man. This sort of tyranny is what Americans fought a revolution to free themselves from 233 years ago.

An executive that operates in accordance with a unitary theory of governance is one that views the capacity to defend the state as being in fact the capacity to defend the realm. As such, one sees a gravitation of emphasis: Rather than focusing on external threats to the collective, the realm becomes obsessed with internal threats to its ability to retain power. The Patriot Act is a clear-cut example of how a unitary executive has undermined and corrupted the legitimate law enforcement mechanisms of the land by vesting the executive with powers normally associated solely with the legislative branch. In this regard, we see the armed forces similarly abused, with the creation of military command structures (namely U.S. Northern Command) which exist not to protect the people, but rather protect the realm from the people. This is not a stated objective, but rather one inferred from the fact that, for the first time since the imposition of *posse comitatus* in 1876, the United States has positioned its armed forces so that they can participate in normal state law enforcement. In short, instead of serving as a force of protection for the American people from external threats, the military views the American people as the threat, "targets" which need to be investigated as potential threats to the military.

An example of just how far off track the executive branch, facilitated by an all too complicit legislative branch, has strayed when it comes to the common defense is the Pentagon's controversial Counterintelligence Field Activity, ostensibly created in a post-9/11 world to "... protect the [Defense] department by supporting the detection and neutralization of foreign espionage." The CFA operates under the umbrella of U.S. Northern Command, created in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks to ostensibly safeguard the American homeland. A major aspect of the CFA's work is something known as the Joint Protection Enterprise Network, or JPEN.

The JPEN network enables the Defense Department to share unverified information with civilian police departments, the FBI and other government agencies such as the National Security Agency (NSA). Originally dubbed Project Protect America, the JPEN system came into being in July 2003 with the full support of then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The heart and soul of the JPEN system is the "Threat and Local Observation Notice," or TALON report, the brainchild of then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. In the conduct of its work, the CFA created and distributed thousands of TALON reports via the JPEN system on the activities of private U.S. citizens, with a particular focus of those engaged in anti-war protests.

The CFA is slated in the near future to be morphed into a larger Defense Intelligence Agency-run Counterintelligence and Human Intelligence activity. Far from limiting the scope and scale of the activities currently undertaken by the CFA, this new organization will simply increase the level of illegal and unconstitutional activities currently undertaken by the CFA against the American "target." The fact that the U.S. military now views the American citizenry as its target, as opposed to the object of its defense, shows just how broken the circle of trust is between citizen and soldier. Additional TALON reports are being assembled on anyone deemed to be a potential threat to the U.S. military, including all who are involved in "counter-recruitment" activities designed to provide alternatives to military service for today's youths. This myopic approach toward installation and facility security undertaken by the Pentagon is not only intellectually weak but constitutionally prohibited. The legislative branch, operating amid constituent apathy, continues to fail in its mission of upholding the rule of law.

In similarly deplorable fashion, the Pentagon has allowed itself to be hijacked by the radical right wing of the Republican Party. The fact that Fox News has become the channel of choice for the U.S. military speaks volumes about the mind-set which has gripped those who lead it. The military has always been a conservative institution. Yet when wearing the uniform of the United States serves more as a front for defending a political ideology (a rabid one at that) rather than upholding and defending the Constitution, the military does itself a disservice. The disconnect between those who serve in the military and those whom they are sworn to protect can be fatal when one realizes the recruiting pool no longer identifies with the military as a legitimate expression of patriotism and citizenship.

The scope of this ideological hijacking is broad, yet barely recognized. One can glimpse just how deep and nefarious this ideological shift is when one considers the extent to which evangelical

Christians have infiltrated the U.S. Air Force Academy, proselytizing their heavily politicized religion to the future officers and leaders of that service. The past comments of Lt. Gen. William Boykin, a decorated Army Special Operations veteran who described America's post-9/11 "war on terror" as a conflict between "Christian" America and "radical Islam," are widely embraced within the U.S. military. President Bush has echoed Boykin in his speeches and statements, and the military's favorite presidential candidate, Republican Sen. John McCain, has become the embodiment of Boykin's philosophy. The Constitution prohibits the notion that America be defined as a Christian nation. To allow the military, sworn as it is to uphold and defend that document, to posture itself as Christian, becoming in effect the "sword of God," is unthinkable and unforgivable.

The implications of such posturing are far-reaching, especially from the military recruitment standpoint. The all-volunteer military succeeds when it attracts to its ranks those who have a sincere desire to serve their nation. It succeeds greatly when those it attracts come from the broadest possible cross section of the American demographic. There has always been an economic aspect to the all-volunteer force; service is not slavery, and the military has always promised the security of a middle-class lifestyle to those who choose to enlist. But military service, properly motivated, has never been solely about the money. It is about defending a greater good, the people of the United States of America and their values and ideals as defined by the Constitution.

It has become increasingly difficult to motivate enough of today's youths to serve in the armed services based upon the call of duty alone. One of the primary reasons for this shortfall is the unfortunate perception, not improperly derived, that military service is not in keeping with the concept of "doing the right thing." This perception, born of an unpopular war and the dishonest foreign policies of successive administrations, is further exaggerated by the reality that the military not only operates as a separate and distinct part of American society (this has always been the case) but, due in large part to post-9/11 hysteria, has been positioned to view the American people as a threat. The inherent problems of the military trying to recruit from a population base which is under attack from the military are self-evident. Genuine patriotism was once a viable recruitment pitch. Now, economic incentives, false promises and pseudo-patriotism are used as the bait to lure the youths of today into America's legions. Like the legions of the past, these new warriors march not on behalf of the citizens they are sworn to protect, but rather the emperor who commands them. This may be viewed as an overly harsh statement, but there is no other way to describe the abuses of a unitary executive who positions himself above the Constitution and Congress in a time of war.

Having described the current state of the military and military service in this manner, why would I ever encourage a citizen of military age to consider service in the armed forces? First and foremost, one needs to understand that the entire military system has not been corrupted. There are still men and women of honor who serve with dedication and pride. They are, in fact, in the majority. It takes only a few bad apples to spoil the lot, however, and our military today, thanks to a nebulous mission and lower recruiting standards, is full of bad apples. Likewise, to quote a Russian general, "a fish stinks from its head," and nothing smells worse today than the "head" of the United States. Our commander in chief has disgraced the office he was entrusted with, and in doing so has severely damaged the foundation of American civil society as well as the institutions sworn to uphold and defend it.

The solution, however, cannot be "cut and run." Simply identifying the problem and pointing a finger at the perpetrators will do nothing to resolve these critical issues. Our military cannot change unless we the people re-establish the link between ourselves and the legislative branch of government and rebuild the bond of trust between citizen and soldier. This cannot happen in stages, but rather must occur simultaneously. While the vast majority of America struggles to regain its moral and ethical compass through the re-establishment of the rule of law as set forth by the Constitution, we need to continue to maintain a military which is capable of defending us.

This requires good people to serve, even if the conditions of their service are not ideal. Do I want to have an intelligent, morally grounded soldier on the front line in Iraq, making the decisions about the use of force in the framework of an illegal and unjust occupation, or do I want to

relinquish that job to a former felon lacking even a high school diploma? Do I want the troops of today led by Bible-wielding zealots or Constitution-wielding patriots? While we struggle to re-establish the bond between citizen and soldier, we have an absolute requirement to ensure we continue to field a military composed of citizen soldiers. The only way to prevent our military from becoming the new Roman Legion is to staff it with citizens of principle who reject such an abominable label. We are a nation at war, not just abroad, but with ourselves. Now, more than ever, we need citizens of standing to answer the call to service, not in the name of a criminal president or an illegal war, but rather in defense of the Constitution and all that it stands for, against all enemies, foreign and domestic.