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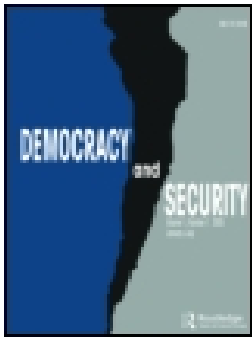
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Delegation or Dereliction? When Governments Assign Too Many Defense Posts to Military Officials

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ABSTRACT

Sometimes democratic political leaders voluntarily cede the armed forces too much authority, assigning them positions that should have gone to civilians. The over-delegation of posts to soldiers can invite problems of dependency, as civilians grow accustomed to the military handling defense policy. This study investigates the delegation of leadership positions in six advanced democracies: Israel, Taiwan, Spain, the US, the UK, and France. It finds that in the first three countries officers dominate many top-tier positions within the defense ministries, while in the latter three, civilians do. Deficiencies in civilian control are unexpected since these countries either face serious external threats or are members of NATO. It is argued that what links the three countries with civilian deficiencies is the presence of wide and longstanding gaps between military and civilian expertise and an absence of incentives to close them. Where civilians suffer from serious knowledge deficits, there is often a temptation to defer to the generals by delegating key ministerial posts to them.

KEYWORDS

delegation; civil-military relations; defense ministry

Introduction

Democratic governments are in charge of delegating executive-branch, defense-related responsibilities between civilian and military personnel. While all governments depend on sage military advice to construct sensible defense plans, sometimes political leaders rely too much on the armed forces by ceding to them excessive authority, assigning them tasks and positions that should have gone to civilians. Political leaders may do so believing that it is an easier path to fulfilling vital functions because officers are readily available, paid for within the defense budget, and well qualified in the realm of defense and security. But the over-delegation of posts to soldiers also invites problems of dependency, as civilians grow accustomed to the military handling defense policy. An overreliance on the military to fill posts can persuade civilians that the armed forces provide the only viable solution and will do so well into the future, thus completely normalizing their dominance.

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To highlight the problem, this study investigates the delegation of leadership positions within the defense ministries of six consolidated democracies: Israel, Taiwan, Spain, the US, the UK, and France. In the first three cases we find that officers dominate many top-tier positions within the ministries, with civilians occupying lower rungs of the ladder. In the last three cases, there is a much stronger presence of civilians within ministerial leadership roles. These imbalances are not the result of military pressure, but rather autonomous civilian preferences.

Why would excessive delegation occur? It is argued that countries whose civilians have longstanding deficits in defense knowledge often defer to officers with greater understandings. Deference can lead to delegation, because those with knowledge are in better positions to command authority and respect in the crafting of defense policy. Where the balance of competence has favored officers over long periods of time, it becomes difficult for civilians to restore any semblance of parity, and more difficult still where there are not sufficient incentives to build up a critical mass of well-trained civilian defense specialists. Instead, governments will take the easier path and allow active or retired armed forces personnel to fill ministerial posts that could have been occupied by civilians.

What is delegation?

For this study, delegation refers to the voluntary transfer of defense-related positions to the military. If delegation occurs, it implies that civilians in positions of governmental leadership not only have the authority to do so, but have done so voluntarily, uncoerced. The motivations for transfer may vary, but they do not stem from fear or pressure generated by actions taken by the armed forces. So this study will restrict itself to scenarios where there are sufficient levels of civilian control in place to allow governments to autonomously divvy up positions between civilian and military personnel.

This study focuses on ill-advised forms of delegation, where positions and tasks could have and should have remained in the hands of civilians. This is to be distinguished from what has been called a “normal” division of labor between civilians and soldiers. As Huntington formulated decades ago, professional soldiers would be relegated to strictly military matters carrying out the orders issued by civilians.¹ Civilians would formulate foreign, national security, and defense policies, while the military would implement them.

Most contemporary scholars recognize that tasks are not so neatly divided between civilian and military, and that there is considerable overlap between the two spheres.² Decisions are not purely military in character, because they can have political implications.³ Likewise, political defense decisions may necessitate military input. Field commanders and other strategically placed officers may need to judge the feasibility of a military course of action desired by politicians.

As a result, civilians and officers will have to convene to discuss defense objectives and plans. When they do so, the decision-making division of labor can sometimes get blurred.⁴

That having been said, even as they invite officers into the policy discussion, democratic governments must nonetheless establish clear lines of authority if they are to secure civilian control. A delegation problem occurs when civilians cede too many government positions to military personnel. This over-delegation, if you will, is problematic because it situates soldiers in positions of authority to unduly influence the crafting of overall defense policy, strategies, planning documents, budgets, and so forth. In this scenario, the military has assumed enough duties and accumulated enough practice to place civilians at a disadvantage, one that creates a dependency on the military that is difficult to undo.

Relying on the military to make vital defense decisions is risky, and as Feaver argues, “would amount to a de facto coup; the military would be deciding policy and making decisions that by rights belong to the civilian political masters.”⁵ This is an extreme form, where civilians thoroughly undermine their overall control of the armed forces by ceding too much authority. But even less extreme, more gradual forms of delegation are undesirable. In this scenario, though overall political authority has not been relinquished, civilians have reassigned defense or security-related tasks to officers alone—work that should have been done by or at the very least should have been shared with civilians. The danger is that such delegation becomes the new normal. As Gordon Adams and Shoon Murray caution, the delegation is “gradual, relatively uncontested, and [appearing to be] even normal and necessary to some.”⁶

This kind of delegation cannot be compensated for with executive oversight. Normally, oversight can mitigate problems posed by delegation by assuring that military personnel do not take advantage of their positions. Principal-agent theory tells us that though subordinate, militaries can leverage civilian superiors because they alone command the guns and render defense for the nation. By virtue of their unique roles in carrying out defense policies on the battlefield, soldiers can cloak their activities from civilian superiors.⁷ They may also have preferences that diverge from those of the political authorities, creating problems for policy implementation.

Principals normally have means to check potential challenges from below. Through close screening of recruits and supervision of personnel, civilian leaders can assure that soldiers fulfill the tasks they are assigned. Through investigation, civilians can discipline or remove officers who skirt their assignments. As Feaver points out, civilians must devise “an optimal mix of monitoring mechanisms” that minimize the “incentives and opportunities for the agent to flout the principal’s wishes.”⁸

But none of those oversight measures are relevant to this delegation problem, one where civilians have ceded too much authority to the military

by placing officers in leadership roles where they can act as principals within key defense institutions. In one respect, the principal-agent relationship has been flipped on its head, as important decision-making posts within the ministries are occupied by officers, while subordinate positions are taken up by civilians. For example, in the three countries under review below, a great majority of ministerial higher-ups are military, including deputy ministers, secretaries, and department heads. They have positions of ample authority where they can design, shape, and direct the defense policies for the nation. By contrast, civilians are found on lower rungs of the ministerial ladder. Even though presidents are civilians and thus the *ultimate* principals in the civil–military relationship, their ability to actually influence the crafting of defense policy is attenuated when just below them is a ministerial hierarchy dominated by military personnel.

Who would supervise these military leaders? Who would check their power? Conceivably, the legislative branch could play that role, were it equipped to do so. In democracies, congresses and parliaments normally should have some say so over defense policies, with the power to legislate, oversee, and scrutinize military activities as well as the work of executive-branch defense ministries. Unfortunately, it is generally the case that legislative defense commissions are poorly equipped, having neither the resources, staff, nor expertise to closely monitor the defense sector. In a major global study of legislative defense oversight, Transparency International finds that 85 percent of countries have parliaments or congresses that “lack effective scrutiny of their defense policies,” while two thirds have “seriously deficient controls over their ministries of defense.”⁹ In sum, where military officers essentially run the show within defense ministries, oversight is a real challenge and remains unfulfilled when legislatures cannot perform their duties.

Potential problems in excessive delegation

As will be shown here, civilians have delegated ministerial leadership positions to the military that should be granted to civilians, thus putting soldiers in positions of authority to unduly influence the crafting of defense strategies, planning documents, and budgets. In this scenario, the military has assumed enough duties and accumulated enough practice to have a decisive edge on knowledge regarding the issue at hand. Civilians are at a disadvantage and continuously defer to the military, wanting to be sure that their decisions have stable foundations. This creates a dependency on the military that is difficult to undo.

Why is that dependency worrisome? First, civilians who might have been employed to undertake those tasks are not, and posts within the defense ministry go to officers. Military authorities then recruit their own, discouraging civilians from even applying for ministerial jobs. Second, the military may claim a certain ownership over the tasks and assert autonomy in this

regard, fending off civilian efforts to influence later on. Third, to the extent that civilians become more reliant on the military, the latter could extract a cost for its continued work. Perceiving that dependence as a sign of weakness, the military requests more in the way of budgeted funds, additional positions for its officers, and so on.

Fourth, military ideas could slowly diverge from civilians over time. With greater knowledge and work experience on its side, the military will assert its preferences in a convincing way, manipulating civilians into pursuing a course of action that may be undesirable from a political and diplomatic point of view. Fifth, there could also be reputational costs, when the military perceived civilian delegation as an admission of incompetence. If civilians are seen to not be up to a task, that could erode military respect for civilian overseers. And, finally, it could turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. An over-reliance on the military to fill posts and gaps in policymaking can persuade civilians that the armed forces provide the only viable solution and will do so well into the future, thus completely normalizing their dominance.¹⁰

A country can have political control over their security forces, and yet not have fully operationalized that by establishing enough civilian presence within key decision-making centers. If so, then a delegation problem may still linger. If we were to look for such a problem, the obvious place would be the defense ministry. The defense ministry is, according to Bruneau and Goetze, indispensable for establishing civilian control. As they say: “The MOD structure has become widely viewed as the best solution to the classic paradox, ‘Who guards the guardians?’”¹¹ These same authors note that one of the primary purposes of defense ministries is to “structure the power relationships between democratically elected civilian leaders and the armed forces command.”¹² If ministries are to do their job, they should have a heavy preponderance of civilian directors, managers, and staffers. An absence of sufficient civilian personnel poses risks for democratic government, as follows.

The purpose of defense ministries is to prepare the armed forces to serve the policy goals of government, and not the other way around. Should active duty or retired military officers occupy too many top positions within the defense sector, they may exhibit divided loyalties. While they are sworn to serve the constitutionally elected government, they are occasionally tempted to betray that oath by obliging the institution they were part of and loyal to for so many years.¹³ Also, the defense ministry is a kind of buffer zone between the president and the service branches, preventing military commanders from occupying positions too close to the executive office where they can exert undue influence. A proper buffer means one with a sizeable civilian presence. Civilianized institutions and leaders must be in place to ensure that policy preferences get translated into defense actions and to stand vigilant against military efforts to push an armed forces agenda at the expense of a national agenda.

Even if these military personnel are devoted first to serving government, there is another problem with having too many officers in leadership positions. They are often like-minded in their approach to defense and security planning. This derives from their service in a hierarchical organization where one set of ideas is disseminated from above and is unquestioned from below. Implementing such strongly held views while dominating ministerial positions means that alternative viewpoints may get crowded out.¹⁴ What is most conducive to good defense policymaking is to have some balance of perspectives that encourages a vigorous give-and-take between civilian and military defense specialists, with the understanding that ultimate policy decisions rest with elected officials. But all of this is moot if enough civilians are not at the decision-making table to have their voices heard.

Consequently, to the extent that democratic governments delegate too many decision-making posts and tasks to military officers within the defense ministry, that poses a fundamental problem for sound defense policymaking in a democracy.

Evidence of delegation: Defense ministry posts in six countries

With that in mind, we have analyzed the defense ministries of six well-known, consolidated democracies: Israel, Taiwan, Spain, the US, the UK, and France.

Though small, this is a good sample to choose from because we would expect to see a sizeable civilian presence in top decision-making positions within the defense sphere. To the extent that we do not, it would call into question conventional views on delegation and suggest the need for an alternative explanation.

Why might we expect civilians to dominate the upper echelons of the defense ministries in these states? There are three important potential explanations that are commonly found in the literature. First, these are all consolidated democracies. As Diamond and Plattner state, “If democracy works in other respects, it is likely over time to bring progress in civil-military relations as well.”¹⁵ As the democratic system advances from transition to consolidation, authoritarian elements are marginalized, while citizens acquire an abiding faith in the rule of law and in democratic institutions and their legitimacy. With stronger citizen support, political leaders are fortified in their efforts to not only oppose military coercive tactics, but more positively to fortify civilian control mechanisms. Political leaders should acquire the confidence they need to tackle second-generation problems of governing the defense and security sectors, where attention turns to state capacity building, “the ability of democratic state structures to provide for the effective management of the armed forces and defense policy.”¹⁶ In short, a consolidated

democracy is thought to be propitious for the strengthening of institutionalized civilian control measures.

Second, Israel, Taiwan, and the US also face harsh external security environments, which should enhance the prospects for civilian control.¹⁷ The need to prepare defenses against a formidable foreign adversary should forge unity of purpose, meaning military elites will work with the political authorities, not against them. The military will demonstrate respect toward civilians who, under conditions of heightened external security risks, come to the job well prepared in defense and national security affairs—as they must—if they are to effectively confront a foreign adversary.¹⁸ One clear implication of the theory is that key defense institutions such as ministries should be populated with capable civilian directors and staffers who can demonstrate leadership in the face of crisis. The incentive to demonstrate capable leadership is all the higher due to the perils of not doing so.

And third, Spain, the US, the UK, and France are members of NATO, and membership in that organization pressures nations to make reforms to improve democratic civilian control over their armed forces.¹⁹ The incentive to abide by NATO standards is derived not just from the added security that comes with alliance protection, but from the technological aid and cost-sharing arrangements that help make defense reforms possible. Many scholars have argued that NATO membership has been beneficial for strengthening civilian control and fortifying civilian-led defense institutions that subordinate the military.²⁰

Hence, considering these explanations, these six countries should qualify as least likely cases for over-delegation of ministerial tasks and posts to military personnel. The results of our investigation are shown in [Table 1](#). Data were compiled on leadership positions, from the minister (or secretary of defense) on down through assistant or deputy secretaries and directors of departments. Some positions are necessarily occupied by military personnel (e.g., chief of staff, deputy chief of staff, and army, navy, and air force commanders), while others could be occupied by either officers or civilians. Of particular note are rows 5 and 6, which reveal the proportion of key posts that are held by civilians. Differences between the first three nations and the second three are sizeable. The average civilian presence (including necessary military positions) for Israel, Taiwan, and Spain is 22.2 percent, compared to 57 percent for the US, the UK, and France. Excluding mandatory military posts, the civilian leadership is 36.2 percent for the first three countries, compared to 85.7 percent for the second three. In short, the first three countries unexpectedly exhibit serious deficiencies when it comes to civilian leadership within their defense ministries, while the second three more predictably show a much stronger civilian presence.

Because the results for the first three countries are unexpected, we explored these in more detail below. But for purposes of brief comparison, we will also take a closer look at the US, where over-delegation does not occur.

Table 1. Civilian versus military leadership in the defense ministry.

Attribute	Israel	Taiwan	Spain	US	UK	France
Total MOD leadership	24	28	46	127	23	35
Number of necessarily military positions ¹	0	11	28	37	7	14
Number of military personnel	17	23	37	67	7	16
Number of civilian personnel	7	5	9	60	16	19
% Civilian (including necessarily military positions)	29.2	17.9	19.6	47.2	69.6	54.3
% Civilian (excluding necessarily military positions)	29.2	29.4	50.0	66.7	100	90.5

Note: Military = Active Duty + Retired Military Personnel.

¹ Positions occupied only by military personnel within the Defense Ministry, such as chief of staff, deputy chief of staff or army, navy, and air force commanders.

Original dataset compiled using official MOD sources, official gazettes, and government transparency websites. If the individual profiles of leaders were not available on official government websites, they were checked online in local press outlets and professional network websites such as LinkedIn.

The list of most heavily used websites are as follows: Israel (<http://www.mod.gov.il/>), Taiwan (<https://www.mnd.gov.tw/>), Spain (<http://www.defensa.gob.es/> and <http://transparencia.gob.es/>), US: <https://dod.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Senior-Defense-Officials/>, UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/people>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence>; France: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/>.

Since its founding in 1948, the top job in Israel's defense ministry has been occupied by active or retired officers for 46 years, or 66 percent of the time. In 2018, 17 of the 24 (70 percent) ministerial leadership positions were held by military personnel. Officers not only directed key defense planning departments, but also departments that deal with logistics, purchasing and production, export control, social security, budget, and human resources. Of the seven civilians who occupy leadership posts, three were in nonessential, nonstrategic roles.²¹

Besides delegating ministerial posts to armed forces personnel, the government also cedes authority to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to dominate the entire defense policymaking process. Civilians are not pressured into this arrangement; they fully accept it. As Metin Heper and Joshua R. Itzkowitz-Shifrinson point out, "Overall, the ability of the IDF to influence government policy has reflected an Israeli acceptance of a civil-military structure that assigned undue influence to the IDF's policy demands relative to those of other branches of government."²² At an institutional, formal level, political leaders have control, but at a substantive level that depends on knowledge and knowledgeable staffers, civilian control loses its validity.²³ In the absence of civilian input, the military filled the vacuum, developing sophisticated analysis of conflict scenarios. For example, strategic planning is one area least supervised by civilian government officials. Following the 2004 Intifada, the military assumed responsibility for this when it became clear that the civilian authorities were providing no direction as to what the war aims were. Rather than wait endlessly for directives, the IDF set its own, without civilian objection.²⁴

In Taiwan, 88 percent of defense ministers since the transition to democracy in 1987 have been active or retired officers. The defense ministry is legally endowed with the powers to fulfill most defense functions, including strategic planning, resource planning, procurement, and mobilization. With the passage of the

National Defense Act of 2000, along with the Defense Ministry Organization Law (DMOL, same year), the ministry's legal authority has been strengthened.²⁵ However, since that time, active duty officers have occupied senior and midlevel positions not only in the ministry but in the National Security Council and National Security Bureau (in charge of intel gathering) as well. Article 15 of the Defense Ministry Organization Law says that one third of all ministerial posts should be reserved for civilians.²⁶ Yet it is often the case that those who pass as civilians are actually retired officers. Because there is no mandatory waiting period for filling government posts after retirement, Taiwan's defense ministry is dominated by individuals whose recent background, expertise, mentality, and loyalties are still very much tied to the armed forces.²⁷

The military turns out to be the main conduit for ministerial recruitment. Of the 28 leadership posts with the ministry, only five (18 percent) are held by genuine civilians. Of these, three are in nonessential (administrative) areas.²⁸ Civilians who staff the defense ministry are administrative civil servants who come to the job without defense education or training. The day-to-day affairs of the ministry are left mainly to active and retired officers who have unchallenged expertise.

Unlike Israel and Taiwan, defense ministers in Spain have been almost all civilian. The Spanish civilian government is in control of defense policy.²⁹ All decisions regarding national defense are made by the government, and its defense ministry is responsible for drafting policy after receiving input from the military general staff. Reforms implemented by Defense Minister Narcís Serra (1982–89) under the auspices of Prime Minister Felipe González (1982–96) empowered the MOD, legally, bureaucratically, and administratively to address all defense policy matters.³⁰

Nonetheless, the MoD leadership is largely militarized, as shown in [Table 1](#). In 2018, out of 46 positions listed as “defense leadership,” 80.4 percent are occupied by retired or active-duty military officers, leaving 19.6 percent of posts for civilians, indicating a reversal of a trend pointed out by a prior study of the Spanish case.³¹ There were at least 10 positions that could be occupied by civilians and are headed by military officers instead. These include the Secretary-General of Defense Policy who is the deputy minister, Director of Infrastructure and Equipment, and the Director of the CSEDN (Center for National Defense Studies), among others. The Ministry has civilian personnel working there, but their roles are mostly administrative, and it is relatively rare to see civilians occupying positions that deal directly with defense policy. Of the nine civilians who hold leadership posts, five are in nonstrategic roles, such as personnel, law, management of military social services, head of the ministerial cabinet, and military education.³²

Some experts maintain that the public servant recruitment process in Spain is to blame for the lack of civilian expertise.³³ The government does not bother to enhance the presence of civilians in top defense ministerial positions either because they do not have personnel sufficiently trained or because potential

political appointees prefer other posts. Either way, political leaders seem content to grant the military a preponderant role in the defense ministry.

The US in comparison

In the United States, civilians are in leadership positions within the Pentagon and play an important role in the devising of defense policy. Since World War II only two of 26 (7.7 percent) secretaries of defense have been commissioned military officers shortly before assuming their posts, requiring special exemptions to the National Security Act in order to serve. All other secretaries have been civilian. Below the Secretary of Defense are Undersecretaries, Deputy Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Department Directors. As shown in [Table 1](#), 66.7 percent of these posts are held by civilians. Examining these personnel more carefully, we can discriminate between civilians who are in charge of strategic (essential) versus nonstrategic tasks. The former refers to all those involved in the development of defense policy, planning, strategy, doctrine—all directly related to the application of force. The latter refer to those in the supportive areas of administration, finance, legal affairs, personnel, and so on. In 2018, of 60 civilians in top positions in the US Department of Defense, 37 or 62 percent were in essential, strategic positions, and 23 or 38 percent in nonstrategic positions.³⁴ In short, a clear majority of top posts within the DOD are held by civilians who are involved in vital defense policy functions.

Why does over-delegation occur?

We surmise that what links the three countries where over-delegation occurs is the presence of wide and longstanding gaps between military and civilian expertise and an absence of incentives to close them. Where early on, nations have knowledgeable military officers coupled with less informed civilians, governments will have greater motivation to delegate key tasks to their armed forces than to invest the time and resources needed to build up a critical mass of civilian specialists. Early deficits in civilian understanding of defense may have put some nations on a path-dependent track toward military assumptions of autonomy and domination over defense ministerial posts later on.

Numerous scholars concur that civilians must demonstrate some competence in defense and security affairs if they are to assume leadership roles.³⁵ Clausewitz himself said that “A certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy.”³⁶ Knowledge confers authority on higher-ups and translates into decision-making influence. If they are to perform valuable leadership functions, civilians should come to the job with expertise in hand. It is not likely that civilians will ever achieve perfect parity with the military on defense, nor is that necessary.³⁷ But civilians must know enough about the military’s side of the defense ledger to

command respect, alleviating any doubts officers may have about the civilian capacity to lead. They must also know enough to oversee work done by armed forces personnel, assuring it conforms to the policy preferences of the government. Moreover, there are areas of overlapping responsibility, where civilians find themselves sitting across from officers at the same decision-making table and must be able to hold their own. A key study of the US decision-making process revealed that with shared defense duties, the knowledge either side brought to the table translated into real influence.³⁸ In sum, civilians ought to have enough defense policy knowledge to earn officers' respect, quiet military apprehensions, exert oversight, and contribute constructively to the crafting of policy.

Understandably then, where civilians suffer from serious knowledge deficits, there is often a temptation to defer to the generals rather than asserting their own points of view. Deference can lead to delegation, where governments feel more comfortable in handing ministerial positions over to either active or retired officers, confident that they will ably design and execute the nation's defense plans. If officers establish their expertise early on while civilians fail to educate themselves, it will be especially difficult to overcome those deficits in the future.

Though additional research will be necessary to confirm this point, for now we would suggest that a path-dependent process is set in motion,³⁹ where it becomes increasingly more likely that key positions and responsibilities will be handed over to military officers who are better prepared. The more tasks that are delegated, the more ownership the military assumes over its newfound duties, allowing it to lock in advantages by claiming that only it has the wherewithal to carry out the defense tasks it has been assigned.⁴⁰ The longer this goes on, the more difficult it becomes for civilians to claw back positions and duties they had given away. The military's accumulation of expertise makes it increasingly implausible that civilians could ever catch up, especially if knowledge gaps were sizeable to begin with.

In Israel, Taiwan, and Spain, civilians within the defense sector suffered from defense knowledge deficits early in the democratization process. For instance, Israel's military had decades ago established a firm reputation for battlefield prowess and strategic acumen, earning for itself unrivaled status compared to civilians in and out of government. But this was reinforced by the turn of the new century, when the asymmetric war with Palestinians posed unforeseen challenges, prompting the generals to devise new modes of strategic thinking to counter the perceived threat. The military became, according to Kobi Michael, "epistemic authorities" on asymmetric conflict, while civilians never mounted their own knowledge-building effort. This widened the knowledge gap between military and political echelons, allowing the former to dominate, which in turn weakened civilian control on an institutional level.⁴¹

In Taiwan, military figures held important posts within the KMT Party that ruled the nation uncontested for 40 years, and they enjoyed autonomy in the making and implementation of defense policy.⁴² An overreliance on officers to hold down key policy positions before and after the transition to democratic rule in the late 1980s has been traced to a “lack of civilian experts qualified to assume these positions,” according to M. Taylor Fravel.⁴³ Finally in Spain, civilians had to play catch-up with military experts. According to Narcis Serra, at the time of the transition, civilian political parties were only just beginning to study defense and security issues.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, at the centers and institutes currently dedicated to the production of defense knowledge, very few of the faculty and students are civilians.⁴⁵ Hence, the civilian defense knowledge deficits persist.

Still, it is conceivable that knowledge deficits could be overcome, were there a strong enough set of incentives to close the gap by supplying the institutional resources to invest in training an entire cadre of civilian defense specialists. Why has this yet to occur in Israel, Taiwan, and Spain?

In countries facing grave external threats such as Israel and Taiwan, there have been more incentives to delegate defense positions to officers than to build up a cadre of well-trained civilians. Threats to national security emerged very early in the nation-building process and have remained with those nations ever since. Taiwan inherited the Chinese threat as a legacy of Chiang-Kai-Shek’s retreat from the mainland in 1949. Israel, upon its founding, immediately entered a geopolitical environment where it was surrounded by hostile states or political forces. In the event of imminent missile strikes, border incursions, and even threats of invasion from a hostile neighboring state, there is little time for deliberation or margin for error. Mistakes are costly, and those with greater defense expertise are less likely to make mistakes, all else equal.

In such circumstances, we argue that incentives to delegate assignments and positions to the military are quite high. If military officers are more knowledgeable on defense in such circumstances, then civilians concerned with preserving the nation in the face of existential perils will see delegation as not only beneficial, but essential. This is especially true when deficits in civilian expertise are sizeable and longstanding, as they have been in our cases. To overcome those deficits would take a considerable amount of time, and time is a resource in short supply for nations facing serious external threats.

Ironically, Spain’s membership in NATO may provide an inducement for delegation. NATO puts a premium on defense readiness, assuring that new members improve their military capabilities as the price for admission. Aspirants must commit to developing forces that are fully capable of contributing to collective defense and participating in the full range of NATO missions.⁴⁶ They must adopt new norms of defense as designed by the older founding members of NATO. Not to adapt could result in membership denial, not to mention the loss of economic and technological benefits that

would derive from being accepted into the “club.”⁴⁷ Once enrolled in NATO, there are pressures to maintain standards and readiness so that members can productively participate in NATO missions.

NATO does stipulate that new members must enhance civilian control, that the armed forces political power be reduced, and that defense ministries have authority.⁴⁸ But demands are generally quite vague, with no penalties for noncompliance.⁴⁹ Nowhere is there a rubric set out as to how they should set up their defense ministries, whether it should be civilian-led, and what the ratio should be between military and civilian staff personnel.⁵⁰ Once in, new members can do as much or as little as they wish to make unspecified improvements, and yet reap all the rewards that come with NATO affiliation. There are no provisions for either sanctioning or expelling members for noncompliance.⁵¹ Hence, if the easiest path is to delegate responsibilities to military personnel, that option is readily available to NATO members, Spain included.

Of course, the US has confronted grave external threats and has been a founding member of NATO. Why then does it not resort to over-delegation? The threat posed by the Soviet Union and the fear of nuclear conflagration prompted civilians to invest very early on in nuclear defense expertise.⁵² By the early 1960s, the US had assembled a team of civilian defense planners and strategists who “exerted their authority [over the military] with vigor.”⁵³ Civilians maintained their level of expertise for the duration of the Cold War and beyond. There was much less of a knowledge gap, and thus less need to delegate defense planning and strategizing to the generals, out of fear that the nation would be unprepared to confront its adversaries.

Conclusion

Any organizational scheme that does not enhance the position and control of democratically elected officials and their civilian appointees has failed at one of its principal tasks in controlling the armed forces and managing defense affairs.⁵⁴ This concretely means having nonuniformed personnel in key leadership positions within the defense sector. This article has focused on the imbalance of military versus civilian appointees in leadership positions within defense ministries of three countries, all of which are advanced democracies. It is found that a disproportionate number of top posts have been allotted to military personnel where civilians could have—indeed, should have—been rightfully assigned those positions. None of these assignments resulted from military pressure; they were undertaken voluntarily by democratic governments.

These asymmetries could have deleterious consequences, by creating a dependency on the armed forces personnel that reinforces itself over time, tempting civilians to continuously defer to military experts. It may also reduce civilian employment opportunities within government, invite military assertions of autonomy, and lessens politicians’ confidence that they could ever replace

officers with equally competent civilians. It is the responsibility of governments to appropriately divvy up defense positions within the executive branch between civilians and officers. But delegation becomes dereliction when it places too many vital decision-making posts in the hands of the military.

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Notes

1. Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 88.
2. Christopher P. Gibson, "Enhancing National Security and Civilian Control of the Military: A Madisonian Approach," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, ed. Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 243.
3. Civilians have the right to assess and re-evaluate military plans. A decision on whether to prolong the length of a war and thus the chances for more fatalities, or whether to expand the battlefield to more heavily populated zones and thus incurring human rights violations, has to be weighed by political leaders and their defense advisors. One decision can affect the public's support for the war at home; the other decision can affect international opinion regarding the legitimacy of the war effort.
4. Christopher P. Gibson, "Enhancing National Security," 243.
5. Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.
6. Gordon Adams and Shoon Murray, eds., *Mission Creep: The Militarization of US Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 14.
7. Feaver, *Armed Servants*.
8. *Ibid.*, 57. Those means can run the gamut from screening and selection of officers, to revising rules of engagement, to launching investigations into military conduct.
9. Transparency International, "Watchdogs: The Quality of Legislative Oversight of Defense in 82 Countries," September 2013, 7.
10. Adams and Murray 14.
11. Thomas C. Bruneau and Richard B. Goetze, Jr., "Ministries of Defense and Democratic Control," in *Who Guards the Guardians and How? Democratic Civil-Military Relations*, ed. Thomas C. Bruneau and Scott D. Tollefson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 71.
12. *Ibid.*, 78.
13. David Pion-Berlin, "Defense Organization and Civil-Military Relations in Latin America," *Armed Forces & Society* 35, no. 3 (2009): 562–86.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, eds., *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), xxxiii.

16. Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds, and Anthony Forster. "The Second Generation Problematic: Rethinking Democracy and Civil-Military Relations." *Armed Forces & Society* 29, no. 1 (2002): 31–56.
17. For example, see Michael C. Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
18. *Ibid.*, 13.
19. Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster, "The Second Generation Problem," 40; Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds, and Anthony Forster, "Civil-Military Relations in Post-Communist Europe: Assessing the Transition," *European Security* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–16; Zoltan Barany, *The Soldier and the Changing State: Building Democratic Armies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 4–35, 221.
20. On NATO benefits, see Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster, "Civil-Military Relations in Post-Communist Europe," 1–16; Barany, *The Soldier and the Changing State*, 34–35, 221; Vladimir Vuckovic et al., "Partnership for a Secure Future: Montenegrin Road to NATO from 2006 to 2015." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 4 (October–December 2016): 602–25.
21. Nonessential, nonstrategic positions for all our countries included financial, legal, personnel, engineering, administrative, health and education-related posts, and so forth. For example, one Israeli official is in charge of family issues, commemoration, and heritage. Another is a legal advisor, and a third is in charge of the construction and engineering division. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/world/middleeast/israel-national-memorial-hall.html>; <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000175398>; <http://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/node/34360>.
22. Metin Heper and Joshua R. Itzkowitz-Shiffrin, "Civil-Military Relations in Israel and Turkey," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 33, no. 2 (2005): 234.
23. Michael Kobi, "Military Knowledge and Weak Civilian Control in the Reality of LIC: The Israeli Case," in *Militarism and Israeli Society*, ed. Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 42–66.
24. Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy* (Washington, DC: US Institute for Peace, 2006), 259.
25. Republic of China, Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Act," <http://law.mnd.gov.tw/FLAWDAT0201.asp?lsid=FL005392>.
26. David Kuehn, "Institutionalizing Civilian Control in New Democracies: A Game-theoretic Contribution to the Development of Civil-Military Relations Theory" (PhD dissertation, Institute of Political Science, Heidelberg University, Germany, 2013), 293.
27. *Ibid.*
28. For example, civilians in nonessential posts are those who head up technology, ethics, and personnel. For the legal description of all roles in the Taiwanese Defense Ministry, see <http://law.mnd.gov.tw/scp/Query4A.asp?FullDoc=all&Fcode=A001701601>.
29. See Narcís Serra, *The Military Transition: Democratic Reform of the Armed Forces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
30. Florina Cristiana Matei and José A. Olmeda, "Executive Civilian Control of the Military: Spain," in *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, ed. Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (New York: Routledge, 2012), 181–90.
31. Felipe Agüero, *Soldiers, Civilians, and Democracy: Post-Franco Spain in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1995.
32. See <http://www.defensa.gob.es/> and <http://transparencia.gob.es/>.
33. Antonio Díaz, email correspondence with author, March 6, 2018.
34. This information was calculated from biographical information found at <https://dod.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Senior-Defense-Officials/>.

35. Gibson and Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence"; Thomas C. Bruneau, "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America: The Hedgehog and the Fox Revisited." *Fuerzas Armadas y Sociedad* 19 (2005): 111–31; Donald A. Downs and Ilia Murtazashvili, *Arms and the University: Military Presence and the Civic Education of Non-military Students* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
36. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 608.
37. A point made by Bruneau in "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America."
38. Gibson and Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence."
39. Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2004.
40. A key study of the US decision-making process revealed that with shared defense duties, the knowledge either side brought to the table translated into real influence. Gibson and Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence."
41. Michael, "Military Knowledge."
42. Kuehn, "Institutionalizing Civilian Control," 249.
43. M. Taylor Fravel, "Towards Civilian Supremacy: Civil-Military Relations in Taiwan's Democratization." *Armed Forces & Society* 29, no. 1 (2002): 82, fn. 26.
44. Serra, *The Military Transition*, 124.
45. See <https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/estadistica-de-centros-de-ense-anza-cursos-y-estudios-2016.html>.
46. NATO Summit, "Membership Action Plan," <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-066e.htm>
47. Anne Clunan, "Globalization and the Impact of Norms On Defense Restructuring," in *Global Politics of Defense Reform*, ed. Thomas Bruneau and Harold Trinkunas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21–48.
48. Rachel Epstein, "When Legacies Meet Policies: NATO and the Refashioning of Polish Military Tradition," *East European Politics and Societies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 254–85.
49. NATO says that there are "no fixed or rigid list of criteria to join the alliance," but rather an expectation that there be conformity with basic principles. See NATO, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, September 3, 1995, Chapter 1. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm.
50. NATO is much more preoccupied with nations getting up to speed on military capacity and operations, so they can contribute to collective defense and participate in various missions. In this area they do set benchmarks and hold countries to achievable standards.
51. On the absence of clear NATO punishments and rewards, which allows for formal compliance that masks actual behavior, see Shalva Dzebisashvili, "Conditionality and Compliance: The Shaky Dimensions of NATO Influence (The Georgian Case)." *Connections* 13, no. 2 (2014): 1–24.
52. Peter Feaver, *Guarding the Guardians: Civilian Control of Nuclear Weapons in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
53. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 19.
54. Among the many who concur are Felipe Agüero, *Soldiers, Civilians, and Democracy: Post-Franco Spain in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Harold Trinkunas, *Crafting Civilian Control of the Military in Venezuela: A Comparative Perspective* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Tom Bruneau and Scott D. Tollefson, eds., *Who Guards the Guardians and How: Democratic Civil-Military Relations* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).