Concordance Theory: A Response to Recent Criticism

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This is a response to recent criticism of the concordance theory that I proposed in the Fall 1995 edition of this journal. The piece entitled, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance," was critiqued by Professor R.S. Wells. The purpose of this rejoinder is to pose a defense to each and every one of Professor Wells's points of criticism, which focus on three major issues: theoretical conceptualization; the limitation of institutional separations, and the presupposition that militaries are innately coercive.

From the outset, Professor Wells asserts that concordance theory lacks originality and the essential elements of theoretical conceptualization. Concordance theory, in fact, offers more than a "set of related conceptual statements," as Wells claims a new theory should. The theoretical method utilized by concordance theory is deductive causation. Causal explanations are generalizations about the world that can be tested empirically. The causal statement provided by concordance theory is quite simple: Agreement among the political leadership, the military, and the citizenry over four specific indicators prevents domestic military intervention. Those specific indicators are the social composition of the officer corps, the political decision-making process, recruitment method, and military style. The article then provides two concrete examples to which concordance theory can be applied: Israel and India. Unlike the current separation theory (also known as "objective civilian control"[1]), concordance does not presume that civilian institutions must control the military. Partnership and dialogue between a nation's major institutions and its culture are more relevant to this theoretical framework.

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Wells claims that the U S. case no longer manifests the degree of separation presumed by my article. To respond, the fact that U.S. military and civilian institutions have shown degrees of intermingling over the years only points to the weakness of the current theory. The empirical situation in most countries, including America, changes; yet the long-standing theory of separate civil-military institutions has remained the same. Moreover, the current separation theory fails to account for diverse cultural elements affecting the role of the military in society; and it superimposes a particular historical value upon nations: the separation of civil-military boundaries. Concordance theory, by contrast, wholeheartedly captures the importance of shifting cultural patterns and their unique significance to military and political institutions.

Concordance theory considers the great importance of context in studying the military and society. Some of the indicators, such as military style and the inclusion of the citizenry as a partner, deal with the norms, customs, and values of particular nations. Concordance theory explains which major aspects of a nation should be in agreement in order to prevent domestic military intervention. How a particular society achieves such an agreement is largely dependent upon the nature of that society, its institutions, and its culture. This is what makes concordance theory unique: it causally predicts conditions for domestic military intervention without superimposing a particular historical or cultural context upon a nation.

While the current theory does not accommodate cultural explanation, Wells is actually quite sensitive to norms that reflect a prevailing American separation between military and civilian professional cultures. The cited Supreme Court ruling over the prohibition of wearing a yarmulke on duty in the Air Force points to that historical and cultural partition. American military professionalism still manifests a professional ethic quite different from that of society at large. On the other hand, the collective experiences of World War II and the Cold War produced situations of civil-military institutional overlap. These facts only point to the incongruity and weakness of the current separation theory. That theory does not bother to address cultural issues, so obviously relevant to this field, as Wells suggests in citing the Supreme Court ruling. Furthermore, the American blending of institutional boundaries, without any incident of domestic military intervention, undermines the predictive power of the current separation theory.

I also challenge Wells's contention that concordance theory is similar to the concept of "fusion." Concordance theory does not advocate the blending or fusion of boundaries, nor does it advocate the separation of civil and military institutions. Rather, as stated in the previous article:

> Cooperation and agreement on four specific indicators may result in a range of civil-military patterns, including separation, the removal of civil-military boundaries, and other variations.[2]

Concordance theory predicts the conditions for military intervention; but it does not superimpose particular values or histories upon nations. In other words, concordance theory can account for the current institutional intermingling of American boundaries *and* its professional cultural separation, as stated in the Supreme Court ruling. Concordance or agreement among the three partners (the political elites, the military, and the citizenry at large) results in this unique American scenario. While some scholars, such as those mentioned by Wells, may object to the current institutional overlap, domestic military intervention in America has been avoided.

The preservation of American military professionalism makes it difficult to label the American case, as Wells suggests, as one of "subjective control." The current literature defines subjective control as the following:

> The antithesis of objective civilian control is military participation in politics: civilian control decreases as the military become progressively involved in institutional, class, and constitutional politics . . . The subjective definition of civilian control presupposes a conflict between civilian control and the needs of military security . . . the essence of subjective civilian control is the denial of an independent military sphere.[3]

There are two forms of subjective control: one where the military assumes disproportionate power over civilian institutions, and one where civilian elites deny the military its independence to the point of threatening national security. Thus, most countries in which subjective civilian control exists, such as nations in Latin America and Nazi Germany, experience either domestic military intervention or coercive civilian control over the armed forces.

The United States, by contrast, has experienced forms of civil-military institutional overlap. Yet coercive civilian control over the military and domestic military intervention are absent in the American case. Even one of the most profound critics of American civil-military relations recently wrote:

> And yet a coup has never really been a serious threat, and the chances today, even of an attempt, are virtually nil. Civilian control is too deeply rooted in a political system based on the rule and the legitimacy of law.[4]

Thus, to label the recent American experience as a case of subjective control truly misrepresents one of the most professional militaries in the world. The fact that institutional overlap can occur without even a hint of domestic military intervention bodes well for American civil-military relations; yet it serves to further challenge the current theory of separation, which assumes that such intermingling can result in intervention.

Moreover, concordance theory has no affinity to the concept of "subjective control." If anything, concordance theory can explain the unique American institutional overlap between civil and military as well as the professional cultural separation between civilian and military societies. As I have written more recently, specific conflicts may exist between certain civilian and military elites; but there remains an overwhelming concordance between the political establishment, the armed forces, and society over the role and mission of the American armed forces.[5]

With regard to concordance versus intervention, concordance theory does not presume that militaries are innately hostile and coercive institutions. Here again, concordance departs from a long-standing tradition in the field of civil-military relations. The field itself was largely developed as result of many worldwide occurrences of domestic military intervention, including areas such as Latin America, Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. In the 1960's important scholars held high hopes for the modernizing capacities of militaries in these regions. When it became apparent that many of these militaries showed interventionist tendencies, the initial hope for positive military contribution was extinguished. As a result, the American and western theoretical ideal of separate civil-military boundaries was superimposed upon these regions as a way to curb the militaries' coercive proclivities.

Nevertheless, smaller developing nations such as Israel and India contradicted the assumption that militaries were innately coercive. As I stated in my article, the former case completely eludes the theory of separation. Despite the almost total unity of military and civilian boundaries, both institutionally and culturally, domestic military intervention remains absent. The Israeli case therefore points to the weakness of separation theory. In addition, it almost forces the scholar to select a theoretical framework that includes cultural analysis in order to distinguish be-

tween true concordance and negative domestic military intervention. A combination of archival research and cultural understanding is practically the only way to comprehend that the overwhelming influence of the Israeli military is, for the most part, not considered to be a negative form of domestic military intervention. In fact, with some exceptions, there is long-standing agreement among the political elites, the military, and the society over the role of the military in that country.

While India is far more receptive to the current separation theory, the significant decline of civilian institutions in that nation should point to some form of domestic military intervention. Its neighbor, Pakistan, has in fact met this fate many times, when its civilian institutions could no longer effectively influence the military and society.[6] Separation theory alone, however, does not provide an adequate explanation for the professional Indian military. Again, India elicits the need for a theoretical framework that includes the unique British *and* Indian influences affecting the role of the armed forces in this society. The four concordance indicators offer a more comprehensive prediction and explanation than the old theory for the role of the Indian military in partnership with the civilian elites and society at large.

Therefore, presupposing that militaries are coercive or noncoercive institutions is not useful. Providing a framework that enables the scholar to conduct responsible research, both institutionally and culturally, is far more beneficial to the study of particular national contexts.

I am rather offended by Wells's assertion that my piece is meant to "destroy or discredit" the old theory. Unlike some scholars in the academy, whose sole purpose is to undermine the thoughts and writings of others, my intention is to provide a positive contribution to the field of civil-military relations. Anyone who has had even a limited exposure to this field knows that it is in sore need of new theory. As I have stated before, there is no "crisis" in American civil-military relations. The United States still has one of the most professional militaries in the world. The crisis, rather, lies with the field itself, in its dearth of appropriate theoretical frameworks.[7] It is Wells who amply asserts that separation theory no long applies to the institutional realities of American civil-military relations.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that the current separation theory remains partially useful. As mentioned above, separation theory can account for a limited understanding of Indian civil-military relations. Concordance theory, however, provides a more comprehensive understanding of India's institutional and cultural transformations. Moreover, Wells's example of the Supreme Court ruling over the yarmulke points to the

cultural separation between the American military and civilian society. Although separation theory ignores culture completely, the civil-military separations cited by the Supreme Court example is quite helpful. In America, there is agreement over these separate societal and military norms that is more thoroughly explained by concordance theory and its "military style" indicator. Interestingly enough, elements of the current concept of separation are subsumed under the more comprehensive theory of concordance. The field of civil-military relations can no longer ignore cultural issues. Concordance theory goes a long way toward offering a causal explanation for the prevalence or absence of domestic military intervention, and it captures the cultural realities of the military in society.

My concern is not to discredit American civil-military relations. Concordance theory, as stated, is applied to this nation as well. A major problem with many theories developed in the post-World War II era is that they tend to superimpose western models and values upon nations that may not possess those values. As observed in the concordance article, the entire concept of "civil" is a Western European experience later adopted by American culture.[8] The Israeli case, by contrast, reflects a very modern country in which the concept of civil is not useful for analysis of its military-society relations.[9] India also represents a nation whose indigenous culture contributed to its civil-military successes. In this post-Cold War environment, past anomalies are becoming the norm, because they often reflect nations no longer aligned with established international standards. Concordance theory is not biased toward one region of the world, but calls for the inclusion of complex and multifaceted institutional and cultural analyses.

Finally, one of the most exciting outcomes of concordance theory is its relevance to the business world. Militaries, as was recently pointed out by a noted Yale professor, can be likened to corporations.[10] Interestingly enough, many prevailing business models resemble the current civil-military separation theory.[11] This separate hierarchical approach is being challenged by newer concepts such as "empowerment" and "reengineering."[12] Concordance theory as applied to business is receptive to these newer managerial approaches. In a world of intense business competition, companies, like nation-states, require internal agreement or concordance among indicators relevant to corporate success. Recently, I applied the concordance theory to the business field and developed an onsite program where company agreement is achieved in "team" environments. Companies that seek to implement objectives in an environment of high morale and consensus may find that "concordance" is a fresh approach to business organization and management. Both approaches, concordance in business and

civil-military relations, express agreement and sensitivity to diverse institutional and cultural realities.

Notes

1. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 189–192.
2. Rebecca L. Schiff, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance," *Armed Forces & Society* 22, 1 (Fall 1995): 12.
3. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 83–84.
4. Richard H. Kohn, "Out of Control: The Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," *The National Interest* No. 35, (Spring 1994): 15.
5. Rebecca L. Schiff, "U.S. Military Recruitment: Concordance In the 1990's," National Strategy Forum, Cantigny Conference Series, Wheaton, IL, May 16–17, 1995.
6. Rebecca L. Schiff, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Case of 'Discordance' in Pakistan," Paper written for the Midwest Political Science Association Conference, Palmer House, Chicago, April 6–8, 1995.
7. Rebecca L. Schiff, "U.S. Military Recruitment: Concordance In the 1990's," 1.
8. Rebecca L. Schiff, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered," 10–11.
9. Rebecca L. Schiff, "Israel as an 'Uncivil' State: A Reconsideration of Civil-Military Relations," *Security Studies*, 1, 4 (Summer, 1992),
10. Paul Bracken, "Reconsidering Civil-Military Relations," in *U.S. Civil-Military Relations In Crisis or Transition*, ed., Don M. Snyder (Washington D.C.: Center For Strategic & International Studies, 1995).
11. See, for example: "The Closed System" in Henry Mintzberg, "Power & Organization of Life Cycles, *Academy of Management Review*, 1984; and the "Matrix System" in Harvey F. Kolodny, "Matrix Organization Designs to Produce Useful Knowledge," in Ralph H. Kilmann, ed., *Producing Useful Knowledge For Organizations* (New York: Praeger, 1983); and "Theory X," in Douglas McGregor, *Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1960. For a summary of these theories see John B. Miner, *Organizational Behavior* (New York: State University of New York at Buffalo, 1988); see also, "Trust In Me," *The Economist*, 16 December 1995, p. 61.
12. See, for example, James A. Belasco and Ralph C. Stayer. *Flight of the Buffalo* (New York: Warner Books, 1993), Michael Hammer and James Champy, *Reengineering The Corporation* (New York: Harper Business, 1993); and Stephen Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).