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Choosing Sides: Military Behavior in Severely Polarized Democracies

Timothy W. Ford
University of Denver

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Choosing Sides: Military Behavior in Severely Polarized Democracies

Abstract
Why does severe polarization result in military intervention in some cases but not others? I argue that the organizational culture unique to a particular military plays a critical role in influencing behavioral outcomes in severely polarized democracies. When faced with sovereign power disputes that arise as a result of severe polarization, military organizations are most likely to develop new strategies of action from the dominant practices, norms, and ideas of military leaders. Severe polarization presents a unique threat to civil-military relations and provides the type of unsettled social periods in which cultural ideologies express an observable influence on military behavior. My project takes a theory building approach and uses critical juncture analysis and process tracing to examine severe polarization in three cases: the United States, Venezuela, and South Africa. I find that in each case a common pathway exists in which severe polarization incentivizes civilian elites to attempt to co-opt the military for partisan gain and results in the politicization of the military. As democratic conditions deteriorate, continued severe polarization erodes many of the structural and rational interest-based mechanisms used for constraining military behavior in democracies. Absent these controls, organizational culture is a critical factor in shaping the collective perception of the military and enabling the problem-solving pathways that are available during contentious periods. In other words, severe polarization creates the conditions in which organizational culture exerts an overt influence on military behavior. The unique organizational cultures of each military, and specifically the cultural role beliefs that define the military's relationship with the state, explain the variation in outcome. In the United States, the military played the role of arbiter at the end of the Trump administration. The South African Defense Force chose to remain neutral amid the end of apartheid and the transition to democracy and the Venezuelan military intervened and attempted to depose the president.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Ph.D.

First Advisor
Rachel A. Epstein

Second Advisor
Deborah D. Avant

Third Advisor
Timothy D. Sisk

Keywords
Civil-military relations, Organizational culture, Severe polarization

Subject Categories
African Studies | American Politics | International and Area Studies | Latin American Studies | Military and Veterans Studies | Other International and Area Studies | Political Science | Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration | Social and Behavioral Sciences
CHOOSING SIDES: MILITARY BEHAVIOR IN SEVERELY POLARIZED DEMOCRACIES

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Josef Korbel School of International Studies
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Timothy W. Ford
August 2023
Advisor: Rachel Epstein
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Abstract

Why does severe polarization result in military intervention in some cases but not others? I argue that the organizational culture unique to a particular military plays a critical role in influencing behavioral outcomes in severely polarized democracies. When faced with sovereign power disputes that arise as a result of severe polarization, military organizations are most likely to develop new strategies of action from the dominant practices, norms, and ideas of military leaders. Severe polarization presents a unique threat to civil-military relations and provides the type of unsettled social periods in which cultural ideologies express an observable influence on military behavior. My project takes a theory building approach and uses critical juncture analysis and process tracing to examine severe polarization in three cases: the United States, Venezuela, and South Africa. I find that in each case a common pathway exists in which severe polarization incentivizes civilian elites to attempt to co-opt the military for partisan gain and results in the politicization of the military. As democratic conditions deteriorate, continued severe polarization erodes many of the structural and rational interest-based mechanisms used for constraining military behavior in democracies. Absent these controls, organizational culture is a critical factor in shaping the collective perception of the military and enabling the problem-solving pathways that are available during contentious periods. In other words, severe polarization creates the conditions in which organizational culture exerts an
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Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful for the advice, suggestions, critiques, corrections, encouragement and support of my dissertation committee. Rachel Epstein, Debbi Avant, and Tim Sisk provided invaluable and timely support as I struggled through the various stages of this project and it is because of them that I was able to finish. This project was incredibly challenging but ultimately fulfilling and I will forever be thankful for the patient assistance they provided at each step. All three provided models that I hope to emulate as I continue my academic journey. Thank you!

My time at Korbel was an incredible journey and I wanted to thank all of my professors for challenging me intellectually. In particular, discussions both inside and outside of class with Martin Rhodes, Marie Berry, and Jack Donnelly were influential not only in my thought process for how I approached this project but also in formulating my broader approach to academic problems and the development of future projects.

And, most importantly, thank you to my family. To Sarah, Sienna, Jake, Arlo and Ollie: thank you for your patience and loving support throughout this long process and thank you for the understanding as I spent far too many hours in front of a computer. To Mom and Dad: thank you for the support from the beginning and thank you for providing the enthusiastic questions even when I wasn’t feeling enthusiastic about the topic. Your interest and questions about my work helped me think about it in different ways. Thank you!
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................... iv

List of Figures ......................................................................................................................... ix

Chapter One: Introduction .................................................................................................... 1
  An Organizational Culture Approach in Brief ................................................................. 6
  Operationalizing Culture: Role Beliefs .............................................................................. 9
  Cultures of Professionalism ............................................................................................... 14
  Outcomes of Interests in a Polarized Society ..................................................................... 18
  Case Selection and Methodology ....................................................................................... 21
    Case Selection and Variations in Outcome ..................................................................... 22
    Culture Across Time: Context and Transformation ..................................................... 28
    Avoiding Measurement Errors ....................................................................................... 31
    Differentiating Culture .................................................................................................. 35
  Alternative Explanations .................................................................................................... 38
    Ideological Alignment ...................................................................................................... 43
    Severe Polarization and Civil-Military Relations .......................................................... 45
  Plan for the Project ............................................................................................................ 47

Chapter Two: Organizational Culture and Military Intervention ......................................... 49
  An Organizational Culture Approach to Intervention ..................................................... 50
    Polarization and Culture ................................................................................................ 54
    Operationalizing Culture as Role Beliefs ......................................................................... 59
  Severe Polarization ........................................................................................................... 63
    Severe Polarization Defined .......................................................................................... 64
    The Threat to Democracy .............................................................................................. 66
    Control and Governance of the Military in Divided Democracies .................................. 69
    Severe Polarization and the Civil-Military Gap .............................................................. 74
  The Role of Organizational Culture .................................................................................. 80
    Culture in Action ............................................................................................................ 82
    Culture Changes .............................................................................................................. 85
    Culture is Collective ....................................................................................................... 89
    Culture Applied ............................................................................................................... 94

Military Politicization ............................................................................................................ 96
  Politicization, Role Beliefs, and Expectations ................................................................. 98
  Sources of Politicization .................................................................................................... 101
  Severe Polarization and Politicization ............................................................................. 103
  Alternative Approaches to Politicization ......................................................................... 106
  Politicization as Partisanship .......................................................................................... 109
  Politicization as Political Participation ............................................................................. 111
Summary................................................................................................................114

Chapter Three: American Civil-Military Discord in the Post-Cold War Period .............. 116
Severe Polarization in the United States ....................................................................... 121
Politicization and Organizational Culture .................................................................... 126
Cultural Entrepreneurs and Changing Role Beliefs ..................................................... 129
The Powell Doctrine .................................................................................................... 136
Bosnia .......................................................................................................................... 140
Iraq .................................................................................................................................. 150
Civilian Activation and Political Endorsements ............................................................ 158
Social Policy and Challenges to Civilian Control ......................................................... 164
Contentious Policy Changes .......................................................................................... 165
Enforcing Cultural Norms ............................................................................................. 173
Revolt(s) of the Generals ............................................................................................... 176
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 182

Chapter Four: American Populism and the Limits of Civilian Control ............................. 184
American Populism and the Military ............................................................................ 187
Courting the Military: Politicization via Personal Loyalty ........................................... 190
Civilian Challenges to Military Culture ........................................................................ 196
Annihilation and Autonomy ......................................................................................... 199
Limited Restraint Leads to Resistance ......................................................................... 204
Different Cultural Responses to Politicization ............................................................. 211
The Final Year ............................................................................................................... 215
Nation-wide Protests Deepen the Civil-Military Divide ............................................... 216
Lafayette Square: A Critical Juncture .......................................................................... 219
A Disputed Election and the Transfer of Power ............................................................ 223
January 6th: A Critical Juncture ................................................................................... 228
The Military Takes a Leadership Role ........................................................................... 230
Evidence of a Competing Culture ................................................................................ 236
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 242

Chapter Five: Chavismo and the Venezuelan Military ....................................................... 248
Democracy and Civilian Control in Venezuela ............................................................. 252
Establishment and Maintenance of Civilian Control .................................................... 255
Institutionalization Leads to a Competing Culture ....................................................... 260
The Caracazo and MBR-200: A Critical Juncture ....................................................... 263
The 1992 Coup Attempts: A Critical Juncture ............................................................. 268
Explaining Military Behavior in 1992 .......................................................................... 270
Chavismo and the Bolivarian Revolution ...................................................................... 274
Chavismo and Severe Polarization ................................................................................. 275
A Civil-Military Union ................................................................................................. 278
Military Discontent and Divisions ............................................................................... 282
Cultural Backlash amid Polarization ............................................................................ 286
Appendix A: List of Acronyms .................................................................459
List of Figures

Chapter Two

Figure 1: Strong Alignment ................................................................. 99
Figure 2: Weak Alignment ................................................................. 100
Figure 3: Severely Polarized ............................................................... 104
Figure 4: Alignment with Polarized Group ......................................... 105
Figure 5: Competing Military Culture ................................................. 106
Chapter One: Introduction

Why does severe polarization result in military intervention in some cases but not others? Declines in global democratic quality and a resurgence of illiberal populism across Europe and the United States have sparked a wide range of literature addressing democratic backsliding.\(^1\) Several studies have focused on backsliding caused by severe polarization and its inherently pernicious effects on democracy.\(^2\) However, until recently little has been said on how severe polarization impacts civil–military relations. This project examines the behavioral choices of the armed forces in deeply divided democracies. I take a theory generating approach to understand why some militaries in severely polarized democracies choose to intervene in political disputes while others

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\(^2\) Severe polarization is the term used in this project but it has also been referred to as pernicious or extreme polarization in other literature. My intent is to treat these terms as synonymous. As discussed later, severe polarization is rooted in social identity and is an empirically distinct concept from traditional measures of political or social polarization that focus on ideological distance. For example, see Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer, “Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How it Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (2019); Thomas Carothers and Andrew O’Donohue, eds. *Democracies Divided: the Global Challenge of Political Polarization* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2019).
maintain their apolitical traditions and remain neutral. I argue that a military’s organizational culture plays a critical role in influencing these outcomes.

An organizational culture approach contends that military officer’s practices, norms, and ideas are a key motivation for military behavior. Severe polarization—polarization rooted in social identity “that divides societies into ‘Us vs. Them’ camps based on a single dimension of difference that overshadows all others”—creates the type of “unsettled” periods in which cultural influences are salient. Affective divides between competing groups in democratic societies diminish the ability for social compromise and lessen the effectiveness of democratic institutions. Apolitical military norms and adherence to civilian control are necessary conditions for a functioning democracy but severe polarization threatens the foundational assumptions on which these are based.

Severe polarization has often resulted in sovereign power disputes as divided social groups compete for control of the state. Literature on military interventions suggests that long standing democracies with a history of civilian control are unlikely to experience


military involvement in civilian disputes. These democratic systems often combine a normative understanding of military professionalism with structural and corporate interest-based means of controlling the armed forces. Huntington argued that a structural division between civil and military spheres would insulate the military from social forces and competing civilian interests. This autonomy enabled professionalism which would render the military “politically sterile and neutral.” According to this theory, a professional military should be unaffected by social polarization.

Rationalist approaches have argued that militaries act to protect their own interests. In these approaches, adherence to civilian control is often determined by domestic political organization, the threats facing the state, or the civilian ability to oversee and enforce civil-military norms. However, historical cases show that severe polarization can erode the processes used to maintain civilian control and diminish the effectiveness of autonomy as polarization permeates institutional boundaries and makes neutrality in society difficult, if not impossible. Absent effective control mechanisms, some


12 McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
militaries in divided democracies have been susceptible to capture by polarized civilian groups while others have remained committed to democratic norms of civil-military relations.

Recent events across the world have brought this issue to the forefront. In the United States, the perception of deteriorating norms of civil-military relations has been scrutinized as questions were raised over the military’s role during the severe polarization that characterized much of the Trump administration. The resurgence of populism throughout Europe has fed social polarization and introduced conflicts between the military and the state there as well. In France, active duty military officers anonymously threatened civil war and open alignment with populist radical right parties.13 Germany experienced a rise in politically motivated violence among some members of the Bundeswehr and disbanded entire combat units because of right-wing extremism in the ranks.14 And in Spain, retired senior officers openly questioned the legitimacy of the elected government and even advocated for a return to Francoism.15


Other historical examples indicate that existing approaches to civil-military relations are difficult to apply to severely polarized states. For example, pre-Chávez Venezuela had successfully established an autonomous military with a history of civilian control and robust norms of democratic civil-military relations. The military’s professionalism was cited as a foundation of its democracy and essential to the survival of the democratic regime.16 Yet, severe polarization during the Chávez regime led to the military siding with the political opposition and pursuing extraconstitutional measures to depose the incumbent leadership.17 Severe polarization in other states such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Turkey, and Brazil all resulted in varied responses from the military and varied outcomes for democracy. These militaries resorted to or supported unconstitutional, nondemocratic, or legally ambiguous acts or behavior contrary to established civil-military norms in efforts to remove or prop-up polarizing incumbents.18 In still other examples—such as post-war Germany—militaries acted as critical sources of resilience in overcoming severe polarization.19 Given the rise in polarization impacting the world’s democracies, understanding the behavior of the military amidst severe polarization is essential.

17 McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
18 Ibid.
An Organizational Culture Approach in Brief

In this project I argue that the organizational culture unique to a particular military plays a critical role in influencing behavioral outcomes in severely polarized democracies. The argument can be broken down into two parts. First, I argue that severe polarization leads to military politicization. Military politicization refers to the ways in which the armed forces’ involvement in political processes exceeds their expected or established role in the state. Politicization can occur either by the military “pushing” into the civilian sphere—labelled military activism—or by a civilian-initiated “pull” of the military into policymaking—labeled civilian activation.²⁰ As severe polarization leads to political instability and incumbent elites seek to maintain their partisan advantage, I maintain that civilian activation becomes the dominant form of politicization. Civilian elites seek to tie the military to the partisan interests of the governing regime or to cultivate the personal loyalty of the armed forces. These methods often result in the military becoming a focal point of the polarizing political strategy.

Second, the methods of civilian activation used to attract the military erode the structural mechanisms used for civilian control. Placement of military leaders into key political posts, delegation of policymaking, and using the armed forces in nontraditional ways are common to all three cases in this study. The military may or may not be willing participants in these methods. Severe polarization erases any meaningful distinction

between civilian and military spheres as all policy—to include military and defense issues—is incorporated into the binary, oppositional cleavage that dominates society.\textsuperscript{21}

The salience of organizational culture is increased in these instances by this lack of separation and the erosion of apolitical norms and structural mechanisms that previously restricted military participation. Absent these controls, Culture acts by shaping the collective perception of organizational members and restricting the problem-solving pathways that are available during contentious periods. In other words, I argue that severe polarization creates the conditions in which organizational culture exerts on overt influence on military behavior that would otherwise be absent.

Military organizational culture is the practices, assumptions, attitudes, and values that are adopted at the organizational level and shape the collective understanding and acceptable behavior of the military.\textsuperscript{22} Culture permeates throughout an organization and exists in different forms at different levels. This study focuses on the macro impact of culture that operates at the organizational level of analysis and manifests in the collective behavioral choices of organizational leaders. The perceptions of the officer corps help them make sense of the world and define which actions may be considered legitimate in a given situation and what strategies are available for problem-solving.\textsuperscript{23} Analyzing the

\textsuperscript{21} McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization”; Carothers and O’Donohue, “Introduction.”


\textsuperscript{23} Kier, \textit{Imagining War}, 28; Taylor, \textit{Politics and the Russian Army}. 

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shared collective understanding of an organization is critical for understanding why a military behaves in a certain way.\textsuperscript{24}

However, even a coherent culture will contain a multitude of ideologies and role beliefs held by cultural members. When a democratic society experiences severe polarization, existing patterns of civil-military relations are disrupted and provide opportunity for cultural ideologies—“explicit, articulated, highly organized meaning systems”\textsuperscript{25}—to shape the organization’s collective perception and problem-solving approaches in new ways.\textsuperscript{26} Cultural contestation between competing ideologies within the military is influenced by different variables such as external civilian inputs, civilian or military sanctioning of deviant behavior, or critical junctures that rapidly alter the organization’s perception of the circumstances. These inputs alter the salience of particular ideologies which then exert direct influence on the strategies and behaviors of military elites. Why one ideology triumphs over another can be traced to the contextual circumstances and structural constraints “within which ideological movements struggle for dominance.”\textsuperscript{27}

Organizational culture is an amorphous concept as it incorporates a broad range of individual elements. Rather than viewing culture as a collection of symbols, meanings,
and norms, I adopt the view of culture as practice developed by Ann Swidler and used in a number of military cultural analyses.\textsuperscript{28} In this view, culture is a dynamic, collective mechanism for ordering action that reflects the “shared sense making” of organizational members.\textsuperscript{29} It does not orient members toward a common interest-based goal but instead creates a sort of bounded rationality that shapes and constrains how decisions are made.\textsuperscript{30} A shared culture does not presume that all members of the organization share the same attitudes, values, and beliefs; only that they are likely to interpret a given situation similarly and share a common acknowledgement of cultural boundaries and constraints.\textsuperscript{31} Structure, institutions, and rational interest continue to play important roles by determining the context in which culture operates. Organizational culture bridges the gap between the structure of a situation and the choices of actors within that situation.\textsuperscript{32}

**Operationalizing Culture: Role Beliefs**

This project uses role beliefs as an operationalization of organizational culture. Role beliefs are the practices and acceptable forms of engagement that establish the relationships between the military, society, and political actors and represent both the purposive and the relational content of organizational culture as expressed through highly

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. This view is further articulated by several scholars such as William H. Sewell Jr., *The Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), and adopted in studies of military culture such as Kier, *Imagining War*; Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*, and Carvin and Williams, *Law, Science, Liberalism*.

\textsuperscript{29} Kwantes and Glazer, *Culture, Organizations, and Work*, 46.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid; Kier, *Imagining War*, 31.

\textsuperscript{31} Sewell, *Logics of History*, 166.

\textsuperscript{32} Taylor *Politics and the Russian Army*, 16.
organized ideologies. The purposive element of a role belief is the shared conception of the military’s mission or purpose in the state. It is those mission areas that the military is prepared to undertake and that are viewed as legitimate uses of the force. The relational element of a role belief is the military’s perception of its role in politics and policymaking including which actions are considered legitimate. Over time, role beliefs come to define what issues the military views as being in the ‘military sphere’ and in which its involvement is appropriate. Surprisingly, there is relatively little connection in the civil-military relations literature between military role beliefs and their impact to overall civil-military relations.

The broader concept of organizational culture contains both internal and external elements. The internal elements include how members conduct daily business, their assimilation processes, how they talk to each other, and the shared approaches to problem-solving. As examples, the military uses salutes as both a greeting and a recognition of authority, and the seemingly endless military jargon that is used in internal communications is sometimes indecipherable to outside observers. Both are internal elements of culture. Culture is learned and the internal elements of culture are developed through an iterative process in which members follow rules (or don’t), process the results

33 Harig, Jenne, and Ruffa, “Operational Experiences.”


35 This point was made by Harig, Jenne, and Ruffa, “Operational Experiences.” There are some notable exceptions that this project draws from such as Fitch, Armed Forces and Democracy and David Pion-Berlin and Rafael Martinez, Soldiers, Politicians, and Civilians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) but the point remains that civil-military relations are often understood as a static concept and not explicitly tied to the dynamic role and position of the military within the state.
of their behavior, internalize these outcomes, and then pass on these lessons to new
generations. Thus, the internal elements of culture become self-reinforcing in the sense
that they help members orient their decision-making within a cultural context. This
pattern of learning that solidifies internal elements is heavily reliant on the contextual
conditions and organizational relationships that make up the external elements of culture.

Role beliefs are an external element of culture and follow a similar pattern of
learning. How the military perceives its relationship with the state and how that
perception influences its actions are external cultural elements that are learned,
processed, and reiterated to future generations. In this way, role beliefs are constructed
and are the “product of common understandings and shared interpretations of acceptable
norms of collective activity.” Civilian inputs that alter the education, organization,
resourcing, and tasking of the armed forces are all deliberate influences that reinforce the
boundaries of acceptable behavior and transform role beliefs over time. More abrupt
influences on role beliefs can occur as a result of critical junctures that either contribute
to a significant change in the distribution of cultural ideologies within an organization or

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36 Kwantes and Glazer, Culture, Organizations, and Work, 46.


create the external conditions in which antecedent cultural role beliefs exert greater force on organizational choices.39

An important indication of role beliefs is found in how cultural boundaries are reinforced. Organizational responses to deviant behavior indicate how the military adheres to and addresses breaches of its cultural values. Repeated reinforcements or punishments—punctuated by bursts of activity during critical junctures—alter the collective perception of the organization and contribute to the transformation or solidification of role beliefs.40 How and when the military responds to insubordination or open disregard for civilian superiors speaks to how the culture views its place in the state and what actions are tolerated or deemed unacceptable. Does the military enforce its own norms and acceptable behaviors? Does it view those situations differently than do civilian superiors? Responses to deviant behavior are related to role beliefs because the military is likely to act differently toward breaches of civilian control in those issue areas in which it feels that its involvement is legitimate. Understanding this aspect of culture can demonstrate why in some cases a military’s behavior can be deemed ‘political’ while it still maintains an overall commitment to democratic norms of civilian control.


40 Kwantes and Glazer, Culture, Organizations, and Work.
I use public statements and observable behavior of military elites to identify role beliefs and trace their transformation over time. The focus on public statements and observable actions is important for understanding military culture as practice rather than on the underlying desires of individual officers. Of particular importance are statements that indicate officers have accepted or rejected the organization’s cultural norms. When available, private thoughts and correspondence between officers is used to illustrate the options that were viewed as possible.

I use historical analysis within each case to identify instances of military politicization, their source, and their consistency with organizational role beliefs. Process tracing is used to analyze the decision-making and motivation of elites during each instance. Military journals, reports, training philosophies, memoirs, public interviews, articles and correspondence, and both formal and informal military doctrine provide much of the source material. This approach supports the view that evidence for cultural norms are found in either “patterns of behavior” or “articulated in discourse.” Likewise, repeated phrases, idioms, behavioral axioms, and historical analogies used by organizational leaders have all been identified as fruitful indications of internalized organizational culture.

41 By “source” I mean whether the politicization is an instance of military activism or civilian activation.

42 Similar approaches and sources of evidence are used in cultural analysis by Kier, *Imagining War*, and Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*.


Cultures of Professionalism

Cultural role beliefs relate directly to the concept of professionalism. Many views of professionalism are rooted in Huntington’s normative conception of a separation of civil and military responsibilities. But a cultural approach rejects a uniform view of professionalism that places it purely in opposition to politicization. Instead, I present professionalism as a cultural concept that represents an adherence to the unique professional norms of an organization. Its meaning to each particular military is dependent on the role of the military in the state—its role beliefs.

Fitch related four broad notions of professionalism to military role beliefs in his study of Latin American democracies: classical professionalism, democratic professionalism, conditional subordination, and the military as a power factor. He used the beliefs of individual service members garnered via interview and survey projects to describe the multitude of role beliefs that were present at any given time in a military. While I find his categorization useful and adopt his naming convention and definitions, I depart significantly in my application of these terms. Rather than individual perspectives, I apply these terms as useful approximations to categorize ideologically motivated behavior at the organizational level. They are used in this study to describe competing

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47 Ibid.
ideologies’ predominant relational attachment to the state and provide an expectation for behavior against which my theory can be tested.

Fitch’s focus on individual perspectives is not incompatible with my approach. As highlighted in the empirical chapters, any organization is almost certain to have a variety of belief systems with differing views on the proper purpose of the military but the collective culture of an organization cannot be determined by aggregating individual viewpoints. Regardless of personal attitudes, the organizational members of a hierarchical organization such as the military are likely to share a common acknowledgement of the boundaries that constrain behavior. The degree to which members adhere to these boundaries is reflected in the cultural coherence of the organization. Cultural coherence refers to the power of cultural norms to restrict aberrant behavior through sanctioning or other means. When military organizations consistently punish deviant behavior, they reinforce dominant cultural norms. When they do not, they leave room for the emergence of a competing ideology or for cultural entrepreneurs to stretch the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

I use Fitch’s categorization to describe the dominant cultural role beliefs that are reflected in the macro-level outcomes of organizational behavior at a given time. As discussed, role beliefs evolve, are destabilized, or are supplanted by competing belief


49 Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine.”

systems. The triumph of one ideology over another is analyzed by identifying the internal and external inputs that reinforce patterns of behavior. Throughout this project, I use Fitch’s terminology to describe these changes as well as the competition between ideologies. Each of the cultural conceptions discussed below are meant to apply to militaries in a democracy. They share a common recognition of the value of civilian control and the idea that the military is constrained in its actions by some legal or constitutional restrictions but all four lead to different conclusions regarding the role of the military in the state.

A role belief of classical professionalism adheres closely to that theorized by Huntington. It is defined by a separation of civil and military spheres that serves to insulate the military from undue civilian influence. Huntington theorized that the development of a professional military was essential for maintaining civilian control. Professionalization could only be accomplished through institutional autonomy, a strict separation of civil and military responsibilities, and military subordination in both policy and politics to civilian superiors. Classical professionalism is not unique to democracies. But civil-military relations in a democracy are further complicated by the need to not only subordinate the armed forces to civilian overseers but also to limit the government’s use of a subordinated military.

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51 Huntington, Soldier and The State; Fitch, Armed Forces and Democracy.

A culture of democratic professionalism is distinguished from classical professionalism by the addition of an “affirmative commitment to a democratic regime.” This role belief combines classical professionalism’s separation of military and political responsibilities with an active commitment to democratic processes and an overarching belief that “the problems of democracy should be solved democratically.”

Civilian control is valued by the military not for its own sake but because it is a necessary condition for democratic government. The specific involvement of the military in the democratic project means that civil-military norms may be violated but it is unlikely that such a military would challenge the continuance of a legitimate democratic regime.

A role belief of conditional subordination subscribes to an autonomous view of military responsibilities but may feel “obligated to safeguard the highest national interests of the Nation, even if that entails…assuming power temporarily.” Finer recognized a similar threat of military intervention that led the armed forces to deem themselves “servants of the state rather than of the government.” As both Finer and Fitch noted, this view often originates from a sense of professionalism and the superiority of military


54 Ibid, 66.


56 Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*, 68.

values in which the military feels they are best positioned to define what constitutes the ‘national interest.’

A cultural model of the armed forces as a power factor within the state is one in which the military recognizes its ultimate subordination to civilian control but also sees itself as having a legitimate role in political decision-making because of “its vital societal role.”\textsuperscript{58} Because this culture orients itself as an active participant in national society, it is especially prone to contestation as challenges to national identity occur. The boundaries of the military’s political role and the outcome of interactions with governments that do not recognize the military’s self-perceived role are ill-defined and have historically contributed to political interventions.\textsuperscript{59}

**Outcomes of Interests in a Polarized Society**

The outcome of interest in this study took one of three forms: military intervention, military arbitration, or non-intervention.\textsuperscript{60} Military intervention entails the threat or use of force to intervene in the political process and may involve the military acting on its own or in concert with civilian factions. In a military intervention, the armed forces have made a conscious decision to become involved in the transfer of power. Military arbitration occurs when the military is pulled into a sovereign power dispute as a result of civilian

\textsuperscript{58} Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*, 67.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 68.

\textsuperscript{60} The distinction between these terms is adopted from Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*, and is relevant to the discussion on military organizational cultures. Some military cultures legitimate involvement in sovereign power issues whereas others are more reluctant to act and are therefore more likely to be involved in arbitration rather than open intervention.
activity. It occurs when “multiple persons or groups claim to hold legitimate state power and the military is forced to decide from whom to obey orders.” In such a case, the armed forces are generally reluctant to be involved but are compelled in some way. Both intervention and arbitration are forms of military involvement in sovereign power issues but are distinguished by the use of force and the motivation of the actors.

A non-intervention occurs when the military seeks to maintain its institutional and political autonomy and remains neutral amid severe polarization, even at the risk of conflict with one or both of the competing social groups. Non-interventions are often left out of analyses because they in some ways represent the expectation for military behavior in a democracy. But in a severely polarized society in which national institutions have been politicized, the choice to remain neutral may itself be interpreted as a political decision and could include disobeying or disregarding legal orders from incumbent civilian leadership. Not acting may in some circumstances be as contentious as taking a side and could contribute to increased democratic backsliding—either through the erosion of civilian control or the decay of other democratic institutions.

The complex dynamics of severe polarization and the undemocratic action it promotes can lead to a variety of behavior that accompanies each of these outcomes. Both military intervention and arbitration can involve the armed forces retaining their institutional attachment to the state, even if that means supporting illiberal or

61 Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army, 7.
62 Ibid, 8.
extraconstitutional actions to retain incumbent power. Or the military can align with the non-state civilian factions and support the opposition to incumbent powers. In either case, the military may justify its decisions as adhering to civilian control (i.e., “just following orders”), as acting in defense of democratic norms, as recognizing the authority of the most legitimate civilian group, or simply by an open alignment with social poles. Likewise, all cases may result in the armed forces splintering into competing factions.

These outcomes are not intended to represent normative categories of “good, bad, or neutral” decisions by the military. Extreme forms of polarization make differentiating between the legitimacy of civilian groups difficult and often put the military in a position to choose between a range of undesirable options. Simplifying the outcome of interest into these categories is instead meant to avoid the nuanced differences between the many types of military intervention that have been documented. In democracies, changes in government and democratic processes have frequently been difficult to distinguish between legal, illegal, and extraconstitutional. Differentiating between a legal impeachment, extraconstitutional means to remove an incumbent from office, or the erosion of democratic processes has often been one of degree and perspective. What matters for this project is the behavior of the military in these actions and how it does or does not align with the military culture’s view of its role in sovereign power issues.

Table 1: Summary of Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Arbitration</th>
<th>Non-Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Align with either incumbent or opposition</td>
<td>Align with either incumbent or opposition</td>
<td>Maintain autonomy/political neutrality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military Role in Sovereign Power Dispute</strong></td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possible Action</strong></td>
<td>Involves illegal or extraconstitutional use of force</td>
<td>Illegal or extraconstitutional behavior is likely but not required</td>
<td>Legal action but still likely to be interpreted as politicized by either group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case Selection and Methodology**

This project uses historical analysis of a single primary case that is complemented by two shadow cases using a most-similar systems design. I use process tracing for within-case comparison and critical juncture analysis to identify the effects of important decision points that influenced ideological competition and the resulting military behavior. Theoretical generalizations and cross-case comparisons are discussed in the final chapter. The United States is the primary case for the investigation and the two shadow cases are Venezuela and South Africa. The shadow cases primarily rely on secondary sources and
are intended to demonstrate the external validity of the conclusions in the core case through within-case analysis and a broader cross-case comparison.

All three cases offer examples of autonomous, professional militaries with traditions consistent with democratic norms of civil-military relations. Severe polarization in each case eventually resulted in a sovereign power dispute that threatened democratic processes. Despite their similarities, each resulted in significantly different outcomes. The United States was a case of military arbitration, severe polarization in Venezuela resulted in military intervention, and South Africa was an example of non-intervention. The outcomes in each case provide important conclusions for how severe polarization contributed to military politicization, the impact of external inputs on ideological contestation, and the influence of organizational culture during sovereign power disputes.

**Case Selection and Variations in Outcome**

I selected cases on the basis of militaries with democratic systems of civil-military relations and the presence of severe polarization that resulted in a sovereign power dispute. Three essential characteristics of civil-military relations were present in all cases: a tradition of subordination to civilian superiors, civilian elites held the authority for policy control of the military, and the armed forces in each case were statutorily subordinate to the rule of law; in “democratic regimes, the armed forces are neither

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65 Fitch highlights these as essential characteristics for civil-military relations in a democracy (Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*, 36-38).
policymakers nor political actors nor are they above the law.” The professionalization of each military also shared consistent markers in that they involved specialized training, promotions based primarily on merit, and specific career paths dependent on specialization or branch of service. Despite a lack of “interventionist histories,” common traditions of democratic civil-military norms, and established institutional autonomy, these cases demonstrated significant variation in the outcome of interest.

The United States was an example of a country facing severe polarization that combined racial, ideological, and religious issues in a single-dimension progressive-conservative divide. Severe polarization in the United States came to a head following the 2020 presidential election when President Trump disputed the results and led a “multistep effort devised...to block the transfer of power.” The U.S. case was an example of military arbitration in which the military, with a long history of democratic civil-military norms was politicized to an unprecedented degree during the Trump administration but ultimately took active measures to avoid any interruptions to the democratic transfer of power. The U.S. military experienced significant cultural

66 Ibid, 38.
70 Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”
contestation between an activist ideology that viewed the military as a power factor in the state and a democratic professionalist ideology that consistently maintained cultural boundaries and adherence to democratic norms. The difference in civilian elites’ behavior prior to Trump and two critical junctures during the Trump administration altered the conflict between these ideologies and, despite being courted by a populist, polarizing administration, the armed forces actively resisted attempts to interfere with the results of a democratic election.

Polarization in Venezuela occurred alongside the populism-fueled rise of Hugo Chávez and came to represent a conflict between Chávez’s participatory democracy versus the pre-existing liberal democracy. \(^71\) The 1958 transition to democracy in Venezuela had established many of the institutional mechanisms required for civilian control and efforts to professionalize the military borrowed heavily from the American model of civil-military relations. \(^72\) The military was granted professional autonomy in exchange for deference to civilian authority and the armed forces became a source of resilience for the state and a model for other militaries in emerging democracies. \(^73\) The Venezuelan case illustrates the importance of civilian inputs in constructing organizational culture. Professionalization was accompanied by a series of institutional changes and decreased sanctioning of deviant behavior that gave rise to a competing

\(^71\) McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization,” 239.

\(^72\) Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control.”

\(^73\) Ibid, 101.
cultural ideology that, over time, displaced the role belief of classical professionalism with one of conditional subordination.

Competition between these cultures led to two failed coup attempts in 1992 but the dominant military culture at the time was credited as a key reason that democracy was maintained. The Venezuelan military’s professionalization, the structural coup-proofing that occurred during democratization, and the failed intervention in 1992 should have made another military intervention less likely. However, Chávez’s use of the military as a central focus of his polarizing political strategy deepened the military’s connection to the Venezuelan people that reinforced their culture of conditional subordination. In 2002, despite his efforts to cultivate personal loyalty from military elites, the military leadership chose to refuse his orders to suppress unarmed protesters and briefly deposed the president. When the interim government threatened the military’s cultural attachment to the people, military elites acted contrary to their own personal interests and reinstated Chávez. Following his return, Chávez deliberately reconstructed military culture such that by the time he died in 2013 the military had become a critical source of regime capacity.

74 Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*; Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control.”

75 Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*.

In South Africa, polarization occurred around the concept of the national idea—whether the white minority could continue to maintain its hegemonic status.\textsuperscript{77} The South African Defense Force (SADF) had a history of institutional autonomy and saw itself as adhering to Western norms of political non-interference.\textsuperscript{78} However, the SADF was increasingly politicized throughout the polarizing apartheid period—particularly through the political influence and autonomy granted during the Botha administration. By the early 1990s, following defeat on the battlefield and with the end of apartheid in sight, civilian control of the SADF disintegrated as defense ministers resigned or were replaced, many senior officers were openly oppositional to the president, and the military’s influence in society increased substantially. Yet the outcome in South Africa was a non-intervention as the SADF leadership affirmatively signaled their commitment to political neutrality and supported the political transition in 1994.\textsuperscript{79}

The SADF’s decision to remain neutral occurred despite significant opportunity to intervene and a competing culture that was violently fighting to preserve the apartheid state. Unlike in Venezuela, civilian elites in South Africa took active measures to tip the scales in the cultural competition between a power factor ideology committed to defending the white minority and an ideology of classical professionalism that saw

\textsuperscript{77} McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization,” 239.


\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
continuing apartheid as incompatible with their mission of national defense.\textsuperscript{80} Despite significant political violence, SADF leadership ultimately adhered to the tradition of subservience to civilian authority and played a critical role in ensuring a successful, if not peaceful, transfer of power and the end of apartheid.

In all three cases, the outcome of interest was at odds with what would be expected by other approaches to civil-military relations. Examining these cases through a cultural lens provides a better explanation for military behavior in these instances. The U.S. military’s history of professionalism, adherence to apolitical norms, and its role in external conflicts suggests that an outcome of non-intervention was most likely. As discussed further in chapter 4, there was little reason for military elites to act as arbiter if not for a resident ideology of democratic professionalism. In Venezuela, the longevity of civilian control, two recent failed coup attempts, civilian efforts at corporate appeasement and the placement of regime loyalists in critical positions suggests that an outcome of non-intervention was most likely.\textsuperscript{81} Yet the culture of conditional subordination allowed interventionist action to be supported by military leaders. And in South Africa, regional experts on civil-military relations as well as government officials contemporaneously predicted that efforts to limit the military’s involvement in the political sphere would


\textsuperscript{81} For example, see Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer, “Toward a Structural Understanding of Coup Risk,” \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution} 47, no. 5 (2003).
likely result in intervention.\textsuperscript{82} But the vestiges of an ideology of classical professionalism provided a foundation that allowed negotiations to occur and paved the way for democratic transition.

\textbf{Culture Across Time: Context and Transformation}

To understand how culture impacted these outcomes, I analyze organizational culture over the long-term which is useful for several reasons. First, whereas many projects have looked at civil-military relations during any single period with the purpose of labelling them as effective or defective, it is more fruitful for a cultural analysis to consider civil-military relations across a long enough time period for cultural practices to take hold. Failing to do so risks mischaracterizing behavior. Although culture is constantly contested, it maintains some consistency in its fundamental expressions across time and through different structural configurations.\textsuperscript{83} Cultural ideologies emerge in unsettled times as incomplete systems that are tailored to address specific problems but because they are incomplete, they continue to rely on many traditional patterns and habits of action. Over time, ideologies can solidify and displace existing cultural systems.\textsuperscript{84}

Civilian administrations provide useful temporal boundaries for delineating differences between civilian leadership but they are in some ways meaningless from a


\textsuperscript{84} Swidler, “Culture in Action.”
military perspective. For example, U.S. public law mandates a deliberate continuity within the military chain of command that purposefully spans administrations and prevents any perception of political influence. The military recognizes such measures as important safeguards of their organizational culture and institutional autonomy. A longer duration analysis helps understand military culture as it exists across civilian administrations and can help differentiate between cultural and institutional causes.

Second, analyzing military organizational culture across time helps break out both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of culture. As critical events and civilian inputs cause changes in organizational culture, variation should be observable in the responses to politicization. These changes in culture help to identify the historical context that impacted the civil-military relationship. For instance, the geopolitical shifts at the end of the Cold War necessitated changes in U.S. military role beliefs, and the political solution developed by a second George H.W. Bush administration would no doubt have been different than that reached under the Clinton administration. Because culture is not itself determinative, this domestic and international context is critical for understanding how cultural role beliefs shaped the perceptions of military elites and constrained their available courses of actions.

85 The timing of appointments for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs was legislated as part of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act and is codified in 10 U.S.C. §152(a). Appointing chairman during odd numbered years was intended to prevent appointments during election years and any perception of political interference.

86 Hugh Shelton, Interview, May 29, 2007, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.
But without studying culture diachronically—i.e., across civilian administrations—it is difficult to definitively say that behavioral responses were a result of cultural shaping or if the resulting choices are better explained by other factors. A longer term analysis of organizational culture helps to differentiate culturally driven outcomes from those that are a result of rational corporate interests or are driven by the immediate structural context. Likewise, a disjunction occurs as culture is reproduced and implemented over time and in different contexts. Culture is altered as it is imperfectly recreated by the different temporal conditions in which it is replicated: a transformation that can only be captured through diachronic analysis.\(^7\) Thus, causal weight can be attributed to organizational culture and differentiated from the impact of institutional or structural factors.

The analysis of the central U.S. case covers the period from the end of the Cold War until the end of the Trump administration. Understanding how the military’s organizational culture interacted with civilian leadership over this approximately thirty year period provides sufficient background on the military’s relationship with the state to identify how cultural factors impacted military leaders’ decision-making, messaging, and publicly known actions during the turbulent end of the Trump administration. The Venezuelan case covers the cultural transformations that occurred as a result of the 1958 transition to democracy and then emphasizes in detail the period from 1989 until the failed coup attempt in 2002. The South African case focuses on the beginning of the

armed resistance to apartheid following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 until the end of Apartheid in 1994.

In all of these cases, severe polarization resulted in military politicization. The militaries responded differently to increased involvement in politics based on their unique organizational cultures. As severe polarization led to political instability, it resulted in sovereign power disputes and created opportunities for military intervention as institutional safeguards were eroded. The increased stature of the military in each state gave the armed forces outsized influence and the ability to either intervene or arbitrate between competing civilian groups. This study seeks to understand why in some cases severe polarization resulted in military intervention and why in others the military maintained its commitment to democratic norms of civil-military relations.

**Avoiding Measurement Errors**

The first problem that arises in cultural studies is the avoidance of endogeneity by describing organizational culture on the basis of the outcome of interest. It is therefore important to separate the type of events being discussed. To do so, I borrow from terminology used by Timothy Colton and Brian Taylor to differentiate civil-military relations between sovereign power issues and defense or social policy issues. Colton described sovereign power issues as “whether soldiers or statesmen are to be supreme in

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88 These terms were defined by Colton and adopted by Taylor in his cultural analysis of Russian military interventions (Timothy J. Colton, “Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet Union,” in *Soldiers and the Soviet State*, eds., Timothy J. Colton and Thane Gustafson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990)).
the state.” In the context of this project, military involvement in sovereign policy issues relates to the outcome of interest and refers to military behavior when the sovereignty of the state is in question—not specifically whether the military will take control of the state.

In contrast, defense and social policy issues are more in line with Peter Feaver’s question of whether civilians in a democracy “have a right to be wrong.” Defense policy issues refer to the training, resourcing, organization, and employment of the armed forces. Theories of democratic civil-military relations place these issues under the purview of civilian leadership, but as Richard Kohn noted, “in practice, the relationship is far more complex.” The civil-military friction that results from debates over defense policy issues often leads to charges of a politicized military and “crises” of civil-military relations. Social policy issues are those that are more obviously out of the military realm but also incorporate the question of “who serves” in the armed forces.

Because the ultimate outcome of interest in this project lies in the realm of sovereign power issues, military culture is described and analyzed using civil-military relations in the other realms. As Taylor states, “whether officers submit to civilian leadership in these

89 Colton, “Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations,” 7.

90 Feaver, Armed Servants, 65.


realms [is] indicative of their degree of attachment to a norm of civilian supremacy.”

Likewise, Swidler asserted that “unsettled cultural periods” increase the causal influence of cultural strategies of action, but that it is more “concrete situations” in which these cultural models will be formed and either “thrive” or “die.” Therefore, the cultural strategies of action relied upon during sovereign power issues brought about by severe polarization are drawn on from the cultural development that occurred during more stable periods such as with civil-military tension while debating defense and social policy issues. This project considers variation across cases primarily through military involvement in sovereign power issues. Variation within cases uses military involvement in defense and social policy issues to identify those elements of culture that later became relevant for involvement in sovereign power disputes.

A second issue that arises in cultural studies, particularly when relying on public documents and statements, is the possibility that actors are using culture instrumentally. This danger is mediated somewhat in a hierarchical organization like the military. Those officers that are able to successfully rise to the highest ranks of the military are those that are more likely to have internalized the cultural norms of the institution. Whether senior officers personally believe the statements that they make is also somewhat immaterial. Research has shown that consistent public reinforcement of cultural norms—for instance

94 Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army, 34.

95 Swidler, “Culture in Action,” 280.

96 Kier, Imagining War; Correlli Barnett, “The Education of Military Elites,” Journal of Contemporary History 2, no. 3 (1967); Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army.
repeated assurances by senior officers of the importance of civilian control—can result in internalization of those views and strengthen the culture, regardless of personal beliefs.  

I emphasize military actions in my analysis to better reflect the collectively understood limitations on behavioral choices that are indicative of a dominant organizational culture.

However, there is significant variation in this study regarding senior officers that make statements or take actions that are contrary to cultural norms. What becomes important is then how the organization reacts to these instances. For example, if the organization reacts strongly to sanction a general officer that makes insubordinate comments to the commander in chief, it indicates that the dominant culture rejected these actions. Responses to deviant behavior from the organization and the organization’s reaction to sanctioning from civilian officials helps differentiate the causal weight of culture from other factors. But if no reprimand is offered, it may be an indication that a competing culture exists.

Divided or competing cultures are not a problem by themselves and, in fact, are especially important to the research question being asked. Here, again, the hierarchical nature of the military means that officers in the senior ranks are more likely to represent the dominant views and culture of the organization. But severe polarization provides the type of unsettled period in which competing cultures are most likely to arise. Where

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98 Taylor, Politics and The Russian Army, 35.

99 Swidler, “Culture in Action.”
applicable, this study analyzes what the competing culture was, what impact it had, how the dominant culture responded, and how it impacted the ultimate outcome.

**Differentiating Culture**

To attribute causal power to organizational culture this project uses a three-part test. First, it must be verified that an outcome is culturally motivated and not easily explained by other factors. For this to be true, I consider both positional and resource dimensions as they are applied in structural and rational approaches to civil-military relations. If institutional structure or corporate interest approaches hold more casual weight then there will be some evidence that the military acted in defense of these interests specifically. Budgetary interests are commonly cited institutional interests but budgetary fluctuation in most democracies is not uncommon and budget allocation ebbs and flows based on international and domestic conditions. Large resource cuts that fundamentally change the positional worth of the military institution are of interest. Other notable interests include threatened changes to the military’s political position or alteration and interference in the military chain of command. Institutional autonomy is both a corporate interest and a structural condition that may precipitate action if

100 A similar set of conditions were used by Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*; Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*; Kier, *Imagining War*, to demonstrate the validity of an organizational culture approach in their studies.

101 William R. Thompson, “Organizational Cohesion and Military Coup Outcomes,” *Comparative Political Studies* 9, no. 3 (1976). Thompson’s grouping of positional and resource interests allows a connection between both structural approaches and corporate interests. For example, the preservation of a favorable structural organization itself becomes a corporate interest for an institution. The converse would also be true.
threatened. Additional positional conditions that will be considered are the introduction of a competing security force, elevation of specific services or elements within the armed forces, or the intrusion of political officials. The presence of such factors as motivating forces behind action indicates that a cultural argument is not the primary explanatory force.

Second, it must be true that culture is not simply a consequence of the contextual conditions in which it is found. In other words, if what is labeled as “culture” changes concurrently with the surrounding structural conditions then it is less likely that action is being driven by underlying beliefs and attitudes than it is by the structure of the moment. For example, Elizabeth Kier demonstrated that the political left in England and France held opposite views of conscription despite similarities in political structure and international threats to their states. The critical difference in these cases was the organizational culture of the respective armed forces. Despite similar structural environments, the French military discounted the value of a conscript army while the British army was more accepting. The result was a divergence in doctrine between the two armies. While the British acceptance of conscripts did little to alter their doctrinal approach to warfare, the French devaluing of conscripts contributed to the adoption of a defensive doctrine prior to World War II.

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This project’s diachronic analysis is used to consider this factor by showing that cultural role beliefs of the military remained relatively consistent through changing contextual conditions. When changes did occur, they are linked to observable inputs. For example, Peter Feaver’s Agency theory posits that civil-military turmoil during the Clinton administration was driven by political weakness on defense issues which prevented effective civilian oversight and an inability to punish aberrant military behavior.\textsuperscript{104} Yet, as discussed in the U.S. case, military “shirking” during this period was not noticeably different under future administrations that did demonstrate greater willingness to oversee and punish military behavior. The similarity in behavior across time lends weight to organizational culture as a factor in shaping military behavior.

The final element to consider is the instrumental use of culture. As discussed above, the use of culture to achieve other goals is not always problematic. It becomes problematic in this study when culture is manipulated specifically to cover the actual motivations of military elites. Differentiating this use of culture is achieved by considering the cost of an actor’s decisions and whether an “actor’s beliefs persist despite the fact that continuing to hold those beliefs keeps them from achieving other important goals.”\textsuperscript{105} This is not to say that actors will forgo their personal or organizational interests in favor of culture. Instead, as Kier states, interests can be traced to cultural factors.\textsuperscript{106}

These three conditions: a lack of alternate explanation; consistency across structural

\textsuperscript{104} Feaver,\textit{ Armed Servants}.  
\textsuperscript{105} Kier,\textit{ Imagining War}, 37.  
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 38.
conditions; and the sincerity of actions and beliefs must all be considered true in order to attribute causal value to culture. If not, then the outcomes are better attributed to an alternative explanation.

**Alternative Explanations**

This section introduces the primary alternative explanations that are engaged with throughout the project. Of primary concern is the research addressing theories of civilian control of the military. Many approaches for understanding civilian control in civil-military relations emphasize either the structural and institutional components of the relationship or the rational, corporate interest-based elements. Regardless of the approach, two points of emphasis in the literature stand out: the treatment of these theories as universal for democracies; and the presentation of the state and the military as unitary actors with mostly shared interests regarding the importance of democracy.

Huntington’s theory of objective control laid the groundwork for a significant amount of literature that followed. The premise of his argument lies in the separation of the military and civilian spheres and the treatment of the military as an autonomous institution that exists within the state but is separate in several ways. Huntington emphasized the centrality of the “military mind”\(^{107}\) to the development of his theory. In this way both Huntington’s approach, and that of his contemporary Janowitz, are non-material approaches that rely on the “ideology of professionalism” for ensuring civilian

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\(^{107}\) Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, Chapter 3. In this chapter, Huntington describes a general military mind that is applicable to all military professionals. It includes the abilities, attributes, and attitudes that make successful military officers and is independent of national context.
control.\textsuperscript{108} But these approaches are non-ideational in that they assume a universal application of the military’s relationship with the state; they do not allow for differences in organizational cultures.\textsuperscript{109}

In the context of this study, Huntington’s approach would expect the U.S. and Venezuelan cases to have resulted in non-interventions. In both cases the military maintained some degree of autonomy from civilian interference, had clearly defined roles and expectations within the state, and had long histories of professionalized officer corps that valued civilian control. However, a closer examination of these militaries’ organizational cultures reveals important differences in their role beliefs and their relationships with the civilian state that allowed for strikingly different outcomes than traditional separation theories would suggest.

An important distinction here is how a military’s organizational culture is related to, but still discrete from, the national character and political culture. The degree of structural separation between the military and civilian society is an inherently political decision that impacts military culture.\textsuperscript{110} How a military is organized and its structural position with regard to civilian society are largely intentional choices, often arising through global or regional norm diffusion resulting in institutional isomorphism between

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\textsuperscript{108} Feaver, \textit{Armed Servants}, 13.
\end{flushright}
like-minded nations.\textsuperscript{111} The dominance of the modern bureaucratic state as the “sole legitimate form of political organization in the world” and a corresponding prioritization of military effectiness has contributed to similar structuring of military organizations across the globe, particularly among mature democracies.\textsuperscript{112} But the way a military behaves within these structural constraints is highly dependent on unique national and organizational contexts.\textsuperscript{113} Although there are similarities between how militaries are structured and organized across the democratic world, it is not correct to assume that military behavior will share these similarities. The cultural approach taken in this project is better suited for explaining these differences by considering the different domestic influences that shape the worldview and decision-making of military officers in unique ways.

Corporate interest-based approaches also tend to treat military interests as universal. For example, Michael Desch’s threat-centric theory of civilian control characterized military intervention as being dependent on perceived threats to the military institution

\begin{itemize}
  \item Martha Finnemore, “Norms, Culture and World Politics: Insights from Sociology’s Institutionalism,” \textit{International Organization} 50, no. 2 (1996), 332. This view of the spread of western bureaucracy and market-driven efficiencies is part of Finnemore’s larger discussion on the spread of western culture as a partial explanation of institutional isomorphism. Her contention is supported by Theo Farrell’s assertion that many military organizational choices that may otherwise seem puzzling can be understood based on the spread of global cultural norms often resulting in isomorphism among military organizations; Theo Farrell, “Culture and Military Power,” \textit{Review of International Studies} 24, no. 3 (1998), 414.
\end{itemize}
which he lists as “preservation of organizational autonomy, protection of budget share, maintenance of cohesion, and survival of the institution.”\textsuperscript{114} He argues that only when these elements are threatened will the military choose to intervene. While his larger argument about the structure of the international and domestic threat environment is compelling, it is difficult to apply to severely polarized democracies.

The cases in this study call into question Desch’s focus on the threat environment as a determining factor for military intervention. The SADF faced a threat from both external forces and from the internal divisions of South African society—a condition Desch predicted would make “direct military intervention in politics more likely”\textsuperscript{115}—yet the actual outcome in that case was non-intervention and the SADF played an important role in allowing the democratic transition to continue. Likewise, the Venezuelan military faced no external threat of note and was closely aligned with strong, centralized civilian leadership that was experienced in and attentive to military affairs. But, contrary to Desch’s structural argument, the Venezuelan military intervened in politics via a military coup.

Similarly, polarizing incumbent leaders have often sought to cultivate loyalty through appeasement strategies that satisfy militaries’ material interests. But as was the case in Venezuela, the appeal to institutional interest has sometimes still resulted in extraconstitutional attempts to depose incumbent leadership. Similarly, the SADF under


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 393.
State President P.W. Botha was granted unprecedented political influence and decision-making power. Under Botha, the SADF dominated national security decisions and achieved notable levels of political autonomy and budget authority. Even with many of the threat conditions still in place—and arguably more so following South Africa’s defeat in Angola—Botha’s successor was able to eventually reestablish civilian control over the military.\(^\text{116}\) Although this transition was anything but seamless, it is notable that the SADF faced direct threats to its institutional interests and, despite opportunity to act otherwise, ultimately chose to preserve democratic authority rather than intervening as Desch’s theory would have predicted.

Without considering the organizational culture of a particular military, it is difficult to determine how the military will respond to domestic threats to democratic quality such as those that occur with severe polarization. Threat-centric theories treat militaries as rational actors that make decisions primarily based on institutional interests. But the cases in this study show that this is not always true. Considering the unique organizational culture of a particular military better accounts for the constitutive relationship between interests and culture. Interests are derived from the cultural context of the organization.\(^\text{117}\) But material or resource limitations can also impact the perceptions of what the military can or should do within the state which, over time, can solidify into new role beliefs that guide organizational decision-making. The assumption that militaries share identical


\(^{117}\) Kier, *Imagining War*, 145; Capoccia, “Critical Junctures.”
preferences leads to the faulty conclusion that all “militaries subject to similar stimuli will react in the same manner.”

**Ideological Alignment**

The second and related point of emphasis in the current literature is that the *state* and the *military* are presented as unitary actors that share mostly similar interests regarding the importance of the democratic regime. Studies of mature democracies tend to take for granted the ideological relationship and historical norms between the civilian and military spheres: sometimes substituting longevity of the existing relationship for stability. The scholarship has relatively little to say about military behavior during democratic erosion and the prevailing theories rest on the assumption of shared interests between the military and the state—predominantly relying on realist views of state interest in which non-material interests and democratic methods of government play relatively little role.

For example, Staniland, while arguing against culture as his primary rival hypothesis noted that, “we do not see backsliding into an increased political role for any European military…these militaries stay out of domestic politics even though the external motivation for them to do so has disappeared.” Samuel Finer theorized that the degree of military intervention in politics was dependent on a nation’s political culture. Yet he leaves what he calls “countries of a mature political culture” out of his analysis, stating that the legitimation of military intervention would be “unobtainable” in those cases.

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120 Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, 88.
As previously noted, democratic erosion in some Western states have proven these statements inaccurate. Severely polarized democracies limit the applicability of these arguments because they challenge their fundamental assumptions. Elements of military culture such as the purposive relationships of the military and the state, and a military’s cultural attachment to democratic norms, play intervening roles that may motivate action contrary to rational institutional interests.

A similar approach to civilian control is concerned more directly with the ideological and normative consistency between the military and society. This approach analyzes the central beliefs about social values and the related roles and responsibilities between the military and the state and is most commonly found in research relating to the development of emerging democracies.121 For instance, Croissant et al. offer ideational alignment around liberal values as one of the key factors in effectively establishing civilian control over a previously autonomous military.122 Pion-Berlin and Martinez came to similar conclusions, demonstrating the need for a convergence of democratic ideals between the military and the state to ensure survival of fledgling democracies in Latin America.123 Interestingly, Huntington’s approach is also valid here as some of his


123 Pion-Berlin and Martinez, Soldiers, Politicians and Civilians.
conclusions are drawn from an analysis of how well the military’s conservative mindset ‘fits’ with a liberal democratic society.\textsuperscript{124}

This line of research has direct ties to a cultural approach as Kier demonstrated in her study of military culture as a determining factor in doctrinal preferences.\textsuperscript{125} But other projects have also sometimes conflated political culture with organizational culture or ignored the impact of a unique organizational culture altogether. Although both political culture and military culture are dynamic and constantly contested, they change at different paces and in response to different stimuli. Military organizational culture is constantly contested and adapts to changing domestic conditions in important ways.\textsuperscript{126}

\textbf{Severe Polarization and Civil-Military Relations}

Polarization challenges the underlying assumptions of these theories. For example, Huntington’s ideal of objective control rests on the premise that “no conflict exists between [civilian control] and the goal of military security” and that the military will faithfully execute the orders of “any civilian group which secures legitimate authority within the state”\textsuperscript{127} But severe polarization causes citizens to question the legitimacy of democratic institutions and which groups can claim legitimate representation of the

\textsuperscript{124} Huntington, \textit{Soldier and the State}; Taylor, \textit{Politics and the Russian Army}, 18, footnote 47.

\textsuperscript{125} Kier, \textit{Imagining War}.

\textsuperscript{126} Ruffa, “Military Cultures.”

\textsuperscript{127} Huntington, \textit{Soldier and the State}, 84.
It is not correct to assume that civilian and military goals will remain aligned in a polarized democracy. In fact, the objective of maintaining military security from external threats has often come into conflict with a polarizing incumbent group’s goal of ensuring domestic hegemony. For example, following defeat in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, the SADF’s goal of military security came into direct conflict with the state’s domestic aim of maintaining the apartheid status quo.

As with Huntington, many prevailing theories depend on an autonomous, professional military to remain politically neutral. But these approaches are problematic because they assume that the military can be insulated from social and political polarization. As will be discussed further in the following chapter, severe polarization makes institutional autonomy less effective at insulating the military from social influences. Military culture, including its professional norms of autonomy, must be understood within the context of national and social traditions in order to understand a military’s behavior in response to severe polarization.

Historically, extreme polarization in democratic societies has been linked to backsliding, illiberalism, and the potential for the reversion or emergency of autocracy. As individuals in society, military service members are likely to experience some degree


130 McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
of polarization as they are subject to the same social influences and movements as the rest of society. But the influence within the military will not necessarily be the same as in the civilian world because the military’s demographics of race, age, gender, social class, and political leanings often differ significantly than those of the surrounding state.¹³¹ Studies on the U.S. military, for instance, indicate that the military tends to be more conservative than the civilian population. As social polarization increases, the willingness of military members to overtly identify politically with one side or the other has also been shown to increase.¹³² Compounding this problem are the differing views of the military institution by polarized civilian groups.¹³³ Severe polarization exacerbates these differences and should therefore be considered a unique threat to civilian control of the military.

**Plan for the Project**

This project analyzes the macro impact of organizational culture as manifest in the behavioral choices and decision-making processes of the senior ranks of the military. The following chapter explains the theoretical framework of the argument, further expands on the concepts of severe polarization, organizational culture, and military politicization, and

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places this project in the context of the existing literature. At issue is not only the literature on civilian control of the military but how severe polarization specifically impacts their fundamental assumptions. The primary case analyzing U.S. military organizational culture is covered in chapters 3 and 4. The goal of these chapters is twofold. They first examine how severe polarization contributed to increasing military politicization and how competing cultural ideologies impacted military behavior since the end of the Cold War. Second, they seek to explain how the military’s organizational culture influenced the behavior of military elites during the severe polarization of the Trump administration.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the shadow cases. Chapter 5 focuses on Venezuela and discusses why a military that was viewed as a model for all of South America could so quickly be politicized to first side with opposition forces and conduct a failed coup before being consolidated as an important element of incumbent power. Chapter 6 discusses the South African case. This chapter offers the opportunity to understand the role that culture played in holding together an organization that was split by contentious divisions in society. Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the common and differentiating elements of culture that can be pointed to across cases to explain the variety of outcomes. That chapter also provides concluding thoughts regarding the application of these findings and the potential for future research.
Chapter Two: Organizational Culture and Military Intervention

The main argument of this project is that a military’s organizational culture plays a critical role in influencing behavioral outcomes in severely polarized democracies. An organizational culture approach argues that military officer’s practices, norms, and ideas are a key element of military intervention in sovereign power politics. This is not to say that other elements play no role or that culture acts alone. Structural opportunity and corporate interest accounts of military intervention play important roles in determining the choices that are available to military actors. Instead, the argument presented here is that actors’ perceptions of available choices are viewed through a cultural lens that shapes and constrains which options are considered legitimate. Organizational culture lends causal weight to the choice and form of military intervention by influencing the strategies of action of its members in these situations.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the ways in which organizational culture influences military behavior in severely polarized democracies. The first section explains the theoretical framework of the argument and justifies the use of role beliefs as the primary operationalization of organizational culture. The next section explains the unique impact of severe polarization on civil-military relations and, in particular, the impact on

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134 Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army, 16
existing understandings of civilian control of the military and the relationship between
the military and society. The following section defines organizational culture as it is used
in this study. Given the unique threat to civil-military relations presented by severe
polarization, the chapter then spends some time discussing the concept of military
politicization. Particular emphasis in this section is placed on understanding politicization
as a function of role beliefs and how the extant approaches to military politicization in
democracies are inadequate for addressing severely polarized states.

An Organizational Culture Approach to Intervention

Organizational culture is a dynamic, collective mechanism for ordering action.
Culture’s influence is most obvious during moments of social transformation or what
Ann Swidler referred to as unsettled times.\textsuperscript{135} During these periods, cultural ideologies
are formed from the preexisting ethos of an organization and emerge to compete for
dominance within a cultural system. Ideologies, “explicit, articulated, highly organized
meaning systems,”\textsuperscript{136} provide actors with “familiar pathways applied in new ways to
solve new problems.”\textsuperscript{137} Cultural models are born, take root, and are incorporated as
unconscious traditions during more stable periods. But during unsettled times, ideologies
are expressed self-consciously and generate a strong justification for new strategies of

\textsuperscript{135} Swidler, “Culture in Action.”

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 278.

\textsuperscript{137} Carvin and Williams, \textit{Law, Science, Liberalism}, 7.
action used to vie for dominance against competing worldviews and behavioral systems.¹³⁸

Severe polarization threatens democratic civil-military relations in unique ways and causes the type of unsettled periods described by Swidler. As polarization leads to political instability, the organization faces critical junctures that make possible new strategies of action—driven by ideologies—that compete to establish new forms of behavior and relationships. These cultural ideologies emerge as incomplete systems in that they are tailored to address specific problems but still rely on other traditional patterns and habits of action. They can therefore influence action in specific areas without upending the overall cultural systems. But over time, ideologically motivated behavior can solidify and displace existing cultural systems. The ideological pathways used during these times retain some familiarity with the existing ethos of the organization.¹³⁹ The argument here is that the effects of severe polarization disrupt existing patterns of civil-military relations and provide opportunity for cultural ideologies to shape, constrain, and enable military behavior during sovereign power disputes.

In the United States, despite decades of increasingly politicized behavior and amid unprecedented attempts at co-option by the Trump administration,¹⁴⁰ senior military leaders resisted incumbent overtures and took active measures consistent with an important cultural ideology to ensure the continuance of democracy. The Venezuelan

¹³⁸ Swidler, “Culture in Action.”
¹³⁹ Ibid, 279.
¹⁴⁰ Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”
military’s ideological commitment to the homeland overrode extreme efforts to cultivate personal loyalty to Hugo Chávez and the armed forces ultimately sided with the opposition in an attempt to overthrow the regime. In South Africa, competing cultural ideologies within the military threatened to tear the country apart during the end of apartheid. Despite a near-total erosion of civilian control, the SADF affirmatively signaled its commitment to political neutrality and sided with the transformational elements of the government. Culture did not determine the actions of military leadership as they worked toward a culturally valued end state or an interest-based goal. Rather, cultural ideologies emerged from existing behavioral patterns that shaped military actors’ perceptions of the circumstances, constrained the repertoire of legitimate options available to them, and allowed new patterns of behavior rooted in their organizational culture.

Organizational culture was not the only force influencing military behavior in these cases. As captured in other streams of research, military intervention in sovereign power politics often requires both a permissive opportunity structure and a motivation to intervene by military actors.\footnote{Finer, \textit{The Man on Horseback}; Taylor, \textit{Politics and the Russian Army}.} Political disputes, civilian decision-making, and the military’s corporate interests all exert force that shapes actors’ behaviors. But the presence of a permissive opportunity structure and a strong interest-based motivation to intercede in sovereign power disputes are often not enough to induce military interventions on their own. Organizational culture shapes the way these situations are
perceived by military actors and can inhibit military involvement or alter the ways in
which they choose to act.\textsuperscript{142}

As the table below highlights, each of the cases examined here provided the militaries
with structural opportunity and some rational interest-based motivation to intervene.
Many of the conditions that have been empirically linked to military interventions in
other countries were present in these cases. Yet the outcomes and behaviors differ
significantly between cases. Variation in the cultural ideologies of each military provide
the key difference. More specifically, the military’s role beliefs—this project’s
operationalization of culture—shaped the worldview of military elites and provided the
resources from which organizational leaders crafted behavioral strategies based on the
emergence of competing ideologies. The cases’ shared traditions of civilian control of the
military and the pernicious effects of severe polarization created similar situations in
which the effects of different organizational cultures can be analyzed.

\textsuperscript{142} Taylor, \textit{Politics and the Russian Army}. 
Table 2: Summary of Cases

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Ideology</td>
<td>Democratic Professionalism</td>
<td>Classical Professionalism</td>
<td>Conditional Subordination</td>
<td>Power Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Arbitration</td>
<td>Intervention against coup plotters</td>
<td>Intervention against incumbents</td>
<td>Non-Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Behavior</td>
<td>Sided with opposition</td>
<td>Sided with incumbents</td>
<td>Sided with opposition</td>
<td>Remained neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition of Civilian Control?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Competing Culture?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Opportunity for Intervention?</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Interest for Intervention?</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Venezuela 1992 was different in that military intervention was not a product of severe polarization. It is included in the discussion in chapter 5 because it was a critical juncture for the formation of the Venezuelan military’s culture of conditional subordination and provides an additional opportunity for analyzing the effects of organizational culture on military interventions.

**Polarization and Culture**

I theorize that the effects of severe polarization contribute to a common process that occurs in severely polarized democracies that I call the polarization-politicization...
pathway. This argument consists of two parts. The first is that severe polarization leads to politicization of the military. This can occur either through military activism or civilian activation. These categories can be roughly approximated as a military “push” or a civilian “pull” into the political realm. As polarization worsens, the opportunity for military involvement in politics increases as compromise or common ground between divided political elites becomes more difficult to find. Gridlocked civilian elites may find it politically expedient to delegate policy decisions to military experts. Or, as is common in this project, the military may become a central focus of polarizing political strategies. This project argues that as polarization leads to political instability, civilian activation becomes the dominant form of politicization and is more overtly intended to induce personal or partisan loyalty from the military.

The second is that when polarization becomes so severe that it threatens democratic processes, the strategies of action used by the military are more directly shaped by the military’s organizational culture. The types of politicization caused by severe polarization

143 These terms are discussed further in the following sections. Golby defines military activism as “individual or collective efforts by the military to inappropriately influence policy outcomes or provide political advantage to a party, candidate, or group” whereas civilian activation is “attempted by civilian leaders to co-opt the military for personal, partisan, or electoral gain” (Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations,” 150).

144 The push/pull dynamic has recently been used to highlight military involvement in politics that fall short of military intervention and is a useful construct for envisioning the initiation of military involvement in civilian affairs (Bove, Rivera, and Ruffa, “Beyond Coups.”).

145 Avant made a similar point that divided elites enable the military to play one against the other (Deborah Avant, Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994)).

146 Bove, Rivera, and Ruffa, “Beyond Coups.”
erode institutional norms and mechanisms that otherwise contribute to control of the military. Absent these mechanisms, military behavior is overtly influenced by the cultural ideologies that emerge and struggle for dominance within the culture.\textsuperscript{147} These ideologies can contribute to a military’s willingness to intervene, or, as Taylor notes, they “can often inhibit military coups, or make them weak and likely to fail.”\textsuperscript{148} While opportunity and motivation define the options available to military leadership, it is the unique values, norms, and practices of a military’s officer corps that determine which choices are deemed acceptable and which are rejected. As institutional norms and controls erode—or are deliberately deconstructed as in some cases—the decision-making and strategies of action available to military leaders become largely dependent on the cultural ideologies formed from the familiar pathways of organizational culture.

The effects of severe polarization provide both an opportunity and a motivation for military intervention in sovereign power disputes. Severe polarization presents a unique threat to civil-military relations in consolidated democracies for two reasons. The first is that severe polarization endangers the mechanisms used for democratic civilian control of the military. Severe polarization is detrimental to democratic institutions and negatively impacts the legitimacy of civilian superiors,\textsuperscript{149} particularly when employed intentionally.

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\textsuperscript{147} Swidler, “Culture in Action.”
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\textsuperscript{149} McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
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by populist leaders.¹⁵⁰ Those institutions used to manage the civil-military relationship are not immune to this erosion. Weakened institutional controls or loss of regime legitimacy have often contributed to an increased opportunity for military action.¹⁵¹

Severe polarization can also threaten the military’s corporate interests and increase the motivation or disposition for intervention. For instance, faltering economies can directly threaten the military’s budget share and resourcing which can then decrease positional interests such as institutional autonomy.¹⁵² Other non-material interests are at risk when polarizing civilian leadership pulls the military into politics through civilian activation. Such a situation can challenge military role beliefs such as the desire to focus on external threats or excessive involvement in domestic affairs. In its most pernicious forms, severe polarization can lead to extreme societal divisions such as civil war or insurrection that threaten military cohesion and survival of the institution itself.¹⁵³ As


¹⁵² Thompson, “Organizational Cohesion and Military Coup Outcomes.”

¹⁵³ Desch lists these factors (organizational autonomy, protection of budget share, maintenance of cohesion, and survival of the institution) as the primary threats to military interests that can trigger political intervention. All of these factors are amplified during severe polarization (Desch, “Soldiers, States, and Structures,” 392).
new cultural ideologies emerge in unsettled periods, new patterns of behavior can also alter organizational interests, sometimes in unexpected ways.  

The second threat posed by severe polarization is that of the responsible democratic governance of the military. That is, it threatens political elites’ willingness to adhere not just to the institutional rules of civilian control but also to the responsible uses of military capabilities that are aligned with the values and shared expectations of a democratic state. Even when civilians’ executive authority over the military is maintained, severe polarization often incentivizes incumbent elites to co-opt the military as a political weapon to advance partisan goals. In these instances, even a military that is completely subservient to civilian direction may be used in ways that threaten the liberal values of a democratic state. Likewise, a military motivated by democratic ideologies rather than unquestioning obedience may find opportunity and justification for intervention in civilians’ lack of competence or partisan aims. Such scenarios bring to mind Huntington’s framing of the civil-military problem not just as one of “armed revolt” but as the “relation between the [military] expert and the [civilian] politician.”

Severe polarization decreases the effectiveness of established structural or institutional mechanisms for civilian control and erodes the normative constraints on the responsible use of military force. In this way, severe polarization provides a permissive structural environment for intervention. Military intervention absent this permissive environment is unlikely in mature democracies. But as numerous historical cases have shown, a permissive environment for intervention and a motivation from military actors also does not guarantee that the military will intervene. Organizational culture bridges the gap between structure and agency: opportunity to intervene domestically and motives to do so.

**Operationalizing Culture as Role Beliefs**

I define military organizational culture as the set of practices, assumptions, attitudes, and values that are adopted at the organizational level and guide the collective understanding and acceptable behavior of the military. Thus, the focus of this study is on the macro impact of culture that operates at the organizational level of analysis. This project operationalizes organizational culture by analyzing the military’s role beliefs. Organizational role beliefs represent the practices and acceptable forms of engagement that establish the relationships between the military, society, and political actors. These

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158 Finer, *The Man on Horseback*.

159 Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*.

160 This definition is similar to those used by others and shares a common point of emphasis on approaching culture as practice and as heavily influencing the perception or worldview of organizational members, see Kier, *Imagining War*; Harig, Jenne, and Ruffa, “Operational Experiences”; Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army*; and Kwantes and Glazer, *Culture, Organizations, and Work*. 59
relational attributes of a military organization define its purpose within the state and shape and constrain the type of relational transactions that are deemed acceptable in a given society and a given structural situation. While cultural role beliefs are continuously shaped by outside inputs—for instance, the civilian inputs that occurred during the consolidation of democratic civil-military relations—they exist and act independently of external controls. That is, they are held at the organizational level and shape the collective perceptions of organizational members.\textsuperscript{161}

Role beliefs represent the purposive and relational content of organizational culture and exist in two related forms. First, role beliefs are the shared conception of the military’s mission or purpose in the state. For example, some militaries have a history of engaging in internal development and domestic enforcement operations whereas militaries that are traditionally externally focused may view such domestic involvement as inappropriate.\textsuperscript{162} Second, role beliefs are the military’s perception of its role in politics and policymaking including which actions are considered legitimate.\textsuperscript{163} Role beliefs are not static nor monolithic. Differing views of the military’s purpose in the state and relationship with civilian superiors emerge in the form of ideologies that are intended to address changes in international and domestic conditions. Ideologies that persist over time come to define what issues the military views as being in the “military sphere.” That is, they define those issue areas in which the military sees its involvement as appropriate.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kwantes and Glazer, \textit{Culture, Organizations, and Work}, 14.
\item Harig, Jenne, and Ruffa, “Operational Experiences,” 3.
\item Fitch, \textit{The Armed Forces and Democracy}, 61.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The use of role beliefs provides the most appropriate option for operationalizing culture in this study. Culture is a large, often amorphous concept and parsing it into a single variable is a particularistic approach that sacrifices some explanatory power of culture overall.\(^\text{164}\) However, role beliefs sufficiently capture the necessary aspects that are relevant to the outcome of interest. They represent the collective worldview of the organization—where this study remains focused—on which behavioral options are available given the situation and speak directly to which choices are or are not considered within the bounds of culturally acceptable behavior. Role beliefs identify not only the purpose of the military within the state but also its relations with political elites and how the military marginalizes divergent practices and cultural non-conformists within the organization.\(^\text{165}\)

A military’s role beliefs are also central to the aspects of civilian control and intervention at issue in this project. Role beliefs were crucial to Finer’s paradigmatic exploration of military intervention in politics. The military’s “consciousness of themselves” as servants of the state, the organization’s unique perspective of the national interest, and the “military’s reluctance to be used to coerce the government’s domestic opponents” were all organizational constructs that contributed to a military’s “disposition” to intervene.\(^\text{166}\) A military’s attachment to the state, to the government, to


\(^{166}\) Finer, *Man on Horseback*, Quotations on page 25 and 27. Finer used disposition and motivation synonymously to describe the internal impetus that contributed to a military’s willingness to intervene in politics.
its own institution, or to some other mix of influences were all seen as potential motivators for intervention.\textsuperscript{167} The significance of role beliefs in maintaining civilian control has also been highlighted by numerous other scholars. For instance, military role beliefs that reinforced the superiority of the organization have been noted as being at odds with the development of civilian control in transitioning democracies.\textsuperscript{168} And, divergence between the military’s role beliefs and civilian expectations have been linked to civil-military conflict in operational experiences.\textsuperscript{169}

Finer’s manifestations of role beliefs relate closely to the typography outlined in Chapter 1 and described by Fitch: classical professionalism, democratic professionalism, conditional subordination, and the military as a power factor. In Finer’s theory, the military’s role beliefs are constrained by the structural, institutional, and rational mechanisms that maintain civilian control and collectively inhibit military interventions in politics in mature democracies.\textsuperscript{170} When these mechanisms are intact, military intervention is seen as “unobtainable” or heavily “resisted” by civilians.\textsuperscript{171} I argue that when these mechanisms are eroded—as occurs during severe polarization—the military’s role beliefs play a larger role in determining the degree and type of military intervention

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{169} Harig, Jenne, and Ruffa, “Operational Experiences”; Ruffa, “Military Cultures.”

\textsuperscript{170} Finer refers to countries that have achieved these high levels of control as those with either “developed political culture” or a “mature political culture.”

\textsuperscript{171} Finer, \textit{Man on Horseback}, 89.
in politics. As argued, these conceptions are subject to change as competing ideologies emerge. For instance, the Venezuelan case provides a clear example of how ideological activity triggered by external shocks shifted the dominant military role belief from one of classical professionalism to one of conditional subordination. The following sections further define the concept of severe polarization and its effect on civilian control, how organizational culture is applied to the military, and how these concepts combine to provide a better understanding of military politicization in a severely polarized democracy.

**Severe Polarization**

The focus of this project is on the effects of severe polarization in democracies. Severe polarization challenges the assumptions that underlie democratic control of the military. It incentivizes extreme partisan behavior and the erosion or bypassing of institutional checks and balances, thereby limiting the ability for civilian leaders to rely on institutionalized civilian control mechanisms. Partisan motivation encourages personalistic control of the military and empowers incumbent leaders to shape the national security apparatus in their favor. From the military perspective, severe polarization calls into question the legitimacy of civilian leaders by either questioning their rightful authority itself or by casting doubt on the motivation behind their lawful orders.

These same factors can be exacerbated by a widening gap in the values of civilian and military cultures. A military that is openly aligned with a particular civilian group, or
simply perceived to be, can have its motivations questioned. Like opposing civilian groups can look to the military as a check on civilian actions, rather than the opposite, intended direction of authority in democratic states. A civil-military gap can also contribute to a growing sense of superiority among the military and increasing disdain for the behavior of civilian superiors—a view that has historically contributed to the military offering its own solutions to political gridlock, often in the form of intervention.

As severe polarization strips away the structural and institutional mechanisms for civilian control, what is left over are the corporate interests of the organization and the organization’s cultural willingness to obey.

**Severe Polarization Defined**

Traditional approaches to polarization often describe it as a phenomenon that characterizes the ideological distance between politicians or other groups of actors. But severe polarization is empirically distinct from other forms such as political, elite, and social or mass polarization. Rather, severe polarization is “polarization that divides societies into ‘Us vs. Them’ camps based on a single dimension of difference that


174 Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*.

175 Lindsay P. Cohn, “It Wasn’t In My Contract: Security Privatization and Civilian Control,” *Armed Forces and Society* 37, no. 3 (2011).

176 Iyengar, et al., “Consequences of Affective Polarization.”
overshadows all others.” Some level of polarization has been linked to positive democratic outcomes when it acts as an enabling force for the creation and consolidation of coherent political party systems, simplifies options for voters, and mobilizes democratic constituencies. Polarization can fuel the identification of opposing viewpoints and the consolidation of blocks of support that are intrinsic not just to democracy but for all types of politics. Severe forms of polarization, however, are inherently detrimental to democracy.

The exact point at which polarization becomes “severe” is elusive as it depends on national context, strength of institutions, and the source of polarization. In general, severe polarization occurs when it becomes rooted in social identity rather than based on coherent policy preferences. Carothers and O’Donohue identified three criteria to help make this judgement. First, severe polarization requires both elite and mass polarization. Rivalries between opposing groups must incorporate both elites and non-elites such that a strong affective dimension arises and opposing groups develop not only a political opposition but a personal dislike of those on the other side. Second, severe polarization

181 Carothers and Andrew O’Donohue, “Introduction,” 7, Kindle.
divides society into binary, oppositional blocks, each supporting incompatible views of a central cleavage that grows to incorporate otherwise unrelated matters and overshadows issues that would normally cut across these divides.\textsuperscript{182} Third, to qualify as severe polarization, it must be sustained such that it lasts beyond a specific event and “usually beyond the rule of a specific polarizing leader.”\textsuperscript{183}

**The Threat to Democracy**

Severe polarization is harmful to democracies because the consolidation of policy positions around two exclusive extremes makes compromise between political parties and the groups they represent nearly impossible. The incorporation of polarized positions into the social identity of competing groups not only reinforces the distance between the groups but hardens their internal positions as group cohesion is solidified through the intentionally polarizing behavior of political elites.\textsuperscript{184} Each side begins to see the other as an “existential threat to the nation” or their way of life,\textsuperscript{185} moderate positions become ostracized, and “it becomes impossible to claim a neutral or middle position.”\textsuperscript{186} Severe polarization increases voters’ willingness to prioritize partisan interests over democratic

\textsuperscript{182} Somer and McCoy, “Déjà Vu?” 3.
\textsuperscript{183} Carothers and O’Donohue, “Introduction,” 8, Kindle.
\textsuperscript{184} Iyengar et al., “Consequences of Affective Polarization”; McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
\textsuperscript{185} McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, “Global Crisis of Democracy,” 34.
\textsuperscript{186} McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization,” 246.
principles and, without a credible threat of punishment by voters, empowers incumbents to manipulate the political process in their favor.\textsuperscript{187}

To maintain their advantage, incumbent political parties are incentivized to alter the rules of the game and use existing institutions as political weapons.\textsuperscript{188} The combination of affective polarization and negative partisanship invites undemocratic behavior as voters prioritize their need to prevent the opposition from gaining power over their desire to preserve democratic and political norms.\textsuperscript{189} The result is political leaders and voters willing to “sacrifice democratic principles rather than risk losing power” and a decrease in “the capacity of institutions designed to manage political conflict and sustain democracy.”\textsuperscript{190}

Severe polarization may arise organically but is bolstered by intentional, polarizing tactics used by political entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{191} The cleavages used to divide society may be preexisting or can be created by political actors and reinforced through radical, divisive discourse. As such, severe polarization shares a similar political construction with radical populism both in the use of demonizing language toward the out group and in the way

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\textsuperscript{188} Levitsky and Ziblatt, \textit{How Democracies Die}.

\textsuperscript{189} Waldner and Lust, “Unwelcome Change.”


\textsuperscript{191} McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
\end{flushright}
that both erode the institutional capacity of the state.\textsuperscript{192} Severe polarization does not require populism but they are often found together. In its most extreme forms, severe polarization centers around the national idea—frequently manifesting as polarized civic nationalism—and challenges who is seen as legitimate participants in state democracy.\textsuperscript{193}

Polarization that centers around competing views of democracy and polarization on the concept of national identity—that is, “formative rifts” that speak to the foundation of the nation-state—often result in the most harmful outcomes for democracy.\textsuperscript{194} The primary case in this project, the United States, offers an example of a country facing severe polarization centering around both concepts and stoked by a populist president. In fact, the United States is somewhat unique in that its social cleavages have combined racial, ideological, and religious issues into a single-axis progressive-conservative divide.\textsuperscript{195} Polarization in Venezuela occurred alongside the populism-fueled rise of Hugo Chávez and came to represent a conflict between Chávez’s vision of participatory democracy versus the pre-existing representative democracy. In South Africa, polarization occurred absent an incumbent populist leader and around the concept of the national idea—whether the white minority could continue to maintain its hegemonic

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\item Kurt Weyland, “Populism’s Threat to Democracy: Comparative Lessons for the United States,” \textit{Perspectives on Politics} 18, no. 2 (2020).
\item McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
\item Carothers, “Polarization in the United States,” 67, Kindle.
\end{enumerate}
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status. All three cases had previously experienced extended periods in which the military was subservient to civilian superiors with civil-military relations approximating the democratic ideal. And, in all three cases, the military became central actors in the polarizing political strategies of civilian elites.

Control and Governance of the Military in Divided Democracies

One of my primary assertions is that the armed forces in consolidated democracies are not immune from the effects of severe polarization. Many structural and rationalist approaches to civil-military relations depend on a professional military to remain politically neutral. But these approaches are problematic in severely polarized societies because they assume the military can be insulated from polarization. Severe polarization threatens to erase any distinction between civilian and military spheres as all policy—to include military and defense policy—is incorporated into the binary, oppositional cleavage that dominates society. Two related problems therefore arise for civil-military relations: the effects of polarization on the relationship between civilian superiors and senior military leaders, and polarization within the military institution itself. The former becomes apparent when considering the characteristics of severe polarization and is addressed here as it relates to the concept of civilian control. The latter problem, polarization within the military, is addressed in the following section.

Civilian control has a wide range of meanings depending on its context but can be summarized as the ability for civilian leaders to dictate the conditions of the civil-military

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196 McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
relationship. This is not to imply that civilian control is an all-or-nothing prospect. Rather, it should be thought of as degrees of control. Civilians may hold total control in some areas, grant shared authority in others, or delegate institutional autonomy to the military to deal with certain internal policies. Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster added the concept of sound governance as a key aspect of control in mature democracies. That is, civilians’ legitimate and accountable management of defense policy and responsible use of military force.\(^{197}\) Regardless of the degree of executive control exercised by civilians, civil-military conflict can result when “the government lacks the competence to make good policy, fails to issue clear orders, or actually hands over policy-making responsibility to the military.”\(^{198}\)

Severely polarized societies, in which incumbent leaders are motivated by partisan interests, challenge both the control and governance aspects of the civil-military relationship. The literature is largely in agreement on the conditions required for maintaining civilian control: that military interests are not able to unduly influence civilian decisions; that civilian leaders have the capability of issuing orders, primarily through functioning institutions; and that both civilian and military elites must recognize the unquestioned authority and legitimacy of civilian leaders.\(^{199}\) Severe polarization offers unique challenges to each of these elements.

\(^{197}\) Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster, “The Second Generation Problematic.”

\(^{198}\) Cohn, “It Wasn’t In My Contract.” 384.

First, severe polarization decreases the likelihood of elite consensus and creates an opportunity structure for excessive or inappropriate military input to civilian decision-making. Previous research has demonstrated that even in benignly polarized political settings which lack clear civilian preferences military agents can exploit civilian divisions to successfully influence bureaucratic outcomes.\(^\text{200}\) Other work has highlighted the propensity for military actors to take advantage of political divisions or domestic crises as opportunities to push into the policy arena.\(^\text{201}\) Severe polarization increases the opportunity for the military to influence policy outcomes as policy consensus between opposing groups becomes increasingly difficult.\(^\text{202}\)

Second, severe polarization weakens the structural checks and institutional norms that make civilian control possible. Politicians motivated by partisan preferences are incentivized to bypass existing safeguards and capitalize on the military’s social esteem to help justify their actions.\(^\text{203}\) For instance, personalistic control of the military promotion system, bypassing statutory requirements for personnel appointments, and

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  \item Bove, Rivera, and Ruffa, “Beyond Coups.”

  \item Finer highlighted a “power vacuum” as a key opportunity structure for military intervention. Here, a true absence of civilian authority is not required as the lack of consensus approximates this vacuum and creates policy space that can then be filled by a military that seeks to satisfy its own policy preferences. (Finer, Man on Horseback, 80).

  \item Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”
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circumvention of existing policy processes were all used in both the U.S. and Venezuelan cases to enhance incumbent control over the national security process and weaken the legal institutions that helped maintain civilian control.

Finally, severe polarization’s most direct challenge to civilian control is in how it undermines the authority of civilian superiors by creating ambiguity around the legitimacy of civilian groups and their behavior. Severe polarization causes citizens to question the legitimacy of democratic institutions and which groups can claim legitimate representation of the state. More perniciously, the incentivizing of incumbent groups to stretch the constitutional boundaries of military use calls into question the legality of their orders.

The concept of legitimacy underlies many traditional approaches to civilian control. Huntington’s theory rests on the premise that the military will faithfully execute the orders of “any civilian group which secures legitimate authority within the state.” This idea is also found in rationalist accounts such as Feaver’s work that begins with the hierarchical nature of the civil-military relationship and presupposes civilian’s “legitimate authority over the military.” Likewise, Cohn points out that the military’s


205 Huntington, Soldier and the State, 84.

206 Feaver, Armed Servants, 54.
duty to obey and their acceptance of civilian superiority is contingent on the “legitimacy of the principal’s orders.”

The cases analyzed in this study contain numerous examples of the fragility of legitimacy amid severe polarization. In the United States, President Trump refused to accept the legitimacy of his electoral loss and sought to use the military to aid his efforts to remain in power. Senior military leaders questioned the legality of his preferred tactics and on more than one occasion either subverted or outright ignored his orders to use active duty troops to maintain order in the capital. In Venezuela, the military recognized the legitimate authority of Hugo Chávez as president but balked at what they perceived as extraconstitutional direction to suppress public protests with force—ultimately leading to their participation in the April 2002 coup attempt. In South Africa, a sizable portion of the military resorted to force in resisting what they perceived as illegitimate changes to national identity during the end of apartheid.

The literature on civilian control of the military in established democracies has, until recently, seldom grappled with the unique challenges that arise from severe polarization. Severe polarization calls into question the legitimacy of civilian leadership, incentivizes extraconstitutional or illegal actions by political actors, weakens institutionalized

207 Cohn, “It Wasn’t In My Contract,” 385.
208 Mark Esper, Interview by the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol, U.S. House of Representatives, April 1, 2022, 25.
210 Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
mechanisms for civilian control, and creates an opportunity for undue military influence. The particular ways in which these actions result in politicization of the military is discussed in a later section. But first, the following section discusses the problem of polarization within the military and its impact on the military’s relationship with society.

**Severe Polarization and the Civil-Military Gap**

The problem of polarization within the military institution relates directly to the military’s relationship with society. A discussion on polarization of individual members of the armed forces is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, polarization within the military is addressed as it relates to the convergence of values between the military organization and society and in the rise of competing cultures that can threaten or upend this relationship. Severe polarization can result in the military, or portions of the military, openly aligning with a particular civilian group. Or it can contribute to a growing sense of the superiority of military values that widens the gap with society and can result in the military offering its own solutions to political gridlock.

One broad approach to civilian control focuses on ideological and normative consistency between the military and society. This ideational approach analyzes the central beliefs about social values and the related roles and responsibilities between the military and the state.²¹¹ Such an approach is most commonly found in research relating to the development of emerging democracies. Several studies have noted the importance of ideational alignment around liberal values as a key factor in establishing civilian

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control over previously autonomous militaries. In post-communist states, Epstein demonstrated that democratization of military control was dependent on a state’s value judgement about the worth of reforming civil-military relations around democratic values. Yet research on ideological consistency within established or mature democracies is lacking. There is little yet said on how a realignment of social values in developed democracies—as is endemic with severe polarization—impacts the civil-military relationship.

Some research has sought to address this gap in other ways. Dauber demonstrated that even relatively small normative differences between institutions can have profound implications for the state. Her work analyzed the scope and logic of arguments used by the U.S. military in determining the appropriate application of force for a given conflict. Subtle differences between the military and the government in the meaning and use of this logic presented challenges in adapting means to ends in support of disjointed national strategy. This line of research has direct ties to a cultural approach as Kier demonstrated in her study of military culture as a determining factor in doctrinal preferences. Likewise, the importance of a military culture that values subordination to legitimate

212 Croissant et al., “Theorizing Civilian Control”; Pion-Berlin and Martínez, Soldiers, Politicians and Civilians.


215 Kier, Imagining War.
authority and inculcates a sense of duty has been well recognized as critical for strengthening civilian control in democratic polities.\textsuperscript{216}

A common approach to ideological alignment in mature democracies focuses on the description of a “civil-military gap.” Usually used to describe the degree of likeness between the military and society, “civil-military gap” is an under-defined term. At different times in the literature, the term is used to describe a difference in values between the civil and military spheres, a demographic difference regarding how representative the military is of society, a gap in policy preferences, or to describe the differences between the military and other state institutions.\textsuperscript{217} The consensus puzzle proposed by these different approaches has been to hypothesize about how this “gap,” in whatever form it might exist, actually impacts civilian control. Severely polarized democracies create an opportunity structure in which a gap in values between the civil and military spheres becomes relevant.

While studies on identifying the presence or absence of a gap have been done in a number of countries,\textsuperscript{218} there is little consensus on the actual impact of cultural

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\textsuperscript{216} Cohn, “It Wasn’t In My Contract.”
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differences between the military and civilians.\textsuperscript{219} In fact, a gap in norms and values between the civil and military spheres was seen as a necessary requirement in Huntington’s theory.\textsuperscript{220} A military that was too representative of society would be easily influenced and lack the professional distance required to develop and succeed operationally. The importance of military and civilian cultural differences, their contribution to effective national security, and the rightful role of each actor in national defense continues to be debated.\textsuperscript{221} What is clear is that military role beliefs and society’s expectation of the role of the military impact the success or failure of civilian control. When society views the military as the “morally superior savior of the nation”\textsuperscript{222} and the military’s perceived role reinforces the moral superiority of the armed forces, civilian control is at risk of being undermined.\textsuperscript{223} This risk is especially heightened under severe polarization as the motivation and responsible management of the armed forces is called into question.


\textsuperscript{222} Croissant et al., “Theorizing Civilian Control.”

\textsuperscript{223} Finer, \textit{Man on Horseback}; Mares, \textit{Civil-Military Relations}; Croissant et al., “Theorizing Civilian Control.”
A similar phenomenon has been identified in the United States. Thomas Ricks’ widely cited article in *The Atlantic* described the military’s increasing sense of alienation from society and a willingness on the part of professional officers to openly identify with partisan political positions.\(^{224}\) His hypothesis has since been supported with survey evidence by several studies.\(^{225}\) The combination of a military that sees itself as morally superior and an American public that traditionally holds the military in high esteem threatens the social fabric that holds the civil-military compact together. As Brooks and Grewal argued, a sense of superiority threatens to undermine civilian control by questioning the capabilities, motives, and respect for civilian leaders and leads to military elites constraining civilian choices, contesting civilian decision-making, and limiting civilian authority within the military sphere.\(^{226}\) States with long traditions of democratic civilian-military relations are just as vulnerable to this phenomenon as others.\(^{227}\)

In a severely polarized society, members of the armed forces will experience some degree of polarization as they are subject to the same social influences and movements as


\(^{227}\) Ibid, 625.
the rest of society. But the effects within the military will not necessarily be the same as in the civilian world because the military’s demographics of race, age, gender, social class, and political leanings often differ significantly than those of the surrounding state. Studies on the U.S. military, for instance, indicate that the military tends to be more conservative than the civilian population. Military members are also subject to institutional assimilation and an organizational culture designed to increase the sense of duty and subordination previously discussed. Organizational culture can act as a “suppressor” that tempers the impact of societal culture in these cases but it is unlikely to fully insulate members from other social forces.

These ideational approaches provide strong support for my argument. Because severe polarization threatens the perceived legitimacy of civilian leadership and increases civilian incumbent’s motivation for extreme partisan behavior, a widening gap between civil and military values increases the possibility of confrontation between the domains. As social polarization increases, military officer’s willingness to overtly identify

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228 As discussed below, organizational culture does not fully insulate members from other cultural or societal influences. The strength or coherence of organizational culture relative to these other influences is a critical determining factor.

229 As an example, see “Demographics of the US Military,” Council on Foreign Relations for demographic information of the US armed forces compared to US civilian society.


politically with competing civilian groups has also been shown to increase. Moreover, the high social esteem of the military—a significant source of a military’s non-material interests—has been shown to be significantly affected by the polarized perspective of different civilian groups. While incumbent civilian groups look to the military to reinforce partisan civilian positions, opposition groups often expect the armed forces to act as a check on incumbent power. Both of these expectations are in conflict with the normative demands of civilian control in democratic states.

The Role of Organizational Culture

This section further clarifies the concept of organizational culture and its relevance in guiding military behavior. Military organizational culture is the set of practices, assumptions, attitudes, and values that are adopted at the organizational level and guide the collective understanding and acceptable behavior of the military. Thus, the focus of this study is on the macro impact of culture that operates at the organizational level of analysis. The cultural role beliefs of the organization are representative of the practices and acceptable forms of engagement that establish the relationships between the military, society, and political institutions. These relational attributes of a military organization define and influence its purpose within the state and shape and constrain the type of


234 Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport, “No Right to Be Wrong.”
relational transactions that are deemed acceptable in a given society and a given structural situation.

Organizational culture has been used in several studies of military behavior and decision-making. Kier used a cultural approach to explain variation in military doctrine development between the first and second world wars. Taylor argued that organizational culture often explained the Russian military’s reluctance to be involved in sovereign power disputes despite permissive opportunity structures. Fitch offered variation in military cultures as a key determinant in the civil-military relationship of new democracies in Latin America. Carvin and Williams used culture to explain the development of a uniquely American way of warfare. Other studies have focused on differences between military cultures in the way they approach peacekeeping operations, militaries’ adherence to the laws of war, or on civil-military fissures that developed as a result of competing or emerging cultures within the military. All of these studies share a common view of organizational culture with this project: that culture

235 Kier, *Imagining War.*
236 Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army.*
237 Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy.*
239 Ruffa, “Military Cultures.”
is a dynamic, collective mechanism for ordering action. As such, it has explanatory value in the way it shapes actors’ development and implementation of new strategies of action.

**Culture in Action**

There are three elements of organizational culture that are critical for the approach taken in this project. The first is the way that culture influences action. This project adopts the perspective advanced by Ann Swidler in which culture provides a “toolkit of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action.” Swidler used “strategies,” “lines,” and “styles” of action interchangeably to represent “persistent ways of ordering action through time.” This approach to culture rejects the notion that culture steers actors to value-oriented outcomes. Rather than defining specific ends, culture supplies the ways in which actors act. The cultural practices, assumptions, attitudes, and values of actors shape their worldview and present some choices of action as legitimate and appropriate while dismissing others as unacceptable.

This emphasis on culture as an ordering mechanism rather than an end state is critical to understanding the argument presented in this project. As Swidler argued, if culture was oriented toward satisfying specific end states or rational interest based goals, then actors would deliberately alter their behaviors and decision-making processes in order to reach these static goals. However, understanding culture as a common repertoire of behavioral options means that some consistency in actors’ strategies is observable. When presented

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243 Ibid.
with novel circumstances, cultural members will apply “familiar pathways…in new ways to solve new problems.” Desired end states are then adjusted based on which outcomes are perceived as achievable.

Cultural ideologies are the tools used to construct potential strategies of action from which behavioral outcomes are selected. Ideologies represent “contested culture” that emerge in periods of social upheaval and play an observable role in organizing action. Ideologies form from an organization’s existing ethos or prevailing ideas and arise as tailored responses to the specific circumstances that challenge or transform these notions. Thus, it is possible for cultural contestation to occur that does not upend or transform all aspects of organizational culture. Unlike during settled times, ideologies compete with other cultural frameworks—those traditions and common sense notions that have been accepted in the broader organizational culture—and give rise to or allow new possibilities of behavior derived from larger cultural understandings. In this way, actors’ interests are culturally derived in the sense that ideologies “construct and regulate patterns of conduct” through which interests are revealed.

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244 Carvin and Williams, Law, Science, Liberalism, 7.


246 Ibid, 279, footnote 14.

247 Ibid.

Organizational cultures consist of a multitude of traditions and common sense notions that have formed and transformed over time. As ideologies emerge during periods of social upheaval their impact on behavior is more explicit and conscious. Explaining culture’s influence on behavior requires an understanding of why an ideology emerged, why a particular ideology triumphed (or didn’t) over other cultural elements, and the “structural constraints and historical circumstances” within which the cultural contest occurred.\textsuperscript{249} I use critical junctures to highlight those instances which heavily influenced cultural outcomes. Critical junctures can either contribute to a significant change in the importance of particular cultural ideologies or create the conditions in which antecedent role beliefs exert a greater force on organizational choices.\textsuperscript{250}

In the context of this project, military organizational culture is an ordering mechanism that constrains behavioral options and provides a range of acceptable outcomes justified by cultural ideologies. Rather than orienting action to achieve a specific value, such as the preservation of civilian control, or toward a rational goal, such as increased institutional autonomy, organizational culture acts through cultural ideologies that emerge from existing organizational traditions and generate novel strategies of action rooted in familiar pathways.

\textsuperscript{249} Swidler, “Culture in Action,” 280.

\textsuperscript{250} Capoccia, “Critical Junctures.”
Culture Changes

The second critical element of organizational culture is that it is dynamic rather than static. Culturally driven strategies of action do display detectable consistency but are also formed from underlying values and beliefs that are constantly contested by external conditions. Cultural practices are inextricably linked with and influenced by their surrounding structures—for example, economic, political or social practices.\textsuperscript{251} As strategies of action are developed within this web of influences, and particularly when applied in unfamiliar or unsettled instances, culture is at risk of transformation. As Sewell noted, every instance makes it possible that culture “will be inflected or transformed by the uncertain consequences of practice.”\textsuperscript{252}

This is particularly true of military organizational culture in democratic states that is subject to and modified by changing domestic conditions.\textsuperscript{253} Some of these changes occur organically as a result of critical junctures. For instance, the Venezuelan military’s violent suppression of protesters during the Caracazo riots in 1989 left an indelible mark on its organizational culture. This event changed the way the military approached domestic operations, altered the relationship between the military and society, and accelerated the rise of a competing cultural ideology that contributed to the civil-military

\textsuperscript{251} Sewell, \textit{Logics of History}, 167.

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid, 168.

\textsuperscript{253} Ruffa, “Military Cultures.”
turmoil of the next 15 years. In a similar way that a large corporation adapts to changing market conditions, a military’s organizational culture is shaped by domestic events.

Military organizational culture is also subject to deliberate influences. As Feaver stated, “civilians invent the military.” That is, they control the makeup, formation, resourcing, and tasking of the armed forces. As noted above however, the consequences of these influences are not always predictable. For example, Venezuelan military culture was rooted in the foundation of the nation which contributed to a self-perception of soldiers as “saviors of the nation.” Later, as civilian control was institutionalized and the armed forces became a professional organization, military culture incorporated traditions that celebrated the role the armed forces played in maintaining democracy and ensuring fair and competitive elections. Some of the changes that were instituted—in particular changes to the military education system—inadvertently gave rise to competing ideologies among the officer corps that were much more directly tied to the Venezuelan people than to the democratic regime. The contest between these ideologies became instrumental in leading to coup attempts in 1992 and again in 2002.


255 Feaver, Armed Servants, 54.


257 Fonseca, Polga-Hecimovich and Trinkunas, “Venezuelan Military Culture.”
Military cultural traditions are formed and reformed as domestic context changes. This does not suggest that changes to culture happen quickly or are immediately responsive to external contexts. In the Venezuelan case described above, changes to the military education system created a generational cultural divide between older and younger officers. The conflict between these competing cultures developed over the course of decades and ultimately culminated in the 1992 coup attempts in which younger officers were defeated by a unified front of senior officers and civilian elites.258

Culture transforms as organizational members observe the results of action. Repeated reinforcements or punishments—punctuated by bursts of activity during critical junctures—alter the collective perception of the organization and contribute to the transformation of its culture.259 Specific cultural ideologies triumph for a variety of reasons. For instance, culturally deviant behavior can be consistently sanctioned by military elites—as was common in the U.S. case—contesting ideologies can go unpunished—as in Venezuela—or external civilian inputs can be used to deliberately shape the outcome of cultural competition—as in South Africa. Behavioral reinforcement contributes to the movement of cultural elements along a continuum between explicit, conscious ideologies; widely accepted traditions; and unconscious, transparent common


259 Kwantes and Glazer, Culture, Organizations, and Work.
Movement of cultural beliefs along this continuum gives culture a dynamic quality, yet one that can also be tracked and with changes identified over time.

The importance of domestic situations also highlights the uniqueness of each military’s organizational culture. Huntington hypothesized the commonality of a “military mind” that exhibited the shared characteristics of professional military officers. Huntington’s depiction is more akin to an occupational culture in that he addresses the personal characteristics generally required to succeed in a given profession. Instead, organizational culture is the collective result of the unique domestic and international influences that combine differently in each military. Relations within the military institution or between the military and civilian elites are all subject to this web of external influences and manifest differently in different militaries. Understanding the culture unique to each military organizational helps explain why militaries respond differently to a similar set of stimuli; why some militaries will intervene whereas others will not given similar opportunity structures.


261 Huntington, Soldier and The State, Chapter 3.

262 Kwantes and Glazer, Culture, Organizations, and Work, 47.

263 Kier, Imagining War, 30.

**Culture is Collective**

The third critical element is that culture is collective. Organizational culture is the “common understandings and shared interpretations”\(^\text{265}\) of acceptable behavior, not the aggregated morals, values and ethics of individual members. Culture provides members with a common perception with which to analyze situational context and develop strategies of action. A shared culture does not assume that all members of the organization share the same attitudes, values, and beliefs. Sewell, focusing on the semiotic aspect of culture, argued that culture is best seen as something of a common language. Members are not required to agree on the moral or emotional meanings behind cultural markers but they nonetheless recognize them as such and they share a common acknowledgement of the boundaries and constraints of the overall cultural system.\(^\text{266}\) Not every member of the organization will react the same way to similar inputs but they will share a common understanding of the constraints that bound acceptable behavior and a (conscious or unconscious) knowledge of how to apply cultural norms in uncertain circumstances.

It is therefore incorrect to assume that any individual military officer holds the values of the organization as a whole. A cultural organization will contain a large variety of individual viewpoints that cannot be aggregated to determine the overall culture of the organization.\(^\text{267}\) Organizational members are subject to a great number of other inputs

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\(^{265}\) Suddaby et al., “Organizations and Their Institutional Environments,” 1235.

\(^{266}\) Sewell, *Logics of History*, 166.

\(^{267}\) Geert Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences*. 89
that influence individual behavior such as rational interests, national context, familial connections, or religious beliefs. But organizational culture helps shape individual action by “virtue of the fact that [it creates] the shared context within which individuals must operate and function with others.”

In civil-military relations, the military’s organizational culture defines the acceptable boundaries of the organization’s relationship with civilian elites and with society more broadly. In this sense, organizational culture has a self-reinforcing characteristic in that individuals, whether they subscribe to the collective organizational values, act within these constraints simply because they are members of the organization. These constraints are, ideally, meant to induce a high probability that individual actors behave in a manner that is beneficial to the collective good of the organization.

The collective rather than individual influence of organizational culture leaves two takeaways for the argument presented here. First, a severely polarized society can strain an individual’s attachment to the organization and leave wide room for other influences to affect individual choice. As an example, in the United States, retired General Michael Flynn openly advocated for a military role in discrediting the 2020 presidential elections. His actions were not reflective of the collective behavior of the organization but they did contribute to a growing public perception that the military may act for partisan


270 Ibid, 46.
purposes. Driven by an ideology of apolitical service, military leaders issued public rebukes to his behavior and increased their attempts to be seen as remaining neutral in the political dispute. In the Venezuelan case, Raúl Baduel, an ideological compatriot and co-founder of Hugo Chávez’s anti-regime military organization, declined to participate in the 1992 coup attempt because of the influence of his spiritual beliefs. In both cases, individual deviant behavior was not driven by collective organizational culture but by other influences.

Influential members can also act as cultural entrepreneurs that shape and shove the boundaries of acceptable action in an organization. Whether successful or unsuccessful, these actions set the precedent for future cultural actors. For instance, U.S. General Colin Powell greatly expanded the power of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and set the precedent for what was considered appropriate behavior for future chairmen. On the other hand, U.S. General Eric Shinseki was strongly admonished for testimony he gave to Congress that was at odds with the administration. The administration’s response had


ramifications for the future willingness of general officers to speak out against administration positions.  

Members of the armed forces are no different than civilians in that they are subject to a variety of behavioral influences but they differ in the sense that military organizations go to great lengths to increase the salience of military culture. The military’s assimilation processes are designed to instill in its members organizational values and insulate members from some external influences. The military acts as a ‘total’ organization that generally results in fairly coherent culture adopted by its members. As Kier notes, “contact with outsiders is relatively limited, and members work, play, and often sleep in the same place…the organization defines its members’ status, identity, and interactions with others.” These indoctrination processes work as a sort of filter that can temper external influences but not truly shield members completely.

The military is also unique from other organizations in that it hires internally. In professional militaries, it is only possible to reach the highest ranks by going through the military’s assimilation processes and beginning from an entry-level position. The result


275 Kier, Imagining War, 29.

276 Elizabeth Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine.”

277 Militaries differ greatly in the way this is accomplished and there is almost always a differentiation between “entry-level” positions in the officer corps vs. those in the enlisted ranks. The general point remains valid across professional militaries, however, in that its highest ranking members are made, not hired.
is that a military’s senior leadership have been subjected to decades of training and education within the organization. Their rise through the ranks indicates that they have demonstrated a willingness to adopt the organizational values in their own professional practice.\textsuperscript{278} Whether or not they adhere to these values personally can, at times, be somewhat immaterial. Their professional persona generally reflects the collective understanding of the organization.

Second, the influence of culturally deviant individual behavior relates to the coherence of an organization’s culture. Cultural coherence, also referred to as its strength, tightness, or consistency, refers to the power of cultural norms to restrict aberrant behavior and the degree of sanctioning for such behavior.\textsuperscript{279} Stronger, more coherent, organizational cultures that punish deviant action are less likely to give rise to competing cultures. The U.S. military maintained a highly coherent organizational culture that consistently supported the sanctioning of members that did not adhere to cultural standards—often even when those members and their actions enjoyed significant support within the organization.\textsuperscript{280} On the other hand, the Venezuelan military’s lack of

\textsuperscript{278} Barnett, “The Education of Military Elites”; Kier, Imagining War; Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army.

\textsuperscript{279} Gelfand, Nishii, Raver, “Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness.”

sanctioning of a known anti-regime element within its ranks directly led to the rise of a competing culture.  

The presence of competing cultures is indicative of the role ideologies play in cultural transformation. Ideologies that emerge in response to unsettled periods generate novel strategies of action by forming new coalitions within the organization, influencing actor’s methods, and altering the existing power dynamics. Over time, these ideologies can solidify into larger cultural systems that dislodge preexisting traditions and worldviews. Such was the case in Venezuela where an ideological attachment to the Venezuelan people eventually displaced the military’s connection to the civilian leadership. Similarly, cultural competition in the SADF was shaped by external inputs in the form of civilian sanctioning and battlefield defeat. In each of the cases in this project, culture influenced the armed forces’ perception of the situation and ideologies emerged, based on the unique combination of traditions inherent to each military, that vied for dominance and impacted their choice of behavior.

Culture Applied

This project’s approach to organizational culture takes into account culture’s critical characteristics as a dynamic, collective mechanism for ordering action. Because organizational culture is dynamic, this project takes a diachronic approach. The influence of organizational culture is more easily discerned across time where changes to culture


282 Swidler, “Culture in Action.”
can be detected and behavior can be attributed to cultural markers rather than being confused with contextually driven circumstantial influences. The collective nature of culture makes it impossible to aggregate individual viewpoints and leads to difficulty in accounting for deviant behavior that is not driven by organizational norms. However, similar, repeated individual responses to contextual conditions provides strong evidence for the collective influence of culture, as do behavioral options that are not entertained by organizational leaders as legitimate options.

The focus here is also on the highest levels of the organization. A military’s senior leaders are primarily responsible for the connection between the civil and military spheres. As U.S. General Mark Milley put it, it is the most senior leaders that are “the dash between the political and the military.”

In a complete, hierarchical organization such as the military, those officers that have risen to the highest ranks are those that are more likely to have internalized the cultural norms of the organization. Focusing on consistent actions, references, and consensus positions of organizational leaders is a more fruitful approach than analyzing any single individual’s response to a situation. Where necessary, such as with the emergence of competing cultures, this study examines the behavior of lower ranking officers that were relevant for the ultimate outcome of interest.

Finally, as an ordering mechanism for developing strategies of action, this project attempts to identify not just the ultimate choice of the organization, but the process by which this choice was arrived at as well as the other choices that were either considered

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or rejected outright as illegitimate. Doing so provides significant causal weight to organizational culture. For instance, a military that consistently behaves in accordance with the expectations of a democratic professionalist culture but then seriously considers armed intervention in a sovereign power dispute would significantly damage the idea that organizational culture influenced their behavior in that situation. Such a situation would call for the examination of other causal sources. For other cultures, such as one of conditional subordination, intervention is one of many options that should be expected to be considered. In these cases, it is important to understand how this decision was arrived at and the motivation behind the choice to intervene.

**Military Politicization**

Military politicization refers to the ways in which the military intervenes in political processes beyond the traditional role of providing national security and defense. Finer theorized a spectrum of military involvement in politics that started with policy involvement and progressed to military pressure or condition setting, displacement of one set of civilian leaders with another, and military supplantment or overthrow of civilian government. While interpreting military actions as political on the latter end of the spectrum is fairly straightforward, determining what constitutes politicized activity in policy disputes or undue military pressure is much less so.

The literature offers three broad approaches to identifying military politicization. The most simplistic approach to politicization is to view it as the inverse of civilian control.

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This approach argues that where civilian control is strong, politicization is therefore
necessarily low. The second approach equates politicization with partisan activity. That
is, the military is politicized when its actions aid, or give the perception of aiding, a
particular civilian group or political party. The third approach focuses on the military’s
participation in government affairs. This approach argues that military members placed in
political or bureaucratic positions provide excessive influence in political policy and
contribute to the erosion of democratic processes.

While all three approaches offer useful insight to undue military influence in the
politics, none of them adequately capture the totality of the challenge posed by severe
polarization. When all policy decisions are incorporated into a binary political cleavage
and when political elites are incentivized to transgress normative constraints on the use of
state institutions, it becomes nearly impossible for the military to remain politically
neutral. The characteristics of severe polarization make identifying detrimental political
behavior by the military even more difficult. I argue that, in the context of severe
polarization, military politicization is best identified as activities that exceed civilian’s
accepted expectation of the military’s role in the state.

Relevant military politicization for this study can be categorized into three types:
military initiated action that is outside of accepted civilian expectations; civilian initiated
action that pulls or forces the military into a political debate; and civilian initiated action
that is intended to cultivate military loyalty either to the incumbent regime or personal
loyalty to the leader. The first is an example of military activism whereas the latter two
are examples of civilian activation. This section first defines politicization as it is used in
this project and then turns to some of the predominant conceptualizations of politicization found in the literature to understand why these are inadequate in a severely polarized society.

**Politicization, Role Beliefs, and Expectations**

This project takes the view that politicization of the military occurs when the military acts outside of its acceptable role in the state as defined by statutory guidance and civilian expectation. This framing has two components. The first is the degree of alignment between the military’s perception of its role in the state and its role in the state as defined by civilian guidance. When these are aligned—when the military accepts the limitations imposed by civilian superiors and constrains its actions to such—the threat of the military acting politically is low, but not zero. Because military culture is distinct from larger national or political culture, it is unlikely that the mutual shared expectations of civilians and the military would ever completely overlap.

Figures 1 and 2 show a basic approximation of this relationship. The large textured squares represent the total possible actions or policy areas of the state. The blue shaded circles represent civilian expectations of military involvement in state affairs. The yellow shaded circles represent the military’s expectations based on its cultural role beliefs—those policy or behavioral areas in which the military wants to be involved and views its action as appropriate. These circles do not depict civilian control but are merely
hypothetical representations of those areas in which each group sees military involvement as appropriate.

Where these circles overlap (the green shaded areas), there is consensus between civil and military expectations and civil-military friction or disagreements are less likely. The solely blue areas represent those areas in which the military views its own influence as inappropriate but is likely to acquiesce depending on the strength of civilian control. Greater alignment means that civilian control is less dependent on institutionalized mechanisms as the military’s professional culture is aligned and therefore more naturally willing to follow civilian direction in these areas. This concept evokes Weber’s notion of control that emphasized the importance of an agent that viewed its domination as legitimate. When military and civilian expectations are aligned, civilian control is
supported by a legitimate belief in the value of following orders and the military’s cultural duty to obey.\textsuperscript{285}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Figure 2: Weak Alignment}
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The amount of overlap between military role beliefs and civilian expectations is indicative of the overall convergence of expectations.\textsuperscript{286} Whereas Figure 1 shows a strong alignment, Figure 2 depicts a weaker alignment in which there is a larger divergence between civilian and military expectations. Civilian’s success in constraining military action to the blue circle is dependent on the overall strength of civilian control and the mechanisms used to secure it: either by constraining the military through institutional controls or appealing to corporate interests to limit the military’s desire to push outside of


\textsuperscript{286} Again, this is not meant as synonymous with civilian control. Unimpeachable levels of civilian control would allow civilians to dictate military action regardless of the amount of overlap between the two areas.
its approved influence area. When the military acts outside of the blue/green circle, then the military is politicized by exerting its influence in unapproved areas.

**Sources of Politicization**

The second component of this framing is the source of politicization—whether it is the military that seeks to inappropriately influence the political sphere or if it is civilians that seek to co-opt the military for political gain. These differing sources of politicization have been labelled military activism and civilian activation. Military activism occurs when it is military elites that seek to “inappropriately influence policy outcomes or provide political advantage to a party, candidate, or group.”

Examples from the U.S. case include General Colin Powell’s public criticism of conducting military operations in Bosnia and General Peter Pace’s condition setting for participation prior to the Iraq Surge which not only affected operational deployment considerations but also included provisions for increasing the size and resourcing of the armed forces into the future.

Military activism is likely to occur as the military pushes to fulfill those roles it deems legitimate (the yellow circle in Figures 1 and 2). In these situations, the military may view its action as appropriate—for example, by pushing back on civilian’s operational restrictions—but it is nevertheless politicized behavior. The success or failure of which is determined by the strength of civilian control. If the military is consistently pushing into political realms, it provides strong evidence of the boundaries of the military’s role beliefs—those areas in which it sees itself as having legitimate input.

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Civilian activation occurs as a result of civilian leaders seeking to “co-opt the military for personal, partisan, or electoral gain.”288 It is the pulling of the military into areas in which it has not previously had a role. Golby argued that successful civilian activation requires “a willing military partner”289 but examples in this project show that this is not always the case. For instance, President Trump’s announcement of the transgender ban pulled the military into the policy realm by not just asking for an assessment on the impacts of such a ban but by placing the design and justification of the policy on the shoulders of uniformed officers. In Venezuela, Chávez’s attempt to use the military to forcefully suppress civilian protesters was more obviously an example of civilian activation. It was not only counter to military role beliefs but would also have been an extraconstitutional use of force by the president.

As with military activism, civilian activation can provide strong evidence of the boundaries of military role beliefs. For instance, under President Trump, the military was given wide latitude in conducting operations outside of designated war zones with little pushback from senior military leaders on any statutory limitations for doing so. However, when those operations experienced setbacks, senior leaders did push back on the lack of accountability displayed by the president. Instead of civilians taking responsibility for authorizing the actions, the military was often left to answer questions on their own.290

288 Ibid, 150.

289 Ibid, 152.

The pushback from the military in these cases occurred as a result of unmatched expectation in the responsible governance of military operations by democratic leaders. Senior military leaders had an expectation that their decision-making and operations authorized by civilian leaders would be accompanied by some sort of political cover—an expectation that was clearly not shared by civilian leadership.

The distinction between these sources of politicized behavior is important for this project. As stated above, both sources can provide strong evidence of the boundaries of military role beliefs. But differentiating between the two helps to identify the unique impacts of severe polarization. As severe polarization increases the distance between different civilian group preferences, civilian expectations and military role beliefs overlap in unexpected ways. Incumbent civilian groups may pull the military into participating in areas that were previously considered unacceptable. Strong norms of civilian control can result in the military acquiescing and satisfying their civilian superiors while acting in ways that should still be considered politicized. The military may also initiate action in areas that were previously uncontroversial but that now give the perception of partisan favor under severe polarization. Although military activism and civilian activation also occur absent severe polarization, the claim here is that severe polarization increases the opportunity for both types of politicization to occur.

**Severe Polarization and Politicization**

Severely polarized societies complicate the alignment of civilian and military expectations. In a severely polarized society, the expectations and preferences of opposing civilian groups diverge and overlap differently with military role beliefs (Figure
3). Some mutual shared expectations are likely to still exist—such as defense of the state from external enemies—but the ways and means with which to do so may differ greatly between the polarized civilian groups and the military’s preferred solution.

![Figure 3: Severely Polarized](image)

When civilian group expectations diverge, it is entirely possible that the military organization can act both in accordance with its own role beliefs and in accordance with incumbent group expectations and still be perceived as being politicized by the opposition group (or vice versa) because civilian expectations are not aligned.²⁹¹ For instance, political endorsements by officers may be viewed as inappropriate by the military or by either civilian group. Or military participation in civic disruptions may be legal but still be perceived as the armed forces being used as a political weapon against the opposition. Even military leadership’s attempts to remain neutral and take no action

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²⁹¹ Robinson, *Dangerous Instrument.*
in certain areas may be interpreted as a political decision in a severely polarized environment where every action or inaction has political ramifications.

Greater alignment between the military and one civilian group can exacerbate these differences and increase the possibility that the military will not only be perceived as a political instrument by the other group but is co-opted by one civilian group and will act as such (Figure 4). In particular, if the military is aligned with the opposition group, the threat of military intervention in sovereign power disputes increases. Or, in perhaps the most dangerous case for democracy, competing cultures can arise in the military and threaten deterioration into civil war or an armed insurgency in the state (Figure 5).

Simply put, severe polarization creates an opportunity structure for politicization. In more benign settings, the military may seek to exploit differences between the groups, perhaps by setting the conditions for troop deployments or other military operations. Or civilians may seek to capitalize on the social esteem of the military by actively pulling them into the political process. The differing views of the military between polarized
civilian groups highlighted previously mean that the military will increasingly find itself acting at odds with one, if not both, polarized civilian groups. Any effort to co-opt the military for partisan gain only increases the politicized nature of military action.

![Figure 5: Competing Military Culture](image)

Thus, the three categories of politicization in this project become more salient. Military initiated action outside of civilian expectation becomes more likely to occur and also more likely to have negative effects on civilian control. Civilian initiated action that pulls the military into political debates becomes more likely as all action becomes political. And civilian action intended to cultivate loyalty to a specific group or leader becomes more likely as actors seek to co-opt the coercive power of the armed forces.

**Alternative Approaches to Politicization**

The concept of politicization advanced here is not at odds with previous approaches to explaining politicization. But existing approaches are often inadequate for identifying

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292 Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport, “No Right to Be Wrong.”
the nature of politicization as it occurs in severely polarized democracies. The literature on military politicization can be summarized in three basic approaches. The first focuses on an inverse relationship between politicization and civilian control and argues that where evidence of civilian control is strong, politicization is therefore necessarily low. The second approaches politicization from the perspective of military behavior intended to help or hurt a specific political party. In other words, it equates political behavior with partisan behavior. The third approach differs in that it does not directly define political behavior but instead seeks to identify the structural indications of military involvement in politics. My argument is not that these approaches are incorrect. On the contrary, these are well thought out approaches that capture important elements of politicization crucial for understanding the civil-military relationship. Rather, when considering severely polarized societies, they fall short of addressing the full spectrum of problematic, politicized behavior.

Focusing on indications of strong civilian control as an indication of low military involvement in politics provides a normative approach to civil-military relations that harkens back to a Huntingtonian division of responsibilities. Desch adopted this view and argued that the best indicator of healthy civil-military relations is found by determining who prevails when civilian and military preferences diverge. When militaries do, “there is a problem; if civilians do, there is not.” Feaver goes so far as to say that “by

definition, civilian preferences must prevail over military preferences in a democracy.”\textsuperscript{294} These approaches do well in describing an ideal setup for civil-military relations and when accounting for military activism but they can be problematic in two instances.

The first is the often blurry line between military advice and insistence.\textsuperscript{295} Whereas the former is both expected and required from senior officers, the latter is an obvious example of military officers stepping beyond their apolitical expectations. Feaver acknowledges the difficulty in drawing the line between these behaviors and states that it often comes down to a judgement call based on the “integrity of the military advice.”\textsuperscript{296} But this can overlook the messiness of civil-military relations when they are put into practice. Rather than a one-sided relationship between principal and agent, national security decisions in practice are frequently a complex negotiation where divided opinions emerge on both sides of the relationship. In the United States, for example, policy making, national strategy development, and implementation of military strategy are inseparable.\textsuperscript{297} Other scholars have argued that the relationship actually represents much more of an “unequal dialogue” where the original preferences of the actors are

\begin{flushleft}
\url{294}\textsuperscript{Feaver, Armed Servants, 59.}
\url{295}\textsuperscript{Burton M. Sapin and Richard C. Snyder, The Role of the Military in American Foreign Policy (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954).}
\url{296}\textsuperscript{Feaver, Armed Servants, 62.}
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ultimately less important than the fact that it is civilians that make the decision on which options to pursue.298

The second problem with focusing on the strength of civilian control as an indicator of politicization is the issue of civilian activation. Many cases have involved military involvement in political affairs at the invitation of civilian superiors. In these instances, there may be little or no challenge to civilian authority and yet the military can expand its jurisdiction into unquestionably political areas. In more benign situations, this may involve the expansion of military expertise to deal with internal threats such as that posed by terrorism.299 Or, military officers may be appointed to political or bureaucratic posts such as in all three cases examined in this project. Measuring politicization as a function of civilian control makes it difficult to account for civilian’s role in politicizing the military. For example, while Feaver acknowledges the long term dangers of expanding the military’s accepted role, he places the onus on the military to avoid these situations, stating that it is “the military” that must avoid “any behavior that undermines civilian supremacy in the long run.”300

**Politicalization as Partisanship**

The second approach to politicization focuses on partisan behavior. In this view, politicization occurs when the military “exercises loyalty to a single political party and/or


\[\text{(2) Bove, Rivera, and Ruffa, “Beyond Coups.”} \]

\[\text{(3) Feaver, Armed Servants, 61.} \]
consistently advocates for and defends partisan political positions.”

Robinson argues that politicization is “any activity...that not only moves the armed forces closer to advocacy of...a specific political party but creates the perception that this is the case.”

This view is also commonly found among military officers. For instance, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Milley argued that an apolitical military is “fundamental to the health of the republic...and apolitical means nonpartisan.”

Political behavior need not be intentionally partisan. As discussed previously, the mere perception that the military is acting as a political instrument of the state can dangerously politicize the military, especially in a severely polarized society. In democracies, it can also be exceedingly difficult to identify partisan behavior simply because the military is subordinated to actors with inherently partisan attachments and motivations—such as a civilian secretary of defense who is a politically appointee of the president. Even good faith actions executed within the legal bounds of military office can occasionally be interpreted as partisan behavior.

Under severe polarization, equating politicization with partisanship is simultaneously both too broad and too narrow of an approach. It is too broad because the interpretation of partisan behavior is dependent on the beholder. In severely polarized societies in


303 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee,” 64.

304 Robinson, *Dangerous Instrument*, 6, Kindle.
which every action and reaction is interpreted through the lens of oppositional actors it becomes nearly impossible for the military to avoid becoming politicized under this criterion. Politicization as partisanship is too narrow in that it leaves out instances of non-action. In a sovereign power dispute between civilian groups, for example, a non-intervention by the armed forces should be the expectation for an apolitical military. But in a severely polarized society, the choice to remain neutral may itself be interpreted as a political decision. Not acting may in some circumstances be as contentious as taking a side.\textsuperscript{305} In these instances, non-action by the military is likely to still be interpreted as a political choice and contribute to the long term view of the military as a politicized institution.

\textit{Politicization as Political Participation}

The third approach to politicization is less focused on defining politicization itself and is instead concerned with the military’s involvement in government. Attempts to categorize the military’s government influence include the Military Participation in Government (MPG) dataset that measures the “proportion of cabinet-level government positions held by military officers;”\textsuperscript{306} the military in politics element of the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) which uses a range of criteria including military occupation

\textsuperscript{305} Taylor, \textit{Politics and the Russian Army}, 8.

of executive and legislative positions;\textsuperscript{307} and the Siaroff Index which identifies civilian reserve domains.\textsuperscript{308} These datasets are often used to provide important evidence for the long term decay of civilian control associated with increases in military influence in policy matters. They provide an important link to literature on democratic backsliding in which the “incremental deterioration” of democratic governance and institutions contributes to the overall weakening of democracy.\textsuperscript{309}

This approach does a good job of capturing the danger of civilian activation as civilian’s are generally responsible for placing military officers into these positions. The absence of military officers in cabinet level positions has been linked to more successful democratic transitions.\textsuperscript{310} And, democratic reversals are often regarded as less likely under civilian-led defense ministries as these are more likely to conduct effective oversight on military actions and decrease the types of factionalism related to coup attempts.\textsuperscript{311}

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\textsuperscript{307} This criterion is used by Bove, Rivera, and Ruffa, “Beyond Coups” to determine levels of Military in Politics (MIP).


\textsuperscript{309} Beliakova, “Erosion of Civilian Control,” 23.


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The problem with using such criteria is that they tend to normalize “healthy” civil-military relations across countries without accounting for differences in national or military culture. For instance, Fitch demonstrated that in certain national contexts military professionalism is not always at odds with political participation.\textsuperscript{312} In the U.S. context, military service is clearly in tension with political service—although it has increasingly been observed since the end of the Cold War. But in other military organizational cultures, the relationship between professional military service and political appointments has not been so cut and dry. In Venezuela, political appointments for the military were enshrined in the 1999 constitution and numerous other countries have turned to their militaries to play important roles in development and democratization projects without obvious erosion of civilian control.\textsuperscript{313} Still, the presence of military officers in non-military government service provides a strong perception of political activity that is important to capture.

In summary, attempts to clarify military politicization as a concept are broad. In considering its application in severely polarized democracies, I borrow from the prevailing definitions but offer a slightly different approach. Politicization here is interpreted as military actions that exceeds the accepted expectations of the military’s role in the state. It can either be initiated by the military or through civilian activation. Interpreting military action in this way then focuses on three primary aspects that are

\textsuperscript{312} Fitch, \textit{Armed Forces and Democracy}, 29.

\textsuperscript{313} Fitch, \textit{Armed Forces and Democracy}; Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization.”
especially problematic for severely polarized democracies: military initiated action that is outside of accepted civilian expectations; civilian initiated action that pulls or forces the military into a political debate; and civilian initiated action that is intended to cultivate military loyalty either to the incumbent regime or personal loyalty to the leader.

Summary

Severe polarization poses a unique challenge to civil-military relations in consolidated democracies. Much of the democratic civil-military relations literature focuses either on the norms of civil-military interactions in mature democracies or on the development of the civil-military relationship in emerging democracies. This project takes an intermediate approach. Severe polarization undermines consolidated democracies by organizing social groups around a central, oppositional cleavage, weakening institutions, and incentivizing extreme partisan behavior. Civilian control of the military that was previously well established is then challenged by the delegitimization of the authority of civilian groups, the breakdown of institutionalized control mechanisms, and the creation of an opportunity structure that encourages military intervention.

The ways in which a military intervenes in politics is captured by the concept of politicization. Conceptualizing politicization as a function of civilian expectations and military role beliefs accounts for the types of politicization that are not always evident from existing explanations. As civilian expectations diverge between oppositional groups, the ability for the military to remain politically neutral becomes difficult, if not
impossible. Even well-intended action within the boundaries of “acceptable” behavior is likely to be interpreted as political by one group or the other.

A military’s organizational culture plays a critical role in influencing behavioral outcomes in severely polarized democracies. During unsettled periods, cultural members rely on ideologies to construct new strategies of action developed from existing organizational ethos. These ideologies compete for dominance within a culture and, over time, can come to displace or transform the dominant cultural practices. The permissive opportunity structure created by severe polarization does not guarantee that militaries will intervene. Rather, it is the organizational culture that acts within this environment that influences the decisions made by military elites. The military’s role beliefs—the practices and acceptable forms of engagement between the civil and military spheres—play a large role in determining the degree and type of intervention in politics when the structural, institutional, and rational mechanisms that maintain civilian control are eroded by severe polarization.
Chapter Three: American Civil-Military Discord in the Post-Cold War Period

“It may be that our assumptions about an assured civilian supremacy over the American military have depended too much upon a certain type of military professionalism, born in nineteenth-century military isolationism and not readily adaptable to the circumstances of the United States as a global superpower.”

— Russell F. Weigley, 1993

Literature on American civil-military relations in the post-Cold War period often painted a dire picture. In the early 1990s, two articles written by prominent military historians excoriated military elites for what they described as inappropriate excursions into the policy sphere and interference in civilian decision-making. The Clinton administration’s perceived political weakness on defense and foreign policy and a series of high profile confrontations with the armed forces set the stage for a series of articles throughout the decade that described a severely damaged civil-military relationship.


Yet, civil-military friction under President Clinton was far from unique. Every civilian administration since the end of the Cold War has experienced its own form of a ‘revolt of the generals.’\textsuperscript{316} Many approaches to understanding the American civil-military relationship have focused on the international structure or behavior of civilian administrations to explain this discord.\textsuperscript{317} However, a longer term view of civil-military relations reveals notable consistencies in military behavior that transcend contextual conditions. I contend that severe polarization in American society and the organizational culture of the U.S. military provide important influences on the civil-military relationship that are often missed by traditional approaches.

The U.S. case is covered in the next two chapters. The main outcome of interest in this case, analyzed in the following chapter, was military arbitration that resulted in the armed forces resisting politicization during the Trump administration and acting to ensure the continuance of democratic governance in America. This chapter sets a foundation for that discussion and focuses on the impact of organizational culture on civil-military relations during the severe polarization of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. In doing so, I emphasize the first part of my politicization-polarization pathway: how


severe polarization in America contributed to military politicization and the role of organizational culture in explaining military behavior during this period.

The impact of organizational culture during this period can be understood as a cultural contestation within the military between competing ideologies. As with any organization, U.S. military culture contained a multitude of ideological differences that were simultaneously present with regard to the role beliefs of the armed forces. I argue that the salience of a particular ideology at a given time was influenced by international and domestic conditions and exerted leverage on military behavior during severe polarization. I simplify this contestation by focusing on two ideologies that struggled for dominance during this period. The first approximated Fitch’s role belief of the military as a power factor. This activist ideology pushed the military to take a greater role in state and international affairs and often resulted in politicization via military activism. The second was rooted in the democratic norms of civil-military relations and represented a role belief of democratic professionalism in which military leadership actively worked to maintain civilian control as a necessary condition of liberal democracy.

I argue that severe polarization created the conditions in which a balance between these competing role beliefs explains much of the military behavior in the post-Cold War period. Unlike during the Trump administration, civilian elites during the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidencies made a conscious effort to maintain democratic norms. As a result, the competing ideologies resident in the military’s organizational culture maintained a balance that both continually pushed the military into political conflict with its civilian superiors but also constrained its behavior in several areas. The salience of
either ideology was affected by the unique structural opportunities and corporate interests that arose at different points during this time. In other words, although the military routinely displayed an inclination for political incursions, civilian and military elites contributed to the maintenance of a workable civil-military relationship and neither the activist nor the democratic professionalist ideology achieved a fully dominant influence on military behavior.

The cultural contest in the U.S. military remained unresolved due to a variety of factors. The activist ideology never fully triumphed because civilian elites generally respected the boundaries of military involvement and maintained important norms. Likewise, combined sanctioning from civilian and military elites kept the most extreme examples of activism in check. Similarly, the democratic professionalist role belief was constantly challenged by an uncertain geopolitical environment and the increasing militarization of American foreign policy that greatly enhanced the popularity of the military and routinely pulled them into a central role in American politics.

Cultural entrepreneurs on the military side stretched the boundaries of the civil-military relationship and relied on ideologically driven notions of the military’s role in society to develop new strategies of action for dealing with civilian leadership. These approaches were heavily influenced by the military’s past experiences that had long been part of the American civil-military relationship. Additionally, geopolitical shocks such as the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks on 9/11 created an uncertain

318 Bacevich, “Elusive Bargain.”
environment that contributed to increased military influence and was aided by polarization that often inhibited civilian elites from providing unified guidance to military agents.319

Two important differences between this period and the Trump administration are worth highlighting. First, until Trump, severe polarization in the United States never reached the point of threatening the core democratic principles of the state. Although the legitimacy of both the Bush and Obama administrations were questioned, there was no sovereign power dispute during this period. Second, whereas Trump showed a regular willingness to upend nearly any democratic norm that inhibited his authority, civilian leadership by Clinton, Bush, and Obama displayed significantly more restraint and often acted to reinforce important norms in dealing with the military.

Several findings from this chapter are critical for understanding the outcome of interest discussed in the next chapter. First, military politicization during this period primarily occurred via military activism. However, consistent with my argument, as severe polarization continued, civilian activation in certain areas became more common, particularly with regard to military endorsements of political candidates and their parties. Second, I argue that military interactions with civilian leaders remained generally consistent throughout this period. By this I mean that the U.S. military routinely engaged in politicized action, regardless of changing approaches from civilian superiors. Severe

319 Feaver, Armed Servants.
polarization set the conditions in which the ideological contest in the military’s organizational culture exerted an observable influence on behavioral outcomes.

This chapter proceeds by briefly summarizing the onset of severe polarization in the United States and its impact on civil-military relations. The following sections analyze the military politicization that occurred under Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama via both military activism and civilian activation. Significant focus is spent on the beginning of the Clinton administration and the behavior of Colin Powell as a cultural entrepreneur that set important precedents for future military behavior. Examples are included from the Bush and Obama administrations that reinforced the lessons learned. Finally, the chapter discusses the military’s involvement in social policy and some of the direct challenges to civilian supremacy that occurred. In discussing these incidents, I stress the efforts of both civilian and military leaders that enforced the boundaries of appropriate military behavior that maintained a delicate balance in the civil-military relationship.

Severe Polarization in the United States

Polarization in the United States was somewhat unique in that it combined racial, ideological, and religious issues in a single-axis progressive-conservative divide. The origins of American polarization date to the 1960s when a wave of changes and new ideas in society disrupted the social unity of the post-World War II era. Although similar changes occurred in much of the Western world, the United States was particularly susceptible to these effects as they resonated with pre-existing cleavages in American

320 Carothers, “Polarization in the United States,” 67, Kindle; McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
society. External factors such as the Cold War and the global threat of communism tempered the most pernicious effects of polarization but the end of the Cold War saw the emergence of a “scorched-earth approach” in domestic politics that expanded political polarization to include not just policy opposition but personal attacks on the legitimacy of politicians such as Bill Clinton.321

Clinton’s 1992 election as president brought a Democrat into the White House for the first time in 12 years and marked the symbolic end of the Reagan defense philosophy that had largely been continued through the George H.W. Bush administration. When Republicans gained control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives for the first time in more than forty years in the 1994 mid-term elections, they adopted obstructionist tactics that aligned with their political goal of smaller government.322 A series of subsequent events—Clinton’s impeachment in 1998, the Supreme Court intervention in the 2000 presidential election, the passage of controversial legislation and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11, and the amplification of racist conspiracies regarding President Obama’s legitimacy—all contributed to intensifying polarization over the next two decades.323

It is worth briefly distinguishing between political and severe polarization in America. While the presence of political polarization in the United States was widely

321 Carothers, “Polarization in the United States,” 73.
323 Carothers, “Polarization in the United States.”
agreed upon, it was debated as to whether it occurred symmetrically— as both parties moved toward their ideological extreme—or if it was the asymmetric result of the Republican party’s “35-year march to the right.” The degree to which political polarization combined with mass polarization has also received considerably less consensus. Some scholars argued that traditional indications of mass polarization have not always been present and that “citizens’ positions on public policy issues…show[ed] little or no indication of increased mass polarization.” However, basing analysis on ideological policy positions incorrectly conflates severe polarization with more traditional approaches to polarization. Severe polarization is rooted in social identity and spurred on by an affective “dislike and distrust” of those on the other side, not purely an ideological distance. Although there is overlap between severe affective polarization and traditional notions of political and mass polarization, studies have shown that ideological divergence is not a requirement for severe polarization and they are empirically distinct phenomena.


The affective dimension of severe polarization is what supports the sorting of societal issues into single-dimension, irresolvable cleavages such that the importance of individual ideological positions is diminished.\textsuperscript{329} The oppositional attacks on the morality and legitimacy of every sitting president of the post-Cold War era meet this criteria.\textsuperscript{330} So too does the rise of American populist movements such as the Tea Party that combined obstructionist political tactics and a nativist conception of American identity with a moral demonizing of the out-group.\textsuperscript{331} Other studies quantified the rise of affective polarization in America by measuring negative feelings toward out-groups that nearly doubled between 1978 and 2016.\textsuperscript{332} Although it is difficult to pinpoint a precise moment at which polarization in America qualified as severe, it is clear that increasing political polarization was accompanied by a strong affective dimension since at least 1994. Consistent with the characteristics of severe polarization, this division was rooted in social identity and consolidated along the single-axis progressive-conservative divide.\textsuperscript{333} The effects of severe polarization on democracy in the United States were consistent with that predicted in the previous chapter. Incumbent parties were more willing to

\textsuperscript{329} Carothers and O’Donohue, “Introduction”; Somer and McCoy, “Déjà Vu?”

\textsuperscript{330} Carothers, “Polarization in the United States.”


\textsuperscript{333} Carothers, “Polarization in the United States”; McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
change the rules of American democracy for partisan gain.⁵³³⁴ The decline of compromise resulted in legislative gridlock and limited Congress’ ability to provide effective checks on executive power and judicial authority.⁵³³⁵ Presidents more often resorted to using executive orders to get around obstructionist tactics in Congress which only deepened the antipathy between parties.⁵³³⁶ And, as expected, severe polarization increased voters’ willingness to prioritize negative partisanship over democratic principles while incentivizing political elites to manipulate the political process in their favor rather than risk losing power.⁵³³⁷

Consistent with my argument, these conditions resulted in the politicization of the military. In some cases, lack of civilian consensus and political gridlock hindered effective congressional oversight of the armed forces.⁵³³⁸ In others, the military pushed beyond traditional structural mechanisms of civilian control and found success in playing the president against Congress or the other way around.⁵³³⁹ Worsening polarization often

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⁵³³⁴ Carothers, “Polarization in the United States.”


⁵³³⁹ Avant, Political Institutions.
made it politically expedient to politicize the military by delegating defense policy or otherwise inviting their participation. Likewise, presidents increasingly politicized the military by using them as backdrops for political events or encouraging their political endorsements. From the end of the Cold-War, the U.S. military experienced increasing politicization via both military activism and civilian activation. The rest of this chapter examines these occurrences in more detail and analyzes the role of organizational culture in influencing military behavior.

**Politicization and Organizational Culture**

This section analyzes post-Cold War politicization of the military through a cultural lens. Throughout this period, the U.S. military both routinely crossed normative civil-military boundaries and yet still maintained a collective tradition of nonpartisan service and a commitment to the principle of civilian control. Severe polarization and an uncertain geopolitical environment created an unsettled period in which cultural ideologies emerged and competed for dominance by crafting new strategies of action for military behavior. I argue that this cultural contestation took the form of competing role beliefs—the organization’s own conception of its appropriate role in society and politics—and pitted an activist ideology against a more democratic professionalist ideology. Military politicization via both military activism and civilian activation were common throughout this period, yet civilian and military elites also consistently enforced

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340 Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”
cultural boundaries that prevented either ideology from dominating civil-military relations.

Military role beliefs are continuously shaped by outside inputs and adapt to changing domestic and international conditions and the operational experiences of the force.\textsuperscript{341} The post-Cold War period contained several monumental changes that impacted the military’s perception of its role in society. The end of the Cold War, the transition to an expeditionary force, the attacks on 9/11, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and various smaller contingency operations all contributed to the constantly evolving role beliefs of the military. Changing circumstances impacted the salience of competing ideologies and correspondingly affected the willingness of military elites to engage in political debates.

The end of the Cold War expanded the pace and scope of military operations. Clinton committed U.S. armed forces to more operations in his first two years in office than in the entirety of either the Reagan or the Bush presidencies.\textsuperscript{342} His decisions of where, when, and how to use military power drew criticism from pundits and caused frustration within the Pentagon. Several accounts explained the increasingly toxic civil-military relationship of this period by pointing to the widening gap between an increasingly conservative military and the Democratic administration as well as Clinton’s political weakness in

\textsuperscript{341} Harig, Jenne, and Ruffa, “Operational Experiences.”

enforcing military expectations.\textsuperscript{343} However, while studies have confirmed that ideological differences existed, these arguments tended to overstate the degree and uniformity of preference divergence, particularly in foreign policy matters.\textsuperscript{344} The civil-military relationship is better understood in terms of the military’s role beliefs and the gap between how the military perceived it should be used and the political realities of military employment.

The role beliefs of the U.S. military were often contradictory. The U.S. military saw itself as professional experts in the management of violence, wary of civilian interference, and an active and legitimate actor in the development of defense policy. The militarization of U.S. foreign policy led the armed forces to regularly assert itself in the decisions made by civilian elites in when and where it should be employed and how it should be resourced.\textsuperscript{345} While it sought professional autonomy and valued the concept of civilian control, the military also regularly involved itself in political policies and national strategic decision-making processes. When successful, it often resulted in the most effective outcomes for strategic development.\textsuperscript{346} But that inclination also led the

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\textsuperscript{343} Thomas Ricks, \textit{Making the Corps} (New York, Scribner, 1997, reprinted with new afterword by the author 2007); Feaver, \textit{Armed Servants}.

\textsuperscript{344} Holsti noted that not only do preferences diverge in nonuniform ways, but that the Clinton presidency saw several areas of convergence between military and civilian preferences (Ole R. Holsti, “A Widening Gap Between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society?: Some Evidence, 1976-96” \textit{International Security} 23, No. 3 (1998-1999)).

\textsuperscript{345} Carvin and Williams, \textit{Law, Science, Liberalism}.

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military to routinely violate many of the norms of civil-military relations and consistently transgress the boundaries between civilian and military spheres. The following sections discuss the influence of an activist ideology that often resulted in politicized behavior and public challenges to civilian positions.

**Cultural Entrepreneurs and Changing Role Beliefs**

President Clinton came into office during a transitional period in American history. A series of epochal events beginning during the preceding administration—the fall of the Berlin Wall, Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing reorganization of Eastern Europe—left the Clinton administration, and the military, with an uncertain future. For the first time in more than forty years a U.S. administration was focused on crisis management and contingency operations rather than centralized planning against a known adversary. As the 1993 Bottom-Up Review (BUR) stated, “the threat that drove our defense decision-making for four and a half decades—that determined our strategy and tactics, our doctrine, the size and shape of our forces, the design of our weapons, and the size of our defense budgets—is gone.”

As the United States emerged from the Cold War as the sole global superpower, military and civilian elites embarked on a reevaluation of national defense strategy and the associated roles and responsibilities of the armed forces. Military leaders played an outsized role that demonstrated the influence of an activist ideology in which the military

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took an active, politicized part in influencing civilian decision-making. I argue that General Colin Powell acted as a cultural entrepreneur that shaped and shoved the boundaries of acceptable military behavior and set important precedents for future officers. His beliefs on the military’s appropriate role in the state, the proper use of military force, and his influence on strategy development all had a lasting effect on the military over the next three decades.

Powell was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) under President Clinton and had ample experience navigating the political minefields of Washington, D.C. throughout the Reagan and Bush administrations. He was also the first CJCS to fully serve under the new roles and responsibilities of the position defined by the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act.349 His ability to navigate the defense policy networks, substantial connections with previous generations of civilian defense officials, and willingness to exercise his influence as Chairman within the full boundaries of the new law gave the military a seat at the policy table in a way they had not had before.350 Once Powell, under President Bush, had set the precedent of a legitimate military voice in policy making, it became exceedingly difficult for the Clinton administration to effectively temper military influence.

349 Although the Goldwater-Nichols Act was passed in 1986, institutional changes as prescribed by the new law were projected to take nearly a decade before they were fully implemented (GAO/NSIAD-89-83, “Defense Reorganization: Progress and Concerns at JCS and Combatant Commands,” United States General Accounting Office (March 1989)).

350 In interviews, Powell noted how easy it was to work within Washington defense circles since they all knew each other and had been working together for quite some time. This began to change dramatically under Clinton (Colin Powell, Interview, December 16, 2011, George H.W. Bush Presidential History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia).
As one historian described it, “no senior military officer had ever resisted civilian proposals as consistently, systematically, and successfully as had General Powell.”\textsuperscript{351} Throughout his chairmanship, Powell frequently clashed with civilian officials over his tendency to incorporate political calculations into military advice. For instance, during planning for the Gulf War, he was accused by Defense Secretary Cheney of tainting his advice with “political judgements” and withholding military options that Powell didn’t believe were politically viable.\textsuperscript{352} During discussions on Bosnia, he was accused—by both Bush and Clinton officials as well as other military officers—of inflating force estimates in order to make the options seem less politically feasible.\textsuperscript{353} As a senior military officer put it, “he did not frame the issue[s] in a way that made it possible for the president to do what he wanted…it wasn’t disloyalty…it was just because it was Powell’s view.”\textsuperscript{354} Powell himself admitted to overstepping his bounds in a number of situations such as when he raised the question of whether it was even worth going to war to liberate

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\textsuperscript{351} Feaver, \textit{Armed Servants}, 183. These are Feaver’s words describing Weigley’s impression of Powell in Weigley, “The American Military.”
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\textsuperscript{353} Madeleine Albright \textit{Madam Secretary} (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003), 182.
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\textsuperscript{354} CSAF General Merrill McPeak as quoted in Michael Steinberger, “Misoverestimated,” \textit{The American Prospect} 15, no. 4 (2004), 23.
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Kuwait\textsuperscript{355} and some accounts argue that any military options that were presented were done so unwillingly.\textsuperscript{356}

Powell’s behavior had less to do with political differences with the Clinton administration—he was equally obstinate under Republican President Bush—than with a general resistance to civilian inputs in defense policy. For instance, in recounting his role in strategy development early in the Clinton administration he stated, “I was determined to have the Joint Chiefs drive the military strategy rather than have military reorganization schemes shoved down our throat.”\textsuperscript{357} The conflict with civilian officials in developing the post-Cold War national strategy is illustrative of Powell’s impact on politicizing the military.

The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe and an expectation that the military budget would see significant cuts under a Democratic administration created the opportunity for a reimagining of the military’s organization.\textsuperscript{358} Two plans were produced

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\textsuperscript{355} By Powell’s account he recognized that asking this question was inappropriate and that he was stepping into political lanes. In defending his decision, Powell referenced the influence of Vietnam and the failure of military leaders to press their political superiors on these important issues (Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, \textit{My American Journey} (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1995), 464).

\textsuperscript{356} Woodward’s \textit{The Commanders} and various interviews by CSAF Gen. Merrill McPeak portray Powell as reluctant to act in the Gulf War. Powell denies these accounts, as do others such as Robert Gates, Brent Scowcroft, and Tony Lake (Feaver, \textit{Armed Servants}; John Shalikashvili, Interview, May 24, 2007, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia).

\textsuperscript{357} Powell, \textit{My American Journey}, 437.

\textsuperscript{358} Both factors represent significant structural changes that impacted the military. The defense budget had been steadily decreasing since 1986 and continued until 1999, these were seen by military leadership as an unfortunate consequence of winning the Cold War but were widely accepted as a reality (Powell, \textit{My American Journey”}; “Military Expenditure (% of GDP) - United States,” \textit{The World Bank}, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=US). The withdrawal of Soviet forces ultimately had a much larger structural impact as it allowed the U.S. military to decrease its permanent overseas basing and transition to a expeditionary force that could focus on global
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to meet these challenges. The first—labelled the Base Force—originated during the Bush administration\(^{359}\) and was developed primarily by Powell. Several elements of the Base Force were incorporated as policy before Bush left office. Relevant here were the changes in the 1991 National Security Strategy (NSS) that greatly increased the definition of national security and the responsibilities of the Department of Defense.\(^{360}\) The 1992 National Military Strategy (NMS) built on the NSS and codified General Powell’s vision that any use of the military must include the ability “to mass overwhelming force and terminate conflict swiftly and decisively.”\(^{361}\)

The second—the BUR—was led by Clinton’s first Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and quickly became a sticking point in domestic politics. Commensurate with the polarized political climate, the BUR was soundly criticized as a political rather than a strategic document.\(^{362}\) This was no less true of criticism from military elites that engaged in military activism by publicly opposing civilian direction. Despite the fact that the final


version of the BUR shared more similarities than differences with the Base Force and adopted many of the strategic principles codified in the NSS and NMS, military leaders criticized the plan as a “less of the same” strategy and resented the fact that they had been excluded from its development.363

In advocating for his approach, Powell rarely hesitated to circumvent the Secretary of Defense, and often the service chiefs, to work directly with the President.364 Powell’s willingness to bypass traditional processes and publicly criticize civilian officials gave implicit approval for the military service chiefs to do the same. For example, the Army Chief of Staff contradicted the administration position and argued that the BUR would increase casualties and make victory in war more difficult.365 General McPeak, the Air Force Chief, testified at length about the dangers of the BUR and argued that under the new changes, the Gulf War would have been un-winnable by turning Operation DESERT STORM into Operation “Desert Drizzle.” These critiques were accompanied by personal criticism of Aspin.366


364 Jaffe, “Development of the Base Force.”


366 Both of Clinton’s selections as CJCS, General Shalikashvili and General Shelton, were openly critical of Aspin. Shalikashvili would later say that “[Aspin] was totally out of his element as Secretary…was just not the right guy.” And, as Shelton put it, “none of us felt like we were going to be well served by Aspin as Secretary of Defense.” (Shalikashvili, Interview; Shelton, Interview). Powell was equally critical of Aspin, stating that he was “miscast” in the role of Secretary (Powell, My American Journey, 580).
The civil-military conflict over the new national strategy presaged the military politicization that would occur throughout the post-Cold War era. Evidence for influence of organizational cultural in these events is found in the way an organization learns from these instances and the reinforcement of their behaviors. Lessons learned from the rocky civil-military beginnings of the Clinton administration shaped the evolution of a new organizational role belief. Influenced by the negative civil-military lessons learned from their time as young officers in Vietnam, military elites under Clinton were wary of ceding policy responsibilities and were publicly resistant to what they viewed as undue civilian interference by unqualified political appointees.

Additionally, the uncertain threats of the new unipolar world lent a sense that the military had to expand its responsibilities to be ready for any threat to the global interests of the world’s only superpower. As CJCS General Shelton described it, “until someone says, ‘don’t worry about that anymore’ you have to have a force capable of

367 Kahl, “Crossfire or the Crosshairs?”

368 This was not limited to criticism of Clinton appointees as similar opposition to Bush appointees had occurred. Huntington also described similar behavior during the Korean War and during the Eisenhower administration. The military was long distrustful of civilian decision-making regarding national security, what was different now was the military felt that such decisions were rightfully part of the military purview. Other scholars have also noted the significant impact that Vietnam continued to hold on the mindset of senior leaders during this period (Wesley K. Clark, Waging Modern War (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 436; Kohn, “Out of Control”; Carvin and Williams, Law, Science, Liberalism, 154; Huntington, Soldier and the State)

369 In one discussion with other senior leaders Powell related the conflict with Clinton to the military drawdown that occurred after Vietnam that had resulted in what many viewed as a “hollow force.” This view was repeated by several senior leaders at the time and over the next decade as an important lesson regarding civilian interference in “military matters” (Jaffe, “Development of the Base Force”; Powell, My American Journey; Clark, Waging Modern War).
responding.” This feeling was reinforced by the expansion of responsibilities in the 1991 NSS and the 1994 NSS that articulated a strategy of “engagement and enlargement” and charged the military with a global commitment to preserving of “our way of life.”

Finally, the precedents set by Powell established a sense of legitimacy and an obligation to speak up regarding when and where to use military force, decisions traditionally considered to be civilian responsibilities. These elements consistently contributed to military activism throughout the post-Cold War period.

The Powell Doctrine

Powell’s influence was equally obvious in shaping the changing role beliefs of the military regarding operational employment. The military’s role belief—and the significant influence of Colin Powell—was epitomized by what came to be known as the Powell Doctrine.

The doctrine was intended to provide guidelines for the responsible

370 Shelton, Interview; Powell offered similar sentiments in his memoirs a few years later reinforcing the idea that there was a mismatch between the BUR cuts and the readiness levels required to execute the strategy (Powell, My American Journey).


373 Also known as the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, it was initially developed by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in 1984. Weinberger, aided by Powell, was motivated to draft the memo by the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983. Weinberger was frustrated that U.S. forces were being put into situations solely for political reasons. Both Powell and Weinberger referenced their experiences in Vietnam and similarities they drew between those situations. It has become most closely related with Powell as he refined its premises and continued to advocate for its principles throughout his career in government (Caspar Weinberger, “Use of Military Force,” CSPAN Video, November 28, 1984, https://www.c-span.org/video/?124872-1/military-force; Powell, My American Journey, 303).
use of force and avoid embroiling the country in unwinnable wars that lacked clear victory conditions or vital national interests. As Powell summarized the approach, “is the national interest at stake? If…yes, go in, and go in to win. Otherwise, stay out.”

Aspects of this approach had been incorporated into the 1992 NMS such as the emphasis on “applying decisive force to overwhelm…and thereby terminate conflicts swiftly” and a commitment to only use military force when a conclusive victory was achievable by military means. Powell highlighted the success of his approach by pointing to interventions in Panama, the Philippines, Liberia, the initial intervention in Somalia, and other examples in which a limited application of military capabilities was coupled with clear, achievable military objectives.

The Powell doctrine was in stark contrast to the civilian administration’s approach. Although some scholars have argued that Clinton lacked a coherent foreign policy doctrine, Madeleine Albright summed up the administration’s approach as a

374 Powell, My American Journey, 303.

375 National Military Strategy (1992), 10. In future writings (e.g., his 1992 Foreign Affairs essay), Powell defended his use of the term “decisive” vice “overwhelming” force and it seemed to become an important distinction for him. The “overwhelming” term has often been adopted by others and tends to imply something approaching total military commitment through all available means. Powell insisted that there was room in his doctrine for limited force, so long as the objectives were clear and a decisive victory could be defined.


recognition that the world was increasingly interdependent and that the United States was in the position to benefit most from this interconnectedness.\(^{378}\) The corresponding use of military force represented a pursuit of limited objectives using limited force. The Clinton team’s use of military force was not always meant to be decisive; it was just as often about shaping the situation so that it could be won through other means or employing the military to demonstrate resolve or commitment to allies. While the Powell doctrine supported a Jominian view of warfare, the civilian administration sought to use military force as an additive mechanism with other instruments of national power.\(^{379}\)

Powell intended his approach not as a guiding philosophy, but as a practical checklist for committing forces.\(^{380}\) When put into practice, however, his emphasis on using decisive force often took a backseat to ensuring a viable off-ramp for military involvement existed.\(^{381}\) The actual impact on national policy of his doctrine is debatable\(^{382}\) and its greatest effect has instead been in shaping the organizational culture

\(^{378}\) Albright, *Madam Secretary*.

\(^{379}\) Kahl, “Crossfire or the Crosshairs?”; Carvin and Williams, *Law, Science, Liberalism*.

\(^{380}\) While foreign policy doctrines are generally used to align efforts toward a vision or strategy of the future, Powell viewed his doctrine as a “practical guide” or a true checklist for committing forces; (Dumbrell, “Was There a Clinton Doctrine?”; Powell, *My American Journey*, 303.

\(^{381}\) For instance, despite warnings about the futility of “surgical bombing” Powell is credited with designing several such strikes. One example was the missile strike on an Iraqi intelligence headquarters in retaliation for the attempted assassination of George H.W. Bush. This attack lacked any clear military objective and included no capability to assess whether it was effective let alone decisive (Powell, “U.S. Forces”; Powell, *My American Journey*; Bacevich, “Discord Still: Clinton and the Military,” *The Washington Post*, January 3, 1999, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1999/01/03/discord-still-clinton-and-the-military/f7f64313-f284-45c7-b000-40b1828d8436/; Feaver, *Armed Servants*).

\(^{382}\) As was well captured at the time, Powell was the Secretary of State during the Iraq invasion in 2003 in which the military infamously lacked a viable exit strategy (Emma Ashford, “Even Colin Powell Ignored the Powell Doctrine. Now, America is Starting to Listen,” *Politico*, October 23, 2021,
of the military as it has held significant sway within the senior ranks for decades. The vast majority of the Joint Chiefs from its inception until the end of the Clinton administration expressed public support for it in some way and it was continuously revived in the following decades as the military took on additional foreign entanglements. The doctrine was taught and widely accepted at the military service academies throughout the 1990s and was embraced by future generals as “truisms.”

The Powell doctrine provided a means of codifying the military’s resistance to civilian adventurism and was used to push the military into the decision-making sphere regarding when and where force should be employed—politicizing actions that are generally seen as contrary to democratic norms of civil-military relations.

Although the Powell doctrine was a mostly symbolic artifact, it was widely accepted throughout the military as an anchor point for their conception on the appropriate use of force. Powell’s continual excursions into policy making set an example for future


Chairmen. His doctrine’s influence on military perception can be seen in the numerous examples discussed in the rest of this chapter and represents the activist ideology that viewed the military as a power factor in national decision-making. Powell’s stature made pushback from the civilian administration difficult and set the stage for continued military politicization throughout the post-Cold War period.

**Bosnia**

The Powell doctrine and the activist role belief it represented had a significant influence on military behavior in combat operations under Clinton. The NATO operation in Bosnia provides a useful example. Military behavior before and during the operation has frequently been described as politicized and contributed to the larger sense at the time that civil-military relations were in crisis. At issue was the question of whether the United States should become involved in the conflict and, if so, what form that intervention should take. In the Bosnia example, explaining military behavior as a clash between competing ideologies leads to a similar conclusion as found in rationalist accounts such as Feaver’s Agency theory that the operation was ultimately a civil-military success story. However, there are important differences between Agency theory and a cultural approach that have implications for explaining why that outcome occurred.

Military behavior in the lead up to Bosnia meets both Feaver’s definition of shirking and my approach to military politicization. Politicization in this case was an example of military activism in which senior leaders took public positions that unduly influenced civilian decision-making. The opportunity for the military’s activist involvement in the political debate was created by significant divergence in civilian preferences on whether
the United States should be involved. The decision of whether to intervene in Bosnia had become a political issue during the 1992 presidential election. In the midst of that election, General Powell published first an interview and then an op-ed in the *New York Times* that reiterated much of his approach to warfare. He cautioned against any use of force that wasn’t intended to achieve decisive victory\(^\text{386}\) and warned against the inevitable threat of escalation that occurs when military force is used without “great care and a full examination of possible outcomes.”\(^\text{387}\)

As Feaver noted, interpretations of Powell’s comments were not unanimous. Some scholars argued that Powell’s public comments were unacceptable and it was inappropriate for a senior officer to be the “arbiter of American military intervention overseas.”\(^\text{388}\) Others noted that Powell’s position was not inconsistent with civilian guidance because no consensus on intervention had been reached.\(^\text{389}\) However, as Feaver notes, Powell’s public criticism put the White House in the difficult position of ordering action that was now obviously against military recommendations, particularly since his op-ed was published shortly after a decision to commit some limited forces had been made.\(^\text{390}\) Powell’s opposition to intervention in Bosnia meets the criteria of politicization.

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\(^{387}\) Powell, “Why Generals Get Nervous.”

\(^{388}\) Quotation from Kohn, “Out of Control,” 12; see also Weigley, “The American Military.”


\(^{390}\) Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 261.
via military activism because it was a public overture that inserted military opinions into the civilian sphere. Whether or not it was effective, Powell’s language gave the impression of an unequivocal opposition from the armed forces.

Culturally, Powell’s public opposition was consistent with the activist ideology that he promoted. The military’s cultural focus on clearly definable victories and its perception of having a legitimate voice in policymaking influenced their willingness to engage in political discourse. Military leadership’s involvement in setting its own terms for participation—for example uniformed planners were accused of condition setting during the negotiations for the Dayton Accord—and Powell’s often vociferous dissent with the Clinton team were indicative of a consistent ideological position rather than specific, topically-based disagreements. As in other areas, however, military elites’ willingness to engage in political debates was limited by the cultural balance resident in the U.S. military’s organizational culture. As other’s have noted, Powell’s readiness to engage in public debate was enabled by a lack of consensus among civilian principles. I agree but also add that Powell’s opposition tactics represented widespread beliefs within the military rather than the actions of a single outspoken general. Furthermore, the military’s ultimate acceptance of civilian direction is poorly explained by approaches such as Feaver’s and is better revealed through a cultural lens that acknowledges the competing activist and professionalist ideologies of the time.

391 Powell, My American Journey; Owens, “Rumsfeld.”
392 Avant, Political Institutions.
Feaver argued that Powell’s retirement was a tipping point in Clinton’s willingness to commit ground forces to Bosnia. However, the military’s ideological commitment to Powell’s approach did not end then. Although Powell’s replacement, General John Shalikashvili, was more willing to entertain a ground option—perhaps because of his previous position as NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR)—he also consistently advocated for many of the same approaches as had Powell.\textsuperscript{393} The same could be said of General Wes Clark, whose appointment as SACEUR was also credited by Feaver for changing the military’s approach to the war. But Clark was consistently critical of the civilian approach that he criticized for violating the principles of warfare as practiced by the American military. Clark’s belief in these principles—that are also captured in the military’s Joint Doctrine\textsuperscript{394}—focused on the need for “massing forces at critical points” to produce “decisive results,” which he viewed as unachievable with the contingent of forces he was given.\textsuperscript{395} The same approach was taken by General Eric Shinseki and his predecessor, Admiral Leighton Smith, who resisted Clinton’s request to guard mass graves being discovered in Serbia, stating, “Mr. President, we can do anything you ask of us, but there’s a price to pay, and, in this case, it means a lot more forces.”\textsuperscript{396}

\textsuperscript{393} Shalikashvili, Interview.

\textsuperscript{394} For example, see Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States. 25 March 2013, incorporating Change 1, 12 July 2017 and Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations, 17 January 2017 incorporating Change 1, 22 October 2018.

\textsuperscript{395} Clark, \textit{Waging Modern War}.

Feaver framed this lack of available troops as evidence of military shirking. Specifically, he stated that the military intentionally inflated force requirements—the initial military estimate included 50,000 ground troops\(^{397}\)—to make intervention untenable for civilians. While certainly possible, this conclusion misses two key points that relate directly to the influence of military role beliefs. First, the estimate ended up being fairly accurate as the NATO Intervention Force (IFOR) was in excess of 54,000.\(^{398}\) Second, that the military would recommend a higher force requirement than would ultimately be used is neither novel nor limited to instances in which the military is opposed to the mission. Earlier interventions in the Gulf War, Somalia, and Haiti were all conducted with smaller forces than the military originally requested.\(^{399}\) This pattern continued to repeat in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iraq surge in 2007 and the Afghanistan surge in 2009—all examples where the military was not obviously opposed to the strategy in question.\(^{400}\)

The insistence for more forces in each of these cases is illustrative of the sometimes complex interplay between culture and interests. It is reasonable to argue that militaries advocate for higher troop levels because of the material battlefield advantage that


\(^{399}\) Shelton, Interview.

overwhelming force provides. More resources often translate to less casualties, lower risk acceptance, and more options for a military—all of which speak directly to corporate interests of force preservation and battlefield success. But a larger deployment force is also indicative of the American military’s purposive role beliefs and their culturally adopted way of warfare. More troops provide more opportunity to successfully execute a strategy of annihilation and overwhelm the adversary, both hallmarks of the American cultural way of warfare.401 Fewer available troops change this calculation and alter military leaders’ perception of what is possible given their culturally adopted way of fighting wars.

The military’s perceptions on the uncertain threat environment—both in Bosnia specifically but also in the larger geopolitical situation—made assessments on troop levels and force planning highly dependent on risk tolerance.402 The conclusion “that the military had been exaggerating the costs so as to foreclose an option”403 neglects to consider the cultural framing that shaped the views of possible actions available to the generals. In other words, the military conducts planning within its established doctrine to accomplish a mission given specific assumptions and constraints. A mismatch between


402 This thought process was captured in an early GAO report assessing the military’s decision-making process regarding force size and structure and contrasting those against ambiguous risk tolerance of various civilian administrations (GAO/NSIAD-93-65, “Force Structure: Issues Involving the Base Force,” *United States General Accounting Office*, January 1993).

403 Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 263.
civilian and military risk tolerance as well as a dynamic ground situation drastically alters the assumptions and constraints and changes what missions may be possible.

The limited objectives in Bosnia and the political unwillingness of the Clinton administration to accept large casualty counts was an essential assumption used for military planning throughout the Clinton administration.\textsuperscript{404} Following the signing of the Dayton Accords, U.S. military leadership reached a consensus that, given the complexities of leading a multinational force, it was operating under clear, unambiguous guidance.\textsuperscript{405} Disagreements between civilian and military expectations seemed to originate from additional missions that emerged over time and stemmed in large part from the military leadership’s assessment that it did not have enough forces to successfully complete additional tasks while also mitigating the overall risk to their given mission. As one senior officer put it in discussing the overwhelming—and in retrospect unnecessary—force used in the Gulf War, “military men are obligated to plan for the worst and pray for the best…the political leadership plans for the best and prays they’re right…we didn’t need all those forces, but who’s to say we wouldn’t have, if [Saddam] had been a wiser adversary? You never really know, do you?”\textsuperscript{406}

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\textsuperscript{404} Shalikashvili, Interview; Shelton, Interview.
\textsuperscript{406} Smith, Interview.
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The repeated invocation of past experiences during discussions about Bosnia are indications that the military’s behavior was influenced by their culture. Powell, Smith, Clark, Shinseki, Shalikashvili and other senior leaders routinely invoked the specter of Vietnam and incidents such as the 1983 bombings in Beirut as well as a general distrust of what they saw as politically motivated alterations to their force requests. When questioned as to why IFOR prioritized force protection rather than taking a more active role in preventing individual attacks on civilians or patrolling neighborhoods to prevent arson, Smith said, “All I think about is 248 Marines in Beirut…if [that] suggests to some that we are leaning forward too much in the saddle, sorry. But we are not going to subject our people to that.” Powell also invoked the Beirut bombing as he “complained about the impetuosity of civilians…who [were] too quick to place American forces in jeopardy unwisely for ill-defined missions.” General Shalikashvili, held similar views, often referencing the service members killed in Somalia as he warned against “politically motivated numbers” and the mission creep that he was convinced would occur throughout the operation.

407 Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*.


409 Gordon, “Powell Delivers a Resounding No.”

That the military ultimately complied with civilian demands, despite their previous
dehement opposition is difficult to account for in approaches such Agency theory. Feaver
concluded that, despite evidence of shirking, “the outcome of the Bosnian case…was an
obvious civil-military success.” But Agency theory offers little to explain the
contradiction between the military’s earlier opposition and their ultimate compliance. I
argue that military behavior in the Bosnian case is better explained by the cultural
competition between an activist ideology and the military’s more democratically aligned
ideology. Outright refusal was never an option and indeed never occurred. Where
political space was available before the operation to provide their dissent, military leaders
felt legitimated in doing so. Yet, once that space was closed by decisive civilian action
and as operational conditions changed, the military’s culture of democratic
professionalism demanded that they comply.

Several factors contributed to this compliance. First, the military’s reluctance to
conduct operations in Bosnia was assuaged by their outsized influence in negotiating the
Dayton Accords. As noted above, the military was satisfied that they were operating
under the clear, definable objectives for which they had advocated. Second, the perceived
inflation of deployment requirements is at least as understandable in terms of risk and the
cultural way of warfare that called for overwhelming force to achieve decisive victory.
And third, the military’s eventual compliance in taking on additional missions was,

412 Owens, “Rumsfeld.”
according to the commanding officer, directly related to the changing nature of the mission itself that was no longer viewed as mission creep. In each case, the initial objections driven by the military’s activist ideology were ultimately satisfied which left little reason to continue their criticism. The military’s initial reaction to the Bosnian operation was consistent with an activist ideology that viewed political participation as legitimate. When presented with clear civilian direction, military leaders fell in line and committed themselves to conducting operations as directed, albeit with continued input.

Likewise, the acquiescence of military leaders in Bosnia was also likely impacted by civilian sanctioning that was occurring simultaneously in other realms. For instance, the Clinton administration had recently concluded its investigation into the Navy’s Tailhook sexual assault scandal and had punished 32 senior Flag officers for their behavior. Clinton had also installed William Perry as Secretary of Defense in 1994 who maintained significantly more control over the senior officers than had Aspin. Sanctioning in these other realms no doubt impacted the military’s willingness to challenge civilian control in other areas. As will be seen in the South Africa and Venezuelan cases, these types of behavior from civilian elites have a significant impact in signaling the clear boundaries of acceptable behavior to military elites and keeping culture in check with expectations.

413 Clark, Making Modern War, 81.

**Iraq**

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, caused another significant geopolitical shift and a departure from the previous decade’s defense strategy. After thirteen years of declining defense budgets, the Clinton administration had begun funding a modernization of the military. This effort was accelerated and transformed under President Bush and his Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who were determined to remake the military into an “agile, lethal, readily deployable” force that could find, fix and “destroy…targets almost instantly, with an array of weapons.”415 Defense strategy from this period reflects an evolution of the shift that occurred under Clinton and was geared toward Capability Based Planning intended to meet global challenges with minimum notice.416 Following 9/11, military roles were again expanded with an increased emphasis on special operations and “in-depth defense of the homeland” that enlarged military roles and responsibilities with regard to domestic defense and internal operations.417 The Global War on Terror (GWOT) that transpired in response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11 provided an opportunity to put these new strategies into practice.418

Although there was notable civil-military friction throughout the GWOT, I contend that culture did not play a dominant role in politicizing the military during the initial


418 Brooks, *Shaping Strategy*. 
phases of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Two factors contributed to minimizing the impact of culture during this period. The first is that for a brief period following the attacks, polarization in society actually decreased amid political calls for unity. A “rally around the flag effect” occurred following the attacks and President Bush enjoyed significant bipartisan support.\textsuperscript{419} Public trust in government spiked to a thirty-year high and nearly 80% of the population supported a military response to the attacks, “even if it meant thousands of U.S. casualties.”\textsuperscript{420} Support for military involvement in Afghanistan remained high, albeit in a steady decline, for several years.

Perhaps more surprising in hindsight is the public support for invading Iraq nearly two years after 9/11. By 2003, polarization, driven by some of President Bush’s more controversial policy responses to the GWOT, was returning.\textsuperscript{421} For example, although a majority of Americans maintained support for the 2001 Patriot Act, a steadily increasing percentage of respondents had begun to see it as going too far and the portion of Americans that prioritized civil liberties over any additional steps had increased from

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{420} Pew Research Center, “Two Decades Later.”
\item\textsuperscript{421} Carothers, “Polarization in the United States,” 75.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
49% in 2002 to 64% in April, 2003.\textsuperscript{422} Still, 72% of Americans supported the decision to use military force in Iraq in March 2003.\textsuperscript{423}

The second reason that culture played little role during this initial period of the GWOT was due to the heavy-handed approach of Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld decreased the autonomy of the military by controlling military planning cycles, appointing loyalists to leadership positions, and consolidating many unformed responsibilities into the civilian secretariat.\textsuperscript{424} His antagonistic management style created divisions between military leaders and upended many of the established procedures resident in the Pentagon.\textsuperscript{425} Rumsfeld took personal control of the military’s strategy in Iraq as it provided an opportunity to validate the transformation of the military that he had initiated.\textsuperscript{426} Consistent with my argument, the temporary hiatus of severe polarization in society and the presence of strong civilian control mechanisms decreased the salience of


\textsuperscript{424} For example, Rumsfeld brought back a retired general to take over for Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki because he “didn't feel there was any Army four-star or three-star who could move the Army forward” and, during the invasion of Iraq, Rumsfeld’s staff took on the responsibility of dictating force movements into and out of the theater (George Casey, Interview, September 25, 2014, George W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia).

\textsuperscript{425} Rumsfeld maintained close relations with some senior leaders such as CJCS General Myers, future CJCS Peter Pace, and CENTCOM Commander Tommy Franks but many generals such as Shinseki and the other Service Chiefs found him difficult to work with and were hesitant to offer critiques. These personal frictions may have contributed to some of the failures in planning as Rumsfeld often worked directly with Franks during the lead-up to the invasion and bypassed the input of the Joint Chiefs (Brooks, \textit{Shaping Strategy}).

\textsuperscript{426} Ibid.
organizational culture in influencing the civil-military relationship during the first few post-9/11 years.

However, organizational culture also seemed to exert minimal influence in the initial stage of Bush’s presidency, prior to 9/11. Rumsfeld’s efforts to transform the American military into a smaller, more agile, and more technology dependent force was resisted by a bloc of generals within the Pentagon. Among these was General Shinseki, now the Chief of Staff of the Army, who was also pursuing Army transformation but differed significantly on the programs and policies he promoted as compared to those favored by Rumsfeld. Shinseki’s dispute with Rumsfeld became contentious enough that they rarely attended the same meetings with Shinseki often sending his deputy in his stead. But other than testimony given in response to direct questions by Congress, Shinseki kept this dispute private—contrary to the example set by Powell.427

This example suggests that even in the presence of severe polarization, forceful civilian oversight can be enough to maintain control and overcome a military culture that is accustomed to vocalizing its opposition. Rumsfeld’s consistent messaging that dissent was unacceptable resonated within the uniformed leadership and there were few instances of politicization during his time as secretary.428 Those that did occur primarily originated

427 Hooker, “Soldiers of the State”; Shelton, Interview.

428 Here it is important to reiterate that politicization is not the same as civil-military friction or disfunction. The literature is replete with accounts of civil-military disagreements during this period and relations are most optimistically described as contentious. But the civilian administration did little to pull the military into political debates and the military mostly abstained from public displays of criticism that undermined civilian decision-making.
from retired members and were met with condemnation from active duty military 
elites.\textsuperscript{429} However, as Brooks pointed out—and contrary to the expectations of Agency 
theory—civilian domination did little to diminish preference divergence between military 
and civilian elites and contributed to significant civil-military disfunction in other areas 
that resulted in “profound flaws in strategic assessment.”\textsuperscript{430}

Although organizational culture was not the primary cause of civil-military conflict in 
the early 2000s, this period still contributed to the overall cultural contestation discussed 
here for two reasons. First, Rumsfeld’s managerial style and rigid control of the senior 
ranks contributed to cultural shaping during this period. Civilian inputs play a large role 
in constraining military behavior and provided lessons learned for the transmission of 
culture to future generations. For instance, when General Shinseki was asked by 
Congress in 2003 how many troops would be needed to secure Iraq in the post-war phase, 
he gave an answer that drew on his experience in post-war Bosnia but that was starkly at 
odds with the administration position.\textsuperscript{431} Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, 
publicly condemned Shinseki’s remarks stating that these comments were “wildly off the 
mark.”\textsuperscript{432} The incident effectively ended Shinseki’s career and sent a clear message that 
“the cost of dissent was humiliation and professional suicide.”\textsuperscript{433} Contrary to civilian

\textsuperscript{429} The most notable of these was the 2006 ‘revolt of the generals’ and is discussed later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{430} Brooks, \textit{Shaping Strategy}, 261.

\textsuperscript{431} Eric Shinseki, “Gen. Eric Shinseki from 02.25.03,” \textit{Youtube.com}, December 7, 2008, 
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_xchyIeCQw.

\textsuperscript{432} Schmitt, “Threats And Responses.”

\textsuperscript{433} Brooks, \textit{Shaping Strategy}, 250.
officials under Clinton, the Bush administration established a clear precedent that it would enforce the boundaries of the civil-military relationship.434

Second, although Rumsfeld’s transformation of the military may have represented a technological revolution for American warfare, it was in many ways a continuation of the activist ideology championed by Powell that emphasized quick, decisive victories and eschewed protracted engagements.435 The failure to adequately account for post-combat operations in Iraq was driven by Rumsfeld’s planning assumption that the military would turn over administration of the country to the State Department.436 Without a need to conduct these operations, Rumsfeld elevated the opinions of commanders in the field such as CENTCOM Commander Tommy Franks and sidelined much of the operational experience resident in the Joint Chiefs that had been developed in more limited and ‘messy’ operations such as those in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia.437

Critically, Rumsfeld’s ownership of the war plan and the self-censorship by the armed forces ultimately made it easier for military elites to overlook many of their own shortcomings in the planning process. Rather than an opportunity to reassess their

434 Other examples included Army Lt. General Scott Wallace who was replaced from his command in Iraq after publicly acknowledging that Iraqi resistance was stronger than anticipated and the Joint Chiefs were sidelined in the pre-planning phase for insisting that a Phase IV—post-war—plan be developed (Robert Burns, “Army Commander Stands By His Words,” Associated Press, May 8, 2003, https://www.seacoastonline.com/story/news/2003/05/08/army-commander-stands-by-his/51272930007/; Brooks, Shaping Strategy, 240.).

435 Carvin and Williams, Law, Science, Liberalism, 185.

436 Brooks, Shaping Strategy.

437 Franks had little operational experience during the limited conflicts of the 1990s (Shelton, Interview).
approach to warfare, Rumsfeld became a useful scapegoat that reinforced the military’s sense of superiority in their planning processes and contributed to a lack of positive change in military culture.\textsuperscript{438} New doctrines were developed, most notably the updated counterinsurgency doctrine,\textsuperscript{439} but by the time U.S. forces left Iraq in 2011, strategic victory remained elusive.

Rumsfeld represented a brief interruption in the pattern of civil-military relations that defined the post-Cold War period. Following his departure, the cultural contestation that occurred during Clinton continued for the rest of Bush’s presidency and throughout the Obama administration. As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dragged on, severe polarization returned.\textsuperscript{440} The lessons learned during the invasion of Iraq that had reinforced the activist ideology reemerged, albeit in slightly different forms. For instance, the discussions around an Iraq surge under President Bush and an Afghanistan surge under President Obama both followed similar patterns as the discussions around a Bosnia intervention under President Clinton. In these instances, cultural differences between military leadership and the White House contributed to conflicting perceptions on what role the military should take.\textsuperscript{441}

\textsuperscript{438} Several generals with experience in the limited wars of the 1990s made statements to the effect of “I can’t believe they didn’t think of this,” or, “if only we had more say”: (Shelton, Interview; Ricks and Tyson, “Withdrawal Would Mean More Unrest”; Brooks, \textit{Shaping Strategy}).

\textsuperscript{439} Department of the Army, \textit{FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency}, December 2006.

\textsuperscript{440} Carothers, “Polarization in the United States.”

\textsuperscript{441} Brooks, “Obama vs. The Generals.”
During discussions about the Iraq Surge strategy, CJCS General Peter Pace followed the precedent set by Colin Powell in developing an approach that was initially at odds both with the civilian administration and the service chiefs. Pace later acknowledged his use of condition-setting as his offer of military support was contingent on several political conditions that were tied to the future size and resourcing of the military.\

Likewise, military leaders attempted to influence political discussions on a resource surge into Afghanistan early in President Obama’s tenure by leaking the military’s assessment of the war to the *Washington Post*.\(^442\) The report painted a simultaneously optimistic and dire picture of the war. It essentially concluded that the military could prevent “mission failure” but only with an additional tens of thousands of troops and a coinciding commitment of increased civilian resources.\(^444\)

It is not surprising that military leaders advocated for increased resources in any of these cases. However, the political condition setting in both Iraq and Afghanistan is contrary to a Huntingtonian view of civil-military relations. Likewise, military behavior shows a consistency that is independent of the assumptions of Agency theory. Military leaders routinely crossed the line between advocacy and insistence and attempted to shape civilian decision-making regardless of civilian monitoring or an expectation of

\(^{442}\) Peter Pace, Interview, January 19, 2016, George W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.


\(^{444}\) Unconfirmed rumors put the Pentagon’s request as high as 80,000 soldiers. Obama would eventually agree to send an additional 30,000 but included a withdrawal timeline for additional forces (Brooks, “Obama vs. The Generals”).
punishment. Both the Bush and Obama administrations demonstrated an ability to monitor and a willingness to punish inappropriate actions from military officers, yet it seemed to require a constant, intentional effort as there was little permanent change in military behavior. The pattern of military activism, sanctioning, and eventual civilian obedience repeated itself throughout this period and is best explained as a continuing competition between the military’s cultural ideologies.

**Civilian Activation and Political Endorsements**

My theorized polarization-politicization pathway predicts that ongoing polarization should also equate to incidents of civilian activation. As others have noted, instances of civilian activation did indeed increase throughout this period.\(^{445}\) One area where this was especially apparent was the growing frequency of military endorsements for presidential candidates. Golby classified political endorsements as a form of civilian messaging that occurs when civilian elites seek to capitalize on the public regard for the military by using them as backdrops or endorsers for policy.\(^ {446}\) While Golby designated these activities as “symbolic” as opposed to “coercive” methods, they are nonetheless harmful to civil-military relations for at least three reasons.\(^ {447}\)

\(^ {445}\) Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”

\(^ {446}\) Ibid.

First, although it was retired officers providing the endorsements, research has shown that the American public does not differentiate between retired and actively serving officers.\textsuperscript{448} When retired generals use their title and previous status to endorse a partisan candidate they are mixing apolitical traditions with partisan service. Second, endorsements have been shown to damage the apolitical reputation of the officer involved. Because a clear distinction is not drawn between the retired officer and the active duty force, this damage extends to the military as an institution.\textsuperscript{449} Finally, political endorsements from retired officers, particularly on social media, have set an example that has increasingly been reflected in the political activity of their active duty counterparts.\textsuperscript{450}

Taken together, political endorsements, while largely symbolic, do have the potential for a larger impact on civil-military relations. The modern precedent for military endorsements of presidential candidates was set in the 1992 election when retired Marine Corps Commandant General Kelley broke long-standing norms by publicly endorsing President Bush during the Republican primary.\textsuperscript{451} This precedent was quickly followed by Admiral William Crowe, a former CJCS under President Bush, who announced his support for Clinton during the run-up to the general election. One retired senior officer


\textsuperscript{451} Griffiths and Robinson, “Three Things to Know.”
captured the military’s sentiment at the time by contemptuously describing the endorsements as a “wish to participate publicly in the selection process of [their] commander-in-chief.”452 Although fairly noteworthy in 1992, by the 1996 election, the precedent held little sway and a number of officers—most notably Colin Powell, Norman Schwarzkopf, and Scott O’Grady, who had been shot down while flying combat missions over Bosnia in 1995—spoke publicly at the Republican National Convention in support of Senator Bob Dole.453

These events opened the flood gates for politicizing behavior that has steadily increased with each ensuing election. In addition to speaking at conventions, campaigns have collected staggering numbers of endorsements from retired flag officers. For example, John McCain received more than 300 endorsements in 2008 and Mitt Romney tallied at least 500 in the 2012 election.454 One study tracked a total of 1,041 individual retired flag officers that offered political endorsements in the four presidential elections between 2004 and 2016.455


454 Griffiths and Robinson, “Three Things to Know.”

Not only has the frequency increased, but the content of endorsements has also become more pointed and politically charged over time. My research shows that retired military speakers at the political conventions in 1996—their first such appearance—avoided mentioning either candidate directly and only vaguely attached themselves to partisan themes. Colin Powell’s speech spoke positively of Republican candidate Bob Dole but focused on his military service and personal characteristics while saying little about his political ambitions and Scott O’Grady’s comments avoided any mention of either candidate at all.456 This changed with the 2000 election when Norman Schwarzkopf said nothing about the Democratic candidate but did offer a direct endorsement of George Bush.457 And in 2004, Claudia Kennedy, a potential candidate for a political appointment by John Kerry, tepidly warned against Mr. Bush’s platform that would “move us back to a much earlier time.”458

The severity of earlier comments was dwarfed by the dueling endorsements of retired Generals Michael Flynn and John Allen at the 2016 party conventions. Flynn gave a highly charged partisan speech that not only endorsed Donald Trump but infamously led


a “lock her up” chant that called for the jailing of Trump’s political opponent. Allen, appearing surrounded by other retired flag officers and veterans of recent wars, called for “every American in uniform” to stand up for “right” and “hope” and support the Democratic nominee. Both cases were obvious partisan statements that drew on the social capital of the retired officer’s former positions and were unrecognizable compared to the benign statements of previous endorsers. The willingness of retired officers to offer increasingly partisan endorsements has accompanied the worsening polarization in the country.

The role of culture in motivating these statements is difficult to identify. Griffiths and Simon noted varying motivation for endorsers. Of the 1,041 individual flag officers that offered endorsements since 2004, only 10 were motivated by personal gain and another 193 qualified as what they considered political ideologues. The remaining 80% appeared to participate only “when prompted by personal connections” and their comments remained mostly benign. Where culture has played a role is in the (mostly futile) attempts by other senior officers to dissuade this kind of activity. Former-CJCS General Martin Dempsey and his predecessor Admiral Mike Mullen both issued separate statements that were sharply critical of these activities and sought to reiterate the


apolitical norms for the entire force. And in previous election cycles, the acting Joint Chiefs have routinely issued statements reminding military members of the importance of keeping partisan views to themselves.

As Golby notes, the impact of these symbolic endorsements on civil-military relations is not entirely clear nor is their relationship to more coercive forms of civilian activation. Likewise, it is difficult to draw a definitive link between military organizational culture and the willingness to offer such endorsements. It may be a result of the activist ideological stream discussed here that promotes an internal view of military superiority and offers an obligation for some senior leaders that feel compelled to speak out. However, considering that less than 20% of endorsers are directly motivated by partisan ideologies, more research is required to assess the overall impact of this minority.

The role of organizational culture is more obvious in the efforts of senior leaders to discourage this behavior and enforce traditional cultural boundaries, although that has been increasingly unsuccessful in this area. Still, political endorsements provide an


463 For example, Martin E. Dempsey, “Putting Our Nation First,” Joint Forces Quarterly, 65, no. 2 (2012).

464 Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”

465 Griffiths and Simon, “Not Putting Their Money.”
important conclusion for this study. Although the dominant form of politicization between 1992 and 2016 occurred via military activism, civilian activation was present and did increase in frequency. Consistent with my argument, the growing frequency and partisan intensity of political endorsements indicates that as norms eroded amid severe polarization, the incidence of civilian activation increased.

Social Policy and Challenges to Civilian Control

Severe polarization contributed to politicization in other areas as well. Throughout the post-Cold War period, the military was routinely accused of overstepping normative boundaries. These incidents provide important takeaways regarding the role that military culture played. The activist ideology promoted by Powell was easily identifiable as it applied to the military’s preferred method of warfare but the competition with an ideology and expectation of apolitical military service and democratic traditions was equally apparent in social policy areas as well.

This section discusses some of the challenges to civilian control that occurred and the role military culture played in their resolution. What differentiates the post-Cold War period from the Trump administration, and from the two other cases in this project, is that both military and civilian leadership displayed a consistent readiness to sanction insubordinate or otherwise deviant behavior within the force. The areas in which the military was willing to challenge civilian leadership are representative of the ideological competition within the culture. The military was willing to act and engage politically, but there were still lines and clear boundaries that were reinforced through elite signaling. The effect of this enforcement—the military’s readiness to sanction its own members,
and the civilian’s willingness to preserve normative lines—preserved the delicate balance between the military’s competing role beliefs.

**Contentious Policy Changes**

Military leadership’s willingness to step into the political sphere also extended to social policy issues. In particular, military elites have generally remained concerned with the social question of *who serves*, despite this being an issue traditionally reserved for the civilian realm. Two related issues highlighted the politicization that occurred and the role of culture in these disputes: the attempt to end military discrimination based on sexual orientation and allowing women to serve in combat roles. Both issues arose early in Clinton’s presidency but remained relevant into Trump’s time in office. Ending the ban on homosexual service members had been an important campaign issue that Clinton was determined to follow through on. Meanwhile, expanding opportunities for women in the military was continued from work begun under President Bush although has come to be most closely associated with Clinton as it was under his tenure that the Risk Rule was revoked and women were authorized to serve in all positions except front line infantry units.

In both cases, Clinton received significant public opposition from senior military leaders. All four of the service chiefs offered criticism in front of Congress about their opposition to lifting the ban on women in front-line combat roles. Air Force Chief of

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466 Owens, “Military Officers.”

Staff General Merrill McPeak was often the most vocal critic. Although he acknowledged in multiple appearances before Congress that he had no intellectual justification for preventing women from combat, he offered instead, “even though logic tells us that women can [conduct combat operations] as well as men, I have a very traditional attitude about wives and mothers and daughters being ordered to kill people.”

Other service chiefs repeatedly referenced the cultural “warrior spirit” or the “band of brothers” and the requirement of “male bonding…not a male bonding against anybody. It is a male bonding together.”

When the policy was ultimately changed, General McPeak was chosen—specifically because of his public opposition—to accompany Secretary Aspin at the Press Conference. As McPeak described it, “I got to announce how happy I was about this development when everybody in the press and in the audience knew that I was very uncomfortable with it.”

McPeak was, in fact, honest about his reservations with the press but regarding the policy change he added,

“the boss had said what the policy was going to be and my job was to either jump overboard or salute smartly and try to do it the best way I could…I went out and

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469 Healy, “U.S. Military Chiefs Oppose.”

found the best women pilots we had…and started them right away in combat crew training and fighter and bomber systems.”

The service chiefs’ opposition to ending sexual discrimination was even more open. In one meeting shortly after the election, McPeak summarized the military’s position, “every single one of us were going to give all the arguments why this was a dumb idea for him to follow through on.”

Lifting the ban on gays in the military was framed by the Clinton campaign as a moral issue—the inverse to the moral focus of the historical bans that had found gays “unsuitable for military service.” The military chiefs resistance to lifting these bans followed a similar logic based on their perceived immorality of homosexuality. General Powell argued that homosexuality was incompatible with military service and General Schwarzkopf testified to Congress that allowing homosexuals in the Army would demoralize soldiers and make the U.S. military comparable to Iraqi troops that were “forced to execute orders they don’t believe in.”

While Clinton and Vice President Gore tried to draw parallels between sexual discrimination and the racial integration of the armed forces, the service chiefs opposed

471 Ibid.

472 Ibid.


on the grounds that gay service members would be “unconstrained by law or morality” and compared being gay to being a Nazi, a rapist, or a member of the KKK.\footnote{Josh Gerstein, “Clinton, Powell Talked Gays in Military,”\emph{Politico}, October 10, 2014, https://www.politico.com/story/2014/10/clinton-documents-gays-in-the-military-111784.}

It is unclear what impact military elites’ vocal opposition actually had on the eventual compromise agreement that implemented the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) policy. Several of the chiefs felt that Clinton largely disregarded their advice and that their opposition had little impact.\footnote{Powell,\emph{My American Journey}; McPeak, “Merrill A. McPeak Collection.”} While some scholars have argued that military opposition impacted public opinion and weakened Clinton’s political leverage, other work indicates that pressure to compromise primarily came from congressional members of the president’s own party.\footnote{Feaver,\emph{Armed Servants}; National Defense Research Institute, “The History of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell; Adam Clymer, “Lawmakers Revolt on Lifting Gay Ban in Military Service,”\emph{The New York Times}, January 27, 1993. https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/27/us/lawmakers-revolt-on-lifting-gay-ban-in-military-service.html.} Regardless, in both issues, the military was guilty of politicized action by weighing in on social policy issues and attempting to constrain the president’s realm of options through their public commentary that went beyond their advisory role.

An important contrast to Clinton’s approach is that of President Obama’s when he led the effort to repeal DADT and legalize open service. Although Obama acknowledged the moral stances behind the policy, he attempted to frame the question primarily as a policy issue and rhetorically appealed to the sense of duty and willingness to serve that should be recognized in all Americans.\footnote{L. Michael Allsep, Jr., “The Myth of the Warrior: Martial Masculinity and the End of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,”\emph{Journal of Homosexuality} 60, no. 2-3 (2013); Carol E. Lee, “Obama Pushes for Repeal of DADT,”\emph{Washington Post}.} By this point, Obama had the support of the Secretary
of Defense, the CJCS, and a Department of Defense report that indicated 70% of service members foresaw no impact in ending DADT. Additionally, public opinion indicated that repealing DADT was not a polarizing issue with deep partisan divides and nearly two-thirds supported repeal even over any potential objection of the military. The service chiefs stopped short of openly embracing Obama’s changes but also offered little of the explicit criticism that was present under Clinton despite retaining opposition support from some powerful members of Congress.

Briefly jumping forward to the handling of similar issues under President Trump provides further insight into how culture played a role in these issues. As discussed in the following chapter, Trump’s polarizing tactics incorporated appeals to traditional gender values and promoted a historically masculine image of the military and of the heterosexual male warrior as an ideal. As such, women serving in front line combat

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481 CNN Wire Staff, “Top Military Brass Splits Over ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ Repeal,” CNN, December 3, 2010, http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/12/03/dadt/index.html; There were also considerable differences of opinions throughout the force. General Peter Pace, CJCS under Bush, felt that one of the reasons he was not renominated for a second term was because of his open opposition to homosexual acts which he qualified based on his religious beliefs (Peter Pace, Interview).

roles, the end of the DADT policy, and allowing transgender service members to serve openly were all consistent targets throughout his term. His handling of the reimplementation of the ban of transgender service members was particularly telling.

Trump took military officials by surprise when he announced via a series of tweets that, “the United States government will not accept or allow…Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. military.” The White House attempted to paint the ban as a military decision and deferred all questions to the Pentagon. But the announcement had not been discussed with military leaders and the Pentagon, now put in the position of policymaker, resisted the development or implementation of any procedure changes. Statements by actively serving and retired senior leaders voiced rigorous opposition to the ban and significantly contributed to the overall civil-military conflict of that period.

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The contrast between the ways these issues were handled between Clinton, Obama, and Trump leave three takeaways for the role of culture in these conflicts. First, the direct influence of ideology on action is evident in the military’s overt resistance to Clinton and Trump. The service chiefs’ opposition to Clinton’s policies shared a common ideology with Trump’s polarizing use of masculine mythology. Both cases drew on the myth of the masculine warrior and a cultural ideology that favored annihilation, decisive victory, and traditional gender stereotypes. In both cases, the military was openly resistant of civilian direction but whereas in the former it was in favor of continued discrimination, in the latter case the military opposed reinstating discriminatory policy. In both instances military behavior bordered on insubordination, albeit on opposite sides of the issue.

The difference in these positions can be attributed to the changing historical context. Opinions on sexual orientation and gender identification shifted massively in the public and within the ranks of the military between 1993 and 2017. Under Clinton, there was significant public disagreement on allowing LGBT service members with only 44% supporting open service, 37% opposing any service, and 19% supporting the restricted service represented by the DADT compromise. By 2010, 75% of Americans supported open service by LGBT members while only 17% continued to oppose their service.488

Department of Defense surveys showed that the acceptance of LGBT service had risen comparably within the ranks. Later surveys on allowing transgender military service showed similar results both among the public and within the military. In short, the military’s misguided moral basis for resisting this change had eroded over time and although concerns still existed among some senior leaders, it was no longer a central factor in their cultural ideology. Along with this, the relative lack of resistance to Obama’s efforts was no doubt aided by his conscious attempts to frame the issue as policy-centric whereas Clinton pursued a moral approach and Trump’s was motivated by partisan ideologies.

Finally, the most important difference reflects the balance between cultural ideologies that has helped to maintain a fairly coherent cultural balance in the U.S. military. In the case of both Clinton and Obama, these were unquestionably civilian-driven policy changes. The civilian administration proposed the policies, asked the military for their legal advice, and then continued to push through normal legislative channels or adjusted the approach based on this response. The military objected based on the contesting cultural ideologies, but ultimately, civilian control was accepted and the policies were implemented. In other words, civilians never transgressed civil-military norms and


although politicization via military activism was present, the pattern of relations reflected the ideological contestation that drove military behavior throughout this period. Contrarily, Trump engaged in civilian activation by placing the onus on the military for developing and implementing the transgender ban. Rather than a civilian policy, it was falsely presented as a military policy justified by military requirements. The severity of this politicization was of a different kind than under Clinton or Obama and as a result, the military response bordered on outright refusal.  

**Enforcing Cultural Norms**

Because culture is learned and constructed, deviant events provide important insight in the way that cultural boundaries are enforced and socialized among cultural members. In the U.S. case, they also provide important evidence of the cultural contestation that existed in the post-Cold War environment. This section analyzes examples that occurred during this period that directly challenged civilian control or implied some level of insubordination on the part of the military. The examples listed below meet the criteria of military activism in that military officers stepped beyond the expected roles of military behavior to advocate for a position or criticize civilian leadership. Of note in this section is the way that senior military leaders either sanctioned or condoned this behavior, often contrary to their personal views on the subject.

This is not to imply that military insubordination was unique to this period. As countless scholars have noted, civil-military friction continuously existed in some form

491 Tracy, “Military is Officially Ignoring Trump”; Carter, “Reluctance to March.”
throughout American history.\textsuperscript{492} Rather, the incidents here give credence to the argument that although the military was often willing to push into the civilian policy realm and insist or strongly advocate that their own positions be considered, there were certain lines that were not crossed. When they were, consistent signaling by military elites that this behavior was unacceptable reinforced the boundaries of military role beliefs relative to their relationship with civilian superiors. Consistent punishing of openly subversive action was a hallmark of the U.S. military that contributed to the coherence of its culture and maintained a balance between competing ideologies.

One such incident occurred early in Clinton’s time in office. In 1993, Air Force Major General Harold Campbell opened a military awards banquet by referring to the President as “gay-loving,” “pot-smoking,” “draft dodging” and “skirt-chasing.”\textsuperscript{493} The Air Force’s investigation into the event revealed that Campbell’s remarks were not only premeditated but that he had instructed reporters not to videotape his introductory remarks with full awareness that what he was about to say was inappropriate.\textsuperscript{494} The investigation—initiated by representatives present at the banquet—resulted in an official reprimand and Campbell’s forced retirement.\textsuperscript{495}

\textsuperscript{492} Bacevich, “Elusive Bargain.”


\textsuperscript{494} Ibid; Article 88 of the Uniformed Code of Military Justice states that “any commissioned officer who uses contemptuous words against the President…shall be punished.” (10 U.S. Code § 888 – Art. 88. Contempt Toward Officials)

Feaver argued that the perceived hostility between the Clinton administration and the military contributed to this discord. In such an environment, Campbell may have felt that his remarks would be well received by a uniformed audience. Further, Clinton’s political weakness on military matters contributed to a hesitancy in dealing with insubordinate behavior.\textsuperscript{496} Equally important, however, is that despite the ongoing conflicts between the military and the administration, it was Campbell’s own chain of command that initiated the investigation and rendered their judgement. That an officer would be disciplined for disparaging civilian leadership is not itself revelatory but the response from the institution is indicative of a cultural adherence and willingness to enforce its values.

To announce the results of the investigation, General McPeak took the unusual step of holding a press conference at the Pentagon. McPeak acknowledged his unusual personal appearance at the press conference by the need to reiterate his “deep personal conviction” on the importance of the issue. He stated that subservience to civilian authorities was a belief in which he and his fellow senior officers shared an “almost religious attitude.” He continued his remarks by relating that what separates the pulling of the trigger in wartime from a criminal act is the basis of “a legitimate chain of command which is founded on the will of the American people, it is not a trivial matter.” At every opportunity during his remarks and questions from reporters, McPeak stressed the importance of this issue to

\textsuperscript{496} Feaver, \textit{Armed Servants}, 180-182.
“military professionals” and to American military professionalism specifically. The organizational response to these remarks was centered around the cultural belief in subordination to civilian authority.

That this performance was an instrumental use of culture must also be considered. However, there is little to indicate that the results of the Campbell incident were directly impacted by corporate interest or other motivation. For instance, civilian authorities were reluctant to take any action, complaints about the incident came from service members present at the banquet, the investigation was rapidly initiated and completed in less than three weeks and uncovered additional damning details that would otherwise likely have remained hidden. Furthermore, there was little public reporting on the incident until the investigation was nearing completion and rather than taking aim at the Air Force or the military, these were framed almost exclusively as further evidence of Clinton’s political weakness. If the Air Force was not itself concerned with enforcing this issue, there were few external drivers to motivate them.

**Revolt(s) of the Generals**

A different aspect of cultural enforcement is demonstrated in the comments made by retired officers speaking out against Donald Rumsfeld’s failures in running the Iraq War in what has come to be known as the ‘revolt of the generals.’ In early 2006, six retired

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498 Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 182.

general officers spoke out, individually, against Donald Rumsfeld’s management of the Iraq war and demanded that he be fired. Their complaints were largely in line with the discussion earlier in this chapter. Rumsfeld ignored military advice and insisted on a smaller force for the invasion of Iraq. His management style prevented collaborative efforts that could have improved the outcome. And Rumsfeld had been motivated by politics in suppressing reports from the field that identified significant shortcomings in the U.S. strategy. President Bush did not fire his secretary of defense at this point—in part because he knew it would have been inappropriate to give the perception that criticism from retired officers led to that result but Rumsfeld did resign following the mid-term elections in 2006.

This example includes two important takeaways that highlight the role of organizational culture and the ongoing ideological contest in military role beliefs. First, culture did not cause the retired generals to speak out in these instances but their comments did reflect a broader view commonly found in the U.S. case that the military had a legitimate role in civilian deliberations. Each of the officers involved criticized the timidity of military voices in objecting to civilian direction and referenced the influence of H.R. McMaster’s thesis on the failures of military leaders to speak out against civilian leadership during the Vietnam war. In a later article, one of the retired officers, Greg

500 Powell, Interview.

Newbold, suggested that while “civilian control of the military is indisputable” it must take into account military advice.502 The implication in these remarks was to suggest that civilian direction is only valid in so far as it takes into account the professional advice of military leaders.

A similar sentiment has been repeated at various other times by post-Cold War military leaders. For example, General Milley, CJCS under President Trump, argued that “civilian control of the military is absolute, but the civilians also must get proper counseling and advice from people like me.”503 Likewise, CSAF General Fogleman resigned his position under President Clinton in part because he felt that civilian leaders were not receptive to military inputs.504 These statements call into question the commonly accepted belief that civilian leaders in a democracy have a “right to be wrong.”505 They represent a commonly found position among military leaders that the armed forces have a legitimate place in policy development that extends beyond providing advice when asked. Survey research has revealed that this opinion is widespread within the ranks as well with one study indicating that more than half of

503 Milley, “Interview by the Select Committee,” 111. Emphasis added.
505 Feaver, Armed Servants, 65; Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport, “No Right to Be Wrong.”
military respondents believed they had the duty to “compel acceptance of the military’s recommendations” regarding where, when, and how military forces should be used.\textsuperscript{506}

The second takeaway from this incident that indicates the influence of culture is in the response from active-duty officers. Almost unanimously, the retired generals’ comments were met with dismissal and scorn from active generals. For example, CJCS General Pace disparaged the generals involved as having been “shown in public to not know their job.”\textsuperscript{507} Army Chief of Staff General George Casey remarked that none of the generals had any first-hand knowledge of what they were talking about—which was not entirely accurate considering the previous jobs held by the dissenters—and that it was not “appropriate for generals to criticize civilian leaders in public.”\textsuperscript{508} CENTCOM Commander General Abizaid was equally dismissive and reiterated the fact that retired officers should play no role in criticizing civilian leaders.\textsuperscript{509}

The unified response from active-duty general officers is an example of clear signaling that indicated the inappropriateness of the retired officers’ conduct. Although many later revealed to hold similar sentiments—Abizaid specifically was very critical of

\textsuperscript{506} These results were from the 1998 Triangle Institute for Security Studies survey as quoted in Owens, “Rumsfeld.”

\textsuperscript{507} Pace, Interview.

\textsuperscript{508} Casey, Interview.

Rumsfeld as the general was retiring\textsuperscript{510}—their remarks were an effort to reinforce cultural boundaries and demonstrated the ideological commitment to civilian control that was often at odds with the more activist ideology that stressed the importance of military involvement and a legitimate voice in civilian decision-making. Notable as well is the contrast between this response and the response to comments from retired officers during Trump’s challenges to democratic norms discussed in the next chapter. Whereas there were clear lines drawn in this instance, under Trump, when democracy itself was perceived to be at stake, active officers were much more willing to tolerate and even reinforce messaging from retired officers.

Importantly, the willingness to enforce standards was not limited to the military organization during this period. Civilian enforcement of civil-military role beliefs was an important element of the cultural balance in the U.S. military. One highly publicized example was President Obama’s firing of General Stanley McChrystal in 2010. McChrystal was fired for remarks published in a Rolling Stone article that disparaged the civilian administration.\textsuperscript{511} In a statement addressing the decision, President Obama made clear that the decision was not due to differences of opinion in strategy or other professional matters but was a direct reaction to McChrystal’s behavior that “undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system…and [the


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responsibility] to the democratic institutions that I’ve been elected to lead.”\textsuperscript{512} Similarly, CENTOM Commander Admiral William Fallon was forced to resign by President Bush after implying that he was preventing the civilian administration from taking more aggressive foreign policy action against Iran.\textsuperscript{513}

Civilian enforcement of military norms played a critical role in restricting more politicized activity by military elites. The enforcement of cultural boundaries on both sides of the civil-military relationship was an important factor in maintaining the balance between competing ideologies in U.S. military culture. The willingness to sanction deviant behavior was often lacking in the other cases in this project and presents a stark contrast between this period and the Trump administration discussed in the next chapter. In particular, Obama’s explicit focus on democratic institutions and norms of civil-military relations provided emphatic signaling for the types of behavior that were considered acceptable. Although military leaders were often willing to blur the lines between advocacy and insistence, sanctioning from civilian and other military elites maintained a balance between the competing ideologies and, for the most part, preserved the larger cultural norms essential for democratic persistence.


Conclusion

Civil-military relations in the post-Cold War United States are consistent with my theorized polarization-politicization pathway. The combination of severe polarization in the United States and shifting geopolitical situation created an unsettled period that gave rise to competing ideologies that allowed new strategies of action for military behavior. Military behavior during this period was defined by cultural contestation between an activist ideology in which the military perceived itself as having a legitimate role in state politics and a democratic professionalist ideology that constrained military action and prevented outright replacement of civilian views with military preferences. Political polarization provided opportunity for military elites to exert pressure in the civilian sphere and unduly influence policy outcomes. At the same time, civilian and military elites continued to enforce many democratic norms of civil-military interactions such that neither ideology gained dominance within U.S. military culture.

Changing international and domestic conditions altered the salience of military culture at different points in time. Cultural entrepreneurs at the beginning of the period took advantage of civilian weakness to stretch the boundaries of acceptable military behavior and set the precedent for military activism that continued throughout the post-Cold War period. Likewise, the temporary absence of severe polarization following 9/11 provided additional evidence for my theory as it decreased the influence of culture as an explanatory factor in civil-military relations. Civilian activation was present during this period. As discussed in the case of political endorsements, there was evidence that it increased in both frequency and intensity as polarization continued. Yet unlike the Trump
administration discussed in the next chapter, civilian elites maintained some limits on their willingness to court military loyalty and continued to enforce many democratic norms.

Unlike the other cases in this project, cultural contestation during this period remained unresolved. Although civilians and military elites showed a willingness to enforce cultural norms, continuing polarization and the militarization of U.S. foreign policy decreased the incentive for the military to fully restrict its politicized behavior. As the next chapter will show, a populist polarizing president would attempt to elevate the activist ideology resident in the military and cultivate personal loyalty from the armed forces.
Chapter Four: American Populism and the Limits of Civilian Control

“You saw close to the worst case on the 6th, which is the usurpation of the Constitution of the United States, the overthrow of the Constitution of the United States, the illegal extension of power, the failure to conduct a peaceful transfer of power, a longstanding U.S. tradition.”

— CJCS General Mark Milley

In the final months of the Trump administration, the senior leadership of the United States military, both civilian and uniformed, believed it was facing an existential threat to the country. The president had led a “multistep effort devised…to overturn the 2020 election and block the transfer of power.” President Trump used intentionally polarizing tactics throughout his time in office to solidify his political support and politicize the military to aid his efforts to stay in power. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper had come to view the president as a direct threat to “the Republic.” Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Mark Milley later described the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol, spurred on by the president, as a “Reichstag moment.”

514 H. Rep. 117-663, x.
515 Esper, Interview by the Select Committee, 34.
516 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 198.
Despite Trump’s efforts to co-opt the armed forces for partisan gain and achieving some limited success in doing so, military elites ultimately played a key role in resisting his efforts.

The outcome of interest in the U.S. case was an example of military arbitration in which the U.S. military was pulled into a sovereign power dispute and forced to choose between two competing civilian groups. Senior leaders found themselves between a legitimately elected civilian administration and an incumbent that was electorally defeated yet continued to assert a claim on state power. Normative approaches to civil-military relations would expect the U.S. military to remain neutral in these circumstances and play no role in the domestic political dispute as mandated by their constitutional roles. Instead, military elites prioritized democratic norms over a strict adherence to civilian control and took a subtle but active role to ensure the preservation of democratic government. In doing so, military leadership showed a willingness to act politically, subvert or ignore Trump’s orders, and take a leadership role among civilian superiors to preserve the national security apparatus during a tumultuous political period.

Events during the Trump administration demonstrated my theorized polarization-politicization pathway. Severe polarization in the United States that had been growing during the previous administrations worsened as Trump used populist political tactics to further enflame existing social divisions. Unlike previous presidents, Trump often used

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517 Taylor defined military arbitration as occurring when “multiple persons or groups claim to hold legitimate state power and the military is forced to decide from whom to obey orders” (Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army, 7).
the military as a central component of this political strategy. As a result, the military was politicized via civilian activation as military leadership was repeatedly pulled into social policy debates. As the president’s polarizing approach eroded the norms and structural restraints of the civil-military relationship, the military’s organizational culture exerted strong influence on the strategies of action used to confront the existential threat to democracy posed by Trump.

The actions taken by military leadership pushed the boundaries of legality. However, the evidence indicates that these actions were intended to ensure the continuance of democratic norms and the transfer of power rather than any intent to benefit their own position or that of a particular civilian group. As the previous chapter discussed, the U.S. military had become increasingly involved in domestic politics since the end of the Cold War, but civilian activation during the Trump administration politicized the military in unprecedented ways. That military elites acted as they did was far from assured. The conservative political leanings of the armed forces, Trump’s appeasement tactics intended to cultivate military loyalty, and the military’s behavior during mass protests in the summer of 2020 gave many the perception that the military would do little to interfere with Trump’s efforts to remain in power. This chapter analyzes military behavior through a cultural lens and argues that the military’s role as arbiter is best explained as the response of a cultural ideology of democratic professionalism.

518 Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”

519 Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport, “No Right to Be Wrong.”
This chapter first discusses severe polarization as the result of Trump’s populist political tactics and his attempts to cultivate the personal loyalty of the military as a form of civilian activation. The following section discusses how severe polarization contributed to military politicization that was intended to tie the organization to the partisan aims of the incumbent regime. A critical part of this analysis is the ways in which civilian efforts to capture the military conflicted with the organization’s cultural practices, norms, and ideas and led to lasting tension in the civil-military relationship. Consistent with the expectations of my cultural argument, U.S. military leadership pushed back on civilian efforts in a way not observed in other cases. Finally, this chapter tests my organizational culture argument by analyzing military behavior surrounding two critical junctures in the final year of Trump’s term: the nation-wide protests in the summer of 2020 and the disputed election that led to the January 6th assault on the Capitol.

**American Populism and the Military**

Disruptions in the U.S. civil-military relationship under President Trump began during his candidacy for president in which he used populist tactics to win the Republican Party nomination. Trump’s instrumental use of polarizing rhetoric amplified preexisting divisions in American society and contributed to an increasing affective dimension between social groups. The effects of Trump’s devotion to divisive discourse are consistent with my argument: as polarization led to political instability, military politicization via civilian activation became increasingly common. Beginning during his candidacy, this form of politicization was geared toward cultivating military loyalty by
appealing to a traditional perception of masculine military values that closely mirrored the cultural divide he promoted in American society. Trump courted military support by positioning himself as the only candidate that could return the military, and the nation, to some pseudo-historical version of its former glory.

Running as an outsider candidate, Trump defied conventional expectations by drawing from a classic populist handbook that played on cultural fears to create a series of political and social “others.” For instance, in the initial announcement of his presidential campaign, Trump described the country’s various adversaries as “morally corrupt,” drug-addled “rapists,” and “political hacks.”\textsuperscript{520} He offered himself as the nation’s only hope, promising to build the country back to its former glory and to “make America great again.” His successful use of divisive rhetoric and polarizing tactics went beyond just an extreme variant of American party politics but was instead something that was “demonstrably different” than the country had seen before.\textsuperscript{521}

Trump exploited the political and social polarization that had been steadily increasing in the United States for decades.\textsuperscript{522} By some measures, the ten highest years of U.S. political polarization since the end of World War II have all occurred since 2006.\textsuperscript{523}


\textsuperscript{521} Matthew MacWilliams, \textit{The Rise of Trump} (Amherst: The Amherst College Press, 2016), 5.


Trump energized these divisions resulting in the four years of his administration being the highest levels ever recorded.\textsuperscript{524} Along with political polarization research also indicated that affective polarization—the tendency to view not just the opposing party, but also individual members of that party negatively\textsuperscript{525}—was also on the rise in America.\textsuperscript{526} The combination of these forces—political and affective polarization—furthered the severe polarization that has historically been detrimental to democracy.\textsuperscript{527}

The appeal of populist, polarizing tactics in affluent western societies has been attributed to several factors. Most promising among these has been research that points to cultural and psychological factors as playing a dominant role in the appeal of charismatic, populist leaders. As Inglehart and Norris pointed out, economic factors alone cannot account for much of the appeal of populists in societies like the United States. Instead, populist leaders that emphasize “traditional cultural values…nationalistic and xenophobic appeals, rejecting outsiders, and upholding old-fashioned gender roles” have found support among the portion of the electorate that holds a “mistrust of the ‘establishment’


\textsuperscript{527} Pernicious polarization is defined as “the division of society into mutually distrustful Us versus Them camps in which political identity becomes a social identity,” (Murat Somer, Jennifer L. McCoy, and Russell E. Luke, “Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies,” \textit{Democratization} 28, no. 5 (2021), 1).
and mainstream parties.” This approach is consistent with an ideational approach to populism in which populist movements draw on existing polarization and often manifest as a backlash against the political establishment or emerging social change that supporters see as threatening their rightful place in society.

**Courting the Military: Politicization via Personal Loyalty**

As a candidate, Trump politicized the military via civilian activation by placing military strength as a central component of his political strategy. These early examples of politicization went beyond the normal entreaties of a pro-military candidate and were intended to cultivate a personal loyalty between the president and the armed forces. Trump’s appeals to a national cultural past hinged on a traditional intersection of masculinity and military dominance and were meant to not only reinforce what was at stake for his supporters but also to curry favor among the military and veterans that he viewed as an important source of his political strength.

Trump’s speeches contained a series of repetitive but sometimes conflicting themes: the U.S. military was the most powerful force in the world but they were in dire need of unprecedented levels of funding; the military “[couldn’t] win anymore;” the military has

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been victimized by corrupt leaders and industry partners; and military elites have been handcuffed and prevented from winning.\textsuperscript{531} In this way, Trump borrowed from other populist leaders in his attempts both to separate the military from its attachment to the previous political establishment and to cultivate his own personal attachment to the armed forces through promises to rebuild and “unleash” the force.\textsuperscript{532}

Trump’s attempts to cultivate the military’s loyalty began with his first campaign speech where he laid out the conflicting themes that would be repeated throughout his time in office. He positioned himself as a staunch military supporter seeking the “strongest military we’ve ever had” while lamenting the poor performance of military and political elites alike in recent campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. He railed against elites who he viewed as incapable of defeating ISIS and divided the military between those that were responsible for the last two decades of failed war and the “General Patton…or General MacArthur”-type that he would find to “take that military and make it really work.”\textsuperscript{533}


\textsuperscript{533} Time, “Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech.”
He also drew a sharp rhetorical distinction between the military that was responsible for wasting taxpayer money in failed foreign campaigns and those members of the armed forces—and in particular, the veterans—that were let down by their leadership. Both as a candidate and later as president, he mixed divisive rhetoric with inclusive language to further reinforce the “us v. them” ideology he promoted. He combined statements praising “our country,” “our values,” “our way of life,” and “our people” with references to taking care of “our veterans,” and “our military.” In statements seeking to differentiate himself from his competitors, Trump used “their decisions” and contrasted “their generals” with “my generals,” and “my military.”

Military service members were not immune to Trump’s divisive appeal as an outside-the-box problem solver. Polling prior to the 2016 election indicated active duty military members favored Trump by a nearly two-to-one margin with even greater support among veterans. Reporting on service member’s reactions to Trump’s election victory referenced the attraction of an outsider who could “fix everything [they] see as broken

534 In each mention of veterans, Trump always referred to them as “our vets” and stated that “our vets have been abandoned” (Time, “Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech”).

535 “Trump’s Speech on National Security.” The Hill.


about the Army* and someone who could “inject something different into the system.” Promises to increase the military budget by ending sequestration, remove restrictive rules of engagement in the fight against ISIS, and accelerate the modernization of the military resonated with many of his military supporters. Similar sentiment was expressed for Trump’s vows to trim the military bureaucracy and the hope that he would reverse many of the social policy changes put in place by his predecessors. At speeches given to military audiences, Trump was often met with enthusiastic support and the open display of campaign signage and memorabilia.

The framing of the military as an essential element of American culture continued throughout Trump’s time in office. Social policy changes within the military were often used as a cudgel to highlight the danger of progressive change and found a receptive audience both within society and in certain segments of the armed forces. Previously legislated issues such as women serving in front line combat roles, the end of the Don’t


*539 Matthew Cox, “At the Pentagon, Troops React to Trump’s Surprising Win,” Military.com, November 9, 2016.

*540 Gibbons-Neff, “Like ‘the Day Osama Was Killed’.”

Ask, Don’t Tell policy, and allowing transgender service members to serve openly were all consistent targets throughout his term. Even the strict targeting restrictions for the military in combat zones designed to limit unnecessary civilian casualties became a topic used to emphasize a supposed national cultural weakness that prevented the military from winning on the battlefield.

Trump’s civilian-induced military politicization created the conditions that legitimated the military’s participation in politics. When viewed in concert with his later attempts to subvert the election, they laid the foundation for what some scholars have labelled “civilian coup advocacy.” In short, continuous pressure from civilians attempted to create the conditions that would induce the military to take an active political role. Some of these efforts were overt and public such as the appointment of recently retired generals to political positions; some were kept private and were more obviously detrimental to democracy such as the plan pushed by retired General Michael Flynn to have the military seize voting machines and rerun the election; while others were more subtle such as Trump’s continuous politicizing rhetoric directed at senior

542 Johnson, “Women and Transgender Individuals.”


officers. In all cases, the danger of civilian coup advocacy is in how it undermines “the norm stigmatizing the armed forces’ involvement in civilian disputes…[indicating that] the army’s assistance is crucial, not forbidden.”

Early in his presidential term, Trump’s antiestablishment rhetoric and appeals to “traditional” values found a welcoming audience in a sizable portion of the military. But, as discussed in the following section, Trump’s treatment of the military clashed with their accepted role beliefs and threatened the organizational culture of the military to such a degree that his support eroded. Following the expectations of my cultural argument, Trump’s support suffered the greatest reversals among career officers—those most likely to have adopted the practices and norms of the dominant organizational culture. Trump’s attempts to induce the collective loyalty of the military failed because his actions were so contrary to the cultural norms of the organization. Despite early popularity with service members, significant resourcing for the military, and appeals to traditional notions of institutional autonomy, friction between the president and military leadership became an omnipresent reality of the Trump administration.


548 Barnett, “The Education of Military Elites.”
Civilian Challenges to Military Culture

Trump politicized the armed forces by placing them at the center of several partisan policy goals. Military leaders often found themselves caught between comments made by the commander-in-chief and previously established policies and norms. Some of these efforts did appeal to elements of the military’s culture and corporate interests such as the changes that increased institutional autonomy and eliminated restrictive rules of engagement. In other areas—for instance, Trump’s disregard for norms on criminal conduct and the use of torture—the president’s behavior clashed with cultural role beliefs and he encountered stiff resistance from current and former military elites. In both situations, Trump politicized the military by aligning them—in the public consciousness—with the larger objectives of his political movement. The argument presented here is not that the military resisted politicization itself but that resistance to presidential action was most evident in those areas that clashed with dominant cultural practices. As will be seen in future chapters, the significant pushback from the military in this way was unique to the U.S. case and can be attributed to the distinctive combination of cultural ideologies not found in other cases.

Trump’s politicization of the military was noteworthy in two ways. First, unlike his predecessors, military politicization under Trump predominantly followed a civilian activation model. Civilian activation was not unique to the Trump administration.

549 Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport, “No Right to Be Wrong.”
550 Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”
Since the end of the Cold War, American politicians had increasingly leaned on the military’s social capital by using service members as a backdrop for political announcements or sought endorsements from notable retired leaders. But recent studies have indicated that civilian activation during the Trump administration was both more frequent and more severe than previously seen. Senior military leaders under Trump more often found themselves pulled into debates, either by being forced to comment on controversial administration statements or, in some cases, being put in position to fully develop policy on partisan issues. Rather than being able to avoid political discourse, the military was put in a position in which they were forced to respond to topics they were often ill-suited or unprepared to address.

Second, civilian activation created a cycle of military politicization as Trump’s impromptu communication style frequently clashed with the established policy development processes the military was used to working within. Trump’s initial appeal to and support from military members was in large part due to the self-styled persona of a military supporter and law-and-order-type candidate. But from a cultural viewpoint, his interaction with the military as president both appealed to and challenged the military’s cultural ideologies. In their analysis of the American way of war, Carvin and Williams described the military’s culture as being a balance between the preference for “overwhelming and quick military victories,” and a “relatively humane” approach that

\[\text{\textsuperscript{551} Ibid.}\]
valued legal restrictions and was “worthy of its core liberal values.” Trump’s approach to military affairs often came into conflict with this cultural balance between annihilation and restraint.

The president’s deference to the military in combat operations appealed to the cultural ideology of annihilation. He used language that evoked the Powell Doctrine and appealed to the military’s desire for “decisive” and “overwhelming” victory by promising to unleash the military in order to “annihilate” its enemies such as ISIS. But his actions also ignored the liberal values on which American military culture was based. For example, he largely dismissed internationally agreed upon rules of war and treatment of prisoners, mocked veterans who suffered from combat related mental health problems, and openly praised and then pardoned service members who had been convicted of war crimes. While none of these examples were openly supported by the Pentagon or senior military leaders, in each case the military was approached for response and subsequently dragged into the political discussion, thus contributing to the cycle of civilian activation and military politicization.

Trump’s use of divisive language and the line he walked between embracing and disparaging the American military is evocative of textbook populist strongman rhetoric. The U.S. military’s high standing among society and ability to quickly mobilize and solve complicated problems made them the ideal institution to support a populist leader that eschewed the complex give-and-take that defines normal democratic

552 Carvin and Williams, Law, Science, Liberalism, 1.
compromises. Trump attracted military support with the promise of increased resourcing and appealed to a cultural desire for greater operational autonomy. But as the rest of the chapter explores, the president’s consistent violation of other aspects of the military’s organizational culture—namely an undermining of the liberal democratic values on which it is founded—led to consistent civil-military friction and ultimately influenced the military leadership’s behavioral choices when faced with a sovereign power issue.

**Annihilation and Autonomy**

As discussed in the previous chapter, a cultural desire for annihilation—the imperative for decisive victory—has manifested differently as international conditions have changed. Whether through the Powell Doctrine or the rise of precision drone warfare, strategies of annihilation have often come into conflict with the political realities of American warfare. Trump appealed to this cultural ideology by granting the military significant autonomy to conduct operations as they saw fit and by lifting many of the rules of engagement that had restricted military tactics. Autonomy is generally thought of as being inversely related with politicization and is more commonly seen as an appeasement strategy meant to appeal to corporate positional interests. But Trump used autonomy as a politicizing tactic and part of his broader political strategy that was

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553 Hunter and Vega note a similar mechanism at play under Bolsonaro in Brazil and Fujimori in Peru (Hunter and Vega, “Populism and the Military”).


555 Thompson, “Organizational Cohesion and Military Coup Outcomes.”
intended to curry favor with supporters that equated operational restrictions with a derogatory view of the invasion of “political correctness” that inhibited American success.556

In a presidential campaign ad released in November 2015, then-candidate Trump promised that he would, “quickly and decisively bomb the hell out of ISIS…rebuild the military and make it so strong no one—and I mean, no one—will mess with us.”557 His pledges to rebuild and modernize the force netted significant support among military members and traditional conservatives that enabled many to look past other faults. As one conservative insider favorably described it, despite viewing Trump as “an extremely dangerous commander in chief…the increase in budgets, readiness levels and modernization efforts [were] sort of like a ‘mini Reagan period.’”558 Trump also oversaw a well-received shift in the overall national defense strategy toward great power competition—although this effort has largely been credited to Secretary of Defense James Mattis rather than the president himself.559

556 For example, see his campaign speech to a veteran’s group in Herndon, VA (Donald Trump, “Full: Donald Trump Speech on Cybersecurity in Herndon, VA,” Youtube.com, October 3, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4mq5EegZw).


Trump’s efforts to “bomb the hell out of ISIS” manifested in what he described as a “total authorization” for the military to act as they saw fit.\textsuperscript{560} Trump granted the military wide latitude to escalate operations by increasing the pace of air strikes, making decisions on troop levels, and expanding the geographic area of combat operations by eliminating the requirement for policy reviews when conducting special operations raids outside of established battle zones.\textsuperscript{561} The military was granted a level of operational autonomy and resourcing that was often asked for but rarely received under previous administrations. In exchange, Trump curried favor with the force and politicized the increased military activity as evidence of his effectiveness as a strongman leader that played to his partisan base.\textsuperscript{562}

The military responded by increasing its pace of operations. In 2017, more airstrikes were conducted in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria than at any other point in those conflicts.\textsuperscript{563} While some of the increase can be attributed to a more active enemy during that time period, it is also true that civilian casualties and friendly fire incidents disproportionately increased as well, sometimes doubling and tripling the rate that

\textsuperscript{560} Donald Trump, “Trump Won’t Say if He Signed Off on Bomb Use,” Youtube.com, April 13, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOkMz5ioRqY.


occurred under previous restrictions. While many in the Pentagon praised the ability to delegate decision-making down to the lowest levels, the president’s strategy did receive some muted criticism for focusing too much on tactical success and ignoring the lessons learned from two decades of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. Specifically, cuts to diplomatic and development programs that were used to offset defense spending were criticized by several, anonymous senior leaders for ignoring the lessons learned on how best to combat violent extremism.

It is fair to say that although President Trump enabled the American military to pursue a strategy of annihilation against its enemies on the battlefield, his hands-off approach created civil-military friction by clashing with other aspects of military war-fighting culture such as accountability—an important element of restraint. For example, Trump frequently divorced himself from the ramifications of military action. In one such instance, Trump blamed senior military leaders for a failed raid in Yemen that resulted in twenty-three civilian casualties and the death of a U.S. Navy SEAL. In another, Trump was criticized by several defense officials for his lack of accountability


565 For example, General James Holmes, then the commander of Air Combat Command, praised the ability of individual pilots to “take more responsibility” at the Air Force’s annual conference (McCleary, “U.S. Bombs Falling”).

566 Brechenmacher and Feldstein, “Trump’s War on Terror.”

567 Carvin and Williams, Law, Science, Liberalism.

568 Phillip, “Trump Passes Blame.”
regarding the death of four Army Green Beret’s in a raid in Niger that he had
authorized.\textsuperscript{569} Trump’s position of “total authorization” for military decision-making was
a form of politicization. The lack of civilian accountability elevated the military from an
obedient servant of the state to an autonomous organization responsible for strategic
decision-making. When operations failed, it was the military, not civilian decision-
makers, that had to defend the actions and justify the expansion of operations.

The Trump presidency marked a period of military autonomy unrivaled since the end
of the Cold War. Yet, an “unleashed” military supplying overwhelming tactical force
proved little better at solving the complex strategic problems of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century
battlefield.\textsuperscript{570} Despite significant tactical success, strategic victory remained elusive. As a
cultural approach would expect, however, the embrace of an annihilation doctrine was,
for the most part, well received within the military because it was in line with their
preexisting views of the American way of warfare. Where dissent did occur, it was muted
and sporadic despite the stark departure from the best practices developed over the
previous twenty years. Still, the clearest examples of military politicization under
President Trump occurred with his challenges to the liberal American values on which
U.S. military culture is based.

\textsuperscript{569} Noah Bierman, Brian Bennett, and W.J. Hennigan, “Analysis: How did Trump’s Response to Four
Soldier’s Deaths go so Wrong?,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, October 18, 2017,

\textsuperscript{570} Brechenmacher and Feldstein, “Trump’s War on Terror,”
Limited Restraint Leads to Resistance

Returning to their study on the American way of war, Carvin and Williams used the concept of restraint to describe the rule-driven respect for life that represents the other side of the military’s annihilation-restraint culture. As they put it, “while the U.S. military is driven by an overriding sense of urgency to achieve a quick, decisive victory, it finds itself restrained by the liberal values of the nation…there is an innate respect for life and human rights that undeniably informs the American way of warfare.” Restraint is based in the rule of law. Consistent with an understanding of cultural transformation, the military’s perception of what is within the admissible bounds of warfare has changed over time as domestic and international law has evolved. On the other hand, severe polarization under Trump was based on the concept that the nation could be returned to a cultural past. His efforts to turn back the clock led to a disregard for the modern constraints of the laws of war and consistently conflicted with the military’s cultural ideologies that were guided by liberal western values and the progressive changes that had taken place in domestic society.

This conflict had two effects. First, Trump’s partisan-motivated policy changes and erratic communication style made it impossible for the military to avoid becoming embroiled in political discourse. Second, politicizing the military in a way that so contrasted with ideological values led to lasting tension between the president and the

571 Carvin and Williams, Law, Science, Liberalism, 11-12.
572 Ibid, 11.
senior ranks of the armed forces. For instance, beginning with comments made during the Republican primary campaign, Trump repeatedly encouraged the use of torture and other illegal techniques against battlefield adversaries. He vacillated between insisting on the effectiveness of torture techniques, despite notable contradictory statements from his advisors,\textsuperscript{573} and arguing that even “if it doesn’t work, they deserve it anyway.”\textsuperscript{574} As president, Trump was legally limited in his ability to actually authorize inhumane interrogation techniques but his support for such tactics continued.\textsuperscript{575}

The military’s resistance to these efforts was obvious. CJCS General Joseph Dunford made headlines when he was questioned on the use of torture and the intentional targeting of terrorist’s families during testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee.\textsuperscript{576} His response made clear that such orders would have an “adverse effect” on American troops and that torture was “inconsistent with the values of our nation.”\textsuperscript{577}


\textsuperscript{576} Trump had suggested the families and other civilian connections of terrorists as a potential target of operations.

retired members of the military was even less muted. In one letter, 176 retired flag
officers—including 19 former Joint Chiefs, Service Chiefs, or Combatant
Commanders—wrote to the president to express their condemnation for his position on
torture. They referenced the inherent link between the military and American values
stating that, “we know from experience that U.S. national security policies are most
effective when they uphold those ideals.” They continued, “torture violates our core
values as a nation. Our greatest strength is our commitment to the rule of law and to the
principles embedded in our Constitution.”

That the military had previously supported the use of such tactics under President
Bush demonstrated an important part of their organizational culture, particularly as it
applies to the ideology of restraint. The “advanced interrogation techniques” that had
previously been authorized were prohibited by President Obama under Executive Order
13491 and later codified into law in 2016. Furthermore, the international basis for the
Justice Department’s authorization of these techniques had been contested and overruled
in 2017 in international courts. That the military now rejected the use of such tactics is
unlikely to be attributed to any changes in the personal views of senior officers. Rather it
is best explained as a collective organizational attachment to liberal rule-based order that
responded to the domestic and international condemnation of the use of such tactics.

Trump-Letter-on.

Trump’s efforts to reinstate torture tactics conflicted with the military’s organizational culture that had adapted to the dominant liberal view in society on these matters.

This is not to imply that the U.S. military never acts outside of these rule-based boundaries or that it does not advocate for expanding what can be considered acceptable action during war. Innumerable examples of aberrant behavior can be found from nearly every conflict involving American forces. But these cases are generally punished either by civilian elites, public discontent, or by the military itself. Consistent sanctioning serves to reinforce culture by establishing or reinforcing the boundaries of legitimate action. Organizational culture is transformed in these instances: as the law and the domestic or international perception of these actions change, so to do the boundaries that define organizational culture. While Carvin and Williams argued that the collective commitment to rule-based order in American warfare “directly stems from the liberal Enlightenment origins of the nation,” critical approaches theorize that the adherence to the laws of war is more instrumental and meant to legitimize violence and maintain an advantage for advanced nations such as the United States. The cultural argument


580 Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver, “Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness.”


presented here is less concerned with the origins of this commitment than with the evidence that it exists.

Further examples of Trump’s clash with the military’s cultural attachment to restraint was found in other areas as well. For instance, the president intervened in three cases of soldiers accused or convicted of violating international laws of war.\textsuperscript{584} He issued full pardons to Army Lieutenant Clint Lorance—convicted of murdering two Afghan civilians—and Army Major Mathew Holstein who was charged with murder in a similar incident.\textsuperscript{585} In the third case, President Trump interceded on behalf of Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher who was acquitted of murder but convicted on charges involving improper behavior with the dead body of an unarmed civilian. In Gallagher’s case, Trump took the unusual step of ordering the Secretary of Defense to ensure Gallagher retained his rank and the coveted Trident insignia that signified his good standing as a Navy SEAL.\textsuperscript{586}

Trump’s clemency in these cases is consistent with his other uses of polarizing political tactics. In comments about the cases he celebrated his decision as “[sticking] up for three great warriors against the deep state,” and acknowledged that he ignored the

\textsuperscript{584} These were not the only cases. For example, towards the end of his time in office Trump also pardoned four military contractors that were convicted of murdering 14 Iraqi civilians (Laurel Wamsley, “Shock and Dismay After Trump Pardons Blackwater Guards who Killed 14 Iraqi Civilians,” \textit{NPR}, December 23, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/12/23/949679837/shock-and-dismay-after-trump-pardons-blackwater-guards-who-killed-14-iraqi-civil).


advice of military leadership whom he accused of being out of touch with the warfighters as they sat “in air conditioned offices and complain[ed].”  

Both Trump’s handling of war criminals and his embrace of torture were partisan victories and indicative of the severe polarization that impacted views on nearly every political topic during his presidency. In one survey, only 40% of all respondents agreed with the president’s pardon of LT Lorance. But the survey showed a stark partisan divide with 79% of Republicans responding favorably while only 12% of Democrats agreed. Research surveys on the use of torture showed comparable partisan splits with more than 71% of Republicans acknowledging that there were “some circumstances in which torture is acceptable” while only 31% of Democrats responded similarly.

Consistent with the expectations of my cultural argument, the senior ranks of the military showed a collective solidarity in their response to these issues. Among active duty uniformed leadership, the response was expectedly muffled but nonetheless clear. Through official service statements, active duty service leadership acknowledged the legality of the pardon process but distanced themselves from the decision and made no


effort to disguise that the order came directly from the president. The Army statement bluntly acknowledged that the president’s pardon power “extends to military court-martial proceedings” and that “the Army will review today’s *executive* actions in order to implement the *presidential* orders.” A statement from the Navy’s chief spokesperson simply stated that “we acknowledge his order and are implementing it.”

Statements of opposition from retired officers made explicit reference to the national values that underlay the military’s cultural role beliefs. Former Marine Commandant General Charles Krulak stated that the decision “betrays [American] ideals,” and that Trump had relinquished the “moral high ground and undermine[d] the good order and discipline critical to winning on the battlefield.” Former CJCS General Martin Dempsey warned of the “signals [to] troops and allies” and the “abdication of moral responsibility” that they represented. Retired Admiral James Stavridis, former Supreme Allied of Commander of NATO, echoed these sentiments and reinforced the danger of a president’s undue interference in the military justice system over such “extreme ethical and moral failures.”


In each of these situations the military was pulled into a political debate and forced to choose between contradicting their commander-in-chief or advocating for continued adherence to international and domestic law. By not responding, the military risked “implicitly approving” the behavior of the pardoned soldiers and the illegal suggestions of the president.\textsuperscript{595} Consistent with my argument, the military attempted to walk a middle ground. They adhered to the principle of civilian control by implementing the pardons while relying on civilian officials in the Pentagon and the outcry from retired leaders to convince Trump to reverse course on torture.\textsuperscript{596} But the backlash from retired senior leaders—who often take on the role of defending military culture when active duty leaders are unwilling or unable to speak out—continued to grow as the president’s behavior became even more erratic at the end of his term.

**Different Cultural Responses to Politicization**

All of the examples offered above are instances of military politicization via civilian activation. But, as a cultural approach would predict, the reactions to Trump’s policies varied. The American case is not an example of a military that uniformly opposed presidential actions. Where Trump’s policies appealed to the military’s cultural element of annihilation, conflict was less likely to occur. The military embraced their granted


autonomy and readily expanded both the tactics used and the geographic scope of operations as discussed above.\textsuperscript{597} When objections did occur, such as with questioning the wisdom of abandoning the best practices of the previous twenty years, they were much more indistinct and statements were given off the record. When questioned by Congress, senior officers provided only muted criticism and statements were given in isolation rather than as collective organizational positions.\textsuperscript{598}

In contrast, where Trump’s policies challenged the cultural ideology of restraint, criticism was much more overt. Reactions to the president’s support for torture and pardoning of war crimes received open and attributable condemnation. And, unlike instances of retired military officers that spoke out against presidential action during previous administrations, criticism was often unified between former and current military elites and focused on values, military identity, and the military’s inherent link to the

\textsuperscript{597} One example came in April 2017 when the US Air Force used a 22,000 pound bomb against Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan. The GBU-43, nicknamed the “Mother of All Bombs,” had never been used in combat and the tactical relevance of using it in this situation, considering the risk of civilian casualties and its lack of penetration capabilities, was questionable. The use of the weapon was a military decision and a result of Trump “unleashing” the military (Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Erin Cunningham, “U.S. Military drops 22,000-pound bomb on Islamic State Forces in Afghanistan,” The Washington Post, April 13, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/04/13/u-s-military-drops-22000-pound-bomb-on-islamic-state-forces-in-afghanistan/).

\textsuperscript{598} For example, General O’Shaughnessy, commander of NORTHCOM, acknowledged in Senate testimony that some of Trump’s policies such as the deployment of active duty forces to the Mexican border were detrimental to military readiness and that there was a lack of any credible military threat in that region but did not directly criticize the decisions. O’Shaughnessy’s statement was largely in isolation and was unique in that he was required to answer questions from the Senate oversight committee (Testimony on the United States Strategic Command and United States Northern Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2020 and the Future Years Defense Program: Hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, 116th Congr. (2019) (Statement of General Terrance O’Shaughnessy, USAF, Commander, United States Northern Command).
Although these results are expected in a cultural framework, many contemporary writers viewed the military’s open resistance to the president as surprising given the military’s stated commitment to apolitical service.\footnote{Lt. Col. Daniel Maurer, “The Generals’ Constitution,” \textit{Just Security}, June 9, 2020, https://www.justsecurity.org/70674/the-generals-constitution/.
}

The collective organizational responses also spoke to the coherence of U.S. military culture with regard to specific ideologies. Whether or not lower ranking officers agreed with the statements of military elites, the unequivocal positions of the highest echelons signaled clear boundaries on the collective position of the organization. There were some that did speak out but those that did so publicly were punished.\footnote{For example, Deborah Pearlstein, “Torture and the U.S. Military,” \textit{OpinioJuris}, November 22, 2016, http://opiniojuris.org/2016/11/22/torture-and-the-u-s-military/.
}

Consistent with other research on organizational culture, the willingness to sanction deviant behavior increases the cultural coherence of an organization and establishes a clear definition of what constitutes culturally acceptable behavior.\footnote{For example, Marine Corps Lt.Col. Stuart Scheller filmed an infamous video in which he expressed support for President Trump and demanded accountability for military leaders that had failed to uphold their oath (James R. Webb, “Marine Officer Who Publicly Demanded Accountability Discharged,” \textit{Marine Corps Times}, December 23, 2021, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2021/12/24/outspoken-officer-who-publicly-demanded-accountability-discharged-from-the-marine-corps/).
}

The military’s reaction to Trump in these instances provides strong evidence for a cultural explanation. Consistent with an ideology of democratic professionalism, the U.S. military was reluctant to overtly disobey civilian leadership. Their criticisms were, for the most part, limited to those actions that directly

\footnote{Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver, “Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness”; Sewell, \textit{Logics of History}.
}
contradicted these cultural ideologies. And, when criticisms were made, they were done so in a way that focused on values-based arguments rather than questioning the president’s right to dictate military policy.\textsuperscript{603}

The examples given here were far from unique. Other instances, such as the military’s resistance to the president’s plan to host a military parade in Washington, D.C. and the criticism of the president’s lukewarm stance toward NATO followed a similar pattern as described here.\textsuperscript{604} Another example, Trump’s ban on transgender service members, explicitly politicized the military by placing the onus for policymaking on military shoulders\textsuperscript{605} and was met with unified criticism from senior and retired military elites.\textsuperscript{606} These examples all support the argument advanced here. Trump’s actions were enabled by severe polarization and meant to appeal to his partisan base. The strategies of action developed by the military were guided by its cultural ideologies. In most of these cases,


\textsuperscript{605} Following the President’s announcement, the White House referred all questions to the Department of Defense and put the onus on the DoD to develop the policy on how best to handle the new policy (Sanders, “White House Press Briefing”; American Oversight, “DOD Records”).

the partisan motivation of Trump’s actions caused significant tension in the civil-military relationship that would come to a head during the final year of Trump’s term and the sovereign power dispute surrounding the presidential election.

**The Final Year**

As the president’s behavior became more erratic during the final year of his term, military leadership became “very concerned” about the type of politicization that was occurring and the public’s perception of military behavior. Although most were reluctant to criticize the president directly, the view of the president’s “immoral” and antidemocratic actions motivated an increasing segment of military elites to speak out against what they saw as harmful policies. Consistent with an ideology of democratic professionalism, military actions during the ensuing sovereign power dispute were motivated by this perception. As one general who served under Trump put it, “silence itself…can undermine the Constitution.”

607 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 58.


610 Gilsinan and Feiger, “The Slow Boil Revolt.”
This section supports this assessment by testing my cultural argument during two critical junctures in the final year of Trump’s presidency. The first was the military’s behavior during national protests in the summer of 2020. Specifically, the response to General Milley joining President Trump in a divisive show of power during a march across Lafayette Square that provided a wakeup call to military leaders. The response shaped military behavior throughout the election period and leading up to January 6th. The second critical juncture was the assault on the Capitol that occurred on January 6th, 2021. This was a critical moment of realization in which military elites made the choice to actively oppose any further attempts by the president to remain in power. In both instances, military behavior was consistent with the expectations of an ideology of democratic professionalism. There was no attempt to use force or threaten the use of force to preserve the democratic regime. Instead, military elites took more subtle actions and willingly chose to subvert the president to ensure the continuance of democracy in America. It was the military’s collective practices, norms, and ideas that shaped the development of new strategies of action during this period.

**Nation-wide Protests Deepen the Civil-Military Divide**

In May 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police officers attempting to conduct an arrest. The incident sparked widespread protests across the United States, activation of the National Guard in 21 states, and the deaths of at least six individuals.\(^{611}\) During the

course of the protests, President Trump threatened to overrule state governors and “deploy the United States military [to] quickly solve the problem.” Trump’s behavior was motivated by partisanship as he railed against the “radical left” elements and demanded that “weak” leftist governors use overwhelming force to restore order before vowing that he would “clamp down very, very strong” with “thousands” of military troops. Trump’s insistence on quelling the protests with force pulled the military into the political spotlight and gave the impression that the armed forces were being used as a partisan instrument.

The president sought to make use of the military’s strength and social capital in a way that was fundamentally opposed to existing cultural norms. In one meeting, the president declared to state governors that CJCS General Milley was in charge of the national response—a position he was not legally authorized to hold and that reportedly led to a shouting match between the two. Trump threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act to legally deploy active duty forces and alarmed his military advisors by making several


615 Deliberation on invoking the Insurrection Act was widely reported at the time and later verified by several members of the administration in congressional testimony. For example, see Milley, Interview by the Select Committee.
“immoral or unethical”\textsuperscript{616} statements regarding the use of deadly force against protesters. Other publicly visible incidents added to the perception that the military had been dangerously politicized. For example, the National Guard was involved in the death of a Kentucky business owner after opening fire on protesters along with local police;\textsuperscript{617} law enforcement officers were seen using riot shields labeled “military police” that they had borrowed from the National Guard;\textsuperscript{618} and two military helicopters were used to intimidate and clear protesters in downtown Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{619}

Each incident furthered the public perception that the military was being used to support the president’s personal position but, importantly, none of the orders given by the president were illegal.\textsuperscript{620} Senior officers knew the president had great latitude in how he chose to employ the military domestically and that there was not any legal impediment to, for example, invoking the Insurrection Act. As Milley put it, sufficient legal conditions for using the military domestically are “in the eye of the beholder, and the beholder is the President of the United States.”\textsuperscript{621} Rather, military leader’s resistance to

\begin{small}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{616} Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 176.
\item \textsuperscript{617} Taylor, “George Floyd Protests.”
\item \textsuperscript{618} Esper, Interview by the Select Committee.
\item \textsuperscript{620} The obvious exception to this is the discussions in the Oval Office regarding the use of deadly force. However, these never progressed any further than these discussions.
\item \textsuperscript{621} Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 40.
\end{itemize}
\end{small}
the president’s intent stemmed from the cultural belief that military forces shouldn’t play a role in domestic disturbances, not that they legally couldn’t.\footnote{Available testimony from CJCS Mark Milley, Army Chief of Staff General James McConville, Army Director of Staff Walter Piatt, and Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations General Charles Flynn, as well as civilian Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper all used consistent phrasing to express these beliefs. Phrases such as “last resort,” “exhaust all other options,” “should not be involved,” and “does not want to be involved” were repeatedly noted. Consistent use of the same language in multiple contexts demonstrates that this is an organizational value and not simply the preference of senior leaders at the time. Moreover, the same language and phrasing is repeatedly found in statements by retired Army senior officers.}

**Lafayette Square: A Critical Juncture**

The conflict between the president and the generals is consistent with the expected effects of severe polarization on civil-military relations. Trump’s partisan motivations and consistent politicization of the military caused many military elites to question the legitimacy of his divisive actions.\footnote{Eric Schmitt and Helene Cooper, “Mattis Accuses Trump of Dividing the Nation in a Time of Crisis,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/us/politics/jim-mattis-trump-protests.html.} The president had militarized the national response to protests and “set up a conflict—a false conflict—between the military and civilian society.”\footnote{Retired General James Mattis as quoted in Schmitt and Cooper, “Mattis Accuses Trump.”} If a singular turning point in this conflict occurred it was on June 1, 2020 when General Milley and Secretary of Defense Esper\footnote{That the civilian defense secretary joined the president is less controversial than the presence of active duty military leadership. Still, the Secretary himself viewed the situation as being inappropriate and received much of the same criticism as did General Milley (Esper, Interview by the Select Committee, 25; Carol D. Leonnig and Dan Lamothe, “How Mattis Reached His Breaking Point—and Decided to Speak Out Against Trump,” *The Washington Post*, June 5, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-mattis-reached-his-breaking-point--and-decided-to-speak-out-against-trump/2020/06/05/6aafd548-a69e-11ea-bb20-ebf0921f3bbd_story.html).} joined President Trump in a show of force against protesters that surrounded the White House. The leader of the
armed forces joining the president in such a divisive situation was especially damaging for a military that was already suffering from accusations that it had become a partisan agent of the president.\textsuperscript{626} The “bizarre photo-op”\textsuperscript{627} in Lafayette Square can be interpreted as a wakeup call for military leaders and their response reflected the influence of culture in crafting organizational behavior.

Following the incident, senior military and Pentagon leaders took more assertive action intended to oppose the president’s efforts to politicize the military. However, in doing so, they inadvertently ensured that the military remained a central part of the polarized political debate. To placate the president’s demand to use force, Esper deployed 1,600 active duty troops to bases around Washington but ordered that they not be moved forward under any circumstances without his own “personal explicit permission.”\textsuperscript{628} The following day, Esper constrained the president’s options when he publicly announced that there was no need to invoke the Insurrection Act or to use active duty forces.\textsuperscript{629} Milley also publicly undermined the president when he apologized and tried to walk back his involvement at Lafayette Square: “I should not have been there. My presence in that


\textsuperscript{627} Leonnig and Lamothe, “Mattis Reached His Breaking Point.”

\textsuperscript{628} Esper, Interview by the Select Committee, 25.

moment and in that environment created a perception of the military involved in domestic politics.”

Milley and the other Joint Chiefs put out a series of statements—both together to the joint force and separately to the individual services—that further broke with the president’s public position. The statements focused on the racial divisions that were present in the country, acknowledged that every American “should be outraged,” and reiterated their support for the constitutional right to protest. Milley’s statement was accompanied with a handwritten note reminding leaders that “we all committed our lives to the idea that is America—we will stay true to that oath and the American people.”

Although none of these statements mentioned the president directly, it is difficult to interpret them except as a rebuke of the president’s divisive rhetoric and a reorientation of military values and connection with their perceived role in American society. The


organization had made a clear statement that its attachment to the state was founded in the principles of the nation, not to any particular political official.

Statements from retired officers mirrored that of active duty leaders. Research has shown that commentary from retired officers is likely to have its greatest influence among members of their own community as opposed to any noticeable impact on public opinion.634 These statements were no different as they were directed to service members rather than addressing the role of civilian officials outside the Department of Defense. The statement’s foci concentrated on the soldier’s oath to the constitution, the threat of an immoral president, the dangerous politicization of the military,635 and accountability for “those in office who would make a mockery of our Constitution.”636 Such comments serve to solidify institutional norms and signal widespread dissent that has been linked to democratization and the prevention of continued backsliding driven by authoritarian leaders.637 As with the messages from currently serving officers, those from retired leaders clearly indicated that the military had come to view President Trump as a threat to


635 Maurer, “The Generals’ Constitution.”


the country. The civil-military relationship had moved beyond conversations about civilian control and military authorities and had entered a realm where the survival of American democracy was perceived to be at stake.

The president’s reaction to the protests can correctly be described as aggressive and divisive but none of his actions were outright illegal or objectively immoral.\textsuperscript{638} There was no question, however, that they transgressed several civil-military norms. The military’s collective organizational response, on the other hand, took on a notably different tone following Milley’s walk across Lafayette Square with the president. The conflict between Trump and the generals centered around the military’s cultural perception of its role in society. The president’s polarizing tactics had led military leadership to question the legitimacy of his actions. Unambiguous signals from military elites successfully dissuaded the president from following through with his plans such that an outright refusal of orders was never necessary. Consistent statements that referenced the military’s constitutional role and attachment to democracy made clear that this messaging was driven by cultural perceptions of the military’s role in American society and represented a value that superseded a blanket dedication to civilian control.

**A Disputed Election and the Transfer of Power**

In the days following the march across Lafayette Square, General Milley intended to resign. In an un-submitted resignation letter, Milley expressed his belief that the president was doing “great and irreparable harm to the country,” referenced Trump’s lack of

\textsuperscript{638} The obvious exception to this is the discussions in the Oval Officer regarding the use of deadly force. However, these never progressed any further than these discussions.
adherence to the Constitution, and vowed not to let the military be used against the American people.\textsuperscript{639} Rather than resigning in protest—a concept with no tradition in American civil-military relations—Milley was convinced to stay and reportedly told his staff that he would instead “fight him from the inside.”\textsuperscript{640} As the election approached, senior military leaders were “connecting [the] dots”\textsuperscript{641} on a series of incidents that convinced many in the Pentagon that the president posed a threat to American democracy itself. Trump’s refusal to concede in the November election and efforts to mobilize partisan legislators to overturn the results confirmed these suspicions and created the conditions for a sovereign power dispute.

When faced with a sovereign power dispute of this type, my theory—as well as a more classical Huntingtonian view of civil-military relations—would expect a military with a culture of democratic professionalism to resist attempts to be dragged into political disputes and avoid any overt challenges to civilian control. Such a culture would seek to ensure that political solutions are allowed to solve political dilemmas: that “the problems of democracy are solved democratically.”\textsuperscript{642} Where my theory differs from others, however, is that when facing an unambiguous threat to democratic governance, a cultural


\textsuperscript{641} Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 53.

\textsuperscript{642} Fitch, Armed Forces and Democracy, 66.
ideology of democratic professionalism may deem some form of involvement as required. U.S. military behavior during this period supports my argument.

In the months leading up to the election, President Trump made repeated comments that foreshadowed his post-election behavior. He questioned the security of electoral ballots, accused Democrats of illicit activity, declined to say whether he would accept the results, and floated the possibility of using the military to secure the election.643 Following the election, the president followed through on many of these threats and launched a multistep effort to invalidate the results.644 Of immediate concern to the military were the replacement of the Secretary of Defense and other key defense and intelligence officials with political loyalists and a plan floated by retired General Michael Flynn to use the military to rerun the election.645 For those working inside the Pentagon, the period following the election was “incredibly tense.”646

Consistent with my argument, the response from military elites was initially to do everything possible to avoid involvement. In response to reporting on General Flynn’s


644 H. Rep. 117-663.


646 Ryan McCarthy, Interview by the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol,” U.S. House of Representatives, February 4, 2022, 73.
plan to involve the military, Army Chief of Staff General McConville and civilian Secretary Ryan McCarthy unequivocally reiterated that “there is no role for the U.S. military in determining the outcome of an American election.” The statement reinforced talking points that General Milley had repeatedly asserted since August. Milley, along with the commander of U.S. Cyber Command and the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, also took the unusual step of holding an off-the-record video call with television network anchors days before the election to restate the apolitical role of the military. As the post-election period became more contentious, the ten living secretaries of defense issued a joint op-ed in The Washington Post that reaffirmed the military’s apolitical commitment to the Constitution. The statement was a clear warning or a “shot across the bow” at the president’s administration.

647 DoD Production 00005855-DoD 00005886.


651 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 231. Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller interpreted the memo similarly and stated that he felt such a warning was demeaning to himself and the “height of disrespect” to have to warn the military not to conduct a coup (Christopher Charles Miller, Interview by the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol, U.S. House of Representatives, January 14, 2022, 70).
Using lessons learned from the adverse political involvement over the summer, the
Pentagon sought to heavily restrict any perception that the military would be involved.
Prior to the election, Secretary Esper had denied requests for the National Guard to
provide election security. As more requests came for National Guard support in the
lead up to January 6th—when Congress would certify the election results—the service
chiefs and civilian secretaries were reluctant to be involved at all. Ultimately, a very
limited role for less than 300 National Guard troops to help with traffic management was
authorized. Any additional use of these forces, their movement from assigned locations,
or the carrying of additional equipment could only be approved by the Secretary of the
Army rather than the on-scene commander as was usual. Strict geographic restrictions
were implemented to prevent any military presence near the Capitol.

To prevent any misinterpretation of the National Guard presence, Pentagon leadership
also took pains to ensure that the public knew that their support was by request of the
D.C. Mayor rather than at request of the president. There was a real concern among
military elites that President Trump might co-opt portions of the force or take more
drastic actions such as invoking the Insurrection Act. The military’s top priority at the
beginning of the day on January 6th was to prevent any perception of military

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652 McCarthy, Interview by the Select Committee.
653 The National Guard were geographically restricted from being placed any farther east (i.e., closer to the
Capitol) than 9th street and they were not authorized to carry any weapons or riot gear such as helmets or
shields. Their mission was specifically tailored to traffic management support and any movement from the
assigned traffic intersections had to be submitted to the Secretary of the Army for approval (Ibid).
654 Miller, Interview by the Select Committee; McCarthy, Interview by the Select Committee.
involvement in the political process. Influenced by the politicization that had taken place over the summer, the military’s primary goal during the election and the lead up to January 6th was to remain out of sight and avoid any perception that they were being used to aid partisan goals. As the January 6th attack on the Capitol unfolded, the military’s response and priorities quickly changed.

**January 6th: A Critical Juncture**

The second critical juncture for military behavior occurred during the events of January 6th. As the attack on the Capitol unfolded, Milley compared the rioters to Hitler’s brown shirts and the attack to a “Reichstag moment.” The military’s behavior leading up to January 6th was driven by a fear of “politicizing the military in an antidemocratic manner.” But as the danger of the situation came into focus, the military’s priorities and perception of their options underwent a significant shift. Senior leaders viewed the moment as a “deliberate attempt to overthrow the Constitution of the United States” and felt that they were compelled to act to ensure the continuance of the democratic government.

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655 H. Rep. 117-663, 726.
656 Multiple senior leaders testified to congressional investigators about the effect that the lessons learned from the summer had on this period (Ibid).
657 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 198.
659 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 281.
General Milley’s actions on January 6\textsuperscript{th} and over the following weeks reflect a military officer whose choices were shaped by organizational culture. Milley’s priorities, shared by the service chiefs, were twofold: to ensure the peaceful transition of power during the inauguration and to prevent the current president from doing anything detrimental to American security before he left office.\textsuperscript{660} The actions taken during this period were consistent with a role belief of democratic professionalism. Rather than going public with their concerns or an overt display of military power to deter disruptions to the inauguration, the military took more subtle action that ensured democratic continuance while still attempting to avoid any public perception of military interference in the political dispute. Rather than remaining neutral, as their constitutional roles mandated, military leaders had chosen a side and felt compelled to act.

Unbeknownst to the public, General Milley took on a leading role in preventing any further disturbance to the democratic transfer of power. In doing so, he also violated several civil-military norms and relied on extraconstitutional actions that he was aware were beyond the scope of his advisory role. Military elites, led by General Milley, took an active role to ensure a democratic transition and limit any ability for President Trump to remain in office. The military’s prioritization of the democratic form of government demonstrated an “affirmative commitment to the democratic regime”\textsuperscript{661} typical of the U.S. military’s organizational culture.

\textsuperscript{660} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{661} Fitch, \textit{Armed Forces and Democracy}, 67.
The Military Takes a Leadership Role

Military behavior following January 6th can rightly be interpreted as politicization via military activism in which the military, guided by their cultural perception of the situation, unduly influenced political outcomes by exceeding the expectations of the civilian government. Unlike more traditional conceptions of politicization in which military behavior is intended to benefit their own position or that of a particular civilian group, the evidence indicates that military action in this circumstance was intended to ensure the continuance of American democracy. Trump’s polarizing tactics had politicized the military throughout his presidency. The series of events culminating with the attack on the Capitol had degraded the structural mechanisms that guided American civil-military relations. Absent these restraints, the behavior of the U.S. military was primarily shaped by the cultural ideology of democratic professionalism. This section tests my argument by analyzing the behavior taken by Milley and other senior leaders in three broad areas: filling the void left by an absent commander-in-chief, coordination to prevent an international security crisis prior to the inauguration, and the interagency coordination that ensured a successful political transition.

Throughout January 6th and in the weeks that followed, the senior echelons of the military were forced to fill a void in the national security apparatus. President Trump, as the only individual with the power to muster the full resources of the U.S. government,

662 Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations.”
was unreachable for more than three hours during the attack on the Capitol.663 In his place, Vice President Pence attempted to assume the role “even though he was not in the chain of command and had no constitutional power to issue orders.”664 Despite multiple calls with the Vice President and other senior members of government, neither the acting-secretary of defense nor any of the military leadership had any contact with the president. Decision-making within the Pentagon was influenced by awareness “about the possibility of a military coup...[and a possible] declaration of martial law.”665 Given this context, senior leaders’ willingness to work around the legal chain of command in organizing a response to the attack is understandable. But the silence between Trump and his senior military leadership continued after January 6th as well.

In fact, uniformed military leadership in the Pentagon had no contact with the president after January 3rd.666 Rather than using various official channels such as congressional oversight committees and cabinet officials, or even publicly addressing the lack of an acting commander-in-chief, military officials worked through back channels to address national security concerns during this time. The failure to use official channels stemmed, at least in part, from the severe polarization that had eroded the structural

663 H. Rep. 117-663, 577.

664 Ibid, 578.

665 The Capitol Insurrection: Unexplained Delays and Unanswered Questions: Hearing before the Committee on Oversight and Reform, 117th Congr. (2021) (statement of Christopher C. Miller, Former Acting Secretary, Department of Defense).

666 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee. Likewise, Acting Secretary of Defense Miller reportedly only had a single meeting with the president after January 6th that dealt with organizational issues in the newly formed Space Force (Miller, Interview by the Select Committee).
guardrails of the civil-military relationship. The legitimacy of the existing system was in question as loyalists installed in key defense positions and many partisan legislators in Congress were met with distrust by military elites.667

Shortly after the rioters at the Capitol were disbanded, Milley began a series of phone calls with his international counterparts. Referencing the call with his Chinese equivalent, Milley described his objective as needing to “make sure they didn’t take advantage of this perception…that civil war was breaking out in the US.”668 Military and civilian elites were concerned that the president would spark an overseas crisis as an excuse to expand his domestic authorities or that adversaries would misinterpret benign actions as the same. To defuse international tensions, Milley directed U.S. Indo-Pacific Command to cancel planned military exercises near Taiwan.669 Contingencies were discussed with the directors of the NSA and the CIA, where Milley urged them to keep their “needles up,” to “take nothing for granted” and to remain vigilant amid a new slate of personnel changes that installed more Trump loyalists in key positions.670 Milley also stepped beyond his advisory role by ensuring that National Military Command Center (NMCC) staff would take no steps toward launching nuclear weapons without his explicit involvement.671

667 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee.
668 Ibid, 129.
670 Ibid, xviii, Kindle.
671 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 140; Woodward and Costa, Peril, xviii, Kindle.
Considered in isolation, these steps were abnormal but none would be considered illegal. As CJCS, Milley routinely coordinated with international counterparts and the heads of the intelligence agencies. And although the CJCS had no statutory operational authority, the position does play a part in the “chain of communication” for any use of military force, including nuclear strikes.\(^{672}\) In other words, the CJCS lacks the legal authority to prevent the president from launching nuclear weapons but would, under normal procedures, be involved in advising the president. Milley’s orders to the NMCC were ambiguous enough to remain legal but they were clearly out of the ordinary. Milley himself was careful in his discussions with other government officials to note that he had “no direct authority” to prevent the president from using force but did vow to not allow anything “crazy, illegal, immoral or unethical to happen.”\(^{673}\) How he actually would have done this is unclear. When considered in their entirety, Milley’s actions, along with the unusual lack of contact between the president and his senior advisors, make clear that Milley remained concerned about illegal or “crazy” behavior from the president and was acting under his own authority to prevent it.

Milley’s concerns extended to domestic issues as well—an area where the CJCS has significantly less responsibilities. His focus on ensuring the democratic transfer of power was personified in near-daily conversations with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and

\(^{672}\) Paul K. Kerr and Mary Beth D. Nikitin, “Defense Primer: Command and Control of Nuclear Forces,” Congressional Research Service, IF10521, Updated December 15, 2022; Milley, Interview by the Select Committee.

\(^{673}\) Transcript of conversation between Mark Milley and Nancy Pelosi reprinted in Woodward and Costa, Peril, xix-xxii.
White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows. In each conversation, the three men shared notes on the events in their respective spheres and coordinated appropriate responses to crises when necessary. Milley took on a leadership role in these conversations and expressed a consistent message common in military circles: “steady, breathe through your nose, we’re going to land the [plane]…peaceful transfer of power.”674 In the absence of an effective commander-in-chief, General Milley took on a leadership role among civilian government officials. This role—one without any legal basis—lacked any of the hallmarks of traditional military interventions but was instead committed to ensuring the democratic process. At the same time, Milley’s actions unquestionably crossed the line between civil and military responsibilities and demonstrated a clear willingness to subvert the will of the president.

For Milley, “landing the plane” was all about shepherding the country through the period between January 6th and the inauguration on January 20th. The general chose to step beyond his constitutional role and take extralegal action with the intent of ensuring a democratic transfer of power. For instance, Milley “insisted and argued” for a multi-day rehearsal of security procedures with the many agencies responsible for the inauguration.675 The military—still concerned with preventing any public perception of political involvement—declined requests to use active duty forces to secure the city but did take a leading role in ensuring the adequacy of the interagency coordination.676

674 Milley, Interview with the Select Committee, 167; H. Rep. 117-663.

675 Milley, Interview with the Select Committee, 198.

676 H. Rep. 117-663.
During this event, Milley addressed the crowd of officials and again compare the president’s supporters to Nazis stating, “we’re going to stop these guys to make sure we have a peaceful transfer of power. We’re going to put a ring around the city, and the Nazis aren’t getting in.”

Although Milley has received much of the focus for these events, it’s important to note that he did not act alone. After the election, Milley and the other Joint Chiefs had reportedly agreed to resign in protest together should the president attempt to use the military to remain in power and contemporaneous observers viewed this as a realistic possibility. A mass resignation from the Joint Chiefs of staff would have been a truly unprecedented event. Whether it would have been sufficient to prevent the president’s quest to stay in power is debatable but it would have drawn outsized international attention to the events taking place. When General Fogleman resigned as Chief of Staff of the Air Force he took great pains to prevent any notion that he was making a political statement—albeit unsuccessfully. But the resignation pact led by Milley was intended to do just that. It was not motivated by institutional interests or to ensure their best military advice was heard, it was intended as the last, best chance military leadership was willing to take to preserve American democracy.

677 Milley, Interview with the Select Committee, 279.

678 Steinhauer and Cooper, “Fears Grow.”

679 See Chapter 3 for discussion.
There is also little evidence to indicate that the actions of senior leaders during this period were opposed within the organization. Despite the willingness to overstep the constitutional boundaries of his role, Milley’s actions received little of the criticism that was so abundant following his walk across Lafayette square and other instances of politicization under Trump. This fact speaks to the coherence of the U.S. military’s culture. Although unquestionably politicized, the actions of military elites following January 6th were seen as legitimate courses of action given the organization’s cultural practices. As one scholar described the situation, when “the military becomes an arbiter of the political fate of the country…that’s undemocratic and inappropriate. [But there’s also a line that] once crossed, means that civilian control as a value must be subordinated to some other value.” Consistent with an ideology of democratic professionalism, senior military leaders subordinated their commitment to civilian control to that of ensuring the continuance of the democratic regime.

Evidence of a Competing Culture

A cohesive culture does not imply that all members of the organization abide by the dominant norms and practices nor that any individual officer necessarily holds the

680 Milley received ample criticism from other circles, particularly as severe polarization has continued to drag the military into the national culture wars. The point here is that the outcry from retired officers and other cultural members on these actions was relatively nonexistent. Even the response of civil-military relations scholars has generally been to acknowledge that the circumstances forced Milley into making difficult decisions (Alexander Ward, “Did Milley Cross a Civ-Mil Line?” Politico, August 8, 2022, https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/08/did-milley-cross-a-civ-mil-line-00050308.)

681 Lindsay Cohn, quoted in Ward, “Did Milley Cross a Civ-Mil Line?”

682 Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver, “Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness.”
values of the organization as a whole. Cultural cohesiveness describes the relative leverage of organizational practices relative to the other influences acting on societal members. Competing cultures are likely to exist in some form in any organization. But stronger, more coherent organizational cultures that consistently punish deviant action are less likely to give rise to significant competing cultures. Severe polarization is one factor that can strain an individual’s attachment to the organization and leave wide room for other influences to affect individual agency. Military participation in the attack on the Capitol itself is worth examining through this lens. Concerns about the military’s involvement in the attack took two forms: the participation of individual service members and any institutional cooperation with the rioters that delayed or prevented a military response that day.

Initial reports indicated a disproportionate number of active and former military members among the rioters and the hallmarks of the attack contained evidence of military-type planning. As of June 2023, 131 of the 968 defendants in Capitol riot cases had ties to the military, either as veterans, members of the guard and reserve, or active duty forces. Much of this involvement was tied to paramilitary and anti-state

683 Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences.*
684 Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver, “Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness.”
organizations that played a prominent role during the lead up and execution of the attack. These white power organizations have an extensive history of recruiting service members returning from combat by providing a sense of continued service and amplifying an American version of the “stab-in-the-back” mythology that blames the bureaucratic state for military failures on the battlefield. Some organizations, such as the OathKeepers, purport to recruit exclusively from military and law enforcement agencies. And although a number of domestic intelligence agencies have reported on the infiltration of military units by these organizations, the connections had previously received little public attention.

At the institutional level, concerns about military involvement centered around the initial reluctance of the military to respond with force and concerns that the president was

687 The January 6th Committee laid out this involvement in detail in their final report (H. Rep. 117-663.)

688 Kathleen Belew uses the term “white power” to capture the full ideological spectrum of these groups. This broad term encompasses the nationalists, supremacist and separatist groups that may be motivated by anti-state, religious, or racial motivations. As she states, it is the most “precise and historically accurate term” when discussing the movement as a whole (Kathleen Belew, Bring The War Home (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018, ix).

689 Belew’s book provides an extensive history of the connections between white power groups and military recruitment. (Ibid).


attempting to use national guard forces to “protect his people.” The slow response time of the National guard and initial reports that military support was denied by either the Pentagon or the White House added to the speculation that some actors were in league with the president’s plan. Furthermore, acting-Secretary of Defense Miller initially testified to congress that the president had ordered national guard troops be on hand to “do whatever is necessary to protect the demonstrators.” The president’s Chief of Staff Mark Meadows alluded to as much in an email on January 5th when he confirmed to some of the rally planners that National Guard support would be on hand “so they can protect pro Trump people.”

The January 6th Committee largely dismissed these concerns. Rather than a deliberate conspiracy, the Committee found that any delay in deploying the National Guard was driven by the military’s reluctance to be seen as interfering in domestic politics, the restrictions placed on the National Guard troops, and the separate, disjointed planning processes conducted by the Pentagon and the D.C. National Guard. Although several

692 Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 212-218.


694 The Capitol Insurrection, (statement of Christopher C. Miller). In later testimony, Miller would walk back this statement somewhat. Despite others, such as General Milley, overhearing the discussion, Miller told investigators that he couldn’t recall that conversation with the president, stating instead “we’re going to support law enforcement, whoever’s breaking the law or causing disturbance, we don’t really care who” (Miller, Interview by the Select Committee, 98).

695 Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, Mark Meadows Production MM000789, (January 5, 2021, email from Mark Meadows to John Aycoth re: DC Mayor Activated National Guard Ahead of Pro-Trump Demonstrations).

key players continue to dispute the official timeline of the deployment discussions, the available evidence indicates that the president’s orders to protect pro-Trump protesters were deliberately ignored by the Pentagon. As of yet there is nothing to indicate that the military or the Pentagon deliberately delayed deployment of the National Guard once the severity of the attack was realized. It also is reasonable to suggest that the Pentagon deliberately withheld deployment of troops not to prevent the National Guard from ending the riot but to prevent the president from having the ability to re-role federal troops to aid the effort to interrupt congress. Although some have speculated this to be true, the January 6th Committee found no evidence to support it.

From a cultural standpoint, two things stand out. First, despite a desire from the president that troops be on hand to protect protesters or possibly enable the disruption of congressional proceedings, there was no observable effort within the military to satisfy this request. Until the severity of the attack was realized, the military’s top priority was to

697 D.C. Metropolitan Police Chief Robert Contee, U.S. Capitol Police Chief Steven Sound, and Major General Walker, commander of the D.C. National Guard, all have argued that their requests to deploy the national guard were initially denied.

698 The president’s chief of staff Mark Meadows described the president’s request for 10,000 national guard troops at the capitol as an “order” (Mark Meadows, “Interview with Maria Bartiromo,” Fox News, February 7, 2021, https://www.foxnews.com/transcript/mark-meadows-biden-administration-policies-put-america-last) but Miller, the service chiefs, nor anyone in the national guard chain of command took any action prior to the 6th to deploy these forces (The Capitol Insurrection, (Statement of Christopher C. Miller).

699 Military officials denied that there was any delay to deploy forces. Instead, they argue that given the strict limitations and the small number of National Guard that were already in the city (albeit none within nine blocks of the Capitol), deploying sufficient force to the Capitol was not something that could be done in a matter of minutes and the actual response time was the best that could be hoped for (H. Rep. 117-663, Appendix 2).


240
minimize any perception of their involvement. Second, the high representation of service
members among the Capitol rioters does indicate that a competing culture exists in
some form among the U.S. military. Service members have historically been tied to white
power organizations at a disproportionate level for several reasons such as the sense of
continued service that they provide. This should be cause for concern regarding the
long term sustainability of a culture of democratic professionalism.

As noted by others, the presence of extremists in the ranks raises questions for the
public about the role of the military in defending the nation against all enemies.
Relevant to this study, however, the competing culture of extremism played no
observable role in the organization’s decision-making on January 6th and the participation
of service members did not represent an organized military action so much as a small
number influenced by the extremist ideology of anti-state organizations. As severe
polarization continues in America, it is too early to tell what role this culture may play in

701 The proportion of service members charged with crimes related to the January 6th riot is roughly twice
as high as the proportion of veterans in the U.S. general population according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
However, when considering partisan affiliation of military members, President Trump’s support among
veterans, and the involvement of paramilitary organizations, it is not immediately clear if this distinction
can rightly be considered “disproportionate.”

702 Belew, Bring the War Home.

703 Kori Schake and Michael Robinson, “Assessing Civil-Military Relations and the January 6th Capitol
Insurrection,” Orbis 65, no. 3 (2021).

704 Of the 16 people charged with seditious crimes for their participation on January 6, more than half were
veterans. However, the longest serving defendant was only in the military for 12 years with most serving 2
years or less. Although their participation is notable because of their veteran status, it is difficult to attribute
their actions to any larger or collective cultural attachment as described in this project (Konstantin Toropin
and Steve Beynon, “Veterans Make Up Most of Proud Boys Members Indicted on Sedition for Jan. 6
Violence,” Military.com, June 7, 2022, https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/06/07/veterans-make-
most-of-proud-boys-members-indicted-sedition-jan-6-violence.html)
future political disputes or if some critical juncture may occur that leads them to displace the dominant organizational culture. As future chapters make clear, cultural transformation at the organizational level can occur when military and civilian elites tolerate the presence of aberrant cultural behavior within their ranks. Although it may yet pose a greater threat in future transformations of U.S. military culture, this competing extremist culture did not significantly impact the collective decision-making of the organization on January 6th.

Conclusion

The U.S. case supports my argument that military behavior in a severely polarized democracy is best explained by a cultural approach. The practices, norms, and ideas of military officers take on added importance during the unsettled times created by severe polarization and military organizations are likely to choose the pathways that are most developed by emergent cultural ideologies. The outcome of interest in this case was an example of military arbitration in which the military was pulled into a sovereign power dispute and forced to choose between two competing civilian groups. The expected behavior given normative approaches to civil-military relations and the constitutional role of the military would have been political neutrality from the armed forces and an outcome of non-intervention. However, the military’s ideology of democratic professionalism led elites to prioritize democratic norms over a strict adherence to civilian control and allowed them to take an active role in ensuring the preservation of the democratic government.
Civil-military relations during the Trump administration also demonstrated my theorized polarization-politicization pathway. As polarization led to political instability under President Trump, the military was politicized primarily via civilian activation. Trump sought to cultivate personal loyalty from the armed forces and capture the military as a loyal instrument of the governing regime. The strong support for the Republican Party within the military, continued appeals to the institution’s corporate interests, and the severe polarization of the time gave many the impression that the military was closely tied to the priorities of the incumbent. Despite these factors, Trump frequently clashed with senior military leaders. He grew frustrated with the retired generals he had brought into his inner circle and bemoaned the fact that military elites never provided the personal loyalty he sought. Although he had delegated significant autonomy to the military in how they conducted operations, Trump’s disregard for military values, his refusal to acknowledge long standing international norms and alliances, and the partisan motivation of his actions clashed with the military’s cultural norms and led to lasting divisions between the military and civilian leadership.

The civil-military conflict of this period is best understood through a cultural lens. The dominant role belief in the U.S. military was one of democratic professionalism in

705 Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport, “No Right to Be Wrong.”

706 Former Marine General James Mattis (Secretary of Defense), former Marine General John Kelly (Chief of Staff) and Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster (National Security Advisor) were all replaced over disagreements with the president in 2018 and early 2019.

707 Trump infamously complained to then-Chief of Staff John Kelly, “you fucking generals, why can’t you be like the German generals” that he incorrectly believed were “totally loyal” to Hitler (Glasser and Baker, “Inside the War”).

243
which a “subjective commitment to democracy as the preferred political system [is combined with] a belief in a professional ethic that differentiates and separates military and political affairs.”\(^{708}\) This was manifest in the balance between the military’s cultural elements of annihilation and restraint. The argument here is not that the U.S. military consistently resisted politicization. As the previous chapter discussed, the U.S. military was often willing to step into political roles in ways that coincided with their cultural belief system. Rather, it was only where Trump’s politicization of the military conflicted with this belief system that civil-military tension resulted.

The actions taken by General Milley and other military elites at the end of the Trump presidency are consistent with this approach. Milley’s actions were examples of politicization via military activism which pushed the boundaries of legality and influenced the outcome of the sovereign power dispute. But, consistent with an ideology of democratic professionalism, these actions were motivated by the threat to democratic government rather than any intent to benefit the military organization or a particular civilian group. The importance of civilian control is a well-accepted cultural value within the U.S. military. As Trump’s first CJCS General Dunford stated, “being apolitical is…an absolute must in a democracy.”\(^{709}\) And as Milley asserted, an apolitical military is “fundamental to the health of the republic.”\(^{710}\) However, when faced with an existential


\(^{709}\) Gilsinan and Feiger, “Slow-Boil Revolt.”

\(^{710}\) Milley, Interview by the Select Committee, 64.
threat to the nation, the military prioritized the continuance of democracy over a strict adherence to civilian control.

An obvious counterfactual arises in this case that asks, what if a different officer had been CJCS? Was the outcome simply the result of Milley’s strong-willed opposition to the president, or was it truly an organizational culture response? The analysis of the previous chapter showed a consistency in the behavior of U.S. military leaders since the end of the Cold War. Milley’s actions and willingness to overlook the flaws of the president in the interest of the military organization prior to the summer of 2020 demonstrated a similar consistency. Furthermore, while calling Milley a political loyalist would not be fair or accurate, he was the personal choice of the president and was installed over the objections of Trump’s senior advisors, contrary to traditional methods of selection. Milley held positional authority within the Pentagon but lacked much of the usual personal authority among his peers.711 However, the critical junctures discussed in this chapter provided important choice points not just for Milley but for all the organizational leaders to reassess the military’s relationship with the state and the governing regime. As a result, Milley was well supported in his efforts to resist Trump’s attempt to remain in office following January 6th.

That support also demonstrated significant coherence in the military’s culture that supports my overall argument. Senior military leaders’ willingness to act politically,

subvert or ignore the president’s orders and step beyond their constitutionally mandated roles to prevent Trump from illegitimately remaining in office received little pushback from within the organization. Similarly, the resistance to Trump’s partisan motivated actions earlier in his presidency received a unified response from current and former military elites. In previous administrations, such criticism was met with sanctioning and there was little public agreement from active duty officers to critiques levied by retired members. The difference was in how the severe polarization of the Trump administration created the unsettled times in which organizational culture is likely to have its greatest effect.

Because the military’s organizational culture remained fairly coherent throughout the Trump presidency, the U.S. case does not demonstrate the ways in which severe polarization can be transformed by civilian inputs. As analyzed in future chapters, cultural change takes time to develop. The lack of clear transformation during this period could be due to Trump’s brief time in office or just an ineffectiveness in manipulating the levers of government that are needed to alter the culture of an organization as large and coherent as the U.S. military. Alternatively, because culture changes slowly, it might be too soon to detect Trump’s impact on military culture. Nearly three years after Trump left office, severe polarization in American society and concerns about the influence of extremist groups on military members remain.712 The precedents set by the high levels of

military politicization and the willingness of military leaders to act as arbiters may yet reveal to be influential to future transformations of U.S. military culture.
Chapter Five: *Chavismo and the Venezuelan Military*

“…I have ordered all of my commanders throughout the country to stay in their barracks. This is not a coup d’état. This is not an insubordination. It is a position of solidarity with all the people of Venezuela.”

“We the members of the national armed forces guarantee the security of all the people of Venezuela.”

-- General Efraín Vásquez Velasco

Severe polarization in Venezuela occurred as a result of the populist President Hugo Chávez. Chávez used polarizing tactics to inflame differences between socioeconomic classes and promote a majoritarian form of democracy. Despite fostering loyalty from the armed forces, Chávez was briefly deposed in a coup in 2002 before being restored to power by the same military leaders. The outcome of interest in Venezuela was a military intervention. The dominant cultural ideology of the military at the time approximated that of conditional subordination in which the military sought to avoid political interference
but felt “obligated” to intervene on behalf of the “highest national interests”\textsuperscript{713} which it defined as the Venezuelan people.

My argument is supported in this case by both the decision to oust Chávez and the subsequent military reversal that returned him to power. In both instances, military leadership’s strategies of action were shaped by their perception of the situation and an unwillingness to take forceful action against Venezuelan civilians. Furthermore, this case demonstrates another example of the polarization-politicization pathway. Severe polarization incentivized civilian-initiated politicization of the military and stripped away many of the institutional mechanisms intended to maintain civilian control. Absent these controls, military decision-making was reliant primarily on familiar cultural pathways for decision-making during the sovereign power dispute in 2002.

This chapter adds to the overall argument by demonstrating two related elements. First, this case shows the degree to which military organizational culture is constructed and influenced by civilian inputs. For much of Venezuela’s post-colonial history, the military played a significant role in state politics. The country rotated among military juntas, dictatorial caudillos, and brief experiments with democracy that tended to either start or end with military intervention. In 1958, when a military coup ended the previous regime, Venezuelan democratizers appealed to military interests such that the armed forces willingly accepted an apolitical role in exchange for increased autonomy and professionalization. Civilian-driven structural controls were used to define the acceptable

\textsuperscript{713} Fitch, \textit{Armed Forces and Democracy}, 68.
boundaries of the civil-military relationship. Over time, these solidified into widespread cultural practices and a dominant ideology of classical professionalism that prevented military involvement in politics for nearly forty years.

Second, Venezuela demonstrates how civilian influence can result in the emergence of a competing culture either through unforeseen consequences or a failure to enforce civil-military practices. Different than the other two cases, the competing ideology of conditional subordination emerged as dominant as a result of civilian inputs. The same mechanisms used to maintain civilian control following democratization inadvertently gave rise to this competing ideology that was rooted in an attachment to the nation and the Venezuelan people. Competition between these ideologies shaped the perceptions and worldviews of Venezuelan military officers throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and contributed to two failed coup attempts in 1992. The rise of a populist leader that relied on severe polarization as a political strategy politicized the military via civilian activation and solidified conditional subordination as the dominant ideology.

The outcome of interest in this case—the April 2002 coup against Hugo Chávez—is an example of military intervention amid severe polarization. This outcome is best understood through a cultural approach that argues that the officers’ practices, norms, and ideas were a key determinant of their courses of action during this event. The puzzle presented by this case is why a military which, through forty years and two coup attempts in 1992, maintained a commitment to civilian control, and accepted the commonly attributed norms of democratic civil-military relations then chose to intervene in a sovereign power dispute and depose the president.
Empirical evidence from studies on military coups suggest that military intervention was unlikely in 2002 due to the long history of civilian control, two earlier failed coups in 1992, and the prestigious social position enjoyed by the armed forces. Yet the Venezuelan military chose to side with opposition forces and remove Chávez from power. This chapter provides an organizational culture explanation. The Venezuelan armed forces’ dominant ideology of conditional subordination shaped the perceptions of senior military leaders and new strategies of action were developed that prioritized their cultural attachment to the nation and the Venezuelan people over their attachment to civilian control.

This chapter first discusses the origin of Venezuela’s pacted democracy, the coinciding institutionalization of civilian control and the ideology of classical professionalism that developed as a result. Next, the chapter analyzes the development of a competing cultural and how two critical junctures—the Caracazo riots and the 1992 coup attempts—accelerated the displacement of the dominant culture in the military. The following section then analyzes the severe polarization and the civil-military union that arose under Hugo Chávez. The chapter concludes by explaining military leadership’s choices during the uprising in 2002 as a factor of the military’s organizational culture that shaped the leadership’s worldview and constrained their available strategies of action.

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714 Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army.
Democracy and Civilian Control in Venezuela

The development of civil-military relations during Venezuelan democratization illustrates three elements of my argument. First, it describes the important role of civilians in crafting the military’s cultural role belief of classical professionalism during democratization. Second, it analyzes the unintended consequences of civilian inputs that gave rise to a competing culture of conditional subordination. Civilian changes to the military’s education system and new domestic responsibilities for the military created a new role belief that formed a greater attachment between the military and the Venezuelan people. This new role belief eventually became dominant within the military amid growing polarization. Finally, this section demonstrates how the failure of the coup attempts in 1992 are best explained by the competing cultures within the military. The failed coups led directly to the rise of Hugo Chávez and the onset of severe polarization in Venezuela that further politicized the armed forces.

Venezuela transitioned to democracy in 1958 after an extended history of autocratic rule. After allying with segments of the armed forces to overthrow the military dictatorship led by President Marcos Pérez Jiménez, the three largest opposition groups—Acción Democrática (AD), Partido Social Cristiano de Venezuela (COPEI), and Unión Republicana Democrática (URD)—entered into the Punto Fijo power sharing agreement that dominated Venezuelan politics for the next forty years.\textsuperscript{715} From 1958 until 1998, the

center-left AD and the center-right COPEI alternated power through an uninterrupted series of fair and competitive elections that survived a brief insurgency, several recessions, and a wave of authoritarianism that swept through the rest of the continent.\textsuperscript{716} Because of its democratic stability, Venezuela was described as a “notable exception,”\textsuperscript{717} the “political darling”\textsuperscript{718} and “wise elder”\textsuperscript{719} of the continent, and a model for other nations that sought to follow the “Venezuelan model.”\textsuperscript{720}

Although Venezuelan elections were widely considered fair and competitive, they were not entirely free. The Punto Fijo agreement was built around key provisions that allowed democracy to take root but limited any meaningful opposition to the dominant parties. As part of the pact, elections were held to select the ruling party while the individual officials that occupied office were selected entirely within the party structure. Lower offices,\textsuperscript{721} influential political appointments, and economic benefits, primarily


\textsuperscript{717} Sylvia and Danopoulos, “Chavez Phenomenon,” 64.


\textsuperscript{721} For example, direct election of mayors and governors was not adopted until 1988 (Michael Coppedge, “Prospects for Democratic Governability in Venezuela,” Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 36, no. 2 (1994)).
from oil revenue, were bargained for between the parties. Legislative votes were almost entirely along party lines and their success or failure was largely predetermined by party leadership before the roll was called. The result was a democratic system that avoided many of the pitfalls and political violence of other South American nations but one in which virtually all civil organizations—except for the church and the military—were subordinated to party control.722

Venezuela’s democratic stability, and the stable civil-military relations that accompanied it, is impossible to discuss without acknowledging the role that oil played. Oil wealth, which predates the transition to democracy,723 provided the motivation behind the strict party discipline that held Venezuela’s pacted democracy together. Rather than allowing political disagreements to spiral out of control, party leaders recognized the benefits of avoiding the type of political violence that would threaten the democratic regime.724 The result was a culture of clientelism that propped up the pacted democracy. What is more remarkable in the Venezuelan case is that, despite its wealth, democracy survived even without the type of strong institutions that are generally required to avoid democratic breakdown.725

723 By 1940, Venezuela was already the third leading oil exporter in the world.
In the place of strong state institutions, Venezuelan democracy existed on the strength and unity of its political parties.\textsuperscript{726} For forty years, this was sufficient for maintaining democratic processes. By the 1990s, access to national oil revenues had become the “central organizing principle” behind Venezuelan politics.\textsuperscript{727} Austerity, stemming in part from a cycle of nationalizing and denationalizing Petróleos de Venezuela (PVDSA) eventually eroded these controls and gave rise to the populist movement led by Hugo Chávez.

**Establishment and Maintenance of Civilian Control**

The pacted democracy that stabilized Venezuelan politics extended to civilian control of the military as well. The armed forces exchanged their political voice for autonomy and the opportunity to professionalize. Venezuelan democratizers used a combination of divide-and-conquer and appeasement strategies that appealed to military corporate interests, fostered competition between the services, and institutionalized civilian control. The result was the emergence of a role belief of classical professionalism in which the military maintained a strong attachment to the concept of civilian supremacy but lacked any specific endearment to the form of government which it served.

The establishment of civilian control in Venezuela was a deliberate process. Prior to democratization, the military had consistently shown a willingness to intervene in Venezuelan politics. In fact, democratization only became possible when military units

\textsuperscript{726} Coppedge, “Venezuela.”

began refusing orders issued by President Pérez Jiménez, himself the leader of an earlier coup. Following a failed coup led by junior officers on January 1, 1958, naval units outside the capital of Caracas rebelled in order to support a general strike on January 22nd. Their rebellion was joined by Army units in La Guairá, cadets at the military academy in Caracas, and finally elite units in the capital before Pérez Jiménez gave up power and fled the country.728

Faced with this history of military interventions, democratizers had to craft mechanisms that would effectively neutralize the personal interests and shifting alliances that led to military interventions. A strategy to institutionalize civilian control had been developed by the leadership of AD as early as 1949 and was agreed to by the other parties as part of the Punto Fijo pact. The unity of Venezuela’s political parties combined with divisions within the military that had emerged following the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez resulted in the military junta voluntarily relinquishing control of the country and democratic elections being held before the end of the year in 1958.729

Democratizers used a mix of divide-and-conquer and appeasement strategies to nullify the threat of military intervention. Military leaders that resisted democratization or were perceived as maintaining too much personal loyalty among their forces were either purged or placed in foreign service.730 The willingness of civilian elites to sanction

728 Karl, “Petroleum and Political Pacts.”

729 Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control.”

730 For example, Lt Col Hugo Trejo, one of the military faction leaders following democratization, was assigned as the ambassador to Costa Rica in order to limit his internal influence (Winfield Burggraaff, The Venezuelan Armed Forces in Politics, 1935-1959 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1972).
unwanted behavior within the military was a critical step in establishing an organizational culture that was responsive to civilian superiority. To solidify military support, several reforms that appealed to institutional interests were introduced. These included modernization, increased pay, and amnesty for any abuses committed during the previous regime.731

With the initial threat of military intervention averted, President Rómulo Betancourt undertook a series of political changes to institutionalize civilian control of the military. These changes shared several similarities with procedural methods found in the United States and other Western democracies. For instance, the president replaced the Venezuelan general staff with a joint staff that held no operational authority, concentrated national defense authority in the office of the president and the minister of defense, and required all promotions above the rank of Colonel to be approved by the president and the congress.732 To encourage competition rather than cooperation within the officer corps, joint military education was replaced by individual service academies, military careers were shortened to a 30-year maximum, and officers rotated assignments every two years. In essence, it “became nearly impossible for [the military] to resist [civilian] authority in any corporate manner.”733


732 Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control.”

From a cultural perspective, these structural changes oriented the collective organizational perception to a new pattern of reinforcement and sanctioning that shaped the boundaries of culturally acceptable behavior. The unified party control at the heart of Venezuelan democracy provided civilian elites the leverage needed to negotiate with military leaders and the credibility to issue threats when required to keep them in line.\textsuperscript{734} Equally important was political leaders’ discipline in not pulling the military into political disputes. Consistent with a culture of classical professionalism, the military exchanged political autonomy for institutional autonomy.\textsuperscript{735} The fact that the party control of civil organizations that so permeated nearly every aspect of Venezuelan democracy never extended to the military speaks to the organizational autonomy and clear delineation between civil and military spheres that was present. In exchange, the military accepted its role as an “apolitical, obedient, and nondeliberative body.”\textsuperscript{736} Structural and corporate interest inputs were used by civilian leadership to establish an obedient culture and dissuade the military of any notion that it had a legitimate role in domestic politics.

Military politicization during this period was low. Civilian officials made a deliberate effort to avoid pulling the military into political disputes. The military was likewise incentivized to avoid pushing into the civilian sphere. Over time, this arrangement solidified into a military culture of classical professionalism that not only accepted but

\textsuperscript{734} Coppedge, “Venezuela,” 328.

\textsuperscript{735} David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” \textit{Comparative Politics} 25, no. 1 (1992); Fitch, \textit{Armed Forces and Democracy}.

\textsuperscript{736} Herrera Campins, “Transición Política,” 111.
came to value its commitment to civilian control.\textsuperscript{737} The longevity of military subordination in Venezuela was in large part due to the methods used to institutionalize this control. Designed to operate even in the absence of high regime capacity,\textsuperscript{738} civilian control remained strong enough for the democratic regime to survive a communist insurgency in the 1960s and multiple recessions that sapped Venezuela’s oil wealth and various domestic roles that, under different circumstances, have been linked with the erosion of civilian supremacy.\textsuperscript{739}

Whereas other South American countries had failed to establish effective boundaries on military involvement in domestic politics,\textsuperscript{740} Venezuela’s early consolidation of civilian control and the subsequent development of an apolitical culture prevented successful military involvement in politics for 40 years. The conscious, deliberate effort of Venezuelan democratizers, using lessons learned from previous failed attempts, was critical in establishing the required political unity.\textsuperscript{741} The result was a dominant culture of

\textsuperscript{737} Fonseca, Polga-Hecimovich and Trinkunas, “Venezuelan Military Culture.”

\textsuperscript{738} Trinkunas makes the point that the methods that encouraged competition within the officer corps and consolidated national security control through the executive branch were mostly self-executing and did not require significant civilian efforts to work. The lack of legislative oversight or other monitoring mechanisms would not become an issue so long as the pacted democracy remained intact and the military was subjected to a unified civilian voice (Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control,” 104).

\textsuperscript{739} Pion-Berlin, and Trinkunas, “Democratization.”

\textsuperscript{740} Specifically, Argentina, Chile, and Peru had similar opportunity structures for establishing civilian control but failed for various reasons (Brian Loveman, \textit{For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America} (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control”).

\textsuperscript{741} Coppedge, “Venezuela,” 324.
classical professionalism in the Venezuelan armed forces that helped maintain civilian control and the survival of the democratic regime through multiple crises.

**Institutionalization Leads to a Competing Culture**

The civilian inputs that established a compliant military culture also resulted in unintended consequences that eventually created a competing culture that threatened the regime. This emerging ideology best approximated one of conditional subordination in which the organization recognized the legitimacy of civilian leaders and preferred to avoid political involvement but in which its highest loyalty was to *la patria*—the homeland—rather than civilian elites. The competing cultures in the Venezuelan case took the form of a generational divide between higher ranking officers and the lower ranks that began their careers under the new structural constraints introduced during democratization.

The institutionalization of civilian control had established clear boundaries for military responsibilities that focused almost exclusively on national security. The generals that now occupied the higher ranks of the military had willingly entered into this civil-military arrangement and had successfully defeated various challenges to the system. The role the military played in stabilizing the country became a source of pride and a symbol of organizational professionalism. By the early 1970s, however, the meritocratic professionalization of the armed forces, changes to the military education system, and a lack of any significant external threat to the democratic regime provided a

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different perspective for a new generation of officers seeking to define the military’s role in the state.\footnote{The brief communist insurgency of the 1960s was mostly defeated by the 1970s. The result was that an entire generation of officers—which included Hugo Chávez—lacked any definitive threat to the state on which to base their focus on national defense from external threats (Iselin Åsedotter Strønen, “A Civil-Military Alliance: The Venezuelan Armed Forces Before and During the Chávez Era,” Chr. Michelsen Institute Working Paper (2016)).} Two aspects of the existing system were especially important to the rise of a competing culture.

First, the professionalization of the armed forces had intentionally changed the military from an institution controlled by elites and used for political advancement to a meritocracy with high potential for social mobility. The generation of officers that entered in the 1970s and 1980s overwhelmingly came from the lower socioeconomic classes.\footnote{Marta Harnecker, “The Venezuelan Military: The Making of an Anomaly,” Monthly Review 55, no. 4 (2003).} The humble origins of this generation was a source of pride. The lack of a military caste created a connection to Venezuelan society that was absent in many neighboring countries. As one senior officer put it, “for the man in uniform it is easy to say what the people are feeling because that’s where he comes from…it is easy to identify with the people.”\footnote{General Jorge Luis García Carneiro, “We Do Not Represent Any Caste, We Come From the People,” Interview with Marta Harnecker, Venezuela: The Military Linked to the People, 7.} Professionalization created an opportunity for social mobility which emphasized the military’s connection to Venezuelan society rather than to political elites.

Second, civilian-initiated changes to the military education system altered the military’s perception of its role in the state. Whereas previous generations had largely...
been educated at the School of the Americas in the United States, the new generation of officers received their military training at Venezuelan military academies.\textsuperscript{746} Here, officers were taught the “ideals of democracy, respect for the Constitution, and [Simon] Bolivar’s ideas.”\textsuperscript{747} The prioritization of Bolivar’s teachings, in particular, imbued these officers with more progressive education than that of the previous generations. The academies emphasized Bolivar’s focus on popular sovereignty, egalitarianism and created a commitment to \textit{la patria}.\textsuperscript{748} As a result of their military education, the competing ideology that developed within this generation of officers practiced a commitment to democracy albeit in its egalitarian, participatory form that foreshadowed Hugo Chávez’s populist focus on popular sovereignty and a backlash against representative democracy.\textsuperscript{749}

While the pacted civilian control that accompanied the Punto Fijo agreement created a dominant culture of classical professionalism, the same institutionalized changes eventually, and inadvertently, contributed to a competing culture of conditional subordination. The opportunity for social mobility offered by the military and the

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\textsuperscript{746} The new education initiatives were part of Plan Andrés Bello that reformed military education to university standards and infused nationalist themes to tie the military more closely to civilian society (Fonseca, Polga-Hecimovich, and Trinkunas, “Venezuelan Military Culture.”

\textsuperscript{747} General Virgilio Lameda, “We Want the People to be the Role Players,” Interview with Marta Harnecker, 38.

\textsuperscript{748} Strønen, “A Civil-Military Alliance.”

\textsuperscript{749} In a series of interviews, most of the generals that served (loyally) under Chávez reiterated this point and the education they received at the military academy as influential in their decisions (Marta Harnecker, “Venezuela: The Military Linked to the People.”

262
progressive education at the new military academies created a younger generation of officers that were more tied to society and conscious of Venezuela’s social inequalities. Combined with nationalistic ideals, the military took pride in being a guarantor of the peoples’ rights and their ability to participate in democratic elections.\textsuperscript{750} When combined, these factors increased military officers’ ability to diagnose and formulate their own solutions to crises that confronted Venezuelan society.\textsuperscript{751} The corporate autonomy granted to the Venezuelan military made it difficult for the nation’s civilian leadership to effectively monitor these changes and eventually contributed to the erosion of civilian control.

**The Caracazo and MBR-200: A Critical Juncture**

By the late 1980s, the military had a generational divide between the higher ranking officers that were tied to the civilian regime and a growing sense of nationalism and defense of the people that was inherent in the younger generation of officers. Unlike in the United States, there was little effort by either military or civilian elites to sanction or correct these perceptions. Two critical junctures influenced the development of the conflicting role beliefs that defined these competing ideologies. The armed forces’ role in the 1989 *Caracazo* riots revealed, for many of the younger generation of officers, the conflicting interests between Venezuela’s political elites and the military’s commitment to Venezuelan society. These experiences directly contributed to the 1992 coup attempts.

\textsuperscript{750} Fonseca, Polga-Hecimovich, and Trinkunas, “Venezuelan Military Culture.”

\textsuperscript{751} This point is made by Fitch in highlighting the sometimes inverse relationship between professionalization and civilian control in South American countries (Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*, 14).

263
that sparked a populist backlash to Venezuela’s pacted democracy. Cultural contestation manifested in the differing perceptions of the military’s role in the state and the conditions in which a military intervention would be viewed as legitimate. Whereas classical professionalism rejects military intervention and prioritizes civilian control above all else, an ideology of conditional subordination sees intervention as a legitimate alternative when necessary to protect national interests.752

In the 1980s, Venezuela experienced an economic downturn amid an international recession and a decrease in oil revenue. Allegations of widespread corruption and deepening inequality fueled resentment in many parts of the country. In response to the economic difficulties, President Carlos Andres Perez implemented neo-liberal market reforms pushed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The reforms were followed by rapid inflation and triggered mass protests throughout the country.753 Despite worsening corruption made possible by the strict party control that created a sense of impunity among political elites, most Venezuelans remained optimistic about the country’s future and President Pérez maintained high approval ratings. But the sudden increase in the cost of goods and services and a sharp decrease in the standard of living triggered three days of violence and rioting centered in the poorer neighborhoods in Caracas.754

752 Ibid.


754 Coppedge, “Prospects for Democratic Governability.”
The government response was brutal. President Pérez suspended portions of the constitution and ordered the police to restore order. When the police failed, Pérez activated Plan Ávila—a military contingency to secure the capital and maintain public order. The military’s efforts to end the riots included indiscriminate killings, unlawful arrests, disappearances, and severe repression of opposition movements. The official government account reported 276 deaths but human rights groups indicated that actual deaths may have been closer to 3,000-5,000.

The military’s role in suppressing the protests exacerbated divisions between senior and junior officers. The lower-ranks of the officer corps—whom by this time largely came from poorer backgrounds—were deeply affected by what they saw as the hypocrisy of political and military elites and the squalid living conditions of the nation’s poor. They were disillusioned by a government that would act so aggressively against the legitimate interests of their population. This rupture was rooted in the differing role beliefs of the competing cultures. The competing conceptions of the military’s purpose

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757 Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”

within the state caused a disconnect in the legitimacy of military behavior during *Caracazo* that increased as conditions deteriorated.

Smaller riots and public disturbances continued sporadically over the following years which lead to an increasing involvement for the military in internal security missions. As the military was called on to support the government against civilian protests, the junior and mid-ranking officers were continually brought in contact with the Venezuelan people. This contact reinforced the view for many younger officers that the Venezuelan people were suffering and that the military should be doing more to support them. An ideological break developed between the closed democracy practiced by Venezuela’s political elite and a view of democracy adopted by the new generation of officers that saw democracy as a method for more efficiently distributing prosperity. These differences were championed by a small faction of junior officers who had formed *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200* (MBR-200).

Hugo Chávez founded MBR-200 along with three close friends in 1982. MBR-200 was an ideological organization with the goal of providing Venezuela with a more inclusive form of democracy. The founding members sought to address the inequalities and corruption they saw as rampant in Venezuelan society. Heavily influenced by the

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759 Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”


762 Hawkins, “Populism in Venezuela.”
nationalist curriculum they had received in the revamped military education system; the group was dissatisfied with the divergence between the values of the political elite and the principles that were upheld in the military. Ultimately, MBR-200 sought a “civil-military revolution” and felt that by not acting they would be “accomplices…by omission” in the failure of Venezuelan democracy. Unlike the dominant military culture, the rising generation, exemplified by MBR-200, saw military intervention not just as a viable option but as a necessity required to preserve the interests of the people.

Initially centered in the military academies, MBR-200 slowly expanded outward as its members graduated and began supporting each other in their career progression. Senior military and intelligence leadership became aware of the counter-culture group and their anti-regime ideology as early as 1984 and concerns were raised to the president. Importantly, however, whereas previous generations of Venezuelan officers had purged cultural dissenters, neither civilian nor military elites punished the plotters. The divided culture and the limited ability for civilian superiors to enforce military standards limited the authority to stop the spread of MBR’s counterculture. Instead, the members were transferred to different units but continued to rise through the ranks. The Caracazo riots were a defining moment for the group that accelerated their efforts and saw their numbers grow to include nearly 10% of the officer corps.

763 Ibid, 1141.
The 1992 Coup Attempts: A Critical Juncture

The political conditions that led to the coup attempts in 1992 have been well documented. Venezuela’s political elites were limited in their ability to address problems with meaningful economic or social reform. The strict party discipline and inter-party agreements that had maintained democracy had also limited the ability for political elites to adapt as the economic situation deteriorated. As clientelism became predominant, a decline in oil revenue made it impossible to satisfy competing political interests. Likewise, the relationship between military and political elites had deteriorated over the previous decade, in part due to the military’s desire for a larger role in development and democracy projects. Given these conditions, other scholars have argued that it is less surprising that the coup attempts occurred than it is that they failed to succeed.

The coup attempts in 1992 were obvious instances of politicization in the form of military activism in which a segment of the military sought to overthrow the regime and take power for themselves. Unlike the other sovereign power disputes in this study, the 1992 coups were not a product of severe polarization. They were, however, a critical juncture for military culture and a turning point in military-society relations in Venezuela. Although the public still overwhelmingly supported democracy as a form of

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768 Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*.

769 Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”

770 Ibid.
government, after the coups more than half of the population began to view military intervention as a viable way to improve living conditions.\textsuperscript{771}

The coup supporters were motivated by ideology and were representative of the counterculture that had developed in the military. Chávez—one of the coup leaders—wrote before the attempt about the need for a responsive government “dedicated to social justice.”\textsuperscript{772} The group maintained an interest in democracy but one that centered the wellbeing of the people as the primary national interest.\textsuperscript{773} In recounting their roles in the coup, nearly all referenced the impact of the military’s role in the Caracazo riots, the need to create an army “for the people,” the failing legitimacy of the current political leaders, and the importance of accepting responsibility for the actions that were taken in order to establish their own legitimacy.\textsuperscript{774}

The first attempt in February 1992 was well planned and nearly succeeded. A group of junior officers—led by members of MBR-200—successfully captured a handful of key military bases.\textsuperscript{775} However, the element tasked with capturing the president was met with

\textsuperscript{771} George Philip, “Venezuelan Democracy,” 459.


\textsuperscript{773} Norden, “Democracy and Military Control.”


\textsuperscript{775} Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”
stiff resistance from the Army and was forced to surrender. This element’s leader—Hugo Chávez—convinced his fellow coup plotters to give up their attempt. The later coup attempt in November 1992, again led by junior officers, was significantly less well planned and was divided in its objectives. It failed when confronted by a united front of military and political leaders. In both instances, the vast majority of the armed forces opposed military intervention and maintained their commitment to civilian control.776

Explaining Military Behavior in 1992

Structural and interest based arguments played a significant role in explaining why a coup occurred in Venezuela. Weakening political institutions, active social protests, poor economic conditions, and an unhappy military have all been empirically linked with military coup attempts.777 Stagnant pay and rising costs of living had the same negative effect in the armed forces as they did in the broader society. The decreased standard of living may have been particularly sharp for a military institution that had previously been appeased with higher pay and benefits than the rest of society.778 In other words, a high opportunity for military intervention existed in 1992. But these elements do significantly worse in explaining why the majority of the armed forces remained loyal to the civilian regime.


778 Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”
As Taylor points out, organizational culture can explain why some militaries resist political intervention even within a permissible opportunity structure or with high corporate interests for intervention. The dominant military culture in Venezuela lacked the praetorian nature that is often required to motivate intervention when corporate interests are threatened.\textsuperscript{779} Organizational culture also explains the generational divide between those officers that remained loyal and those that rebelled. The senior ranks of a hierarchical organization are those most likely to have adopted organizational values in their professional practices.\textsuperscript{780} In this case, senior officers who adhered to a more classical professional role belief not only declined to participate but violently resisted the coup. It was the younger officers that adhered to the emerging culture of conditional subordination, who were “ideologically or morally committed,” that participated in the coups.\textsuperscript{781}

Trinkunas argued that institutionalized civilian control is “what allowed the democratic regime to survive… in 1992.”\textsuperscript{782} In essence, Trinkunas is making a cultural argument as much as he is an institutional one. The institutionalized controls he referenced did no work specific to the coups themselves.\textsuperscript{783} Rather, the control

\textsuperscript{779} Taylor, \textit{Politics and the Russian Army}, 30; Finer, \textit{Man on Horseback}.

\textsuperscript{780} Barnett, “Education of Military Elites.”

\textsuperscript{781} Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations,” 57.

\textsuperscript{782} Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control,” 77.

\textsuperscript{783} The one possible exception here are the divide-and-conquer strategies that made it difficult for junior officers to coordinate between branches. This was particularly true in the November coup. However, this divide is absent in the highest ranks where cultural effects are strongest in hierarchical organizations. As
mechanisms exerted their influence in the practices, norms, and ideas of the officer corps such that intervention was not a legitimate option for the majority of senior officers and other members of this dominant culture. An organizational culture committed to civilian control was the end result for a generation of officers who were taught and constrained by the institutionalization of civilian control mechanisms.

The coup supporters represented a competing culture that had inadvertently emerged as a result of those institutional changes by civilian leaders.\textsuperscript{784} The professionalization of the military, progressive changes in the military education system and increasing involvement in internal civic operations altered the military’s perception of its role in the state. As Norden points out, the professional autonomy that is essential to establishing a military culture of classical professionalism is often susceptible to just such changes in the military’s role beliefs.\textsuperscript{785} As junior and mid-grade military officers increasingly identified with the civilian populace, their conception of the military’s purpose within the state progressively diverged from that of political and military elites.\textsuperscript{786}

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Trinkunas notes in a different paper, the unification of the senior ranks in siding with the ruling civilians was essential in both attempts (Ibid, 57).

\textsuperscript{784} The institutionalized controls used in Venezuela were designed to operate with low regime capacity which often made oversight and civilian monitoring difficult. What had held previous generations of officers together was often a willingness from civilian principles to purge dissenters. As mentioned, that did not happen with members of MBR-200 and their counterculture continued to gain strength (Ibid).

\textsuperscript{785} Norden, “Democracy and Military Control.”

\textsuperscript{786} Ibid; Stepan previously identified different conceptions of democracy between the military and political elites as a significant source of civil-military conflict (Alfred Stepan, \textit{Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988)).
The younger officers that supported the coup attempts came from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds, received more progressive, nationalistic military education, and had much more experience in domestic operations than did the more senior generation of officers. Ignoring this cultural division reifies “the military” as a unitary whole and overlooks the important changes that took place in educating and employing the younger generation of officers. The Venezuelan model of classical professionalism “encouraged considerable professional expertise and autonomy while also pursuing the convergence of values” between military and civilian leadership.\textsuperscript{787} But the professionalized system that developed the younger officers and their identification with a broader swath of Venezuelan society led to a sharp divergence in these values.

This is not to say that the generational divide in organizational cultures determined whether an officer would take part in the coup or remain loyal to the regime. For instance, Raúl Baduel—a close friend of Chávez and one of the founders of MBR-200—declined to participate in the coup because he did not think military intervention was a legitimate option in a democracy.\textsuperscript{788} Likewise, the November 1992 coup plotters did include a few senior ranking officers in their number, primarily from the Air Force and Navy. These officers were met with distrust by their more junior co-conspirators in the Army who were acting primarily out of ideological motivations through their connections with MBR-200. This distrust and difference in motivation was an important contributor

\textsuperscript{787} Norden, “Democracy and Military Control,” 146.

\textsuperscript{788} Baduel was heavily influenced by his Taoist beliefs. As a General in 2002, he would again decline to be involved in the April 2002 coup and initially agree to keep his troops in garrison. A few days later he played a key role in the restoration of the Chávez regime. (Nelson, \textit{The Silence and the Scorpion}).
to the coup’s failure.\textsuperscript{789} The fact that the vast majority of coup plotters fell along a generational divide and the different cultural influences that affected each group cannot be ignored. Similar opportunity structures had existed several times since democratization but until 1992, a coherent military culture had inhibited any attempt at military intervention.

\textbf{Chavismo and the Bolivarian Revolution}

This section analyzes the onset of severe polarization in Venezuela and the rise of Hugo Chávez as a populist leader. Consistent with my overall argument, severe polarization was accompanied by military politicization in the form of civilian activation. Chávez pursued a civil-military union that placed the military at the center of his political strategy. Civilian activation was intended to tie the military to both the populist regime and to Chávez himself. Civil-military relations during this period encouraged an increased attachment between the military and the Venezuelan people that fostered the growing culture of conditional subordination. As the younger generation of officers moved into the senior ranks of the military, these changes laid the groundwork for the 2002 coup that briefly ousted Chávez as president.

The cultural shift that led to the coup attempts in 1992 extended beyond just the military. The decreasing legitimacy of the democratic regime and the public’s sudden willingness to accept radical solutions to governmental change marked the beginning of

\textsuperscript{789} Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”

274
the end for Venezuela’s pacted democracy.\textsuperscript{790} The changing organizational culture of the military was founded in the growing connection between the military and society and the failure of Venezuela’s ruling parties to adequately address these issues. The changes that took place in society over the following decade were inseparable from those already underway in the armed forces. As the culture of conditional subordination tied to defense of the Venezuelan people became dominant in the armed forces, opposition parties arose in Venezuela that reflected these same interests.

\textit{Chavismo and Severe Polarization}

For Hugo Chávez, his arrest during the April 1992 coup attempt had vaulted him into the national consciousness and laid the groundwork for future electoral victory in 1998. On the day of his arrest, Chávez was given the opportunity to address television cameras to convince his fellow coup plotters to surrender. He appeared in the military fatigues and red beret that became symbolic of his movement and delivered his infamous speech, “\textit{por ahora,} the objectives we sought were not achieved…we will have new situations. The country…has to embark on the road to a better destiny.”\textsuperscript{791} These words sparked mass support for Chavez that kept him in the national spotlight through his brief time in prison and his presidential election six years later.\textsuperscript{792}

\textsuperscript{790} Philip, “Venezuelan Democracy.”

\textsuperscript{791} Hawkins, “Populism in Venezuela,” 1148.

\textsuperscript{792} Opinion polls from 1992 showed that Chavez enjoyed the support of 67.4\% of the people following his speech and that this popularity remained high over the ensuring years (Angela Zago, \textit{La Rebelión de los angeles} (Caracas: WARP Ediciones, 1998); Damarys Canache, “From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo Chávez,” \textit{Latin American Politics and Society} 44, no. 1 (2002)).
Chavismo—the term given to Chávez’s populist movement—was ultimately about a polarized vision of democracy and is a paradigmatic example of populism in its minimalist form. Rather than polarization centered on cultural divisions as practiced by Trump and often seen in other developed nations, Chávez’s appeals to the popular will through democratic reform contributed to a uniquely long lasting form of populism.\footnote{Hawkins, “Populism in Venezuela.”} Like other forms of populism, Chavismo contained democratic dimensions in that it idealized the popular will of the people but it rejected pluralist and representative forms of democracy that it cast as problematic for the people.\footnote{Ibid.} Chávez appealed to voters that felt left behind and angry about the corruption that had for so long gripped the nation. Polling showed that the vast majority of pro-democracy voters in 1998 supported Chávez over traditional party candidates.\footnote{Canache, “From Bullets to Ballots.”} Following the 1998 election, Venezuela transformed from a pacted democracy that experienced, perhaps, too little polarization to one that rapidly became severely polarized.\footnote{McCoy and Somer describe the corruption of the pacted democracy era as one of “too little polarization” because everything was agreed to in advance with little obvious disagreements or public debate. The result was to divide society through class inequality; divisions that were used and encouraged by Chávez to quickly create a period with deep antipathy between social classes. (McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization”).}
Chavismo required polarization. Initially devoid of a formal policy or ideological basis, Chavismo relied on a charismatic linkage between its leader and the voters and “unusually intense” discourse that pitted the Venezuelan people against the Venezuelan elite. Although Chavistas emphasized leftist policies that focused on wealth redistribution, raising the minimum wage, and land reform, the actual implementation of policies was much less consistent and prioritized electoral gain over ideology. Through the expansion of powers granted to the presidency by the 1999 constitution, the broader Chavismo movement rapidly devolved into a personalistic faction that relied on the popularity of Chávez himself. As such, it became increasingly difficult for some early supporters to reconcile “their reverence for the charismatic leader with their belief in popular empowerment and autonomy.”

Chávez’s reliance on intentionally polarizing tactics that emphasized the differences between the people and the political elites was well received by much of the military.

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798 Although Chávez revealed himself to be a staunch left-wing populist, the initial appeal of Chavismo was grounded in its promise to reform democracy. Chávez’s turn toward “socialism for the 21st century” would not fully reveal itself until around 2003-2004. (Kirk A. Hawkins, Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)).

799 Hawkins makes the point that Chávez’s discourse was intense in that it “featured strong, clear references to an evil elite and assumed a highly bellicose, uncompromising stance.” Although many other populists have used similar tactics, Chávez was “unusual” in his longevity and the ability of Chavismo to maintain such an intensity where others have not. (Kirk A. Hawkins, “Responding to Radical Populism: Chavismo in Venezuela,” Democratization 23, no. 2 (2016), 244).

800 Sylvia and Danopoulos, “The Chavez Phenomenon.”

801 Hawkins, Venezuela’s Chavismo, 7.

802 McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
The encouragement of a social attachment to the military was consistent with the emerging culture of conditional subordination. Chávez came to power at a time when much of the younger generation of officers were rising into the highest ranks of the military. His personalistic control of the military undid many of the institutionalized control mechanisms of the Punto Fijo period and enabled a cultural shift in the military that had long been developing.

**A Civil-Military Union**

As president, Chávez’s military policy was intended to create a civil-military union. In his writings, he outlined a vision of military participation that paralleled the participatory notion of democracy that his movement promoted. Just as he sought to make the people the “protagonists” of Venezuelan democracy, he pursued a civil-military relationship that was “based on integration [with the people], not on domination.”

These efforts were rooted in the charter of MBR-200 which, following the failed coup in 1992, had been refashioned into a political party, the *Movimiento Quinta República* (MVR). The changes that took place politicized the military, deepened the military’s connection to society, and formalized the culture of conditional subordination as the dominant organizational culture of the armed forces.

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Politicization of the military during this period took the form of civilian activation and fundamentally altered the military’s formal role beliefs. Two issue areas provide an example of military politicization via civilian activation: political appointments for military officers and the military’s involvement in social policy. Shortly after taking office, Chávez began placing military officers in high ranking offices throughout the government. In his first term, military officers occupied one-third of cabinet positions. The 1999 constitution, overwhelmingly approved by national referendum, enshrined the military as an “essentially professional institution, without political militancy” that performed its duties at “the exclusive service of the nation and in no case to any person or political party.” Although official government appointments are at first glance incompatible with a constitution that promises an apolitical military


807 Canache, “From Bullets to Ballots.”

808 Article 328, Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1999, translation by the author.
institution, the involvement of military officers in political roles was not necessarily inconsistent with these constitutional statements. Rather, the constitutional arrangement of the armed forces reinforced the cultural belief that the military was beholden to the nation—*la patria*—and political service was a responsibility for military officers that ascribed to these role beliefs. In other words, political service represented an opportunity to ensure the well-being of Venezuelans, not just the interests of the military institution.

This was reinforced by the military’s involvement in social projects and policies. Chávez’s civil-military union was predicated on the idea that the military was an inseparable part of society and therefore had an important and active role to play in the maintenance of the nation.809 Chávez took advantage of the organization and extensive resources of the armed forces to involve them in multiple public works. The military took a leading role in food distribution, various construction projects, and disaster recovery following devastating floods in 1999.810 As a result, public confidence in the military as a nonpartisan institution remained high and military officers further cemented their connection to the Venezuelan people. The military also reinforced a perception of itself as an elite institution, dedicated to “defense of social liberties, the poor, and the marginalized.”811

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809 Strønen, “A Civil-Military Alliance.”

810 Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”

The type of politicization of the military seen under Chávez meets the criteria of civilian activation that was intended to induce military loyalty to the state. These initial changes were political but not—initially—overtly partisan. For instance, of 500 officer promotions requiring presidential approval in 2001, less than 20% identified as either for or against the regime.\textsuperscript{812} It was not until after the 2002 coup that senior ranking officers were required to be members of the president’s party. Still, the military high command was all personally chosen by Chávez and his deep ties to the military ensured that his supporters were put in charge of key combat forces.\textsuperscript{813}

By this point, the military’s organizational culture had three defining characteristics. The first was the history of democratization and the role the armed forces played in ensuring national stability since 1958. The military took great pride in its part in upholding democracy and the role it took in ensuring the continuation of elections throughout this period. The second was the nationalistic influence of Simón Bolivar’s teachings. The changes to the military education system in the 1970s—that were given further emphasis under Chávez—gave rise to a new generation of military officer that saw the military as the fundamental protector of the nation.\textsuperscript{814} Imbued with progressive

\textsuperscript{812} Sylvia and Danopoulos, “The Chavez Phenomenon,” 73.

\textsuperscript{813} For example, Raúl Baduel was quickly promoted through the ranks and by 2002 was in command of Venezuela’s premier fighting force. Nelson indicates that the connection between Baduel and Chávez was not widely known and it was not until after the 2002 coup that senior officers finally understood why Baduel had risen through the ranks so quickly. (Nelson, \textit{The Silence and the Scorpion}).

\textsuperscript{814} Fonseca, Polga-Hecimovich and Trinkunas, “Venezuelan Military Culture.”
and nationalistic ideals, this generation saw the military as being the guarantor of the nation and the rights of the people.

The third influence that defined the organizational culture of the military was epitomized by Chávez’s civil-military union. The polarization that fueled *Chavismo* and the institutional changes implemented by Chávez politicized the military. They also legitimized the cultural of conditional subordination by legally justifying the military’s participation in social policies and providing the military with greater involvement in national affairs. Chávez’s civil-military union formalized the military’s belief in its role in the state that had begun in the 1970s. Politicization accompanied a change in role beliefs that not only permitted but required an increased role in state affairs. As the older generation of officers retired and Chávez stocked the military high commands with loyalists, the new culture originally epitomized by MBR-200 solidified as the dominant organizational culture in the Venezuelan military.

**Military Discontent and Divisions**

For the most part, the military embraced their new role in the state while still acknowledging their subservience to civilian leadership. Internal military responsibilities have commonly been equated with increased politicization and the development of anti-regime sentiment. But military involvement in domestic affairs is not, by itself, enough to indicate the erosion of civilian control.\(^{815}\) The Venezuelan military’s political involvement was consistent with the new changes in domestic law and enshrined in the

\(^{815}\) Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization.
constitution; there was commonality between the military’s perception of its role and the civilian expectations of the military’s role in the state.

As Fitch pointed out, professionalism and politicization are not necessarily inversely related. Venezuelan military culture equated professionalism with service to the country and defense of the Venezuelan people and homeland as critical factors. Politicization via civilian activation was not antithetical to this notion and instead reinforced the dominant view of the military’s purpose in the state. Likewise, the military’s material interests continued to be adequately supported through high wages, benefits, and resourcing. Several of the same appeasement strategies that ensured civilian control under the pacted democracy continued to operate. Thus, from both a corporate interest and an institutional perspective, the opportunity structure for intervention remained low as the military was largely satisfied with both its perceived role in the state and the actual role as implemented by civilian leadership.

However, discontent with the military’s increased involvement in politics came in different forms. The direct inclusion of the military in domestic affairs was criticized but generally only by retired officers. Chávez had also begun dismantling other institutionalized methods for civilian control through additional changes found in the 1999 constitution. The limit on military service was raised from thirty to forty years and the president became the sole arbiter of promotions above the rank of Colonel. In effect,


817 Even as the economy worsened in 2001, Chávez raised military pay and extended additional benefits to the rank-and-file members. (Sylvia and Danopoulos, “The Chavez Phenomenon”).

283
Chávez was able to promote loyalists and increase their time in service an additional ten years. Additionally, changes to the organization of the armed forces consolidated several personnel decisions to the organization as a whole and eliminated the competition between branches that had been a key element of the Punto Fijo agreement.\textsuperscript{818}

Still, as a number of the participants in the 2002 coup noted, the issue of loyalist promotions was a small annoyance compared to the changes that Chávez made to the military’s role in national defense.\textsuperscript{819} As part of his Plan Bolivar 2000,\textsuperscript{820} Chávez embraced an alliance with Cuba and even supported joint training with Cuban military officers. He also ended military operations against Colombian guerrillas that often used Venezuelan territory as staging areas for their operations.\textsuperscript{821} The effect on the military was two-fold: embracing two long-time enemies of Venezuela frustrated many officers and it left the military without a clear role in external defense. The military’s external role was further replaced by internal social support during large scale landslides and flooding in Vargas that killed as many as 30,000 people. The military launched an extended recovery mission that—similar to the effect of the Caracazo riots—further cemented the link between the military and the people.\textsuperscript{822}

\begin{footnotes}
\item Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”
\item Nelson, \textit{Silence and the Scorpion}, 123.
\item Plan Bolivar 2000 was a social program that used the military for a number of social policies, medical services, food distribution, construction, and transportation services across the nation (Strønen, “A Civil-Military Alliance”).
\item Sylvia and Danopoulos, “The Chavez Phenomenon.”
\item Unlike Caracazo however, the military endeared itself to the population through its recovery efforts. (Strønen, “A Civil-Military Alliance”).
\end{footnotes}
The literature is divided on how the increase in the military’s political role should have impacted Venezuelan civil-military relations. Conventional understanding of coup motivations would argue that the failed coups in 1992 were likely to strengthen the inhibitions within the officer corps against conducting another intervention. Likewise, corporate interest approaches would argue that military personnel under Chávez were well regarded, generously provided for, and military preferences were well represented in the state; thus, both their material and non-material interests were satisfied. Although there was some discontent over Chávez’s personalistic management of promotions, institutional autonomy remained high overall. Military involvement in domestic missions has generally been considered a negative influence on civil-military relations in consolidated democracies but as previously discussed, the findings are much more favorable for nations such as Venezuela that have a history of domestic involvement and when such missions are initiated and sanctioned by strong civilian leadership.

In the first two years of his presidency, Chavez’s politicization of the military encouraged their involvement in politics but not in such a way that was obviously detrimental to the state or the military as an organization. Civilian activation encouraged the military’s involvement and promoted a deeper loyalty to the state and the people but not yet to the partisan regime. Consistent with my argument, the Venezuelan military’s culture of conditional subordination was unlikely to forcefully object to these changes.


824 Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization.”
The military prioritized their attachment and commitment to the Venezuelan people. Other changes, such as decreased autonomy and Chávez’s alliance with historical enemies were not sufficiently problematic for challenging civilian control. Such a culture would not be expected to reject civilian inputs until their primary attachment to the state was threatened.

**Cultural Backlash amid Polarization**

A faltering economy and the severe polarization of *Chavismo* set the conditions for social unrest that ultimately dragged the military into sovereign power politics once again. This section argues that the military’s now-dominant culture of conditional subordination was the primary cause of their involvement in the April 2002 coup that briefly removed Chávez from power. Despite civilian-initiated politicization and challenges to military autonomy, it was not until the military’s cultural commitment to the Venezuelan people was threatened that the military acted against the president.

The 2002 coup against Chávez has been written about extensively and several explanations for the military’s decision to intervene have been proposed. The most straightforward explanation argued that the military, empowered by its increased role in domestic politics, sided with political elites amid worsening public unrest and removed the president from office. When the public support for their actions evaporated, the military reversed course and enabled Chávez’s restoration to power. Contributing factors to this decision-making included encouragement from the United States to remove
Chávez from office and threats by Chávez loyalists within the military. These explanations portray the military as taking advantage of the opportunity structure created by polarized civilian elites to intervene in politics. The decision to depose Chávez and the interim civilian government that succeeded him are explained as survival strategies. However, these corporate interest explanations struggle to fully explain the military’s behavior leading up to their decision to remove the president and their motivation for restoring the Chávez regime—a decision that was clearly at odds with the self-interests of the coup leaders.

Military decision-making during the 2002 coup is better explained through a cultural lens and an understanding of the dominant military role belief as one of conditional subordination. As the previous section explained, the military culture in Venezuela was shaped by three dominant influences: their historical pride as founders of the nation and interpretation of Bolivar’s teachings; their role in ensuring the success of Venezuela’s democracy beginning in 1958; and the civil-military union that had been formalized by Chávez. As the following sections make clear, these factors combined to form the perceptions and influence the palette of options that were available to military leaders in 2002.

825 For example, Steven Barracca notes these factors as contributing to the coup and countercoup and adds that divisions within the military made it impossible for the coup to continue. But as discussed below, this analysis leaves out critical evidence in how the coup unfolded and the how the military interpreted the situation (Steven Barracca, “Military Coups in the Post-Cold War Era: Pakistan, Ecuador and Venezuela,” Third World Quarterly 28, no. 1 (2007)).

Rather than a premeditated intervention stemming from the military’s increased political role, the evidence indicates that the Venezuelan military first attempted to remain neutral in the confrontation between Chávez and the opposition. When ordered to use force against unarmed protesters, military leadership was faced with the decision to either follow orders, resign en masse, or intervene and replace the president. The confusion and apparently spontaneous involvement of the military in the dispute suggest that military intervention was unlikely without Chávez’s order to forcefully end the protests.\textsuperscript{827} The military’s culture of conditional subordination that was predicated on their attachment to the Venezuelan people decreased the likelihood that they would use force against the protesters and allowed political intervention to be considered as a legitimate option.\textsuperscript{827}

Instead of seizing power for themselves, the military brokered an agreement with the leaders of the political opposition to temporarily take power until democratic elections could be held. When Pedro Carmona—the opposition leader that assumed the presidency—began suspending portions of the constitution, disbanded the congress and began hunting Chávez’s supporters,\textsuperscript{828} the military withdrew its support and reinstalled the Chávez regime. Here too, the influence of organizational culture is clear. The military

\textsuperscript{827} Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, among others, point to Chávez’s decision to activate Plan Avila as the crucial point at which military support was lost. What is left open is how the military would have reacted had the president never taken this step. Their implication, and mine, is that the military would have remained neutral in the dispute.

viewed their initial intervention as necessary for protecting the Venezuelan people and the national interest. Once it became clear that their support for the opposition was misguided, they again acted with the same motivation and took the best option they perceived as being available. The following sections review the conditions that led to the coup, provide an overview of the four-day interruption of leadership, and more deeply explain the role that organizational culture played in the decision-making process. The actions and statements of military leadership make clear that their behavior was shaped primarily by cultural influence.

**Opportunity for Intervention**

By 2002, the polarizing tactics of *Chavismo* had reached a boiling point. The passage of the 1999 Constitution had provided unprecedented power to the office of the president. Chávez used this power to implement increasingly leftist policies that appealed to the base of his political support. As global oil prices plummeted, the Venezuelan economy contracted significantly and unemployment reached as high as 25%. To continue funding his political projects, the National Assembly—which was overwhelmingly constituted by *chavistas*—passed an enabling law in 2001 which allowed Chávez to rule by decree and “effectively [eliminated] the capacity of the elected opposition to exercise any power.”

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829 Barracca, “Military Coups.”

Chávez used this power to issue a set of 49 enabling laws that were deeply polarizing and intended to reshape national economic power away from the upper classes.\textsuperscript{831} The decrees included land redistribution reforms that significantly decreased the power of landlords in rural areas and the Organic Law of Hydrocarbons that specified changes in the management of the oil industry which accounted for nearly 50% of government revenue and was crucial for funding Chávez’s social programs.\textsuperscript{832} In February 2002, Chávez fired the president of PVDSA and began installing loyalists on the board of managers.\textsuperscript{833}

As Chávez’s policies became more leftist, his regime also became more authoritarian and personalistic. He demonized the media as traitors and railed against the upper class and his political opposition as “oligarchs and escuálidos.”\textsuperscript{834} Chavismo essentially ran on the severe polarization between socioeconomic classes and the differing visions of democracy that they represented. Still, even a number of close Chávez loyalists were

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\textsuperscript{833} Appointing members with no PVDSA experience to the board of directors was an extremely provocative move. Those positions had traditionally been reserved for PVDSA employees that had worked their way to the top of their profession. Chávez effectively eliminated the meritocracy and politicized the board in an unprecedented way (Wilbert, “Economics, Culture, and Politics.”).

\textsuperscript{834} Chávez used escuálidos as a derogatory term for his opponents that denoted weakness. Its literal translation is “emaciated” or “scrawny.” (Samet, “The Photographer’s Body,” 536).
\end{flushleft}
alarmed by the “belligerent, exclusive discourse and increased militarization of the
government.”\textsuperscript{835}

By 2002, Chávez’s new policies had effectively divided the nation between the
upper/middle class and the lower class/chavistas. The final straw for the opposition came
in early April 2002 when Chávez fired the remaining members on the board of PVDSA.
In response, the nation’s largest trade union and the largest business association\textsuperscript{836}
initiated a general strike starting on April 9\textsuperscript{th}. The opposition’s demands quickly escalated
from reinstating PVDSA’s neutrality to calls for Chávez’s resignation.\textsuperscript{837} On April 11\textsuperscript{th},
when a protest march was rerouted toward Miraflores—the presidential palace in
downtown Caracas—Chávez ordered the military into the streets. The military refused
and the following days saw the removal of the president, the installation of a regime
headed by the leader of FEDECAMARAS, and the subsequent restoration of the Chávez
regime.\textsuperscript{838}

\textsuperscript{835} Barry Cannon, “Venezuela, April 2002: Coup or Popular Rebellion? The Myth of a United Venezuela,”

\textsuperscript{836} Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV) and Federación de Cámaras de Comercio y
Producción (FEDECAMARAS), respectively.

\textsuperscript{837} Encarnación, “Venezuela’s ‘Civil Society Coup’,”

\textsuperscript{838} Which side was responsible for “rerouting” the protest on April 11 has received much scrutiny in both
journalistic and official accounts of the April 2002 coup. In fact, the literature is divided on a number of
key events between April 11 and April 14 and there is speculation that Chávez invited a coup attempt in
order to justify taking more extreme action in its aftermath. This matter is made worse by the official
Venezuelan government account of the coup being published as two accounts, one that tends to support the
opposition account and the other representing that of the chavistas (Asamblea Nacional/Comisión
Parlamentaria Especial para investigar los sucesos de Abril de 2002, (2002); Informe de la comisión
Parlamentaria Especial para investigate los sucesos de Abril de 2002). The key differences in these
accounts are well documented in Cannon, “Venezuela, April 2002.” The following section attempts to
avoid bias represented in these accounts by relying on the timeline of events that has been confirmed in
Plan Ávila: A Critical Juncture

A cultural explanation is supported in this case by the initial indecision and lack of agreement among military leaders on what actions to take once the president had ordered the military to intervene against the protesters. Consistent with the cultural attachment to the Venezuelan people, senior military elites shared a common perception that the military should not be used to suppress the protests but there was no consensus on further courses of action and little collective desire for open intervention against the president. The strategies of action developed by senior military officers were highly influenced by the practices, norms, and ideas that had defined their service. At issue was the president’s order to use force against the protesters, the legitimacy of the president as a result of these actions, and the options available to military leadership to respond.

As the public protest became larger and began marching toward Miraflores, Chávez ordered the implementation of Plan Ávila. Venezuela’s highest ranking generals had all resisted efforts to mobilize the military in response to the march but Chávez was able to reach a lower ranking general, Jorge Luis García Carneiro, who ordered a tank

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839 Generals Rincón and Rosendo, the two officers who directly outranked Velasco had both refused to implement Plan Ávila but were divided in their next steps (Nelson, Silence and the Scorpion).

840 Plan Ávila and other uses of military force against civilians had been outlawed as part of the 1999 constitution. The inclusion of this in the 1999 constitution was a direct appeal to the military’s reaction against the use of Plan Avila during the Caracazo riots and speaks to the importance which the military viewed its attachment to the Venezuelan people. However, Chávez’s political advisors had discussed the use of Plan Ávila in meetings with the military high command for at least a week prior to these events (Ibid, 20).
battalion to secure the presidential palace. The tanks never reached Miraflores as the commander of the battalion was ordered to return to base and General Velasco—the head of the Army—ordered a nationwide military lockdown to prevent any additional deployment of forces. Velasco cited two priorities with the lockdown: to prevent any use of force against civilian protesters and to prevent any military units from acting against the president.

The refusal to follow the president’s orders sparked questions on the president’s legitimacy among military leaders. Chávez was clearly the legitimately elected ruler of Venezuela and open revolt was a difficult line to cross for many generals who would rightly be considered loyalists. However, the president’s actions were judged as erratic and the use of military force against civilians had been outlawed in the 1999 Constitution, “even in a state of emergency.” At multiple points, the military leadership’s decision to disobey Chávez was communicated to the president as “an act of disobedience” and a refusal to follow unlawful orders rather than any attempt to replace civilian leadership.

For example, General Rincón was the Inspector General and the senior officer in the Armed Forces, General Rosendo was the Supreme Commander of the armed forces and second only to Rincón, Generals Velasco and Ruiz were the head and second in command of the Army, respectively. These, along with most other Army generals, had ignored or refused the president’s order. General Carneiro was the commander of the Third Army Division and accepted Chávez’s order. (Ibid).

After three years in office and the way he had taken control of the military promotion and appointment system, nearly all of Venezuela’s highest ranking generals had some personal connection to Chávez and were in their current positions because of him. For instance, General Velasco was personally selected by Chávez to lead the army less than four months prior to the coup.

Article 45, Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1999, translation by the author.

Similar statements were communicated directly to the president by Luis Miqulena who was a mentor to Chávez and the intellectual leader of Chavismo as a political philosophy and by General Rosendo who had
This was reiterated in public addresses by the heads of Venezuela’s military branches. The message from the military leadership was that the president’s actions were illegitimate and that they “would not take to the streets to fight against Venezuelans.”

As Chávez continued urging armed resistance to the protests and began calling out his paramilitary forces, his civilian allies began withdrawing their support. In one public statement, Luis Miquilena—a long time mentor to Chávez and one of the intellectual leaders of Chavismo—publicly withdrew his support and urged the president to resign. That military involvement occurred after the withdrawal of civilian support seems to support the alternative explanation that the military was employing survival strategies but rather than intervening in the dispute, the initial response from military leadership was resignation. Velasco, Rincón, and Rosendo all separately attempted to resign their positions to the president but were either denied or talked out of it. Velasco, specifically, was convinced by other Army leaders that he could not resign and must remain in place to prevent further bloodshed. The attempted use of legal resignations to signal dissent rather than illegal intervention is consistent with the cultural elements of the Venezuelan military described above.

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846 General Velasco statement on April 11, reprinted in Nelson, Silence and the Scorpion, 133.

847 Toro, “The Untold Story of Venezuela’s 2002 April Crisis.”
Although Velasco quickly emerged as the face of the military’s resistance, it was still not clear what path their resistance would take. Ultimately, an announcement was made that Chávez would resign and with the Vice President and most of the cabinet officials having gone into hiding, the military high command negotiated with the civilian opposition to install Pedro Carmona as the president of a civil-military transitional government.\textsuperscript{848} However, when Carmona disbanded congress, suspended the Constitution, announced his intent to replace all state governors, and began hunting down chavistas, the military quickly withdrew their support.\textsuperscript{849} Velasco, surrounded by other high ranking officers, again addressed the public reiterating that “the members of the national armed forces guarantee the security of all the people of Venezuela,” and that steps would be taken to restore the constitution and democratic institutions of the nation.\textsuperscript{850} The brief Carmona regime was ended amid growing pro-Chávez protests and a counter-coup from the palace guard who—working with the Army—returned Chávez to power.\textsuperscript{851}

\textsuperscript{848} Chávez initially agreed to a conditional resignation that included safe transport for himself to Cuba and a guarantee of safety for his family. General Rincón prematurely announced this resignation to the nation. Chávez resisted putting the resignation in writing until his conditions were met. He later insisted that he didn’t resign and had never intended to. (Nelson, \textit{Silence and the Scorpion}); Scott Wilson, “Leader of Venezuela is Forced to Resign,” \textit{The Washington Post}, April 13, 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/04/13/leader-of-venezuela-is-forced-to-resign/cc06e4b8-5753-49b9-b3ec-864350cb762c/.


\textsuperscript{851} The commander of the palace guard was working with General Baduel who controlled a not insignificant amount of military force in Maracay. Although Baduel had initially agreed with Velasco to keep his forces in garrison, he reversed course once the intentions of the Carmona regime became clear and threatened to intervene on behalf of Chávez (Nelson, \textit{Silence and the Scorpion}).
A Cultural Explanation

The courses of action taken by the military during the coup are best understood by an organizational culture framework. A permissible opportunity structure existed for the coup attempt—for example, a failing economy, loss of public trust, and divided political elites. Echoing analysis of the 1992 coup attempt, the fact that a coup attempt occurred was sometimes described as less surprising than the fact that it did not succeed. As Taylor argued, “organizational culture can often inhibit military coups, or make them weak and likely to fail, even if the opportunities are relatively high…and there are strong corporate interest motives for intervention.” I argue that the cultural norms of the Venezuelan military in 2002 inhibited a successful coup by constraining the options that the majority of military leaders saw as legitimate strategies of action.

Amid the worsening crisis, the military was faced with three options: to take illegal or extraconstitutional actions to retain incumbent power by following Chávez’s order to implement Plan Ávila; to remain neutral and take no action by remaining in the barracks and allowing civilians to decide the outcome; or to align with the opposition. Given the longevity of civilian control, the recent failed coup attempts in 1992, Chávez attentiveness to military interests, and the widespread placement of regime loyalists among military elites, the expected outcome in this case was military elites siding with Chávez or remaining neutral. However, Venezuela’s military leadership ultimately chose

852 Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”
853 Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army, 30.
to align with the opposition—an outcome that was consistent with their dominant organizational culture. Three choices stand out as especially illustrative of this assertion.

First, the decision to resist the implementation of Plan Ávila demonstrated the prioritization of their role belief as protectors of the people rather than the regime. There is little to indicate that the military would have intervened had this order not been given. The cultural norms that solidified following military involvement in the Caracazo riots made forceful suppression of civilian protests unthinkable. Second, the indecision and lack of a cohesive plan among the generals demonstrated that there was never any intention to seize power for themselves or to achieve other instrumental goals. The military remained loyal and involved until Chávez ordered Plan Ávila. After this point, the military’s actions demonstrated a lack of clear objectives and a continued resistance to overt involvement. Even among the highest echelon of coup supporters, there was much back and forth between the generals and Chávez on the most legitimate path forward.

This is not to say that culture determined or guaranteed these actions. The interpretative approach adopted in this project recognizes that culture has an agentic aspect and that the same structural conditions will not act equally nor be interpreted

854 Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization.”

855 Rincón, Rosendo, Velasco, and Usón (a General serving as the head of the treasury at the time) have been highlighted as the core of the military opposition. At various points all offered their own resignation, urged the president to resign, and variously acted as go-betweeners between the president and the civilian opposition.
identically by all actors. For example, while the majority of the Venezuelan high command disobeyed Chávez’s order to use force against the protesters, General Carneiro acted immediately in his attempt to deploy a tank battalion to protect Miraflores. Likewise, the indecision of how to proceed once Chávez was taken into custody reflects the differing personal interests of many of the generals. While some saw Chávez’s arrest as a point of no return, others—such as Rincón and Rosendo—continued working toward a peaceful, political solution. After the decision to remove Chávez was made, corporate interests and self-preservation likely played a significant role in individual decisions on how to proceed.

Culture does not prevent these types of disagreements and aberrant cases. Instead, it shapes a collective, organizational perception of the situation and the options available to cultural members in which these structural and interest-based inputs act. These differing viewpoints existed within the same cultural medium. That is to say, the consequences of implementing Plan Ávila or of deposing the president were interpreted similarly by all members. There was no question that both actions were unacceptable in the current civil-military relationship. That some actors were more strongly influenced by personal attachments to the president—for instance, both Carneiro and Baduel described themselves as close compañeros of Chávez—or other competing influences is not


857 General Jorge Luis García Carneiro, “We Do Not Represent Any Caste, We Come From the People,” Interview with Marta Harnecker, 7.

298
surprising. The outcome of interest is based on the collective perceptions of cultural members whose development of strategies of action were consistent with what a culture of conditional subordination would lead one to expect.

Third, the nearly immediate withdrawal of support from the Carmona regime demonstrated sincerity of motivation in the military’s behavior. Despite the realization that reinstalling the Chávez regime would be bad for nearly all the military leadership, military leaders nevertheless withdrew their support when it became clear that Carmona had no intention of preserving the constitution. Typical of a culture of conditional subordination, the military felt an obligation to act in the “national interests of the Nation.”\textsuperscript{858} The brief Carmona regime indicated the dissolution of a political solution and, acting despite the obvious potential for personal costs, the military again took action to impose order and restore the previous government.

**Summarizing the Argument**

The casual weight of organizational culture in this case is especially clear when applying the three-part test introduced in Chapter 1. First, the actions of the Venezuelan military leadership were culturally motivated and not easily explained by other factors. Arguments that focus on corporate interests or a lack of institutional autonomy do not well account for the military’s actions in these cases. Despite national economic trouble, the military remained well paid, well resourced, and their preferences were well accounted for in national decision-making through their representation both in the cabinet.

\textsuperscript{858} Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*, 68.
and in important bureaucratic postings.\textsuperscript{859} There was little obvious threat to institutional interests.

Some lack of autonomy was experienced under Chávez, particularly in his embrace of a Cuban alliance and the allowance of Colombian rebel groups to operate unfettered in Venezuelan territory. But the overall autonomy of the military in conducting operations and providing support to the people had increased substantially under Chávez.\textsuperscript{860} Also, the senior military leadership by this point was almost entirely constituted of Chávez loyalists and there is little evidence that pressure from lower ranks contributed to military decision-making.\textsuperscript{861} It is unlikely that civilian intrusions on military autonomy significantly contributed to military motivation among this group of loyalists. If anything, autonomy adversely contributed to the military’s view of itself as defenders of the nation and made intervention more, not less, likely.\textsuperscript{862}

Other explanations have often focused on the increasing involvement of the military in domestic affairs as a precursor to military intervention. The argument is that domestic involvement invites an erosion of civilian control and internal missions contribute to adverse politicization of the military making the military more prone to providing its own

\textsuperscript{859} Sylvia and Danopoulos, “The Chavez Phenomenon.”
\textsuperscript{860} Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization,” 22.
\textsuperscript{862} David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy”; Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization” 23.
solution for political shortcomings. However, in the Venezuelan case, the actual timeline of events does not support these explanations. It was not until Chávez ordered Plan Ávila that the military disobeyed the president. There is little evidence to indicate that the military would have acted had this order not been given.

Furthermore, the military had steadily increased its domestic role in the state since the 1989 Caracazo riots. Their involvement in development and recovery projects was viewed as legitimate by both military and civilian leaders and was in line with the dominant role beliefs of the military. As was common in several South American countries, the military often took on domestic roles to supplement a lack of state capacity or in times of social crisis. As others have noted, the political effect of a military that is domestically focused is often dependent on how both the military and civilians view their role in the state and is generally less detrimental to democracy given strong civilian leadership—as was the case in Venezuela.

The most compelling alternate explanation for the coup and Chávez’s subsequent return to power is offered by Steven Barracca. Focusing primarily on the reasons the


864 Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization.”

865 Fitch, Armed Forces and Democracy; Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, “Democratization.”

coup failed, he argued that public mobilization against the coup, and disunity among the Venezuelan generals, were both causal. These factors have previously been shown to play a large role in the success or failure of military interventions. These are compelling explanations and certainly played a role. However, the arguments lack a deeper analysis of the domestic issues that led to the uprising and, furthermore, they do not discount the role that culture played in shaping the choices available among military leaders.

Loss of public support for Chávez offers a compelling explanation for military intervention, particularly given the military’s organizational culture that drew a significant part of its relational identity from its connection to the Venezuelan people. But as Barracca notes, polling just prior to the uprising in April indicated that only a slim majority of Venezuelans wanted Chávez to step down and he continued to enjoy strong support among the lower classes—his primary political base. It is also important to note that the April general strike was not the first instance of widespread public demonstrations against the president. In each previous case, the military had remained sidelined and content in its role. Further, while there was a counter-mobilization of Chávez supporters that demanded his return, it didn’t materialize in significant numbers.

867 Barracca, “Military Coups.”

868 For example, see Daniel Sutter, “Legitimacy and Military Intervention in a Democracy: Civilian Government as a Public Good,” American Journal of Economics and Sociology 58, no. 1 (1999); Thompson, “Organizational Cohesion.”

869 Barracca, “Military Coups,” 146.
until after Carmona announced steps to suspend the democratic institutions and the military was already in the process of restoring the government.\textsuperscript{870} 

Baracca correctly notes the disunity in the military over how to proceed but tends to overestimate its importance. At no point was it clear that the military had a unified plan on how to move forward. However, each public address from military leadership during the events was conducted by large groups of senior officers including the heads of each branch. It was General Rincón—a staunch loyalist who retained his attachment and position under Chávez even after the coup—who prematurely announced the president’s resignation and the intention to establish an interim government.\textsuperscript{871} Although there was internal disagreement among the leadership, the military presented a unified external front throughout the ordeal. 

The most compelling evidence Barracca offers is the danger of internal military divisions that threatened to pit General Velasco against a large force controlled by General Baduel. While Baduel originally agreed to keep his forces in garrison, he had begun planning a rescue of the detained president. But again, serious steps in this direction weren’t taken until after Carmona’s initial address to the country. Still, the unwillingness by Velasco and other senior leaders to engage in direct fighting with other elements of the Armed Forces cannot be discounted as a motivation for their actions. 

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\textsuperscript{870} Nelson, Silence and the Scorpion.

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Even if accurate, however, this motivation does not exclude the role that culture played. In other instances of domestic emergencies, the Venezuelan military consistently displayed a willingness to resolve internal differences and unite around their institutional identity that went to great “lengths to avoid being placed in situations that would lead it to order the use of force against other elements of the Venezuelan military or against the people.”

In short, despite their internal disagreements, avoiding conflict within the armed forces was a foundational piece of the organization’s cultural identity.

Second, the culture of conditional subordination was not simply a consequence of the immediate context. The role beliefs and cultural norms adopted by the Venezuelan military had developed over time and the new strategies of action chosen in 2002 were consistent with the preexisting ethos of the organization. Changes to the military’s culture predated the Chávez regime. The adoption of Bolivarian nationalism, the perception of the military as the founding source of democracy and the nation, and the attachment to the Venezuelan people were, by this time, entrenched sources of military identity.

Chávez’s implementation of a civil-military union and the changes to the constitution are best seen as formalizations of a relationship that had begun nearly thirty years prior.

Finally, the cultural motivations in this case were not employed instrumentally to achieve other interests. In other words, the costs of the leadership’s decisions were clear throughout the incident and were later realized when Chávez regained power. Most

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873 Ibid, 9.
illustrative here is the decision to support the restoration of the Chávez regime. Once back in the president’s palace, Chávez jailed, discharged or otherwise persecuted more than 40% of Venezuela’s generals—including Velasco—and hundreds of junior officers and members of the secret police. Any coup attempt comes with personal risk for those involved but the decision to reinstall the deposed president despite having succeeded is especially puzzling if not viewed through a cultural lens. Senior military leadership took these actions despite awareness of the likely outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The Venezuelan case supports my overall argument. The new strategies of action developed by the Venezuelan military during the 2002 coup were consistent with the collective practices, norms, and ideas that were preexisting in the organization. The military’s dominant organizational culture in 2002 was best described as one of conditional subordination in which the military sought to avoid political interference but felt “obligated to safeguard the highest national interests.” In this case, the dominant military culture defined their highest interests as the defense of the Venezuelan people.

Severe polarization incentivized Chávez to alter the civil-military relationship. As a result, the military was politicized via civilian activation. Chavismo pulled the military into politics through political appointments and by granting greater policy influence to military leaders. Personal loyalty to Chávez was cultivated through appeasement

874 Tamayo, “Chávez Purging Military.”

875 Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*, 68.
strategies that satisfied both material and non-material interests. For the most part, the military did little to resist this pull into politics as it was aligned with their cultural role beliefs. It was not until Chávez ordered a violent response to civilian protests that the military’s culture came into conflict with the president’s partisan agenda and the decision to intervene was made.

Organizational culture did not predetermine the 2002 coup. Rather, it constrained the options that military leadership viewed as legitimate—such as forceful suppression of civilian protests—and allowed for the development of new strategies of action that resulted in deposing Chávez. Military elites’ first reaction to political instability was to remain neutral and, for some, to offer their resignations rather than continue their support for the president. When Chávez contradicted the established role beliefs of the military by ordering the forceful suppression of protests, neutrality became impossible and the military defied the president. As the opportunity for a political solution dissolved, the military sided with the opposition in an attempt to restore order. When that solution revealed itself as a threat to the Venezuelan people, military leaders reversed course and acted to restore the most legitimate civilian leadership that was available. All of these actions are consistent with a cultural role belief of conditional subordination.876

One of the lessons from the Venezuelan case is the degree to which military organizational culture is constructed by civilian inputs. During democratization, civilian leaders deliberately crafted the conditions under which a culture of classical

876 Ibid.
professionalism developed and purged military defections that arose in the early years of the democratic regime. Structural controls were used to define the acceptable boundaries of the civil-military relationship. Over time, these solidified into widespread cultural practices. Chávez took similar action following the 2002 coup. He further entrenched his personalistic control of the military, redesigned the officer education system to focus on partisan loyalty to the regime, and required officers to be members of his political party. The result was a loyal military that became a source of regime stability and shepherded both Chávez and his successor through a series of public crises but was devoid of any of the hallmarks of democratic civil-military relations.

On the other hand, military practices in the 1970s and 1980s were not met with the same actions. Some changes occurred organically and were the unexpected consequences of professionalization—for example, the changes to the military education system, the social mobility opportunities offered by military service, and the continued close contact between civilians and military officers that resulted from increased domestic operations.

877 Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”


Others were more glaring. Rather than enforcing cultural boundaries, both civilian and military elites allowed the members of MBR-200 to continue their careers, progress through the ranks, and spread their ideology. Organizational culture is learned and is constructed from a pattern of reinforcement and sanctioning that reinforces organizational practices.\textsuperscript{880} A lack of enforcement left room for the emergence of a competing culture that ultimately became dominant when it was formalized under Chávez’ civil-military union construct.

Previous research has identified that democratic institutions are inherently weakened by populism and severe polarization.\textsuperscript{881} The impact of severe polarization on civilian control of the military in Venezuela offers a similar lesson. The Venezuelan case indicates that institutionalized civilian control and a culture of classical professionalism are often not enough to resist capture by populist or polarizing leaders. Institutionalizing civilian control is an excellent tool for molding resilient institutions and was largely responsible for democratic resilience during the 1992 coup attempt. But, as Chávez demonstrated, institutional norms and controls can be reversed and longevity of tradition is not in itself enough to prevent intervention.\textsuperscript{882} Once undone, the decision-making and strategies of action available to military leaders are largely a result of their organizational

\textsuperscript{880} Kwantes and Glazer, \textit{Culture, Organizations, and Work}.

\textsuperscript{881} For example, see Weyland, “How Populism Dies.” Weyland’s full argument is that the populism inevitably weakens institutions and ultimately strangles itself because of a lack of a functioning state. However, as other scholars have noted, Chávez was a particularly intense and unique populist that largely managed to escape the populist trap that Weyland describes (Hawkins, “Responding to Radical Populism”).

\textsuperscript{882} Fitch, \textit{Armed Forces and Democracy}, xv.
culture. Put differently, culture acts as a backstop to the type of threats that occur amid severe polarization. It can either resist capture—as in the U.S. case—or it can invite intervention as it did in Venezuela.
Chapter Six: Cultural Divides in the South Africa Defense Force

“We would also like to pay tribute to our security forces, in all their ranks, for the distinguished role they have played in securing our first democratic elections and the transition to democracy, from blood-thirsty forces which still refuse to see the light.”

- Nelson Mandela

On May 10, 1994, Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as president of South Africa. His inauguration officially ended the apartheid period that had dominated South African politics since 1948. As Mandela took the oath of office, he was surrounded by military leaders that had fought against his organization for more than three decades. The symbolic importance of the moment was obvious. In the years leading up to the elections, the South African Defense Force (SADF) had been the most powerful entity in the state and enjoyed enormous autonomy and influence in nearly every aspect of state policymaking. The military was the central pillar of apartheid’s “radical survival plan” that was intended to ensure the hegemony of the white population “at all costs.”


Ultimately, however, the SADF chose to support the peace process that ended apartheid and led to democratic elections. Despite enormous political influence and a permissive opportunity structure for intervention, the SADF chose to remain neutral and support the political solution that transpired. The outcome of interest in the South African case was a military non-intervention.

This chapter argues that the SADF’s organizational culture played an explanatory role in inhibiting intervention in the early 1990s and allowed military leadership to support the democratic transition. The pre-existing ethos of the force informed military leaders as they developed new strategies of action during the contemptuous period that led to political transition. Critical to this argument were the competing cultural ideologies that long existed within the SADF. Throughout its history the SADF was torn between two dominant role beliefs. The ideology of classical professionalism that would emerge as dominant and support the political transition was influenced by the SADF’s western origins, valued the apolitical traditions of a military that was responsive to civilian direction, and prioritized the external defense of the nation. In contrast, civilian-driven politicization of the military gave rise to a competing ideology that viewed the military as a power factor within the state and a vital participant in the national project with a legitimate role in domestic politics. The SADF’s role in the state throughout the apartheid era was defined by a competition between these two cultures.885

As in Venezuela, the South African case also illustrates the ways in which military organizational culture is constructed and modified by civilian influences. The SADF’s origins as a British organization, modifications under the National Party that remade it as an Afrikaner force, combat experiences during campaigns in Angola, and politicization via executive invitation during the 1980s all left behind observable cultural artifacts that played important roles in the military’s eventual decision to support the end of apartheid. This is not to say that the SADF merely adapted its organizational outlook to civilian preferences. Rather, the SADF’s organizational culture was self-reinforcing in that it shaped the shared worldview of organizational members and constrained their collective actions within the acceptable boundaries that were defined by changing domestic conditions and reinforced by civilian inputs. These civilian inputs were critical in altering the salience of particular ideologies and tipping the scales in the cultural struggle for dominance within the armed forces.

The military’s willingness to support political change has received surprisingly little direct attention in the literature and is often treated as a complimentary element of the overall transformation that took place. This is particularly unexpected considering much of the literature from the 1980s on the SADF predicted intervention, insurrection, or at the very least, significant disruption to any proposed changes. The literature is replete with explanations for the “small miracle” of the end of apartheid itself. In some views the

domestic and international pressures of maintaining apartheid were simply too great and drastic reform was inevitable. Others have pointed to the ideological collapse of Afrikaner superiority in the face of an opponent that “extolled human rights and non-racialism.” Kaufmann offered symbolic politics as an explanation in that apartheid had always represented protection for the Afrikaner volk. As geopolitical circumstances changed, the “continuation of apartheid came to be seen as more threatening than its dismantlement.” It has also been hypothesized that State President F.W. de Klerk “simply miscalculated” during negotiations and rather than negotiating over some necessary reforms to apartheid, the result was a tearing down of the entire system.

What has been written on the SADF’s role has generally focused on the military’s repressive activities prior to the transition, negotiations with Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) as part of the peace process, or the transformation from the SADF to the post-apartheid South African National Defense Force (SANDF). The most common explanation for the SADF’s political neutrality has focused on the military’s pragmatic approach to preserve its corporate interests in exchange for political neutrality. As Ellis noted, the African National Congress (ANC) had “the wisdom to offer the National Party constitutional terms which were broadly acceptable to the SADF generals…and thus to tempt them into


889 Giliomee, “Surrender Without Defeat.”


891 Giliomee, “Surrender Without Defeat,” 188.
peace.” Such an explanation is common feature of literature on democratic transitions. But while preserving SADF corporate interests certainly played some part in the South African case it does not tell the whole story. Negotiations with the ANC as well as the earlier political transition that occurred in Namibia modeled a viable exit strategy that could be followed in South Africa. But it was an ideology of classical professionalism already resident in the SADF’s culture that enabled military leadership to so quickly shift directions and accept the options provided to them without plunging the country into further turmoil.

In fact, the military’s corporate interests—organizational autonomy, resources, and organizational coherence—were all unquestionably threatened by the prospect of a black majority government. Only its institutional survival was guaranteed throughout the transition period but even this was compromised by the potential for retaliation against individual SADF senior leaders by an ANC government. Appealing to SADF corporate interests may have placated some of the more reluctant reformers but, as will be discussed, many of these appeals did not occur until transition was all but assured and many others never materialized at all. Still, had the political process not provided sufficient accommodation for SADF interests, the outcome may very well have been different. Rather than a competing argument, however, a cultural approach to SADF behavior accounts for this contradiction. In other words, the SADF’s acceptance of the


893 For example, Adam Przeworski, Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern and Latin America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
transition process during the formation of the SANDF and its advocacy for maintaining professional standards as a key element of the integration was indicative of culturally derived preferences that had been inherent in the SADF since its formation.\textsuperscript{894}

This chapter first briefly describes the severe polarization in South Africa during the apartheid period and its role in the militarization of South African society. The next section establishes the cultural foundation of the SADF from its inception through its first failed intervention in Angola. The following section analyzes military politicization that occurred in the 1980s and describes the conflict between the pragmatic, professionally oriented role belief of the military and the more politically active, racially ideological role belief. The chapter then analyzes the SADF’s role in the events that led to the end of apartheid by examining the influence on organizational culture of two critical junctures: the SADF’s defeat at Cuito Cuanavale and F.W. de Klerk’s assumption of the presidency. Finally, the chapter analyzes the role of organizational culture during the democratic transition and the creation of the SANDF.

**South Africa’s Severe Polarization**

Severe polarization in South Africa revolved around national identity and took the form of racial divisions in which the country’s white minority fought to maintain its dominance over the black majority. Apartheid, implemented following the National Party’s electoral victory in 1948, institutionalized the political, social, and economic domination of the country by the white minority. Polarization around racial identity is a

formative rift that is especially difficult to reconcile.\textsuperscript{895} In the South African case, the ruling party structured political functions to reinforce racial differences and created a crisis of representation in which the majority of the population enjoyed few civil rights. Race was the primary division but polarization was also fueled by religion that framed Afrikaners as a “chosen people” that must secure the future of white civilization in Africa. Thus, both the black and, to a much lesser degree, the English-speaking white populations were depicted as national enemies.\textsuperscript{896}

The combination of racial discrimination and religious justification was also used to present the conflict as part of an international one of Christianity versus “godless communism.”\textsuperscript{897} The communist threat was frequently used to soften the central issue of race, particularly as international support for the South African government waned. Prime Minister P.W. Botha claimed that “the battle in South Africa was not between black and white but between Christian civilization and Communism.”\textsuperscript{898} The combined “black and red” threats were used by the National Party to stoke fear among the white population and depict Afrikaners as being besieged on all sides by enemies that sought their destruction.\textsuperscript{899} This siege mentality led to the militarization of polarization in a way rarely

\textsuperscript{895} McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”
\textsuperscript{896} Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid,” 15; Giliomee, \textit{Afrikaners}.
\textsuperscript{897} Prime Minister D.F. Malan quoted in Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid,” 16.
\textsuperscript{898} Prime Minister P.W. Botha quoted in Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid,” 22.
\textsuperscript{899} Howe, “South African Defence Force.”
seen in other cases. The security forces, first the South African Police (SAP) and later the SADF, became the central pillars that upheld apartheid.

Organized armed resistance to apartheid began shortly after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. The massacre, in which 69 unarmed protesters were killed by police, was a significant turning point for both sides of the conflict. In response to the violence, the ANC—spurred on by the South African Communist Party—established its armed wing, MK, and embraced the violent resistance that paralleled its peaceful protest efforts. In the following two years alone, MK and its loose network of affiliates conducted more than 400 acts of sabotage against the South African state.900

For white society, the reaction to Sharpeville justified much of their fear of the black majority and its confluence with global communism.901 Amid international condemnation, the government doubled-down on its efforts to preserve white civilization against the black and red threats.902 Both the ANC and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) were outlawed. John Vorster was appointed as the Minister of Justice and new, extralegal authorities were granted to the SAP.903 Under Vorster, who later served as prime minister, the SAP developed an expertise in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations both inside of South Africa and in operations in Rhodesia and Namibia where MK sought


901 Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid.”

902 Howe, “South African Defence Force and Political Reform.”

903 Ellis, “ANC’s Armed Struggle.”
alliances with various guerrilla armies such as the South West African People’s
Organization (SWAPO) and ZIPRA, the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African People’s
Union.904

Beginning in the early 1980s, more traditional political polarization emerged between
white elites. Factional divisions split the National Party between more liberal whites that
recognized the need to quickly reform apartheid and hardline conservatives that favored a
much more moderate approach to reform. Complicating matters was the growing
popularity of the Conservative Party that had deep ties with far-right extremist groups
and opposed reform altogether.905 The SADF was caught in the middle of these debates.
The military was the central pillar upholding the National Party’s apartheid management
but its leadership maintained close ties to far-right leaders such as Eugene Terre Blanche
and a majority of its officers identified as Conservative party members.906 By the end of
the decade, white politics were dominated by debates on whether to reform, how far to
reform, and how fast to reform but the central question of racial integration, political
power-sharing, and the end of apartheid altogether was still very much in question.

South Africa’s Military Culture and Traditions

Severe polarization in South Africa created a novel environment for the development
of the SADF’s organizational culture. Because polarization was so foundational to the

904 Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
905 Timothy D. Sisk, “White Politics in South Africa: Polarization Under Pressure,” South Africa Today 36,
existence of the South African state, military behavioral choices were often caught between contradictory motivations in a way not seen in other cases. By most accounts, the military was a western-oriented force that valued its apolitical traditions and sought professional autonomy to ensure the external defense of the nation. In this vein, the SADF has been described as “Huntingtonian by nature with efforts to both depoliticize and professionalize its members.” 907 The origins of the SADF—then the Union Defense Force (UDF)—while the country was still under British dominion laid the foundation for a force that adopted a western-outlook on civil-military relations, was subordinate to civilian rule, and was traditionally averse to political intervention. The volume and variety of threats for which the SADF was responsible throughout the 1970s and 1980s also contributed to a professional ingenuity that became a source of pride for the force. 908

More or less simultaneously, the military was inherently political, seen by the black majority as an armed wing of the National Party, and the primary vessel for the dissemination of a militarized ideology throughout white South African society. 909 By the 1980s, the SADF’s identity was seen as dependent on the “pre-existence of the white state.” 910 Threats to National Party rule led to an extreme politicization of the force and the adoption of a “special operations mentality” and a “need-to-know” culture in which

909 Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians; Griffiths, “South African Civil-Military Relations.”
910 Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians, 171.
military actions that transgressed “normal military ethics” were justified as necessary for fulfilling the force’s functional imperative and civilian awareness of the totality of military action was limited.\textsuperscript{911} Thus, the SADF’s culture was defined by a near-constant struggle for dominance between contradictory ideologies.\textsuperscript{912} This section describes the bases for these competing cultures by examining the unique blend of social and political influences that acted on the military.

\textbf{The British Origins of an African Military}

Great Britain played a consequential role in the development of the UDF as South Africa remained a British commonwealth until 1961. During this period, the ruling white minority was divided between Afrikaners and English-speaking whites. These divisions were aggravated by Louis Botha’s embrace of the British Empire following his election as the first prime minister. Botha’s goal was to build a unified white nation. However, without any significant indigenous defense industry or organic training capability, Botha and Jans Smuts—another Boer war hero and the first minister of defense—tied the training, resourcing, and organization of the new military to British traditions.

This reliance extended to using British officers as instructors at South African military schools and a cadre of British officers that took equivalent positions within the UDF.\textsuperscript{913} In essence, the UDF was “trained in the British tradition to serve under British

\textsuperscript{911} Seegers, “Current Trends,” 169; Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”

\textsuperscript{912} Frankel, \textit{Pretoria’s Praetorians}, xv.

command, with British equipment.”

Even as animosity deepened between Afrikaners and English-speaking whites, British influence remained dominant within the military. Disaffection between the two groups was further enflamed when South Africa entered World War II on the British side and many Afrikaners avoided military service entirely. As a result, by 1948, the UDF was “almost entirely British…in both appearance and ethos.”

The British origins of the SADF left two lasting contributions to its organizational culture. First, the SADF retained much of the British regimental tradition, particularly in that portion of the reserve forces known as the Citizen Force. These units maintained their own traditions, regalia, and unique corporate identities that existed within the larger organizational culture of the SADF. The relative autonomy of these individual units continued throughout the ensuing decades. Second, scholars consistently credit the early British influence with the SADF’s lasting tradition of civilian obedience and apolitical service. Even during the height of the organization’s political influence in the 1980s, regulations continued to be passed that prohibited members from political activity.

914 Ibid, 68.


916 Visser, “British Influence,” 73.

917 Esterhuyse, “Comparing Apples With Pears.”

918 Frankel, *Pretoria’s Praetorians*.

Although the SADF itself became deeply involved with state policymaking, the organization still cultivated this ideology of classical professional, an ethos of apolitical service to a higher duty, and a high regard for civilian control among individual members.

**The ‘Afrikanerization’ of the SADF**

The domination of English-speaking whites and British influence in the South African armed forces began to change with the National Party’s victory in the 1948 election. Opposed to any excessive attachment to Great Britain, Prime Minister D.F. Malan and Minister of Defense F.C. Erasmus sought to elevate Afrikaner culture throughout white society and “eradicate the vestiges of the imperial mentality and English-speaking dominance.”\(^{920}\) But the continued supremacy of the small white population required unification. Erasmus viewed the military as the keystone for spreading Afrikaner culture to all parts of white society.\(^{921}\) Erasmus’ influence constructed a cultural ideology of the military as a power factor in South African society.

As black resistance to apartheid began to escalate, National Party propaganda played on white fears to emphasize the need for all white male citizens to protect their civilization.\(^{922}\) In remaking the armed forces in the new image of the nation, the UDF


\(^{921}\) Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”

adopted new uniforms, introduced new officer ranks, and redesigned the military academies and officer training pipelines to favor Afrikaner traditions and perspectives on warfare.\footnote{Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”} Erasmus also made the Afrikaans language an important element of cultural change by mandating bilingualism as a prerequisite for officers. Combined with selective promotions that favored Afrikaner officers, these changes had the effect of dissuading English-speaking South Africans from joining.\footnote{Visser, “British Influence.”} Just as the UDF prior to 1948 had been British dominated, the post-1948 military quickly became an Afrikaner organization.

Erasmus’ priorities for the military were not so much to make it an overtly Afrikaner-dominated organization as to ensure that it was “politically correct” whites that were placed in important positions and thus were aligned with government priorities.\footnote{Seegers, \textit{The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa} (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 1996).} Accordingly, several high ranking officers were reassigned, forced into retirement, or passed over for promotions when they were deemed to be supporters of the United Party or otherwise insufficiently loyal to the new regime.\footnote{Visser, “British Influence;” Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”} This type of politicization—a form of civilian activation—ensured that commanders were aligned with political objectives.\footnote{Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”}

Thus, although the military’s practices retained many of the British habits and traditions of its origin, civilian inputs constructed new boundaries for culturally appropriate

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Alexander} Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”
\bibitem{Visser} Visser, “British Influence.”
\bibitem{AlexanderA} Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”
\end{thebibliography}
behavior that tied the SADF to the priorities of the National Party and the broader Afrikaner society.

Several key changes in the 1950s and 1960s further politicized the military and contributed to the dual Afrikanerization/militarization of society. For instance, Erasmus introduced military-like training for young white males in 1952 that began a slow but steady progression toward compulsory military service in 1968. The South African arms industry began expanding its indigenous capabilities and the prime minister was given sole control of a fund for purchasing arms and munitions on the world market. The Defense Act of 1957 initiated further reorganizations that spread military influence throughout society. The act re-designated the UDF as the SADF, elevated the territorial Commando Forces as an official reserve element, and more directly integrated the reserve Citizen Force with the active duty Permanent Force. The Afrikaner domination of the SADF, youth training programs, expansion of the national arms industry, introduction and expansion of conscription, and the increased integration of the reserve forces all worked toward a common outcome. Over the next few decades nearly every white household became well acquainted with military—and therefore Afrikaner—culture.


930 Frankel, *Pretoria’s Praetorians.*
These changes only tied the military to the white segment of polarized society and compromised the organization’s political neutrality.\textsuperscript{931} Selective conscription—compulsory service was only “universal” as it applied to the white population—established a continuous circulation of personnel and ideas between civilian and military spheres and deepened the common interests of political and military elites.\textsuperscript{932} Although SADF culture retained many of the classical professionalist role beliefs and traditions, civilian inputs elevated the ideology of the military as a power factor and provided the basis for a legitimate military role in state policymaking.

**The Operational Emergence of the SADF**

Culturally, the apolitical traditions within the SADF remained relevant because the military played only a small role in national politics until the mid-1970s. Prior to World War II, the UDF was more ceremonial than operational and other than a brief build-up to support the war, the military remained small, underfunded, and ill-equipped.\textsuperscript{933} Under Erasmus, the military grew, but remained primarily an external force focused on regular warfare.\textsuperscript{934} The SADF was a useful symbol of Afrikaner culture more so than an integral feature of state policy. It was the SAP that was primarily responsible for upholding apartheid and preserving white supremacy both within South Africa and in the border

\textsuperscript{931} Esterhuysse, “Comparing Apples With Pears.”

\textsuperscript{932} Frankel, *Pretoria’s Praetorians.*

\textsuperscript{933} Grundy, “South African Security Establishment.”

\textsuperscript{934} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
The SADF’s emergence as a meaningful operational force in the preservation of apartheid began in earnest with the invasion of Angola in 1975. The lessons learned in this conflict—namely the high levels of integration required between the SAP, the SADF, and political decision-makers—set the stage for the conflict between the professional and politicized cultures within the SADF.

South Africa’s intervention in the Angolan Civil War was motivated by two related objectives. The first was to establish a friendly government that could curb SWAPO incursions into Namibia and limit MK’s ability to use Angola as a haven. The second was that, like many international conflicts of the period, the war was framed as a proxy war against the international threat of communism. Material support from the Soviet Union and combat forces from Cuba increased the possibility that Angola could fall to a communist government. Thus, the conflict satisfied the need for action against both the black and red threats that drove much of South African decision-making.

The true scope of the SADF’s involvement was hidden from the South African public. Codenamed Operation SAVANNAH, the invasion proved to be a political miscalculation. The insistence on secrecy prevented the use of heavy weaponry and limited the available support from the South African Air Force. The political necessity of secrecy required strict limits on the number of white casualties in the conflict which


adversely affected the type of tactics used and restricted options such as the widespread use of conscripts. Furthermore, because South African officials had interpreted the Angolan civil-war as a proxy-war between the Soviet Union and the United States, they overestimated the amount of support that would be provided by the United States and other African nations.937

Faced with a determined adversary reinforced by large numbers of Cuban soldiers and armed with the Soviet Union’s most advanced weapons, the limited conventional effort by the SADF, in retrospect, had little chance of success. South Africa’s political objective of preventing the MPLA938 from forming a government was ill-matched with their limited military aim of supporting the UNITA and FNLA939 opposition movements with training and resources while committing minimal white forces. Politically unwilling to commit more adequate forces to combat the MPLA, the SADF stood little chance as Cuba increased its involvement.940 By December 1975, white casualties had reached the

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938 The Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) was a communist-aligned black nationalist organization supported by Cuba and the Soviet Union.

939 Uniao Nacional para a Independência Total d’ Angola (UNITA) and Frente de Libertação de Angola (FNLA) were black anti-colonial opposition movements that opposed the MPLA takeover.

940 Rodney Warwick, “Operation Savannah: A Measure of SADF Decline, Resourcefulness and Modernization,” *Scientia Militaria-South African Journal of Military Studies* 40, no. 3 (2012); Rialize Ferreira and Ian Liebenberg, “The Impact of War on Angola and South Africa: Two Southern African Case Studies,” *Journal for Contemporary History* 31, no. 3 (2006). Estimates on Cuban military strength in Angola during Operation SAVANNAH range from 15,000-36,000 while South Africa intended to commit no more than 2,500 troops. As the operation deteriorated, the SADF presence eventually numbered between 3,000-4,000 before additional Citizen Force conscripts were finally introduced to support the withdrawal.
point where SADF involvement could no longer be hidden from the public and the decision was made to withdraw in early 1976.941

The failure of the SADF’s conventional warfare effort in Angola had two effects on the military’s organizational culture. First, the idea that politician-imposed restrictions were to blame for the SADF’s struggles gave rise to a version of the ‘stab in the back’ mythology that was shared by many veterans of the war and the general public as knowledge of the intervention became available.942 The normally government-friendly South African press described the operation as a significant mistake and some compared it to a South African “Bay of Pigs.”943 Similar to the effects of Vietnam on the U.S. military’s activist culture, this belief enhanced the salience of the activist ideology in the SADF and set the stage for further political involvement based on a sense that political elites should not be allowed to sacrifice military gains.944

Second, the failure to achieve objectives called into question the SADF’s capabilities and undermined the political strategy of relying on buffer states to provide international security. A hostile government in Angola provided SWAPO and MK a safe haven that altered the balance of power in the region.945 In response, South Africa drastically

941 Warwick, “Operation Savannah.”


increased funding for the military and reevaluated the SADF’s role in strategic policy that further amplified the military’s activist ideology.\textsuperscript{946} Additional buildup of conventional weaponry and a massive investment in the domestic arms industry significantly increased the capability of the SADF but policymakers also realized that conventional capabilities alone were insufficient for the continued survival of apartheid. As a result, the SADF also invested in irregular capabilities and adopted many of the SAP’s practices that further blurred the lines between the civilian and military spheres.

By the end of the 1970s, the ideological struggle for dominance within the SADF was established. The military’s Permanent Force had professionalized out of necessity to counter the state’s adversaries and retained the western-oriented influence of its British origins.\textsuperscript{947} The relatively small size of the SADF meant that it was primed to embrace a western approach that emphasized advanced technologies, disciplined training, and modern doctrines. Tactical ingenuity and innovation were valued and competent officers were rewarded with promotion and opportunity.\textsuperscript{948} Simultaneously, the failures in Angola increased the belief that the SADF \textit{should} play a more active role in national policymaking. The adoption of SAP practices also contributed to significant cultural transmission between the organizations and the rise of a secretive, “need-to-know”


\textsuperscript{947} Esterhuyse, “Comparing Apples With Pears.”

\textsuperscript{948} Seegers, “Current Trends”; Herbert M. Howe, “South African Defence Force.”
approach that became dominant in the SADF Special Forces.\textsuperscript{949} The construction of the SADF as an Afrikaner force inherently politicized the armed forces and a common problem-solving approach developed between civil and military authorities.\textsuperscript{950}

**Total Onslaught, Total Strategy, and Total War**

Consistent with my theorized polarization-politicization pathway, severe polarization in South Africa significantly politicized the military as political stability deteriorated. Politicization provided the SADF with enormous influence during the 1980s and created a permissive opportunity structure for intervention. There is no doubt that the military acted as a politicized arm of the state during this period. However, further political intervention was inhibited by the division that occurred between the military’s role belief of classical professionalism that retained its apolitical—although not “un-political”—attachment to civilian direction and the activist praetorian ideology that embraced politicization and remained staunchly conservative in its commitment to racial discrimination.\textsuperscript{951}

Substantial politicization of the SADF coincided with P.W. Botha’s election as prime minister in 1978. Conventional defeat in Angola and the success of communist insurgencies in neighboring states provided refuge and support to the revolutionary

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\textsuperscript{949} Seegers, “Current Trends.”

\textsuperscript{950} Frankel, *Pretoria’s Praetorians*.

movements that sought change within South Africa itself. The poor performance of the SADF in Angola and an intensification of the conflict in Namibia forced military leadership to reevaluate their methods and, importantly, their role in the state. This eventually led to the advent of a Total National Strategy that incorporated nearly every aspect of national politics into the defense of the state.\textsuperscript{952} The implementation of the Total Strategy had significant impact on SADF role beliefs, further blurred the lines between the SAP and the SADF, and played a critical role in the events that led to the end of apartheid.

As a result of the deteriorating security situation, government repression of uprisings became more severe and South Africa was further alienated in the international community.\textsuperscript{953} A siege mentality spread throughout Afrikaner society which viewed Africa as “fundamentally and increasingly hostile to South Africa.”\textsuperscript{954} Botha argued that the nation faced a “total onslaught” from internal subversives seeking to upend the racial status quo and also from a “Marxist onslaught…[that would] cause chaos in this country.”\textsuperscript{955} The confluence of threats justified expanding the defense of South Africa

\textsuperscript{952} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”

\textsuperscript{953} For example, the 1976 Soweto uprising resulted in more than 700 protesters killed by the SAP (Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid”). In 1977, the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 418 which specifically cited the “massive violence against and killings of the African people, including schoolchildren and students and others opposing racial discrimination.” The resolution imposed a mandatory arms embargo against the South African government and remained in place until 1994 (United Nations Security Council, Resolution 418, UNSCR.com, 4 November 1977, Retrieved from http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/418).


beyond its borders and into Rhodesia, Mozambique, Namibia, and Angola. Given this hostile environment and the “insoluble dilemma” faced by the government, scholars have noted that the increasing politicization of the military was virtually “inevitable.”

Politicization via civilian activation altered the military’s perception of its primary role in the state and elevated its activist cultural ideology. Although still driven by the overarching goal of ensuring the survival of white racial hegemony, the SADF under Botha departed significantly from its strict western professional model that focused primarily on external threats. Instead, Botha constructed an SADF role belief that embraced its role in domestic COIN operations as well as in nearly all aspects of state policy making. By restructuring the state security apparatus and cultivating close personal relationships with military leaders, Botha enabled the SADF to wield significant domestic influence and, in many cases, place itself beyond the purview of parliament and other forms of civilian accountability.

Botha’s efforts in this instance highlight the complicated interaction of culture and interests and the challenge of politicization via civilian activation. The prime minister appealed to SADF interests by elevating their importance in the state and increasing their material resources. The SADF served in this role via executive invitation—consistent with its tradition of civilian obedience. Similar to the development of the Venezuelan military’s culture of classical professionalism following democratization in that country,

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957 Howe, “South African Defence Force.”
Botha did not create the military’s power factor ideology so much as he created the conditions that allowed SADF leaders to take a greater role in state affairs. Over time, these habits and traditions hardened into an observable ideology in which the military viewed its role in policy development as legitimate. The legitimation of this role by civilian leaders increased the concern of what may occur in the future if the SADF’s political influence was eventually curtailed.

**A Total Strategy for a Total Onslaught**

South Africa’s Total National Strategy was initially developed by SADF leadership. First publicly articulated in the 1977 Defence White Paper, a total strategy had been discussed internally in slightly different forms since the beginning of that decade. Its early machinations warned of the total onslaught by disruptive forces—specifically the ANC—that targeted South Africa using “military, political, economic, social, educational, psychological, subversive, terrorism, sabotage, and espionage” practices.958 From the perspective of SADF leadership, the ANC’s objective was to make the country ungovernable. In so doing, the ANC sought to spark a revolution that would not only overthrow the white regime in South Africa but also usher in a period devoid of “so-called colonialism and racialism and [to establish] Pan-Africanism.”959 Thus, the link


between preserving the racial order in South Africa and defense against the international threat of communism was explicitly adopted as official state policy.

Established as official national strategy in 1980, the military’s approach to the Total Strategy was patterned on COIN doctrine used by the British in Malaysia and by France in Algeria.\textsuperscript{960} As with those experiences, South Africa’s Total Strategy was meant to address overall state security not through purely military means but by closely coordinating military and police activity with political, economic, and social objectives.\textsuperscript{961} The Total Strategy was far more than just a military strategy. It was the recognition that all aspects of domestic and foreign policy must work in unison using all available tools of the state. While it was heavily militarized due to the violent opposition tactics, it was not only militarized and also included significant changes in other areas such as economic and foreign policy.\textsuperscript{962} Total Strategy was not the subordination of political objectives to military objectives but rather the tying of them together in such a way that there was often little difference or disagreement between the two.

The SADF’s role in the state during the 1980s was not a type of military control of the South African government. Although similarities can be found, the SADF did not intervene in politics in the traditional sense as captured by theoreticians such as Finer.\textsuperscript{963}

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\textsuperscript{961} Mortimer, Submission IRO the Former SADF.


\textsuperscript{963} See Finer, \textit{Man on Horseback}, Chapter 7.
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Finer’s articulation of undue military influence over civilian authorities mirrors some of the practices of the South African situation but the reality was that the Total Strategy designed by military leadership was adopted as a civilian policy at nearly all levels and all aspects of government operation.964 Furthermore, SADF leadership retained important aspects of their professionalist ideology and repeatedly emphasized the importance of finding a political solution to the total onslaught stating that military action should contribute “at most twenty percent” to the ultimate solution.965 The promotion of militarization as the key pillar of the Total Strategy increased the influence of the military in all aspects of the state but military leadership remained, at least rhetorically, committed to the idea of a political solution to the conflict.

The ensuing politicization of the SADF supports the larger argument advanced in this project. As the effects of severe polarization increasingly threatened domestic conditions, the military was politicized, primarily—but not exclusively—through forms of civilian activation. Civilian elites encouraged the SADF to take on larger roles in the policy making capacity of the state and, when required, to take armed action that was often divorced from direct political oversight. Whether these actions were the result of the military acting outside normal channels of political accountability or if the military was simply acting in accordance with civilian direction that granted them wide latitude to

964 Davies and O’Meara, “Total Strategy.”

965 Grundy, “South African Security Establishment,” 35. Direct quotation is from the SADF Director of Army Operations, but as Grundy notes a similar 80:20 ratio was expressed repeatedly by several military and political elites to describe the struggle. Similar statements were also captured by Davies and O’Meara, “Total Strategy,” and by Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
execute orders as they saw fit is indicative of the cultural competition within the SADF itself.

The reality is that both are true. The SADF was deeply politicized and became “one of the most loosely-controlled security forces in the modern world.”966 Yet there was also little doubt that its actions were in accordance with overall civilian intent in the furtherance of the state’s Total National Strategy.967 The following sections analyze this contradiction between politicization and professionalism, how it both affected and was affected by organizational culture, and the implications for the period of transformation that would begin at the end of the 1980s.

**Politicked Warriors…**

Politicization of the SADF during the 1980s took the form of all three types of politicization relevant for this project. The dominant form of politicization during this period was civilian activation that placed the military at the center of state policymaking. Structural changes that accompanied the Total Strategy pulled the military more fully into the management and application of domestic COIN operations and blurred many of the lines of demarcation between the SADF and the SAP. Civilian activation intended to cultivate loyalty to the white majority was also present and seen in the close relationship between Botha and the military leadership as well as in the increased role of military officers in the political apparatus. Military activism during this period is more difficult to


967 Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
discern. There were few, if any, overt challenges to civilian control but military activism was nevertheless present in other forms. Fulfilling its mission in domestic COIN led the SADF to push into new roles in local governance, often beyond the expectations of, or without the knowledge of, civilian superiors.

To implement the Total Strategy, Botha restructured the national security apparatus to facilitate better coordination between the various arms of government. Botha expanded the State Security Council (SSC) and appointed a permanent secretary that reported directly to the prime minister.\textsuperscript{968} Although statutorily established in 1972 as an advisory committee to the Cabinet, the expansion, the staffing of the secretariat primarily with defense and intelligence officers, and the direct communication pathway to the prime minister quickly elevated the SSC above the Cabinet in terms of political influence.\textsuperscript{969}

For the regional coordination of SSC directives, a National Security Management System (NSMS) was established in 1979 with the intent of managing the division of government efforts between welfare programs and security activities. Local implementation of these programs was then delegated to Joint Management Centers (JMC) established throughout the Southern African region. Although nominally responsible for implementing all aspects of government policy at the local level, the JMCs became the focal points for coordination between the SAP and the SADF and the

\textsuperscript{968} Mortimer, Submission IRO the Former SADF. Among the new responsibilities for the SSC was the Strategic Communications branch (StratKom) that became instrumental after 1985 in the coordination of counterrevolutionary efforts and in many of the illegal covert operations that were hidden from the public (O’Brien, “Assassination as a Tool”).

\textsuperscript{969} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”

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enactment of counterrevolutionary actions such as assassinations and the sanctioned disappearances of subversives.\textsuperscript{970}

SADF influence in the JMCs and the NSMS increased dramatically under Botha. Much of this increase was due to the new importance of the SADF’s Department of Military Intelligence (DMI) which was elevated to a special advisory role to the prime minister’s position and oversaw many of the covert SADF units.\textsuperscript{971} These units, managed either by the DMI or by SADF Special Forces command were designed to operate outside of parliamentary accountability and report directly to the SSC Secretary and the Prime Minister. Their use increased substantially following the declaration of a State of Emergency in 1986.\textsuperscript{972} While this is an overly simplistic explanation of what was in reality a complex web of systems and hierarchies, the takeaway is that the adoption of Total Strategy pulled the SADF into the management and operation of \textit{state} policy—not just defense policy.\textsuperscript{973}

In essence, Botha institutionalized military politicization. He restructured the security apparatus in a way that brought military influence into the political realm and entwined the military and civilian spheres in an inextricable way. In doing so, Botha also closely connected the SADF and SAP in new ways. Although greater coordination between the

\textsuperscript{970} O’Brien, “Assassination as a Tool.”

\textsuperscript{971} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{973} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
two organizations did not begin in earnest until around 1985, the restructuring began a process that saw increasing overlap in their primary roles and responsibilities.

For example, the NSMS was originally a SAP organization partially responsible for enforcement of apartheid law and disruption of any local subversive networks, but it was staffed at its highest levels by SADF officers from DMI. Likewise, the SSC secretariat was run by a mix of senior SADF officers and intelligence officials and the local JMCs used a mix of SAP and SADF units to disrupt, arrest, or assassinate government opponents.\textsuperscript{974} Covert SADF units used civilian covers such as the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB) to increasingly take extraconstitutional actions within South African borders.\textsuperscript{975} Although these actions were legally supposed to be coordinated and approved by civilian officials, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) later found that these units often acted beyond this oversight and the required coordination and approvals did not occur.\textsuperscript{976}

Civilian activation of the SADF was also evident in the ways that it furthered the loyalty between the SADF and the National Party. Here, the cultural connections between the SADF and Afrikaner culture discussed earlier continued to play a large role. There was no delineation between threats to the Afrikaner-led military and the Afrikaner

\textsuperscript{974} O’Brien, “Assassination as a Tool.”
\textsuperscript{975} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”; Pauw, \textit{Heart of the Whore}.
The cultural attachments between the SADF and Afrikaner society that had been cultivated for decades were reflected in the common approach found between civilian elites such as Botha and military leadership. “Close personal relations,” “similarities of perception,” and a “common adherence to a technocratic-managerial style of social problem-solving” meant that there was often little difference in the way senior SADF leaders and political elites approached social unrest.

These close ties were further encouraged by the increased political influence and bureaucratic placements for a number of senior SADF officers. Personalistic control of military budgets, secret funds, and the granting of significant operational autonomy served to tie the military to the interests of the National Party and Botha in particular. Even the restructuring of the government services intended to streamline managerial functions reflected the common cultural perception shared between the military and civilian spheres. The strict ordering and hierarchical nature of these organizations reflected the influence of SADF culture beyond what is normally found in civilian bureaucracies. Just as the SADF had once been remade to represent Afrikaner culture, the South African government was now being reorganized to reflect military traditions.

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978 Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
979 Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians, 171.
If the military was out of control during this period, as they often were accused of being, then it was equally true that Botha’s government encouraged them to be. The structural changes that institutionalized SADF political involvement were deemed a necessity given the dire situation perceived by the governing regime. Similar to other cases in which the threat of terrorism has increased military involvement in domestic policy, the civilian government under Botha turned a striking level of domestic and international decision-making over to the SADF. The unintended consequence of these changes was that when this autonomy was eventually rescinded, a not-insignificant portion of the force continued their counterrevolutionary tactics even further divorced from political oversight.

Finally, military-initiated politicization did occur throughout this period as well although it is unclear the degree to which this activity occurred because of military initiative or was actually at the implicit behest of civilian superiors. One example is found in the behavior of the covert units. Although all such units were purportedly under the direction of the SSC, commanders were most often given a general policy while the actual execution of that policy and specific target selection was left to their discretion. Other than specific SSC authorization to act against certain high level targets or when conducting cross-border operations, a great deal of autonomy was granted to individual commanders. This makes it difficult to definitively say that any single operation was

982 Bove et al., “Beyond Coups.”

983 O’Brien, “Assassination as a Tool.”
an example of the SADF acting outside of civilian expectations. What is clear is that many of the established procedures—for example, the requirement for the SADF to coordinate internal operations with the SAP—were often ignored.

In other areas, military activism was less ambiguous. For example, the training of an offensive paramilitary force in Inkatha, the distribution of drugs intended to destabilize specific regions, and the use of front companies to export “ivory, hardwood, diamonds, and other products out of Angola” all appear to have been approved internally by the SADF without the knowledge of civilian superiors. All of these were done under the auspices of the SADF’s role in COIN—a mission that existing literature has found to be inherently politicizing for military forces. The SADF’s management of the townships, as part of their involvement in the JMCs, placed the security forces in the position of not just providing security for these areas but involved them in the most “minute details of municipal government.”

Some scholars have attributed these actions to the organizational development of a “need-to-know” or “special operations mentality.” This mentality was encouraged by

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989 For example, see Seegers, “Current Trends;” Howe, “South African Defence Force.”
civilian politicians that kept military operations and white casualties hidden from public view for years. As a result, the SADF began to see itself as “beyond the reach of parliament, the courts, commissions of inquiry, and even the state’s auditors.” The development of this mentality was driven by the “total onslaught” and implicitly authorized through the implementation of the Total Strategy.

...Or Obedient Professionals

What makes military activism more difficult to define during this period is that there is little evidence that the military was acting contrary to civilian desires—if not their overt direction. Despite the SADF’s willingness to conduct operations that were not explicitly authorized, there is little to indicate that the overall performance of the SADF was not aligned with the desires of the civilian government. The distinction between a politicized or out-of-control defense force acting on their own initiative and SADF claims that they were simply acting from a sense of professionalism empowered by civilian leadership is critical to understanding how organizational culture influenced SADF actions during the end of apartheid. The argument here is that the institutionalized politicization driven by political elites empowered the rise of the activist ideology within the SADF that struggled for dominance with the SADF’s more apolitical cultural ideologies.

Rather than viewing politicization and professionalism as opposing ends of a military’s political involvement, the competing cultures within the SADF demonstrate

990 Howe, “South African Defence Force,” 34. Similar findings were noted by the TRC in its final report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Final Report,” Volume Five, Chapter 8 (1998)).
how these two conditions can coexist, and the ramifications of such in a severely polarized society. In its final report, the TRC concluded that it was simply implausible that the SADF could act so untethered from civilian direction given the hierarchical structure of the security apparatus and the sheer scope of SADF activities during this period. Rather than misinterpreting or ignoring civilian orders, the TRC found that the SADF’s actions were commensurate with SSC direction and that civilian orders used intentionally vague language to guarantee a degree of plausible deniability.991 This was supported by the statements of various political elites such as Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok and Minister of Defense Magnus Malan who reportedly praised the actions of covert units and personally authorized a number of human rights violations.992

During testimony to the TRC and other investigations, senior SADF leadership relied heavily on the portrayal of the SADF as a professional organization, subordinate to civilian direction, that were merely following orders and whose actions were the direct result of the deteriorating security context of the time. For instance, General Constand Viljoen, Chief of the SADF from 1980-1985, framed military actions as those of a “well trained and well disciplined” force that was the “legal instrument of a legal government.”993 His successor, General Johannes Geldenhuys repeatedly justified the use

993 “Armed Forces Hearing, SADF” Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
of counterrevolutionary tactics as a necessity given the condition of warfare that existed in and around South Africa.\textsuperscript{994} Malan, Viljoen’s predecessor and Minister of Defense beginning in 1980, represented the SADF in a similar way, explaining military behavior as “\textit{bona fide}” operations undertaken at civilian direction throughout the conflict.\textsuperscript{995}

The small number of amnesty applications from the SADF was defended in the same terms: that a lawful armed force operating under civilian direction had no reason to seek forgiveness for actions taken during war.\textsuperscript{996} Likewise, the TRC final report repeatedly referenced SADF justifications based on “a new kind of total war.”\textsuperscript{997} Several respondents referenced the actions of the ANC and the need for the SADF to respond in kind in order to “turn back” the revolutionary phases through which the ANC was progressing.\textsuperscript{998} Consistent themes from SADF members throughout the investigations attempted to emphasize the professional nature of the military that was following civilian direction. Although some atrocities were acknowledged, they were described as being committed in the context of a bloody battle for the survival of the state and consistent with the legal roles and responsibilities of the SADF.

\textsuperscript{994} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{995} Malan, “Submission,”

\textsuperscript{996} “Armed Forces Hearing, SADF,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission.


This portrayal of SADF professionalism as loyal servants of the state acting in good faith is no doubt an example of military leadership using culture instrumentally. The sincerity of this defense, particularly given the contradicting evidence that has emerged in the succeeding decades, is worth calling into question. However, senior leaders attempting to hide their actions behind an organizational culture of professionalism does not invalidate the existence of that culture. As several regional experts have attested, the SADF was a professional force by traditional measures and did have a long history of civilian obedience.

Esterhuyse argued that the SADF identified itself with Western norms of professionalism and an emphasis on discipline and subordination to civilian oversight.\footnote{999}{Esterhuyse, “Comparing Apples With Pears.”} Seegers noted that the SADF professionalized out of necessity due to the long struggle against the ANC and had repeatedly resisted the politicization that occurred under Botha.\footnote{1000}{Seegers, “Current Trends.”} It is, in fact, difficult to find a description of the SADF that does not include its adherence to the value of civilian control and the traditions that were imbued within the organization by its cultural history.\footnote{1001}{Howe, “South African Defence Force”; Frankel, \textit{Pretoria’s Praetorians}; Visser, “British Influence”; and Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society” all specifically cite the influence of the British tradition in shaping these views as discussed in previous sections.} Even F.W. De Klerk later acknowledged that although the security forces had been allowed to “run free” under Botha, they still had an
“ingrained sense of obedience”\textsuperscript{1002} that would become a critical factor in securing their support during the end of apartheid.

Botha created the conditions for a hyper-politicized military that allowed the SADF to act as a true power factor within the state. Still, as seen in previous chapters, the construction of new organizational practices and incentives does not immediately supplant previously existing cultural elements. As discussed in Chapter 2, culture transforms as organizational members observe the results of action. The violent, politicized practices of the South African military during the 1980s were rewarded by civilian politicians that viewed the ANC as an existential threat. There was little to no external sanctioning of organizational behavior that continuously pushed the boundaries of civilian-defined expectations. Likewise, without external impetus to do so, there were few efforts from within the military to deter culturally aberrant behavior.\textsuperscript{1003} The result was cultural incoherence and ideological contestation between competing role beliefs within the SADF that continued into the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{1004}

\textbf{The Third Force}

The SADF’s activist ideology manifested in what came to be known as the Third Force and in the implicit and explicit approval of their actions by SADF senior

\textsuperscript{1002} F.W. De Klerk, \textit{The Last Trek: A New Beginning} (London, Pan Macmillan, 1999), 263.

\textsuperscript{1003} One notable example is the illegal actions of Major General Joubert as commander of SADF Special Forces Command and the failure of his superiors to follow through once they became aware of his actions (“Armed Forces Hearing, SADF,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Drogin, “South Africa”).

\textsuperscript{1004} Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver, “Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness.”
leadership. The Third Force was responsible for much of the extralegal activities during the Total Strategy and was instrumental in perpetuating the violence throughout the peace process in the early 1990s. A third force is an organization that exists between two opposing forces. In the South African context, it referred to an organization that was neither fully under military jurisdiction nor was responsible to the state’s law enforcement but generally acted as a reserve police unit that also had significant national security responsibilities. Minutes from several meetings at the SSC reveal that Botha and his security officials considered establishing an official Third Force in the model of several foreign examples. The option was ultimately disregarded primarily because the covert units in the SAP and SADF were already fulfilling many of the same functions.

Rather than a sanctioned, government controlled third force, the version that emerged in South Africa was an indistinct mix of SADF and SAP units and extreme far-right paramilitary groups. It was the “substantial, organized group of security officials or


1006 The Carabinieri in Italy, the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité in France and the Bereitschaftspolizei in Germany are all examples of official government third forces and were used as the basis for inquiry in establishing a similar force in South Africa.

1007 Minister of Defense Malan testified to the TRC that these initial discussions occurred as part of SSC meeting 18/85 on 4 November 1985 and was discussed multiple times through 1988 (Malan, “Submission”).

1008 A full accounting of the different units involved in organized Third Force activity has probably been lost to history. But the TRC, journalistic accounts, various court cases, and historians have identified many of the units responsible. These included SAP murder squads such as Vlakpaas, and C1/C10 led by Eugene de Kock. SADF units included the CCB and the various special forces Recce brigades as well as auxiliary units such as the 32 Battalion. These were supported by far right groups such as the Afrikaner Resistance
former officials” that operated beyond formal political oversight and received significant material and non-material support from within the SADF.\textsuperscript{1009} Although history has often associated the Third Force more closely with the SAP, it was the SADF that actually played the principle role in irregular warfare as part of the Third Force.\textsuperscript{1010}

Third Force activities can be divided into two phases. The earliest phase, starting sometime around 1985, was a centralized effort responsible for countering the ANC’s guerrilla tactics and the harassment of white opposition movements such as the End Conscription Campaign. As Ellis stated, “it cannot be considered to have been independent of the National Party itself.”\textsuperscript{1011} Although government involvement was hidden from public view, the attacks perpetrated by these groups were “so similar and favored government interests so obviously” that the connection was impossible to hide completely.\textsuperscript{1012} The second phase was the continuing violence after the official suspension of armed activity by the ANC in 1990. During this period, and particularly after F.W. de Klerk purged senior SADF officers in 1992, the third force was

\textsuperscript{1009} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force,” 263.

\textsuperscript{1010} Ellis attributed the historical association with the SAP and the relatively obscure role of the SADF to a few different factors. The high profile prosecution of SAP assassin Eugene de Kock is one. Another is that the ANC had a poor political relationship with the SAP and a fairly healthy working relationship with the SADF during negotiations. The importance of the SADF in the democratic transition made the ANC reluctant to cast too much blame on the military for its illegal activities (Ibid, 295).

\textsuperscript{1011} Ibid, 293.

\textsuperscript{1012} Seegers, “Current Trends,” 168.
significantly less organized and if official government support still occurred, it was more difficult to identify.

Third Force motivation varied between units and between the two phases. During the first phase, Third Force activity was an element of the Total Strategy. If ANC operations were viewed as an attempt to make South Africa ungovernable, Third Force operations were meant to demonstrate that the ANC was equally unable to protect the black population.\textsuperscript{1013} The central pillar of the Total Strategy was the establishment of a secure society from which negotiations for apartheid reform could be conducted, thereby lessening both domestic and international pressure on the government.\textsuperscript{1014} Third Force operations—or at least the government sanctioned ones—were then intended to use violence to “secure a political settlement on the terms most favorable to white South Africa.”\textsuperscript{1015}

During the second phase, once de Klerk had initiated negotiations with the ANC and real change was visible on the horizon, Third Force motivations should be seen differently and were more varied. For some, continuing the violence was a manner of ending the negotiations entirely and returning to the Total Strategy.\textsuperscript{1016} For others, the violence may have been an extension of social negotiations that sought to ensure

\textsuperscript{1013} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”

\textsuperscript{1014} Grundy, “South African Security Establishment.”

\textsuperscript{1015} Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force,” 294.

\textsuperscript{1016} Howe, “South African Defense Force.”
previously influential white groups remained relevant or as an attempt to marginalize social groups that were gaining prominence.\textsuperscript{1017} SADF officers and former officers remained active participants in the violence during this period as well as in more visible efforts to halt the transition as discussed in the following sections.

The culture of dead enders within the security establishment represented the continuation of the SADF’s activist ideology that sought the perpetuation of white domination in South African society regardless of civilian direction. This culture was in direct competition with the ideology of classical professionalism that tolerated civilian efforts to continue negotiations. Frankel described the internal conflict within the SADF as one between a “larger managerial-technocratic” culture and a “warrior element…determined to perpetuate apartheid for a mixture of ideological reasons and bureaucratic self-interests.”\textsuperscript{1018} In this description, the latter represents those elements that comprised the Third Force and continued the violent struggle beyond the purview of civilian authorities and well into the transition period that followed. The result of the struggle for control of the military between these two cultures was critical in the outcome of the political transition to democracy.


\textsuperscript{1018} Frankel, \textit{Soldiers in a Storm}, ix, Kindle.
The SADF and the End of Apartheid

The SADF’s role in the events that led to the end of apartheid illustrates the importance of organizational culture and highlights how external inputs can influence the struggle for ideological dominance within the military. In the early 1990s, the SADF ultimately chose to remain neutral during the political process and thereby expressed their support for the transition through passive acceptance. This occurred despite the high levels of military politicization throughout the 1980s and a permissive opportunity structure that presented real opportunities for military intervention. If the SADF had chosen to oppose the legalization of the ANC and the transition to free and fair democratic elections—as literature in the 1980s viewed as a distinct possibility, if not a likelihood—then the end of apartheid would have taken a strikingly different path.1019

The argument presented here is that the cultural competition within the SADF was resolved through significant civilian input and the dominant culture that emerged—one of professional, apolitical service—inhibited organized intervention and thereby allowed military leaders to accept the political transition. The emergence and subsequent influence of culture is demonstrated in this section through the analysis of two critical junctures. The first was the defeat of the SADF at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale which definitively demonstrated the precarious position of South African security and led to

1019 At a minimum, the “small miracle” of South Africa’s democratic transition would likely have taken an even more violent path had the military not supported a political solution. The view from the previous decade that the SADF was unlikely to support a transition is best expressed by Howe, “South African Defence Force,” and Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians and is discussed in more detail in the following sections.
another reevaluation of the military’s role in the state. The second was the assumption of the state presidency by F.W. de Klerk.¹⁰²⁰ Both events resulted in the SADF reevaluating their role and relationship with the state and demonstrate the influence of organizational culture.

**SADF Defeat at Cuito Cuanavale: A Critical Juncture**

The battle for Cuito Cuanavale took place between August 1987 and March 1988 and was the last large-scale push of SADF forces into Angola.¹⁰²¹ The battle has been a source of much debate both in the scholarly literature and within South Africa politics for several reasons, two of which are pertinent to this project. The first is whether the SADF was actually defeated or instead withdrew after accomplishing its actual, more limited objectives. The second is how the results at Cuito Cuanavale impacted the military’s role in the end of apartheid. The answer to both of these is important for understanding the role of military culture in the upcoming political transition.

The result of the SADF invasion of Angola in 1987 has been heavily debated. Following the SADF withdrawal and a peace accord in 1988, both sides declared victory. For Angola, the withdrawal of SADF forces represented an unconditional victory for

¹⁰²⁰ Constitutional reforms in 1984 eliminated the prime minister’s position. Botha, the prime minister at the time, assumed the executive role of State President that was now the de facto leader of the state.

¹⁰²¹ Like most battles in modern warfare, the dates included here are a bit arbitrary. Shaping operations in the vicinity of Cuito Cuanavale took place at least as early as mid-1986 and smaller skirmishes continued sporadically until mid-1988. Furthermore, there is significant scholarly discussion on whether there ever was a battle “for” Cuito Cuanavale so much as a battle “near” Cuito Cuanavale. While this distinction may be critical in other fields, this project uses the phrase “battle for Cuito Cuanavale” to represent the final push of SADF forces into Angola. Where pertinent, some of these distinctions are presented in this discussion, for a fuller understanding of the battle itself, see Leopold Scholtz, *The SADF and Cuito Cuanavale: A Tactical and Strategic Analysis* (Johannesburg: Delta Books, 2020).
FAPLA\textsuperscript{1022} and its Cuban and Soviet allies.\textsuperscript{1023} On the South African side, the SADF had, for the time being, successfully supported its ally, UNITA, in stopping the FAPLA advance into southern Angola and thereby preserved a critical buffer zone for limiting SWAPO incursions into Namibia.\textsuperscript{1024} Referring both to SADF operations in Angola and to the broader conflict with the ANC, Minister of Defense Malan argued that the SADF achieved its objectives because it “managed to maintain an acceptable climate in which negotiations could take place.”\textsuperscript{1025}

Differing interpretations of the “last hot battle in the Cold War”\textsuperscript{1026} have often come down to these two perspectives. Ample literature has been written that supports the South African point of view that there was no defeat at Cuito Cuanavale because the battle itself

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1022} The People’s Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) was the armed wing of the MPLA which had governed Angola since the last major incursion of SADF forces during Operation SAVANNAH, discussed previously.

\textsuperscript{1023} By some accounts Cuba had nearly 50,000 forces in Angola by 1987. While the SADF achieved significant tactical success against FAPLA, it was a large Cuban feint threatening an invasion of Namibia on the SADF’s western flank that ultimately sparked peace negotiations. (Leopold Scholtz, “The South African Strategic and Operational Objectives in Angola, 1987-1988,” \textit{Scientia Military: South African Journal of Military Studies}, 38, no. 1 (2011)). Cuban forces and support from the Soviet Union furthered the perception of a communist threat to South Africa itself that forced SADF involvement and also represented the military strength and potential for escalation that drove the South African government’s willingness to negotiate (Saney, “African Stalingrad”).

\textsuperscript{1024} Beginning in 1975, South Africa’s primary motive for involvement had been preventing a safe haven for SWAPO and ANC operations into Namibia and South Africa itself. The SADF was committed in large numbers again in 1987 in order to prevent what could have been a FAPLA rout of UNITA forces near Cuito Cuanavale. Helping UNITA more directly in their fight to displace FAPLA had been discussed but was ultimately discarded and was, at best, a secondary objective to ensuring that UNITA maintained some operational presence in southern Angola (Scholtz, “Strategic and Operational Objectives”).

\textsuperscript{1025} Malan, “Submission.”

\end{footnotesize}
was never intended to capture Cuito Cuanavale. Likewise, others have used the battle to remark on the success of communist interventions in Africa and the impact they had on ending apartheid. For practical purposes, however, debates over the technical results of the battle represent a distinction without a difference. South Africa’s willingness to negotiate a political solution to the war without having achieved a decisive battlefield victory overshadowed their achievement of any other, more limited, strategic objectives.

The aftermath of the battle makes clear that regardless of any tactical or operational successes, Cuito Cuanavale was a resounding strategic defeat for South Africa and presented a critical juncture for the SADF. The evidence for this conclusion is twofold. First, the battles around Cuito Cuanavale resulted in significant casualties of white soldiers that turned the tide of support against continuing the Total Strategy. Until this point, black soldiers had disproportionately borne the brunt of combat operations both in the border regions and as askaris within South Africa itself. Continuing to minimize white casualties in order to keep these operations a secret had been an explicit directive in the operations around Cuito Cuanavale. Knowing this, inflicting white casualties on

1027 For example, see Scholtz, “Strategic and Operational Objectives.”
1028 For example, see Piero Gleijeses, “Moscow’s Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988,” Journal of Cold War Studies 8, no. 4 (2006). According to Scholtz, Gleijeses was one of the few scholars to have access to the Cuban archives about the battle. Likewise, access to South African archives has been limited due to continued classification. The result being the sometimes drastically different interpretations of the war in Angola (Leopold Scholtz, “The Standard of Research on the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, 1987-1988,” Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies 39, no. 1 (2011)).
1030 Scholtz, “Strategic and Operational Objectives,” 80.
the SADF had been an express objective of the Cuban forces. Large numbers of white casualties made it impossible to hide foreign operations from the public and as casualty numbers increased, feelings “of insecurity and vulnerability grew among the white South African population.”

The SADF’s role in the Total Strategy had seen public confidence in the military reach record highs and while casualties did not shake this support for the military as an institution, they did bring a growing opposition to the military’s centrality in state policymaking. The public was beginning to reconsider the military’s role as an instrument of the ruling party rather than a neutral guarantor of state security. As the government began calling up Citizen Force members to support Angolan operations, an increasing number of white youths refused conscription orders, the government increased its oppression of the End Conscription Campaign, and professional soldiers were more frequently questioning the motives and direction of the civilian government.

Second, the withdrawal from Cuito Cuanavale led SADF leadership to reassess its role in apartheid enforcement. Unlike critical junctures in the U.S. and Venezuelan cases, defeat in Angola primarily posed a threat to SADF corporate interests that triggered this

1031 Seegers, “Current Trends.”
reevaluation. Despite significantly increased budgets, the Total Strategy had stressed military resources. Rather than budget limitations, SADF operations were restricted by the numerical limits of the white population from which it could resource its Permanent Force. Continued foreign interventions involving heavy casualties and loss of equipment threatened this delicate balance.

In this instance, threats to the SADF’s corporate interests drove a reevaluation of the purposive role that it was playing in the state. Continuing to support its role in the Total Strategy would further threaten material interests, but sacrificing the influence in state affairs that accompanied the SADF role in apartheid enforcement would endanger its positional interests. Whether or not the SADF wanted to continue in its current role was ultimately overshadowed by its ability to do so without damaging the organization. In 1989, the SADF offered Botha a choice, “they could either continue the war and patrol the borders of South Africa, or police the townships, but not both.” Thus, the SADF withdrawal from Angola precipitated a significant reanalysis of the state’s entire approach to the Total Strategy and weakened the military’s activist ideology that had been justified by its significant role in domestic apartheid enforcement. These national-level results leave little doubt that the battle of Cuito Cuanavale was a resounding strategic defeat for South Africa.


1036 Harvey, The Fall of Apartheid, 213.
The second major impact of Cuito Cuanavale was the effect it had on the march to the end of apartheid. Simply put, the battle was a major turning point that accelerated the change. Prime Minister Botha had publicly announced his intention to reform the apartheid system in 1986.\textsuperscript{1037} This public acknowledgement of a view that was held internally among many of the securocrats that dominated Botha’s government was targeted at reforming many of the “petty” forms of apartheid that were seen as limiting the growth of white South African capitalism.\textsuperscript{1038} Labor disruptions and international sanctions threatened the long term viability of apartheid and made the necessity for such reforms obvious to many.\textsuperscript{1039}

Despite the need to reform apartheid in the long-term, the Total Strategy had found short-term success against the ANC within South Africa. The inclusion of the SADF in domestic operations had violently eroded the ANC’s ability to mount a successful resistance. By the middle of the decade, ANC leadership had realized that open revolution was not viable against the strength of the South African state.\textsuperscript{1040} The TRC concluded that, by 1987 “the government had succeeded in reasserting control and effectively defused whatever potential existed for an insurrectionary situation.”\textsuperscript{1041} The


\textsuperscript{1038} Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid.”

\textsuperscript{1039} Even some more conservative members of the National Party, such as F.W. de Klerk, had begun seeing change as inevitable. It was not yet clear if merely reforming petty apartheid would be sufficient or if change on a grander scale would be required (Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid”).

\textsuperscript{1040} Giliomee, “Surrender Without Defeat.”

ANC adapted to this realization by altering its methodology and increasingly used terrorist tactics that targeted soft targets and civilians.\textsuperscript{1042} This shift fueled the fear in white South African society that fed racial polarization and had renewed public faith in the security forces to protect white society.\textsuperscript{1043} But the defeat suffered in Angola undid much of this support.

Defeat in Angola demonstrated that the SADF—and, by extension, white racial hegemony—was far from invincible. ANC President Oliver Tambo described the battle of Cuito Cuanavale as “Pretoria’s Waterloo” and the “humiliation of the SADF” that paved the way for the independence of Namibia and negotiations for the end of apartheid.\textsuperscript{1044} For white political elites, defeat at Cuito Cuanavale revealed the vulnerability of the state. The SADF’s own view of the defeat, combined with the threat to the institution’s corporate interests discussed above, convinced military elites that the current path was untenable and that the continuance of apartheid was incompatible with the maintenance of national security against the communist threat. This realization played a large role in decoupling the “black and red threats” that had for so long been used to justify the apartheid system. More than anything, Cuito Cuanavale was a symbolic defeat that weakened the SADF’s political influence and paved the way for a shift in power


\textsuperscript{1043} Seegers, “Current Trends.”

toward political elites as they gained confidence in their ability to control a military whose politicized, activist ideology was now under threat.\textsuperscript{1045}

\textbf{De Klerk As State President: A Critical Juncture}

The opportunity for increased civilian control over the military was realized in August 1989 when Botha resigned amid health problems and F.W. de Klerk assumed the state presidency. Many of the reforms that had accompanied the Total Strategy had not only increased the political role of the military but had also tied them directly to Botha who maintained “exceptionally close” relationships with many of the SADF senior leaders.\textsuperscript{1046} De Klerk shared little of this rapport with the military and had not been part of Botha’s inner circle.\textsuperscript{1047} As de Klerk assumed control of the government and almost immediately began implementing changes geared at reforming apartheid, the military was faced with a choice of whether to support these efforts or resist.

There was notable concern within the government whether de Klerk could successfully manage a military that had wielded such “extensive influence over state decision-making and policy implementation.”\textsuperscript{1048} Further, many government officials feared the military would resist de Klerk and conduct a coup to retain its prominent

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1045] Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid;” Frankel, \textit{Soldiers in a Storm}.
\item[1046] Howe, “South African Defence Force,” 34.
\end{footnotes}
As much contemporary scholarly work made clear, the more praetorian vein of the SADF could easily undermine the political effort and threaten the reform efforts or take power for themselves.¹⁰⁴⁹

De Klerk’s actions in asserting control over the military are an example of deliberate attempts to alter the organizational culture of the SADF. The Total Strategy had rested on the central pillar of establishing a stable security environment to conduct negotiations from a position of strength. The result was to elevate and politicize the military. De Klerk pursued an alternative strategy based on reconciliation that did not require stability as a prerequisite. This lessened the influence of the SADF in the political process and threatened their “corporate identity by reducing [their] power and status.”¹⁰⁵¹ Some predicted that attempts to force the military out of the political realm would pose a significant threat to any reform-minded civilian administration.¹⁰⁵² However, while de Klerk may have threatened the more praetorian-minded ideologies resident in the SADF, his changes were designed to elevate the classical professionalist ideology that still remained.¹⁰⁵³ It was this more professional ideology inherent in the SADF that de Klerk would rely on to support the upcoming transition.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Harvey, The Fall of Apartheid, 162, 164.
¹⁰⁵⁰ Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians; Howe, “South African Defence Force.”
¹⁰⁵² Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians, 181.
¹⁰⁵³ Esterhuyse, “Getting the Job Done.”
De Klerk achieved this in two ways. First, he implemented a series of structural changes that reversed the institutionalized politicization established under Botha. De Klerk modified the SSC such that the state president was no longer a member, SSC members had to be elected politicians, and it was stripped of decision-making power as its advice now had to be approved by the full cabinet. The NSMS was abolished and replaced with a National Coordinating Mechanism (NCM) that further reduced military involvement in policy implementation. He limited the length of conscription which decreased the size of the military by nearly half, reduced the defense budget each year of his presidency, announced the dismantling of the countries secretive nuclear weapons program, and joined the international Non-Proliferation Treaty in an attempt to normalize international relations. De Klerk’s reforms were met with some limited resistance within the military but despite significant challenges to the SADF’s status and traditional interests, the top echelon of SADF leadership largely supported his efforts to rein in the security forces.

Second, de Klerk restricted the activity of the covert units involved with the Third Force. Because this series of reforms did not happen immediately, critics accused de Klerk of following a double-edged strategy of both negotiating with the now-legalized

\[\text{References}\]


ANC while still allowing covert units to continue their operations.\textsuperscript{1057} De Klerk had acted early in his term to disband some of the SADF’s covert units associated with the Third Force such as the 32 Battalion and the CCB death squad. But these efforts did little to stop the violence and many black communities experienced an increase in atrocities in the early 1990s, particularly following the legalization of the ANC and the initiation of formal peace negotiations. However, in December 1992, de Klerk purged 23 SADF senior officers for their involvement in illegal political acts uncovered by the Steyn Commission.\textsuperscript{1058}

The Steyn Commission was established in 1992 following allegations of SADF involvement in political violence. Led by Air Force Lieutenant-General Pierre Steyn, the commission uncovered a wide range of “illegal and unauthorized”\textsuperscript{1059} activities committed by special forces and military intelligence units that connected them to the Third Force. Activities included massacres and bombings that targeted civilians in black communities, attempts to overthrow local township governments, chemical attacks, various arms caches spread throughout Southern Africa, and a wide range of personal corruption.\textsuperscript{1060} As the TRC found, the illicit activities were often hidden in plain sight,

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\textsuperscript{1057} Howe, “South African Defence Force;” Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”


“being woven into authorized and official operations, making detection more
difficult.”\textsuperscript{1061} The Steyn Report itself was kept secret and SADF leadership, as well as de Klerk, would falsely testify to the TRC that no written report was even produced.\textsuperscript{1062}

De Klerk provided the report to the Chief of the SADF, the Chief of the Army, and the Chief of Staff of Military Intelligence—all of which were named in the report itself—who then proceeded with the firing or forced retirement of the 23 officers. The “night of the generals” as it was called, was not well received in the SADF. Senior officers questioned the reliability of Steyn’s information and there were inconsistencies between the officers implicated by Steyn and those that were actually fired.\textsuperscript{1063} For de Klerk, however, the purge was less about targeting specific troublemakers than it was about establishing control of the SADF as a whole. His intent was to “puncture the steel-belted culture of the SADF.”\textsuperscript{1064}

The purge did not end Third Force violence but it did unequivocally signal that the government would no longer sanction such activity within the military. As Ellis argued, the need-to-know mentality that had defined the military’s cultural approach to operations in the 1980s meant that this “warrior” culture would continue their attacks

\textsuperscript{1061} Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Final Report,” Volume 2, Chapter 6, 542.

\textsuperscript{1062} Ibid; “Armed Forces Hearing, SADF,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission; A summary of the report was leaked in 1997 by the Mail and Guardian newspaper after a copy was provided to the TRC by Nelson Mandela’s ANC government. The report itself would remain hidden from public view until it was declassified in 2006.

\textsuperscript{1063} As the TRC noted, the list of purged officers included some that were not named by Steyn and senior officers omitted their own names, whom Steyn had named as participating in illegal activities (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Final Report,” Vol 2, Chapter 7, p587).

\textsuperscript{1064} Hamann, \textit{Days of the Generals}, loc. 3798 of 5231, Kindle.
“until unambiguously ordered to stop.”

De Klerk’s crackdown, whether reluctant or intentionally delayed, had finally provided the order. As with other events described in this project, de Klerk’s actions did not create a new organizational culture with apolitical traditions. Neither did they guarantee that military leadership would fall in line. Instead, the purge established a clear boundary for acceptable military behavior that allowed for the more professionalist culture already present in the SADF to accept the conditions being set.

Both an opportunity and a motivation for military intervention still existed. De Klerk lacked the loyalists within the military that could be installed in key positions as enjoyed by Botha. What the purge achieved was to shape the competition between the politicized and professional ideologies already inherent in the SADF. Had the military continued its politicized activity, it would cross a line that would have put the SADF in direct confrontation with the civilian government. The decrease of military activism following the purge is evidence that the military’s choice to end its Third Force participation was significantly influenced by its cultural ideology of classical professionalism.


1066 Some scholars have argued that the government was well aware of and could have cracked down on this illegal activity long before it did. In this light, De Klerk’s delay in doing so has been attributed to a negotiating tactic in which he could not afford to do so until political negotiations had progressed to the point that continued political violence was no longer helpful. Before this point, the security apparatus was still in a position to continue its opposition to the ANC. Once a political solution became clearer, this activity was no longer needed. (Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force”). Other scholars have argued that there was little that could be done to rein in the violence being committed by SADF and SAP units (Harvey, Fall of Apartheid).
Cultural Competition Amid Reform

The fact that the purges were effective in quelling the state-sanctioned portion of the violence demonstrates two things. First, despite warnings from contemporary experts that infringing on SADF autonomy would result in violence or military intervention, the purge demonstrated that the military was willing to accept the course that was being set by civilian leadership. Put differently, had the military not been willing to accede to civilian restrictions on their autonomy or the reduction of their corporate interests, other viable paths remained to challenge de Klerk’s authority. For example, the political activity and growing following of former General Constand Viljoen demonstrated the considerable influence of an officer that, by this time, had been out of service for nearly a decade. Sudden changes to cultural practices—in this case the significant curtailing of military autonomy—often have uncertain consequences.1067 De Klerk himself was aware of the danger in reestablishing civilian control of the military and was at least somewhat reluctant to take such drastic actions. As he later wrote:

In my relationship with the security forces, I sometimes felt like a man who had been given two fully grown watchdogs…Their previous owner had…allowed them to run free and chase cats all over the neighbourhood [sic]. I had put a stop to all that. As a result, they did not particularly like me—although they had an ingrained sense of obedience…I could guide them, but I knew that if I pulled [on the leash] too hard, I might choke them—or they might slip their collars and cause pandemonium.1068

1067 Sewell, Logics of History, 168.

1068 De Klerk, Last Trek, 264. Quote also appears in similar context in Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid,” 31-32.
Second, the effectiveness of the purge in curtailing illicit military activity demonstrated the reactivity of organizational culture. Culture is learned and reinforced as behavior is either rewarded or punished. Specific to a military’s organizational culture, the acceptable boundaries of behavior are defined by external inputs and changing domestic conditions that define the organization’s relationship with civilian elites and with society more broadly. The purge did not create an organizational culture that was willing to follow civilian direction. Rather, an ideology of classical professionalism was an already present element of SADF organizational culture. The actions taken by de Klerk, the realization after Cuito Cuanavale that apartheid was detrimental to the SADF’s interests, and the turning tide of public opinion on the military’s more political behavior helped to tilt the scale between the military’s competing cultures and provide clear signals of the acceptable range of military behavior.

The politicized warrior ideology represented by the Third Force did not go away as a result of de Klerk’s changes. Violence continued throughout the transition period and well into Mandela’s term as president. However, following the 1992 purge, the Third Force lacked any “recognizable degree of central coordination.” Many of the rank-and-file members that were no longer serving—because of de Klerk’s decrease in the size of the SADF—joined private security firms that continued the fight against racial

1069 Ruffa, “Military Cultures.”

1070 Frankel, Soldiers in a Storm.

1071 Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force,” 293.
integration. But this privatization of the Third Force effectively divorced these elements from any central command and control they had enjoyed from within the government itself and helped shift the culture of the SADF that was now more willing to support the political transition.

**Democratic Transition and the Creation of the SANDF**

Although de Klerk had reestablished some limited form of civilian control of the military, the government continued to grow weaker amid the continuing violence. Direct conflict between the government and the ANC had diminished but neither de Klerk nor Mandela could fully restrain the more extreme elements on either side of the conflict. Political violence resulted in more than 10,000 deaths from 1990-1994. It was during this period that the SADF emerged as the most powerful force in the state and became “the essential arbiters of whether the country would have all-out war or elections and something resembling peace.” It was now that the opportunity for military intervention was greatest. Military behavior during this time further demonstrated the ways in which the SADF’s organizational culture inhibited intervention and provided political space for the peace process to succeed.

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1072 Howe states that private firms employed as many as 300,000 former SADF and SAP members by mid-1993 (Howe, “South African Defence Force,” 35).


1074 Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid.”


1076 Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force,” 293.
The continued potential for political violence throughout the transition period was well recognized by the government and the ANC. For both, the SADF was a significant source of concern and several efforts were made to sideline the military. For example, a 10,000 member national peacekeeping force (NPKF) was established to quell the violence in the townships. But the NPKF proved ineffective and was quickly replaced by the SADF. Likewise, operational control over the SADF remained elusive as military combat capability was so decentralized among the various reserve and covert units. Civilian accountability mechanisms did exist but were never fully utilized by parliament or de Klerk’s cabinet officials because of the relative power of the military. Absent civilian’s ability to fully control the military, the transition to democracy hinged on the SADF’s choice to support the process and its willingness to curb the type of disruptions that might derail it entirely.

The prospect of a military coup was raised several times in the early 1990s. Magnus Malan claimed to have been approached multiple times by business leaders urging him to lead a coup. He declined to follow through because as he stated, “my whole way of thinking is that you serve the government of the day and that this is a democratic country…if you want to change it you use the ballot box.” The most serious threat came from former General and now leader of the far-right Afrikaner Volksfront Constand Viljoen. Viljoen had a large armed following and the support of many elements of the


1078 Magnus Malan, quoted in Hamann, Days of the Generals, loc. 4185 of 5231, Kindle.
Commando Force but was vocally opposed by the current Chief of the SADF, General Georg Meiring.\textsuperscript{1079} While Viljoen admitted to pursuing options for a military takeover, he ultimately realized that a coup was not likely to succeed without the support of the SADF’s Permanent Force. Meiring was increasingly involved in preventing rogue elements from disrupting the elections and issued a series of warnings to other potential coup plotters: \textit{“As julle \textquoteleft n ding gaan doen gaan ons julle opvok: julle moet pasop!”}\textsuperscript{1080}

Despite the unpopularity of de Klerk among SADF generals and a permissive opportunity to derail the peace process, the commitment of the SADF leadership to see the elections through was also demonstrated by its willingness to act against Afrikaner opposition movements. For example, in 1991 the SADF confronted several organized demonstrations by armed right wing groups. One such occasion included nearly 2,000 AWB marchers that were attacking black civilians in Ventersdorp.\textsuperscript{1081} As the elections approached, the SADF prevented several such disruptions from groups on both sides of the political aisle.\textsuperscript{1082} The military’s willingness to use force against white protesters led some, such as then-ANC President Oliver Tambo, to conclude that the SADF was growing more powerful, but also more moderate.\textsuperscript{1083}

\textsuperscript{1079} David Welsh, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Apartheid} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Kaufmann, “End of Apartheid.”

\textsuperscript{1080} Translated by Hamann as “If you’re going to do something, we’ll fuck you up: watch out!” as quoted in Hamann, \textit{Days of the Generals}, loc. 4207 of 5231, Kindle.

\textsuperscript{1081} Harvey, \textit{Fall of Apartheid}.

\textsuperscript{1082} Hamann, \textit{Days of the Generals}.

\textsuperscript{1083} Harvey, \textit{Fall of Apartheid}, 21.
That the SADF’s behavior can be attributed to a newfound political moderation is unlikely, however. De Klerk had retained the same security ministers that served under his predecessor.\textsuperscript{1084} Likewise, the senior leadership of the SADF retained their positions and continued to advance under de Klerk. This included senior officers such as General Meiring and several others that had been connected to illicit activity by the Steyn Commission.\textsuperscript{1085} Meiring was promoted to the Chief of the SADF under de Klerk in 1993 and became the first Chief of the SANDF under Mandela in 1994. Furthermore, the SADF was still an Afrikaner-dominated organization and polling in 1992 indicated that a majority of white officers supported the Conservative Party and retained strong anti-ANC ideologies.\textsuperscript{1086} The SADF’s willingness to support de Klerk in the early 1990s and act against cultural deviants despite personal ideologies is consistent with the expectations of an organizational culture that develops strategies of action based on the collective good of the organization.\textsuperscript{1087}

**Creating the SANDF**

Alternative arguments for the military’s willingness to go along with the peace process often point to the SADF’s pragmatic attempt to secure concessions during the

\textsuperscript{1084} Minister of Defense Magnus Malan, Law and Order Minister Adriaan Volk, Justice Minister Kobie Coetzee and Foreign Affairs Minister “Pik” Botha had all served under P.W. Botha and continued under de Klerk (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, “De Klerk’s Relationship”).


\textsuperscript{1086} Howe, “South African Defence Force.”

\textsuperscript{1087} Kwantes and Glazer, *Culture, Organizations, and Work*, 46.
transition as an example of the importance of corporate interests in the process. There is little doubt that appealing to SADF interests was a critical factor in securing success. However, two factors call into question the corporate interest explanation. The first is the timing of the negotiations. By the end of 1992 when the military began officially negotiating the creation of the new SANDF, democratic transition was already on the horizon.

    Constitutional negotiations between the ANC and the government had been ongoing through the multi-party Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). When those negotiations hit a deadlock, the Chief of the SADF Kat Liebenberg began talks with the MK. General Meiring, who succeeded Liebenberg and continued the negotiations with MK, described the mindset at the time as “okay, [we know] this is going to happen, so let’s go and talk to them.” Furthermore, these initial talks, that were critical in reinvigorating political negotiations, achieved little in determining that actual makeup of the future SANDF and instead focused on short-term transitional control of all the involved militaries. Military-to-military negotiations were less about the outcome of the transition then they were about securing the best available terms during the transition. Still, the formation of a new defense force for democratic South Africa was critical to the transition from apartheid to democracy. The negotiations were intentionally led by

1088 Ellis, “South Africa’s Third Force.”
1091 Mashike, “‘Blacks Can Win Everything.”
the representatives of the now-dominant professionally oriented culture of the SADF and the more ideologically driven counter-insurgent arms of the force were left out. As such, the SADF’s position was rooted in a “strong emphasis of maintaining internationally accepted standards of military professionalism.”1092 The SADF secured significant concessions during these negotiations. For instance, its members retained their positions and rank and were not subject to the same review process as members of the opposition forces. However, the SADF also relented on several demands that threatened their autonomy and organizational cohesion. Most notably, the transitional agreement provided for internal oversight of the SADF by ANC observers, a condition the SADF had previously declared unacceptable.1093 Additionally, many of the original agreements reached in 1993 were already “in tatters” before the election occurred.1094 Ultimately, the agreements reached during these lengthy negotiations were more about finalizing the peace process than satisfying SADF demands.1095

It is difficult to say what would have happened had the negotiations between the SADF and MK not succeeded. As described above, the SADF had already demonstrated their support for de Klerk multiple times. And the structural changes and personnel purges implemented by de Klerk had already amplified the importance of the

1092 Esterhuysen, “Getting the Job Done,” 5.
1094 Frankel, Soldiers in a Storm, 41.
1095 Mashike, “Blacks Can Win Everything.”
professionalized, western-oriented vein of the SADF that sought normalization among its international peers. But tensions remained high in the country and historical cases have demonstrated the importance of a military agreements in securing democratization.\textsuperscript{1096}

Without acceptable terms, the SADF may well have withdrawn their support for transition. However, negotiations with the ANC were sufficient to provide an acceptable recourse to SADF leaders and the reassertion of apolitical cultural traditions allowed them to accept the option. Organizational culture was not the only reason the military supported the political process but de Klerk’s attention and efforts to influence the organizational culture in the senior ranks of the SADF created the conditions where a successful transition was possible by marginalizing the impact of more praetorian-minded ideologies.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter argued that the SADF’s organizational culture played an explanatory role in inhibiting military intervention during the end of apartheid. Throughout its history, the SADF was repeatedly subjected to domestic inputs that formed and reformed organizational practices. Like the U.S. case, civilian inputs and political conditions contributed to contestation between competing ideologies. One ideology took the form of an activist culture of the military as a power factor in the state with a legitimate influence on political decision-making.\textsuperscript{1097} The other was a classical professionalist culture rooted

\textsuperscript{1096} Przeworski, Democracy and the Market.

\textsuperscript{1097} Fitch, Armed Forces and Democracy, 67.
in the apolitical traditions of the military’s origins. Different from the U.S., I found nothing to suggest that the willingness to accept civilian direction was motivated by a desire for democratization, specifically. Consistent with my argument, the competition between ideologies was resolved by civilian signaling that reestablished the acceptable boundaries of military behavior.

The South African case demonstrated two key portions of my overall argument. First, this case is consistent with my theorized polarization-politicization pathway. In the 1980s, as severe polarization increased social instability, military politicization via civilian activation pulled the SADF into policymaking and the institution enjoyed immense autonomy and power within the state. The politicization of the military in the 1980s encouraged the emergence of a “special forces mentality” that pursued a politicized and autonomous approach to the conflict. As the SADF became the central pillar in the Total Strategy, traditional mechanisms for civilian control eroded or were intentionally dismantled. Absent these controls, the militaries decision-making on whether to support or oppose the civilian direction was heavily influenced by the ideological contestation within its organizational culture.

Second, the emergence and relative importance of the competing ideologies was shaped by civilian inputs that regulated SADF practices by rewarding or punishing those actions that exceeded the acceptable boundaries of behavior as defined by civilian superiors. The SADF’s British origins as a Western military force, the reconstruction of

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1098 Seeger, “Current Trends.”
the military as an Afrikaner force loyal to the National Party, and the reestablishment of civilian control under de Klerk all played a part in shaping the competing ideologies inherent in the SADF’s culture.

The defeat at Cuito Cuanavale and de Klerk’s purge of senior officers were two critical junctures that altered the distribution of ideologies in the SADF. Unlike critical junctures in the U.S. or Venezuelan cases that more directly threatened military culture, these events directly imperiled SADF corporate interests. In the case of their defeat at Cuito Cuanavale, threats to military corporate interests led SADF leaders to reconsider the military’s role in domestic apartheid operations. This reevaluation weakened the military’s activist ideology and opened the door for the reestablishment of some form of civilian control. It was de Klerk’s deconstruction of the institutionalized politicization and signaling of official intolerance for illicit actions that ultimately helped tip the scales in the cultural competition. The SADF was left with a choice between ideologies. The culture of classical professional that emerged as dominant, that followed an apolitical ideology, inhibited any remaining willingness to intervene and allowed the military to remain politically neutral and accept the conditions as offered by the ANC and its own civilian leadership.

This is not to argue that SADF actions during apartheid should in any way be excused. SADF members committed horrible atrocities and human rights violations that far exceed any justification. The argument that the SADF adhered to an apolitical tradition as a collective organization should also be divorced from any idea that they were ‘un-political.’ The military played an active role in the development and implementation
of the Total Strategy and were involved in destabilization campaigns throughout the region. Individually, senior military leaders were often staunchly conservative in their approach to race relations and supported the continued subordination of black South Africans. This was not a case of a purely subservient organization unthinkingly following orders or of a progressive organization that supported change in the name of racial harmony. Rather, the reliance on apolitical cultural traditions influenced the SADF’s choice to remain politically neutral and support the political solution that transpired.
Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusions

Why does severe polarization result in military intervention in some cases but not others? I have argued that the organizational culture unique to a particular military plays a critical role in influencing behavioral outcomes in severely polarized democracies. Severe polarization presents a unique threat to civil-military relations and provides the type of unsettled periods in which cultural ideologies express an observable influence on the strategies of action developed by military leaders. When faced with sovereign power disputes that arise as a result of severe polarization, cultural ideologies shape the collective behavior of military elites and allow for the development of new strategies of action based on the application of existing cultural resources to address novel problems.

The effects of severe polarization create both an opportunity and a motivation for military intervention. The institutional mechanisms used for democratic civilian control of the military are eroded in divided democracies and the legitimacy of civilian leadership is often called into question. Nevertheless, severe polarization threatens both the military’s material and non-material interests in ways that have historically contributed to political interventions. But as the cases in this study demonstrated,

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1099 McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”

1100 For example, Desch, “Soldiers, States, and Structures”; Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster, “Second Generation Problem.”
organizational culture often acts to inhibit military intervention and influences behavior in otherwise unexpected ways. It is organizational culture—the collective practices, norms, and ideas of the military—that bridges the gap between opportunity to intervene and motives to do so.

**Severe Polarization and Military Politicization**

In this project I identified a common polarization-politicization pathway that occurred in severely polarized democracies and can be summarized in two parts. The first is the way in which severe polarization led to politicization of the military. This begins with the notion that military organizational culture is constructed and is heavily reliant on inputs from civilian elites. For example, all three cases demonstrated how changes to the officer corps’ education or the resourcing of the force provided outer boundaries within which organizational culture developed and contributed to the doctrinal adoption that impacted the strategic perceptions of the military and their unique forms of warfare. Patterns of relations between civilian and military spheres were developed over time through the institutionalization of control mechanisms and the repeated sanctioning of unacceptable behavior. Likewise, failure to sanction deviant behavior created opportunity for the emergence of new ideologies that competed for dominance within the organization. These inputs contributed to the development of a ‘toolkit’ that loosely guided military decision-making during settled periods.

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1101 Similar findings on the importance of external inputs have been noted by Kier, *Imagining War*; Kahl, “Crossfire or the Crosshairs”; and Carvin and Williams, *Law, Science, Liberalism*. 379
Severe polarization disrupted these settled periods and incentivized civilian elites to politicize the military. All three cases saw the placement of military officers into political positions or the dissolution of established procedures designed to limit military influence in government. In the United States, Trump encouraged the military to ignore international norms on the treatment of prisoners and enemy combatants, lifted many of the operational restrictions designed to limit civilian casualties, and pulled the military into policy making on polarizing subjects. In Venezuela, Chávez made explicit constitutional changes to increase the military’s participation in domestic politics and undid many of the institutionalized forms of civilian control that had aided democratization. In South Africa, the SADF was pulled into local governance by its involvement in domestic COIN operations and given great influence in coordinating defense policy with all aspects of national policy.

Severe polarization directly contributed to the politicization of the military via forms of civilian activation that either pulled the military into political debates or were intended to cultivate loyalty to the incumbent regime. In all three cases, the military was a focal point for the political strategies of polarizing incumbent leaders. In the United States, President Trump often placed military issues at the center of his populist political tactics and pulled the military into cultural debates by delegating policy making on issues used to exaggerate the central social cleavage of the time. In Venezuela, Chávez explicitly sought a civil-military union and Chavismo encouraged a deep connection between the economically underprivileged that formed the base of his political support and a portrayal of the military as the protectors of this portion of society against the “oligarchs and
escuálidos" that comprised the Venezuelan elite. In South Africa, the SADF was the central pillar of the Total Strategy that upheld the institutionalized racial discrimination of apartheid and was granted enormous autonomy and influence in state policymaking.\textsuperscript{1103}

The centrality of the military to polarizing politics meant that even good faith actions by the military were often interpreted as partisan behavior by a polarized society.\textsuperscript{1104} Incumbent civilian groups sought military loyalty through appeasement strategies and appeals to military institutional interests: greater autonomy, increased resources, favorable political or personnel placements, etc. As severe polarization led to declining political stability, the structural conditions of the civil-military relationship eroded amid further overtures intended to capture the military institution as a partisan arm of the government.

**Organizational Culture and Critical Junctures**

The second part of this pathway was found in how organizational culture impacted military decision-making during sovereign power disputes that arose as a result of severe polarization. Huntington’s classical approach to civil-military relations relied on a separation between civil and military responsibilities. But severe polarization erases any meaningful distinction between civilian and military spheres as all policy—to include

\textsuperscript{1102} Samet, “The Photographer’s Body.”

\textsuperscript{1103} Grundy, *Militarization of South African Politics*.

\textsuperscript{1104} Robinson, *Dangerous Instrument*. 

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military and defense policy—is incorporated into the binary, oppositional cleavage that dominates society. The salience of organizational culture was increased in these instances by this lack of separation and the erosion of apolitical norms and structural mechanisms that previously restricted military involvement in politics. Culture acted in these periods by shaping the collective perception of organizational members and the problem-solving pathways that were available during contentious periods. In other words, severe polarization created the conditions in which organizational culture exerted an overt influence on military behavior that would otherwise be absent.

In addition to civilian inputs that tend to have a slower impact on organizational culture, I used the concept of critical junctures to identify those instances that either created rapid shifts in the ideological distributions within a culture or created a cognitive opening that acted as a wakeup call or an opportunity for reevaluation of the military’s relationship and role within the state. It is in these critical junctures that antecedent cultural elements can exert influence over the strategies of action developed by military elites. Cultural models are born, take root, and are incorporated via a constructive process during more stable periods. The critical junctures identified in each case produced an opportunity in which military elites reevaluated the organization’s position vis-a-vis the state and the pathways that guided their decision-making were heavily


1107 Swidler, “Culture in Action.”
influenced by ideologies that emerged from the preexisting practices, norms, and ideas of organizational culture.

In the United States, the reaction to General Milley’s march across Lafayette square provided an opportunity to reevaluate the military’s relationship with the Trump administration and altered the course of action for the armed forces during the president’s attempts to discredit the election. The behavior of military elites following this event demonstrated a distinct focus on returning to nonpartisan norms and a desire to portray the force as taking no role in the political turmoil that followed. When political neutrality was perceived as no longer being a tenable approach—specifically following another critical juncture during the attack on the Capitol—military elites took further action to undermine the assault on democratic norms: prioritizing the preservation of the democratic transfer of power over apolitical traditions and adherence to civilian control.

Critical junctures in Venezuela played two roles. The military’s role in suppressing the Caracazo riots and the coup attempts of 1992 ignited a significant shift in the distribution of cultural ideologies and contributed to the displacement of a role belief of classical professionalism with a role belief of conditional subordination. The military under Chávez, by this point perceived to be a loyal instrument of the state, faced another critical juncture when the president activated Plan Ávila and ordered the military to act against civilian protesters. In this case, the critical juncture acted as a decision point in which the dominant cultural ideology directly shaped the strategies of action developed by military leadership.
Two critical junctures were also apparent in South Africa. The SADF’s defeat at Cuito Cuanavale threatened the SADF’s material interests and provided a wakeup call to the insoluble dilemma between continued domestic action to preserve apartheid and the primary role of the military in providing external defense of the nation. Similarly, the actions taken by new State President F.W. de Klerk provided a choice between divergent options: whether to intervene in the interest of the organization and that segment of society that desired to maintain apartheid or to remain neutral and allow a political solution to transpire. The decision-making process of military elites during these critical junctures represented an emphasis on maintaining the organization’s commitment to civilian direction during these critical junctures.

In each of these cases, the military’s perception of its options and the resultant strategies of action were shaped by the collective practices, norms, and ideas that defined organizational culture. As cultural ideologies emerged and competed for dominance in each case, critical junctures arose that impacted the cultural contestation and directly influenced military behavior. Institutionalized civilian control mechanisms such as those that often accompany successful democratic transitions are important tools for molding resilient democratic institutions. But severe polarization weakens these control mechanisms in much the same way that it erodes other democratic norms.\textsuperscript{1108} Organizational culture provided an important element in understanding the behavior of a military during these unsettled periods.

\textsuperscript{1108} McCoy and Somer, “Theory of Pernicious Polarization”; Weyland, “How Populism Dies.”
Organizational Culture in the United States

U.S. military culture since the end of the Cold War can be described as a contestation between an activist ideology that viewed the military as a power factor in the state and an ideology of democratic professionalism that maintained an affirmative attachment to democracy as the preferred form of government. These ideologies coexisted in a continuous struggle for dominance. Changing geopolitical conditions, varying civilian inputs, and signaling from military elites altered the salience of these ideologies at different times. For instance, the uncertain international environment at the beginning of the Clinton administration created opportunity for military cultural entrepreneurs to greatly expand the influence of the armed forces and consistently politicized the military via military activism. However, this activism did not extend to other areas such as insubordinate activities by military officers. In these instances, military sanctioning of such behavior clearly signaled the boundaries of appropriate behavior within the organization.

These same ideologies exerted influence during the Trump administration. As severe polarization worsened under President Trump, civilian activation became the dominant form of politicization and the military was continually pulled into partisan debates. However, critical junctures during the nationwide protests in the summer of 2020 and the attack on the Capitol in 2021 proved influential in shaping military behavior. In the first instance, the outcry from retired and active military elites shifted the ideological distribution such that the military altered their behavior to remain as politically neutral as possible. In the second instance, and amid continued politicization of the military by the
Trump administration, military elites realized that political neutrality was no longer a viable strategy. The military was faced with a choice of whether to remain neutral or to take extraconstitutional actions to ensure the democratic transfer of power. Rather than relying on political and judicial processes to resolve the conflict, the senior military leadership chose a side and took positive action to ensure the democratic transfer of power.

**Severe Polarization and Military Politicization**

As with the other cases, the U.S. case supports my theorized polarization-politicization pathway. The onset of severe polarization in the early 1990s contributed to increasing politicization of the military. Political gridlock and a decreasing ability to provide effective oversight contributed to the emergence of the military’s activist ideology that saw the armed forces as having a legitimate role in national politics. This ideology led to politicization via military activism as the military sought to set the conditions for its involvement in national defense. Cultural entrepreneurs shaped the civil-military relationship and set lasting precedents for future generations of military leaders. Still the balance between cultural ideologies was maintained by the willingness of civilian and military elites to enforce behavioral expectations in several areas. Although civilian activation was present during this period, it was not until severe polarization led to political instability during the Trump administration that it became the dominant form of politicization.

President Trump used populist tactics and intentionally polarizing behavior to galvanize his support and ushered in a period of severe polarization that fed on existing
divisions within the United States. The military was often used as a focal point of this strategy. Politicization in the form of civilian activation was used to drag the military into national cultural debates and exaggerated the social cleavages already present in society. The president emphasized a masculine image of the military that he would use to “make America great again” and “bomb the hell out of” its enemies.\textsuperscript{1109} Furthermore, civilian activation under Trump was also intended to cultivate the personal loyalty of the armed forces. The president placed several former generals in political roles and used divisive rhetoric in an attempt to create divisions between “my” military and “their” military.\textsuperscript{1110}

Trump granted the military increased autonomy and appealed to corporate interests with higher budget shares and modernization efforts. However, in many instances Trump’s efforts clashed with military cultural principles that valued restraint and were rooted in the liberal values of the nation.\textsuperscript{1111} Trump’s pardoning of war criminals, endorsement of torture, and illiberal proclivities consistently contributed to increasing civil-military friction. Additionally, a lack of accountability for civilian-directed military operations and efforts to force the Pentagon into policymaking exacerbated the relationship between Trump and military elites.

**Organizational Culture and Role Beliefs**

Severe polarization eroded many of the structural checks and balances traditionally used to provide military control. Absent these controls, organizational culture exerted \textsuperscript{1109} Robson, “Trump Says Troops Love Him.”\textsuperscript{1110} Abadi, “Trump Won’t Stop Saying ‘My Generals.’”\textsuperscript{1111} Carvin and Williams, *Law, Science, Liberalism*. 387
observable influence on military behavior. Unlike the other cases, Trump took few actions that directly altered the military’s culture. There were no changes to military officer education or the introduction of additional roles and responsibilities for the military during his presidency. The most notable exception was Trump’s attempts to use the armed forces to suppress domestic protests. Although this was initially successful, Milley’s march across Lafayette square acted as critical juncture that reoriented military perspectives. The outcry from retired and active duty officers about this blatant politicization of the military led to a reassessment of the military’s relationship with the president and military leadership resisted future attempts around the election and the lead-up to January 6th to involve military force in domestic disputes.

As military leadership realized the danger to American democracy on January 6th, priorities changed and, consistent with the cultural ideology of democratic professionalism, the military took an active role to ensure the democratic transfer of power occurred. In doing so, military leadership took extraconstitutional action and ignored or subverted the president on several occasions. The conclusions from the U.S. case support my overall argument that the actions taken by the U.S. military were commensurate with strategies of action that were heavily shaped by the cultural ideology of democratic professionalism. The military played the reluctant role of arbiter and evidence indicates that the motivation for the actions taken by CJCS General Milley and other senior leaders was driven by the desire to support the most legitimate civilian group that had been elected in democratic elections.
This is not to imply that the U.S. military culture is immune to intervention in politics. It is likely too soon to know the full extent of the impact of politicization during the Trump administration. Previous norms that restricted active and retired officers from criticizing civilian leaders were repeatedly violated and the precedent set by General Milley could have significant implications in future situations. Furthermore, severe polarization has continued in the United States absent Trump and the military has continued to be a focal point in the national culture wars.1112 Under previous administrations, balance between cultural ideologies was maintained by the willingness of civilian and military elites to enforce cultural boundaries. But previous behavior does not guarantee that it will continue in the future.

Organizational Culture in Venezuela and South Africa

The results of the shadow cases demonstrate a consistency in military decision-making approaches that supports my overall argument. In both cases, severe polarization created the conditions in which the practices, norms, and ideas of the officer corps exerted significant influence in developing the strategies of action used by the SADF and the Venezuelan military. As with the U.S. case, polarization weakened the institutionalized checks and balances that had dictated the terms of the civil-military relationship and created a permissive opportunity structure for military intervention. The


389
organizational culture of each military shaped how these situations were perceived by military elites and provided familiar tools for solving unfamiliar problems.

As with the United States, both the Venezuelan and South African militaries had extended periods in which civil-military relations approximated the democratic ideal. Democratization in Venezuela followed a traditional pathway in which the military—which had a long history of political interventions—willingly ceded its political voice in exchange for institutional autonomy. Democratizers institutionalized civilian control such that the Venezuelan military became a loyal servant of the state and was often used as a model of successful civil-military relations for other Latin American countries. A role belief that approximated classical professionalism accepted subordination to civilian direction and ordered much of the military’s decision-making during this period.

Similarly, the SADF had a long history of civilian obedience that scholars have credited to its origins as a British-influenced force. The SADF’s organizational culture retained this attachment to civilian control even as changing conditions altered organizational role beliefs and contributed to the rise of a competing ideology that embraced the military’s role in state policymaking. Unlike in Venezuela, cultural development in the SADF was heavily influenced by the ongoing armed conflict in the state. As a result, the SADF developed not just as a national military but as the armed

1114 Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians.
1115 Grundy, Militarization of South African Politics.
wing of the ruling political party. Beginning in 1948, the National Party reconstructed the military as a representation of Afrikaner society and relied on social militarization to defend the apartheid regime. Rather than fully supplanting the pre-existing professional ethos, the SADF’s role in the state throughout the apartheid era was defined by competition between these ideologies that intensified as severe polarization led to deteriorating political conditions.

Despite similar starting conditions, the organizations’ unique cultures led to different perceptions and developed different strategies of action to deal with the circumstances. The decision of whether to intervene and what form that intervention would take was indicative of the dominant role beliefs and the unique relationships between the military, the state, and society that defined the military cultures at the time. The Venezuelan military’s behavior in 2002 was an instance of military intervention in which the military’s role belief as protectors of la patria and defenders of the Venezuelan people permitted its decision to refuse orders from Hugo Chávez and briefly depose him. The SADF’s non-intervention in the early 1990s and willingness to support the political solution that transpired was enabled by the ideology of classical professionalism that emerged as dominant during that period.

**Severe Polarization and Military Politicization**

Consistent with this project’s argument, severe polarization led to military politicization in both cases. Politicization primarily occurred via civilian activation as the...

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1116 Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”
military, in both cases, was explicitly used as the focal point of each regime’s political strategies. Civilian initiated action that pulled the military into civilian policymaking was evident in both cases. In Venezuela, Chávez pursued a civil-military union that expanded the military’s domestic role and placed many senior leaders in bureaucratic positions. The military was charged with overseeing development projects and disaster recovery efforts, military officers were tapped to lead several civilian departments such as the Treasury, and the organization was given notable leeway in the administration of domestic law enforcement programs.¹¹¹⁷

Beginning with the advent of apartheid, civilian initiated actions led the South African military to become the symbolic representation of white society. Changes to military policy, such as Afrikaans language requirements, conscription programs, and military-like youth training programs, were used as vehicles for unifying and militarizing the English-speaking and Afrikaner white populations against the black opposition movements.¹¹¹⁸ In the 1980s, the SADF was the central pillar in the government’s Total Strategy. COIN and counterrevolutionary tactics drew the military into not only internal defense and law enforcement roles but also into governance roles and a central place in state policymaking.¹¹¹⁹ In both cases, the incumbent regime’s polarizing tactics sought to eliminate or greatly diminish the lines between the civil and military spheres.

¹¹¹⁷ Trinkunas, “Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations.”
¹¹¹⁸ Alexander, “Militarisation of South African White Society.”
¹¹¹⁹ Grundy, Militarization of South African Politics
Both cases also saw civilian activation intended to cultivate loyalty to the incumbent regime itself. Personal control of military budgets and promotions, the placement of loyal officers in critical command positions and close personal relationships were characteristic of both Venezuela under Chávez and South Africa under P.W. Botha. Both types of civilian activation greatly expanded the military’s influence in the state and both were used as deliberately polarizing tactics by civilian elites. Consistent with this study’s argument, the effects of this politicization led to a permissive opportunity for military intervention by undermining the institutionalized checks and balances that were previously used to maintain civilian control. The different outcomes between these two cases can be traced to different influences in each military’s organization culture.

Organizational Culture and Role Beliefs

Despite the similar starting conditions and the similar politicization that occurred within the militaries as a result of severe polarization, the differing outcomes of interest are best explained by the different organizational cultures that were unique to each military. The diachronic approach taken in this project revealed the ways in which culture was transformed over time. The role beliefs that developed over time shaped the perceptions of military elites and led to the different outcomes that were observed.

The outcome in both cases is contrary to what many existing theories of civil-military relations lead us to expect. In both cases, the corporate interests of the military were well provided for by the incumbent regimes. The Venezuelan military enjoyed high pay and benefits, sufficient resources, and there were few challenges to their organizational coherence. Continued service under Chávez would likely only have increased their
influence within the state as the military had become an important source of stability. 
Although an opportunity structure existed amid the growing civil disturbances, there was 
little to indicate that a political intervention would be regarded as legitimate within 
Venezuela. Further, returning Chávez to power was an unmistakable threat to the 
personal interests for those involved as well as a threat to organizational autonomy given 
the predictable ramifications that were later realized after his return. There were little 
structural or rational interests to indicate that the military would depose the president, and 
even less to explain their subsequent reversal.

Under the Total Strategy, the SADF enjoyed record budgets, high pay and social 
prestige, and nearly unfettered institutional autonomy. Although some reform to 
apartheid was increasingly seen as necessary by both military and civilian elites, there 
was little indication that the conservative military supported a transition to majority 
rule. F.W. de Klerk’s assumption of the presidency and march toward reform led 
many, both scholarly observers and government officials, to warn of the potential for 
military action against the new government. Yet, the SADF ultimately not only chose not 
to intervene, but they also adhered to civilian control in actively supporting de Klerk 
against white opposition movements that sought to stop the radical transformation of the 
state. During the periods of social upheaval that emerged in both cases, the familiar

1120 Philip, “Venezuelan Democracy.”
1121 Frankel, Pretoria’s Praetorians.
1122 Harvey, Fall of Apartheid.
pathways provided by organizational culture shaped the strategies of action that were used in developing solutions to these novel social problems.

In Venezuela, changes to the military education system and the use of the military in suppressing civil dissent resulted in the emergence of a competing cultural ideology. Democratic civil-military relations in Venezuela were formed by granting the military operational autonomy in exchange for civilian obedience. The military stayed out of politics because civilians stayed out of the military. However, professionalization of the military led to changes in the military education system and the development of the military as an avenue for social advancement. The combined results of these alterations was to nationalize the military and construct a role belief most closely approximating that of conditional subordination. In this view, the military’s greatest loyalty was to the Venezuelan people rather than the regime, the concept of civilian control, or any specific attachment to democracy as a form of government.

Despite the politicization of the military that occurred under Chávez, the preponderance of military forces in Venezuela did not support military intervention until ordered to act with force against peaceful protesters in Caracas in 2002. The strategies of action developed by military elites during this event were convoluted and involved much internal dissension between different elements of the military but were united in their refusal to follow these orders. The return to power of Chávez was again motivated by this same ideology.

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1123 Harnecker, “The Venezuelan Military.”
While the emergence of a competing culture in the Venezuelan military was the unintended result of professionalization that occurred during a more settled political period, the emergence of a competing ideology within the SADF was more directly the result of the severe polarization that accompanied apartheid. Executive actions constructed an SADF role belief that legitimized their political role in the state. The collective decision-making of military elites was torn between coexisting cultural roles that viewed the military as an essential power factor in the nation and one that merely sought to execute the orders—either implicit or explicit—of the civilian government.

In both cases, critical junctures resulted in a reevaluation in military behavior. These points provided an opportunity for elites to reevaluate the direction of the organization. It is during these unsettled periods that the effects of organizational culture were most readily observed. For the Venezuelan military, the backlash to the Caracazo riots and the result it had in the development of the ideology of conditional subordination was pivotal in the later evaluation of options when Chávez attempted to implement Plan Ávila in 2002. Faced with this order, military elites relied on their experiences from previous situations and the cultural ideology of conditional subordination that had developed from them. In South Africa, a similar role was played by the defeat at Cuito Cuanavale and by the changes implemented under de Klerk. The SADF was forced to reevaluate their role in the state and the value of their current direction. As with the U.S. case, these events acted as a sort of ‘wake-up call’ that reoriented military perspective and impacted the development of strategies of action to deal with the presented situations.
Theoretical Contributions

The focus of this dissertation has been on military behavior and the perception of senior military leaders that has guided their decision-making. A cultural approach to military intervention rejects the notion that there is a one-size-fits-all pattern to civil-military relations in a democracy. The overarching themes of professionalism, autonomy, and interests that are common to traditional approaches to civil-military relations remain important factors but they should be understood as existing within unique cultural contexts. Military organizations are likely to respond differently to similar structural and contextual conditions based on their particular traditions, practices, values, and beliefs. Culture acts in these instances by providing a consistent sense-making of changing conditions as organizational leaders develop strategies of action based on familiar cultural pathways.

All three militaries in this project ascribed to civil-military relations that approximated the democratic ideal. All three recognized civilian control and apolitical traditions as important parts of their professional ethos. Yet the differing outcomes presented in this study demonstrated that institutional control mechanisms and appeals to a military’s corporate interests are often not enough to ensure a military will remain politically neutral. Severe polarization weakened democratic institutions and called into question the legitimacy of civilian groups on which structural and institutional approaches to civil-military relations rely. The following sections highlight some of the theoretical contributions of this study.
**Professionalism, Autonomy, and Role Beliefs**

Huntington’s theory of objective control relied on military professionalism as the primary mechanism for preventing military involvement in politics. To develop as a professional force and prevent civilian interference in military affairs that would negatively impact their neutrality, Huntington hypothesized autonomy as a necessary condition. But as I have argued and as others have noted, military professionalism is not universal. Rather, it exists within a larger organizational and national political culture that impacts militaries differently, even under similar circumstances. For instance, professionalism in the SADF and Venezuelan militaries did little to prevent the type of subjective control that Huntington warned against. The particular ways in which a military is professional are better understood as elements of organizational culture and the role beliefs to which a military subscribes.

Huntington conceptualized a military as professional “only to the extent to which its loyalty is to the military ideal...only if they are motivated by military ideals will the armed forces be obedient servants of the state.” As Finer pointed out, however, the problem with this type of neutral professionalism is that it may well set the military on a collision course with civilian control in that a “military’s consciousness of themselves as a profession may lead them to see themselves as servants of the state rather than of the government in power.” Going further, Finer notes the danger of a professional

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1124 Fitch, *Armed Forces and Democracy*.
1125 Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 74.
military that “draws a distinction between the nation and government in power” and the way that such a distinction can lead the military to “invent their own private notion of the national interest.”1127

Certainly, this distinction has been present in any number of armed forces throughout history. In the United States, the MacArthur Doctrine has continued to receive some support in modern times by officers that emphasized senior leaders’ loyalty “not to a person but to the Constitution.”1128 This line of thinking encourages officers to speak out, even to the point of moral resignations,1129 in those instances when civilian direction is in conflict with the military’s subjective interpretation of the national interest. Yet, there is no history of moral resignation in the U.S. military and the MacArthur doctrine has been discredited by both scholars and generals alike.1130 Professionalism in these cases has little to do with the type of autonomy as described by Huntington.

Professionalism is better defined in relation to role beliefs as crafted by civilian inputs and understood by the military’s organizational culture. Role beliefs, rather than an objective view of professionalism and autonomy, define the practices and the acceptable forms of engagement that establish the boundaries of the civil-military relationship. Role beliefs are built on the concept of legitimacy and are useful in interpreting the perception

1127 Ibid.

1128 Newbold, “Why Iraq Was a Mistake.”


1130 Bacevich, “Elusive Bargain.”
of military actors when confronted with novel situations. How a military perceives its purpose and attachment within the state and how it interprets the boundaries of transactional relationships with civilian superiors provides a more useful interpretation of military behavior than does an objective view of professionalism as presented by Huntington.

A military’s attachment to the state, to the civilian government, to its own institution, or to some other mix of influences have all been observed as potential motivators for intervention. A military’s professionalism is thus better understood in the practices that guide its actions and its relative adherence to the norms of its particular civil-military relationship. Each case in this project demonstrated unique role beliefs with different attachments to the state. The U.S. cultural ideology of democratic professionalism displayed an attachment to the nation’s liberal democratic regime. When contested by the Trump administration, this role belief influenced the action of the military to defend this attachment. Likewise, the role belief of conditional subordination in Venezuela found its primary attachment in defense of the Venezuelan people and, when ordered to act against protesters, the military refused. The SADF’s ideology of classical professionalism was shaped by its attachment to civilian control rather than a specific attachment to a form of government or even racial hegemony that so motivated its competing culture. In each case, the forms of professionalism were resident in the military’s role beliefs and defined their unique attachments to the state.
When Culture Matters

The results of this study are consistent with Swidler’s argument that it is during unsettled periods that the influence of culture is greatest. Periods of social transformation—in this study represented by the sovereign power disputes that arose as a result of severe polarization—upset the status quo and created the conditions in which actors apply “familiar pathways…in new ways to solve new problems.”

Organizational culture is not created in these instances. Rather, the familiar pathways applied during unsettled periods are created and reinforced during more settled times in which organizational members observe the results of action and adjust their approaches accordingly. Repeated sanctioning or allowance of deviant behavior leaves lasting organizational memory that constantly redefines the acceptable boundaries of organizational behavior and decision-making.

During more stable periods, organizational values are present but are often overshadowed by other influences. The diachronic approach taken in this study provided firm examples of this behavior. The post-cold war U.S. military displayed increasingly politicized behavior. The uncertain international situation during the Clinton administration and the critical role of the armed forces in international conflicts following the attacks of 9/11 led the military to expand its power in American politics and exert influence in a variety of ways. Greater influence led the U.S. military to consistently transgress civil-military norms. Yet this activist ideology was contested by the military’s

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apolitical traditions and an ideology founded in the liberal values of the state. Severe polarization created the conditions in which these competing ideologies expressed observable influence on military behavior. In less polarizing times, such as the period immediately following 9/11, military behavior was better understood by other approaches.

The same can be said of each of the shadow cases. Military behavior in Venezuela was guided by the arrangements of the state’s pacted democracy. As cultural boundaries were shaped by continued civilian inputs during this period and events such as the Caracazo riots, a competing ideology inadvertently emerged that challenged the dominant culture’s role beliefs and led to the emergence of a role belief of conditional subordination. Likewise, the SADF had little reason to challenge civilian direction and was consistently used as a politicized arm of the National Party. There was little need or reason to question the boundaries of this relationship until severe polarization so eroded political conditions that the military was forced to choose between exclusive options. The cultural contestation during this period was shaped by the changing political conditions. Severe polarization in each case led to the conditions in which organizational culture was the dominant influence acting on military decision-making.

**Cultural Coherence, Transformation, and Competition**

In addition to identifying the ways in which culture impacts decision-making during sovereign power disputes, the results of this study also speak to how military organizational culture is transformed and competing ideologies emerge. Organizational culture is formed and transformed by repeated reinforcements or punishments—
punctuated by bursts of activity during critical junctures—that alter the collective perception of the organization.1132 The collective impact of these actions leaves cultural markers that contribute to common understandings of the boundaries of acceptable behavior.1133 Critical differences between cases in this study were a result of two factors: competing ideologies and the willingness to enforce cultural boundaries.

In all three cases, competing ideologies existed simultaneously within the organization. Competing ideologies emerge from opportunity. In the U.S. case, geopolitical uncertainties and cultural entrepreneurs contributed to the emergence of an activist ideology that favored greater military involvement in political affairs. During the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations, this ideology was balanced by a role belief of democratic professionalism that valued the military’s apolitical traditions and enforced structural boundaries. This cultural balance was challenged by civilian activation under President Trump who sought to cultivate loyalty in the force. The critical junctures that occurred in the final months of his presidency shifted the salience of the competing ideologies and the military’s cultural ideology of democratic professionalism allowed it to take action to ensure the democratic transfer of power.

Stronger, more coherent organizational cultures are maintained through strict adherence to cultural boundaries: either by external sanctioning such as that done by civilian elites or through internal control as exerted by military elites. Throughout the

1132 Kwantes and Glazer, *Culture, Organizations, and Work*.

1133 Sewell, *Logics of History*. 

403
post-Cold War period, civilian and military elites displayed a willingness to sanction deviant behavior that was often absent in the other cases. Military activism was consistently punished by civilian leaders such as with the examples of General Campbell, General Shinseki, and General McChrystal in each of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. Likewise, this punishment was most often conducted with the support of military leadership which clearly signaled the boundaries of acceptable action to cultural members. When military activism was left unpunished, for example the willingness of General Powell to push the boundaries of the civil-military relationship, it created precedent for future military officers to follow and the emergence of a competing cultural ideology.

The shadow cases demonstrated more variability in the willingness to sanction deviant behavior. In Venezuela, democratization was achieved and maintained in its early years by the willingness of political and military elites to purge or otherwise punish senior military leaders. However, failure to do so beginning in the 1970s and 1980s provided room for the emergence of a competing ideology among a younger generation of officers. Failure to punish Chávez and his MBR-200 organization led directly to the coup attempts in 1992 and Chávez’s later emergence as a populist strongman. However, the role belief of conditional subordination remained dominant in Venezuela and eventually contributed to the 2002 coup attempt—despite efforts by Chávez to promote loyalty from the senior military leaders.

Similarly, civilian leaders in South Africa consistently sanctioned SADF officers that were not sufficiently loyal to the National Party. During the 1980s, the implicit approval
of military leadership to deviant behavior during the Total Strategy contributed to the cultural competition between the politicized warrior culture and the more classical professionalist culture. De Klerk’s willingness to reestablish sanctions and purge deviant officers tipped the scales in the cultural competition and the culture of classical professionalism emerged as dominant.

As demonstrated, culture is never fully coherent. In addition to the cultural contestation described in chapters three and four, members of the U.S. military have long had ties to anti-state extremist organizations and, despite the organization’s apolitical traditions, it has increasingly been identified with conservative political leanings.

Although political preferences and the attachment to extremist ideologies did not play a direct role in the outcome of interest in 2021, results from the shadow cases indicate that these elements may contribute to future ideological emergence. In the post-Trump years, the military has continued to be dragged into the national culture wars. The lessons from Venezuela and South Africa suggest that if allowed to continue, a competing culture that adheres more closely to only a segment of the population is likely to strengthen over time. While a balance between competing ideologies was maintained before the Trump administration, Trump’s time in office demonstrated that continued severe polarization

1134 Belew, *Bring the War Home*.

1135 Liebert and Golby, “Mid-Life Crisis?”

1136 For example, Lange, “GOP’s Cotton and Crenshaw.”
may impact the ability or willingness of civilian and military elites to provide the type of sanctioning required to maintain cultural balance within the organization.

**Culture, Democracy, and Norms of Civilian Control**

Lastly, although civilian control is a necessary condition for democratic persistence, it is neither unique to democracies nor is there a one-size-fits-all solution to the relationship between the military and the civilian state. For example, successful civilian control in Venezuela was achieved and institutionalized through a transactional arrangement between civilian democratizers and military elites. There was little to indicate that Venezuelan officers were particularly attached to democracy as a form of government. Yet this arrangement was sufficient for the military to act to preserve the democratic order during the coup attempts in 1992. On the contrary, civilian control in the United States is maintained on a normative basis in which military leaders recognize and continually reinforce the value of civilian control as a necessary condition for the continuance of a liberal democratic regime. While there are clear differences in the way each of these militaries approach civilian control, both were effective—prior to severe polarization—in ensuring continued civilian governance.

The argument here is not that a culture of democratic professionalism is required for successful civil-military relations. Civilian control can and does exist absent any affinity toward democracy. Studies of militaries in nondemocratic regimes have demonstrated the same. For example, Taylor’s study of Russian military interventions made clear that

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1137 Trinkunas specifically cites healthy civil-military relations for the preservation of democracy during these incidents (Trinkunas, “Crafting Civilian Control”).

406
organizational culture can inhibit intervention for reasons that have nothing to do with democracy. The SADF’s non-intervention during the end of apartheid can be seen in much the same light. But the results in the U.S. case indicate that an affirmative attachment to democracy—rather than just to the notion of civilian control—can act as an important safeguard during political breakdowns.

The consistently responsive nature of organizational culture to domestic conditions makes it difficult to identify role beliefs in real time. Moreover, the cultural competitions in Venezuela and South Africa make clear that identifying military culture as one type or another can only be done as a snapshot at a given period. The results of the cases, made particularly clear in the Venezuelan case, demonstrate that civilian input and other external factors can often have unintended consequences for developing military culture. However, what this study makes obvious is that organizational culture exerts a strong influence on military behavior. Rather than relying on structural or rational appeals to ensure military obedience, democratizers must also consider the development of a military culture that supports democracy itself and how different inputs may significantly alter a military’s attachment to the state.

Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Future Research

As described throughout this work, the characteristics of severe polarization present unique challenges to democracies and democratic patterns of civil-military relations. The cases included here were examples of the most pernicious types of severe polarization

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1138 Taylor, Politics and the Russian Army.
that divided societies based on formative rifts central to national identity.\textsuperscript{1139} It is unclear if similar mechanisms are applicable to other forms of severe polarization such as that centering around economic ideologies or other forms of democratic erosion that don’t involve severe polarization. Waldner and Lust’s assertion that democratic backsliding is often more successful under institutional configurations that break down government accountability and effectiveness suggests that military organizational culture is still likely to play an important role in how military leaders respond.\textsuperscript{1140} However, the findings from this study on the important role of civilians in reinforcing cultural boundaries indicate that certain cultures may be more receptive or agnostic to the political changes taking place in the civilian realm.

Likewise, severe polarization or other forms of democratic backsliding that occur without a coinciding sovereign power dispute may diminish the importance of organizational culture in influencing military behavior. For example, although some SADF officers did push back against the institutionalized politicization of the military that occurred under Botha,\textsuperscript{1141} it was not until the nation was faced with an existential decision point that organizational culture exerted observable influence in their decision-making. This suggests that without a similar forcing mechanism, militaries that lack an

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408
affirmative attachment to democracy may be unlikely to take any action to reinforce democratic principles.

Additionally, all three cases in this study were presidential systems that consolidated the majority of defense policy in the office of the executive. The impact of severe polarization on presidential systems, and particularly the structure of the American political system, make it especially difficult to overcome the challenges of severe polarization.\textsuperscript{1142} It is unclear how my conclusions would travel to a parliamentary system in which military control may be more distributed within the civilian government. Similarly, legislative influence in shaping and maintaining military culture was largely absent in these cases. For example, in South Africa, the legislature had several mechanisms for controlling the military that were unused.\textsuperscript{1143} Cases in which military control is more diffuse, either through a more balanced executive-legislative configuration or in parliamentary systems, may be insightful and reveal additional conclusions on the importance of organizational culture.

The internal validity of this study was also impacted by its methodology. I conducted this study using publicly available information with the intent of prioritizing the observable behavioral outcomes of the highest echelons of the military over the internal deliberations between military elites. The opportunity to conduct in depth interviews with the actors involved may have revealed additional motivations for their behavior that are

not otherwise obtainable. Further opportunity for archival research and declassification of pertinent documents may also reveal information that contradicts some of these findings. For example, much of the SADF’s internal documents regarding the aftermath of the Battle for Cuito Cuanavale remain classified. And in the U.S. case under President Trump, most of the pertinent military actors remain in active duty service which has likely limited their ability or willingness to share critical details of the sovereign power dispute that occurred at the end of the Trump administration.

Furthermore, my focus on the highest echelons of military leadership was justified given the focus of the project but there is more to be said on how competing ideologies are propagated through a military organization. In focusing on military leadership, my intent was to describe military perceptions of their role in the state. A future focus on the civilian role in shaping and adhering to democratic norms of civil-military relations may provide a different perspective. More specifically, research on the impact of civilian activation as a form of politicization remains understudied and the results of this project indicate that it has significant impact on military behavior.\footnote{Golby, “Uncivil-Military Relations”; Banerjee and Webeck, “Civil-Military Relations.”}

As a starting point for this work, I relied on existing literature to identify those elements of culture that were dominant in each military. Doing so left me with two questions. The first is on how the origins of these cultures impact cultural transformation and the emergence of competing ideologies. The culture of the U.S. and South African militaries emerged more organically and occurred along with the development of the
nation-state. Alternatively, the development of Venezuelan military culture was the result of a more deliberate constructive process and part of a negotiated settlement that accompanied democratization. It is unclear from my results if these differences impact cultural resilience and there is more to be said on how military origins may influence cultural transformation.

The second and related question involves exploring in more detail how civilian inputs impact the emergence of competing ideologies. The Venezuelan case demonstrated that changes in the military education system played a large role in the emergence of a more progressive and nationalistic cultural ideology. And in the United States, the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act provided additional authorities to the CJCS that provided an opportunity for greater military influence in civilian policy development. The impact on military behavior in both examples was inadvertent. Further research on purposeful cultural transformation can be a useful addition to democratic civil-military relations literature and have lasting effects on defense policy.

**Conclusion**

Severe polarization is a unique threat to civil-military relations in a democracy. While much of the literature on severe polarization has been focused on the societal impacts and implications for democracy itself, its effects on the civil-military relationship can have significant impacts on regime survival that are separate from polarization’s impacts in other areas. I have argued that severe polarization leads to military politicization. As polarization worsens, the military is politicized primarily via civilian activation. The efforts by civilian incumbents to cultivate loyalty and tie the military to the priorities of
the governing regime are contrary to the normative, apolitical traditions of democratic civil-military relations.

As severe polarization worsens, it leads to both opportunity and motivation for military intervention. These conditions create the type of unsettled social periods in which culture exerts an observable impact on military behavior. During these periods, cultural ideologies emerge from existing organizational ethos and develop new strategies of action that guide the collective decision-making of the organization. In each case in this study, the outcome of interest was different than existing literature would have expected. Rather than remaining neutral, the U.S. military acted as an arbiter between competing civilian groups and the Venezuelan military—structurally tied to the aims of the state—conducted a coup and deposed the president. And in South Africa, the SADF remained neutral despite the threats to its corporate interests and contemporary predictions that it would behave otherwise.

The results of this study highlight the importance of organizational culture as a crucial aspect of maintaining civilian control and preserving democracy as a form of government. The corrosive effects of severe polarization limit the applicability of traditional understandings of the civil-military relationship. As polarization erodes structural and interest-based control mechanisms, organizational culture exerts an observable influence on the behavior of military organizations and provides a more effective avenue for explaining behavioral choices.
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446


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Appendix A: List of Acronyms

AD - Acción Democratica  
ANC - African National Congress  
AWB - Afrikaner Resistance Movement  
BUR - Bottom-Up Review  
CCB - Civil Cooperation Bureau  
CENTCOM - United States Central Command  
CIA - Central Intelligence Agency  
CJCS - Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
CODESA - Convention for a Democratic South Africa  
COIN - Counterinsurgency  
COPEI - Partido Social Cristiano de Venezuela  
CSAF - Chief of Staff, United States Air Force  
DADT - Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell  
DMI - Department of Military Intelligence  
FAPLA - The People’s Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola  
FNLA - Frente de Libertaçao de Angola  
GWOT - Global War on Terror  
IFOR - Intervention Force  
IMF - International Monetary Fund  
JMC - Joint Management Centers  
LGBT - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender  
KKK - Ku Klux Klan  
MBR-200 - Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200  
MK - Umkhonto we Sizwe  
MPLA - Movimento Popular de Libertaçao de Angola  
NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
NCM - National Coordinating Mechanism  
NMCC - National Military Command Center  
NMS - National Military Strategy  
NPKF - National Peace Keeping Force  
NSA - National Security Agency  
NSMS - National Security Management System  
NSS - National Security Strategy  
PAC - Pan-African Congress  
PVDSA - Petróleos de Venezuela  
SACEUR - NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Europe  
SADF - South African Defense Force  
SANDF - South African National Defense Force  
SAP - South African Police  
SSC - State Security Council  
SWAPO - South West African People’s Organization  
TRC - Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF - Union Defense Force
UNITA - Uniao Nacional para a Independência Total d’ Angola
URD - Unión Republicana Democrática