Civil–Military Relations

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter summarizes the theoretical basis for the study of civil–military relations and then discusses the military as a political actor in the United States, other consolidated democracies, post-communist and other formerly single-party states, and developing states. The maintenance of healthy civil–military relations depends strongly on the government's overall legitimacy, which can be threatened by changing technology, societal fragmentation, or government weakness and incompetence. The domestic civil–military relationship can affect international security dynamics through its effects on domestic regime stability and ability to reduce ungoverned spaces, foreign policy decision-making, and relative military capability.

Keywords: military, civilian, authority, democracy, governance, professionalism, expertise, dissent, control

HOW has our understanding of the military as a political and social actor evolved, and how might that understanding change in the future? It is hard to talk about academic progress in a sub-field when the questions that most engage researchers are the same ones that were raised by philosophers thousands of years ago. The stubborn persistence of old questions and old answers is vividly evident when the most-quoted aphorism was penned by first-century Roman poet, Juvenal—"who will guard the guardians?" (Satire VI, lines 347–8)—and the most cited theory was published 60 years ago (Huntington 1957).

In the classic clash of paradigms—realism vs liberalism vs constructivism—civil– military relations falls primarily within the liberal paradigm as a study of domestic factors that shape state capabilities and international behavior. Within the sub-field, however, elements of realism—in the form of concern for external material threats—and elements of constructivism—in the form of competing conceptions of military professionalism—have also been prominent. In terms of positivism vs critical security studies, the US-focused literature tends to the positivist, while the non-US literature features a full spectrum of approaches.

Patterns of civil–military relations are typically studied according to three distinct sets of interactions: the relationship between the government and the military—focused on civilian control, best military advice, defense budgets, etc.; the relationship between the military and the larger society—focused on recruiting, mutual perceptions of service-members and civilians, race, gender, and class issues, etc.; and the relationship between society and government—focused on public opinion and oversight with respect to military, defense, and foreign policy issues.

The sub-field has four noteworthy and idiosyncratic features that have limited the development of general theory. First, the most thoroughly researched case, the United States, is arguably *sui generis* and thus a poor basis for generalization. Second, the core problem in one area (coups in fragile democracies) is all but non-existent in other areas (p. 712) (advanced industrial democracies). Third, a dominant theoretical model (Samuel Huntington's) is widely challenged by scholars but generally embraced, at least as a normative ideal, by many key practitioners (senior military officers). Fourth, questions about "what is" and "what ought to be" are closely intertwined in the thinking and action of the military as a political actor, and thus hard to separate.

Despite these challenges, the sub-field of civil–military relations has been both central and fertile for the field of international security studies. The scholarly interest is fueled by still greater policy interest. Even in countries where the extreme pathology of a military coup is a non-concern, the broader question of civilian control of the military—how can civilian political leaders ensure that military tools align with, and do not undermine, political objectives—remains a central preoccupation of policy-makers and the engaged public. Political science must remain interested in civil–military relations in part because practicing politicians—at least successful politicians—remain so.

This chapter proceeds with a brief discussion of general theory, a focus on the widely covered American case, and then a summary of military politics in other cases. We conclude with observations on likely emerging trends.

48.1 The Civil–Military Problematique and Huntington–Janowitz Baseline Theory

The central problem in the sub-field of civil–military relations is as old as Plato's *Republic*. How could warrior auxiliaries of the state be trusted to obey the polity's unarmed philosopher kings, and protect a vulnerable citizenry, but not use the very same strength to enslave them for corrupt or self-centered purposes? (Bloom [Plato] Book II, 375d–376c). Huntington noted in his classic *Soldier and the State* (1957) that some solutions to this problem only introduced other problems: keep the military weak so it is not a political threat and your society is at risk from foreign enemies.

Huntington's preferred solution involved a particular understanding of *professionalism*: if military personnel were allowed to exercise their professional competence free of inter-

ference, they would return the courtesy to the civilian policy-makers, whose competence was the crafting of national strategy and policy. The warriors guarding a liberal society would be trustworthy as well as militarily effective because their professional competence and identity required them to police themselves. Huntington called this objective control, and distinguished it from subjective control, where each civilian faction equates maximizing civilian control with maximizing its own political control over the military, thus politicizing the military by dragging it into fights between powerful civilians.

Huntington's approach attracted a strong sociological critique from Morris Janowitz (1960), who argued that professionalism was endogenous to deeper societal and technological forces. Contra Huntington, there was not a single pure form of military professionalism and therefore not a single optimal pattern of civil–military relations (Janowitz (p. 713) 1960; Moskos et al. 2000; Schiff 2009). And yet, Janowitz's approach relied as much as Huntington's did on the military embracing an ethic of subordination (Feaver 1996).

One promising approach to general theory that moves beyond Huntington and Janowitz is agency theory (Feaver 2003). Agency theory framed relations as a game of strategic interaction between a military agent and a civilian principal, each holding distinct rational preference orderings. If military preferences differed strongly from those of civilian authority, and if there was a low probability of being caught or punished, military officers might "shirk" unpalatable tasks handed down by civilian authority (cf. Avant 1994; Weiner 1996; Brooks 2008).

The principal–agent approach continues to be a productive line of inquiry (Sowers 2005; Coletta and Feaver 2006; Ruffa 2013), though a controversial one (Burk 1998; Owens 2011). It has also led to a revival of the Huntingtonian approach in an effort to redefine military professionalism after the Cold War (Snider et al. 2002; Nielsen and Snider 2009).

48.2 The American Case and the Evolution of the Military as a Political and Social Actor

Huntington wrote during the first decade of the Cold War, and as America's geostrategic environment shifted in the ensuing decades, so too did the kinds of problems raised by the military as a political and social actor. These problems included retaining political control as both superpowers married hydrogen bombs with thousands of aircraft and intercontinental missile launchers (Feaver 1992); rebalancing civil–military relations after the political disillusionment and societal upheavals of Vietnam (Moskos 1979); and redefining characteristics of civilian control for irregular threats and high operations tempo after the Cold War (Avant 1996–97; Desch 1999; Strachan 2006). Throughout, the United States military maintained a high degree of professionalism, Huntington's essential ingredient for healthy civil–military relations; yet the American military also engaged in bureaucratic subterfuge that raised concerns about civilian control.

This pattern reached what some considered a crisis point with the end of the Cold War and the arrival of an inexperienced, socially liberal administration that campaigned on domestic economic concerns and vowed to harness the military for progressive social change and humanitarian goals (Powell 1992–93; Kohn 1994). The concerns focused particularly on the military as a social actor, one operating across a wide gap from the rest of civilian society, or at least civilian elite society (Holsti 1998–99; Feaver and Kohn 2001; Dempsey 2010). Some warned about (and others welcomed) the possibility that the military would act to bring civilian values more in alignment with theirs (Dunlap 1992–93; Milburn 2010).

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 opened a new chapter in civil–military relations. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had been fighting bureaucratic wars inside the Pentagon (p. 714) to advance a transformation agenda before 9/11, and continued to fight them even as the military establishment ramped up to launch a series of shooting conflicts (Brooks 2008; Herspring 2008). The ambivalent progress of the Iraq War sent shockwaves through American civil–military relations. Was the problem that civilian authority, first under President Bush and then under President Obama, cavalierly dismissed professional military advice (Ricks 2006; Desch 2007)? Or was the military, by reason of intimidation, inadequate education, or failure of Congress to exercise its prerogatives under the Constitution, too cowed to insist when civilians were wrong (McMaster 1997; Moten 2014)? Alternatively, were top officers availing themselves of levers in American democracy—among them sworn testimony before Congress; the threat of resignation; commentary before the media; and punditry of retired officers—to resist civilian preferences and otherwise constrain civilian leadership (Kohn 2009)? How should civil–military operations function when civilian leaders and military leaders fundamentally disagreed on the way forward in Iraq (Feaver 2011)?

The historic election of the first African-American President, and President Obama's decision to keep Republican Robert Gates on as Defense Secretary, brought only the briefest of respites in actual civil–military relations. By the end of his first year, Obama was stuck in a bitter civil–military dispute over strategy and resources in Afghanistan, and civil–military tensions continued throughout the rest of his tenure (Owens 2011; Davidson 2013; Herspring 2013; Moten, 2014).

Continued prominence of civil–military conflict in American policy making has been matched by continued fertility in American civil–military relations scholarship. Research has tracked the effects *of* and effects *on* civil–military relations with respect to decisions on the use of force (Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Saunders 2015; Recchia 2015); public support for war (Gelpi et al. 2009; Golby et al. 2013; Baum and Potter 2015); inter-branch politics (Campbell and Auerswald 2015); combat effectiveness (Farrell et al. 2013); the role of civilian partners and quasi-military surrogates in operations (Avant 2005; Dunigan 2011; Ruffa 2013); the political behavior of the military (Brooks 2013a; Golby et al. 2013; Golby 2015; Inbody 2016); and the age-old question of the sociological gap between those who serve and those who are served (Golby et al. 2012; Bacevich 2013).

48.3 Comparative Civil–Military Relations in Theory and Practice

48.3.1 Theory

The study of comparative civil–military relations has followed a roughly similar evolution, in part because comparativists found it necessary to respond to theoretical and empirical developments that were pioneered in the data-rich American case. Of course, there is far more variance on the dependent variables of interest when the aperture is widened to consider the rest of the world. As a consequence, while the comparative (p. 715) sub-field sometimes runs into data limitations, the breadth of concepts, theories, and issues covered more than compensates.

The problem of political control arises for any society in which leadership of the armed forces is distinct from political leadership, whether that society is democratic or not. Mulvenon (2001) and Broemmelhoerster and Paes (2003), however, note that “civilian control,” in the sense of the government having full and direct control over the armed forces, is a fairly recent historical development, associated primarily with Western democracy. This explains the dichotomy in the literature between developed and developing states, and indicates caution for efforts to generalize from the United States or other cases of mature democracies to the rest of the world.

The literature on political control of the military agent is largely in agreement on three points (cf. Cohn 2011: 385ff.): civilians must have the institutions and authority to issue orders; they must not be subject to undue influence in the formulation of the orders; and the orders must be obeyed. While some scholars discuss the significance of good policy making (e.g. Huntington 1957; Avant 1994; Cohen 2002), most simply assume the government is issuing competent and legitimate orders. This neglects what Cottey et al. (2002) called “governance”: if the government fails to issue clear orders, or abdicates its policy-making responsibilities, the relationship is no longer one of “control” (Cottey et al. 2002, 2005; Born et al. 2003; Cohn 2011; Mannitz 2013).

Three main mechanisms drive civilian/political control: belief in the legitimacy or authority of the principal; shared ideals, beliefs, and preferences; and self-interest. Belief in authority shows up as appeals to “professionalism,” “duty,” “service ethic,” etc.—anything that relies on the military agent’s self-control. In Nordlinger’s classic (1977) treatment, this is described as the liberal model of civilian control, and is the one most heavily relied upon by democracies and those states hoping to become democratic. Shared ideals, beliefs, and preferences are prominent in Nordlinger’s traditional and penetration models, as well as several of Quinlivan’s (1999) “coup-proofing” techniques. Finally, the rationalist models (Avant 1994; Feaver 2003) highlight the role that pure self-interest can play.

Synthesizing these theories, Cohn (2011) proposes six variables for evaluating the strength of control: (1) institutions that place civilians in positions of authority over the military; (2) civilian leader competence for good governance, understood as issuing rea-

sonable and legitimate policies; (3) an agent culture of duty/obedience; (4) effective systems of agent monitoring and punishment; (5) preference compatibility between the principal and the agent; and (6) coherence within the agent organization.

48.3.2 Practice: Developing/Democratizing States

The literature on the developing world focuses on three main concerns: the military as a player in the struggle for ultimate power in the state; the lack of military effectiveness due to measures taken to keep them subordinate; and the military as a distorter of the economy through their economic activities.

(p. 716) 48.3.2.1 Power Struggles

The military often becomes an important faction in the struggle for power in weak states, either on its own or as a key supporter courted by other groups (see, e.g., Fossum 1967; Barany 2011; Brooks 1998, 2013b). The developing and non-democratic worlds are thus dominated by Traditional and Penetration models of civilian control, which tend to involve one or more “coup-proofing” techniques (Quinlivan 1999). These include exploiting family/ethnic/religious loyalties; creating multiple competing military-like organizations; creating multiple security institutions with overlapping jurisdictions as a form of intrusive monitoring; fostering professionalism/apolitical culture among the officers; and manipulating how the institutions are financed (to create mutual self-interest between officers and regime).

These methods have had mixed success. Research indicates that creating multiple security organizations, fostering professionalism (without also creating legitimate governance), and giving military officers independent economic interests can all lead to *more* coups (Quinlivan 1999; Broemmelhoerster and Paes 2003). There is some evidence that relying on family, ethnic, or religious loyalties is a more effective form of coup-proofing than any of the others (Barany 2011; Bellin 2012; Makara 2013), but it may also lead to militaries that cannot perform well on the battlefield.

48.3.2.2 Military Weakness

The weakness and/or limited resources of developing states frequently mean that the military is tasked with a number of missions that fall to other agencies in more developed states. These include civil defense, response to natural disasters, law enforcement/maintenance of public order, and, sometimes, defender of the constitution against corruption (Bruneau and Matei 2013; Pion-Berlin 2016). These roles tend to politicize the military, undermining the possibility of control passing smoothly and democratically from one administration to another.

Another result of this is that the military’s attention and resources are diverted away from strictly military effectiveness, leaving the state potentially vulnerable to enemies (Talmadge 2015). Thus, contrary to popular perception, most non-democracies are forced

to come down on the side of military weakness, if they wish to keep their militaries under control (Quinlivan 1999; Pilster and Bohmelt 2011; Powell 2012; Talmadge 2015).

48.3.2.3 Militaries in Business

Finally, a weak state that has trouble collecting taxes and/or allocating sufficient funding to defense will frequently encourage the armed forces to find their own funding (Broemmelhoerster and Paes 2003, 9f.; Mani 2007). This can range from individual moonlighting to the military organization owning large enterprises and using military assets for business purposes (Mulvenon 2001; Broemmelhoerster and Paes 2003; Cheung 2003; Mani 2007). This means, however, that the militaries are in full control of those revenue streams, which reduces the amount of oversight and control civilians can exercise over them (Broemmelhoerster and Paes 2003: 1; Barany 2011).

(p. 717) There is enormous variation in the ways that militaries can be involved in economic activity, and the type of involvement can lead to very different historical trajectories. Some militaries in Latin America, for example, tended to engage in heavy industry (Argentina) and more consumer-oriented sectors (e.g. commodities, banking, and finance in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua). Now, however, they have either exited those entirely or are on their way out, as the enterprises became inefficient or the public mood shifted against such involvement (Castro and Zamora 2003; Scheetz 2003; Mani 2007; Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas 2010). In many states in sub-Saharan Africa, individual members of the military engage in enterprise to augment their sometimes unreliable incomes, and use their status as uniformed (and armed) personnel to economic advantage (Paes and Shaw 2003). This is unlikely to change while state weakness persists. Siddiqa-Agha (2003) argues that the Pakistani military's involvement in the business world has been detrimental to its military readiness and effectiveness, as funds that ought to have gone toward military ends have been diverted to improving market competitiveness. Because of the domestic political power wielded by the military, however, it is unlikely that this situation will change any time soon.

48.3.3 Practice: Post-Communist and Other Single-Party Rule Transitioning States

Most of the literature on control in the post-Communist transitioning states of Central and Eastern Europe has focused on two issues: "professionalizing" military establishments that had been highly political, and working to develop civilian defense expertise so that the governments would not be wholly dependent upon their armed forces for policy advice and decisions (Cottey et al. 2002; Malesic et al. 2003).

The first of these enterprises appears to have gone well, and most militaries in Central and Eastern Europe are not inappropriate players in governmental politics, although they may still be subject to corruption and nepotism. Their biggest challenge was moving away from being party instruments to being democratic instruments (Cottey et al. 2002, 2005; Barany 2012). Building civilian expertise has been slower and more difficult. However, these militaries have benefited significantly from their association with NATO (Cottey et

al. 2005; Gheciu 2005), and the main concern now is a lack of funding for modernization and training. Despite their concerns about Russian intentions, this is not likely to change significantly, due to the economic and social stress these countries have been experiencing. As populations decline, budgets stay stagnant, and Russia becomes more of a threat, we may see several of these countries revert to some form of conscription.

In the now-mature democracies of Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, literature on civilian control of the military focused similarly on how to construct institutions of control. The difference with these states is that the military had been a strong independent player in governance before democratization, as opposed to a party (p. 718) instrument (Cottey et al. 2002: 36; Fravel 2002). As Chinese, North Korean, and Russian assertiveness increase, we may see the militaries of these and other Asian democracies return to traditional roles and become bolder in their policy participation.

48.3.3.1 Russia

The USSR was a prime example of a successful Penetration model (Nordlinger 1977), but what about the post-Cold War period? Evidence indicates that the Russian military under both Yeltsin and early Putin tended to engage in public criticism of the regime and make their own policy decisions (Belkin 2003; Brannon 2009). Under Medvedev, a series of reforms were undertaken, aimed at the modernization of both equipment and personnel practices. These reforms and investments did produce some modernization and increased capability—though not as much as the investment warranted, and their effects have been complicated and delayed by corruption (Kofman 2016). One initiative aimed to reduce the number of conscripts and increase the number of contract personnel, which would likely make the military a more effective and reliable tool of national strategy (Golts 2016: 12f.; Kofman 2016: 7). To be successful, however, this sort of reform required a move toward a more meritocratic and less politicized personnel system (Golts 2016: 15), and it hit a significant snag in 2012 when Putin fired its architect for corruption (Golts 2016: 15ff.). Since the beginning of Putin’s third term as president in 2012, the interests of the military appear to have converged with his (Cottey et al. 2005; Golts 2016).

It is unclear, however, how long Putin’s Russia can continue active military operations before the economic and domestic political underpinnings become untenable (Kofman 2016). Golts (2016: 18) argues that professionalism and morale problems continue. Even so, the military at this writing appears to have little incentive to resist Putin’s policies, be they domestic or in Eastern Europe or Syria.

48.3.3.2 China

Civil–military relations in China are increasingly murky, largely because of the shifting role played by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) and Navy’s (PLAN) bids for greater autonomy (Shambaugh 2002). China is another salient example of Nordlinger’s penetration model, in which the military is under total Party control, both at the level of top officers and through political commissars placed throughout as monitoring agents.

Although the PLA's business activities did produce valuable resources, training, and employment for many members and dependents, party leadership worried about its effects on professionalism, cohesiveness, and military preparedness (Mulvenon 2001: esp. 138ff.; Cheung 2001, 2003: 65ff.). It led to an enormous amount of corruption and economic criminality, and in 1998 the party issued a directive requiring all military enterprises to be shut down or transferred out of the military. This led to only partial divestiture, but did result in cleaning up some corruption and modernizing political control over the military (Mulvenon 2001; Cheung 2003). Cheung (2001, 2003) believes that the PLA(N)'s current focus on professionalism, effectiveness, and operational (p. 719) readiness indicates a low likelihood that the military will try to regain its old market share any time soon.

48.3.4 Practice: Consolidated Democracies

In advanced democracies aside from the United States, the scholarly conversation has focused much less on the professionalism or monitoring of the military institution and more on the roles of legislative branches and civil society. This discussion of "governance" calls for more parliamentary oversight and significantly more informed participation by citizens, academia, and the press (Cottey et al. 2002; Fravel 2002: 76ff.; Born et al. 2003; Malesic et al. 2003; Barany 2012; Bruneau and Matei 2013; Mannitz 2013).

48.4 Conclusion

The civil–military relations sub-field has remained lively, with waves of scholarship reflecting new methodological or theoretical trends seen in other areas of political science, despite being preoccupied with the same basic sets of questions identified in the earliest scholarly work. These underlying questions are all aspects of the same fundamental dilemma the institution that protects can also threaten. Steps taken to protect the polity *from* the military complicate the effectiveness of protection *by* the military, and vice versa.

In other words, the future of civil–military relations theory and practice is likely to look a lot like the past. Even so, we see trends in the scholarship worth flagging. First, the concerns (and literature) of civil–military relations and the concerns (and literature) of democratization and development are converging. The factors identified as problematic for civil–military relations also tend to be those that weaken democratic governance and/or result from weak or corrupt state structures. In the developing world, the concerns stem primarily from the dynamics of power consolidation, but power consolidation is inevitably linked with popular legitimacy. In the transitioning world, the biggest problems are the development of tenacious and legitimate democratic institutions and civil society. In consolidated democracies, attention focuses on problems of political apathy and bureaucratic politics, which raise questions about the legitimacy of foreign policy decisions.

Second, if democratization continues, the canonical threat of a coup may begin to give way to concerns about nuanced forms of domestic or transnational power and influence that militaries could wield in the future. In consolidated democracies, militaries can accomplish more through political influence than they could through coup. Whether this

takes the form of being the only source of security and defense expertise, as in many former Communist states, or of being the most trusted institution in society, as in the United States, Pakistan, and several other places in the Middle East and Latin (p. 720) America, or of being so important to the economy that their voices must be considered, these are the challenges to true “control.”

Third, the sub-field may increasingly attend to the functional side of the civil–military dilemma, rebalancing away from preoccupation with the complexities of democratic control as states in all three of our regime categories are forced to respond to rapidly evolving security challenges. We expect to see more debate over how configurations of civil–military relations affect variables such as war-initiation, conflict and crisis escalation/de-escalation, strategic innovation, operational and tactical proficiency, risk portfolios, and so on.

Fourth, the sub-field will increasingly focus on mid-range theorizing, at the expense of proposing grand civil–military paradigms. We also expect research to take advantage of growing large-n databases relevant to civil–military relations and to use a wider range of analytical tools to study the military as a political actor. Of course, this simply follows trends in the larger discipline, but the civil–military sub-field may be especially ripe for this because here more traditional forms of analysis have remained prominent much longer than in other political science scholarship.

In the practical realm, we expect that the configuration of the civil–military relationship will continue to be a key factor in states’ behavior and capabilities, and will continue to pose important concerns to those in power or attempting to consolidate power within states. In the United States, this issue will be closely connected to the polarization of partisan politics, increasing pressure on the national budget, and strong disagreement about the nature of the threats facing the country. As recent survey research has shown, there is the potential for serious breakdown in norms of civil–military relations in the US (Golby et al. 2016), and this is a trend that must be actively managed.

In other consolidated democracies, where publics and the press may not be very engaged with defense and security issues and militaries constitute small, largely content, and socially marginal organizations, the result may be a further de-militarization of foreign and security policy. This prediction may hold true particularly for many European states, and may contribute to disagreements within both the EU and NATO. For those states facing significant threats to their territorial integrity, however, both consolidated and transitioning democracies may turn to conscription and/or alliance structures to keep their budgets manageable. In those states where the military used to be a key political actor before democracy, we may see a return to more military influence.

In developing and democratizing countries, the patterns of power struggle, coup-proofing, and independent economic activities are likely to continue; these will be brought under control only by consolidation of democratic institutions and civil society. It is particularly important to understand the domestic dynamics of such states, as militaries are likely to play very different roles in, for example, popular uprisings, depending on factors

such as co-ethnicity, external support for the regime, and the overall structure of the state security apparatus.

One promising hypothesis worth exploring is the possibility that the spread of information technologies has created a new and different balance of power between (p. 721) society and the coercive institutions of the state. On the one hand, it may be that new technologies have made it possible for citizens to respond quickly in the face of an unfolding coup, making it harder for coup plotters to create a *fait accompli* without confronting the painful choice of inflicting mass violence on the citizenry. On the other hand, the same technologies may have so improved the surveillance capacity of the state that citizens enjoy less privacy and autonomy than they previously expected even in unstable polities. On the third hand, it is possible that the new technologies will result in a distribution of lethality across a wider spectrum of actors, narrowing the gap that separated the armed forces from all other rivals; if so, the field of civil–*military* relations could morph into something else, with multiple (potentially) coercive institutions in play.

A prediction that the future of civil–military concerns will resemble the past is based on the assumption that political change in consolidated democracies will proceed in gradual, evolutionary fashion. Of course, it is at least imaginable that a period of revolutionary change might disrupt even consolidated democracies. If that happens, the implications for civil–military relations are very hard to predict with confidence, save this: that the armed forces will be a hinge institution on which the political trajectory will turn, for good or ill. Either way, with or without revolutionary change, it will remain important for students of international security to heed the military as a political actor, for it can shape policy as well as constitute power.

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