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Civil-Military Relations: Is there really a problem?

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The author has argued in a previous article that Security Sector Reform (SSR) is essentially a melange of Anglo-Saxon Civil-Military Relations (CMR) theory and the traditional dim view of the military usually held by those in the development sector.[1] This article, treats the first component in more detail, since the main theoretical assumptions of SSR about the security sector, the place of the military, and so forth, are essentially dependent on the validity of certain propositions advanced by CMR theorists in the past. Thus, if these propositions are shown to be false, or even incomplete, then there must be important reservations about the validity of much SSR thinking, not to mention practice. It is, indeed, the element of practice which is especially important here, because, unlike CMR which was essentially descriptive, SSR is overtly prescriptive. A theory which describes reality incorrectly or incompletely is unfortunate, but that a doctrine which *prescribes* action on the basis of a fallacious theory is positively dangerous.

The logic of this article is straightforward. Theoretical and prescriptive writing about SSR is heavily influenced by the vocabulary and concepts of CMR theory. That CMR theory is acknowledged by all not to be pragmatically based on the analysis of case studies, but on inductive political reasoning, from a long liberal political tradition. Analysis of a number of well-known cases of supposed military intervention demonstrate a picture which is both more complex and varied than that normally found in CMR literature, and which also fails to conform to some of that theory's major assumptions. To the extent that SSR theory is based on the theories of CMR, therefore, its intellectual underpinnings are in jeopardy.

This article seeks to do three things: first to describe and try to account for the rise of CMR theory, and note its inherent limitations and weaknesses; then look at some of the implications of this theory, and at what would have to be true in the real world for it to be correct; finally, to show, by reference to a few well-known historical examples, that the assumptions that the theory makes about the real world are inaccurate.

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[1] David Chuter, "Understanding Security Sector Reform" in *The Journal of Security Sector Management,* Vol 4, No 2, (2006).

The purpose here is not to prove a new theory, but to demonstrate that there are serious questions about one which already exists. The assumptions of CMR theorists, and especially the pretensions of their theories to universality, make it essential that these theories can be shown to apply in all places at all times.[2] To falsify these theories, therefore, a few counter-examples will suffice. A theory which has forfeited its claim to universality is one whose applicability has then to be argued on a case-by-case basis, and cannot just be assumed.

Finally, there is no attempt try to survey the whole of the CMR literature. Partly this is for reasons of space, but mainly it is because what is important is the banalised form in which it has been adopted by SSR theorists, rather than the complexities of the original debates, which have anyway now largely been lost sight of.

The Dangers of Theory

The idea of a close link between SSR thinking and traditional CMR analysis should not in itself be controversial. The obsession with "control", especially "civilian" control, in much SSR theorising, is traceable directly to the literature of fear and suspicion of the military reviewed briefly below. "Control", after all is only necessary of there are potential dangers in a lack of control. If modern SSR thinking does not usually explicitly cite the risk of military coups or undue military influence, the intellectual heritage is nonetheless clear. It is traceable particularly to the well-known work by Samuel Huntington, supplemented occasionally by others.[3] Most citations in this article, are therefore mainly from Huntington, not because it is the best book of its type (in truth, it is a poor piece of work) but because its vocabulary and concepts have come to dominate much SSR thinking.[4]

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[2] This is reflected in the numerous lists of "best practices" that characterise much writing about SSR. By definition, "best practices" are potentially applicable everywhere, or they would not be best practices. So, one author proposes "strengthening civilian management and control" and "strengthening the capacity of civil society to perform monitoring functions" as components of any SSR intervention anywhere. This implies that "civilian control", for example, will always, or at least very often, require strengthening. See Herbert Wulf, *Security Sector Reform in Developing Countries: An Analysis of the Debate and Potentials for Implementing Reforms with Recommendations for Technical Co-operation*, Deutsche Geselleschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit, 2000, p.27. See also Nicole Ball, S*preading Good Practices in Security Sector Reform: Policy Options for the British Government*, London, Saferworld, 1998.

[3] Samuel P Huntingdon, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil Military Relations,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957. S E Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*. London, Pall Mall, Press, 1962, and, somewhat later, Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, New York, Free Press, 1971. It should of course be noted, first that this list by no means exhausts the CMR literature, and secondly that even the authors cited here do not agree with each other in all cases. Nonetheless, the literature as a whole shares certain assumptions about reality which are examined here.

[4] Sometimes the borrowings are very precise. See, for example, Michael Brzoska, "The Concept of Security Sector Reform" in *Security Sector Reform*, BICC Briefing Paper No 15, Bonn, 2000, who argues that the purpose of SSR is "to create armed, uniformed forces which are functionally differentiated, professional forces under objective and subjective political control, at the lowest functional level of resource use" (p.9) This reproduces Huntington's vocabulary exactly.

In turn, of course, Huntington was not writing in a vacuum: few of the ideas in his book are original, and most have a long history. They fit neatly into a long tradition of anti-state (and often anti-military) writing, which has, indeed, been dominant in Anglo-Saxon political thinking for centuries. John Locke's Two Treatises of Government (1690) is the best-known early example. From the complex and varying body of this theory, two main strands of argument can be distinguished.

Firstly, for the rising middle classes in Britain, and in colonial America, the military was identified with the aristocracy, and with the power of the monarch. As a result, fear of a powerful standing army appears to have plagued the thinkers, both British and American, who were influential in the founding and development of the United States, and that fear also persisted in Britain after American independence. It is curious that, whilst for the United States (and indeed for most democracies) "the central problem of civil-military relations has not been the most fundamental one – that of preventing a military takeover of the state,"[5] British and American writers on these issues have nonetheless identified it precisely as the major problem.

For the middle classes of the eighteenth century, seeking to convert their economic weight into political power, in a state controlled by Crown and aristocracy, the priority was to "control" the state and the army, and reduce their power to the maximum extent possible. The middle classes had little interest in becoming officers themselves, and in the absence of military service, they seldom had any first-hand experience of how the military worked. They knew and cared little about military affairs; the Army was a dangerous beast which needed to be chained up. Its proper role was not as guardian of the frontiers or of the supreme national interest, but like the rest of the state, a servant with strictly limited roles. It was a kind of tradesman, to be dismissed if the quality of work was unsatisfactory.

Secondly, this lack of interest in military issues was directly linked to the liberal concepts of peace and war held by these same middle classes. They dismissed war as bad for commerce, soldiers as stupid and bloodthirsty, and war as a state which rational humans beings would do everything to avoid. They considered that war was often caused by armies which were too large and influential, or by arms races between states. They embraced the new economic theories of Adam Smith, who argued that commerce, rather than war, was what enriched nations, and that cooperation was better than competition.[6] Whilst the middle classes (who in due course went on to dominate political life, the media and academia) were seldom pacifists, they did hold firmly to the notion that war was often stupid and generals were usually idiots. For the British, the experience of the blunders of the First World War, and the folk-memory of Generals sending a generation of intellectuals to be slaughtered, was to be influential for many decades afterwards.[7]

Yet if these ideas had been around in various forms for centuries, why was there a rash of books and articles about Civil-Military Relations between the 1950s and the 1970s? There seem to be two reasons. Much of this writing was American, and was produced at a time when the United States was coming to terms with a vastly increased military apparatus, and a network of bases and defence agreements all over the world. It was also the time of fears about the "military-industrial complex" as expressed by (ex-General) Eisenhower, of the book

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[5] Eliot A Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime*, New York, The Free Press, 2002, p. 225. Emphasis in original.
[6] On these concepts, see, amongst others, John Macmillan, *On Liberal Peace: Democracy, War and International Order,* London, IB Tauris and Co, 1998. For the economic arguments against war, made by Smith, Cobden and others, see Edward P. Stringham, "Commerce, Markets, and Peace: Richard Cobden's Enduring Lessons," in *Independent Review* 9, no. 1 (2004), pp.105-16.
[7] See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford, OUP, 1975.

and film Seven Days in May about an attempted military coup in the United States, and of Stanley Kubrick's film Dr Strangelove about a mad General who starts World War III. (In the early days of the US nuclear programme, warheads were controlled by civilians, lest the military be tempted to misuse them). All these fears lacked any grounding in reality, of course, and there was never an instant where the US military looked as if it might seek a political role or start a war.

The second, more general, reason was a consciousness of "military" regimes apparently appearing around the world, at a time when political scientists, especially in the US, started to take an interest in the military as an institution. Such regimes had existed before the War in Europe – in Hungary and Poland, for example – but by the 1950s military involvement in Latin American politics had almost become a cliché, and military regimes seemed to be everywhere in that continent. Unsurprisingly, relations between the political world and the military became a major theme of study, albeit one difficult to investigate empirically. As a result, much of the work had to be done by inference, through careful reading of legislation and government statements, and through the application of theoretical models. These models were often derived from a layman's understanding of the operation of the US political system. Thus, they were generally inaccurate and incomplete, but they were nonetheless rigidly based on theories about how the US system was supposed to work.

When newly independent states in Africa began to fall under military control as well, it seemed to some that there was a world-wide tendency for the military to seek power. This impression was strengthened by the rise of military governments in places as various as South Korea and Pakistan. Thus emboldened, non-specialists began to wonder whether there were, in fact, things of general applicability that could be said about the military, and the rash of books from the 1950s to the 1970s already mentioned argued implicitly that there were. Although it is important not to minimise the real difference in approach between these books, they do share some common features. The armies portrayed in them noticeably resemble those of Britain and the United States, as well as those written about by Latin American CMR specialists. They are large, powerful, well trained and well disciplined and so it is a mystery "not that this force rebels against its civilian masters, but why it ever obeys them."[8] Likewise, it was argued that the officers of these armies were always "pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power-oriented, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist and instrumentalist in [their] view of the military profession."[9]

This type of analysis was very simple. It assumed only two actors (the military, often in practice the Army, and civilian politicians), in an adversarial relationship involving a constant battle by civilians to "control" the military. This in turn meant that the two played a zero-sum game, in which "the essential premise for any system of civilian control is the minimisation of military power."[10] It was further argued that this power varies with "the proportion of the national product devoted to military purposes and … the number of individuals serving with the armed services."[11] As often with Huntington, this is a little obscure but presumably refers to the percentage of Gross National (or more probably Domestic) Product taken by the defence budget, together with the absolute size of the armed forces, possibly including reserves, or possibly not. These are two of the ways of measuring a nation's defence effort, although not necessarily the most illuminating ones. Logically,

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[8] Finer, *Man on Horseback*, p. 6.

[9] Huntington, *The Soldier*, p.68.

[10] *Ibid,* p.122. Cited – approvingly – by Ernesto Lopez, "Latin America: Objective and Subjective Civilian Control Revisited" in David Pion-Berlin (ed), *Civil-Military Relations in Latin America: New Analytical Perspectives*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, p. 91.

[11] Huntington, *The Soldier*, p.88.

therefore, civilian control is enhanced by reducing defence budgets and manpower levels, and indeed SSR theorists have generally drawn this conclusion, and acted upon it.[12]

This type of analysis is, of course, an assertion about a power relationship: it is not a hypothesis that can actually be tested, since there is no way, let alone an agreed way, of measuring "power" in this context. Moreover, the variables selected are open to all sorts of criticism, especially the first. If, for example, the defence budget grew by 1% per year, but the economy grew by 2%, then defence would take up a progressively smaller share of GDP as the years passed. Thus the power of the military would decrease even as their budget increased, which would be a curious outcome. Likewise (to take a real example), during the Cold War the defence budgets of Britain and Germany were of about the same absolute size, but the British budget consumed a larger share of GDP because the economy had been less successful. By contrast, the German Army (relying on conscription) was much larger than its professional British equivalent. Thus the power of the German Army was both greater and smaller than that of its British counterpart at the same time, which is another curious outcome.

Nonetheless, whilst one can argue that better variables could have been chosen, the real issue is whether any variables of this kind can translate into "power," however that concept is measured, let alone into a relationship which is supposed to be true at all times and in all places. Here, it is worth pointing out that CMR theorists were using a very simple concept of power "especially prominent in recent academic discussion," according to one commentator, which sees it as a "simple quantitative phenomenon." [13] In this tradition, power, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, is "a present means to obtain some future apparent good."[14] Trying to estimate the power of the military in quantitative terms thus comes naturally to anyone schooled in this tradition. It is also natural to imagine (as Hobbes did) that power is a zero sum exercise, where you or I can have it, but not both.

But of course it is not the only tradition of the analysis of power, and never has been. Power as force, the ability to compel obedience, is not the whole story. History is full of contrary examples: colonies were ruled for decades by handfuls of colonial administrators with tiny numbers of troops, often recruited from the local population. They could never have withstood a serious attempt to unseat them. Even in Huntington's time, people obeyed the government of their country not because they were frightened of it, but because it had legitimacy – a point covered in more detail below.

If the analysis of power as simple force – an engineering or kinetic model of politics if you like – is clearly inadequate at the macro level of society, it should not be surprising if it is also inadequate to explain relations between the military and the state. Indeed, to continue with the same nation, the enormous variations in the size of American forces over the last fifty years, and the substantial changes in the size of the budget absolutely and as a proportion of GDP, seem to have had no measurable impact on the "power" of the American military at all. Indeed, whilst the US may currently have the largest defence budget in the history of the universe, recent accounts suggest that the "power" of the military has never been less, and the dominance of the civilians never more total.[15]

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[12] Occasionally this is made explicit in the theory as well: see, for example, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Working Table III, Security and Defence issues, "Security Sector Reform", paper for the Regional Conference, Bucharest, 25-26 October 2001.
[13] Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p.1.
[14] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed JCA Gaskin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 58.
[15] See for example Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, London, Allen Lane, 2006.

But there has always been another concept of power, more subtle and ultimately much more useful for explaining real events. Since the time of John Locke, other theorists have insisted on the need for legitimacy, if power is to be effectively held. Power is therefore a type of contract, and the state is obeyed because it is seen as carrying out legitimate functions. This is true whether or not states are formally democracies. By this argument, the military obeys the civil power, not because it is small and weak, but because it regards the civil power as legitimate.

Modern theorists have also noted that, of course, legitimacy can be assumed for the wrong reasons. People may fail to identify their own interests, for example, or they may accept a political system because they are denied accurate information about the alternatives. In the last analysis, some legitimacy at least can itself be argued to be illegitimate, because it is based on manufactured consent.[16] The French philosopher Michel Foucault, who was fascinated all his life by issues of power and domination, focused in his writings on the micro-level of power relationships: not so much how people can be compelled, but why they choose to obey when they do not have to.[17] Any serious discussion of how power is exercised in organisations and governments really should take insights like this into account. As will be seen in the discussion of France before the Second World War, what is not done can be more important than what actually is done, and voluntary limitations on activities can be more significant than formal controls on them.

For those who have actually worked in government and the military, such theories as those of Foucault describe familiar occurrences. But CMR writers generally ignored these subtleties, and focused on a kinetic dynamic of overt conflict between “military” and “civilians” with measures of success for the latter, which, whilst difficult to demonstrate empirically, were nonetheless simple to describe. It was this facility of description, perhaps, which made the kinetic model attractive to those who wished to construct a simple theory of general application. Likewise, the very absence of empirical support for these ideas was paradoxically attractive: non-specialists could adopt them without needing to make any detailed studies of regions or political cultures. Without the need to demonstrate that these ideas were pragmatically true, their proponents could apply them enthusiastically to all situations, and indeed did so. Likewise, countervailing powers to the military – civilians of all kinds, parliaments, civil society – could always be enthusiastically supported, irrespective of context or history, precisely because they were countervailing powers.

The origins of SSR in this kind of thinking are one reason for its extreme concentration on overt power relationships and formal structures of control, at the expense of an understanding of how organisations and the world of politics actually function.[18] Likewise, the universalist aspirations of SSR, drawing on the CMR heritage, encourage the view that there is only one game – civilians versus military – and only formal measures of success actually matter. A couple of real life cases may make this clearer.

The defence establishments of the former Warsaw Pact countries wanting closer relations with NATO presented CMR analysts (and the Alliance) with a pretty problem. In principle, the issue was simple: the military was too strong, the Minister of Defence was a military officer, and the Ministry of Defence was military-run. The answer seemed simple: a

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[16] The argument, albeit highly simplified, of Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man, Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston, the Beacon Press, 1964.
[17] By no means all of Foucault's extensive writing about power has been translated into English, but see *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*, Ed Colin Gordon, London, Longman, 1995
[18] To his credit, Huntington did understand this point. See Unfortunately it has rather been lost sight of since.

civilian Defence Minister and a large civilian presence in the Ministry. It was only later realised that this perception was wrong. The military was not strong, but weak; umbilically linked to the ruling party, under constant surveillance by organs of state security. The Ministry was not a ministry, and the Minister was not a minister. Indeed, Ministers in general were not what they were in the West: all the important decisions were taken within the ruling party. Failure to understand that "civilian control" had already been absolute before 1989 led to the near destruction of the defence sectors of these countries as political parties fought to control the security forces, in order to use them against their political opponents.[19] The simplistic, kinetic model of power inherited from CMR theory, and applied here by NATO, simply could not cope with this kind of situation.

At much the same time, the process of restructuring the defence sector in South Africa was beginning. Here, there was not even a Defence Ministry (it had been abolished in the 1960s): everything was done by Defence Headquarters. It was believed, not without reason, that the military had been too powerful under the apartheid regime, even though for the most part that was because the civilians had simply come to rely more and more on the military. The new government, wanting to establish "civilian supremacy" therefore decided to set up a civilian-run Defence Secretariat to "balance" the military. This proposal – drawn from CMR textbooks[20] - encountered early difficulties because there were few civilians available with the necessary expertise. Being a civilian was one thing, but it was also necessary to understand something about the issues to work effectively. Part of the solution was to "civilianise" military officers and to ask them to act as it was assumed civilians would. The Head of the Defence Secretariat was recruited in this way. Inevitably, the two organisations, staffed in much the same fashion, competed for power and got in each other's way. The situation was eased somewhat with the arrival of trained civilians, but the situation is still far from resolved.[21]

In addition, Huntington's concept of "professionalism", by which the military are rigidly limited to a group of functions separate from the civilians, to prevent them meddling in politics, caused endless trouble when the South Africans attempted to implement it. There were pointless arguments (which continue) about whether certain tasks were "military" or "civilian", which were necessarily inconclusive, since every significant defence issue has elements of both.

For all its demonstrated weaknesses, the kinetic approach remains dominant, both in the literature of political analysis, and in attempts to transform the security sectors of states under the rubric of Security Sector Reform. Elements or variations of them are taught in Staff Colleges and Political Science courses, and are found in policy papers and international declarations on the security sector. Yet, as will have become obvious, there is no empirical foundation for this approach at all, and indeed few writers in this area have attempted to argue from the basis of real events. Rather, the communities influential in this discourse have sought to impose theoretical interpretations drawn from Anglo-Saxon political thinking onto all sorts of different situations. Whilst it is true that behind some of these theories there is a

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[19] See Larry Watts, "Reforming Civil-Military relations in Post-Communist States: Civil Control vs. Democratic Control", in *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol 30, No 1, (2002), pp. 51-70,

[20] One of the architects of the structure expressly referred to Huntington's "Balanced Model" several times in conversation (personal reminiscence).

[21] This section is based largely on the author's personal reminiscences, but see also, for example, Gavin Cawrthra, "Security Transformation in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in Gavin Cawthra and Robin Luckham (eds) *Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Transitional Democracies*, London, Zed Books, 2003.

real historical incident, it is not clear that middle-class sensitivities about standing armies in 18th century America are necessarily easily transferable to, say, Africa today.

But to be fair, theorists writing between the 1950s and the 1970s probably had little choice. In those days, foreign news came slowly, by teleprinter and telephone, and by expensive and cumbersome 35mm film. Little serious analysis was available on the militaries of, say, Indonesia or Paraguay, at least not in English, which was the only language most researchers knew. Field trips were difficult, expensive and sometimes dangerous. It was natural, therefore, to construct theories on the basis of what was known (essentially assumptions about the Anglo-Saxon experience) and apply them liberally to other situations.

Thus, from what could be discovered, it seemed to many analysts that the common factor in many sudden and violent regime changes was the military. Generals or Colonels would be involved, and one of them often appeared as the new ruler. It was this functional similarity among different cases around the world which was stressed, rather than the comparative political backgrounds of the countries involved, which would have been very much more complicated and difficult to analyse. It came to seem, therefore, that there was something odd about the military as a whole. The military, in all countries, seemed to have an institutional hunger for power, and so civil-military relations was essentially defined as about keeping the military out of power. Partly, it was proposed to do this by reducing numbers and budgets, as described above, and partly by promoting Huntington's concept of "professionalism" which meant in practice marking out certain areas as exclusively the preserve of the military, and forbidding them to involve themselves in other areas.

But what should these areas be? One American writer bravely proposed a pattern of "military advice" on "force levels, weapon systems, expenditures", and of "political, civilian advice as to diplomacy, budget and tax policy and political acceptance."22 But no democratic regime could possibly allow so much military influence, even if it were clear what is meant by "advice.' In practice, and as the South Africans were not the only ones to learn somewhat later, there are no purely military areas, and for that matter no purely civilian ones either. Such are the perils of discussing the relationship between politics and the military without experience of either.

In theory, these and many other discouraging experiences should have brought about changes in SSR doctrine. After all, the failures of SSR programmes on the ground have now been extensively described. 23 True, at the rhetorical level, SSR concepts and guidelines now refer more readily to the need to take local circumstances into account. But in practical terms, it is very hard for universalist theories to take account of specific circumstances without forfeiting their universality. An example is the role of parliaments.

Rare indeed is the SSR concept that does not mention the need to strengthen parliamentary "control" of the military, for example in agreeing overseas deployments, or approving procurement.24 This precept has always co-existed awkwardly with the reality that

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[22] Harold Millis, "Reogranization" in Millis, with Harvey Mansfield and Harold Stein, *Arms and the State,* New York, Twentieth Century Fund, 1958 p.

[23] See for example Mark Sedra, "Security sector reform in Afghanistan and Iraq: exposing a concept in crisis" , *Journal of Peacebuilding and Developmen*t Vol 3 No. 7, 2007, pp 7-23, and Sébastien Melmot, "Candide au Congo: L'échec annoncé de la réforme du secteur de sécurité", Paris, IFRI, *Focus stratégique*, No 9, September 2008.

[24] In practice, the former is not, of course, parliamentary "control" of the military in any simple sense, since it would be most unusual for the military to decide on overseas deployments themselves. It is better understood to be an aspect of the wider power struggle for control of foreign and security policy between an executive and a parliament, in which the military are simply a piece on the board.

many parliaments around the world are uninterested in the function, or incapable of performing it. As Lauren Hutton notes, this could be for a variety of reasons, ranging from lack of legitimacy to corruption and nepotism.[25]

If it was possible to overlook this contradiction in the past, recent scandals in two of the oldest established parliaments in the world have made it more difficult. In Britain, parliamentarians have been found falsely claiming for expenses allegedly incurred as part of their duties. Some of this behaviour may only be unethical, but some is downright fraudulent. A number of parliamentarians have already resigned, and some commentators are wondering whether faith in the British system will ever be restored. Meanwhile, in the United States, only the most recent of many scandals involves parliamentarians conspiring with arms companies to force the government to order military equipment it does not need, but which will benefit their constituencies and themselves.[26] Not all parliaments are as corrupt as the British and American; conversely, some are rather more so.

However, it is obvious that a system which takes for granted that "parliamentary control of the military must be strengthened" under all circumstances, must ultimately be incapable of responding to such embarrassments, or even acknowledging them. To propose adding to such documents qualifications like " … where this is wise and necessary" or "… together with suitable independent anti-corruption measures" would not be a drafting amendment, but a fundamental re-casting of the problem. But such are the dangers of theory.

The Theory of Dangers

There is room for a good comparative study of military interventions in politics around the world. The length of the present article obviously does not allow for this this, but the following pages deal briefly with two subjects. First, there is the issue of why theorising about military interventionism today fails to define the problem correctly. Then there is the question of what a properly constructed and testable theory of the dangers of military intervention would actually look like.

The position seemed relatively simple in the 1950s and 1960s, and produced an appropriately simplistic model of military interventionism, as recounted above. But at the end of the Cold War, military regimes began disappearing rapidly, not only in Latin America, but also in Africa, and there were few coups to replace them. So what had happened? Had civilian control been triumphantly asserted everywhere? Had the military undergone a mysterious collective political evolution? It soon became clear that post-military regimes came in all shapes and sizes and that there were few common features among them. In many cases, budgets and manpower were savagely cut, yet scholars found that there were relationships between the military and new civilian regimes of unsuspected complexity, and that "control" was a much more slippery concept than it had previously appeared. The old kinetic model of power and influence clearly did not apply any more, if it ever had. Even in the relatively homogeneous area of Latin America, it was not clear whether civilian "control" had been enhanced or reduced, or even if the concept had much meaning. As J Samuel Fitch noted, all this uncertainty was

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[25] Lauren Hutton, A bridge too far? Considering security sector reform in Africa, Pretoria, Institute for Security Studies, *Occasional Paper 186,* May 2009.

[26] See, for example, the "1.75 Bn Bonndoggle", *New York Times,* 15 July 2009. This sum would buy precisely seven aircraft. Meanwhile, the majority of the members of the US House of Representatives committee on Pentagon spending are under investigation for allegedly corrupt relationships with contractors. See "7 on Defence Panel Scrutinised", *The Washington Post*, 30 October 2009.

troubling in a field that aspires to be treated as a serious social science. The lack of even minimal consensus on seemingly basic questions undermines our authority as scholars to speak on policy issues that are crucial.27

The much greater volume of experience and comparative analysis now available should enable us to construct a theory of military interventionism which is much more subtle and useful than those which have already been described. But before plunging in to such a task, we might pause and reflect if any general theory of military interventionism is in fact necessary. The current thesis, a little battered by experience, but still surprisingly powerful, holds that the institutional military appetite for power is such that civil-military relations in any country largely consists of minimising and controlling the power of the military. But this only holds true if all cases of military interventionism are similar. If this is not true, then the problem does not really exist. My suggestion is that the evidence – or rather lack of it – demonstrates precisely that it does not exist.

In a sense, this is an obvious and not terribly useful conclusion. It is not possible to say whether the authors of some well-known CMR texts actually believed that their theories were universal or not, but in any event such claims would be impossible to prove, or even really illustrate interestingly. What may be called the Strong Theory of CMR – all militaries everywhere seek power in the same way – needs therefore to be left to one side as an intellectual curiosity. It is analogous to Aristotle's theories of physics, which were intellectually dominant for a very long time but not actually true. It is still possible to admire Aristotle's writing, but if we tried to build an aeroplane based on his principles, it would never leave the runway.

In practice, what most writers on CMR and SSR (including, quite possibly, some of the authors just cited) seem to believe is what could be described a Weak Theory of CMR. This has nowhere been properly formulated, but implies a belief that military intervention in politics of one kind or another, although not universal and although influenced by historical and cultural particularities, is common enough to be a problem. (Indeed, if it were not perceived to be a problem, "control" of the military would not be such a common feature of SSR writing). That is at least a coherent position, and moreover it is one that can be tested. One of its logical consequences is that societies need to guard against the possibility of some kind of institutional intervention by the military to take power as a corporate body. Although a theory of this more tentative kind is not easy to disprove, we can look to see whether examples of institutional power-seeking are common in recent history. The easiest way is to look at some well-known cases of military intervention in politics to see whether examples can be found to support even this weak version of the Theory of Dangers.

Is There Really a Problem?

It is not disputed that there have been many examples of seizures of power by the military, or at least individual officers, as well as cases where the military have clashed with civilian politicians (elected or not) or where they have tried to wield undue influence. The question, once more, is what if any collective significance to give to these events, and whether there are any general conclusions to be drawn from them, now that there are decades of experience to analyse. The idea of some kind of worldwide competition for power between politicians and generals has frequently been touted over the years in the literature. So Finer lists, with seeming relish, all the occasions in 1958 when the military took power in different countries, citing with apparent approval the judgment of The Times of London that it had been an "annus mirabilis" for The Generals. It is as though there were some world-wide

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[27] J Samuel Fitch, "Military Attitudes Towards Democracy: How Do We Know if Anything Has Changed?" in Pion-Berlin (ed;) *Civil-Military Relations*, p.60.

football match going on between The Generals and The Politicians, in which the latter, by poor defensive play, had allowed the former to rack up a number of goals.[28]

So how similar, in fact, are these episodes in which the "military" are assumed to have "taken power"? Let us start with the two events in 1958 which most excited The Times and Professor Finer; the arrival in power in France and Pakistan of Generals de Gaulle and Ayub Khan respectively.

In looking at the first, it is useful to consider its historical background, which is something all too infrequently done.[29] This history – which extends back to the founding of the Third Republic in 1870 - is of interest precisely because it does not conform to the kinetic concept of the measurement of military influence, but instead suggests that the relationships of power are much more subtle and many-sided, and that something along the lines of the Foucaultian analysis of power discussed above is actually more appropriate. .

On the face of it, the Third Republic was an admirable example of CMR theory in practice. It was a strongly parliamentary regime, where the executive was weak, and the President (although commander of the Armed Forces) a political non-entity. All the important decisions were taken in parliament. Moreover, the Defence Minister was a civilian for the whole period, and had a Ministry to run, headed by a civilian Secretary-General. Civilians controlled the finances and made the important policy decisions. Career military officers were not even allowed to vote in elections.

Yet in 1940, this political system disintegrated in a few days, to be replaced by an authoritarian state headed by a retired Field Marshal. The successor Fourth Republic was overthrown in a military coup in 1958. So what had gone wrong? Had civilian control been less thorough than it appeared? Had the military conducted a political flanking attack?

The explanation, of course, is much more complex than that, and involves structural weaknesses in the French political system itself. First, because the regime was a hyper-parliamentary one, and the Council of Ministers was often referred to as the "executive committee" of parliament, that institution could stop any initiative it did not like. The difficulty of constructing governments in the factionalism of the time meant that they could be brought down at any moment, often for reasons of short-term political gain. Ministers therefore had little time to master their briefs - a year in office was a good run. However, parliament disliked taking controversial decisions, and so frequently voted "full powers" to a government to take those unpleasant decisions itself. In turn, governments would often resign rather than do so.

Any form of long-range planning or strategic analysis was therefore impossible. The system could not cope with crisis, or the need to manage complex issues, like relations with Germany in the 1930s. No coherent policy was possible when governments changed so frequently, and parliament became an essentially negative force, preventing any serious decisions being made. (It never formally declared war on Germany in 1939, for example).

Consequently, the system was hopelessly discredited in the eyes of voters. Cynicism about politics was rife, and voters on all sides of politics yearned for a strong leader who would actually get something done for a change. So when the Third Republic fell, hardly anybody minded. By the same token, the Republic was not really overthrown: it committed suicide. In the august surroundings of the Casino at Vichy, parliament voted "full powers" for the last time, to Marshal Pétain, before dissolving itself.

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[28] Finer, *Man on Horseback,* p. 2.
[29] See David Chuter, *Humanity's Soldier: France and International Security,* Oxford, Berghahn, 1996, which also contains an extensive bibliography.

Relations with the military were not what they seemed either. From 1870 to 1914, the Army represented the only means by which 40 million French could be protected from 70 million Germans, and the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine regained. That gave the Army massive credibility and influence which it did not scruple to use, although never overtly. After 1919, the Army basked in the glory of having saved the nation, and its great leaders were celebrities and figures with an almost divine status. If they formally avoided discussing political issues, they nonetheless expressed themselves publicly on a whole range of politically sensitive issues. There was little the despised politicians could do.

Moreover, the French military, at all levels, was deeply authoritarian, anti-democratic and anti-republican. Most officers identified with parties of the extreme right, and yearned for the overthrow of the corrupt Republic and its replacement by an authoritarian state along German lines. Whether French commanders actively tried to lose the war in 1940, or whether they were just incompetent and did not care, is still a subject of fierce debate. (Certainly, when French troops were actually engaged and properly led, they put up strong and courageous resistance.) In the end, it was the military's fear of domestic revolution which was decisive. Weygand, newly appointed commander-in-chief, refused to fight on, claiming that a Communist government was already in power in Paris. If they did not like that, they could sack him. Unable to do this, the politicians gave way.

So was this a military coup? No, because the military were not alone in their desire to see an end of the republic. Practically the whole of the French elite – political, intellectual, commercial and financial – as well as government officials and diplomats – thought the same way. It was for this reason that they happily worked under Pétain, and collaborated with the Germans. (Many of the logistic vehicles used by the Germans on the Eastern Front were made in France). There was thus no coup, because there was no need for one. The democrats and republicans were just eased out, and the government continued as usual.

Obeying the law of French politics that says that every new regime is an overreaction to its predecessor, the Fourth Republic (1944-58) was a reaction not against the weaknesses of the Third, but of the centralisation of the Vichy years. Full of good intentions, the regime was nearly as weak as its predecessor in the 1930s. Confronted with the spectre of the loss of Algeria, which was then legally French territory, the French political class put up little resistance when the Army intimidated the Fourth Republic to death to prevent that happening. This brought De Gaulle to power.

Yet this was not a military coup. De Gaulle was not a serving General, and had left the army nearly twenty years before, becoming Deputy War Minister in the last weeks before the French defeat in 1940. Unlike almost all his colleagues, he went into exile in Britain, where he became the political leader of the Free French. He never sought a military role again. He returned to France in 1944 to be the first political leader of the Fourth Republic, and left politics in disgust several years later.

If the French military shared Professor Finer's analysis of his return to power in 1958, they were gravely disappointed. De Gaulle not only gave independence to Algeria – the catalyst for the Army's involvement - but faced down an attempted military coup against him in 1961. He proceeded to massively reduce the power of the military, and to build a large and powerful Presidential staff, which put control of the military, and of military operations, firmly in the hands of elected civilian leaders for the first time in French history. Some of this was not immediately obvious, perhaps, but there was no excuse, even in 1958, for not knowing that De Gaulle had been a civilian politician for almost twenty years and was a Republican and a democrat.

This episode illustrates three things. First, relations between the military and the civil power are often highly complex and dependent both on personalities and on cultural and historical factors. Second, here, as elsewhere, "the military" do not act as a unified body with an appetite for power. Rather groups of them act in concert with some parts of the political system, and against other parts. Thirdly, the appearance of a former military leader in power does not mean that this leader represents the military, or even some of it.

Ayub Khan is, at first sight, a more persuasive case. He was a professional soldier and he seized power in 1958. Yet he did so after the President, Iskandar Mirza, had already declared martial law, worried about losing the forthcoming elections. Morza was bloodlessly replaced and packed off into exile. Ayub Khan's coup seems to have been generally welcomed, because people were tired of the political instability of the country in the decade after independence. Ayub Khan restored the Constitution quickly, and introduced a number of progressive measures to promote development, crack down on corruption, and increase the rights of women. Nonetheless, he was not really able to address the country's problems and, in spite of winning an election of dubious honesty in 1964, he was obliged to leave power in 1969. Although defence preparations against India were a constant concern, Ayub Khan did not do special favours for the Army, nor was his government a military one. Rather, he is a good example of a figure who is supported less for his own virtues than in reaction against the defects of the system which has been replaced. Ayub Khan began a long tradition of army involvement in Pakistani politics, which has usually taken place when the population as a whole tires of the endemic corruption, factionalism and mismanagement of the political system.

There were a series of other military interventions in the formative years of CMR writing, some of which are, indeed, referred to in books at the time. The most significant of them are briefly discussed below.

A coup took place, in South Korea in 1961. Since the end of the Second World War, that country had been run by Rhee Syng-man, a virulently anti-communist politician backed by the United States. His rule was corrupt and ineffective, as well as brutal, and after one rigged election too many, he was driven from power by a student-led national uprising in 1960. A year of political chaos followed before General Park Chung-hee took over. The coup seems to have been popular enough with a people exhausted and angry with political instability and corruption. Park was a curiosity: he had served in the Army of the Japanese puppet state of Man Chu Kuo, and had undergone several years of training in Japan. He had been a member of a Marxist political party, and had taken part in an abortive mutiny in the late 1940s. As President for almost 20 years, winning a series of heavily manipulated elections, he turned his country into an economic powerhouse, in emulation of Japan. Development, rather than the military, was his preoccupation and the military, as a group, were not particularly influential, in spite of the technical state of war with the North.

When the first studies of Civil-Military Relations were undertaken there were, as yet, few independent African countries, and so few coups. But two coups – in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Nigeria - established Africa's reputation as a coup-prone continent very quickly. Yet neither case was simple. Joseph Mobutu was not originally even a soldier: he was a journalist and aspirant politician, who had done military service in the colonial army as a punishment. But when Congolese troops of the new national army rebelled against their Belgian officers, Lumumba, then Prime Minister turned to Mobutu to find a local military leader. Mobutu overthrew Lumumba, and President Kasavubu, with western support and encouragement, and became effective dictator. Nonetheless, this was not a military coup in any real sense; Mobutu ruled in his own interest, and actively set out to destroy the army in case it posed a threat to him. He staged a second coup in 1965, also supported by the West, who saw in him a good anti-communist.

Likewise, the Nigerian coup of 1966 was in fact several coups; the first, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, which ultimately installed major General Johnson Ironsi as head of state, was initially extremely popular in replacing a corrupt and ineffective civilian government. Yet because the leaders of the coup and the new regime were Igbos from the southeast, other groups felt threatened, especially by the imprisonments and executions of non-Igbos which followed. So the counter-coup later that year by the then Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a Christian from the middle belt of the country, was as much about internal ethnic politics as anything else. It led directly to the slaughter of thousands of Igbo, and indirectly to the Biafran war of secession. Gowon himself led the country until 1975,and presided over a period of economic growth and development.

Although these incidents may seem complex as presented, in fact the above accounts barely scratch the surface, and each could easily be preceded by a narrative as long as that just offered for France, to explain where the crisis that provoked the military intervention originated. It is possible to find points of similarity, of course. For example, a number of these coups were brought about by the disintegration of political systems and public discontent with corruption and mismanagement. A larger selection of military interventions would provide other interesting comparisons. But that is not really the point. What is important is what is missing: the institutional hunger for power by an organised and disciplined military moving to overthrow a civilian government. Even from this short selection, deliberately confined to cases which would have been known to early CMR theorists, it is clear that an institutional hunger for power is nowhere to be found. Rather the picture is confused and contradictory, with the military fighting among itself, and different factions of the military allying with civilian politicians and other interests.30 At a minimum, no general conclusions about relations between the military and the state can be drawn from such episodes, and no general theory can be constructed on the basis of them.

Part of the problem is the tendency to make an artificial distinction between sudden changes of political regime which involve the military in some way and those that do not. Not all military interventions are violent, and some – in Peru for example – have notably safeguarded human rights. By contrast, the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, and the attempted coup by the Nazis in 1923, both involved violence. There is also some confusion about what military involvement means. De Gaulle, to repeat, had been out of the Army for eighteen years when he came to power. Hitler, by contrast, had been a soldier less than five years before the 1923 coup attempt, which was supported by a militia consisting largely of discharged veterans and which used the aged Field Marshal Hindenburg as a figurehead. Yet historians do not describe it as an attempted military coup. That is a correct judgement, but one which is equally applicable to many other supposed cases of military interventionism.

Even when part or all of the officer class of the military acts collectively to overthrow the civil power, the reasons are frequently complex and confused, and different parts of the military, and different individuals, may well have different agendas. Samuel Decalo's comment that motives for military coups in Africa "have always been complex and include personal considerations"i applies to most other regions of the world as well.31

[30] A tradition which apparently still continues today, given the latest developments in Guinée, where the main personalities involved in the recent military coup seem to have now fallen out with each other. See for example, "Clivage au sein de la junte militaire", Radio France Internationale, 9 October 2009.

[31] Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Motivations and Constraints*, Second Edition, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990, p. 29.

The most that can be said is that, during sudden political transitions, individuals or groups from the military may play a role on one or more sides, and for one of a variety of reasons. Military or ex-military figures may emerge as leaders, supporters or figureheads of new political dispensation, and some or all of the military may cooperate with it. This military involvement almost always takes place at a time of crisis when normal political solutions are not available. It may be for political, ethnic, religious or financial reasons, or it may be because some in the military genuinely believe that only they can save the country from political disaster, corruption, communism, Islam, civil war or a variety of other threats.

In none of the cases briefly described above did the military even try to rule on their own, and in every case they had at least the tacit consent of the government apparatus. Civilian politicians often benefited from military rule, and many who did not personally benefit still believed that the policies the military was carrying out were correct. When military governments fall, it is usually because this passive acquiescence has been exhausted, and a disillusioned population is prepared to give civilian politicians another go. It is seldom because of abstract arguments about democracy and authoritarianism.

This suggests strongly that the central problem of civil military relations as conceived by authors such as Finer, Huntington and Janowitz, and which is still dominant today, may not exist: or to be more precise, that it is not easy to find empirical evidence that it has ever existed. This does not mean, of course, the relations between the military and the civil power are uniformly excellent everywhere, or that the management of defence poses no grave obstacles. But it does mean that evidence for the existence of a military often, but not always, institutionally hungry for power is slight. Thus, even what has been referred to as the Weak statement of the CMR problem is difficult to substantiate from the historical record.

But of course civil-military relations extend to the whole set of interactions between the state and the military. So what about the struggle for power in "the corridors of government, far removed from the usual ambit of scholars"32 Here the daily zero-sum game between the military and civilians for power and influence apparently takes place. It is not like that in practice of course. Two things are being confused here.

In all governments and large bureaucracies – for that matter in University Politics Departments – there will be disagreements and struggles over all sorts of large and small issues. This is unavoidable. In a democracy, the basic rule is that elected politicians have the last word, because they are elected and because they take responsibility if things go wrong. Controversial issues in defence may therefore well involve disputes between civilians and the military. The military may want a force embarking on a peace mission to be more heavily armed than civilians think is politically acceptable. The Air Force may want to buy a plane from abroad but be overruled and forced to support local industry. These issues are seldom clear-cut, and there may be fundamental and powerful disagreements. But the military do not necessarily form a united bloc – military tribalism is legendary – and civilians in the Defence Ministry may well agree with their military colleagues rather than their opposite numbers in the Ministry of Finance. However, because these sorts of bureaucratic battles do indeed take place away from the eyes of enquiring researchers, it is hard to understand them correctly, and there is a tendency to extrapolate from what is known, or assumed, about particular cases. Typically, extrapolation is from the workings of the vast, cumbersome and fragmented US system, where political appointees bitterly contest control of key issues. But in fact the US system is highly atypical, and most other systems work very differently.

Who "wins" in this sort of conflict depends very much on the particular circumstances, and indeed what the sides are. But what is clear is that size and budget have little to do with political influence. The Japanese Self Defence Forces are around half the size

[32] Welch, *Civilian Control, p. 9.*

of their Korean counterparts, although they are all professional. They have a budget which is more than twice as large. But their influence in decision-making within government is a pale shadow of their Korean counterparts, for understandable historical reasons. Similarly, the French military, although smaller than its German counterpart, wields massively more influence in the making of policy. Examples could be multiplied, but the point is clear enough: the problem as posed by CMR theorists does not really exist.

The second issue is much more fundamental, and it is the involvement of the military in the normal political process itself; This is not as rare as it may sound to Anglo-Saxons, nor is it always seen as a bad thing. Much, as always, depends on history and culture. In the Former Yugoslavia, the armed forces were known informally as the "ninth republic" because of their political influence. This in turn derived from the partisan heritage and the fact that many early leaders of the country were veterans of the war. Far from resenting this military intervention, the Communist Party welcomed and fostered it, partly because the armed forces were a genuinely multi-ethnic organisation. Similar traditions are found in parts of Africa where the indigenous population fought wars of independence. By definition, this kind of civil-military relationship can only exist in a one-party state, where the Army is the military wing of the ruling party. The transition to a multi-party system can therefore be disastrous, as in the Yugoslav case. A variant is where the military supports not a political party but a socio-economic group (as with the Burundian Tutsi) or is heavily associated with a dominant clan or ethnic group, as was often the case elsewhere in Africa.

In any event, historical tradition may give the military a large political role. Part of the Latin American problem was the inheritance, from Imperial Spain, of the idea of the Army as the ultimate guardian of the national interest. As a result, the very idea of military subordination to the elected government "is false for the civic culture that is predominant", and most ordinary people accept that the military should play a major role in politics.33 By contrast, the very concept of civil-military relations is redundant in traditional cultures (such as many in Africa) where every adult male was a warrior. What you think the problem of civil-military relations is depends very much on where you start from.

In conclusion, perhaps the easiest way to understand all this intellectual confusion is to see it as a failure to discriminate between two quite different, but superficially linked phenomena. One issue involves a series of incidents in modern times when military officers have become involved in violent or unconstitutional changes of government. They may have acted on their own, as part of a group, or different officers may have joined in on different sides. These events are certainly worthy of study, although they are so various and have such disparate origins that it is not possible to draw any useful general conclusions from them.

An entirely separate issue is the relationship of the military, and the security forces in general, to the civil power, in a democracy. Unlike the first question, which is largely about the acts of individuals, this question is about the relationship of groups to the civil power. In principle, the situation is straightforward. A legitimate government has the right to demand that all of those who serve the state support it and implement its policies, in line with laws and the Constitution. This means that the military do not make defence policy any more than teachers make education policy, and in this limited fashion, one can talk about "control" in the sense in which one controls a car, for example. The situation is slightly more complicated

[33] Luis Tibletti, "Armed Forces Mission and the Strengthening of Democracy in the Americas", in Donald E. Schultz, (ed.) *The Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas: Civil-Military Relations for the 21st Century*. Conference Report, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1998, p.77.

than normal in the security sector, and especially with the military, in the light of the kind of historical and cultural factors reviewed above. But it is not fundamentally different.

The failure to understand this, and the assumption that these two phenomena are linked, or that the first is an extreme example of resistance to the second; has provoked much confusion. It has led to a great deal of wasted energy, seeking to describe and resolve a problem that does not really exist.