Exploring the Nexus of Military and Society at a 50-Year Milestone

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Review Essay

Exploring the Nexus of Military and Society at a 50-Year Milestone

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ABSTRACT: There is an ongoing dependence and tension between the military and the society it protects. This article examines the relatively new “military and society” field using the 50-year anniversary of the journal Armed Forces & Society as a focal point. This dynamic field is influenced by world events, cultural trends, and politics. Civil-military relations is at the heart of the discourse. An international and interdisciplinary journal, Armed Forces & Society reflects the changing nature of the field over the last 50 years. I have edited the journal since 2001 and bring this experience to the discussion.

Keywords: civil-military relations, Morris Janowitz, Afghanistan War, all-volunteer force, postmodern military

Armies and societies are connected within a common culture and across time. The ancient Greek epic poem, the Iliad, well demonstrates this connection. This link becomes apparent when soldiers return to their communities as veterans. It also manifests at the strategic level when generals advise or take orders from civilian leaders. The formal and systematic scientific study of the relationships and connections between the military and society, however, is relatively new. This contemporary field of study (military and society) traces its origins to World War II and the early Cold War period.

The military and society field of study is about 80 years old. The academic journal Armed Forces & Society has reached a half-century milestone in 2024. Having edited the journal since February 2001, I will reflect on the evolution of the field. This important area of inquiry lies at the intersection of military and society and involves the policy-informed empirical and theoretical concerns that arise as “military and civilian sectors negotiate their shared role in society and on the world stage.” Its wide berth incorporates “all aspects of relations between armed forces, as a political, social and economic institution, and the society, state, or political ethnic movement of which they are a part.”

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This interdisciplinary field of study claims military sociology and the civil-military relations subfield of political science as founding pillars. Early works include Samuel Stouffer’s landmark 1949 book, *The American Soldier*, which surveyed more than 500,000 World War II soldiers. Samuel P. Huntington’s influential *Soldier and the State* helped define the Army’s position on civil–military relations for many decades and is a staple in Army professional military education. These two founders illustrate the field’s wide scope, which ranged from the combat soldier to relationships between generals and presidents.

The field grew and reached maturity throughout the Cold War. The Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, the first academic professional organization devoted to this topic, emerged in the 1960s. In 1974, against the backdrop of the divisive Vietnam War’s conclusion, the new all-volunteer force (AVF), and the twilight of the Cold War, professor and veteran Morris Janowitz founded *Armed Forces & Society* journal. This international and interdisciplinary journal brings the theories and systematic, rigorous empirical methods of social science to questions that connect the Army and society. It also includes soldiers’ voices, such as those of retired Army General David Petraeus and the late retired Army Reserve Colonel James Griffith.

The European Research Group on Military and Society was founded in 1986. Sweden and Israel also established research organizations devoted to this topic in 2012 and 2011, respectively. In 2020, Springer’s open-access online *Handbook of Military Sciences*, financed by the Norwegian Military, devoted a major section to “Military and Society.” Clearly, this field of study has matured since the 1960s when Janowitz first gathered a handful of scholars to share their work.

Societal shifts such as the civil rights and women’s movements and the growth of social media have influenced this dynamic field. War and Black Swan events, like the September 11 attacks, have also expanded the field in scope and nature. I view the journal’s scope or mission using the metaphor of a dartboard: the most salient subject matter is in the center—soldiers’ and veterans’ welfare, the reserves, recruitment and retention, civil-military relations, military professionalism, and military families are bull’s-eye topics. Other important examples include sexual misconduct, ethics, unit cohesion, casualties, contractors, public opinion, force health, and domestic military deployment during a crisis. *Armed Forces & Society* is also defined by the topics it does not cover, such as strategy, tactics, and weapons system design. The journal’s 50th anniversary offers an opportunity to examine this timeless and modern field of study’s nature and contributions.

Events like the transition from conscription to an all-volunteer force have an immediate impact but also have surprising rippling effects across decades. Over time, published research and commentary can capture and elucidate
past policy innovations’ unanticipated consequences. This article identifies and emphasizes triggering events and explores how they interact with the security environment and manifest as institutional change.

My reflection unfolds chronologically, beginning with the Vietnam War’s passion-filled ending and the AVF’s beginning. The second section explores the immediate end of the Cold War and the late 1980s a key transitional time. Third, I examine how the post–Cold War military was tested after the September 11 attacks, focusing especially on the impact of the long, so-called small wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Next, civil-military relations trends are examined. The conclusion discusses emerging topics within the military and society field of study, such as the simultaneous overlapping of police and military roles worldwide.

From Vietnam to the End of the Cold War

The Vietnam War evoked protest for many reasons. The pervasive risk of the draft drew universities and their students into center stage. It was no accident that *Armed Forces & Society* was born at the end of the Vietnam War. The selective service college deferment policy inadvertently filled campuses with men trying to avoid a tour in Vietnam. The resultant anti-war movement on college campuses eventually erupted into violent protests and made it challenging for military academics, like faculty at the United States Military Academy, to find publication outlets. Janowitz established *Armed Forces & Society* to provide current and future scholars with an academic journal focused on military-related social science questions.5

While the Vietnam War protesters called for the draft to end, influential conservative economists led by Milton Friedman supported ending conscription for different reasons. They argued the draft interfered with the free market by mandating that citizens serve at a below-market wage. Econometric studies also supported the volunteer force’s viability. The new volunteer force represented a cosmic shift in military manpower policy that reverberated through the pages of *Armed Forces & Society*.6

Almost immediately, the Army’s demographic makeup changed. Significantly more women and minorities filled its ranks. During conscription, women were restricted to 2 percent of the force and segregated into organizations like the Women’s Army Corps. They were also channeled into work that was traditionally dominated by women, such as nursing. The Army faced shortfalls in recruitment during the volunteer force’s early years. Female soldiers closed a crucial gap. Societal changes like increased female labor force participation and the women’s movement encouraged young women to consider
the Army as a career choice. In 2022, women made up 15.6 percent of the active-duty Army.\(^7\)

During the draft period, Black soldiers accounted for approximately 18 percent of the force. By 1977, four years after conscription ended, 31 percent of Army recruits were Black, perhaps unsurprisingly. During the Korean War—well ahead of the civil rights movement—the military dropped Jim Crow–type policies and opened opportunities to African-American men. The Army had less discrimination and offered more choices to young Black men than the civilian labor force, particularly in the South. The econometric studies had not predicted that the all-volunteer Army would have proportionally more women and minorities than the draft-era Army. Starting with the first issue, *Armed Forces & Society* has been filled with AVF studies.\(^8\)

The all-volunteer force also changed incentive structures and the nature of the institution. Military sociologist Charles Moskos ushered in a practical theory that captured these changes. In 1977, he wrote a landmark article proposing a developmental model to help the Army navigate the changes. He showed how the military was transforming from an “institutional” organization committed to “values and norms” or a “purpose transcending individual self-interest in favor of a presumed higher good” to an “occupational” organization dominated by the marketplace and monetary rewards. This practical theory provided a useful lens through which to view these changes and has guided the design of recruitment and retention strategies in militaries around the world. As it turns out, soldiers’ motivations to join and serve are a combination of transcendent values and marketplace rewards.\(^9\)

During the draft era, the Army discouraged enlisted men from marriage and fatherhood. The enlisted men and women of the volunteer force brought their families with them. Mady Weschler Segal, in a 1986 *Armed Forces & Society* article, used the “greedy institution” model to capture the nature of the stresses and strains facing Army families. Greedy institutions seek “exclusive and undivided loyalty.” Soldiers with families are caught between two such institutions—their families and the Army. This predicament is particularly stressful for military women and Army wives, who generally shoulder greater responsibility for managing the household and childcare. This influential article helped shape policy and research on military families.\(^10\)

**The End of the Cold War until the September 11 Terrorist Attacks**

The world changed in the late 1980s as the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact began to dissolve. The bipolar world of great-power conflict faded, as did the
threat to Europe. As the need for mass armies declined, most Western militaries stopped relying on conscription. Many changes the United States experienced as it transitioned to a volunteer system also began to emerge in European militaries, such as the increase in women among their ranks.\footnote{11}

During this period, the Army began to tackle more complex gender issues—sexual harassment and integration of the LGBTQ community into the force. In the 1980s and 1990s, the US gay rights movement pressured the Army to eliminate its ban on homosexuals. An in-between policy called “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was invented and implemented. Following events like the Tailhook scandal, concern about sexual harassment and assault surfaced more prominently. \textit{Armed Forces \& Society} chronicled the nature of these evolving gender-related challenges.\footnote{12}

Although the threat of a world war appeared to be over, militaries around the globe were facing a different, more varied, and often asymmetrical threat environment. Expeditionary forces traveled to remote locations where they confronted non-state opponents, including terrorists, and engaged in complicated counterinsurgency operations. Other militaries managed the peace as they encountered warlord militias, terrorists, hostile host nationals, and criminal gangs. Operation Restore Hope in Somalia is illustrative of these phenomena. Small wars became the norm.\footnote{13}

By the time the post–Cold War period reached a 10-year milestone, military institutions worldwide had adapted to the new environment. These post–Cold War militaries used volunteers, engaged in new missions, belonged to a multinational effort, and were led by international organizations. Scholars referred to this emerging transformed force as the “postmodern military.” All four traits characterized the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, which soon became the longest and most serious test of the West’s postmodern military.\footnote{14}

\begin{center}
\textbf{The Afghanistan War Years}
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By the time of the September 11 attacks, the Western post–Cold War military transformation had mostly solidified. By 2001, the Western all-volunteer forces had matured and proven themselves. A peacetime military should lay the foundations to ensure the system will not jeopardize performance during war. The transformative Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts seriously strained US and NATO forces. In this section, I will focus on insights that can be gleaned from \textit{Armed Forces \& Society}. My tenure as editor began in February 2001 and included the entire Afghanistan War, giving me a unique and long vantage point.\footnote{15}
The Volunteer Force: The People

The Afghanistan and Iraq wars affected AVF servicemembers and the institution charged with achieving victory. The wars placed significant stress on the all-volunteer force. *Armed Forces & Society* articles revealed how the soldiers who served and their families bore a particular burden. During the Vietnam War, conscription spread combat risks and dangers. The smaller post–Cold War all-volunteer force repeatedly required soldiers to return to the combat arenas. Health, family, and veterans’ articles chronicled the impact of multiple deployments on the people who served and their loved ones.

Veterans are at the intersection of the military and society. They leave service transformed as they navigate the transition into civilian life. *Armed Forces & Society* captured all aspects of this tradition, including serious problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical disability and families ill prepared to cope with loved ones hurt by deployments. By the early years of these wars, female veterans had reached a critical mass. The US Department of Veterans Affairs was unprepared for the unique nature of women’s health issues. In addition, female veterans faced higher levels of disability compared to their male counterparts.16

Families of active duty and reserve personnel bore the burden of increased multiple deployments. Spouses and the children of servicemembers across the countries that fought challenges such as domestic violence, depression, and living with a loved one with PTSD. Articles in *Armed Forces & Society* analyzed these subjects and stress mitigators, including childcare, relationship quality, effective leadership, community support, and positive emotions.17

The dangers of deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq took lives and left returning soldiers with missing limbs, PTSD, head and brain injuries, and muscular-skeletal systems disorders. Health is an umbrella topic that intersects with veteran and reserve status, race, and gender. For example, Scott Landes, Andrew London, and Janet Wilmoth discovered that veterans with service-related disabilities had shorter lifespans than their nonveteran counterparts. Mental health issues such as stress, suicide, PTSD, stigma, and problematic behaviors were also studied.18

The All-Volunteer Force: The Institution

The literature on health, veterans, and families focuses on the experiences of individuals or their families. The Army institution also transformed through more extensive reliance on reserve forces and private security contractors. During the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, reserve force engagement evolved
from occasional to “routine full-time military service in support of national security objective.” Reserve servicemembers, like veterans, lie at the society-military intersection. These soldiers are “transmigrants” who traverse military and civilian worlds and often feel like outsiders in both. The betwixt and between status led to questions about reserve servicemember identity. Combat stress and the challenges of building relationships with active-duty servicemembers also complicated life inside the unit.  

Given the reserve force’s greater involvement in the mission, studies examined questions commonly associated with active-duty forces, such as enlistment and retention within the United States and allies like Great Britain. In addition, articles examined sexual harassment among female reserves and family struggles with mental and physical health. Before 2000, *Armed Forces & Society* articles on the reserves were sparse. In 2024, published studies examining all facets of the reserve experience have become commonplace, and more will follow. The three reservists killed in Jordan in January 2024 are fallen witnesses to reservists’ expanded presence and service.

Reservists, like their active-duty counterparts, receive a paycheck from the US government. War-zone contractors are paid by private companies that support military initiatives and profit from war. The Afghanistan and Iraq wars propelled contractor use into the combat zone. As contracting work became more routinized, *Armed Forces & Society* explored its effectiveness and the hidden risks and costs of substituting contractors for active-duty military members.

The research on contracting is challenging because contractors have “proprietary rights” and do not have to make basic data public (for example, employee demographics). We cracked this barrier with studies on contractor motivation, medical care, and contractors as “new veterans.” Ori Swed et al. (2020) creatively used public data on contractor deaths to study their demographics.

### Asymmetric, Multilateral War

Up until this point, the discussion has focused on the ways the Afghanistan and Iraq wars influenced the institution and its people. We will now consider how these protracted, asymmetrical, and unconventional small wars influenced the spaces where the military and society interact. These wars forced the Army to attend to conventional and unconventional or asymmetric warfare simultaneously. The Army’s shift toward asymmetric warfare can be observed in the updated field manuals *Stability Operations* (FM 3–07) and *Counterinsurgency* (FM 3–24). Leaders also recognized that the Army operated in theaters of war where the course of conflict was increasingly influenced
not only by the opposing hostile force but also by operations among the local civilian population. These smaller but intense wars widened the landscape in which society and the military interact. Counterinsurgency operational goals, such as rebuilding a Taliban-free Afghanistan and changing hearts and minds, tested NATO’s multinational International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in daunting new ways.\(^{22}\)

These challenges led scholars from allied countries to write articles on topics related to their unique experiences operating in a small war “among the people.” René Moelker’s article describing the Dutch approach to asymmetric conflicts illustrates the diverse ways ISAF forces responded to such a war. American, British, and Canadian forces operated from fortified compounds; the Dutch, in contrast, were “inviting the Taleban round to tea” in their “mud-walled . . . multi-functional qalas.”\(^{23}\)

The small wars’ expeditionary environment generated additional articles that challenged assumptions about traditional functions, such as appropriate military skills, training, leadership, multilateral management, and key concepts, such as the nature and definition of victory and power. When war is close to the people, soldiers can be called to assume police functions to keep order in unconventional war zones. Remi Hajjar argues that diplomatic or peacekeeper competencies should also be added to the post–Cold War warrior skill set. Collaboration became a focus of analysis as multilateral forces composed of multiple and diverse cultures operated in fluid environments. Scholars examined various aspects of this environment, including cultural stress and cross-cultural competencies (such as negotiation skills and language proficiency). Bastian Giegerich and Stefanie von Hlatky showed how military and strategic cultures influenced outcomes in provincial reconstruction teams.\(^{24}\)

Armies also faced the challenges of working and building relationships with the local population. Celestino Perez explored ethical and political responsibilities toward the “other,” or the “person who lives where troops are deployed.” Effective communication with the Afghan people depends on linguistic competencies. The Army relies on local interpreters to facilitate dialogue and engage local populations. Dutch scholars found that cultural competencies among ISAF military personnel led to better relationships with Afghan interpreters. Local linguists also facilitated communication during advising missions. Hajjar found that leaders of Army advising missions often use linguists as peacekeepers, diplomats, innovators, and subject matter experts. Linguists, interpreters, and their loved ones comprised a significant portion of the Afghan citizens who rushed to the Kabul airport in the final days of the evacuation.\(^{25}\)
Assuredly, the 20-year Afghanistan War has left and will continue to leave an imprint on the Army. For example, soldiers who are now being promoted to colonel and lieutenant colonel spent their formative years in an Army engaged in this long small war. The chaotic and ignominious US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 prompts us to ask how we as a society can make sense of this painful experience.

Armed Forces & Society responded to this question by devoting a special issue to the Afghanistan War (published online in 2022 and in print in 2023). The 13 commentaries of the “Perspectives on the Afghanistan War” issue, written by an international array of scholars, examined various topics, including why the United States lost, lessons learned about state building, the impact of banning negotiations with terrorists, NATO’s struggle with accurate and effective intelligence, private outsourcing, and civilian casualties, among others.26

The introduction to “Perspectives on the Afghanistan War” encouraged readers to continue the dialogue through critical commentaries. In October 2023, we received a response from three young Afghan scholars in Kandahar and Kabul. Voices from Afghanistan and other regional actors were clearly missing from our initial discourse, and their perspectives were welcome. After a blind peer review process, we accepted their commentary, which was published in early 2024.27

I was struck by three key points in their commentary. First, Afghanistan has historically defeated larger expeditionary foes. To Afghanistan, the United States was just another world power defeated in the “graveyard of empires.” Second, Islamic teachings informed Afghanistan’s approach, providing Afghanistan with a much longer timeline for victory than that of the West. Third, while the authors appreciated America’s need to respond to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they noted that the deaths of thousands of innocent Afghan civilians over the course of the war eroded and undermined local support for anti-Taliban measures. The value of skill sets such as cultural competency, state building, and winning hearts and minds deteriorated as locals watched their uncles, brothers, and sisters become collateral damage. The Western presence became the primary cause of resistance. The futility of developing effective strategies (such as counterinsurgency) in the presence of ongoing innocent civilian casualties should be a key lesson learned from the Afghanistan experience.28

We will also use the journal’s website to aggregate all Armed Forces & Society articles dealing with Afghanistan as a resource for future scholars and policymakers. We believe it is important to keep a focus on and make sense of the Afghanistan War. Ukraine and the contemporary threat environment
might overshadow lessons learned from this longest US war. We hope our focus on Afghanistan will help ensure this war is not forgotten.

Civil-Military Relations

As indicated in the introduction, the military and society field of study traces its origins to military sociology and a branch of political science known as civil–military relations. Up to this point, I have emphasized the sociological perspective. This section focuses on the political science viewpoint.

John C. Binkley recently defined “American civil–military relations” as “a catch-all phrase for those legal and cultural interactions that exist between two sets of partners: the civilian leadership, starting with the president as commander-in-chief and the military professionals that advise that leadership and carry out its orders.” One facet of civil–military relations not caught in this definition concerns a “gap in attitudes, values, perspectives, opinions, and personal background” between the American public and the military and how that gap influences “military effectiveness and civil–military cooperation.” These two factors—the relationship between civilian and military leaders, with an emphasis on the president and the various gaps between the military and public perceptions—are at the heart of informed civil–military relations.

For half a century, Armed Forces & Society has published lively commentaries and hundreds of articles on all facets of civil–military relations around the globe, including the ethics of officer resignation, coop-proofing, the civil–military gap, case studies assessing civil–military relations in every world region, officer education, the behavior of generals, such as Mark A. Milley and Eric K. Shinseki, and the influence of wars and crises like the Arab Spring. Perhaps more importantly, the journal has been a forum to develop, examine, and assess civil–military relations theory.

Practitioners, such as Army officers, often rightfully view theory as suspect because it appears arcane and out of touch with reality. Good theory, however, compared to immediate experience and empirical findings like survey results, has great staying power. For example, survey results shed light on the civil–military gap at a particular point in time. Theory explains the gap as circumstances change. Its concepts and hypotheses can act as useful tools, which help people negotiate real–world puzzles and problems and “shape an undetermined future.” It acts like a map, which is an abstraction representing reality. Theory aids navigation within reality. Useful civil–military relations theories are not accepted as truth or without fault and should be judged by their usefulness. Armed Forces & Society has devoted considerable attention to theory development. In our 50th-anniversary issue, we highlight
three theoretical articles written by students of Janowitz and Huntington—Peter D. Feaver, Rebecca L. Schiff, and James Burk.\footnote{30}

In 1974, when *Armed Forces & Society* came on the scene, Huntington's *Soldier and the State* was a well-established founding and enduring civil-military relations and military studies document. In 1991, historian Edward Coffman asserted that Huntington's work legitimized American military history by providing “a structure for the evolution of the American military institution other than a chronological approach that featured battles and leaders.” Huntington's subject, “the place of the professional soldier in the United States,” forced historians to stop and examine “the great dichotomy that . . . existed between officers and their civilian contemporaries.” This “structure for the evolution of the American military institution” exemplifies theory that aided in and changed the way scholars and officers have navigated their understanding of military institutions, particularly the relationships between presidents and elite military officers.\footnote{31}

At the heart of the civilian supremacy concept lies the paradox of “how to reconcile a military strong enough to do anything the civilians ask them to with a military subordinate enough to do only what civilians authorize them to do.” The system collapses in a coup or when it produces a military too weak to defend the nation. Feaver asks how civilian and military actors can resolve this paradox. In Huntington’s normative theory, responsibility for broad policy decisions, such as the use of force, lies with civilian leaders. Feaver coined a powerful phrase to capture this paradox: “. . . civilians have a right to be wrong.” Military leaders must follow their orders regardless of consequences. In return, civilians grant broad autonomy to the military on how policy objectives are met. The system also relies on laws such as the Uniform Code of Military Justice and professional norms that act as guardrails that reinforce separation. For example, officers should not publicly criticize the president, and civilian leaders should show respect for servicemembers and their traditions.\footnote{32}

Huntington’s theory does not account for when the military challenges civilian control in ways that fall short of a coup. The cases of Harry S. Truman and General Douglas MacArthur during the Korean War and Bill Clinton’s desire to end the ban on gays serving in the military during the early 1990s are examples. In the first case, MacArthur was fired, and in the second, a compromise (the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy) was crafted. In both cases, Huntington’s theory was unhelpful. Feaver’s article artfully shows key flaws in his mentor’s theory and paves the way for his path-breaking book, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight and Civil Military Relations*. Here he uses principal agent theory to develop a robust theory that explains when officers disregard orders and the likely consequences.\footnote{33}
Huntington’s theory also has limited applicability to civil–military relations outside the United States. A more flexible theory accounting for culture and state characteristics was needed to explain coups and persistent unstable civil–military relations. Schiff, a student of Janowitz, proposed concordance theory as an alternative. Her theory focuses on preventing domestic intervention by incorporating a country’s level of agreement, cooperation, or consistency among political elites, the military, and the citizenry. She uses four key “indicators” of discord: “[1] the social composition of the officer corps, [2] the political decision-making process, [3] recruitment method, and [4] military style.” Disagreement on any of these four indicators among the military, political elites, or the citizenry can increase the likelihood of unstable civil–military relations and lead to coups. Schiff operationalized her theory, showing its relevance in Israel and India. Since its publication in 1995, her theory has proved useful in analyzing civil–military relations cases around the world, including those in Bangladesh, Ghana, Indonesia, Türkiye, and many more.34

In “Theories of Democratic Civil–Military Relations,” Burk, another student of Janowitz, switches the spotlight from the problem of civilian control to how well civil–military relations in mature democracies “sustain and protect democratic values.” He first considers the conceptions of democracy underlying Janowitz’s and Huntington’s respective theories. Huntington draws on the liberal theories of Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill that position the protection of “the rights and liberties of individual citizens” as an overriding priority. The military’s chief responsibility in this context is to protect citizens from foreign threats. By its nature, the theory has little to say about sustaining democratic values, such as citizen participation.35

In contrast, Janowitz draws on the civic republican tradition that traces its roots to Plato, Aristotle, and James Madison. This theory “stresses the interconnection of individual freedom and civic participation with the promotion of the common good.” It prioritizes “engaging citizens in the activities of public life.” Service in the military, or defense of the republic, is an essential way to take responsibility for the common good and support a thriving democracy. Citizen-soldiers are instrumental in citizen participation in a healthy democracy.36

Civic republican democratic theory suggests the military’s composition should mirror society’s and that the military’s and citizenry’s political and cultural views should be similar. Conscription, rather than a volunteer system, is more likely to result in a force representative of the people it protects. It has a greater potential to reinforce and protect democratic values. The key questions then become: how can an all-volunteer force be made more representative, and how
can AVF leaders best ensure that the force protects democratic values? So far, there have been no satisfactory answers to these questions.

Over the 50 years of the all-volunteer force, the US military has drawn more from southern, conservative states and Evangelical Christians. The gap between the military's political, socioeconomic, and cultural views and those of civilian counterparts has grown, as have opinions about the use of force.\(^37\)

In 1996, Feaver noted that civil-military relations should receive more attention because “220 years of apparently successful [American] civil-military relations have obscured its importance.” Civilian and military personnel’s willingness to follow laws and norms accounted for much of this success and why a military coup seemed almost impossible.\(^38\)

Feaver reiterated this theme in a recent commentary, where he assessed the civil-military problematique and its implication—civilian leaders have the “right to be wrong.” He criticized his theory for downplaying the importance of “abiding by and reenforcing norms” and noted that in practice these norms were poorly understood by presidents, their appointees, Congress, and voters. He faults civil-military relations theorists for failing to “build norm awareness in key constituencies.” Further, the “right to be wrong” norm “does not translate into a civilian right to abuse the military.” He identified civilian norms that should be more explicit.

1. Presidents should not “publicly [criticize] the military, especially by name.”
2. Presidents should not “[undermine] the chain of command by criticizing officers while embracing rank and file.”
3. Presidents should not “openly [policitize] the military for partisan gain.”
4. The Senate should “[limit] its use of the privilege of ‘holds’ and not [freeze] the careers of large groups of senior military leaders indefinitely.”\(^39\)

Civil-military relations during the Trump administration were among the most contentious in history. Further, the riots at the Capitol that interfered with a peaceful transfer of power on January 6, 2021, raised doubts about the long-term success of contemporary civil-military relations. Two recent *Armed Forces & Society* articles address the unique contemporary challenges to norms and laws designed to enhance and strengthen the relationship between presidents and their military advisers.
Presidents should build their own relationships with military leaders. “Successful partnerships are based on mutual trust,” which generally incorporates respect, candor, technical know-how, and “a shared world view which incorporated a shared understanding of the scope of military professionalism.” Absent these factors, the relationship flounders, as it did during the Trump administration. Although harsh blame came from both civilian and military sides, Binkley argues that Donald Trump, not his generals, ultimately bears responsibility for the shredded relationship between military leadership and the president. For example, when President Trump claimed that he knew more about the military than his military advisers, he was dismissing military professionalism, a cornerstone and font of officer values and identity. Such behavior breaks the civil–military relationship. “From the military’s perspective, the attack upon their professional values was triggered by a commander–in–chief who failed to respect the military and the contours of professionalism.”

Ryan Burke and Jahara Matisek also see a crisis in civil–military relations and place the blame on vocal senior military retirees. They show how retired officers operated outside the law (UCMJ Article 88). Further, Trump’s norm-bending call for inappropriate domestic action fell within the scope of the Insurrection Act of 1807, a law that grants wide presidential authority to use force internally. When military retirees criticized these violations of presidential norms, they “violated Article 88 of UCMJ law for contempt toward officials and the norms meant to insulate the military from partisan politics.”

Retired officers were not charged with a violation under Article 88. This action resulted in a kind of double punch—unenforced laws and disregard for military norms by military actors. Of course, Trump’s behavior undermined the civilian part of the bargain. For example, he called military officers “some of the dumbest people” and suggested the military should be deployed to Chicago and New York to fix crime problems. This situation left an untenable fissure in civil–military relations where the president trampled on norms and retired active-duty officers ignored laws. Burke and Matisek ask that the UCMJ laws be “enforced, rewritten, or abolished because non-enforcement degrades civil–military relations and military professionalism.”

Although I would not anticipate a military coup, the guardrails for civil–military relations to function successfully appear much shakier than assumed. Army leadership must be well schooled in contemporary civil–military relations. I applaud Parameters’ commitment to publishing on civil–military relations. It is clearly a place officers can go to stay up to date and informed on the subject.
Conclusion

From my perch as editor, I get insights into emerging trends and topics within the military and society field of study. First, there appears to be a blending of the military studies and criminal justice fields along many dimensions. In different contexts, soldiers are becoming more like police, and police are more militarized. Small wars, stabilization, and peacekeeping missions often call for both roles. In other cases, the military is more involved in internal security. The criminal justice system collects data on myriad activities, from the initial crime to incarceration. Databases contain information on veteran status, which enables a closer look at criminal and incarcerated veterans. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related disasters have stimulated increased involvement in disaster response from armies worldwide. Third, recruitment policies around the world are returning to conscription, particularly in Western Europe where the perceived threat has grown. Finally, the submissions I have received from countries in Eastern Europe, India, China, Southeast Asia, South America, and Africa are using more sophisticated research and statistical methods. There appears to be greater potential for evidence-based decision making, particularly in training.

The military and society field of study began at the end of World War II and became established during the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet Union ushered in the postmodern military with its volunteer forces and expeditionary terrorism-informed missions. We seem to be at another inflection point with the Russia-Ukraine War and Israel’s response to the Hamas terrorist attack. The United States is facing a more complicated and volatile threat environment. The links between the military and society will play an important part in shaping the events that follow. Hopefully, over the next 50 years, Armed Forces & Society will continue to provide an outlet for high-quality research and commentary.
Patricia M. Shields

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Endnotes


4. For more information, see Swedish Center for the Study of Armed Forces and Society (2012) and Association of Civil-Military Studies in Israel (2011). All three of these organizations sponsor regular conferences. Israel also has a journal. Sookermany, Handbook of Military Sciences; and Shields, “Dynamic Intersection.” Return to text.


20. Shields, “How Afghanistan Influenced,” 898. Armed Forces & Society devoted two special issues to reserve forces—one in 2011 (vol. 37, no. 2) and the other in 2021 (vol. 47, no. 2). Return to text.


32. Quotes from Feaver, “Civil-Military Problematique,” 154 and 149, respectively. Note: this right does not authorize a president to violate the Constitution in an order. Return to text.


40. Quotes from Binkley, “Civil–Military Relations,” 57, 72–73.


42. Quotes from Burke and Matisek, “Trump(ing) Tradition,” 3 and 1, respectively.


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