

Concordance Theory: A Retrospective on the Creation of New Civil– Military Relations Theory

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Abstract

This piece is part of the 50th Anniversary *Armed Forces & Society* (AF&S) special issue. I am honored to be a part of this selection of essays. I am grateful to my colleagues at AF&S for their expertise and intellectual insights over the years since my original Concordance theory article—“Civil–Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance”—was published in 1995. Any comments made here that reflect on the current state of the academy and my experience with it over the years are in no way directed at AF&S and the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society (IUS-AF&S). Both AF&S and IUS have been extremely supportive of my work and the scholarship of many students, researchers, and academics around the world. I have been proud to be a part of both the journal and the organization that supports the study of civil–military relations. My Concordance theory and its evolution have only benefited because of my affiliation with AF&S and IUS.

Keywords

concordance theory, civil–military relations, relationship between military and society, domestic military intervention, coup, coups and conflicts

Concordance theory challenges the current theory in the field of civil–military relations and offers an alternative theory. That was the objective I was given as a doctoral student of Political Science at the University of Chicago over 30 years ago. The

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Harvard professor Samuel Huntington's prevailing theory of objective civilian control explains the reasons for separation of civil and military institutions (Huntington, 1957). Political Science faculty at University of Chicago encouraged me to find the current theory in my chosen field, challenge it, and create a new one. That was the UChicago way back then. I chose civil–military relations because I was interested in both international relations and domestic politics. Civil–military relations is also a sub-field of Political Science and desperately in need of new theory. Subsequently, I challenged objective civilian control and created Concordance theory the subject of this essay: "Civil–Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance" (Schiff, 1995). I was told by many scholars over the years that Concordance is an elegant and culturally robust theory relevant to many countries, including the United States.

By contrast, Huntington's separation theory could only explain why the United States did not suffer from coup and his followers continue to superimpose his theory and Western American values on nations around the world. They insisted that other countries, even developing nations, should aspire to be like America, even if their cultures and institutions were indigenously different (Schiff, 2009, 47–48).

Concordance theory, however, could explain why several cases including the United States did not suffer domestic military intervention—and why some did. Concordance theory could explain these case studies within their own cultural and institutional contexts. Why would you superimpose U.S. cultural values on a Hindu dominated nation like India? Culture matters as well as institutions. That is the heart of concordance theory.

Then, there is Israel, the modern, democratic developing country with overlapping institutional and cultural civil–military boundaries and very high external threat conditions. And yet, no coup . . . ever. How could that be? Huntington's separation theory collapses with the Israeli case study. That was Concordance theory's major case that made it a publishable theory (Schiff, 2009, 109). Concordance theory was also successfully applied to India, Pakistan, the United States and Argentina.

Over the years, concordance theory became popular in Europe and in developing nations. My book *The Military & Domestic Politics: A Concordance Theory of Civil–Military Relations* (Schiff, 2009) was even translated into Chinese. I am grateful to *Armed Forces & Society* (AF&S) for celebrating my theory. Concordance, however, was not well received by certain U.S. academic circles, especially in the national security field, from both the senior scholars and their junior successors. The Israeli case, which undermines Huntington's theory, was viewed with askance. I was told privately 30 years ago that any other major case study would have been a better choice: Egypt, Brazil, and Turkey would have brought MacArthur-like fellowships. Nevertheless, I was delighted and honored to receive the Israeli-based Lady Davis Fellowship and the Hebrew University post-doctoral fellowship supported by one of my dissertation committee members, the late Professor Moshe Lissak of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Inter-University Seminar (IUS) Fellow. Anti-Semitic disdain for Israel affected my career tremendously. It was frustrating as a young

scholar, because you do the hard work and you do not understand why the field is so lackluster toward an original theoretical contribution and in a field that desperately needs new theory. Today, the compromised intellectual and physical safety of scholars who support Israel in their work is now truly apparent as we all witness campus violence and contempt for Israel throughout the country. Today, many in the academic elite reflect anti-Semitic viewpoints, although they try to present it as criticism toward Israel. I regret to write that in this current environment of cancel culture and anti-Semitism, the development of new and robust theory is highly unlikely. This is so unfortunate given the fact that many young scholars at the last 2023 IUS conference were wondering if theory was indeed dead because there were so few panels dealing with civil–military relations theory. Cancel culture in university classrooms/encampments around the country has made the creation of new theory extremely challenging, if not virtually impossible (Dershowitz, 2020; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018, 2023; Shay, 2021).

For the purposes of this piece, however, I will focus on the positive outcomes of Concordance theory. As the world ponders what a future Palestinian state would look like, and as other fledging states strive for stability, one of the main contributions of Concordance theory was its relevance to North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) support for state-building and the relationship between military and civilian personnel. In addition, an outcome of Concordance theory is the concept of "targeted partnership" which also points to important overlapping military and societal relationships to assist nations in their state-building efforts (Schiff, 2012 & Schiff, 2018).

Concordance theory predicts the onset or prevention of domestic military intervention. There are three Concordance partners: the political elite, the military, and the citizenry. "Concordance theory views the military, the political leadership, and the citizenry as partners and predicts that when they agree about the role of the armed forces domestic military intervention is less likely to occur in a particular state" (Schiff, 2009, 43). The four concordance indicators are the following: (a) The Social Composition of the Officer Corps; (b) The Political Decision-Making Process; (c) Recruitment Method; and (d) Military Style. If agreement takes place among the Concordance partners over the four indicators, domestic military intervention is less likely to institutionally and culturally evolve.

As an extension to Concordance theory, Targeted Partnership embraces concordance or agreement regarding specific alliances between the military and policymakers. Targeted partnership means collaboration among policymakers and military officers over matters such as international capacity-building or state-building. Targeted partnership as a distillate form of concordance theory occurs for a limited period to provide short-term frameworks for civil–military collaboration. It is intended to accomplish specific foreign policy and military strategic objectives. While concordance theory provides a framework for civil–military relationships, targeted partnership points to the fluidity of roles which may be needed when specific objectives require unique civil–military collaboration (Schiff, 2012, 318).

I believe that my participation in NATO's RTG-HMF-226 project (2015–1018) with some of my IUS colleagues was a critical representation of Concordance theory and Targeted Partnership, because it showed what the policy impact of the theory in an NATO context could have been.¹ During this time, as U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq continued to unfold, state-building and the war on terror were at the forefront of world events.

My NATO book chapter titled "Concordance Theory, Defense Personnel Relations, and the Global War on Terror" offers a fresh approach for the betterment of civil–military personnel relations when NATO troops are called in for peacekeeping and to support the development of fledgling state-building actors whose cultural and institutional origins are unique. The chapter offers "a theoretical and policy perspective for a project that embraces institutional civil–military separations while simultaneously benefiting from overlapping boundaries regarding civil–military employee relations." Moreover, separate and commingling boundaries in the form of "targeted partnership" among varying players would augment both peacekeeping efforts and state-building (Schiff, 2018, 22-1).

In the NATO book chapter and in a previous 2012 article published in *AF&S*, I offered an example of targeted partnership:

General David Petraeus' Joint Strategic Assessment Team, which created a counterinsurgency strategy that encouraged Shia and Sunni power-sharing and reconciliation in Iraq Petraeus was able to "achieve a targeted partnership based on robust discussion with diverse civilian and military leadership, both among the U.S. decision makers and on the ground in Iraq." Petraeus understood the overarching goal of superimposing Western democracy on Iraq; but he also had deep experience in state-building and knew that simply superimposing a Western model on indigenous cultures would fail. (Schiff, 2012, 326)

My colleague, Ambassador J.D. Bindenagel understood that the concept of "targeted partnership" during the Afghanistan reconstruction, meant that the United States needed to go beyond the institutional separations espoused by Huntington, to achieve civil–military reciprocity during the peacebuilding mission. He writes about the American-led and German supported Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The PRTs were first developed in 2002 in Afghanistan and Iraq to empower local governing bodies and to assist in reconstruction efforts. Civil–military cooperation, which included the turning over of political administration and combat responsibilities to the political elites, local military, and the citizenry, was major PRT responsibilities. Bindenagel writes,

One approach to such civilian-military missions could be served by exploring civilian-military concordance theory and targeted partnerships, which Rebecca Schiff argues create a temporary and synergistic collaboration of civilian and military boundaries. Targeted partnership is a short-term distillation of concordance theory that offers the opportunity for policy makers and military leadership to achieve

nation-building objectives that marshal diverse civilian and military perspectives in a protected space of dialogue and encourage discourse leading to effective policy and military strategy. Targeted partnership does not superimpose a Western-bound civilian-military relationship on a host nation's indigenous cultures and institutions. (Bindenagel, 2015, 252)

Bindenagel suggests that while German diplomats were responsible for "reconstruction and stabilization programs," some military "mission creep" was needed to help with practical efforts like building bridges and coordinating security with local leadership (Bindenagel, 2015, 254).

Concordance theory was poised to be not simply an alternative theoretical perspective to Huntington, but a theory with deep policy implications in the important areas of peacekeeping and nation-building. What held Concordance back was the then subtle and now overt anti-Semitic climate that refuses to embrace Israel as a successful developing nation. The Huntingtonian national security field, which would not acknowledge the meaningful relevance of Concordance theory, now seems to mourn the decline of the entire national security field. Mike Desch (2019) reflects this sentiment in his book: *Cult of the Irrelevant: The Waning Influence of Social Science on National Security*. My published review of that book discusses the non-intellectual influence of cancel culture which includes anti-Semitism on university and college campuses across America. National security policy and new theoretical perspectives cannot evolve in a campus climate that shuts down freedom of expression and embraces Hamas-inspired organizers. I write in that review: "It is the political advocacy narrative itself, embraced by university cultures, that pushes social science and the study of national security down the path of irrelevancy" (Schiff, 2022, 41). This unfortunate reality is tragic because as people try to imagine what a Palestinian state with healthy civil-military relations might look like, those in the national security arena who belong to a community bent on ostracizing Israel are actually rejecting the most successful example of Middle Eastern state-building. It would behoove national security advisors and international policy-makers in that region to emulate and learn from Israel's state-building successes, as well as its historical challenges.

In addition to its relevance to state-building and peacekeeping, Concordance theory and my work with NATO led to a unique course I created at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island entitled: "A World Without NATO." Military officers, who were my students, were given realistic scenarios (e.g., Russia invades Estonia on a world stage of conflict escalation) and students resolved the conflict in a "world with NATO" and in a "world without NATO." I was honored to teach and influence military professionals in the United States and around the world. I also enjoyed teaching civil-military relations at the U.S. Naval War College with my colleague Mackubin "Mac" Owens, an important civil-military relations scholar (Owens, 2011). And it is my hope that the many Concordance theory-related lectures I offered at the Swedish Defence College over the years educated military officers

there on the topic of civil–military relations—as Sweden made an eventual transition from NATO partner to full NATO member.

Finally, Concordance theory influenced young scholars over the years who sought theoretical guidance for their case studies or theoretical approaches to civil–military relations. One such scholar was Sallek Musa whose applied Concordance theory to Nigerian civil–military relations. He was a student of my IUS colleague, Lindy Heinecken, in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Universiteit Stellenbosch University in Stellenbosch, South Africa. I was honored to be an external examiner for his thesis titled “Military Internal Security in Plateau State, North Central Nigeria: Creating Security or Insecurity.” Sallek’s thesis was later accepted by IUS for conference presentation; I was delighted to support him in those efforts.

Concordance theory offers a theoretical alternative to separation theory in the field of civil–military relations. Concordance theory also has policy implications as demonstrated by my work with NATO and by others who worked closely with U.S. and NATO allies during their involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Finally, young students and scholars benefit from a theoretical approach that embraces indigenous institutions and culture. I was thrilled to advise some of those young scholars in their intellectual pursuits. I hope the world becomes a better place for scholarship because of their efforts to embrace Concordance theory and perhaps create new alternative theories that can explain important topics like domestic military intervention and the impact on nations around the world. I want to thank AF&S for celebrating Concordance theory. I greatly appreciate the honor.

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1. NATO’s RTG-HFM refers to the (NATO) North Atlantic Treaty Organization (RTG) Research Task Group-(HMF) Human Factors and Medicine Panel.

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Author Biography

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