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Avoiding the Coup-Proofing Dilemma: Consolidating Political Control While Maximizing Military Power

Dan Reiter
Department of Political Science, Emory University

Civil-military relations scholarship forecasts that governments fearing coups d'état and facing belligerent external and internal adversaries face a dilemma. Governments can coup-proof to reduce coup risk, but such measures reduce military effectiveness. Conversely, if they eschew coup-proofing to maintain military effectiveness, they risk coups. This paper explains how governments facing coup threats and belligerent adversaries can alleviate this dilemma. It first describes five coup-proofing measures that generally reduce military effectiveness, such as politicized promotion and reduced training, and two other coup-proofing measures that do not reduce effectiveness, bribery and indoctrination. Because leaders can pick and choose which coup-proofing measures to employ, leaders facing coup and belligerent adversary threats can reduce the coup-proofing dilemma by adopting those coup-proofing measures that do not reduce effectiveness and avoiding those measures that reduce effectiveness, within availability and dependence constraints. The paper presents a case study of coup-proofing in Nazi Germany, a deviant case for coup-proofing theory and democratic victory theory because Adolf Hitler avoided being overthrown in a coup and fielded an effective military. The case study demonstrates support for the theory that a leader can simultaneously reduce coup risk and optimize military effectiveness by employing some coup-proofing tactics but not others.

Coups d'état occur when a "small but critical segment of the state apparatus" displaces from power the ruling leader (Luttwak 1979, 27). Leaders wish to avoid being overthrown because leadership provides personal benefits, leaders wish to shape national policy, and leaders can personally suffer imprisonment, exile, or execution if they lose power. Coups often involve members of the military, and their involvement has led scholars to describe a dilemma faced by coup-threatened leaders. Leaders can take actions to reduce the coup threat, "coup-proofing," but, conventional wisdom holds, these actions reduce military effectiveness. That is, conventional wisdom declares that governments can *either* address internal coup threats *or* optimize military effectiveness but not both (Biddle and Zirkle 1996; Brooks 1998,

Dr. Dan Reiter is the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Political Science at Emory University. He is the award-winning author, coauthor, or editor of *Crucible of Beliefs: Learning, Alliances, and World Wars* (Cornell, 1996), *Democracies at War* (Princeton, 2002), *How Wars End* (Princeton, 2009), and *The Sword's Other Edge: Trade-Offs in the Pursuit of Military Effectiveness* (Cambridge 2017), as well dozens of articles on international relations, foreign policy, conflict, and methodology. Previous versions of this article were presented at the Universities of Chicago, Virginia, and Maryland. For additional helpful feedback, thanks also to Michael Horowitz, Jeff Staton, and Caitlin Talmadge. For research assistance, thanks to Stefan Koehler.

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2019; Quinlivan 1999; Reiter and Stam 2002; Biddle 2004; Beckley 2010; Pilster and Böhmelt 2011; Talmadge 2015, 50; De Bruin 2018, 1437).

This article proposes that this iron dilemma between either preventing coups or optimizing military effectiveness is not inevitable. Leaders can ameliorate this dilemma, simultaneously addressing coup threats and threats from belligerent adversaries, both other states and internal rebel groups. Leaders have several coup-proofing tools at their disposal. Some tools reduce military effectiveness, such as distorted command structures, nonmerit based promotion practices, reduced training, counterbalancing, and restricted information flows, while other tools, such as indoctrination and personal bribery, do not. Leaders can adopt some tools and not others. When a leader faces a coup threat and a belligerent adversary, they can reduce both threats by employing coup-proofing tools that do not reduce military effectiveness and avoiding tools that reduce effectiveness. As a result, coup-threatened leaders can simultaneously reduce the threat of overthrow and deploy effective militaries.[1]

This article applies this argument to a case study of Nazi Germany. There have been several single case studies of civil-military relations and military effectiveness (Brooks 2006; Gaub 2013; Grauer 2017; qualitative comparative works include Biddle and Zirkle 1996; Brooks 1998; Quinlivan 1999; Talmadge 2015; Pollack 2019) because such an approach provides the depth needed to account for context, process-trace, and accurately code independent and dependent variables. Nazi Germany was selected because it is a "deviant case" not well explained by current theory. Exploring the case provides an opportunity to develop and demonstrate the plausibility of new theory (George and Bennett 2005, 75, 114–15). Conventional coup-proofing theory forecasts that coup-threatened regimes can choose either to reduce coup risk or field an effective military but not both. And yet, Adolf Hitler, fearful of a coup, was able to reduce substantially this tradeoff, avoiding getting overthrown while fielding an effective military. How did he do this? Relatedly, democratic victory theory proposes that dictators tend to lose their wars in part because they are more likely to coup-proof (Reiter and Stam 2002), and yet totalitarian Nazi Germany built a gigantic empire through war, before suffering eventual defeat. Critics of democratic victory theory focus on Nazi Germany as a critical outlier of the democratic victory thesis (Desch 2008), noting that "the army that is most often singled out as the historical exemplar of tactical effectiveness is not democratic: Germany" (Brooks 2003, 187). The theory here explains the deviant case of Nazi Germany for both theories: why coup-threatened leaders can avoid being overthrown and field effective militaries and why dictators can sometimes field effective militaries.

Nazi Germany demonstrates the patterns forecast in the theory. Hitler implemented coup-proofing tactics that do not threaten effectiveness, personal bribery and indoctrination, and with a couple of exceptions avoided tactics that threaten effectiveness, regarding training, promotion, command, information, and counterbalancing. As a result, Hitler avoided being overthrown while fielding an effective military. Further, the German military avoided the specific effectiveness pitfalls that the coup-proofing literature forecasts will be caused by coup-proofing, such as inability to conduct combined arms operations, inability to implement maneuver strategy, inadequate training, and poor military leadership. The exceptions are that Hitler impeded information flows and counterbalanced at high levels (though he did not do so at low levels). Though these high level actions may have degraded German intelligence, they did not preclude Germany from achieving overall high levels of military effectiveness. These actions are interesting because coup-proofing theory predicts low level information impediments and counterbalancing rather than high level efforts, and, therefore, they suggest expanding coup-proofing theory.

[1] See also Brown, Fariss, and McMahon (2015).

This article has four parts. First, it describes five coup-proofing tools that reduce military effectiveness and two coup-proofing tools that do not reduce effectiveness. Second, it argues that governments facing both internal coup threats and belligerent adversaries can ameliorate the coup-proofing dilemma by adopting coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce military effectiveness and avoiding those that reduce military effectiveness. Third, it presents the Nazi Germany case study. Last, it concludes, suggesting avenues for future research.

The Tools of Coup-Proofing

Coups become more likely as the military (and other elites) gain increased motive and ability to replace the leadership. Scholars have for decades explored coups (Nordlinger 1977; Finer 1988), describing actions leaders sometimes take to reduce coup risks (Luttwak 1979; Wiking 1983; Horowitz 1985; Sudduth 2016). Huntington (1957, 8–10) proposed that military professionalism can prevent coups, professionalism being composed of expertise, social responsibility, and corporate identity. Civil-military scholars have debated Huntington's professionalism thesis, noting that professional militaries intervene in politics (Feaver 1996; Finer 1988, 21), expertise sometimes facilitates military intervention in politics (Nordlinger 1977, 50), and social responsibility sometimes causes a military to intervene (Nordlinger 1977, 85).

Some factors that affect coup likelihood are difficult for a leader to manipulate easily and/or quickly. Economic downturns make coups more likely. Political institutions in authoritarian and democratic settings affect coup risk; for example, single party regimes are more durable than personalist regimes (Geddes 1999).

Actions leaders can more easily take to alleviate coup risk are often termed "coup-proofing." Definitions of coup-proofing overlap substantially but not completely. Quinlivan (1999, 133) defined coup-proofing "as the set of actions a regime takes to prevent a military coup." Sudduth (2016) described coup-proofing as "strategies that are associated with reducing the militaries' coup-making capabilities." She excluded redirecting resources—bribery—as coup-proofing, assuming that such actions might increase the ability to launch a coup. Conversely, Quinlivan included the diversion of resources to the military, "funding," as coup-proofing. This article follows Quinlivan's broader definition, but it discusses the point that resource diversion might increase coup capability while reducing motive.

Scholars propose that coup-proofing undermines military effectiveness. Leaders facing coup and belligerent adversary threats confront a fundamental dilemma: actions taken to limit coup threat reduce military effectiveness and increase exposure to belligerent adversaries, but eschewing coup-proofing to optimize military effectiveness makes a coup more likely. Military effectiveness, "the process by which armed forces convert resources into fighting power" (Millett, Murray, and Watman 2010, 2; see also Reiter 2017), is often divided into four levels: tactical (techniques used by combat units to secure operational objectives), operational (using appropriate concepts and doctrines to accomplish objectives within a theater of war), strategic (using armed forces to accomplish political goals), and political (securing necessary resources for military operations). As discussed below, different coup-proofing techniques predict different levels of (in)effectiveness.

This article proposes that the coup-proofing dilemma does not always exist; leaders need not always choose between either reducing coup risk or maximizing military effectiveness. It develops this claim in the next two sections. This section describes seven major coup-proofing tools, listing first coup-proofing tools that threaten military effectiveness and then tools that do not reduce effectiveness. This section builds on Talmadge's (2015) framework, first listing her four coup-proofing tactics that reduce effectiveness, promotions, training, command, and information, then adding a fifth, counter-balancing. The section then describes two coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce effectiveness, military indoctrination and

personal bribery. The following section proposes that leaders facing both internal coup threats and belligerent adversaries can ameliorate the coup-proofing dilemma by implementing coup-proofing tools that do not reduce effectiveness and avoiding tools that reduce effectiveness.

Coup-Proofing Tactics That Reduce Military Effectiveness

Promotions

Disgruntled military officers launch or support coups. Leaders can reduce coup threat by selecting and promoting military officers that are loyal and less likely to participate in a coup attempt and by dismissing, imprisoning, or executing military officers unlikely to be loyal and more likely to participate in a coup attempt. Leaders distinguish between likely loyal and disloyal officers by noting officers' familial, ethnic, religious, and/or ideological characteristics. South Vietnamese leaders privileged Catholics over Buddhists, Iraq's Saddam Hussein promoted Sunnis over Kurds and Shiites, and Cuba's Fidel Castro favored ardent Communists (Horowitz 1985; Biddle and Zirkle 1996; Brooks 1998; Harkness 2018, chapter 13; Quinlivan 1999; Talmadge 2015; Roessler 2016; Johnson and Thurber 2020).

However, promoting on qualities other than merit worsens performance, as officers are lower caliber, reducing military leadership quality at all levels of rank (Biddle and Zirkle 1996; Quinlivan 1999; Talmadge 2015). Loyalty concerns drove Saddam Hussein to purge competent Iraqi commanders after the Iran-Iraq War: "Generals who could execute complex military operations competently could also execute *coup d'états*. That was certainly the basis of Saddam's approach to his senior commanders. He preferred those he could trust no matter how stupid or incompetent over the competent and independent" (Murray and Woods 2014, 303n). In the 1990s, Peru's Alberto Fujimori government consolidated control by promoting loyal officers, who were "not the brightest and the best, but the mediocre and the weak" (former Peruvian general Daniel Mora quoted in McMillan and Zoido 2004, 84).

Competent military leaders contribute to effectiveness in three ways: inspiring troops to fight harder, mastering the craft of combat, and selecting quality subordinates (Reiter and Wagstaff 2018). Specifically, competent leaders are needed to implement more demanding, successful military strategies, such as maneuver-based and modern system strategies (Mearsheimer 1983; Reiter and Stam 2002; Biddle 2004). Quantitative studies have demonstrated that quality leadership is correlated with battlefield success (Reiter and Stam 2002, 79; Reiter and Wagstaff 2018).

Training

The skills needed to fight belligerent adversaries can also be used against the civilian government itself. Seizing control of the state can require force, including capturing the capital and important infrastructure, arresting civilian leaders, and containing troops loyal to the regime. Civilians concerned about coups understand this and sometimes deliberately reduce training quality and/or frequency to reduce coup threat (Biddle and Zirkle 1996; Quinlivan 1999; Talmadge 2015). Countries receiving US-sponsored military training assistance experience more coups, demonstrating that high quality training makes militaries more capable of carrying out coups (Savage and Caverley 2017).

Sabotaging military training to neuter a coup threat undermines tactical and operational military effectiveness. Realistic, extensive training is critical to help militaries fight well, use military technology competently (Biddle and Zirkle 1996), implement demanding military strategies such as the modern system or maneuver-based plans (Biddle 2004, 49–50), maintain cohesion (Castillo 2014, 30–31), and execute combined arms operations (Talmadge 2015, 14). Combined arms operations are critical for combat success because they allow different elements to contribute

their strengths while concealing weaknesses: infantry control territory, artillery and air deliver heavy firepower, etc. (Biddle 2004, 37–39).

Command

Even if high-ranking officers are loyal, leaders worry that coup threats that might emerge from lower in the ranks. Lower level officers might seek to overthrow the government and would have the capacity to do so if they led enough troops and/or were stationed near the capital (Singh 2014). Some (political) leaders reduce this threat by centralizing the military command structure. Specifically, lower level commanders receive limited command autonomy and must secure permission from higher levels of command to act, even during fighting, such as to pursue the enemy or to redeploy. Reducing command autonomy limits the ability of junior officers to use the forces at their disposal to overthrow the regime. There also may be frequent rotation of commanders in order to prevent them from bonding with the troops under their command (Quinlivan 1999; Biddle 2004, 49; Talmadge 2015).

Centralizing command in this manner reduces tactical and operational military effectiveness. It removes from combat leaders the ability to innovate quickly and react to emerging threats and opportunities. It also impedes the ability to implement military strategies that require commander autonomy, such as maneuver strategies and the modern system (Mearsheimer 1983; Biddle 2004; Talmadge 2015).

Information

Information flows are critical to organizing and thwarting coups. Coup-plotters seek to learn the preferences of others, communicating secretly to coordinate amongst themselves and recruit more supporters (Singh 2014). Conversely, civilians wish to monitor information flows within the military to detect possible coup-planning activities and to impede these flows to make coup-planning more difficult. Civilians might impede both horizontal information flows (communication between military branches at similar levels of command) and vertical information flows (communication up and down the chain of command). This is done both directly, through restricting information flows within the military, and indirectly, by creating internal security units designed to heighten units' and officers' suspicion of each other, thus reducing cooperation and communication (Quinlivan 1999; Talmadge 2015).

However, impeding coup-related communications can also block combat-related communications, undermining tactical and operational effectiveness. Healthy information flows enable militaries to reduce the uncertainty inherent to combat environments, providing accurate data on deployments and performance of the opponent, the nature of the combat environment, and the performance of one's own military, facilitating adaptation and improvement (Grauer 2017). Further, blocked information flows can undermine the interbranch coordination required for combined arms operations (Talmadge 2015, 14). These dynamics can reduce tactical and operational effectiveness.

Counterbalancing

Leaders can reduce coup risk by counterbalancing, building separate military or paramilitary units, often stationed near the capital, that answer to the leader and are tasked with protecting the leader from coups. Relatedly, leaders sometimes increase and deepen divisions within the military hierarchy, including establishing more branches of the military and/or reporting channels, to impede the coordination coups require (Huntington 1957, 82; Belkin and Schofer 2003; De Bruin 2018; Pilster and Böhmelt 2012; Powell 2012). Quinlivan (1999) describes this dynamic as building "parallel militaries."

However, counterbalancing can reduce political and operational military effectiveness. Parallel armed forces make the allocation of military resources less

efficient if those forces have first priority over advanced technology and other material and are not used in combat. During the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussein kept his Republican Guard, an elite unit created to protect the regime from coups, deployed near Baghdad and away from battle (Quinlivan 1999, 146). Further, those units are less likely to be used effectively in combined arms operations because they are outside the command structure of the rest of the military (Quinlivan 1999; Pilster and Böhmelt 2011).[2]

Coup-Proofing Tactics That Do Not Reduce Military Effectiveness

Military Indoctrination

Different types of indoctrination of the military can reduce coup risks, indoctrination being different from training in combat skills. First, military academies and education can stress the difficulty of successfully executing a coup (Quinlivan 1999, 151–52). Second, members of the military can be indoctrinated to accept the norm of civilian rule, the core of Huntington's (1957) conception of objective civilian control. In countries like North Vietnam, Communist ideology stresses the role of the Communist Party in leading the nation (Talmadge 2015, 63–64). Third, the military can be indoctrinated to be loyal to a specific civilian leader, emphasizing the ability, destiny, and/or divine right of the leader to guide the nation. Leader-based indoctrination can incorporate other ideological elements, such as nationalism (and the leader's duty/right to lead the nation) as well as the subversion of the individual to the group and in turn the leader of the group (Castillo 2014, 28–29).

All three kinds of indoctrination reduce coup risk. Stressing the difficulty of a coup discourages potential coup-potters, and emphasizing the norm of civilian rule stresses the illegitimacy of a coup. Leader-based indoctrination can strengthen regime control of society and the military (Castillo 2014, esp. 29). Leader-centered ideologies emphasize the ability and/or destiny of the current political leader to guide the nation and the military itself. Individuals who embrace this perspective would oppose any efforts to displace the leader, viewing such acts as treason that threaten the nation's very existence. Note that even if higher level officers are not effectively indoctrinated, the indoctrination of soldiers and lower-ranked officers makes higher level officers less willing to launch a coup because a coup is unlikely to succeed if the bulk of the armed forces are unwilling to follow or are actively opposed (Singh 2014).

Indoctrination ought not reduce military effectiveness. Some studies have found that ideological indoctrination, including of leader-based ideologies such as Nazism, can actually increase tactical effectiveness, by improving military cohesion, the "capacity of a country's armed forces to fight with determination and flexibility on the battlefield, while also resisting the internal pressure to collapse when the likelihood of winning a war diminishes" (Castillo 2014, 18; on nationalism and military effectiveness, see Posen 1993; Reiter 2007). That said, other studies have expressed doubt that indoctrination affects soldier motivation or unit cohesion (Shils and Janowitz 1948), but virtually no studies argue that indoctrination undermines effectiveness.[3]

[2] Narang and Talmadge (2018) find that paramilitaries do not reduce military effectiveness.

[3] In World War II, hypernationalism reduced Japan's military effectiveness, as brutalizing prisoners made American troops less willing to surrender (Reiter 2007). However, Germany did not abuse Anglo-American prisoners. In the East, in 1941, Germany treated Soviet prisoners poorly even as hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers surrendered. By the end of 1941, Germany improved its treatment of Soviet prisoners, as they needed them to address emerging labor shortages (Morrow 2014, 208–24). Hence, German hypernationalism did not reduce German military effectiveness by increasing POW abuse, which would have reduced surrender rates.

Personal Bribery

Civilians can provide rewards to military members to incentivize them not to launch coups. Forms of bribery vary widely, including official payments, unofficial payments, control of legal or illegal economic assets or activities, gifts of luxury goods, increasing military spending, permitting corruption, and providing sexual/marital slaves/partners, among others (Quinlivan 1999, 153–54; McMillan and Zoido 2004). Some forms of bribery might increase the capability of the military to launch coups, if those material rewards increase the organizational strength of the military through, for example, increased military spending (Powell 2012; Svolik 2012; Sudduth 2016). However, other forms of bribery, termed here "personal bribery," involve the transfer of resources directly to individuals and do not increase the military's capacity to launch a coup because they are too small in amount to increase organizational power, are directly controlled by individual officers for their personal consumption, and/or are not fungible (such as luxury goods). Though personal bribes do not increase the capability to launch a successful coup, they can disincentivize officers from launching coups.

Personal bribes ought not reduce military effectiveness. An exception might be if bribery is widely known throughout the military, undermining military cohesion and the willingness of troops to fight and die for the regime (Brooks 1998). These deleterious effects will be avoided if bribes are kept secret.

Summary of Expected Consequences for Military Effectiveness

The individual effects of different coup-proofing tactics can be difficult to untangle because some coup-proofing tactics predict the same outcomes, and there are synergistic effects across coup-proofing tactics, but forecasts can be made. Training, leadership, command, and information undermine tactical military effectiveness, and those four plus counterbalancing undermine operational effectiveness. Several coup-proofing tactics undermine the ability to execute combined-arms operations and maneuver or modern system military strategies. Counterbalancing might reduce political effectiveness, described as the efficient allocation of resources.

Which Coup-Proofing Tools Do Leaders Employ?

The above section describes seven coup-proofing tactics, five of which reduce military effectiveness, two of which do not. When do leaders adopt coup-proofing tactics? Broadly, leaders are more likely to coup-proof as the perceived coup threat grows. Talmadge (2015, 2) echoes long-standing ideas from coup scholarship that leaders are more likely to perceive a coup threat, and in turn coup-proof, when political institutions are weak and a country has a history of coups. Some propose that because dictators face far greater coup risks than elected leaders (Powell 2012), they are more likely to coup-proof (Pilster and Böhmelt 2012; Talmadge 2015).

The next question is, *which* coup-proofing tactics do coup-threatened leaders employ? Scholars often propose that a coup-threatened leader tends to adopt a suite of coup-proofing tactics rather than pick and choose among them (Brooks 1998, 9; Quinlivan 1999; Gaub 2013, 224; Narang and Talmadge 2018, 133). Talmadge (2015, 253n) allows that, theoretically, coup-threatened leaders could adopt only some measures, avoiding those tactics that might degrade military effectiveness, but she dismisses this possibility, proposing that, empirically, leaders tend not to be satisfied with limited coup-proofing measures and instead implement a broad set of coup-proofing tactics. Relatedly, many scholars conclude that coup-proofing presents a dilemma, that a government can *either* protect itself against internal coup threats by coup-proofing but reduce its ability to confront belligerent adversaries, *or* eschew coup-proofing to optimize military effectiveness but expose the government to heightened coup risk. Talmadge (2015, 19) made this point:

> The trade-off will be acute. Adopting coup prevention practices will secure the regime against the military at home but hobble the state's ability to defeat a conventional foe. Adopting conventional war practices [rejecting coup-proofing] will maximize the state's chances of victory against the external foe but significantly raise the chances of the regime being overthrown at home.

Quinlivan (1999, 165) agreed: "a state that organizes its forces according to the coup-proofing principles . . . has a military capability smaller than indicated by inventory counts of units or weapons." Pilster and Böhmelt (2011, 347) concurred:

> Political leaders face a dilemma. To paraphrase Chiang Kai-Shek, should they pacify the interior or focus on the external threat? Coup-proofing protects leaders from domestic threats as military coups become less likely. Simultaneously, coup-proofing harms military effectiveness and therefore makes leaders more vulnerable to external threats.

Brooks (1998, 53) stated, "maintaining political control [of the military] involves a substantial trade-off in military effectiveness," and, more emphatically, in a 2019 review of civil-military relations scholarship, "such trade-offs are a central theme in the body of scholarship on how coup prevention tactics impede military effectiveness. . . . Leaders must accept greater risks of either military defeat or loss of office from coup conspiracies" (Brooks 2019, 390). Biddle and Zirkle (1996, 173) made this point in a more specific application: "In states like Iraq the threat of political violence by the military creates powerful incentives for civilian interventions that reduce the military's ability to cope with advanced technology."

However, because only some coup-proofing tactics reduce military effectiveness, leaders might be able to alleviate this dilemma. Specifically, leaders might adopt coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce military effectiveness and avoid, or at least reduce, their reliance on coup-proofing tactics that do. This is consistent with the view that leaders choose from an array of tools to stay in power, what Schedler (2002) referred to as a "menu of manipulation" and what Frantz and Kendell-Taylor (2014) described as a "dictator's tool-kit." This article's central proposition is: *Leaders facing a high coup threat and confronting belligerent adversaries will tend to adopt coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce military effectiveness, and tend to avoid those coup-proofing tactics that reduce military effectiveness.*

This proposition builds on and qualifies Talmadge's central thesis. She lists four types of coup-proofing tactics, all of which reduce military effectiveness. She proposes that rises in external threats can cause governments to abandon coup-proofing tactics, but because she does not include coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce effectiveness, within her theory, governments are unable to reduce coup threat while also addressing external threat. By allowing that some coup-proofing tactics do not reduce military effectiveness, the theory here explains how leaders can reduce coup risk and optimize military effectiveness simultaneously. That is, where Talmadge predicts that leaders facing high coup and external threats must choose between addressing either the coup threat or the external threat, this article proposes that leaders can address both threats, by implementing coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce military effectiveness and eschewing those that do.

If leaders can choose some but not all coup-proofing tactics, this raises two questions. First, what factors affect civilians' choices? Second, why don't leaders always make the apparently optimal choice of implementing only those coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce military effectiveness?

Governments do not always have complete flexibility in choosing coup-proofing tactics. Different regimes, including different types of dictatorships, rely on varying tactics to hold on to power (Geddes 1999). Some leaders are so dependent on certain tactics they use to maintain power that they are unable to abandon them, as doing so would cause them to be overthrown. Also, some coup-proofing tactics

might not be easily available or implemented in all regimes. Some dictatorships cannot impose effective leader-centered indoctrination, such as South Vietnam and Syria. Bribery may be challenging if the right kinds of resources are unavailable. Regimes may be unwilling to purge military officers from a different ethnic group, as doing so might make civil war more likely (Roessler 2016; Harkness 2018). The military effectiveness incentives to give more autonomy to lower level commanders might be lower, if those officers are themselves low quality and unable to make use of greater autonomy, as was the case in 1970s Egypt (Pollack 2002).

One final point. Reduced military effectiveness affects the ability to fight civil as well as interstate wars. Several coup-proofing tactics, such as politicized promotion and reduced training, undermine the ability of a military to engage in any type of warfare, including counterguerrilla warfare (Sudduth 2016). One reason the Libyan military could not crush the 2011 rebellion was because coup-proofing, including centralizing command and promoting on the basis of tribal affiliation, had damaged its effectiveness (Gaub 2013). The Iraqi military performed poorly against ISIS in the mid-2010s in part because of coup-proofing, including promoting Shiites over Sunnis and Kurds (Fraiman, Long, and Talmadge 2014; De Bruin 2014).

Coup-Proofing in Nazi Germany

This section applies the theory to Nazi Germany, exploring how Hitler's choices of coup-proofing tactics affected coup risk and German military effectiveness. There are advantages to a qualitative approach. There are no high-caliber, cross-national, quantitative data to measure personal bribery,[4] information flows, or command structures. Case studies permit process tracing and accounting for context, enabling the identification of spurious correlation. For example, as discussed below, Hitler took increasing control of his military not to coup-proof but to guide Germany to victory. Relatedly, measuring military effectiveness quantitatively across wars is difficult. Using war outcomes as a proxy for military effectiveness risks aggregation error. Further, the very nature of effectiveness varies across wars. Some belligerents focus on capturing territory, while others focus on attriting the enemy, making it difficult to craft a single, cross-conflict measure of effectiveness.

Hitler perceived a coup threat. When he took power in 1933, Germany lacked a tradition of strong civilian control of the military. There was weak civilian control of the military up to the outbreak of World War I in 1914 (Snyder 1984). In 1916, General Erich Ludendorff and Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg executed a de facto bloodless coup, creating the "Silent Dictatorship" (Kitchen 1976). More coup attempts followed, including the 1918 Kiel sailors' revolt and the 1920 Kapp Putsch.

This historical context gave Hitler reason to suspect the military. He was especially paranoid of the old Prussian officer corps and, in late 1939, regarded the Army as the "most insecure element of the state" (quoted in Goda 2004, 101; see Wette 2006, 155). Later, in March 1942, Heinrich Himmler warned Hitler that "anti-Party and anti-state movements [in the Army] were in progress" (Engel 2005, 126). A few months later, Hitler remarked to Himmler that his "enemies were growing stronger the longer the war went on . . . [they included] even high-ranking people in the military" (Engel 2005, 140–41). In May 1943, Hitler remarked to Joseph Goebbels, "All generals lie . . . All generals are faithless. All generals are against National Socialism. All generals are reactionaries" (Lochner 1948, 368). In the words of one historian, "Hitler was in fact by no means always certain that he had the generals' support, and he remained suspicious of them to the very end" (Wette 2006, 153).

Hitler was not overthrown. But was this because Hitler's control of the military was so strong that a coup was unlikely, making coup-proofing unnecessary? If Hitler

[4] Powell (2012) uses military spending per capita to measure bribery.

was secure from coup threats, then this was *because* of the coup-proofing efforts described below, including bribery and indoctrination. Historians have made just this point, that especially after 1938 Hitler faced limited threat from his generals because of his coup-proofing efforts (Wette 2006, 153–56).

Another perspective is that coup risk in Nazi Germany was low because of the strength of Nazi political institutions, not because of Hitler's coup-proofing. Classifying the strength of Nazi German political institutions is difficult because Hitler cemented his hold on power by destroying some German political institutions and creating an odd political regime that exhibited both "shapelessness" and "power" (Broszat 1981, 346). That is, Nazi Germany exhibited some forms of high institutionalization, like a strong party, but lacked others, like an authoritarian parliament or rules for leader succession. However, the general strength of German political institutions notwithstanding, Hitler still perceived a coup threat, motivating him to coup-proof.

Avoiding Coup-Proofing Tools That Reduce Military Effectiveness

Hitler mostly rejected coup-proofing tools that might have threatened German military effectiveness, such as undermining training, politicizing promotion, centralizing command, blocking information flows, and counterbalancing. Hitler wanted an effective military to conquer lands in Europe, the Soviet Union, and North Africa and to fend off perceived threats. One of the most important consequences of avoiding coup-proofing measures that reduced effectiveness was that it permitted combined arms operations and the implementation of maneuver-based military strategies. The particulars will be developed below, but two general points are worth stressing. First, Germany not only employed combined arms and maneuver based strategies, but they largely *innovated* their use, especially the incorporation of armor and airpower (Murray 1983, 30–31, 35–39; Mearsheimer 1983). Maneuver strategies to this day are sometimes known by the term invented by the Germans, *blitzkrieg*. Second, combined arms and *blitzkrieg* were the most important elements of German operational military effectiveness, permitting the conquests of Poland, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Greece, and Yugoslavia, and hundreds of thousands of square kilometers of Soviet territory. "Rapidly effective communications" between German ground and air forces in the May 1940 campaign in the west was essential, as German air force attacks in support of ground operations "played a decisive part in the success of the German campaign in the west" (Umbreit 2015, 282–83). Successful cooperation between air and ground units was also critical for the conquest of Norway (Murray 1983, 35). One comprehensive assessment of military effectiveness in World War II declared, "the Blitzkrieg was nevertheless an authentic new operational form, and . . . would prove to be the most sophisticated and effort-effective of those employed in the war" (Ziemke 2010, 302).

Germany was able to take these actions because it mostly eschewed coup-proofing measures that would reduce effectiveness. Regarding promotion, Hitler prioritized merit to a perhaps surprising degree, improving the quality of German military leadership. Though Hitler engaged in occasional, targeted purges in the 1930s, such actions became less frequent once the war started. Hitler stayed away from the comprehensive dismissals of officers sometimes seen in other regimes—such as the Soviet Union in the 1930s or Turkey in 2016—refraining from relieving, imprisoning, or executing vast numbers of officers suspected of dissent, even after the July 1944 assassination attempt (see below). Keeping purges targeted and limited allowed Hitler to bolster the internal strength of his regime without significantly undermining the quality of military leadership.

Specifically, Hitler declared as early as 1939 that demonstrated performance in combat would determine promotion. He formalized this view in 1941, relieving several commanders following setbacks in the Russia campaign, choosing their

replacements on the basis of combat performance rather than political reliability (Kershaw 2000, 445; Hürter 2007, 349). Hitler remarked to an aide in October 1942 that he "did not demand of any officer that he be a National Socialist, but enthusiasm to strike a blow, to fight were pre-conditions for everything which followed" (Engel 2005, 137). After July 1944, general staff officers could only be promoted after serving a tour at the battlefront (Van Creveld 1982, 144). One quantitative study found that in the North African, Italian, and West European theaters, German generals were significantly more likely to be demoted after poor performance in combat in comparison to exhibiting mixed or strong combat performance (Reiter and Wagstaff 2018).

Hitler also avoided reducing military training as a coup-proofing tactic. German soldiers received high quality training. This training, including exercises in combined arms operations, prepared the army well in the years leading up to the outbreak of war (Messerschmidt 2010, 245). During the war, combat veterans improved training by sharing lessons from contemporary combat experience with new recruits, improving German combat performance (Van Creveld 1982, 73–74). Superior training helped Germany attain higher tactical and operational military effectiveness than Allied militaries (Fritz 1995, chapter 2; Müller 2016, 91–92).

Hitler's approach to military command is more complex. At lower levels of command, he gave German officers substantial combat authority. His willingness to give junior officers command authority is expressed in *Auftragstaktik*, the German notion that commanders are informed of their objectives in broad terms and given leeway to decide how to accomplish those objectives, using their own initiative and judgment if needed (Van Creveld 1982, 35–37; Widder 2002). *Auftragstaktik* was not disrupted by Hitler's ascent to power (Messerschmidt 2010, 243). *Auftragstaktik* requires giving commanders the authority to innovate in battle and a system of military education and training that nurtures and develops resourceful and clever officers. Affording command authority to German field officers improved combat performance and enabled the implementation of the German military strategy of *blitzkrieg*. Greater command authority had other benefits, such as allowing commanders to react to devastating losses by throwing together the survivors of destroyed units to create new, surprisingly effective combat formations (Fritz 1995, 236).

An alternative view is that *Auftragstaktik* aside, Hitler engaged in other forms of command centralization, personally taking increasing command over the direction of the war as it progressed, especially beginning in December 1941, when the invasion of the Soviet Union stalled. However, Hitler's growing involvement was driven not by coup-proofing incentives but rather by a desire to improve combat performance (Fest 1996, 183–84; Weinberg 2005, 293–94; Hürter 2007, esp. 284; Fritz 2018, 263). That is, he did not exert increasing control over military operations to prevent officers from coordinating in preparation for a coup but rather because of his belief that he and he alone could guide Germany to victory.

The next question is, did Hitler's assertion of command undermine military effectiveness? German generals after the war self-servingly claimed that Hitler was an incompetent amateur, and if he had left the war to them, Germany would have enjoyed greater success. However, recent historical work demonstrates the flaws in the argument that Germany would have won if only the war had been left to the generals. German generals sometimes agreed with Hitler's erroneous judgment. For example, in 1941, both Hitler and his generals assumed Germany would easily defeat the Soviet Union (Weinberg 2002; Förster 2010; Fritz 2018). On June 6, 1944, both Hitler and his generals were hesitant to send forces immediately to meet Allied forces landing in Normandy, all speculating that the Normandy landing was a decoy, a distraction from the main landing at Calais (Fritz 2018, 314–15).

Two further questions merit discussion. First, did the centralization of command produced by Hitler's assertion of control reduce the ability of the German military to engage in combined arms operations or maneuver warfare? Hitler's actions had

neither effect. For example, in the early months of 1943, long after Hitler asserted command, the Germans executed a "classic" of maneuver warfare on the Eastern Front in the Donetz Campaign, routing Soviet forces and stopping a Soviet counteroffensive (Glantz and House 1995, 147). Germany used maneuver tactics in defense that August at Orel and Belgorod-Kharkov (Glantz and House 1995, 167–70) and defense-in-depth tactics in July 1944 to effectively blunt the British Operation Goodwood Offensive, defense in depth requiring, among other things, competent, autonomous lower-level commanders (Biddle 2004, chapters 3, 6). German forces continued to engage in combined arms actions throughout the war, when they had the material capacity to do so.

Second, some might argue that Hitler's "no retreat" order, a manifestation of reduced commander autonomy, undermined the German war effort. The rigidity of Hitler's "no retreat" order has been exaggerated, as Hitler sometimes permitted or authorized retreats, including from Donetz on the Eastern Front in February 1943, in southwest France in fall 1944, from the Balkans in 1944, and from Latvia in 1944 (Glantz and House 1995, 144; Weinberg 2002, vii; Evans 2008, 211–12). Some propose that the no-retreat order was prudent, as it may have helped prevent larger setbacks (Kershaw 2000, 456), or that it did not harm the war effort, such as Hitler's refusal to allow withdrawal from the Kuban bridgehead near the Crimea in 1942 (Weinberg 2002, vii).

Regarding information, the record is more mixed. Hitler did not disrupt horizontal flows of information within and between military units. As noted, the relatively unimpeded horizontal flow of information between units permitted successful combined arms operations. On the other hand, Hitler impeded information flows at higher levels partly to consolidate his political control, perhaps undermining German intelligence. Relatedly, he engaged in counterbalancing at high levels to cement his control, including exacerbating divisions between the high commands of the armed forces (OKW) and army (OKH), splitting the air force from the army, and allowing Joachim von Ribbentrop to create a spy agency alongside military and party intelligence organs (Kahn 1978, chapter 27; Fest 1996, 103). He fragmented these higher elements of the state to prevent substate actors from gathering power through monopolizing intelligence and to make them more dependent on him, thereby consolidating his political power. These actions degraded German intelligence by distributing resources inefficiently and by preventing actors from aggregating all the pertinent information for making decisions (Kahn 1978, 535). Quality intelligence is an input into what Millett, Murray, and Watman (2010) describe as strategic military ineffectiveness, as when, for example, inaccurate assessments of the enemy reduce the likelihood of operational success. Some propose that poor intelligence contributed to the ill-fated decision to invade the Soviet Union (Förster 2010, 199–204).

Three points about these intelligence/counterbalancing dynamics are worth noting. First, existing coup-proofing scholarship says little about how controlling information flows or counterbalancing might undermine intelligence at higher levels of political and military decision-making. Its discussion of information focuses on degraded ability to conduct combined arms operations and to self-correct for shortcomings revealed in combat rather than distorting broader assessments (Quinlivan 1999; Pilster and Bohmelt 2012; Talmadge 2015, 17–18) or on "yes-men" dynamics undermining intelligence (Talmadge 2015, 17–18, Pollack 2019, 115–16). That is, the German case emphasizes a previously underexplored consequence of coup-proofing for military effectiveness. Second, we should be careful about blaming Hitler's operational failures on intelligence failure caused by coup-proofing. Other factors beyond coup-proofing contributed to German intelligence failures, including arrogance, an aggressive foreign policy orientation that encouraged the neglect of intelligence, an organizational culture within the German military that was hostile to a focus on intelligence, and anti-Semitism (Kahn 1978, chapter 27). Further,

a taproot source of Hitler's greater errors, declaring war on the Soviet Union and the United States, was his core political ideology that envisioned war with these two states as vital and inevitable (Fritz 2018, 129; Weinberg 1995, 153–54, 195), perhaps reducing the role played by intelligence estimates in causing these decisions. Third, as described below, any deleterious effects on intelligence notwithstanding, Germany still enjoyed overall high levels of tactical and operational military effectiveness.

Beyond splitting elements of the high command and intelligence apparatus, did Hitler engage in other counterbalancing that might have undermined effectiveness? German combined arms successes suggest the absence of detrimental counterbalancing among military branches. Some might propose that Hitler used the SS as a counterbalancing tool to coup-proof, perhaps reducing military effectiveness by siphoning off resources to units that were kept away from combat and did not coordinate with other military units.

Hitler did not use the SS in a manner that reduced German military effectiveness. The SS evolved over time, and, during the war, SS duties included policing, occupation duty, mass killing, managing economic enterprises, and combat. The focus here is on the combat Waffen SS units because, as the war progressed, the Waffen SS expanded greatly in size, such that, by 1944, 75 percent of the eight hundred thousand SS personnel were Waffen SS, and understanding the military effectiveness implications of the SS requires focusing on the Waffen SS (Stein 1984, xxxii; Koehl 2000, 205; Brebeck 2015, 120; see also Wegner 1990). Consistent with the theory developed here, Hitler envisioned that after the war, with a reduced external threat, the SS would shift its emphasis from combat back to internal security (Cameron and Stevens 2000, 166–67).

The Waffen SS did not waste military resources; they were sent into combat and not kept near Berlin to protect the regime (Ripley 2004, 337). Further, Waffen SS units generally cooperated with the rest of the German military, not operating as a separate, unintegrated force. Friction between the regular army and the SS was about the same as friction among the branches within the regular German army (Müller 2016, 41). The Waffen SS fought effectively and in concert with other units, helping Germany accomplish key military objectives in the east and west, such as rescuing embattled German forces at the Third Battle of Kharkov in February and March 1943 (Ripley 2004, e.g., 333–34). These units were not redeployed to Berlin following the July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, in contrast to their likely concentration around Berlin in early 1938, perhaps because of the much higher external threat in 1944 (see Koehl 2000, 207). This is consistent with this article's proposition that under higher conditions of threat from belligerent adversaries, dictators are less willing to engage in coup-proofing measures that undermine military effectiveness.

Employing Coup-Proofing Tools That Do Not Reduce Military Effectiveness

In short, Hitler mostly avoided coup-proofing tactics that would have reduced military effectiveness. Conversely, he embraced coup-proofing tactics that did not threaten military effectiveness. Hitler used personal bribery to maintain the political support of his generals, offering promotions, money, and land (Hürter 2007, 135–37, 164, 174–75; Seaton 1982, 143–44). Several members of the high command received birthday presents of 250,000 reichsmarks (Goda 2004, 111). General Heinz Guderian received double his normal salary, tax-free (Hart 2010, 83). When General Werner von Blomberg was dismissed in 1938 because of personal scandal, his ongoing loyalty was cemented with a fifty-thousand-reichsmark bribe and a full pension (Kershaw 2000, 31). SS officers were promised large farms in conquered regions of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Tooze, 2006, 270–71).

Hitler was sometimes creative in his bribery. In 1938, he looked past his aversion to divorce, encouraging/allowing Army Commander in Chief Walther von Brauchitsch to leave his wife and marry his mistress. Hitler personally paid the divorce's financial settlement, a sum Brauchitsch could not afford, providing more payoffs to Brauchitsch over time to ensure his loyalty. Not unrelatedly, Brauchitsch did not participate in coup plots in fall 1938 and fall 1939 and even informed Hitler about rumors of a coup plot in January 1939 (Gisevius 1947, 260, 264; Fest 1996, 95; Nicholls 2000, 35; Orbach 2016a, 88, 283–84). Brauchitsch's unwillingness to participate in coup threats was contagious, as it dissuaded generals such as Franz Halder from engaging in coup plotting (Orbach 2016a, 90).

To reduce internal coup threats, Hitler used bribes that "were specifically designed to bind senior military officers to Hitler and the Nazi state" (Hart 2010, 83). Hitler described the practice to an aide: "[Hitler] spoke about promotions following the French campaign . . . He had done it intentionally and deliberately . . . the more one honoured bravery and military success, the more indebted and duty-bound did the recipients become, quite independent of their personal beliefs, to their oath and to the figure they had to thank for the honour. In this way he was linking a tax-free gratuity to the promotions . . . what he did expect of a general and an officer was that he subordinate himself in politics utterly to the political leadership . . . That would be easier to accomplish, even against one's inner conviction, as the recipient of honours awarded by the head of state, and by this means of itself and also towards the state he would feel duty-bound to so act" (Engel 2005, 96). Indeed, when Guderian was relieved of his command, bribes tempered "whatever bitterness Guderian felt at his dismissal," and, perhaps not surprisingly, Guderian rejected approaches from several coup-plotters across the course of the war, electing not to participate in the July 1944 assassination attempt (Hart 2010, 83, 99). Colonel-General Johannes Blaskowitz, one of the few military officers who formally protested atrocities committed in Poland in 1939–1940, never participated in coup activities and condemned the July 1944 assassination attempt, perhaps because of the steady discretionary financial payments he received (Clark 2014, 56). As these bribes were generally concealed, and recipients kept these payments secret (Goda 2004), the bribes did not reduce military effectiveness by undermining troop morale.

Hitler also reduced coup risk by indoctrinating German soldiers to be loyal to him (Bartov 1992; Fritz 1995). Broadly, Hitler created a political ideology for all of German society that demanded unwavering loyalty to Hitler personally and the Nazi Party, through propaganda, the schools, the media, destruction of non-Nazi Party institutions, and crushing dissent. Boys between ten and eighteen were required to join German Youth and Hitler Youth for a combination of indoctrination and premilitary training. Simply by being drawn from German society, German soldiers were indoctrinated to obey Hitler (Bartov 1992; Kershaw 2000; Castillo 2014, 46–54; Müller 2016, 94). Once within the military, this indoctrination accelerated. Hitler changed the soldier's oath in 1934, requiring soldiers to swear loyalty to him personally rather than to the state (Deutsch 1974, 19–20). While serving, soldiers were exposed to a constant barrage of leaflets, booklets, speeches, radio broadcasts, newspaper articles, and other forms of propaganda emphasizing Nazi ideology (Bartov 1992, 120; Fritz 1995).

The indoctrination of younger officers and soldiers and their likely nonparticipation in coup efforts made coup plots less attractive to highly ranked officers opposed to Hitler, including during the fall 1938 Sudetenland crisis (Orbach 2016a, 61), the fall of 1939 after the invasion of Poland (Müller 2016, 117), and the 1944 coup attempt (see below). Troops were deeply loyal to Hitler, and even in the last months of the war, when Germany was being annihilated, there were no troop mutinies (Fritz 1995, 252). Officers recognized that propaganda had made the majority of German troops loyal to Hitler and "even those [German officers] who did find the courage to plot against Hitler were evidently much disheartened to

discover that virtually no military units existed which could knowingly be deployed in a *Putsch* attempt" (Bartov 1992, 146; see also Fest 1996, 332).

Indoctrination did not reduce effectiveness but rather increased German troop staying power and effectiveness (Fritz 1995, esp. 241–42; Förster 2010; Castillo 2014, 207). In particular, the ongoing annihilation of German units in the east meant that primary groups would be unable to maintain unit cohesion, critical for tactical effectiveness, because the primary groups were being destroyed. Cohesion and a willingness to fight were maintained, rather, by indoctrination (Bartov 1992, chapters 2–4).

Some might propose that German military effectiveness was undermined because German generals did not contest foolish orders, perhaps because they were indoctrinated to believe in Hitler's infallibility. However, the historical record does not support such a view. Generals sometimes disagreed with Hitler. They dissuaded Hitler from invading France in fall 1939. They disagreed with the scope of his December 1944 Ardennes offensive. And, they genuinely supported perhaps Hitler's largest error, the invasion of the Soviet Union, not because their vision was blocked by ideological blinders but because their professional judgment was simply wrong (Weinberg 2005).

Summary

Facing coup threats and belligerent adversaries, Hitler mostly avoided coup-proofing tactics that reduced military effectiveness and employed tactics that did not reduce effectiveness. He could do this because coup-proofing tactics that do not reduce effectiveness were available; he could make personal bribes, and his political persona and regime ideology facilitated effective indoctrination. The result was that he employed enough coup-proofing to limit the risk of being overthrown while fielding a tremendously effective military that built a gigantic empire. The exception to this pattern, as discussed, is that restricting information and counterbalancing at higher levels of decision-making may have degraded intelligence.

These coup-proofing choices helped optimize German military effectiveness. The definitive study of great power military effectiveness from 1914–1945 concluded that Nazi Germany had one of the most operationally effective militaries and the most tactically effective military (Cushman 2010, 321). A quantitative study found that when facing British or American units, German forces inflicted about 50 percent more casualties than they suffered, attesting to German tactical effectiveness (Dupuy 1977, 234–35; see also Van Creveld 1982, chapter 1). A leading comparative study of military cohesion classifies Nazi Germany as having high levels of cohesion, in part because of indoctrination (Castillo 2014). Van Creveld (1982, 163) states: "In point of morale elan, unit cohesion, and resilience, [the Germany Army] probably had no equal among twentieth-century armies."

There was coup-plotting in Nazi Germany, the most salient episode being the July 1944 coup attempt. The plan was to assassinate Hitler, after which the plotters would seize control of the government. This article's theory helps explain why the coup attempt failed. Bribery dissuaded senior German officers like Guderian and Blaskowitz from participating, weakening the effort. Once the assassination attempt failed, the coup-plotters became deeply disillusioned, recognizing that indoctrination doomed the effort because, as long as "the Führer was alive . . . no amount of charisma [of the coup-plotters] could persuade the majority of officers to turn against his orders" (Orbach 2016a, 232). They were right; because of indoctrination, troops recoiled from rather than rallied around the conspirators once they heard of the assassination attempt (Fritz 1995, 242). Some might point to the hundreds of officers arrested in the wake of the attempt as an example of a coup-proofing purge,[5] but these are relatively modest purge figures, presenting limited reduction

[5] On hundreds arrested, see Orbach 2016b.

in military effectiveness. They pale in comparison to the ten thousand military officers arrested in the purge following the 2016 failed coup in Turkey (Kenyon 2018) or the thirty to forty thousand Soviet officers imprisoned or executed by Stalin from 1937 to 1941 (Glantz and House 1995, 11).

That said, the broader lesson of the 1944 incident is that leaders cannot always eliminate coup risk and optimize military effectiveness. Our theory disagrees with the conventional scholarly wisdom that leaders face a dilemma and must choose to either reduce coup risk or optimize military effectiveness. But our theory does not forecast that leaders can completely avoid this tradeoff; they cannot simultaneously build highly effective militaries and reduce coup threat to zero. Hitler reduced coup risk without undermining military effectiveness through indoctrination and bribery, but the risk was not eliminated, as evidenced by the July 1944 plot. To go farther in reducing coup risk would have required him to engage in coup-proofing measures such as loyalty-based promotions that would have further reduced military effectiveness, a tradeoff he was unwilling to make.

Conclusion

Leaders can substantially reduce the coup-proofing dilemma by employing a mix of coup-proofing tactics. Choosing the right mix allows them to alleviate coup risk and field effective militaries. The argument improves our understanding of military effectiveness, explaining that leaders do not always have to choose between either reducing coup risks or fielding effective militaries. Relatedly, it helps explain why dictators like Hitler can field effective militaries without being overthrown.

There are several avenues for future research. First, the Germany case suggested a new connection between coup-proofing and military effectiveness: blocking information flows and counterbalancing at higher levels degrades intelligence. Future work can develop a deeper theoretical account of this dynamic, build out specific empirical expectations (how exactly might degraded intelligence manifest itself), and execute empirical tests. It might also apply coup-proofing to war initiation decisions, exploring more deeply why regimes like dictatorships are less likely to start wars they go on to win (Reiter and Stam 2002).

Second, more empirical work is needed, including reanalysis of cases previously explored in coup-proofing research. Regimes described previously as having been coup-proofed comprehensively may be better characterized as implementing some but not all coup-proofing techniques, as forecast by the theory. For example, in the late 1980s, Saddam Hussein reduced some but not all coup-proofing techniques—such as improving training and making promotion more merit-based while retaining bribery and indoctrination—allowing Iraq to perform better in its war against Iran while avoiding Saddam's overthrow (Karsh and Rautsi 1991, 181–84; Pollack 2002, 218–21; Murray and Woods 2014, 286–87, 302–3; Talmadge 2015; Marr 2017, 164–65). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Egypt rolled back some but not all coup-proofing techniques—such as improving training, reducing counterbalancing, and making promotion more merit-based while still engaging in some purges—allowing Egypt to perform somewhat better in its 1973 war with Israel without experiencing a coup (Pollack 2002, 89–90, 98–99; McGregor 2006, 275). After 1940, Joseph Stalin reduced some but not all coup-proofing techniques—such as rehabilitating imprisoned military officers, improving training, giving commanders more authority, and making promotion more merit-based, while retaining counterbalancing and maintaining Communist indoctrination—allowing Soviet military performance to improve but without permitting Stalin's overthrow (Reese 2005, 146–47, 160; Glantz 2005, 124, 472–74, 615–19; Kotkin 2017, 759). High caliber cross-national data on various coup-proofing techniques and military effectiveness would permit quantitative testing.

Third, bribery as a coup-proofing tool needs further exploration. The article suggests the importance of categorizing and understanding the variety of different types of bribes that can be offered, recognizing that some can reduce coup motivation without increasing coup capability. Future work can also explore how at least some forms of bribery might affect military effectiveness, such as widespread, demoralizing corruption practices. There is also the possibility of connecting bribery practices within state governments with comparable practices in rebel groups, including securing lootable resources and distributing sexual slaves and "war wives" to maintain control. Rebel groups sometimes approve forced marriages to officers as a means of strengthening loyalty to the leadership (see Baines 2014).

Fourth, future work could explore when coup-proofing tactics are or are not available to be implemented effectively by leaders. Not all attempts at indoctrination work equally well in all regimes. Not all bribery options are always available. A more complete understanding of what tools are available to what leaders will provide a fuller understanding of how leaders choose.

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