

American political divide under the dilemma of American civil-military relations

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Abstract: *In recent years, a series of manifestations of American political divide have aroused widespread concern in the international community. Tracing the source and analyzing the extent of American political divide are important issues, closely related to the security and stability of the international community. As an important part of American political system, the performance of American civil-military relations shows the state of American political system in a concentrated manner. Based on historical reviews and current comments of American civil-military relations, it can be concluded that although American politics has shown divisions, American political system is relatively stable.*

Keywords: *American Politics; Civil-Military relations; Political Divide*

1. Introduction

Stressed by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the phenomenon of American political divide and political polarization, which is the concentrated manifestation of the United States' many dilemmas, has become more and more evident. It has triggered widespread concern in the international community about the political instability of the superpower, the United States, which may affect the strategic security of the international community. During the presidential campaign between Trump and Biden in 2020, American society was on the verge of a civil war as the two presidential candidates took unexpected ways to win the support from U.S. military during the election process. Moreover, shortly after Joe Biden took office in 2021, more than 120 retired U.S. generals accused the new president of election fraud and mistakes in many domestic and foreign policies within an open letter.

In recent years, many scholars focused on the topics about American political divide and political polarization and did in-depth researches on the influences of economic, institutional, and cultural on the root causes. However, these studies have less connections with topics about the state of American political divide, and weakly to predict the extension of American political divide in the coming decades. To understand the extent and influence of American political divide under various conditions, this article elaborates the characteristics and history of American civil-military relations in the following parts.

2. The definition of civil-military relations

Karl Marx pointed out that there is no mystery when observing the human society and analyzing the relationship between individuals of human being. Human basic material needs such as food, clothing, housing and transportation cannot be separated from the division of labor and cooperation in the society. Due to the complex connections of human being with the society, the relationships between human beings are different. Various organizations or departments responsible for different functions formed in the process of social production magnify the relationship between individuals into the relationship between organization and organization, or between department and department. The armed forces mainly composed by the army, responsible for defense and security affairs, has been closely connected with human society after the appearance of class society. As consequences, there are inseparable relationships between military and politics, military personnel and non-military personnel, military organizations and other non-military organizations functioning in legislation, justice, and administration in a state.

The term "military" in the civil-military relations refers to army members, organizations, and the use of the army in a narrow sense, while the terminology of "civil" refers to the relationship between the

adjustment of class relations and the realization of class ruled by the state in a class society. In general, the civil-military relations means the relationship between military force and state power. Specifically, such as the relationships between a country's military and civilian groups, and the relationships between military power and legislative, judicial and administrative powers. The research regarding civil-military relations, especially when conducting civil-military relations regarding a superpower such as the United States, should not be limited to examining its domestic military and political relations, but also need to examine its military and political influence in the international level.

3. The content and characteristics of American civil-military relations

In the United States, civil-military relations are mainly presented by the following four aspects: 1)relation between U.S. military (officers) and U.S. President, 2)the relations between U.S. military (officers) and U.S. political parties, 3) the relations between U.S. military (officers) and U.S. Congress, and 4) the relations between U.S. military (officers) with the court, etc.. In terms of the relations between U.S. military and U.S. President, U.S. Constitution designates U.S. President as the commander-in-chief of its armed forces. Thus, the president controls the entire military and carries out power by the following two approaches: 1) Implementing administrative leadership on the entire army through U.S. army, U.S. Air force, and U.S. Navy, etc., 2) Implementing combat command through the joint chiefs of staff and various joint commands, such as the theater command and the special command, etc..

The United States has designed its civil-military relations so far with the following characteristics. The first significant characteristic is the high level of institutionalization of the "literati control". That means the authority of the military is the smallest authority relative to the domestic literati group, and the military appears to be "incompetent or neutral" in domestic literati politics. The second feature relates to military "partyization", which indicates that the military has the obligation to obey the literati government that obtains legitimacy through elections. Although the military cannot legally interfere in party politics such as elections, it can take various "active measures" like political parties to obtain public support for the military. Thirdly, the military authority is restricted by the political structure of the "powers separation", which means different institutions responsible for legislative, judicial and administrative have the corresponding authority to influence military authority. Therefore, in the United States, if the opposed parties obtain authority related military in different departments, it can also bargain with the ruling party in the formulation and implementation of various military policies.

Military and politics has always been closely linked and strongly impacted the relations between war and peace in the international aspect. Mao Zedong once said that war is bloody politics, indicating the importance of the relations between military and politics. "Planning and directing wars must have a deep understanding of the political nature of wars, insisting military obedience to politics, military strategy obedience to political strategy, and think about war issues from a political perspective." This view is also suiting for U.S., which has been fighting abroad for many years, when dealing with its own civil-military relations. Otherwise, it will fall into the embarrassing situation as Mao Zedong said, "People who do not understand politics do not understand war." As the number one military power after World War II, especially after the Cold War, the United States has the most powerful military technology for supporting, the largest defense expenditure for backing, the largest number of military bases for deployment, and the most influential military alliances for linkages. The performance and state of the civil-military relations between the alliances has always been a focus of research.

4. The dilemma of American civil-military relations in Trump's final term of office

Civil-military relations is of considerable importance in the political system, thus, when the dilemma of the American civil-military relations is once again stressed, it has received widespread attention from all over the world.

Firstly, the constant discord between the then President Trump, who only wanted to use the military to get out of trouble and win the election, and the then Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were bound by the tradition of "political neutrality". In order to resist the severe economic stagnation and many negative effects caused by the COVID-19 epidemic and the protests, especially to ensure the victory of U.S. election, as early as June 1, 2020, Trump accompanied by Mark Esper (the then Secretary of Defense) and Mark Milley (the then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), delivered a speech in the Rose Garden. In this speech, Trump threatened to use the military according to the Insurrection Act to suppress the people protested and dealt with who he called "The lowlifes and

losers." After that, Mark Esper and Mark Milly in camouflage uniforms also staged a photo with Trump. Late that night, under the strong request of Trump, Mark Milly had to patrol the streets of Washington for evaluating the demonstrations and the role of the National Guard.

The above-mentioned photo-op and Mark Milly's visit to the streets undoubtedly have the political significance of supporting the president's domestic policies, but these behaviors directly violate the so-called U.S. military's non-interference in domestic politics, which is a tradition and constitutional provisions. Considering these circumstances, on June 3, Mark Esper claimed that he did not know there would be a photo-op at that time, and directly expressed his disapproval of the President's proposal to command the U.S. military to handle civil unrest through the Insurrection Act. At the same time, Mark Milly stated in a memo issued to the commanders of the major services that he would "defend the Constitution" and declared that he would "stay true to the American people." On June 11, in a graduation video speak at the National Defense University, Mark Milly said that, the accompaniment and photo-op incident before the Rose Garden speech was a mistake. A series of actions and statements of the two show that they were not willing to sacrifice their reputation and interests to unconditionally help Trump achieve his domestic political goals. Trump, who failed to achieve his goals, quickly dismissed Mark Esper, who was "ineffective".

Secondly, the then President Trump and the political opposition both tried their best to win the military's support. Unlike Mark Esper and Mark Milly who were quite taboo about their own domestic political behaviors, and did not explicitly state that they would not implement the presidential order, many retired senior generals, senior officials of the Ministry of Defense, and members of Congress expressed a strong condemnation of Trump's attempt to use the military to suppress the continuous domestic protest. James Mattis (a four-star general, served as Secretary of Defense from 2017 to 2019) and William Perry (the 19th U.S. Secretary of Defense) were the representatives. On June 3, Mattis issued a statement in *The Atlantic* that pointed out directly that photo-op and the speech made by Trump about domestic affairs had violated the rights of Americans which are stipulated in the Constitution, and Trump was severely condemned for dividing U.S. On June 4, William Perry also issued a statement expressing his anger at Trump's politicization of the military at domestic, he declared that U.S. military "was never intended to be used against American citizens, and it was never intended to be used for partisan political purposes", "the military swear an oath to support the Constitution, not any individual", which means, the President of the United States cannot use any military organization to support his personal domestic political purposes.

At the same time, the then President's attempt was also widely worried and resolutely resisted by some political forces: Many people in the U.S. worried that Trump would not transfer power peacefully after the election. As a result, Mark Milly had to accept congressional inquiries and ensure that U.S. military would not interfere in U.S. election. Undoubtedly, nearly all political forces in the United States, including military officers and members of Congress, generally believe that Trump's behaviors have stressed the dilemma of American civil-military relations, and divided American society.

5. Historical investigation of the dilemma of American civil-military relations

The dilemma of the American civil-military relations originated from the fear of U.S. domestic society and literati government about the threat of military. After the colonists immigrated to the Americas, they had been engaged in the so-called "fight for survival": fighting against native Indians, fighting against colonists from different countries, fighting against the British regular army, and finally establishing the U.S. through these wars. Military and its activities accompany the entire history of the United States. Therefore, the internal concepts and struggles of how to build, develop, and control military have been running through American history. The American civil-military relations is inherited from the civil-military relations of traditional European countries, such as the United Kingdom, which has suffered from the painful memory of the military dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell and the dictatorship of House of Stuart. From the very beginning, American society was afraid of the powerful military threatening the stability of its domestic politics, like interfering with domestic party elections and other performance. The American society not only hopes to develop and expand its military to respond to security threats and gain benefits, but also fears that a powerful military will affect domestic literati politics and infringe on the rights and interests of civilians. This is the birth of the dilemma of American civil-military relations, and it is still happening today.

After a series of fierce struggles, in U.S., the main content of its dilemma of civil-military relations has deepened from the contradiction between the literati government and the military to the contradiction

created by different factions in the literati government fighting for military authority. Military has been deeply involved in intricate political party disputes. For a long time, although U.S. military has always been the object of competition among different domestic political forces, there have been many conflicts and even crises in the civil-military relations. In terms of external performance, the American civil-military relations has been continuously adjusted and evolved, and there is no huge contrast between the institutional design and actual operation of the American civil-military relations. In other words, U.S. military has served American government's external expansion very well.

6. Conclusion

In the United States, the dilemma of American civil-military relations, which is a concentrated manifestation of American political divide, has deepened from initial literati government and domestic society's fear of military to struggles between different factions in the literati government for military authority. These struggles are not obvious during the development period of the United States, while it is particularly intense during the relative decline of the country. Although the appearance of political divide in the United States is particularly complicated under current conditions, from perspective of historical origin and actual performance of the American civil-military relations, American political system only shows "conflict and divide", and is not really reaching the edge of "crisis".

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