

To get along with civilians, be apolitical, expert says

Historian compares Rumsfeld, McNamara

By Kelly Kennedy

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CARLISLE BARRACKS, Pa. — A top expert on civil-military relations regaled his Army War College audience Dec. 6 with tales of secretary-of-defense behavior gone bad, using Donald Rumsfeld and Robert McNamara as examples.

Then he surprised the audience of about 100 instructors, students and others by telling them they brought it on themselves — and that the other services are just as much to blame.

Richard Kohn said the military has lost the trust of civilian leadership by becoming a political force that takes sides and lobbies for budget goals.

“We are not talking about coups or defiance or insubordination,” Kohn said. “In virtually all of its history, the military has acted in its own institutional interest.”

But, maybe more importantly, military advisers aren’t necessarily advising civilian leadership in a truthful way, he said.

Kohn served as chief of Air Force history for 10 years and is considered an expert in civilian-

military relations. He is the Omar N. Bradley chair of strategic leadership at the Army War College.

He began his presentation, “Dealing with the Devil: Assertive Secretaries of Defense and How to Deal with Them,” at Carlisle Barracks by comparing traits of Rumsfeld, who became defense secretary in 2001 and resigned Nov. 8, and McNamara, who held the position from 1961 to 1968.

Both, he said, served longer than other defense secretaries, came in with radical ideas, began with flurries of respect and praise, and had complete confidence in their power. They also dominated the press, acted condescendingly and left office “long past their usefulness,” he said.

However, Kohn said, Rumsfeld’s accomplishments never quite matched up to those of McNamara — who “revolutionized” the Pentagon, “seized control” of the budget and linked it to policy, and was at the helm when the Special

Forces were created, when the space program took off, and as the missile program hit its stride.

“He changed for the better the way the Defense Department operates,” Kohn said.

In comparison, Rumsfeld’s list of accomplishments includes more unmanned vehicles, operations during Hurricane Katrina, and the largest base realignment and closure operations. Kohn

said he got Rumsfeld’s list from the Secretary of Defense Web site.

“The list is not nearly as what I described to you of Mr. McNamara,” Kohn said. “They are not comparable in influence, impact and accomplishment.”

But both leaders, he said, “engendered a real hatred from the unified military.”

He called them ruthless, humiliating men with no boundaries to their power. Both dictated tactics, and Rumsfeld chose generals down to the two-star level.

“Rumsfeld made the Army justify every single unit — some-

times down to the company level,” Kohn said. Of both former defense secretaries he said, “We have had their like before, and we will undoubtedly have their like again.”

Kohn offered a plan for senior military leaders:

■ **Gain trust.** No more leaks, no more games, no end runs up the chain of command: total openness.

■ **Speak up and insist on the right to give the military perspective and not varnish it.** But keep it confidential; let the politicians leak it to the media.

■ **Do what’s right from a moral perspective.** “The civilians have the right to screw it up, and it’s not up to the military to undermine it.”

■ **Work toward change, reform and alternative thinking.** Get ahead of civilians.

■ **Resist pressure.** Speak up, rather than hold your say to save your career. Don’t get caught up in taking sides or defending civilian actions, such as justifying the war in Iraq. And never use the threat of resignation to make a political statement.

Kohn said taking sides and becoming partisan, as the military has done since the end of the Viet-

nam War, is the worst thing senior military leaders can do.

“The military has to be seen as unpartisan,” he said. “We’re just not even in the same category. As a general, you have no political affiliation.”

He said the relationship between generals and politicians should be similar to that between a dentist and a patient, or a lawyer and a client: primarily one of education.

All of these values have already become obvious, Kohn said, from the questions incoming Defense Secretary Robert Gates was asked during his confirmation hearings: Will you be honest when called to testify? Will you testify? Will you respond to our reports? Will you allow your people to testify without fear of retaliation?

Congress, Kohn said, should be able to say yes or no to the military’s requests, oversee the military and expect that the military will put its professional judgment — unvarnished — on the record.

“The American officer corps is the only group in the nation who think about civil-military relations,” he said. “It’s crucial to the fate of our country.” □



Kohn

House Republicans want big boost in force

By Rick Maze

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A new report by Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee says the Bush administration is putting the nation at risk by fielding a military that is too small and inadequately equipped.

Twenty-three Republicans on the committee, including chairman Rep. Duncan Hunter of California, called for increases in the military’s force structure to restore it to a size capable of carrying out two nearly simultaneous conflicts in addition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That would require adding eight Army brigade combat teams, 10 Marine infantry battalions, 21 amphibious ships, four Navy carrier battle groups and air wings, seven to 20 attack submarines, and five Air Force air expeditionary forces over and above the force structure outlined in the Pentagon’s most recent Quadrennial Defense Review earlier this year.

Following the recommendations would result in the purchase of about 850 additional aircraft for the Air Force and 444 more for the Navy, four aircraft carriers, up to 15 more attack submarines, and thousands of armored and tracked vehicles.



CHRIS HONDROS/GETTY IMAGES

Lt. Col. Miska of Task Force Dagger questions a boy in the Hurriyah neighborhood of Baghdad. A new report from Congress suggests the Army needs at least eight more brigade combat teams to sustain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and be ready to respond to other military needs.

The report does not say how to pay for all that. “I don’t think the price tag is there,” acknowledged John Holley, a spokesman for Hunter and other Republicans on the committee.

In fact, Holley said, the whole idea behind the review was to develop a force structure without considering budgetary restraints, an entirely different approach than the annual defense budgets

approved by Congress and even the Pentagon’s own reviews, where spending limits hang over decisions and result in trade-offs.

The committee effort began as a bipartisan project, but Democrats ended up backing out before the final conclusions and recommendations were made. Committee Democrats “went into the ... defense review process with a good-faith effort,” said Loren Dealy, a spokes-

woman for those Democrats.

Democrats “were able to agree on many things and are committed to ensuring our military has adequate resources to meet the missions given to them,” Dealy said. “Unfortunately, the final draft report was built on assumptions that yielded unrealistic force-structure outcomes and perpetuated flawed thinking about the war on terror.”

In January, when Rep. Ike Skelton of Missouri, the committee’s ranking Democrat, becomes chairman, Democrats will focus on improving readiness, oversight of the current conflicts and the lives of troops and their families, Dealy said.

With or without Democratic support, the report sets a difficult benchmark for Democrats who will take control of Congress in January. Although Republicans have controlled the White House and Congress for six years, the report provides ammunition for Republicans to challenge Democratic responses to the charge that the military lacks enough people and equipment.

Bigger force structure is one of the report’s major recommendations. It says increases are needed to conduct the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while also remaining

prepared to respond to two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts, which had been the basis for defense force structure for the 15 years leading up to the current conflicts.

Having enough force structure — both people and equipment — to carry out two other conflicts in the midst of current operations “is critical to deterring aggression by any potential state adversary,” the report says.

Specifically, it calls for a force of 78 Army brigade combat teams, 43 Marine infantry battalions, pre-positioned stocks for four Marine squadrons, 55 amphibious ships, 15 aircraft carrier strike groups and air wings, 55 to 68 attack submarines, and 15 Air Force air expeditionary wings.

The report also says capability and readiness are decreasing because the military is not replacing weapons, vehicles and other combat gear as fast as the wars are wearing them out. The report calls for one-for-one replacements.

A declining number of weapons platforms “reduces strategic depth and flexibility, forces higher use of existing equipment so it wears out faster, weakens the industrial base and limits the ability for the U.S. to engage in or threaten to engage in a long conflict,” the report says.

In addition to more acquisition, the report says, systems should not be retired until proven and deployable replacements are available. □