Creating Military Power

The Sources of Military Effectiveness

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DOMESTIC INSTITUTIONS are powerful determinants of military effectiveness among modern nation-states. The rules within which political contenders compete for leadership and delegate tasks to military organizations affect the strategies that politicians employ to affect military behavior and also, over time, the professional strength of military organizations and their preferences as embodied in organizational culture or bias. Domestic institutions might vary in several ways: on a continuum of capability and legitimacy (from strong to weak states), mode of authority (from democratic or autarchic), or constitutional arrangement (parliamentary to presidential). In this chapter, I focus on how different constitutional arrangements affect military effectiveness by examining two states that are similar in strength and mode of authority but have different constitutional arrangements: the United States and the United Kingdom.

I argue that the difference in institutional structures in these countries has resulted in military organizations that capitalize on different elements of military effectiveness. U.S. institutions foster military organizations that emphasize skill and quality, whereas British institutions foster military organizations that stress responsiveness and integration. Each military suffers corresponding risks: the United States risks spending too much and generating skills and doctrine not well suited to some strategic goals, and the United Kingdom risks spending too little and having personnel with less refined skills in some key areas.
This leads parliamentary systems to tend toward unity. Because the parliament is elected all at once, from the same constituency, and for the same period of time, there are no institutional incentives that exacerbate disagreement. Instead, institutional incentives reward compromise and agreement within parties. Although there may be policy disagreements among leaders within a party, the party must coalesce around a set of issue stances to enhance its chances of victory, and it is only through the party's victory that individuals can take positions of leadership. Whatever party wins a majority thereby creates a government and can make policy according to the party's platform. This often leads parliamentary systems to generate "efficient" outcomes—where voters choose between parties on the basis of different national policy platforms—rather than other more local concerns such as patronage or "pork." This institutional structure eases the way for concerted action among civilians.

In presidential systems, where the executive is elected separately from the legislature, there are institutional reasons for civilians to disagree, regardless of their ideological perspectives. Civilian leaders are elected from different electorates, for different time periods, and thus are more likely to have different views of the impact of particular policies on their immediate chances for reelection. For example, presidents may be willing to respond to changes in the international system, but Congress members may be less so if these changes result in less spending in their districts. This institutional structure makes concerted action more difficult.

These institutional arrangements have consequences for the way civilians are likely to control the military—both for the immediate ability of civilians to intervene in a particular situation and for the strategies by which civilians organize military forces, both of which have long-term impacts on the culture of military organizations. The consequences for immediate action are relatively straightforward. Civilians in unified systems have an easier time agreeing on what to do and designing appropriate strategies to direct the military. The greater the chances for civilian agreement on national policy, the more clearly civilians are able to communicate their preferences to military organizations. Furthermore, if civilian leaders agree on policy, they are also more likely to create efficient processes—mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning—that incite the military to pay attention to and respond to civilian preferences.

In divided systems, the opportunities for disagreement and conflicting demands are greater. When different civilian institutions have competing powers over the bureaucracy, disagreement over policy can lead to conflicting instructions to the military. Confronted with two sets of directions, military agents can choose the direction that best suits their interests, or they can play the two off against one another to generate a policy more to the military's liking. Even beyond the complication that different policy preferences lend, competition for power over the military bureaucracy may also lead civilian leaders to greater rigidity in their processes of control. Once actors do come to agreement, they may embed the agreement in the organization's structure as a way to avoid constant future jockeying for new agreements. If the future looks uncertain, actors may fashion the organization in such a way as to shield it from future authority, either to reduce opportunities for their opponents in the future or to tie their own hands so as to shield themselves from potential domestic political consequences. Divided systems are also prone to the development of distrust between civilians that can circumscribe their control strategies, making it more likely that they will choose strategies that preserve their political power even if they are less effective. For example, distrust between Congress and the president can lead the president to be hesitant to use controversial personnel appointments to change the military rapidly in a crisis, even though that may be what is required to institute quick changes.

The long-term consequences of these strategies are less obvious but potentially more important. Civilian choices have significant effects on the strength and preferences of military organizations, influencing whether military organizations are strong, united, and professional or weak, divided, and amateur. The strength of military organizations, in turn, affects the degree to which those military organizations can develop and communicate their preferences. The civilian choices common under divided institutions are more likely to yield strong military organizations with clear preferences. Such organizations are more likely to play one civilian institution against another and to develop strength and discretion over time as civilians disagree. Furthermore, although the military's preferences may be influenced by many factors, significant among them is past civilian direction. Civilian choices about standards for training, promotion, and budgets become embedded in military organizations and condition what military leaders expect to be rewarded for. These incentives shape the culture of the organization, which determines its standard, or default, set of choices.

**Institutions and Military Effectiveness**

One might imagine that the choice between these institutional setups is clear and a unified system is superior for military effectiveness. In fact, however, the two systems buffer against different risks and capitalize on different benefits. Generally, divisions in civilian institutions allow more room for the establishment of strong and professional military organizations that develop specialized expertise beyond what civilians have and that
standardize their practices. One of the key reasons to delegate in the first place is to have agents with specialized expertise beyond what the principal can provide. This is more likely to develop when organizations are professional, a quality whose hallmarks are expertise, responsibility, and a collective sense of the profession. According to Huntington, it is strong and professional organizations that are most likely to develop the “complex intellectual skill requiring comprehensive study and training” that is necessary in the modern military.

When this expertise becomes institutionalized within the culture of military organizations, it defines the realm in which the military expects to operate: where it should innovate and where it should not. This prevents quick alterations in response to short-term incentives and promotes a stable environment in which the military can hone its skills. A strong professional military is more likely to develop education and training programs based on military professional standards, and these standards are likely to be represented in a promotion system and thus define merit in an explicit way. Both of these should be closely associated with increased skill. In addition, the development of strong professional organizations can create the conditions for the military, by virtue of its expertise, to help civilians understand the variety of things the military must have, such as up-to-date weaponry and adequate force levels, to achieve success according to its professional standards. This may, in turn, increase the quality of military hardware and personnel and thus increase military effectiveness.

Finally, divided civilian institutions guard against civilian extremes. The key concern of the American founders with respect to civil-military relations was not what the military would do, but what factions of civilians might have them do. When institutions require agreement to get change, it makes it harder for one group to hijack the military. The hurdles for generating agreement also encourage civilians to rally the public around policy in ways that increase national resolve. In this circumstance, change may be slower but it is more likely to reflect agreement and resolve, which enhance morale and thus military effectiveness.

A drawback of divided civilian institutions, however, is that if the military faces new threats not defined within its professional mission, it is likely to be less responsive. Indeed, the military may not even recognize such threats because its intelligence-gathering tools are focused on the threats that it expects. Even when civilians require that the military meet a threat for which it is not prepared, the organization is likely to produce fairly traditional doctrine and planning, which may be ill suited to the goals set by the civilians. Divided institutions are thus less likely to maximize responsiveness and integration for particular kinds of unanticipated threats or those on which there is not widespread civilian agreement.

\[\text{Table 4.1: Institutions and Aspects of Military Effectiveness}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Aspects</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic assessment and coordination</td>
<td>Integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military budget</td>
<td>Quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intelligence collection</td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Officer selection</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and education</td>
<td>Skill</td>
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Conversely, unified civilian institutions foster agreement, which enhances the ability of civilians to direct the military in the short run. Such agreement also makes it easier for civilians to intervene to prompt quick changes, particularly by replacing personnel easily. Even if civilians do not intervene, past interventions can prompt the military to anticipate civilian preferences: if military personnel know that particular options are likely to affect future promotions because they will please civilian leaders, they are more likely to search for these options. This structure creates a different kind of personnel system, one that is closely attentive to civilian preferences, goals, and strategies and thus integrated with civilian goals. Because the military is not so wedded to a standard way of doing things, it is likely to be more responsive to the particular situation it finds itself in. Without strong opinions of its own about the kind of intelligence that counts, the military is more likely to pay attention to what is working, and thus to be more responsive to its enemy.

The unified institutional setting, however, is less conducive to the development of an area of military autonomy that can allow a set of independent and professional standards to grow. Without such standards, the military is less able to anticipate the need for new skills, and it has a weaker basis for urging political leaders to pay for their development. It also reduces the military’s ability to pressure for investment in particular kinds of weapons. Set against militaries that have carefully invested in and honed their professional skills, militaries geared more to responsiveness and integration may be at a disadvantage as to skill and quality. Furthermore, unified civilian institutions make change easier but also increase the risk of civilian mistakes and excesses. If civilians err in their direction of the military, there are fewer channels for the military to voice its disapproval and to check mistakes. It is also easier, in unified institutional settings, for a faction of civilians to hijack the military, using it for political purposes or to pursue goals not widely shared by the polity.
In general, then, we should expect these different institutional settings to lead to different strengths and weaknesses in the properties of military effectiveness. Divided institutions do not favor integration and responsiveness so much, but they should enhance military skill and quality, particularly of military organizations that are strong and professional. Unified institutions bode well for integration and responsiveness but detract from military skill and quality. See Table 4.1.

**United States and Britain Compared**

Apart from domestic institutions, of course, many other variables may influence the effectiveness of different militaries. In choosing to compare the United States and the United Kingdom, I have controlled for other obvious institutional variables such as state strength (whether a state is coherent, capable, and legitimate) and mode of authority (whether a state is democratic or authoritarian). Some argue, however, that the power of a state relative to other states in the international system is more important for the effectiveness of its military response than any domestic institutional variance. Others argue that the nature of the threat a state faces is the key factor in the effectiveness of its military response. To control for some of the variation suggested by these arguments, I compare cases where the United States and the United Kingdom held similar positions of relative power and faced threats of a similar nature. In particular, I compare how each military, when in a position of relative but not unrivaled strength, responded to multifaceted threat environments: the United States in the 1950s and 1960s and the United Kingdom from the turn of the twentieth century through World War I.

In the following sections, I discuss the evolution of the U.S. and UK militaries—particularly their armies—and how this influenced their performance against peripheral and central threats in their respective periods of similar strength and similar threat environments. I then describe the institutional dilemmas for military effectiveness in each polity and suggest that, as the dilemmas are different, so too are the strategies most likely to resolve them.

**The United States**

In the United States, concern with the usurpation of power by factions of civilians led the founders to set up a system of checks and balances that institutionalized divisions among the civilian leadership. Different civilian institutions, with different constituencies, often developed different preferences over the best way to meet military challenges. Initially, however, the institutional divisions did not lead to competition over the control of the army. Congressional concern with national military policy before the turn of the twentieth century overwhelmingly concentrated on the militia. Because state parties controlled congressional nominations and received many political benefits from their control over the militia, congressional representatives had domestic political reasons to pay attention to militia rather than army matters.

After the Civil War, the U.S. Army professionalized itself in a state of isolation. Congress was content to let the army set its own standards for education, training, promotions, evaluation, and retirement relatively free from interference as long as it did not request increased budgets. The absence of external threat combined with the political lessons of the immediate post-Civil War period kept the president from interfering. The resulting culture was influenced by the admiration with which the army observed the military progress of the Prussians. The American army devised a highly deductive approach to warfare that relied heavily on the "science of war" manifested in Prussian military theory. Although the army was engaged in many different kinds of missions day to day, such as occupying the South and "pacification" efforts against Native Americans in the West, the army focused on military principles more suited to war with major powers in the European theater. The army objected to the preparation of armed forces for police or constabulary work as beneath the soldier's vocation. Its system of education focused on using military history to teach the principles of war and to cultivate uniformity of thought and procedure. This created biases toward offensive, decisive doctrine generally more suited for conventional war with European powers in the European setting.

As a result of the progressive reforms that loosened the ties between congressional nominations and state parties, and in response to the rise in U.S. power in the first half of the twentieth century, Congress reorganized its oversight of the military. As the military became more salient in American politics, and as national politics became more important than local politics for congressional careers, Congress became more interested in military activity.

Congress's expanded role in military affairs, particularly after World War II, enhanced the army's discretion over doctrine, contrary to what one might expect. Having more civilians control the army made it easier, not harder, for the army to maintain its focus. The increased power of Congress in military affairs allowed the army, a strong organization with
distinct preferences, to appeal to Congress when it was dissatisfied with presidential direction. Appeals to Congress on the basis of military expertise could result in hearings that had political repercussions. By raising the potential political costs of intervention by the president, the post–World War II structure of American civil-military relations intensified the army’s ability to focus exclusively on conventional war and ignore appropriate doctrine for low-intensity conflict, despite executive branch preferences.

This is not to suggest that civilians had lost control over the military. In fact, congressional changes in the budgetary process during the 1920s induced the main military organizations (the army, the navy, and later the air force) to compete with one another over funds. Competition over funds quickly became competition over strategy. The interservice rivalry that ensued provided civilians with a range of doctrines appropriate to meet a variety of pressing security concerns (as well as the parochial pork-barrel concerns of Congress). Given that the most pressing security concerns identified by civilian grand strategy in the interwar period was the potential for major-power conflict, and that attention to this kind of conflict was reinforced by army preferences, the hypotheses would predict that U.S. military organizations would yield high levels of skill, subscribe to doctrine that was well integrated with grand strategic needs, and be responsive to the threat.

After World War II, however, Congress passed the National Security Act of 1947 (revised in 1949), which institutionalized Congress’s role as an active participant in the formation of military policy. The act also gave Congress access to military advice and as a practical matter furthered a process in which Congress relied on military dissenters for information about potential alternatives to the plans of the administration or other services. Interservice rivalry became a primary mechanism through which Congress operationalized its oversight role.

At the same time, civilian leaders were gradually settling on a grand strategy that required a set of military instruments flexible enough to meet a wide variety of threats. Civilian leaders in the United States were concerned, first and foremost, with the Soviet threat. The theater of concern reinforced the army’s preference for preparing to fight a conventional war in Europe. As the logic of containment unfolded, however, it increasingly focused on the need to contain communism at the margins in places like Vietnam, where opponents practiced a variety of strategies. It was in those marginal areas that U.S. forces actually fought, but the army had few institutional reasons to be responsive to such threats or to create strategies for meeting them that corresponded to civilian goals.

In this situation, we should expect that the army’s professional focus would keep the skill of its forces and the quality of its equipment high. We should also expect that the same professional focus, combined with budgetary incentives to compete with the other services, would allow it to contribute to civilian thinking about the best way to meet the Soviet threat. As for conflicts more removed from the army’s preferred type of war, however, we should expect to find a lower level of integration and responsiveness of doctrine.

**MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS TRADE-OFFS**

The army’s focus on planning for big conventional wars in the European theater did keep it well prepared for such a conflict. “The commitment of substantial American forces to the defense of Europe is a cornerstone of contemporary American strategy and the principal determinant of the organization, training, and equipment of American general purpose forces.” Although there were arguments in the policy establishment about the degree to which these forces were to be designed primarily to deter or instead to win a war, there was widespread agreement that defending Europe from the Soviet threat was the prime mission of U.S. forces. Army personnel were trained and educated to meet the Soviet threat, the personnel system rewarded those who had focused on this threat, doctrine was developed to be integrated with this threat, and planning was responsive to changes in this threat.

Evidence can be found in the frequent updating of the U.S. posture toward the European theater reflected in army doctrinal innovations. Huntington identifies the army as the service primarily responsible for initiating innovations in European defense. Indeed, the army even endorsed and supported the notion of limited conventional war from the mid-1950s on, partly as a mechanism for defending the army’s role in American defense. The notion of flexible response, which became linked to that of limited war, was created to promote a conventional defense of Europe first, the rest of the world after. Having a range of potential nuclear and conventional responses to any Soviet incursion promised a way around the unsatisfiability of high-stakes nuclear options.

Because combating the Soviet Union was the prime motive of all the services and each service had a different idea about how to go about combating this threat, the interservice rivalry that ensued gave civilians a range of options for meeting this threat. As Huntington puts it, “When the State Department wanted to reinforce Europe in 1950, the Air Force took a rather skeptical attitude, but the Army moved in to help develop and merchandise the policy. Conversely, when the Secretary of State spoke of Massive
Retaliation, the Army dissented, but the now favored Air Force congratulated the diplomats on their military common sense. 20 Thus interservice rivalry became a mechanism by which U.S. civilians could ensure that military doctrine was well integrated with U.S. goals in Europe.

The same professional focus that generated integration and responsiveness in Europe, however, also allowed the army autonomy to resist changes in training and doctrinal development in those areas outside of Europe where the threat did not fit into the army's standard way of thinking, most notably Vietnam. The army's response in Vietnam demonstrates the resulting trade-off: disintegration and lack of responsiveness to threats that fit neither the civilian top goals nor the army's predominant mode of thinking.

The goal of U.S. involvement in Vietnam was to create a stable, non-communist South Vietnam. As instability mounted in the south after the abrogation of the Geneva Accords in 1956, the United States sent advisers to train the South Vietnamese Army. 21 The army's initial approach to the South Vietnamese Army, based on its biases, worked against, rather than toward U.S. goals. Even as crisis after crisis mounted and civilian leaders became increasingly convinced that the army should change its approach to one more appropriate to counterinsurgency, the army misunderstood and resisted civilian intervention. One can find examples of the army's failures in its training of the South Vietnamese Army and its development of strategy to fight the insurgency itself, as well as in its use of intelligence. Both promotion policies and standard training and education exacerbated the difficulties. The result was that training for the South Vietnamese military, and eventually U.S. military strategy itself, was not integrated with American goals and was not responsive to the threat in Vietnam.

**EXAMPLE 1: U.S. TRAINING FOR SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES**

As the United States stepped up its efforts in Vietnam in 1956, the purpose of military training, according to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was to reorganize the South Vietnamese Army in such a way as to allow it to maintain internal security. Any external threat would be met by the new regional security organization, the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). 22 At the highest levels, the army, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pacific Command Planners, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) all agreed that the most important immediate danger came from subversion and that the South Vietnamese government required forces that could maintain order within the country. 23

The army, however, focused its efforts on the creation of an army able to withstand a conventional attack from the north. The assumption, common in U.S. Army training, was that regularly trained troops would also be capable of performing internal security duties. Thus the army developed a plan to strengthen the South Vietnamese Army while reducing its size to six divisions: three full divisions capable of at least delaying an invasion from the north, and three territorial divisions organized around existing regional commands to provide for internal security and reinforcements. 24

This plan had several faults. First, it required that while forces were centralized for training, they left large portions of the population unprotected. Second, it considerably reduced the size of forces to where they were inadequate for internal security tasks, according to local leaders. Finally, the training, according to General John W. O'Daniel, officer in charge of the training effort, was designed to teach South Vietnamese forces to push the enemy "off the roads and into the mountainous untracked areas where, if civilians are evacuated from these areas, the enemy [would be] in dire straits." 25 In fact, this was just where the enemy normally operated. The focus on creating a conventional army in South Vietnam led the U.S. Army to pull forces away from the population they were supposed to protect and to orient them to defeat a conventional force, rather than the insurgent force that was actually operating in the countryside.

In the late 1950s, the execution of this plan resulted in a Vietnamese Army of seven divisions based on the U.S. Army divisional force structure. According to a senior Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) official, it was "a very close parallel on a considerably lighter scale of the division as we knew [it] in World War II." 26 During this time, however, the communist organization in the south that would later prove devastating to U.S. goals took root. Party operations and then violence increased, in the form of stepped-up assassinations, kidnappings, and guerrilla attacks. In areas no longer protected by regular army forces, province chiefs found themselves with no way to cope with the increasing violence. 27

**EXAMPLE 2: U.S. ARMY RESISTANCE TO COUNTERINSURGENCY**

President Kennedy came into office keenly interested in having the right forces and right doctrine not just for Vietnam, but for the whole range of peripheral conflicts the United States might need to fight. Taking the focus on limited war a logical next step, Kennedy tried to get the army to adopt counterinsurgency capabilities and to create a counterinsurgency doctrine for conflicts like Vietnam.

The army did not need to invent new doctrine for counterinsurgency: such a doctrine had recently and successfully been used by the British in Malaya. Counterinsurgency doctrine has several defining features. It is defensive, with the goal of pacifying (denying enemy access to) increasing areas of territory. Its tactics involve close association with the population to
be protected, to deprive the guerrilla of the protected population's support. As the enemy retreats, the aim is to prepare the population and local forces for self-protection while pushing the enemy farther and farther out. The goal is to deny the enemy access to the population and its support rather than to destroy the adversary's will.

The professional standards that led the army to develop innovative doctrine for the European theater also led senior army leadership to see countering insurgency as a "fad" to which it should give minimal effort so as not to "ruin" the army for a serious war. As the Kennedy administration could—and did—appoint new leaders for the Special Forces, the army's strong professional bias was embedded in its doctrine, training, and standards of evaluation. All of this led the army leaders to see the insurgent threat in Vietnam through the lens of its conventional war bias and to resist changes in training for fear of undermining the army's capacity to fight a conventional war. Individuals farther down the chain of command faced career disincentives if they focused on countering insurgency. The army was not completely resistant to change, but the experience of its leaders, its standards for evaluation, and its resource battles with the other services kept it overwhelmingly focused on the prospect of a big war with the Soviets in Europe.

Thus although the army gave lip service to the administration's efforts, it did little to change training or doctrine. Instead, the army redefined counterinsurgency missions as special tasks adjacent to conventional war, such as searching out and destroying guerrilla bands. The concept of denying the enemy access to the population, central to counterinsurgency, was missed by this redefinition. When civilians demanded more training in counterinsurgency, the army simply relabeled traditional activities as counterinsurgency. According to the Howze Board Report on special warfare in 1962, the army had a latent potential for counterinsurgency operations, but "neither its indoctrination nor training is now altogether satisfactory for this mission." Furthermore, the report found, the counterinsurgency concept was foreign to fundamental army teaching and practice.

The importance of this misunderstanding of counterinsurgency by the army is illustrated in the experience of the Special Forces. The Special Forces had a promising beginning as they worked under the direction of the CIA to create the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) in the highlands of Vietnam early in the 1960s. Special Forces personnel worked to fortify village security, set up warning systems, and train local strike forces to patrol, set up ambushes, and assist villages under attack. By August 1962, the area under the program encompassed 200 villages in Daklak Province and is credited with the secure status of that province at the end of 1962. Even under CIA direction, however, the Special Forces personnel were said to have had a bias toward creating strike forces capable of offensive action. This bias could be attributed to the army's standards for evaluation, which were geared toward offensive action.

Just as the CIDG program had made some progress, however, the army was moving to consolidate control over forces in Vietnam through the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), which replaced MAAG as part of the increase in American assistance to Vietnam in early 1962. As the direction of the Special Forces was passed back to the army, MACV declared that enough strike force troops had been trained to allow the U.S. Special Forces to concentrate exclusively on offensive action against the Vietcong. According to army Chief of Staff General Harold Johnson, there was not much utility in "simply building little enclaves in each tribal area"; he wanted to see them operating in a manner "consistent with the army's view of unconventional warfare doctrine of mobile, agile forces operating with minimal combat and logistic support." Under army direction, the Special Forces moved further away from counterinsurgency doctrine and toward the redefined mission and offensive plans.

Even when the army was fully in charge of the Special Forces in Vietnam, the leadership at MACV saw them as a stepchild branch, not to be trusted. "The Special Forces available at the time President Kennedy latched on to them as a new gimmick were what I would describe as consisting primarily of fugitives from responsibility. These were people that somehow or other tended to be nonconformist, couldn't quite get along in a straight military system." The army's suspicion of Special Forces led to bureaucratic difficulties and uncertainty. Those serving in Special Forces units, for example, were unsure whether their tours would be counted as tours in a combat unit, which had significant import for promotion. Even basic supply issues were complicated for these forces.

Kennedy tried to use his power of appointment to change the army's focus, but as the hypothesis about domestic political costs predicts, he did not try anything very bold. Replacing the army's chief of staff with a counterinsurgency expert, for example, would have risked political attack. Instead he created a new post of special assistant for special warfare, to which he appointed General William B. Rosson, a counterinsurgency expert. When General Rosson complained that he was shut out by the army, Kennedy appointed a generalist, General Paul Harkins, in the hopes that someone with more political capital could make the army take note. However, this, too, failed to spur the change Kennedy hoped for.

The army did make changes in Vietnam; however, these changes were not determined by what would best meet the insurgent threat but rather...
what could fit into standard army thinking about warfare and could be applicable to a serious war in Europe. Some of these, such as search-and-destroy missions, were almost completely counterproductive. Others, such as the use of helicopters for air mobility, were arguably much more appropriate to their circumstances. Both, however, were innovations that were geared for mid- to high-intensity conventional war and were simply scaled down for the insurgent threat. Harry W. Kinnard, who commanded both the air mobility concept test organization and the army’s airborne division, said, “We felt that if we could make it applicable to mid-intensity and high intensity . . . it would be effective at a lower level.”

Instead of counterinsurgency, the army's plans in Vietnam focused on offensive action, with search-and-destroy missions as the primary vehicle. The army eventually developed a strategy based on attrition, seeking to kill a large enough percentage of the enemy that a “crossover point” would be reached at which they were killing enemy soldiers more quickly than they could be replaced by new forces. This was a plan that closely followed the army’s general theory of war, scaled down for Vietnam. It dictated attention to particular kinds of information—specifically, the opponent’s ability to recruit for its main forces. The army’s undue attention to main force units and neglect of irregular forces generated a heated debate between the CIA and its Defense Department counterpart (the Defense Intelligence Agency [DIA]) over the correct way to calculate the “order of battle.”

Although this debate caused much political consternation—and even a lawsuit when retired CIA analyst Sam Adams accused General William Westmoreland of “cooking the books” on Vietnam body counts—it missed the larger problem. As a 1966 CIA report suggested, it was the army’s larger theory of war that was wrong, not just its estimation of the numbers of the enemy. The report argued that the Vietnamese communists, having learned from the French, aimed to undermine the American will to persist. The U.S. fight to undermine communist will, it argued, was likely to be ineffective: bombing was unlikely to reduce supply to the point where the communists would be unable to carry out attacks and where the communist leadership would lose their freedom of movement. However, battlefield hardships did force the communists to rely more heavily on coercion rather than persuasion to maintain support from the rural population, suggesting that an army strategy to protect the rural population, rather than contribute to communist deaths alone, might have yielded useful results.

This kind of thinking, however, was foreign to the army concept of war, which was focused on offensive operations to seize the initiative and take the battle to the enemy. All of this made sense in a conventional conflict, but it made less sense in the context of an insurgent war. But the strength and professional focus of the U.S. Army had embedded this theory in doctrine, training, and personnel systems. This generated many organizational disincentives for individuals to understand the insurgent threat in Vietnam, and it made it likely that those who did understand and push for change would be punished. Thus the army’s potential for a responsive counterinsurgency strategy was small.

**Military Effectiveness in Vietnam**

The U.S. Army’s strategy in Vietnam was not effective. In the 1950s, as this strategy focused on training the South Vietnamese Army, it failed to further U.S. goals. The U.S. Army created a force for protecting South Vietnam’s borders when what South Vietnam needed was a force for internal protection. During its formation, the force was removed from the countryside, allowing the Vietcong to take hold. When the force returned, it was smaller and increasingly focused on tasks unrelated to internal security.

In the early 1960s, American troops acting as advisers increasingly worked alongside South Vietnamese troops and also on their own, but they were not responsive to the actual nature of the threat or to the civilian goals. Seeking to maximize offensive actions, the army even pulled Special Forces troops away from counterinsurgency activities. When the United States finally committed troops (rather than so-called advisers) in 1965, the army’s strategy used search-and-destroy missions and bombing campaigns, both of which aimed to kill communist troops. This strategy subjected the Vietnamese population to significant risks, which further reduced the already low prospect that the population would support the government. Thus it was not integrated with a key U.S. goal: to achieve a stable, noncommunist South Vietnam. Furthermore, it was failing even on its own terms because of the lack of protection for villagers increased the communists’ ability to coerce villagers into serving their cause, causing the ill-advised “crossover point” to recede ever further.

The problems were not with the skill of the troops or with the quality of American matériel (although as the war dragged on and morale dropped, skill may have suffered as well). The primary problem of military effectiveness was that the army’s plans were not responsive to the enemy faced in Vietnam or integrated with civilian goals. The army sought to win a conventional war while the communists were fighting an insurgent war. The strategy was also not a good match for strategic goals. Raiding villages to kill communists also harmed the local population, which eroded rather than enhanced the potential for a stable noncommunist Vietnam.
United Kingdom

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS

Modern parliamentary institutions in the United Kingdom grew out of resistance to weak absolutist rule. Initially, when the crown was stronger, British institutions reflected more divisions. Changes in the nineteenth century, however, centralized power over policymaking in the cabinet, opening the way for the unified system of rule. The British Army was becoming professionalized just as this unified system was established. The Cardwell reforms of the 1870s solidified Parliament’s control of the army, removing all royal authority; it established a new system of service and abolished the purchase of commissions, setting the British Army on its way toward professionalism. With only one institution (all of whose members were beholden to the same constituency) responsible for controlling the military, British politicians in the cabinet had an easier time agreeing on what to tell the military to do and ensuring that civilian preferences were represented in both the structure of military institutions and in military policy.

The strengthened mechanism for civilian intervention had an impact on the way military professionalism developed in the United Kingdom. There was no shortage of military theorists bent on creating a scientific professional military in Britain; indeed, theorists with a continental focus were behind the Cardwell reforms and remained an important element of British Army thinking into the twentieth century. The continental perspective, however, was only one among many represented in the British Army and did not gain dominance over its theory of war the way it did in the U.S. Army. The cabinet and the secretary of state for war could appoint officers with more “practical” ideas. Because of this civilian power over military appointment, a range of perspectives became represented in the upper echelons of the British Army. This included traditionalists, who were skeptical about professionalism in general; continentalists, who were eager to create army professionalism based on the science of war and the Prussian experience; and imperialists, who were also eager to create army professionalism but who sought to modify continental lessons to fit the immediate military threats that Britain actually faced.

Although the continentalists played a large advocacy role in the reforms of the 1870s, “their failure to pay attention to the needs and functions of an imperial army meant a steady decline in their influence.” As British troops engaged in many different kinds of missions toward the turn of the century, those with a more imperialist vision, who advocated a focus on imperial policing and home defense as the key missions for the British Army, were rewarded by Parliament for their “reasonable policy prescriptions for national security problems.” The “scientific” school associated with the continentalists had only marginal impact. The structure of officer promotion rewarded military leaders who paid close attention to the concerns of civilian leaders, so military leaders tended to heed civilian goals and to create military plans that would meet them. Unified civilian institutions thus influenced the style of British Army professionalism. The lack of institutional divisions gave army leaders fewer opportunities to carve out spheres of professional discretion based on the abstract principles of war in vogue in many militaries at the time. Indeed, even among British army leaders, there were differences of opinion over what principles of war might be appropriate.

This structure enhanced the chances that the British Army would be responsive to the threats the nation faced and would create war plans that were integrated with civilian goals. Control over appointments, by itself, increased the chance that army leaders would attend to civilians’ strategic choices. Also, less blind reliance on traditional doctrines combined with a promotion system tied to success led personnel in the army to be attentive and responsive to their enemy. The British Army at the turn of the century focused on the wars it actually fought, rather than on theory from other wars. The education and promotion structure reflected the wide variety of missions the British Army undertook rather than the narrow goals examined by the military science of the time. The army’s leadership thus reflected a focus on a variety of doctrines and an ability to respond to new threats as they arose and to create strategies that were in line with civilian security goals.

Unified civilian institutions, however, also weakened British Army professionalism. The British Army was unable to argue its views or propose policies based on invocation of its professional expertise alone. This meant that the British Army was less able to push for its professional interests or to weigh in on the kind of skills a modern army should have or how it should prepare effectively for future war. As a result, the British government made less investment in the development and standardization of army skills. There was also less investment in the matériel the army needed, so its weapons were of lower quality. Thus British military preparations to build long-term skills and material capabilities relied less on the services’ wishes than on civilian decisions (or, as some put it, on the whims of the prime minister). 

British troops often lost battles early in all their wars and even in the face of clear warnings, the army did not realistically consider the problems posed by large-scale land warfare. 
In the heyday of its power around 1900, growing power on the Continent and Britain's extended empire throughout the world presented it with a set of security concerns similar to those to which U.S. containment doctrine of the late 1950s and early 1960s would later respond. Given Britain's different institutional structure, however, we should expect the British military to show greater responsiveness and to react more flexibly to threats, with more attention to the strategic designs of civilian leaders. We should also expect a trade-off: an army with fewer skills and less capacity to lobby for expensive preparations to meet future threats that civilians did not foresee.

MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS

The Boer War illustrates both sides of the dilemma: both the British Army's lower levels of skill and quality and its responsiveness and integration. The British went to war with the Boers in 1899 on behalf of British immigrants living in South Africa. The British had annexed and protected Boer settlements from hostile Bantu tribes in 1877, but after this they gradually gave more autonomy to the Boers while protecting European (and particularly British) residents. Conflict over the voting rights of British immigrants ultimately led to the conflict. The intelligence office had noted an increase in military preparations by the Boers since 1896, and the commander in chief of the British Army had warned that British forces in South Africa were too small to protect the colonies. However, British civilians remained optimistic that a negotiated solution over the citizen rights of the European residents could be reached. They worried that a British mobilization would ruin political options. This perspective was undoubtedly bolstered by British concerns about defense spending. Britain was, as a result, not prepared for war when the Boer forces attacked in October 1899.

The first problem the British forces experienced in the field was a shortage of troops, which was directly tied to the lack of preparation. Even once they had more troops in the country in December 1899, however, British forces suffered a string of defeats during "Black Week." The Boers initially defeated the British Army through better skill and matériel. They were equipped with superior weaponry, including Krupp artillery and Mauser rifles, and they used innovative tactics, overpowering and outmaneuvering the old-fashioned and staid conventional-war tactics of the British. Bound by their dependence on rail lines and their reliance on a traditional use of artillery to "soften" enemy forces and on cavalry charges, the British were overwhelmed by the highly mobile Boers, mounted on ponies and equipped with machine guns.

Britain's civilian leaders responded by calling up the reserves and replacing the commander in chief for South Africa, Sir Redvers Buller. However, they made no suggestions for specific changes on the battlefield. British Army leaders innovated of their own accord. Buller had ordered changes in equipment immediately. He mounted the infantry and issued them trousers like the Boers. In tactical innovations, he used artillery in conjunction with a creeping infantry assault, mounting half the troops to secure the flanks of the attacking infantry column so as to outmaneuver the Boers. Lord Roberts, Buller's replacement, continued the pattern of innovation, departing from the rail lines to surprise the Boers.

Although both leaders responded to the Boer threat, the variety of approaches among professionals in the British Army was shown by the fact that they responded in different ways. Buller opted for slower but steadier progress, with painstaking coordination among artillery, infantry, and mounted troops. Roberts opted for rapid victories. Sweeping through the capitals, as Roberts did, demonstrated his understanding of the futility of frontal attacks against the Boers, but it also left more Boer forces behind, and thus gave them more ability to mount guerrilla strikes.

Within a year of Black Week, the innovations had yielded the results civilian leaders were seeking. The British had captured the Boer capitals in Transvaal and the Orange Free State and won the conventional war. However, the Boers did not surrender but launched a guerrilla war.

Unlike the American army in Vietnam, the British Army responded adaptively to this threat. The British Army, now under Kitchener, developed a two-pronged strategy to counter the new Boer doctrine. First, they conducted large sweeping operations to flush out guerrillas, and then they destroyed anything that could give the guerrillas sustenance. They made sure that areas were kept clear by building a perimeter of blockhouses or fortified huts within rifle range of one another around designated areas. This was a brutal scorched-earth strategy: pictures of burned farms and rural populations interned in camps, where thousands of civilians lost their lives because of inadequate facilities and poor sanitation, incited protests in Britain against the "methods of barbarism." These protests would affect civilian calls for different counterinsurgency tactics in the future. Unlike the American army's search-and-destroy missions, however, this strategy, although brutal, was effective: it removed rural support for the insurgency and forced the Boers to enter negotiations in April 1902.

MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS IN THE BOER WAR

The British Army was unprepared for the Boer War. Some of this unpreparedness could not be overcome once the conflict began. British weaponry, for example, never caught up with the Boers. Even once the
British mounted a portion of their infantry, they had to use rifles that had too short a range (carbines) or were too large and unwieldy (Lee-Enfields) to be useful. The British Army was responsive to the Boer threat and to civilian goals, and it created new plans in the field to address both. Given the comparative weakness of the Boers, the British responsiveness was enough to prevail in the conventional portion of the conflict.

When the Boers turned to guerrilla tactics, the British Army responded once again. The strategy was brutal but effective. Whether this strategy was integrated with British civilian goals, however, is a more complicated question. Sir Alfred Milner, high commissioner for South Africa, was aghast at the plans, but the initial reaction in the cabinet was not so intense: British leaders were generally inclined to judge the army on results alone. The government did become more concerned as domestic protests unfurled, but because the war did not drag on, protests over the abuses had a shorter political life than the Vietnam War protests.

Although the British Army was responsive to the enemy’s tactics, the Boer War was seen at the time as evidence of its unpreparedness. The British Army had been brought to its knees, for a time, by a bunch of farmers. British civilian leaders therefore set up professional bodies to advise the cabinet and the Committee on Imperial Defense (CID), and they undertook a series of reforms. They formed an Army Council, similar to the Board of Admiralty on issues of sea power, to act as a strategy department like the Prussian General Staff. The Army Council created a permanent defense secretariat (this became the basis for the future cabinet office of minister of defense) that would not simply wait for civilian requests but would take the initiative to inform the prime minister of pressing defense matters as the council saw fit. The effect of the existing institutional structure, however, was hard to modify. Because the secretariat operated under the absolute power of the prime minister, it had little room to carve out an area of professional autonomy. Indeed, the degree to which the British Army subsequently fixated on certain concepts (such as offensive doctrine during World War I) can be attributed to civilians’ efforts tobulk the army with their preferred approach. The secretariat prevented army leaders who were convinced of the usefulness of innovations in armored warfare to incorporate them into war plans before World War II because civilians were reluctant to foot the bill. The British Army continued to be more subject to the whims of its civilian leaders than the U.S. Army was.

**Different Logics, Different Effectiveness Trade-offs**

The cases examined here illustrate dynamics still at work in the British and American militaries. American domestic political institutions foment disagreement and allow military professionals room for autonomy in the formation of their identity and focus. This leads to great skill (and spending) but sometimes less responsiveness to unanticipated threats and less integration of civilian goals and military plans. Integration is greatest concerning those threats that civilians agree are the most important, particularly when such threats are already included in military planning. Responsiveness is most apparent when the threat fits in with what the American military expects. Evidence indicates that when civilians come to agreement on issues of military importance, they can force change on the military, but the choices that make most political sense to civilians sometimes reduce military responsiveness. British domestic political institutions foster agreement and tend to dampen military professional autonomy. This is more likely to lead to integration and responsiveness but tends to hinder development of skill (and spending) compared to the United States. Knowing the institutional conditions under which the civil-military relationship operates yields different expectations about military effectiveness. It should also inspire those worried about managing the respective weaknesses to choose different strategies.

**Notes**

1. The institutional model draws broadly from the new institutionalism, a diverse set of theories that focus on the interaction between structure and process. See James March and Johan Olsen, "The New Institutionalism," *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1984): 734–49. One branch of this theorizing has adopted assumptions from microeconomics to explain how formal rules affect decisions about delegation and policy outcomes, given exogenous preferences. A different branch has adopted assumptions from sociologists to explain the way that culture and norms affect the preferences actors have and even their perceptions of the boundaries of feasible options. See discussion in Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). A third approach, the most influential for my analysis, has examined the way that structure and process interact historically and uses microeconomic assumptions about individual choices; it also recognizes that these both operate within boundaries set by social structures in the short run and that they affect the development of social structure in the long run.

2. This is similar to Allison's bureaucratic politics model. Graham Allison, *The Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).


8. Ibid., 13.


10. The broad outlines set by different domestic institutional structures come to affect the structure of military organizations and the civil-military relationship in practice, and thus they are mediated by the political process at it unfolds historically. Although institutions mediate civilian and military choices, it is those choices rather than institutions per se that affect the strength and culture of military organizations. Civilian choices, made in response to particular international and domestic contexts, have important effects on the qualities of military organizations. Military responses to these choices shape the particular qualities of military culture. In the United States and the United Kingdom, this process has been critical to the formation of civilian tools and military culture at any particular point in time because both have shifted and developed over their histories.


17. Ibid., 312-26.

18. Ibid., 345.


27. See Jeffrey Race, War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), Chapter 4. This is not to suggest that the South Vietnamese Army was effective before the U.S. training; it was not. However, U.S. training was not aimed at the immediate problem facing the south, and it left large portions of the population vulnerable to threats, violence, and organized communist activities.


29. The road to the top in the army necessitated experience in Europe and specializations in armor, infantry, or airborne units. See Betts, Soldiers, Statesmen and Cold War Crises, 81-83; Krepinevich, The Army in Vietnam.

30. UCCONARC, Historical Division (1962), vol. 1b, enc. 5, sec. 7, 4-5-59, Center for Military History. See also Krepinevich, The Army in Vietnam, 44 and 282, note 48.


33. Increased Viet Cong activity in the summer of 1961 precipitated a flurry of plans in the fall. President Kennedy dispatched Walter Rostow and Maxwell Taylor on a fact-finding mission to Vietnam. The result of that mission was the decision to increase the advisory effort and establish a military command, rather than simply an advisory group. By the summer of 1962, the army strength in Vietnam was eight times what it had been the previous summer.
35. Ibid., 64, note 46.
36. Ibid., 64–65.
37. Krepinevich, _The Army in Vietnam_, 120.
40. Civilian failure to control the highly organized army after the English civil war had led civilians to be wary of a strong military in any form; thus they sought to control the army to keep it weak and unorganized. Officers were required to purchase their commissions, which was thought to ensure that the military would be a part of and represent the property class. The absence of a structured military education program, however, prevented the formation of shared preferences within the organization. There was a high degree of variation in officers’ beliefs and capabilities, which contributed to the highly variable performance of the army. Effective performance by the British Army before the professionalizing reforms of the 1870s was heavily dependent on the personal qualities of particular leaders. A gifted leader such as the Duke of Marlborough in the early eighteenth century could make the system work, but the army often floundered under less committed generals, as evidenced by the uneven British performance in the period between the American Revolution and the Crimean War. Correlli Barnett, _Britain and Her Army, 1569–1978_ (New York: Morrow, 1970).
41. Cox, _The Efficient Soldier_.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.

54. Stone, _The Boer War_, 174; Pakenham, _The Boer War_.
55. Pakenham, _The Boer War_, 522.
57. Harold Winton, _To Change an Army_ (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988).