



Civil-Military Relations: What Is the State of the Field

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Abstract

In the study of states and societies, civil-military relations ought to occupy a central position. It is only the armed forces that can provide for a nation's defense and at the same time are capable of overturning that nation's government. These dual powers are extraordinary and can constitute both an essential coercive asset and a potential threat to governments and citizens that must be neutralized. The goal of any state is to harness military professional power to serve vital national security interests, while guarding against the misuse of power that can threaten the well-being of its people. To face this challenge, governments must be properly equipped and motivated to lead, militaries must be sufficiently subordinate to

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civilian rule, and societies must better understand what roles the armed forces should and should not play. The rich literature on civil-military relations addresses these topics, and much more. In fact, the subfield is vast, and no single essay can do it justice. To simplify the task, we have focused on four essential elements: military coups, democratic transitions, civilian control, and military-societal relations. Within each of these topics, discussion will be limited to what are, in our view, some of the key scholarly works on the subjects.

Keywords

Civil-military relations · Civilian control · Military · Coup d'état · Military-society relations

Introduction

Armed forces ultimately exist to protect society from outside threats. Often, however, militaries overstep this role and become political actors, undermining the system they are intended to protect. The challenge for governments is therefore to establish armed forces capable of protecting the state while at the same time refraining from use of their military power to determine political affairs of that state. This challenge forms the central focus of the field of civil-military relations. At the core of this are questions of military's proper role in the society, its appropriate level of political influence, and the means by which to achieve a balance. In addressing these questions, we focus on four essential elements of the field of civil-military relations: military coups, democratic transitions, civilian control, and military-societal relations.

Military coups have long been at the heart of the field of civil-military relations as they represent an ultimate symbol of military insubordination to civilian authorities. When armed forces overthrow civilian authorities from power, they become critical arbiters of political contests and processes, whether they assume leadership positions or transfer powers to new authorities. As such, understanding the circumstances and causes of military coups is often seen as the central challenge of civil-military relations.

However, while overt intervention against the government represents the most extreme means of military's intrusion in politics, the armed forces may undermine civilian authority in subtler ways; by defying orders, challenging decisions, and using formal and informal channels to exert undue influence over policymakers, the military may expand its political reach and impair the government's ability to exercise its political prerogatives. As a result, scholars ask how governments can exert civilian control over the armed forces without undermining their capacity to defend the country? We answer that question by focusing on four factors often emphasized in the literature: beliefs, context, institutions, and agency.

The process of establishing democratic control over armed forces is particularly complex during democratic transitions. Emerging democracies must not only

survive the military's potential to disrupt the process of democratization, but they often must redesign the military's role in the society, establish a proper distribution of power between soldiers and civilians, and develop institutional structures for effective oversight of the defense establishment. While these may be challenging tasks for any country, they are particularly difficult in incipient democracies with underdeveloped democratic institutions and legacies of nondemocratic civil-military relations.

While the field of civil-military relations often focuses on the relationship between civilian leadership and the military institution, the broader relationship between the armed forces and the citizenry is just as essential in understanding the military's role in a society. To what extent are the interest and preferences of the government, the military, and the society aligned? To what extent does the military resemble the society it is intended to protect? Answers to these questions may affect whether a military chooses to identify with the public or with the government if the two are opposed to each other and may ultimately affect political outcomes.

Military Coup

A military coup d'état is the most extreme manifestation of military intervention in politics. Militaries in both democratic and authoritarian states have overthrown governments they were intended to serve, either seizing power themselves or transferring power to new authorities. While arguably most militaries have the ability to overthrow their civilian rulers at any point in time, they do so only when a number of elements align. The soldiers must be motivated to topple their government and the conditions must be favorable to allow them to do so with least resistance and most support. This section explains four elements essential in understanding military coups and their occurrence: what motivates military coups, under which conditions will the armed forces opt to topple their rulers, what is needed to execute a successful military coup, and which preventive measures can the government take to reduce the likelihood of military coups.

One of most commonly offered explanations of military's motivation to intervene in politics is the interest of the military organization and its members. In *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments*, Nordlinger (1977) argues that "by far the most common and salient interventionist motive involves the defense or enhancement of the military's corporate interests" (pp. 63–64). Such interests of the military include the satisfaction with the budgetary support it receives from the government, preservation of its autonomy from civilian interference, and the lack of threat to the military institution by competing rivals such as militias under civilian control. Threat to any one of these interests can provide the military with sufficient incentive to enmesh itself in the political processes of the country and even to overthrow the government whose actions have endangered its corporate interests. While acknowledging that military's corporate interests often play a role in its decision to intervene, Finer (1962) argues that individual interests of soldiers can also serve as a motive for

intervention, ranging from a desire to be a part of an important event, to receive higher pay, or to advance up the promotion ladder.

But the threat to military interests can be less direct and still motivate the military to overthrow the government it is supposed to serve. If the military personnel identify with a particular socioeconomic class or region, the armed forces might topple the governing elites if they perceive interests of that class or region to be threatened (Finer 1962; Huntington 1968; Nordlinger 1977; O'Donnell 1986). Based on Latin American experiences, Nordlinger (1977) demonstrated that the armed forces mainly identified with the middle class, and would intervene to protect its interests as well as its own, in the face of challenges from the lower classes. Similarly, O'Donnell (1986) argued that societal changes brought about by rapid modernization lead to political and economic instability and high levels of class conflict, affecting the interests of middle class soldiers. Huntington (1968) agreed that the military intervenes on behalf of the middle class, either by toppling oligarchies to permit the middle class to enter the political arena or populist governments whose policies endanger the interests of the middle class. Finally, Finer (1962) went beyond class interests in arguing that the military as an institution which identifies with national interest might feel obligated to overthrow the government whose actions seem to threaten the interests of the nation.

While government's actions that adversely affect the military organization and its members may incentivize soldiers to intervene, this is unlikely to occur unless the circumstances favor a military intervention. The question of when the military will act on its interests and take extreme steps to protect them requires a look outside the military organization and into the broader societal conditions. As Huntington (1968) pointed out, "the most important causes of military intervention in politics are not military but political and reflect not the social and organizational characteristics of the military establishment but the political and institutional structure of the society" (p. 194). Scholars have identified the government's loss of legitimacy as the most important context in which militaries may turn to coups (Belkin and Schofer 2003; Huntington 1968; Nordlinger 1977).

The loss of legitimacy by the ruling elites challenges their right to continue to govern and provides an opening for the military to translate its interests into actions by generating public support for military intervention. While the actual act of toppling the government may be performed by a small number of individuals, "normally the support of a fairly large proportion of the total number of political actors in the society is achieved before the coup is launched" (Huntington 1968, p. 219). Such support is likely to be gained when government performance failures manifest themselves in constitutional violations, persistent economic crises, and pervasive violence and disorder in the country (Nordlinger 1977). As Huntington (1968) pointed out in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, "military intervention is thus usually a response to the escalation of social conflict by several groups and parties coupled with the decline in the effectiveness and legitimacy of whatever political institutions may exist" (p. 216). A military coup under such circumstances serves to reduce societal tensions and put a stop to violence by removing from power the object of popular discontent.

In addition to government legitimacy, Belkin and Schofer (2003) argue that the history of successful coups and the strength of civil society can also explain the incidence of coup attempts. A history of successful coups increases coup risks while a strong civil society acts as a brake against military coups; an organized public will openly resist illegitimate overthrows of civilian governments. This focus on weak civil society as a facilitating condition of coups echoes Luttwak's (1969) argument that "The social and economic conditions of the target country must be such as to confine political participation to a small fraction of the population" (p. 24). In his seminal work *Coup D'état: A Practical Handbook*, Luttwak argued that the lack of political participation among the general population, political independence of the state, and centralized state power are three core requirements for the military to execute a successful coup because they allow a relatively small number of military personnel to efficiently seize power without provoking much resistance from the general public.

While motives and opportunities may translate into a coup attempt, its success will largely depend on the capacity of coup participants: unity, secrecy, and organization, must all align to result in a successful ouster of the existing authority. According to Nordlinger (1977), it is essential that the military be unified in its agreement that a coup is necessary, that "strategically situated, middle-level troop commanders" (p. 102) be actively involved in the coup, that the military possesses sufficient troops to take over key positions, and that it acts quickly and in a coordinated manner in order to surprise the government. Singh (2014) adds another necessary element: the ability of coup participants to convince other armed elements that the coup will succeed. Considering military coups as coordination games, Singh argues that if coup participants are able to assure potential opponents that the coup is widely supported, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: different groups and individuals join in support because they don't want to be on the losing side. Luttwak agrees – the success of any coup rests on the participants' ability to turn key armed sectors into active participants of the coup and to neutralize other military, police, and security agencies. Political opposition, surprisingly, does not have to be neutralized at the onset of a coup; because political forces do not present a physical threat to coup participants, their opposition can be defused in the immediate aftermath of a successful coup (Luttwak 1969, p. 51).

Military motivations and structural conditions of the society are not sufficient to guarantee a successful toppling of the existing authority, because governments that face high levels of coup risks have developed coup-proofing strategies. James T. Quinnivan (1999) demonstrates how Middle Eastern authoritarian governments have successfully used five coup-proofing strategies: taking advantage of family, ethnic, and religious allegiances by strategically building support among crucial groups; creating parallel military forces loyal to the government, with the purpose of protecting the leadership against a possible military intervention; establishing various security agencies in charge of overseeing different security sectors, possible opposition, as well as each other; promoting and enhancing military professionalism; and committing enough resources to fund not only extra military and security agencies but to offer rewards for loyalty to the ruling elites. While the author

demonstrates that these strategies have reduced the likelihood of military coups in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Syria, he also recognizes that they have also had negative effects on these states' military readiness and expertise by diverting funding and delaying modernization of the regular armed forces.

Other scholars have similarly identified the division of armed forces into rival organizations as a common coup-proofing strategy used by authoritarian leaders (Belkin 2005; Belkin and Schofer 2005; Stepan 1971). Belkin and Schofer (2005) argue that a divide and conquer strategy, which involves a creation of additional armed services such as new military branches or paramilitary and intelligence agencies, diffuses military power and offers governments a safeguard against a possible coup risk. "Counterbalancing is the only strategy that pits force against force, and alternative strategies that leaders use to minimize the risk of a coup can be quite ineffective" (Belkin and Schofer 2005, p. 150). They, however, go a step further and argue that since even divided militaries may collaborate against the governing elites, the leaders may engage in or aggravate international conflicts to "drive wedges between different branches, further reducing the risk of military coup" (p. 151; see also Belkin 2005). Scholars have disagreed, however, on the extent to which international conflicts serve to reduce the likelihood of coups. While Desch (1999) would agree that external threats lead to higher levels of civilian control over military, Finer (1962) argued that both international and domestic conflicts lead to the governments' dependence on the armed forces, increasing the influence of the military and thus its opportunity to intervene in politics.

Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Transitions

The issue of civil-military relations is particularly significant during democratic transitions as it poses challenges that can greatly affect both the outcome of the transition process and the quality of the democratic system that emerges. States undergoing regime transition face two distinct challenges in the realm of civil-military relations. First, they must neutralize the military's potential to disrupt the democratization process. If the armed forces are threatened by political and social changes and their effects on the security establishment, they may derail the process or halt it altogether. Second, transitioning societies must not only reform their political systems but must carefully redefine civil-military relations. As any transition ought not be considered complete until the armed forces have been placed under the control of democratically elected civilian authorities (Barany 2012; Karl 1990), it is essential that transitioning countries redefine the role of the military, its levels of autonomy, eliminate the military's political prerogatives, establish a proper distribution of power between civilian and military authorities, and develop institutional structures for democratic control over armed forces if their democratic endeavors are to succeed.

According to Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster (2002b), the process of establishing democratic civil-military relations in transitioning societies proceeds through two generations of reforms. During the first stage, the establishment of formal

institutional structures for democratic oversight over the defense sector launches the process of reforming civil-military relations and provides a foundation for the second stage during which those institutions are strengthened and implemented through capacity-building, through strengthening democratic civilian control of defense policy and democratic governance. However, the first generation reforms can only be undertaken if the military allows the transition to take place by refraining from intervention. As a result, the first stages of transition should be marked by reducing military political prerogatives, removing it from the political arena, and lessening its inclination and capability to intervene through a rudimentary legislative framework (Pion-Berlin and Martínez 2017; Serra 2010). Only after the threat of military intervention has been neutralized can the government focus on strengthening institutions for democratic control over the armed forces and defense policy, which usually occurs during the phase of consolidation.

Thus, the primary challenge transitioning countries face is preventing the armed forces from disrupting the process of democratization. A threat of a military coup, undue influence over domestic and foreign defense policies, use of entrenched positions to prevent political and economic reforms, and obstruction of human rights prosecutions are some of the means by which the military may undermine and alter the outcome of democratic transition. Such a threat is particularly acute in countries emerging from military-dominant regimes. As the outgoing ruling elites, the armed forces will use their power to negotiate favorable transition conditions (Burton et al. 1992; Geddes 1999; Geddes et al. 2018; Karl 1990; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Whitehead 1986), and if they can't secure satisfactory terms they may halt the reforms altogether. At this point, the balance of power between the civilians and the military will define the role of each side in the transition process (Agüero 1995, 2001; Arceneaux 2001; Barany 2012).

The balance of power between civilians and the military during regime transformations will greatly be affected by the nature and the level of success of the outgoing authoritarian regime. As Craig Arceneaux (2001) puts it, "transition control is determined long before the actual transition from military rule to democracy occurs" (p. 13). Focusing on Latin American transition experiences, Arceneaux finds that officers are in a better position to negotiate favorable transition terms if their rule was marked by military unity and strategy coordination. While unity provides the armed forces with a stable basis of support and allows them to fend off challenges from the opposition, strategy coordination produces a consistent economic and political agenda, reducing the emergence of challenges altogether. Where both factors are present, the military is able to exert control over the transition process and its outcome, leading to a democratic system to a large extent designed by the outgoing military elites.

Felipe Agüero (1995) similarly focuses on the nature of the previous regime but argues that the level of military empowerment during authoritarian rule and the mode of transition are essential in explaining its bargaining strength in the transition process. Where civilians managed political decisions, even if the military occupied important positions within the government, the military was not able to set the transition agenda and dictate policy reforms. If on the other hand the officers directly

crafted public policy and determined successions of the executive, they were also more likely to dominate the transition process. This empowerment of the military is further reinforced in states undergoing a planned transition introduced incrementally by the outgoing authoritarian elites. When, however, a regime suffers an unanticipated collapse as a result of domestic uprising or a military defeat, civilian authorities are more likely to take charge, thus dictating the terms and the timing of reforms and limiting the range of options for the former ruling elites (Agüero 1995).

Barany (2012) similarly finds that a defeat in a major war is more likely to result in a successful democratization of civil-military relations and of the political system in general, as it decreases the legitimacy of the old elites and increases the leverage of the incoming democratizing forces. In his comprehensive study of 27 countries across six different contexts, Barany concludes that democratization of civil-military relations is also facilitated by the European setting and the legacy of communist one-party rule. In line with other scholars who have found that prospects of NATO and European Union membership have provided additional incentives for democratization of defense establishments (Betz 2004; Cottey et al. 2006; Epstein 2005, 2006; Matei 2013; Serra 2010; Vankovska and Wiberg 2003), Barany finds that the European context in both former communist and military-dominant regimes created conditions conducive to democratization of civil-military relations. The prospect of international integration encouraged the states to establish democratic institutional structures, and their militaries were motivated to reform, professionalize, and turn their attention to external missions.

The Central and Eastern European context provided an additional safeguard against military intervention during the transition process: the legacy of communist rule (Barany 2012; Cottey et al. 2002c). In contrast to former military-dominant regimes, Eastern European armed forces did not pose a direct threat to emerging democracies because of their history of subordination to civilian authorities. By practicing subjective civilian control in Huntington's sense (Herspring 1999), the ruling elites of communist states maintained firm control over their armed forces through political indoctrination of the ranks, resulting in their unconditional allegiance to the Communist party and its ideology. Because the militaries were conditioned to be subordinate to civilian leadership, democracies emerging from communism did not face praetorian threats from their armed forces and civilian supremacy was not contested. As a result, in *Politics and the Russian Army*, Taylor (2003) concludes that the organizational culture of the Russian armed forces prevented military intervention during the period of political transition and state transformation, even when opportunities and motives for such interventions were present.

The level of violence and human rights abuses committed during an authoritarian regime is another important factor in explaining the military's determination to obstruct the process of democratization. High levels of violence during authoritarianism, especially if committed by the military, will lead to more resistance to transition due to increased fears of human rights trials. Threatened by the transition, the officers "will strive to obtain iron-clad guarantees that under no circumstances

will ‘the past be unearthed’; failing to obtain that, they will remain a serious threat to the nascent democracy” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, p. 29). Despite this threat, ignoring the issue of accountability may undermine the legitimacy of the new democracy (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Serra 2010) and may empower the military by instilling a sense of invulnerability (Rouquié 1986). As a result, the new democratic rulers must carefully balance the need for justice with the need to keep the army in the barracks. To that end, Barany (2012) recommends “strategic compromises” which avoid drastic actions against the armed forces and take into account both the timing of reforms and the need for accountability (p. 351).

Preventing the soldiers from obstructing the process of transition is just one challenge of democratizing civil-military relations. The militaries must be reformed, and civilians must have the will and the capacity to carry out the necessary reforms. According to Serra (2010), a successful transition requires not only the reduction of military autonomy and its political prerogatives, but also the lessening of societal conflict, which if persistent can strengthen the armed forces. Additionally, the military profession must be reformed to coexist within a democratic context (Serra 2010). The nature of military reforms, however, differs in countries emerging from military-dominant and civilian-dominant one-party regimes. In post-military regimes the priority is removal of soldiers from the political arena; in post-communist states, on the other hand, the main challenge is removal of politics from the armed forces (Barany 1997, 2012). While soldiers in one-party communist systems tend to be subordinate to civilian authorities, they are at the same time deeply politicized, loyal solely to the Communist party whom their career advancements depend on (Betz 2004; Cotter et al. 2002a; Herspring 1999). As a result, Danopoulos and Skandalis (2011) find that Albania’s newly democratized government prioritized four aspects of military reform: depoliticization, departization, democratization, and professionalization.

Another particularly challenging legacy of both civilian- and military-dominant authoritarian systems is the lack of civilian competence in defense matters. As has been recognized by civil-military relations scholars, at least some level of knowledge of and expertise is required if civilians are to take charge of security and defense policies (Bruneau 2005; Bruneau and Goetze 2006; Gibson and Snider 1999; Giraldo 2006; Pion-Berlin 2009). As even some established democracies still continue to struggle with the lack of civilian expertise in defense matters (Pion-Berlin et al. 2019), transitioning societies are even more likely to face the problem of uninformed civilian officials, leading to their dependence on military guidance on defense issues. In addition to affecting the trajectory of political reforms, O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986) demonstrate that such deference to the officers can reinforce the military’s image of itself as guardians of the national interests. If civilians continue to defer under the pressure of uncertain developments brought on by the transition, they will reinforce these sentiments, endangering further the process of democratic completion.

Civilian Control

There are numerous approaches to the topic of civilian control – too numerous in fact to review them all. This chapter will confine itself to four important ones: beliefs, context (historical and political), institutions, and agency. These are the themes that crop up most persistently in the literature. The central dilemma facing all governments is how to maximize their political power over the military so that it serves the interests of the government, while allowing the military to perform well, professionalize, and conduct the missions assigned to it. The military instrument is a potent one, and it must be utilized carefully so that it furthers the defense and security interests of the nation without jeopardizing the political system it is a part of. Unlike the United States and many European countries, relations of power are not completely settled in vast parts of the developing world. Militaries contest policy and policymakers, exert pressure outside of official channels, and in worst case scenarios, topple governments. So governments in developing countries must learn how to curb military political influence while preserving or enhancing military professionalism. This is the challenge of civilian control.

Beliefs

Scholars agree that civilian control is made easier where there is a military belief in political obedience. This can be attributed to long periods of professionalization, where through educational indoctrination, soldiers have internalized the concept of obedience to political authorities (Bruneau 2005; Finer 1962; Fitch 1998; Huntington 1957; Pion-Berlin and Martínez 2017; Taylor 2003). As S.E. Finer said, the armed forces will not intervene when they *believe* in the principle of civil supremacy. Principles get reinforced from one generation of military students to the next, and lessons learned are not forgotten as officers climb through the ranks. When principles become deeply embedded within the military, there develops an internal, organizational culture of respect for political authorities and rejection of insubordinate behavior (Taylor 2003). By the same token, ideas favoring intervention and coup d'états can be reinforced across generations, becoming elements of an alternative organizational culture.

In *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America*, Samuel Fitch (1998) demonstrated that while core professional values regarding hierarchy, discipline, and expertise (Huntington 1957) remain unchanged, role beliefs do not. Role beliefs are “military conceptions of their role in politics” (p. 61), and the “proper relationships between civilian authorities, the armed forces, and society” (p. 61). Those officers who embrace a “democratic professionalist” mindset believe they should stay out of politics, and fully comply with government orders handed to them. Alternatively, officers who subscribe to a set of beliefs known as “conditional subordination” maintain that in crisis situations – where national interests are imperiled – they have the right to intervene.

Militaries subscribe to different ideologies which affect their judgments about incumbent regimes and the wisdom of military intervention. During the Cold War, in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, anti-communist and counter-revolutionary doctrines often shaped military views. Fearing that elected governments were not up to the task of defeating left-wing insurgencies, militaries seized the reins of power themselves. Then and today, developmental doctrines have been important components of military thought. The military has been called upon to play a role in development projects (building infrastructure, schools, hospitals, etc.), as well as to relieve hardships and respond to immediate material needs of disadvantaged populations (food distribution, health provision, housing, etc.). Is this detrimental to civilian control? It depends. According to Pion-Berlin (2016a) in *Military Missions in Democratic Latin America*, threats to civilian control are minimized if the military's development role is carefully circumscribed, prohibiting officers from occupying positions of political and fiscal authority, and assuring that government or outside agencies exert oversight. However, civilian control could be adversely affected if the military's developmental role becomes so significant that governments come to depend on soldiers who cash in on that dependency by demanding a say on policy matters.

Context

The values that are learned and relearned within the military are affected by the larger political context surrounding the military institution. Professionalization on its own may *or may not* induce norms of compliance. For Samuel Huntington (1957) it did, and his concept of objective control is foundational to the field. Military institutions, he claimed, become increasingly subordinate when left to their own devices to modernize, professionalize and in that matter, become politically neutral. In the U.S., part and parcel of that process was the cultivation of a military mind-set that was dismissive of societal trends, contemptuous of politicians, and yet committed to remaining nonpartisan and obedient.

This is a curious blend that has often been absent in developing societies. In fact, the more familiar pattern is one where a professionally qualified yet aloof military convinces itself that it is in many respects superior to the political elites and thus more capable of governing than they. Hence, *professionalism may actually set the stage for military intervention*. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Latin American militaries became more professional largely thanks to counsel from military missions sent from Europe. But like the Europeans – indeed because of them – Latin American military establishments acquired deep distrust of, if not contempt for, civilian authorities. According to the work of Frederick Nunn (1983) and Brian Loveman (1999), military professionals advocated a form of professional militarism, viewing governments of that era as incompetent and corrupt while seeing themselves as more capable and ethical. Hence, with professional upgrading came improved self-image, and officers increasingly believed they could manage the affairs of state

better than the politicians themselves. Eventually, many militaries would seize state power to prove they were up to the task.

If officers are convinced they are superior to politicians, they may still refrain from intervening if civil society is resolutely committed to defending the political order against efforts to overturn it. As S.E. Finer argued in his classic text, *Man on Horseback* (1962), widespread public approval for legitimate procedures of transferring power and agreement on who has sovereign authority act as a constraint against coercive modes of influence. The military will choose noncoercive actions compatible with the prevailing political order. Conversely, when the public loses faith in the legitimacy of government, this can set the stage for military intervention, as Alfred Stepan (1971) persuasively showed in *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil*. Militaries, he argued, often gauge public sentiment before toppling regimes, to make sure that a sizeable portion of the public is behind them.

National cohesion is another component to context. How unified or divided is a nation? (Dudley 2016; Mietzner 2014; Shah 2014; Wilkinson 2015). When nations are polarized between competing parties, factions, and groups, the instability that results can invite military intervention, as scholarship on India and Pakistan illuminates. Though they share the same heritage – both products of British colonialism and officer training – the Indian military has remained firmly subordinate to civilian control since the nation's birth, whereas the Pakistani military has intervened repeatedly to topple democratic governments. What explains the difference? Aqil Shah (2014) in *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* argues it has much to do with national divisions and party politics. Pakistan failed to overcome serious ethnic, regional, and religious divides because the ruling party enforced a single language on a nation with linguistically different subregions. This only fueled anger and conflict, sharpening the military perception that civilians were not capable of governing. By contrast, Steven I. Wilkinson (2015) in *Army and Nation: The Military and Indian Democracy Since Independence* demonstrates how in India, The Congress Party incorporated many different ethnic groups, thus generating cross-cutting cleavages and avoiding sharp ethnic polarization and disenfranchisement that could have drawn the military in.

Institutions

The third approach to the study of civil-military affairs is institutional. Institutionalists put their stock in organizational designs which can either define barriers to entry or ease access for soldiers who would attempt to unduly influence policy. As Croissant et al. (2013) have said, “institutions define power relationships and hierarchies, empowering some actors while closing channels of power to others” (p. 47). Military behavior would be subject to laws, rules, and procedures embedded within an institutional setting that could either enhance its influence or diminish it. In the USA, the framers were more concerned about concentrated power in the hands of a civilian despot than they were about power in the hands of a military still in its nascent stages of development (Huntington (1957). For them, the solution was to

divide control of the armed forces between the federal government and the states, and between the executive and legislative branches. Unfortunately, this allowed the military to play off one center of civilian power against another. In Huntington's view (1957), civilian control has remained strong only because of US geographical isolation and international balances of power.

More contemporary scholars have followed up on Huntington's interest in institutional arrangements. Deborah Avant (1994) argued that unified political institutions in Great Britain facilitated civilian intervention to shape military doctrine, allowing it to adapt to changing threats, whereas divided institutions in the USA ceded greater autonomy to inflexible military planners who failed to respond to changing circumstances. Pion-Berlin (1997) explained how the ability of the armed forces to exert pressure on Argentine policymakers depended on how concentrated (or dispersed) decision-making authority was, and how insular (or vulnerable) decision-makers were. High levels of concentrated authority and autonomy within the democratic state allowed civilians to design and execute policies more easily because the military would have fewer intragovernmental divisions to exploit. Conversely, dispersed authority and low autonomy forced policymakers to navigate more decision points from execution to implementation, affording the military numerous avenues of influence.

If there is one institution that represents the keystone holding up the arch of civilian control, it is the defense ministry (Bruneau and Tollefson 2006; Edmonds 1985; Pion-Berlin 2009). As Bruneau and Goetze (2006) say, the ministry "has become widely viewed as the best solution to the classic paradox, 'Who guards the guardians?'" (p. 71). The purpose of the defense ministry is to prepare the armed forces to serve the policy goals of government and act as a buffer zone between the president and the service branches. Should active duty or retired military officers occupy too many top positions within the defense sector, they may exhibit divided loyalties, exert undue influence, dominate defense and security policymaking, and crowd out alternative viewpoints, according to a number of scholars (Bruneau and Tollefson 2006; Pion-Berlin 2009). A proper ministerial buffer means one with a sizeable presence of civilian leaders to ensure that policy preferences get translated into defense actions and to stand vigilant against military efforts to push an armed forces agenda at the expense of a national agenda.

Agency

The final approach has to do with agency: the difference that individuals make as they operate within contexts and institutions. Scholars often conclude, appropriately, that agency is possible, but that the range of options available to the decision-maker to effect changes in the armed forces is constrained by her unique environment. Civilians who want to reduce the political power of the military and insure its cooperation in the development of defense policy must have some knowledge and strategies for doing so. A few prominent scholars have investigated this issue. Alfred Stepan (1988) in *Rethinking Military Politics* argued that achieving civilian control

involved a process of reducing military contestation and prerogatives. He delimited 11 important areas where military power had to be cut back, ranging from its participation in the cabinet to its role in internal security, policing, state enterprises, intelligence gathering, etc. While he provided ordinal measures for these prerogatives delineating low, moderate, or high scores for each, he also treated all prerogatives equally, with no suggestion as to how democratic leaders might sequence their selection of prerogative-reducing strategies.

Narcís Serra (2010) in *The Military Transition* based on the Spanish case proposed one solution to this problem. He differentiated between measures that ought to be taken during a period of democratic transition, from those taken during consolidation. During the transitional phase, emphasis is placed on limiting the military's proclivities for intervention and extracting the armed forces from policy processes and spheres of influence. Then, policymakers could turn their attention to crafting military and defense policies, and strengthening institutions such as the defense ministry, during the consolidation phase. Serra's approach bears resemblance to Cottey et al. (2002b) who distinguished between first and second generational problems.

Peter Feaver (2003) greatly advanced the study of civil-military strategic interaction in *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight and Civil-Military Relations*. Using a Principal-Agent theoretical framework, Feaver demonstrates how civilians (principals) can overcome the vexing moral hazard of losing some control once they delegate defense and security tasks to the military. They reduce the chance of military shirking via a range of monitoring strategies backed up by sanctioning, affording civilians the ability to punish the military for avoiding its duties. This is a more intrusive form of control, where civilians break through the stiff barrier that Huntington had set up between politicians and soldiers. In a similar vein, Eliot A. Cohen (2002) argues that in wartime, political leaders have the right to prudently intrude into the military sphere, because battlefield decisions have political consequences.

Croissant et al. (2013) in *Democratization and Civilian Control in Asia* follow up on Feaver's work by broadening the concept of control strategy while contextualizing its use. Civilians can resort to monitoring and sanctioning – what they describe as a robust power strategy – but *only* in a context that affords them ample resources and opportunities (p. 51). Civilians with scant resources and fewer opportunities may have to settle for weaker forms of control, relying either on legitimization strategies which alter military norms or compensation strategies that attempt to purchase military compliance via rewards. This framework borrows from Trinkunas' (2005) model in *Crafting Civilian Control of the Military in Venezuela: A Comparative Perspective*. He identifies four strategies civilians have relied upon to develop leverage over the armed forces: appeasement, monitoring, divide and conquer, and sanctioning. The choice of strategy is conditioned (but not determined) by the breadth or narrowness of the opportunities availed to civilians in the aftermath of transitions from authoritarian rule. Policymakers have more room for maneuver when armies are fragmented while civilian elites are unified. But Trinkunas argues that agency is critical, because while some policymakers take advantage of their wide opportunities, others do not.

Military-Society Relations

When civil-military relations are analyzed, they are most often linear – restricted to discussions on the interaction between armed forces personnel and government officials. That comes at the expense of the broader, triangular relations between the soldiers, politicians, and society (Serra 2010). Every nation has to, at some point in its history, come to grips with achieving a more enduring harmony between those three elements. The Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) referred to this as the “Great Trinity,” the essential ingredient to fighting successful wars. Political theorists have since contended that in peacetime too, there should be an alignment between a government’s military policy, the military itself, and societal interests (Burk 1998). This is a point of view originally put forth by the sociologist, Morris Janowitz (1960) who claimed that armies should and would adopt features of society, mirroring its attitudinal, occupational, and professional traits.

In the contemporary world, how important is it that there be a connection, and mutual understanding and respect between society and its armed forces? Feaver and Kohn’s (2001) study discovered problems with the US military-societal relation, most notably a civil-military attitudinal gap featuring sizeable differences in partisan attachments and ideology between military leaders compared to nonveteran civilians and the general public. The military had increasingly aligned itself with the Republican Party and conservative ideology to a degree not seen within the American citizenry. A follow-up study of the army conducted a decade later by Jason Dempsey (2010) confirmed there was a gap but of a different kind. Senior officers identified with Republicans much more than junior officers and enlisted soldiers, but the political preferences of the lower ranks did not differ much from the general population. In the aggregate, the gap was still present, but appeared to be closing.

But are differences between elite officers and civilians a function of military culture or demographics? The US Army, for example, is more male, white, wealthier, and more highly educated than the general population – traits that may skew its ideology and party ID. To control for this Jason Dempsey’s study (2010) took a stratified sample of civilians that mirrored the army’s demographics. Sizeable differences still emerged between the civilian sample and army *senior officers* which could not be explained by demographic traits. Are they explained by army identification? Dempsey could not confirm that either, and more research is warranted.

Be that as it may, do military-societal differences matter? Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. (2012) argue that gaps are not the same as crises. Large gaps may result in no crises at all, whereas smaller gaps may be of the kind that do generate crises. For example, it has been found that the military has a certain contempt for societal mores. But so long as it abides by its professional duties in defending the nation, such a gap in cultural attitudes may have no detrimental effects.

If there is one *potentially* harmful gap, it is the breach between society’s admiration for the armed forces and its understanding of it (Schake and Mattis 2016b). The US public is both enamored with the military and ignorant about it, while at the same time considerably distrustful of political leaders. A citizenry seduced into what Andrew J. Bacevich (2005) calls a new American militarism is one that accepts,

indeed invites, misguided notions that the military should be a nation's number one problem solver. In a study based on a 2014 survey of Americans, half of those nonveteran civilians polled think military rather than political goals should determine the application of force, and a strong majority (83%) believe a civilian government should let the military take over running a war (Golby et al. 2016, p. 112). These sentiments run counter to every principle of civilian control, reflect the public's lack of knowledge about civil-military affairs, and can tempt political leaders to make poor foreign policy decisions.

When an unknowing public wants the military to be more influential, it creates an atmosphere where politicians would rather align with public sentiments than lead, by deferring to those admired generals. Accordingly, more resources flow to the defense budget to pay for military personnel while leaving the diplomatic corps and State Department depleted of funds (Brooks 2016). The tendency is for civilian policymakers to "rely on the credibility of their military commanders to garner support for their policies" (Schake and Mattis 2016a, p. 302). This then "creates perverse incentives for senior officers to use the threat of public opposition or resignation to extract policy concessions from elected officials" according to Golby, Cohn, and Feaver (2016, p. 134). Political leaders will allow themselves to be led by an increasingly assertive military. The irony is that all this may eventually erode the military's fine standing with the public if it is perceived to be too political.

Latin America is one part of the world where the military has for too long been demonstrably political, often at the expense of democratic rule. Studying civil-military relations and democracy in Latin America, Pion-Berlin and Martínez (2017) argue there needs to be a greater convergence between the armed forces and society that centers on the military's increased respect for core democratic values and institutions. Convergence is hard to come by, because soldiers are physically, institutionally, and attitudinally walled off from society, adhering to their own standards and norms which may collide with those of society. Again, the question can be asked: does it matter? The answer in the Latin American context is yes. Isolation has often reinforced an attitude of superiority among officers, exhibiting contempt for politicians who are perceived as less capable of managing the affairs of state than they. From there it was often just a short jump to the conclusion that officers should take charge of governing. Though the threat of coup is much lower today in Latin America than in the past, scholars agree that society must be vigilant in defense of democracy, and the military must take steps to conform to democratic rules of the game.

In any country, tearing down the walls separating military from civil society is a process whereby soldiers and civilians come to better understand, value, and respect each other. Moskos and Wood (1988) urged armies and societies to forge links, calling this an "external integration" of the armed forces. One such link is through education. Donald A. Downs and Ilia Murtazashvili (2012) argue that civilian students must open their minds to the value of duty, discipline, and sacrifice, while cadets steeped in the culture of hierarchy and command could stand to broaden their intellectual outlook, sharpen their critical thinking, and appreciate the value of a liberal education. This convergence ought to occur on campuses because the authors

argue the university “is a microcosm of civil-military relations. . .” (p. 31). Their goal is to integrate a military perspective into education, not to promote one, and can be accomplished through programs such as the ROTC. On balance however, these authors do seem more concerned with overcoming civilian educational deficits than military ones.

How convergent or divergent are military-society relations can have serious repercussions for regime survival. Civil-military scholarship on the Arab Spring and its aftermath has brought into sharp relief just how critical the military is to the fate of popular uprisings against autocratic regimes, and to the fate of the besieged autocrats themselves (Albrecht et al. 2016; Barany 2016; Bellin 2012; Croissant et al. 2018; Lutterbeck 2013; Pion-Berlin 2016b; Pion-Berlin et al. 2014). A military has choices: it can remain loyal to the authorities by repressing the opposition; it can stay quartered and remove itself from the political maelstrom; or it can defect by either joining the protests or overthrowing the regime. Scholars demonstrate that the decision rests on military’s institutional traits and distinct ties to the regime, its strategic calculations based on corporate self-interest, the size and breath of a mobilized public, and the military’s links to it (Barany 2016; Bellin 2012; Pion-Berlin et al. 2014).

A patrimonial military is one whose ranks are filled with soldiers recruited based on ethnic, tribal, religious, or familial identities which closely match those of the ruling elite. In that case, the military will be deeply invested in the regime’s survival and prepared to suppress the opposition (Bellin 2012). A more professional force chosen on meritorious criteria and attentive to its own corporate interests could decide to withhold its support of the regime. In every case where a president (and his government) has fallen from power as a consequence of a civilian uprising, the armed forces had refused his pleas for assistance (Barany 2016; Pion-Berlin 2016b).

Larger, broad-based, nonviolent protests invite autocrats to call for a decisive military response, but at the same time cause the armed forces to deliberate, often questioning the wisdom of the order (Bellin 2012). The application of brute force could lead to massive bloodshed, harming the military’s reputation. Soldiers on the frontlines may balk at the orders, and senior officers not wishing to invite a breach within the ranks may decide the best course of action is to resist repression orders for the sake of institutional unity (Lutterbeck 2013). In addition, soldiers who more strongly identify with the demonstrators will be more hesitant to fire on them. Those connections hinge on whether the armed forces are a conscripted force that recruits from a broader cross section of society or are chosen based on ascriptive identities that accentuate the differences between them and the opposition (Barany 2016). Thus, the ties that bind a military to society are ones that can spell doom for authoritarian regimes.

Conclusion

The civil-military field is a sprawling, complex mix of various themes and analytical approaches. But there are threads that weave through the entire fabric, holding it together. At its heart the field shows a lasting concern for how nations attempt to deal

with the one organization that has unchallenged coercive might. Whether it be preventing coups, navigating transitions from ancient regimes to new ones, enhancing professionalism and subordination, or forging stronger ties to society, the field is always preoccupied with the interactions between political leaders, soldiers, and civilians. No matter how seemingly stable those relations may be, they should never be taken for granted. Those relations are dynamic, subject to unanticipated changes that could create moments of instability or crisis. Both policymaking elites and ordinary citizens alike need to pay closer attention to the armed forces – who they are, what makes them tick, what their legitimate needs are, and what roles they should and should not play. Likewise, officers and the enlisted must be more sensitive to the concerns, attitudes, and values of civilians who they ultimately serve. Improvements in civil-military relations will depend on whether enhanced mutual understanding can be forged between the two sides.

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