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The sources of military dissent: Why and how the US military contests civilian decisions about the use of force

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Abstract

How do militaries push back when they oppose civilian initiatives? This article analyses the sources and character of military dissent, focusing on the United States. It details the sources of military preferences over policy and strategy outcomes, emphasising the interplay of role conceptions with other material and ideational factors. It then presents a repertoire of means – tactics of dissent – through which military leaders can exert pressure, constraining and shaping civilians' decision-making calculus and the implementation of policy and strategy choices. Empirically, it traces military dissent in the 1990s-era humanitarian interventions; the US's 'War on Drugs' beginning in the 1980s; and the Afghanistan surge debate in 2009. In so doing, the article contributes to a broader research programme on military dissent across regime types. It also expands scholars' understandings of preference formation within militaries and illuminates the various pathways through which military dissent operates and potentially undermines civilian control.

Introduction

In 1992, during the lead up to the presidential election, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell wrote a *New York Times* op-ed titled 'Why Generals Get Nervous', in which he outlined his opposition to any US military involvement in the Bosnian civil war. Powell's views, voiced in the opinion piece and in other public statements and actions, stood in stark contrast to the position on Bosnia adopted by Bill Clinton, who was then a candidate in the US presidential election. Powell, in turn, praised George H. W. Bush, saying that he 'more than any other recent President, understands the proper use of military force'.[1] At the time, Powell was one of the most visible and popular military leaders in recent history, following the US and its coalition partners' success in forcing Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf War. The timing of Powell's op-ed was also notable, coming four weeks before election day and three days prior to the first presidential debate.

According to many analysts, Powell's actions constituted an alarming example of political activism by a prominent military leader aimed at shaping the debate about foreign intervention. Through his actions, he mobilised public opinion and Congressional opposition thereby circumventing Clinton's platform of committing US troops to Bosnia. Indeed, so alarmed was one prominent scholar of civil-military relations that he deemed Powell's advocacy a harbinger of a 'crisis' in US civil-military relations.[2]

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[1]Colin Powell, 'Why generals get nervous', *New York Times* (10 October 1992), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/08/opinion/why-generals-get-nervous.html}.

[2]Richard H. Kohn, 'Out of control: The crisis in civil-military relations', *The National Interest* (1994).

What motivates military leaders like Powell to push back on civilian initiatives? What methods do they use to engage in such opposition? In this article we address these questions, making two sets of arguments. First, we contend that the preferences driving military push back emerge from the interplay of both ideational and material factors. Military leaders view civilian initiatives through the lens of their operational role conceptions, which as outlined in the Special Issue's introductory article by Christoph Harig, Nicole Jenne, and Chiara Ruffa, consist of prevailing normative beliefs about the appropriate aims for which the military should be used.[3] Yet, these conceptions are not deterministic of military preferences over how and whether military resources are to be used in a particular conflict or issue domain. Rather, US military leaders' preferences also variously depend on the external threat environment, cultural factors, organisational interests, and the military's dominant narratives about past wars.

In turn, when they disagree with civilian plans or initiatives, military leaders draw from a repertoire of tactics to contest those measures, many of which have been under-conceptualised or analysed. Often when scholars focus on the capacity of a military to resist civilian authority, they focus on its coercive power, to threaten or actually unseat governments, or its leaders' overt defiance of orders.[4] A framework that emphasises just those actions, however, truncates variation in the empirical incarnations and incidence of military dissent.[5] In the US case, such extreme forms of push back are exceedingly rare; as in other established democracies, the military's power tends to derive from conventional, rather than coercive, sources.[6] Accordingly, we argue that there are a variety of tactics that militaries draw upon short of deploying their coercive power, which include actions that operate through domestic politics, such as issuing public appeals and mobilising civilian allies; measures that employ bureaucratic tools, such as agenda-setting and slow rolling that affect decision-making and the implementation of civilian orders; as well as efforts to invoke potential legal restrictions to shield against pressure to engage in undesired missions.

Empirically, the article analyses three contentious civil-military episodes, spanning the 1980s to 2009. The qualitative cases include 1990s-era disputes over what Nina Wilén and Lisa Strömbom refer to as 'collective security' roles, involving interventions for the sake of international crisis management and for humanitarian purposes to counter famine and genocide in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, and Rwanda.[7] They include push back over the military's national security role in the country's 'War on Drugs' beginning in the 1980s, as well as military dissent against opponents of an expanded counterinsurgency (COIN) effort by the US in the War on Afghanistan in 2009. The cases all entail significant commitments of military resources in which the Army (potentially) plays a major role and involve major policy and strategy decisions by both the senior military and political leadership. In each episode we trace the effects of military preferences and its leaders' concomitant tactics of dissent, thereby empirically illustrating the mechanisms of our arguments and demonstrating their plausibility.

We make several contributions to existing scholarship. First, we seek to present, both conceptually and empirically, a nuanced typology of the means through which senior military leaders undertake opposition to civilian initiatives. In so doing, we join growing scholarly efforts to

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[3]See also Brian Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689–2000* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Samuel J. Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998).

[4]In other words, scholars too often commit the 'fallacy of *coupism*'. Aurel Croissant, David Kuehn, Paul Chambers, and Siegfried O. Wolf, 'Beyond the fallacy of coup-ism: Conceptualizing civilian control of the military in emerging democracies', *Democratization*, 17:5 (2010), pp. 950–75.

[5]Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[6]Risa Brooks, 'Integrating the civil-military relations subfield', *Annual Review of Political Science* (2019).

[7]Nina Wilén and Lisa Strömbom, 'A versatile organisation: Mapping the military's core roles in a changing security environment', *European Journal of International Security*, this Special Issue.

discriminate among acts of military disobedience or insubordination.[8] This study in turn lays the groundwork for future research on the factors that determine when military actors are inclined to engage in acts of dissent, and for theorising about the variables that explain why they choose particular tactics over others. The article also lays the foundation for greater cross-national comparison of states' civil-military relations. While we focus on a single democracy (the US), we anticipate that these expressions of dissent can occur in other established and developing democracies, as well as in non-democracies. Indeed, focusing on non-coercive forms of dissent provides a means for bridging the study of civil-military relations across regime types.[9]

Second, and importantly, we contribute to the Special Issue's focus on operational role conceptions, by exploring how prevailing views of the military's appropriate uses shaped its leaders' preferences in different use of force scenarios in the United States. In so doing, the article contributes to efforts to better understand preference formation in the US military and potentially within militaries generally. Today, scholars commonly assume the character of military preferences, deduce them from the military's organisational interests, or infer them from culturally informed doctrinal understandings.[10] Rather than assuming or deducing preferences from extant theories, this article adopts a third analytical approach that measures military preferences by observing them.[11]

Third, the argument contributes to scholarly efforts to conceptualise challenges to civilian control. Civilian control is often understood as varying dichotomously, such that it is present or absent, depending on whether civilians enjoy formal authority to make decisions, and on whether or not militaries engage in overt insubordination.[12] In contrast, we adopt an approach that stresses the degree to which civilians are able to consider all options when making decisions, acquire information, and ensure their policy choices are implemented as key to their capacity to translate their political objectives into military policy and activity.[13] Military leaders accordingly undermine the principle of control when they act to intensify domestic political costs, skew information, or obstruct implementation of civilian initiatives. The article thus shows how many mundane and non-coercive forms of military dissent, which often go unobserved, corrode civilian control.[14]

Finally, the article has important normative implications for how individuals analyse the risks and benefits of military dissent. Some, for example, might be sympathetic to the points that Pentagon officials made in the 1980s expressing scepticism about military involvement in counterdrug operations, or to the arguments of advocates or opponents of the 1990s humanitarian interventions and the Afghan Surge in 2009. Nonetheless, the article shows how military dissent – even when undertaken for purposes with which one might agree – comes at the cost of the

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[8]See David Pion-Berlin and Andrew Ivey, 'Military dissent in the United States: Are there lessons from Latin America?', *Defense and Security Analysis*, 37:2 (April 2021); Eric Hundman, 'The diversity of disobedience in military organizations', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 6:4 (2021). Hundman also provides an innovative theory for why and when individuals will engage in acts of insubordination based on their relations with superiors and tolerance for risk.

[9]Brooks, 'Integrating the civil-military relations subfield'.

[10]Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[11]On these three alternative approaches to discerning actors' preferences, see Jeffry Frieden, 'Actors and preferences in International Relations', in David Lake and Robert Powell (eds), *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[12]Mara Karlin, 'Civilian oversight in the Pentagon: Who does it and how?', in Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, and Dan Maurer (eds), *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations: The Military, Society, Politics, and Modern War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University, 2020); Risa Brooks, Jim Golby, and Heidi Urben, 'Crisis of command: America's broken civil-military relationship imperils national security', *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2021).

[13]Risa Brooks, 'Paradoxes of professionalism: Rethinking civil-military relations in the United States', *International Security*, 44:4 (2020); Feaver, *Armed Servants*.

[14]For discussion of some these concerns in the US, see Brooks, Golby, and Urben, 'Crisis of command'.

erosion of a larger principle of civilian control and hence undermines a bedrock of democratic governance.[15] How to reconcile these tensions is an inherent, and difficult to resolve dilemma of civil-military relations.[16]

This article first discusses tactics of dissent and then the source of political-military preference divergence. The next sections discuss the 1990s-era humanitarian interventions; the War on Drugs; and the Afghan Surge of 2009. The article concludes with a brief discussion of implications for future research.

Conceptualising military dissent

This section presents our framework for military dissent by outlining the objects, tactics and sources of dissent.

Objects of dissent

A first step in conceptualising dissent is clarifying its object: about what exactly does the military disagree? The typology outlined by Wilén and Strömbom in this Special Issue provides a useful framework for understanding the levels of analysis on which military dissent can occur. They discriminate broad military 'roles or purposes' from tasks that are 'work-related activities'. One role analysed by Wilén and Strömbom focuses on external defence, which could encompass tasks like conventional ground force operations, counterinsurgency, or non-domestic counterterrorism operations. A second role focuses on collective security and involves tasks related to international crisis management, such as humanitarian interventions or peacekeeping. A final category is comprised of national security roles, in which the military supports federal law enforcement, counter-drug and domestic counterterrorism, natural disasters, or public health (for example, pandemic response). Militaries might oppose being committed to a particular role, or to specific tasks.

Paul Shemella suggests another layer, in that militaries may oppose particular missions, which capture the discrete actions that are required to execute a task; in other words, military actors may be fine with a national security role in which they undertake a counterterrorism task, but take exception to specific missions that fall within the general rubric of that task.[17] Finally, the military or its suborganisations may agree with the purposes for which their resources are being used, but disagree with the means through which civilians propose they do so, disputing the proposed military strategy, campaign plan, or tactical engagements. In short, military dissent can occur across different issue domains and dimensions, including roles, tasks, missions, and means.

Tactics of dissent

When militaries disagree along any of these dimensions, they can resort to a variety of tactics of dissent, which we define as actions that serve to distort civilians' process of assessment and deliberation about military options or strategy, the implementation of their initiatives, or the domestic

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[15]Note that whether or not dissent is seen as justified or normatively appropriate is a second-order question that often rests on two considerations: a person's agreement with the military leadership's position on an issue (that is, one person's act of military defiance might be seen as another's justified act of persuasion); and a person's definition of civilian control and 'healthy' civil-military relations, which can affect, for example, whether or not military leaders' participation in domestic debate is seen negatively.

[16]Brooks, 'Militaries and political activity in democracies'; Risa Brooks and Michael Robinson, 'Let the generals speak: Retired officer dissent and the George Floyd protests', *War on the Rocks* (9 October 2020); Lindsay P. Cohn, Max Z. Margulies, and Michael Robinson, 'Dissents and sensibility: Conflicting loyalties, democracy and civil-military relations', in Beehner, Brooks, and Maurer (eds), *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations*.

[17]Paul Shemella, 'The spectrum of roles and missions of the armed forces', in Thomas Bruneau and Scott D. Tollefson (eds), *Who Guards the Guardians and How Democratic Civil-Military Relations* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp. 125–8.

costs they bear for those choices. Tactics of dissent can be employed against any constituency in the civilian political elite, including in the legislative or executive branch.

The first set of tactics consists of efforts to influence the domestic political constraints, especially via public opinion, that leaders face in making military policy or decisions about the use of force.[18] These mechanisms include public appeals (statements in public venues), such as Powell's op-ed, threats to resign in protest,[19] or leaks to the press. Demonstrations of opposition aim to raise the salience of issues and increase the domestic political costs of violating military opinion. In so doing, they constrain politicians' choices by rendering them more politically costly. Sometimes these measures may aim to foreclose civilians' options; at other times, they may aim to elevate a favoured one. Here military leaders and their civilian allies may harness the military's public esteem, or their own public reputation and stature in such acts, to push back against opponents or mobilise supporters within the military or society to advocate on behalf of military involvement in particular roles, tasks, missions, or means. An example is George Bush relying on General Petraeus in selling the Iraq Surge of 2006/2007.[20] Similarly, Bill Clinton chose to install retired general Barry McCaffrey as his Drug Czar as a way of bolstering support for his 1990s war on drugs.[21]

A second category of tactics involves interest group politics and coalition-building. The military may form alliances with societal groups. The military will also at times coalesce with members of Congress, or seek to mobilise them to oppose an administration's policies. There were many vivid examples of this dynamic in the early 1990s, when some in the military sought (successfully) to prevent policy changes that would have allowed homosexuals to serve openly in the armed forces.[22]

A third set of mechanisms involves exerting influence via intragovernmental processes. It encompasses more prosaic forms of military dissent, such as slow rolling, or efforts to exploit information asymmetries between civilian and military leaders, such as agenda-setting. Information asymmetries are endemic to military organisations because militaries have private information and expertise about the military organisation, and military leaders may have incentives to exploit these advantages when there is underlying preference divergence; the structure of oversight, including monitoring, is an attempt to mitigate that problem and align the incentives and practices of military actors in conformity with civilian preferences.[23] Yet, this is an imperfect process and when militaries disagree they can use this information asymmetry during the decision-making and implementation phase to their advantage.

Specific tactics of bureaucratic maneuvering might include military leaders slowing efforts to procure resources or equipment to implement civilian directives; ordering long reviews and drawn out consultations; establishing new rules such as reporting requirements; or devising work-arounds, such as repositioning forces or reallocating resources to offset deployments or cuts made by civilian policymakers. There is vast empirical variety in the specific expression of this kind of dissent. Andrew Krepinevich describes many of these efforts by the Army to delay transformation and adoption of a counterinsurgency doctrine in the US's war with Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s.[24] In April 1994, similarly, in the midst of the Rwandan genocide, military officials pushed

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[18]Brooks, 'Militaries and political activity in democracies'.

[19]Patricia M. Shields, 'Introduction to Symposium: Roundtable on the ethics of senior officer resignation in the United States', *Armed Forces & Society*, 43:1 (January 2017), pp. 3–4.

[20]Peter D. Feaver, 'The right to be right: Civil-military relations and the Iraq surge decision', *International Security*, 35:4 (spring 2011), pp. 87–125.

[21]See Clinton's introduction to Congress of McCaffrey in full uniform in this footage, available at: {https://www.c-span.org/video/?69496-1/1996-state-union-address}.

[22]David M. Rayside, 'The perils of congressional politics', in Craig R. Rimmerman (ed.), *Gay Rights, Military Wrongs: Political Perspectives of Lesbians and Gays in the Military* (New York, NY: Garland, 1996).

[23]Feaver, *Armed Servants*.

[24]Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); see also Conrad Crane, 'Avoiding Vietnam: The U.S. Army's response to defeat in Southeast Asia', *US Army War College Monograph* (2002).

back on orders to provide equipment to assist in a UN effort, by quibbling over the cost of transporting the vehicles. The Pentagon insisted that the UN pay to move the vehicles from American bases in Europe to Rwanda, and then balked when the cash-strapped UN opted to return the vehicles by vessel instead of air in order to save money.[25] Still other forms of dissent within military operations might include seeking a clarification of orders in order to assert the military's independence and modifying the implementation of orders.[26]

A third set of tactics manipulates the military's role in advising civilians, by capitalising on the information asymmetry about its internal affairs and expertise.[27] For example, military leaders can adjust which options they present to civilian leaders, or how they assess and characterise their costs and risks. Generally, tactics like these that limit the choice set or skew assessments, rather than offering an impartial or comprehensive assessment, serve an agenda-setting function. The military may also use the information asymmetry to their advantage in other ways. For example, declines in transparency (deciding unliterally to no longer report information publicly or to the legislature) can be a means of enhancing control over information and capacity to use it selectively to advocate for different policy choices.

Research by Doyle Hodges on what he terms 'military legalism' suggests a fourth tactic, in which military leaders resort to legal arguments to justify military actions.[28] Taken one step further, invocations of particular legal interpretations with respect to the Uniform Code of Military Justice or international law pertaining to particular tasks or missions might be used as a shield or a sword to protect the military from missions it opposes, or to advocate in favour of doing so. While subjecting proposed military operations within the chain of command to legal scrutiny may be common (and appropriate), raising legal constraints as a rhetorical device in Congressional testimony or public debate as part of a broader effort to push back on missions the military opposes can be a form of dissent.

Sources of dissent

There are four sets of factors that we focus on in analysing the basis for military preferences in the conflicts we examine in this article. The first, as Harig, Jenne, and Ruffa observe in this Special Issue (introduction), is the role conceptions dominant within the military. Military organisations exhibit different normative conceptions about the appropriate role or purpose of the military.[29] As Theo Farrell describes, 'organizations in a [military] field gradually develop understandings of appropriate form and behavior'.[30] These norms are regulative in that they proscribe and prescribe particular behaviours to be undertaken by the organisation's members; that is, they 'assign a value to an action or way of behaving (for example, obligation, permissibility, appropriateness, prohibition)'. These norms are also constitutive of military identity[31] and express what the members of a military believe to be the overriding (appropriate) purpose of the institution they serve, and the tasks it should undertake.

Existing scholarship suggests in fact that militaries vary broadly in their attachments to these roles. For example, while some are wary of taking on roles beyond external defence,[32] others

[25]Michael R. Gordon, 'U.S. to supply 60 vehicles for U.N. troops in Rwanda', *The New York Times* (16 June 1994).

[26]Pion-Berlin and Ivey, 'Civil-military lessons from Latin America'.

[27]Feaver, *Armed Servants*.

[28]Doyle Hodges, 'Let Slip the Laws of War! Legalism, Legitimacy, and Civil-Military Relations' (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2018).

[29]Scholars also focus on beliefs related to involvement in politics. See, for example, Finer, *Samuel Finer, The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1962/2002 [orig. pub. 1962]) and Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America*.

[30]Theo Farrell, 'World culture and military power', *Security Studies*, 14:3 (2005), p. 455.

[31]Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, 'The sources of military change', in Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff (eds), *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, and Technology* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2002), pp. 3–20.

[32]Nicole Jenne, 'Civilizing the armed forces? Peacekeeping, a traditional mission for the military', *Defence Studies*, 20:2 (2020), pp. 105–22.

embrace internal security roles.[33] As Gustavo Flores-Macías recounts, Latin America has seen a surge of instances in which the military has taken over policing or other domestic missions and embraced doing so.[34] Vincenzo Bove, Mauricio Rivera, and Chiara Ruffa discuss how after being pulled into a domestic counterterrorism role, some members of the French military have come to embrace it.[35] Pascal Vennesson et al. have parsed different role conceptions in European militaries.[36] Broadly speaking, Shemella discriminates among militaries that see themselves as encompassing the roles of War Fighters, Defenders or Peacekeepers, Fire Fighters, or Police Officers.[37] He characterises the US as a War Fighter that sees itself as organising its military for conventional combat against external state adversaries. As we describe below, this role conception seems to be especially important in understanding US military objections to involvement in some missions in the counterdrug war, and to the 1990s humanitarian interventions.

Second, the threat environment can fundamentally affect the bases of military dissent. Michael Desch, for example contends that when there is agreement on the nature of an external threat, it harmonises civil-military relations.[38] This renders tasks that might otherwise be controversial, less so. In contrast, where there is a more complex threat environment, or the absence of serious external or internal challengers, there is less consensus about how the military should be used and the purposes to which it should be put, which can fuel military dissent. In addition, as becomes evident in the case of the 1990s humanitarian interventions, tasks that might be seen as normatively consistent with military leaders' role conceptions are viewed as inconsistent with them when undertaken in a different threat environment.

Third, threats to organisational interests can motivate dissent. Like all organisations, militaries are heavily inclined to minimise uncertainty, which leads them to prioritise maintaining their autonomy and securing their budgets.[39] Similarly, military organisations often care about protecting their cohesion and societal reputation. These considerations played an important role, for example, in fuelling US military dissent against the 1990s humanitarian interventions in that they perceived them as contrary to these organisational interests.[40]

Fourth, military dissent can also arise when militaries are required to rely on military strategies, operational plans, doctrines, weapons, or tactics that conflict with their organisational cultures. For historical reasons, militaries, or their suborganisations, can develop distinctive understandings of how they should fight and with what weapons.[41] They may also develop idiosyncratic, culturally embedded, means of implementing and practicing abstract doctrinal concepts

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[33]Brian Loveman, *Por La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Alfred Stepan, *The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

[34]Gustavo Flores-Macías, 'Latin American generals, back in the political labyrinth', *The Washington Post* (14 November 2019); Christoph Harig, 'Brazil: Will officers' role in government taint the military institution', *AULABlog* (6 March 2019), available at: {https://aulablog.net/2019/03/06/brazil-will-officers-role-in-government-taint-the-military-institution/}; Adam Scharpf, 'Dangerous alliances: Populists and the military', *GIGA Focus*, 1:1 (February 2020).

[35]Vincenzo Bove, Mauricio Rivera, and Chiara Ruffa, 'Beyond coups: Terrorism and military involvement in politics', *European Journal of International Relations* (2019).

[36]Pascal Vennesson, Fabian Breuer, Chiara de Franco, and Ursala C. Schroeder, 'Is there a European way of war?', *Armed Forces and Society*, 35:4 (2009), pp. 628–45.

[37]Shemella, 'The spectrum of roles and missions of the armed forces'.

[38]Michael Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[39]Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*.

[40]That they perceived them this way is also a reflection in part of their dominant role conceptions though, as not all militaries would perceive such a task as contrary to their cohesion or societal reputations.

[41]Kier, *Imagining War*; Jeffrey W. Legro, 'Which norms matter? Revisiting the "failure" of internationalism', *International Organization*, 51:1 (1997), pp. 31–63; Jeffrey Long, 'The Evolution of U.S. Army Doctrine: From Active Defense to Airland Battle and Beyond' (Master's thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1991).

such as patrolling in peacekeeping operations.[42] This factor becomes especially important in understanding the push for counterinsurgency by military leaders during the Afghan Surge debate.

Finally, they may dissent when asked to carry out tasks that conflict with prevailing narratives and dominant understandings of the lessons of past wars; these can be shaped by their actual experience in prior wars, but are also coloured by the particular interpretations of the causes and nature of those operational experiences. Understanding the impact of these narratives on military dissent is important because as Ronald Krebs argues, dominant narratives set the 'boundaries of what actors can legitimately articulate in public, what they can collectively (though not individually) imagine, and what is politically possible … They privilege a range of policies and impede the legitimation of others.'[43] Once again, we see this as a basis for dissent in the case of the 1990s interventions, as well as in the Afghan Surge.

While categorised here as discrete phenomena, and evaluated as such, these ideational and material factors likely interact and influence each other over time. Role conceptions may be shaped by perceptions of threat; dominant lessons learned from wars can reflect different role conceptions, or preferences over tasks or means. Organisational interests can support different role conceptions, or undermine support for tasks, missions or means; those interests in turn may be shaped by role conceptions (in that the latter may affect how 'costs' to an organisation are perceived). For analytical simplicity, these factors are treated separately in the analysis below. Nevertheless, understanding the sources of dissent more fully requires appreciation of these interdependencies and endogeneities – a theme we return to in the conclusion.

Military dissent in US civil-military relations

In the sections below we discuss three episodes of military dissent, which are intended to illustrate the processes through which dissent operates: humanitarian interventions of the 1990s in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia; the US 'War on Drugs'; and the Afghan Surge in 2009. These cases vary in the axes of military dissent and its sources. They also all focus on missions that would involve large force commitments from the US Army in order to control for the differences in role conceptions and organisational preferences over warfighting that occurs across the military services.[44] Each section begins with brief overviews, and then discusses military preferences dissent and then the military's tactics of dissent. Although not the article's central focus, each section ends with a brief reflection on the efficacy of the tactics in shaping the military's role in each conflict.

Collective security interventions in the 1990s

In the 1990s wars over self-determination and genocides in Bosnia and Kosovo in former Yugoslavia caused immense human suffering, as did famine in Somalia in the early 1990s and a political crisis in Haiti and genocide in Rwanda in 1994. With the end of the Cold War, political leaders around the globe in the US and in the UN began to consider the possibility of using military forces to address these humanitarian crises. What was required in each case varied significantly from peacekeeping type operations, to armed foreign military intervention, to disaster relief, but they all involved internal interventions to protect vulnerable populations.[45] In the

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[42]Chiara Ruffa, *Military Cultures in Peace and Stability, Afghanistan and Lebanon* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

[43]Ronald Krebs, 'How dominant narratives rise and fall: Military conflict, politics, and the Cold War consensus', *International Organization,* 69:4 (autumn 2015), p. 813.

[44]Jeff Donnithorne, *Culture Wars: Air Force Culture and Civil-Military Relations*, The War College Series (2015).

[45]Deborah Avant, 'Are the reluctant warriors out of control? Why U.S. military leaders have been averse to respond to post-Cold War low level threats', *Security Studies*, 6:2 (1996); Stefano Recchia, *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors: U.S. Civil-Military Relations and Multilateral Intervention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

United States, however, civilian policymakers would encounter significant push back from the military to involvement in these crises.

Sources of military dissent in the 1990s: Several factors explain why the US military resisted interventions in these conflicts. The first was the changing threat environment, which repositioned the role under which the military would undertake the 1990s interventions. Whereas during the Cold War, interventions of these kind might have been as extensions of a role of external defence, in the 1990s they fell under the role of collective security. In other words, part of the issue with the 1990s internal crises was not simply the nature of the task involving armed internal intervention to stabilise a foreign country's state and society, but the purposes that larger intervention served; the US military may have been more opposed to undertaking these tasks when they were not serving the role of external defence, with which US military leaders normatively identify.

In the 1980s, for example, the military intervened in Panama and Grenada with the aim of removing a dictator in office and stabilising the regime, respectively; yet seen in the context of the Cold War and President Ronald Reagan's concerns about expanding Soviet influence in Central America and the Caribbean, these did not elicit the same kind of reservations that a similarly aimed intervention in the post-Cold war era to restore Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1994 following a 1991 military coup generated.[46] Had, for example, a civil war broken out in the heart of Europe during the Cold War (as occurred in Bosnia in the early 1990s), the US military might have seen intervention there as more consistent with its external defense role conception. In contrast, the humanitarian interventions in Bosnia fell under the role of collective security and the task of international crisis management, about which there was far less consensus than one based on external defense.[47] In August 2000, Condoleezza Rice, George W. Bush's future National Security Adviser, captured well how the humanitarian interventions were seen when she argued that the US is not the 'world's 911', referring to the emergency phone number the US public uses to summon police assistance.[48]

The second factor relates to how the US military understood the lessons of the war it had fought in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s (the US Vietnam War), which led military leaders to see the 1990s-era humanitarian interventions through a particular lens, and therefore as fraught with risk to the military and to the country. The dominant narrative to emerge within the military from Vietnam was that a war with an open-ended commitment and complex internal dynamics would lead to the gradual escalation of force commitments without a clear strategy; this would embroil the U.S. military in a long and ultimately failing war without an endpoint.[49] In addition, this narrative held that civilian leaders, such as President Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, had tied the hands of the US military in preventing it from waging a more robust conventional war effort against the North Vietnamese Army, which was necessary if North Vietnam were to ever seek peace.[50] These civilian leaders had then been abetted by military leaders in Washington, DC, who had failed to speak truth to power regarding the true nature of the war.[51]

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[46]The mission was initially to provide an armed intervention to help restore President Aristide to power. After a diplomatic solution was reached to the crisis, the mission turned into more of an occupation and domestic policing force designed to maintain order.

[47]Avant, 'Are the reluctant warriors out of control'; Recchia, *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors*.

[48]Bob Kemper, 'U.S. not "world's 911" says foreign policy adviser', *Chicago Tribune* (2 August 2000), available at: {https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2000-08-02-0008020256-story.html}. Note that Dr Rice's view changed considerably after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

[49]H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1998); David Petraeus, 'The American Military and the Lessons of Vietnam: A Study of Military Influence and the Use of Force in the Post-Vietnam Era' (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1987); Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Presidio Press, 1982).

[50]Summers, *On Strategy*.

[51]McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*; Krebs ('How dominant narratives rise and fall') argues, counterintuitively, that dominant narratives are harder to dislodge in the face of failure, which is consistent with the staying power of this interpretation of the Vietnam era into the 1990s.

However incomplete, if not inaccurate, was this narrative, with the publication of Harry Summers's book, *On Strategy*, it became dogma within much of the US Army.[52] Subsequently, the military strongly embraced a preference of warfighting focused on conventional military operations.[53] These lessons were then institutionalised in the development of new doctrine in the 1980s.[54] In turn, while the Vietnam War provided the cautionary tale of the dangers of open-ended intervention in the 1990s, the lessons drawn by the military from the 1991 Gulf war only reinforced it. That war had been remarkably successful in the military's view because it involved a massive commitment of forces and limited objectives, unlike what they foresaw in the 1990s-era humanitarian interventions. Speaking days after the end of the Gulf War, President George H. W. Bush remarked, for instance, 'It's a proud day for America. And, by God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all.'[55]

Meanwhile after the US did intervene in Somalia in 1992, initially under George H. W. Bush and then under Bill Clinton, the death of 18 US soldiers during the 'Black Hawk Down' incident in October 1993 only seemed to reinforce the claim that humanitarian interventions could unravel to an ugly conclusion, as well as spark domestic opposition.[56] After that intervention, as one reporter put it, the military was concerned about crossing a 'Mogadishu Line' that could tarnish the military and endanger the lives of US servicemembers.[57] Here we see how a particular operational experience was interpreted in a way that supported opposition to all armed humanitarian interventions, rather than being attributed to particular failures in the Somalia case. In fact, military leaders at times failed to parse the differences between the tasks of humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping in the 1990s despite the fact that they often entail very different missions (for example, providing food vs policing combatants) – a phenomenon that reflects an overall tendency to distinguish tasks categorically according to whether they support a role conception of external defence, or not.

Finally, intersecting these lessons were concerns about the reputation of the US military and its cohesion, which also motivated dissent against the 1990s humanitarian interventions. This was another lesson that had been learned from the Vietnam War, and the Korean War before that: an absence of public support for limited wars is devastating to the military's social standing and reputation.[58] As contempt for the war effort among the public transferred to those engaged in fighting the conflict, the military services experienced significant discipline and morale issues. Here the 1991 Gulf War also seemed to prove the opposite – that a quickly earned military success (in the form of expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait) could increase support for the military. The 1990s interventions were assessed through the lens of the former wars, and hence were seen as risky to the military's cohesion and reputation.

[52]Summers, *On Strategy*.

[53]John L. Romjue, *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine, 1973–1982* (Fort Monroe, VA: United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. TRADOC Historical Monograph Series, 1984); Roger J. Spiller, 'In the shadow of the dragon: Doctrine and the US Army after Vietnam', *RUSI Journal: Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies*, 142:6 (1997), pp. 41–54; see also Crane, 'Avoiding Vietnam'.

[54]The first official version of the Army's post-Vietnam doctrine was dubbed 'Active Defense'. This doctrine was strongly critiqued within the Army. In 1982 the Army instituted its 'AirLand Battle' doctrine, the principles of which guided and established the foundation of the Army's operations in Panama in 1989 and Iraq in 1990–1; see also James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1997); Romjue, *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle*.

[55]George Bush, 'George H. W. Bush Proclaims a Cure for the Vietnam Syndrome', American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) (1991).

[56]Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 205–41.

[57]John Darnton, 'U.N. buildup in Bosnia eyes "Mogadishu Line"', *New York Times* (7 June 1995).

[58]Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime* (New York, NY: Houghton-Mifflin, 1969); McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*; Petraeus, 'The American military and the lessons of Vietnam'.

Tactics of dissent in the 1990s: Military leaders employed a variety of political tactics to signal their hesitation for intervention and assuming expanding roles in the Balkans, Somalia, Haiti, and Rwanda. These activities consisted of making public appeals through the press, as well as setting the agenda and slow rolling, while lobbying with senior civilian policymakers. They demonstrate how military leaders overtly and covertly leveraged their standing with the public to constrain the options of civilian officials.

For example, in addition to the *New York Times* opinion piece penned by General Colin Powell mentioned earlier in this article, Powell subsequently wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* published in winter 1992/1993. Ostensibly, Powell uses the essay to draw the reader's attention to important changes in the National Military Strategy, but the essay also goes much further, urging the country to insist that policymakers provide 'clear and unambiguous objectives' to the armed forces before committing them.[59] In one of the more controversial sections of the essay, Powell further opines about the breakup of Yugoslavia, stating that, 'In the Balkans such hatreds and centuries-old antagonisms have burst forth into a heart-wrenching civil war'.[60] This statement implied that there was little US military force could effectively do to prevent further violence in the region, an idea that ran counter to those held by many in the incoming Clinton administration.[61]

The military also engaged in agenda-setting to resist increasing involvement in the 1990s-era crises. The clearest example of this was the adoption of the so-called 'Weinberger doctrine', named after President Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger. This doctrine, which became associated with Powell, espouses six short rules for the use of military force, including, 'go in only with clear political and military objectives', and 'if we commit, do so with all the resources necessary to win'.[62] It delineated a choice set about which conflicts civilians should enter: only those where it was possible to have a clearly known end state and in which it was logistically and politically feasible to commit large numbers of forces, including ground forces, were on the table. Clearly, this ruled out many conflicts, including those in the 1990s. In effect, it sets conditions on whether and when civilians could use the military, signalling to the public that it should hold civilians to those limits.

That agenda-setting continued behind closed doors in the presentation of options. As then Secretary of State Madeline Albright (2006) described how Powell would convey options during Principals Committee meetings:

> On a regular basis Colin would come in and do a presentation. He is a brilliant briefer, and the Pentagon is really good at pictures and charts and 3-D things. Colin had a little red pointer and he'd go through this and say, 'We can take this hill and we can do that and we can do this. You know we have the best military in the world, but it's going to take 500,000 men and $500 billion and 50 years. What are you going to say to Sergeant Slepchok's mother when he dies from having stepped on a landmine?'. So he'd lead you up the hill of possibilities and then drop you off the other side, and you'd end up with no options.[63]

In addition, the military engaged in slow rolling in implementing civilian directives. For example, in his memoirs, Richard Holbrooke, Clinton's special envoy to the Balkans, recalls that military leaders pushed back against embracing several important missions that Holbrooke felt were essential to maintaining a tentative peace in Bosnia in crafting the Dayton

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[59]Colin Powell, 'U.S. forces: Challenges ahead', *Foreign Affairs*, 71:5 (1992), p. 38.
[60]Powell, 'U.S. forces', p. 35.
[61]Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2013).
[62]Colin Powell and Joseph Persico, *My American Journey* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1995).
[63]Madeline Albright, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project Interview, 30 August 2006.

Accords.[64] In particular, Holbrooke notes that military leaders eschewed taking up roles in promoting elections and investigating previous human rights abuses or atrocities on the grounds that such activities would strain personnel and resources and ultimately result in 'mission creep'.[65]

The military employed similar tactics in Somalia. As Deborah Avant notes, the military combatant command in charge of overseeing Operation Restore Hope (UNITAF), Central Command (CENTCOM), 'was adamant in resisting "mission creep"' and 'outlined the bounds of U.S. participation in such a way that it was easy to resist new demands'.[66] It used the specificity of its mission statement to deny requests to help disarm militia and establish control in Somalia's northern areas. The military then employed similar tactics in Haiti.

A final tactic employed by the military involved leveraging support with Congress. As Deborah Avant recounts, opinion on the interventions was divided between the executive and Congress, and among legislators.[67] This structure created opportunities for military leaders opposed to involvement to exploit these divisions and leverage domestic politics for their own advantage. In his memoir, Holbrooke writes, 'if the military openly opposed the deployment, [the Clinton administration's] political difficulties would be vastly increased. We had to have their backing to get Congressional and public support for the mission, which meant they [the military] had the upper hand in the debate over what their mission would be.'[68]

In sum, military leaders employed a variety of tactics to resist interventions in the 1990s, or to place conditions on the terms under which they would be undertaken. While the US did eventually become involved in Somalia and Haiti, it never did so in Rwanda. In Bosnia, at the outset of NATO intervention in 1992, the US's commitment of ground forces to the war was very limited, consistent with Powell's warnings of committing them to the conflict. Only years later, after extensive NATO air campaigns and bombing missions, did the US ultimately commit extensive ground forces, following the signing of the Dayton Accords.

The US 'War on Drugs'

In a now famous speech in 1971 President Nixon declared illicit drug use in the US 'public enemy number one', setting the stage for a new aggressive framing of the issue.[69] Ten years later, on 14 October 1982, President Ronald Reagan, speaking at the Justice Department, declared that illicit drugs posed a 'threat to U.S. national security'.[70] For the next 15 years, with broad bipartisan Congressional support, Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton directed the military to participate in solving the US's domestic drug problem. Although initially limited to primarily providing intelligence support to US law enforcement agencies, Congressional demand for military involvement increased as the 'War on Drugs' intensified.[71] By 1989, Congress had deemed the Department of Defense 'the single lead agency' responsible for identifying and monitoring the flow of illicit drugs into the US.[72]

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the US military would at times play a significant part in counterdrug tasks. In 1986, for instance, Army aviation elements participated in Operation Blast Furnace, during which US pilots and helicopters were used to transport Bolivian counterdrug forces aiming to disrupt the illicit production of cocaine.[73] In March 1990, without approval

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[64]Richard C. Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1999), pp. 218–23.

[65]Holbrooke, *To End a War*, p. 221.

[66]Avant, 'Are the reluctant warriors out of control', pp. 66, 76.

[67]Avant, 'Are the reluctant warriors out of control'.

[68]Holbrooke, *To End a War*, p. 219 (brackets added by the authors for clarification)

[69]For a transcript, see: {https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2016/06/26404/}.

[70]Andrew Glass, 'Reagan declares "War on Drugs", October 14, 1982', *Politico* (2010).

[71]Bruce Bagley, 'Myths of militarization: Enlisting armed forces in the War on Drugs', in Peter Smith (ed.), *Drug Policy in the Americas* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

[72]Peter Zirnite, *Reluctant Recruits: The US Military and the War on Drugs* (Washington Office on Latin America, 1997).

[73]Michael H. Abbott, 'The army and the drug war: Politics or national security?', *Parameters*, 18:1 (1988).

from Bogota, the US Navy seized two Colombian freight ships within the country's maritime zone on the suspicion of transporting drugs, unleashing a brief but heated torrent of international backlash against the United States.[74] In short, during the late 1980s and into the mid-1990s, the military's resources in intelligence, satellites, radar, and transport proved central in 'drug surveillance, detection, and monitoring of drug trafficking'.[75] Nevertheless, the military pushed back throughout and won important concessions with promises that it would not be used for law enforcement tasks and significant new revenue streams to support counterdrug missions. Hence, while on the surface, civilians prevailed, the military also shaped the conditions under which it would be involved.

Sources of military resistance: Three factors illuminate the source of military dissent to involvement in the counterdrug task. First, the national security role supported by counterdrug operations fell beyond the military's dominant role conceptions, which were premised on preparing for and deterring conventional interstate war. This context then positioned the counterdrug effort in opposition to the military's organisational interests in protecting its autonomy and resources to perform its 'legitimate' external defence role; the military saw involvement in the counterdrug missions as zero-sum – as taking away from their 'real' role, rather than as complementary or auxiliary to it.[76]

In addition, the interpretation of the counterdrug task as a 'law enforcement' activity fuelled opposition. Here it is important to note that the logistical and intelligence help it provided to US federal authorities and foreign militaries was not in reality qualitatively distinct from other missions the military might perform in external defence. Yet, because the counterdrug mission was contrary to prevailing role conceptions, military leaders interpreted the task as being different and akin to law enforcement. Perhaps this sentiment is best captured by the title of an op-ed penned by Reagan's former Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger: 'Our Troops Shouldn't Be Drug Cops; Don't Draft the Military to Solve a Law-Enforcement Problem'.[77] Two years earlier, Weinberger opposed provisions in 1986 legislation calling on the military to assist in stopping drug smuggling by aircraft and vessels at the border. One journalist noted that Weinberger, 'said he preferred going after drugs at their source in South and Central America in what would be "a much more appropriate role for the military … a much more effective role".'[78] These sentiments reflect the construction of such 'national security' roles as being beyond the legitimate purposes of the military.

Tactics of resistance in the Drug War: Agenda-setting was the primary tactic employed by the military in resisting greater involvement in the war on drugs; military leaders sought to exploit its influence and expertise to frame the choices and options available to political leaders. This is evident throughout Congressional hearings held in the 1980s and the early 1990s, as Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton worked with Congress to involve the military in the war on drugs.

In particular, military leaders repeatedly invoked the national debate over the demand versus supply dimension of illicit drug use in the United States, while also stressing the military's ostensible lack of capacity to undertake counterdrug missions, especially interdiction. In Congressional hearings, the military often raised concerns about the requirements and efficacy of enacting a 'supply'-based approach, which entailed the disruption and interdiction of the flow of illegal drugs by civilian law enforcement agencies (and later, the military). Instead they

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[74]Bagley, 'Myths of militarization'.

[75]Zirnite, 'Reluctant recruits'.

[76]Bagley, 'Myths of militarization'.

[77]Caspar Weinberger, 'Our troops shouldn't be drug cops; don't draft the military to solve a law-enforcement problem', *The Washington Post* (22 May 1988).

[78]Richard Gross, 'Weinberger Calls Anti-Drug Bill "Absurd", UPI archives (15 September 1986), available at: {https://www.upi.com/Archives/1986/09/15/Weinberger-calls-House-anti-drug-bill-absurd/8366527140800/}.

often emphasised the superiority of a 'demand'-based approach, involving drug education, treatment programmes, and legal measures.[79]

During a seminar sponsored by the Congressional Research Service on 7 June 1988, Marine Lieutenant General Stephen Olmstead, then serving as the Assistant Secretary for Drug Policy and Enforcement, for example, told the seminar, 'I believe the best way to interdict drugs completely is to have the American people say in Washington or Albany or New York, "I don't want that junk" … Demand reduction is the answer. So I wonder if we're going after the right strategy.'[80] The same year, Navy Admiral Frank Kelso, then the Commander of the US Atlantic Fleet, told the Armed Services Committee that, 'interdiction is the most difficult and most expensive initiative to fight drugs. In military terms, it is like attempting to shoot down a missile after it is fired rather than shooting the shooter. We must shoot the archer not the arrow.'[81] Leaving aside the larger debate about the merits of a demand versus supply side approach to drug abuse, in the context of Congressional testimony such statements served as a bureaucratic tactic to frame the problem as beyond the military's purview and to shield it against calls for increasing military involvement in supply side activities.

Similarly, military leaders tried to shape the decision context by repeatedly asserting that use of the military would not be efficacious and significantly reduce the flow of drugs into the United States. During a Joint Committee on Armed Services hearing held on 15 June 1988, several military generals and admirals, as well as President Reagan's Secretary of Defense, Frank Carlucci, went to great lengths to argue that there were limits to what military force could accomplish with respect to the specific drug interdiction missions. For instance, the first Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Robert Herres, spent the bulk of his testimony debunking what he perceived to be seven misperceptions or 'myths' regarding 'the role that interdiction, both maritime and aerial … could play' in the war on drugs.[82] In particular, Herres emphasised the limits of certain military technologies, such as radar, in identifying shipments of illicit drugs.[83] The military's civilian and uniformed leadership likely saw themselves as merely conveying their assessment of the practical difficulties of drug interdiction. But notably absent was an acknowledgement of how military resources might be tailored to the task; rather, the discussion was framed around obstacles to effective use. This is the context in which policymakers were assessing what the military might be asked to do.

Similarly, the military used a zero-sum framing in constructing involvement in the counterdrug task as harming readiness and detracting from external defence. In turn, its leaders claimed that new resources would be required to fulfill what were portrayed as 'extra' tasks – a framing that reinforced what military leaders saw as the costs and infeasibility of military involvement. These points were emphasised throughout Congressional hearings. At one point, Carlucci told the Committee, 'the Defense Department can increase the level of support we provide to the nation's anti-drug efforts, but we must be provided additional resources. Otherwise, our military readiness, which is already under pressure due to budget restrictions, will suffer even more.'[84] Likewise, in the same hearing, uniformed military leaders refuted the notion that conducting

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[79]Bagley, 'Myths of militarization'; Christopher Schnaubelt, 'Can the military's effectiveness in the Drug War be measured?', *Cato Journal*, 14:2 (1994), pp. 243–65.

[80]Narcotics Interdiction and the Use of the Military: Issues for Congress, Washington, DC, Seminar held by the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 100th Cong. (1988) (testimony of Lieutenant General Stephen Olmstead, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Drug Policy and Enforcement), p. 13.

[81]Role of the Military in Drug Interdiction: Hearings before the Joint Committee on Armed Services, 100th Cong. (1988) (testimony of the Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Robert Herres, & Admiral Frank Kelso), p. 309.

[82]'Role of the Military in Drug Interdiction; 100th Cong. (1988) (testimony of the Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, Robert Herres, & Frank Kelso), pp. 293–6.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid., p. 282.

activities associated with the counterdrug mission, such as surveillance, would constitute meaningful preparation for the military's external defence mission. As Admiral Kelso voiced his concerns to the Committee, 'drug interdiction operations do not provide the necessary training to prepare our planes or ships to deploy ... an increase in operating tempo for drug interdiction will be paid for by the American sailor in more time at sea, and we will be less ready to deter war'.[85]

In addition, we see elements of what Hodges terms military legalism in efforts to use legal restrictions to frame the options available to political leaders. Invoking legal restrictions dating to the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, military leaders expounded at length on these restrictions to ensure that it would operate in a supporting role to law enforcement agencies – rather than lead the effort. These statements were coupled with claims that the military was unprepared and poorly trained for law enforcement tasks. During a seminar sponsored by the Congressional Research Service on 7 June 1988, Marine Lieutenant General Stephen Olmstead, then serving as the Assistant Secretary for Drug Policy and Enforcement, offered insight into why the military did not seek a greater role in the country's fight against drugs. He said, 'the military can do the job. But, I think the job is being done pretty well right now by the properly trained law enforcement officials.'[86] Olmstead remarked further, 'If the Congress ... passes a law ... we're going to put our heels together and go out and do it. Now you probably won't like the way we're going to do it. We're not going to read the Miranda Act to people, and we're probably going to settle it with machine gun fire because that's the way we're trained.'[87]

Two things are notable about this exchange. First, Olmstead is accurate in his point, that with exception of some Military Police units, the active-duty military's training is not oriented towards law enforcement style tasks. Yet, as noted above, in many cases what was being asked (and was ultimately done) was not beyond the military's toolkit, and involved using intelligence and logistical capabilities to assist in drug interdiction and other purposes. Second, and perhaps more interesting, Olmstead makes this argument despite the fact that the law has already been settled preventing the military from undertaking the kind of arrest and interrogation activities that he is referencing. The 1976 Mansfield Amendment to the Internal Security Assistance and Arms Export Act of 1961 provided that 'no officer or employee of the United States may engage or participate in any direct police arrest action in any foreign country with respect to narcotics control efforts' and the Department of Justice had reaffirmed that interpretation in 1986.[88] While Congressional legislation drafted in 1981 and passed as part of the 1982 Defense Authorization Act legalised military support to law enforcement with intelligence, equipment and facilities, it maintained prohibitions on the military participating in searches and arrests of civilians.[89] In other words, Olmstead's comments were primarily rhetorical and represented a way to harness legalities as a means of undercutting advocates for the military playing an expansive role in counterdrug efforts.

In sum, the military pushed back on the counterdrug missions, although interestingly it did so with different tactics than it employed with respect to the 1990s-era humanitarian crises, relying more on bureaucratic tools and agenda-setting than on public appeals and domestic political

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[85]Role of the Military in Drug Interdiction; 100th Cong. (1988) (testimony of the Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, Robert Herres, & Frank Kelso), p. 314.

[86]Narcotics Interdiction and the Use of the Military, 100th Cong. (1988) (testimony of Lieutenant General Stephen Olmstead), p. 15.

[87]Narcotics Interdiction and the Use of the Military: Issues for Congress, Washington, DC: Seminar held by the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 100th Cong. (1988) (testimony of Lieutenant General Stephen Olmstead), p. 15.

[88]See 'Application of the Mansfield Amendment' (September 1986), available at: {https://www.justice.gov/file/23866/download}.

[89]Bagley, 'Myths of militarization'; see also Congressional Research Service, Report No. 42659, 'The Posse Comitatus Act and Related Matters: The Use of the Military to Execute Civilian Law' (2018).

measures. These tactics nonetheless still shaped the decision-making context for civilian policy-makers and yielded concessions about how and under what conditions the military would participate in the counterdrug task. In addition, the military asked for and received enormous budget increases to fight the war on drugs; in 1992 it received more than a billion dollars of additional funding for the task.[90] In short, Congress seemed to respond to the zero-sum framing about the impacts of interdiction and surveillance and claims that the counterdrug operations would come at the expense of the military's 'true' purposes.

The 2009 Afghanistan surge

In this final case we investigate dissent over a military task: whether to (further) invest in a large counterinsurgency effort in the war in Afghanistan in 2009 – an issue in which military leaders held strong views and would advocate for them with a variety of tactics of dissent.

After President Barack Obama assumed office in 2009, among his first priorities was undertaking a review of the Afghanistan War. The US had been fighting, alongside NATO allies, the war since late 2001, after it initiated a military campaign to eliminate Taliban support for al-Qaeda and apprehend the planners of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Subsequently, in early June 2009, General Stanley McChrystal was given the job by Obama of undertaking a sixty-day assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. On 31 August, McChrystal provided to the Pentagon a report that concluded, 'Failure to provide adequate resources' for a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in Afghanistan, is 'likely to result in mission failure'.[91] A key axis of the emerging debate following McChrystal's report was whether the US would invest in what military leaders called a 'fully resourced counterinsurgency' versus stick to a less resource-intensive counterterrorism mission combined with efforts to train Afghan security forces.[92]

Early in the debate it became clear that top military leaders strongly favoured the ramped-up COIN effort. Then commander in Afghanistan Stanley McChrystal, head of US Central Command, David Petraeus and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen all strongly endorsed the idea, while Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, ultimately sided with the military leaders' view. The adoption of an enhanced COIN effort, however, would entail a substantial new commitment of troops; McChrystal ultimately advocated that forty thousand additional military personnel be sent to Afghanistan to prosecute the invigorated COIN effort.

While top military leaders were united on the issue, however, opinions were more divided within the administration. Some contended that the US should not invest in a large COIN-centric Afghan Surge and instead focus on a hybrid option that combined counterterrorism with training of Afghan security forces.[93] Obama himself was surveying his options and considering different directions throughout the review. Military leaders endeavoured to push against those that opposed the COIN centric option, using several tactics of dissent.

Source of dissent to opponents of the surge: Several factors help explain why the military advocated so strongly for an enhanced COIN effort. Among them is the way that COIN had taken root within a prominent cohort of the Army leadership; in other words, there was a strong and

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[90]The Fiscal Year dollar amounts received by the US military to fight drugs are listed below, and were compiled with the help of Bagley, 'Myths of militarization'; Zirnite, 'Reluctant recruits'; and Bob Dreyfuss, 'The Drug War: Where the money goes', *Rolling Stone* (11 December 1997). These figures are: FY 1982: 4.9 million; FY 1985: $100 million; FY 1987: $379 million; FY 1989: $300 million; FY 1990: $ 525 million; FY 1991: $1.1 billion; FY 1992: $1.2 billion; FY 1997: $957 million); FY 1998: $809 million.

[91]Mark Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars: The Military's Undeclared War against America's Presidents* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2017), p. 242; Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010), p. 178.

[92]Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 246; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 236.

[93]Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 246; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 236.

ascendant subcomponent of the Army that had adopted as part of its organisational culture a belief in the efficacy of COIN, and in particular a newly articulated version of it.[94] The Army had embarked on an extensive effort to develop the newly conceived and expanded COIN doctrine, which was led by David Petraeus. In so doing, this cohort was pushing against sceptics within who embraced a role conception faced on external threats against peer adversaries, in which the primary task should be conventional warfighting.[95]

The lessons of the US recent wars likely also played a role in fuelling dissent against opponents of a surge in Afghanistan. The US had employed a strategy of counterinsurgency in Iraq in the mid-2000s, which in combination with political developments in the war that led to the decline of al-Qaeda's social support and other factors, helped provide for a dramatic drop in violence beginning in 2007. The military, in particular, saw this as validation that a well-conceived and resourced COIN effort could reverse Taliban gains in Afghanistan. Notably, Petraeus has spearheaded that effort and was now in charge of the effort overseeing the war in Afghanistan in his capacity as head of Central Command. The challenges of coordinating with allies in prosecuting the Afghanistan War could also have been a factor; with a more expansive resource commitment to COIN, the US would be less reliant on allied resources.

The aforementioned dominant narrative from the Vietnam War cast a shadow in the background. As noted above, that narrative proposed that US politicians had waffled on their commitments, preferring to incrementally expand troops and resources without a clear strategy for doing so, while preventing military leaders from using a strategy and tactics that would have allowed the military and its South Vietnamese allies to prevail over the North Vietnamese. Another piece of the narrative, propagated by a popular book by H. R. McMaster,[96] had been that the Pentagon's military leadership had been derelict in not more forcefully advocating in favour of its preferred strategy. Hence, the framing of a political leader hesitant to commit forces decisively, overlaid by the critique that weak military leadership contributed to US failings in the war in Vietnam, potentially fuelled dissent, while also normatively validating engaging in tactics to influence Obama's decisions.

Finally, and related, the military's long experience and investment in the war likely played a role. By the time the Afghan Surge was being debated, the military had been fighting the war since 2001 and had become deeply invested in it. Nearly 12 years after the surge, as a debate simmered about the fate of a potential peace treaty under President Biden, and withdrawal of US forces, JCS Chairman Mark Milley captured these sentiments when he argued against abandoning the effort, given '"all the blood and treasure spent" there over the last two decades'[97]

Tactics of dissent: The military leadership employed several sets of tactics to try and press Obama to adopt a 'fully resourced counterinsurgency' in Afghanistan in 2009. They first sought to shape public opinion and Congressional politics on the matter via public appeals. One example of this occurred after an article by *Washington Post* journalist David Ignatius was published that was critical of the prospects of COIN in early September 2009. The following day Petraeus contacted another journalist, Michael Gerson of the *Post*, who then published an interview with the general, in which Petraeus advocated, echoing McChrystal, for a 'fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign'.[98] In other words, Petraeus was pushing back publicly on criticism of the COIN option.

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[94]As evidence of this, consider that the US Army and US Marine Corps revamped its counterinsurgency field manual, FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 right as the surge to Iraq was unfolding.

[95]For an example of a sceptical view, see Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2013).

[96]McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*.

[97]Alex Ward, 'An emotional moment in an NSC meeting show why withdrawing from Afghanistan is so hard', *Vox.com* (4 March 2021).

[98]Robert F. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2014), p. 367; Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 245; Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 157.

Another instance involved the leaking of McChrystal's report to the press. On 21 September 21, the *Washington Post* published a version of the McChrystal assessment under the headline, 'McChrystal: More Forces or Mission Failure', which at least according to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, had been leaked by someone on McChrystal's staff.[99] As Peter Feaver put it at the time, 'The leak makes it harder for President Obama to reject a McChrystal request for additional troops because the assessment so clearly argues for them.'[100] Finally, in October 2009 in a speech on Afghanistan at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, McChrystal was asked if he might support a counterterrorism option, instead of his preferred COIN approach, to which he replied, 'the short answer is: no'.[101]

In addition to these tactics, military leaders engaged in some agenda-setting and appeals to allies in Congress. For example, Admiral Mullen testified during hearings on his reappointment as Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman that he supported a 'properly resourced classically pursued counterinsurgency'.[102] It is incumbent on military leaders to report to Congress forthrightly in testimony, but importantly Mullen made these comments in the midst of Obama's strategy review. As close observers of these events remarked, Mullen could have demurred, noting that a policy review was in process and decisions were yet to be made.[103] As it was, his language and the tenor of his remarks fostered a sense that there was a 'military bloc' pushing COIN.[104] Subsequently, Senator Lindsey Graham reportedly told the Obama administration officials through back channels that Republicans would support the Afghan strategy 'as long as the generals are ok and there is a meaningful number' of at least thirty thousand troops committed.[105]

There was, in addition, some bureaucratic manoeuvring to affect the presentation of options to political leaders. At one point, in response to Vice President Joe Biden's interest in considering a counterterrorism mission, General Cartwright, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, developed options to that end.[106] By going directly to the Vice President, the Vice Chairman had violated conventional practices with respect to following the chain of command, which caused frictions with Chairman Mullen.[107] But equally important, Mullen opposed the option Cartwright had proposed to the White House. As one observer of the episode recounts, 'Admiral Mullen despised the hybrid option. He did not want it discussed and debated at the White House. So he barred it from leaving the Pentagon.'[108] Only subsequently, after Obama learned of the option as outlined by Cartwright, did the military leadership reluctantly present it to him.

Notably, while undertaking these tactics, military leaders contested that they intended to exert pressure on the process. For example, at one point during the review, Obama questioned whether the military was pressuring him to accede to their recommendations. Mullen reportedly replied, 'We would never do that.'[109]

In the end, Obama sided with the generals, although he granted them only thirty thousand additional troops, rather than the forty thousand they requested. That, and especially the fact that he placed a timeline in which they would have to demonstrate the success of their COIN effort, rankled the military leadership considerably. While Obama ultimately made the decision,

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[99]Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, p. 368.

[100]Peter Feaver, 'Bob Woodward strikes again! (McChrystal Assessment Edition)', *Foreign Policy* (21 September 2009), available at: {https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/21/bob-woodward-strikes-again-mcchrystal-assessment-edition/}.

[101]John Burns, 'McChrystal rejects scaling down Afghan military aims', *The New York Times* (1 October 2009).

[102]Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 246.

[103]Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 173.

[104]Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, pp. 365, 367–8.

[105]Peter Baker, 'How Obama came to plan for "surge" in Afghanistan', *New York Times* (5 December 2009).

[106]Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 244.

[107]Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 237.

[108]Ibid., p. 236.

[109]Perry, *The Pentagon's Wars*, p. 247

actions by the military had shaped the decision-making context through its public appeals and agenda-setting actions.

While the surge succeeded in pushing back on Taliban gains in the southern part of the country, however, it failed to produce lasting strategic or political gains in the war. As such, the Afghan Surge provides another data point in the military's ongoing narrative about the lessons of the wars it has fought. There is some evidence that it has since shaped organisational debates, and contributed to the marginalisation of the cohort of COIN advocates in the Army. With the publication of the 2018 National Defense Strategy,[110] the military's role conception based on external threats and favoured task of focusing on conventional wars, now focused on China and Russia regained its preeminence.

Conclusion

This article explores the sources and nature of tactics of military dissent employed by the US military in three key moments of civil-military friction, spanning the 1980s to the 2009. Each of the three moments illustrate different sources and tactics of dissent employed by the military.

Several implications for future research follow. First the analysis suggests that scholars might engage in more theoretical and empirical work on preferences and preference formation in militaries.[111] The analysis of the US case reveals that there is no single basis or issue driving military dissent; it operates on several levels of analysis, in which the roles, tasks, missions, or means might alternatively spark opposition to civilian initiatives. In addition, while role conceptions provide important framing for how military leaders often assess the appropriateness of engagement in different conflict situations, the origins of military preferences in any given context are multifaceted. The article thus underscores the potential benefits of analysing the combination, if not interaction, of materialist and rationalist components and ideational factors in understanding military preference formation. In particular, further investigation of how dominant narratives about the sources of failure and success in war is warranted. Why do militaries come to learn some lessons, and not others, from their experience in war, and how does that then interact with their role conceptions and future assessment of military roles and tasks? For example, while the military took away from its war in Vietnam that counterinsurgency was fraught and risky,[112] the British and French militaries learned very different lessons from similar wars.[113] The issue has become especially important in the wake of the end of the US involvement in Afghanistan in August 2021. How the narrative of that war and the way it will interact with role conceptions and shape preferences over the use of force in future conflicts remains to be seen – yet more scholarly study of how different narratives of war emerge and become salient would provide tools for understanding the phenomenon.

Second, researchers might investigate why particular tactics of dissent are chosen – and even more fundamentally, why military leaders choose to take up any tactics of dissent against some civilian initiatives and not others. The analysis in this article suggests that the choice of tactic might vary in systematic patterns. In the debates over the interventions of the 1990s and the Afghan Surge in 2009, the military used many tools that sought to leverage public opinion, while many agenda-setting tactics in Congress were employed in the counterdrug debates. Those cases too provide some clues about the factors that might drive tactic selection. For example, the timing of Colin Powell's comments are provocative, suggesting that public appeals could be more likely during elections when the candidates are split on an issue. Dissent may also

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[110]For a copy of the 2018 US National Defense Strategy, see: {https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf}.

[111]Brooks, *Shaping Strategy*; Feaver, *Armed Servants*.

[112]Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*.

[113]Long, 'The Evolution of U.S. Army Doctrine'; Crane, 'Avoiding Vietnam'.

be more common when societies are polarised, or when civilian elites are disunified. For example, in the counterdrug debates, there was significant agreement among civilians in Congress across party lines about using the military for the task, rendering it more difficult for military leaders potentially to leverage partisan and institutional divisions.[114]

Third, scholars might consider the efficacy military dissent. When, for example, will tactics of dissent have a greater impact on civilians' choices about how military resources are used? Similarly, the analysis raises theoretical and normative questions about how scholars and practitioners assess when civil-military relations are healthy and, relatedly, how they conceive of and measure challenges to civilian control. In other words, is military dissent always contrary to civilian control of the military, or is it often just a natural byproduct of civil-military decision-making?

Finally, researchers might analyse military dissent cross-nationally, looking at other democratic and non-democratic settings to determine the factors that shape the character, intensity, and consequences of military dissent. Here the analysis could be linked with comparative efforts to analyse the determinants and robustness of civilian control. In short, much more is to be known about why and how militaries engage in dissent, and what happens when they do.

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[114]On how civilian disunity creates opportunities for military opposition, see Deborah Avant, *Military Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); see also Drew Kinney, 'Sharing saddles: Oligarchs and officers on horseback in Egypt and Tunisia', *International Studies Quarterly*, 65 (2021), pp. 512–27.