#4: Explain how leadership affects combat compliance (You must cite from lectures and Kindsvatter)

**Leadership’s Effect On Combat Compliance**

Combat compliance, as defined in the August 26th lecture is “...the variable willingness or unwillingness of rational human beings to accept orders that put them in mortal peril, such as the possibility of being wounded or even killed.” (Magagna, 8/26 lecture) To what extent does leadership affect combat compliance? In the lectures on August 28th and September 4th,, there is mention of correlation with leadership. In this conceptual framework, leadership may be a substantial factor but it is likely not a critical one. I will argue in this essay though that leadership, at least theoretically, has the possibility of being a crucial factor in high combat compliance. Leadership has the possibility of performing this role because of its role in three critical components: 1) The creation of significance or the moral and ethical basis for conducting war. 2) The ability to create a forged united purpose. 3) Building rapport and trust.

This essay will investigate military leadership. In order to not confuse military leadership with civilian politics, this essay will ignore the implications of political leadership, including civilian military leaders, like the president of the United States, and examples from history where military leaders had significant political power like Napoleon Bonaparte.

This essay will investigate the premise that combat compliance is based on a rational calculation made by individuals, generally young and middle aged men. Leadership can vary in its form (Yammarino), in its proximity (generals like Patton vs squad leaders), leaders who are great in their strategy, others who are great at increasing morale, at gaining the trust of troops and other important metrics. In its most extreme form, theories of leadership like the Great Man Theory, suggest leaders have a critical role in successes. This essay will attempt to expand on the definition of combat compliance, looking at the clear ways in which leaders can affect combat compliance. Further, it will connect to historical examples, looking for clear examples of correlation and then looking for extreme cases where leadership may have been a crucial factor in clear demonstrations of combat compliance.

**What is a Bad Leader?**

In order to talk about the importance of leadership, it will provide a good initial counterpoint to highlight how significant bad leadership can be. Some of the most stark examples of poor leadership can be seen in conflicts where politics plays a role, it is often to the detriment of the quality of leaders. Good examples include the political appointments of generals in the civil war by Lincoln who were often incompetent (Magagna, 9/4 lecture) and the Soviet military in World War 2 where promotions were based on political comnnections. The Soviet military suffered phenomenal casualties in World War 2, especially during early conflicts with Nazi Germany. In the same way, Eastern Union generals, who had been appointed for political reasons, in the Civil War showed such incompetence that Lincoln needed to bring in Sherman and Grant from the Western front.

These are especially significant because both of these wars had clear significance to the people who were fighting. For Americans in the Union, this involved protecting American democracy, being able to unite as a single nation and being able to repel foreign threats (Magagna, 8/28 lecture) For the Soviet Union, this was about the all important family and friends doctrine, IE the idea that you are protecting your friends and family by fighting, the most significant motivators of combat compliance (Magagna, 8/26 lecture). In the American Civil War, this moral and ideal reasoning was also buffered by the fact that the Union had more than twice the army capacity of the Confederacy along with more than double the population.

Leaders like this are often not only bad at strategy but also being able to rally their troops. Not surprisingly, Eastern troops in the Civil War under the guidance of generals like Bragg, Burnside, Butler, McClellan and others, suffered from low morale (Magagna, 8/26 lecture).

Beyond poor strategic decision making, bad leaders have the ability to sabotage even strong situations, like the Eastern front Union Generals. Bad leaders can lose the hearts of their soldiers to the point of having at worst maximum non-compliance, or open rebellion.

**What is a Good Leader in Theory?**

For soldiers on the ground, there are numerous factors that play a role in combat compliance (Magagna, 8/26 Lecture). There are moral components, such as the belief that you are fighting for what is good and right. There are ideas like the belief that soldiers are protecting something they care about, the “friends and family doctrine.” At a base level, the combat compliance theory is based on the idea that the greater the range and subjective value of the incentives, the greater the likelihood of soldiers to be willing to fight. Militaries that are not able to supply good incentives are not fighting for much in the estimation of their soldiers.

Protecting the homeland is generally a powerful incentive but not always. In the case of Italy in World War 2, soldiers were not afraid that the Allies would do terrible things if they surrendered and also they were fighting to support a government that many did not believe in (Magagna, 9/4 Lecture).

In the midst of war, leaders can often take on larger roles. This includes the ability to interpret the significance of events. A good example would be President Eisenhower (at the time a General) ordering the attack on Normandy:

“You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the eliminations of Nazi tyranny over oppressed people of Europe, and the security for ourselves in a free world.”

Leaders can also gain the trust of soldiers, giving them the sense of significance. Something that negatively impacts morale and loses the trust of soldiers is not only incompetence but also the sense that leaders do not care about the lives of their soldiers. Ordering strategically impossible attacks and putting soldiers in impossible situations destroys trust. Similarly, ignoring the plight of soldiers in extreme situations, like those who were stuck in trenches for long periods of time, also exhausts trust.

Good leaders remind soldiers of the reason they are fighting. They show mutual understanding with soldiers, reinforcing the reasons for them to fight and reminding them of their purpose in the current campaign. Good leaders are able to forge a united purpose, giving soldiers meaning in working together. The act of war is, at its basis, a team effort as mentioned in the August 26th lecture. It can be helpful for leaders to be liked but that is not as important as being trusted. Military leaders often need to ask their men to carry out orders that can put the soldier’s lives in danger. It is through soldier’s trust that this level of combat compliance can be achieved.

Good leaders communicate effectively and can rally their troops. This can help soldier’s morale, despite the situation soldiers may find themselves in. It is important to know that avoiding danger does not necessarily raise a soldier's morale or increase combat compliance. In the Civil War, the choice by Union Generals to push on even when being checked by the Confederate Army at great cost, actually raised morale (Magagna, 8/26) by providing a sense that this was helping to end the war.

Leaders can significantly enhance the combat compliance of troops by helping to increase the quantity and quality of incentives. This can be done through effectively communication, by showing mutual purpose and struggle, by providing significance and by building community, so that it is viewed as a team effort.

**Historical Examples of Good Leaders**

There are many types of great leaders. General Patton, for an example from the lectures, is someone who had the trust of his soldiers even if he also garnered their frustration and dislike. Some of the things he did to gain trust was to show an understanding of the reality on the ground for soldiers such as dealing with trench foot (Magagna, 8/26 Lecture). This trust is important for combat compliance, especially when asking soldiers to follow orders.

General Sherman and General Grant are examples from the Civil War of good leaders. Strategically, they were outdone by Confederate General Lee (Magagna, 9/4 Lecture). Yet, soldiers felt higher morale through the Union General’s strategy of pushing through and trying to end the Civil War even though there were significant casualties (Magagna, 8/28 Lecture).

The ability of leaders to build connections, making soldiers believe that their sacrifice is recognized is important. It is this shared sense of sacrifice towards a mutual goal that also adds to a sense of purpose and is important to create for combat compliance. Pre-modern wars may have included looting as an incentive but large modern wars rarely use mercenary forces and even then, legitimacy often prevents looting. Large scale modern wars, even proxy wars, often require the backing of a nation state. With this consideration, the ideas and moral components of war have taken on much more significance than material rewards. Though material rewards have motivated some modern armies along with sexual violence as a goal for invading armies. (Inal) Modern American warfare has not involved looting or pillaging nor has that been a clear objective in any military engagement in American history.

There are also situations of good leaders finding their moment. General Westmoreland showed bravery and great command skill in World War 2 and South Korea but made many unnecessary miscalculations in Vietnam. His replacement in Vietnam, General Abrams, is cited as a great general who had a lot of insight yet he was also tasked with the sobering objective of winding down the Vietnam conflict (Sorley). This was a task where a strategic victory was unlikely or impossible, though Abrams, for whom the widely known Abrams Tank is named after, has been cited for making the best of it.

General Lee of the Confederate Forces is often considered a good general, trusted by his troops and strategically brilliant. Yet, by 1864, the troops in the Confederate army were suffering low morale through a combination of deprivation and sense about the general direction of the war.

**The Limits of Leadership**

Though leadership can certainly play an important role in combat compliance, it is a secondary factor. If there are no base criteria that motivate soldiers, like protecting their homes, fighting for a moral constant, enforcing a larger ideal or working for their material betterment, they cannot be brainwashed by good leadership into having significant combat compliance. As mentioned in August 26th lecture, “How much can you convince rational human beings to do?” (Magagna, 8/26 lecture).

Northern Vietnam’s Vo Nguyen Giap’s army suffered from large drops in morale after major losses (Magagna, 8/26 Lecture). This was despite having a large volunteer army and fighting for a popular nationalist cause, that of ending the occupation by foreign invaders (Zasloff).

There are many situations where outside factors alone were critical in combat compliance by soldiers. For instance, the 442nd regiment all Japanese regiment performed incredible feats in World War 2, for the purpose of enfranchisement. During the battle of the bulge, the 969th all Black division was given the option to retreat but showed the highest levels of combat compliance, being surrounded on all sides and knowing that the Germans would not take any Black prisoners and would kill them immediately if they were captured (Magagna, 8/26 Lecture).

Many Soviet combatants were highly motivated to fight in World War 2, yet were lead by incompetent leaders (Magagna, 8/28 Lecture). These are examples of maximum compliance and are situations where soldiers decide that the combat bargain, the potential risk to themselves, is outweighed significantly from the risks to something valuable or to the potential rewards to be had.

There are situations on the opposite spectrum where cost minimization is the only concern of soldiers, as occurred to Russian troops in 1917, who were swept in the tides of the Russian Revolution at the time and not interested in protecting the current regime.

**Conclusion**

As mentioned in the August 28th lecture, leadership, along with logistics and cohesion are factors that enable combat compliance. They are not however, primary drivers of combat compliance.

Leadership is a secondary factor, relying on other criteria. Good leadership can help expand combat compliance, just as bad leadership can ruin morale. However, when soldiers consider they are fighting for something of high value, they will fight harder and have higher combat compliance. It is the incentives, a provision of value that must be meaningful to each soldier individually, that alters the personal rationale involved in combat compliance. Just as German soldiers fought harder when the Allies were approaching the German border, so too did Russian volunteers fight bitterly during World War 2.

Leadership matters, however it is correlated with combat compliance, not causational. It matters to soldiers who are being asked to put themselves into mortal danger. It matters that they feel trust in the people who are asking them to risk their lives. It matters that leaders provide a reason for soldiers to participate in war.

However, the primary causes for combat compliance are more fundamental, such as ideals that must be protected, the family and friends doctrine of protecting loved ones, and enfranchisement and material gains, for instance the GI Bill.

In order to have combat compliance, it is up to each society to provide a rationale that is convincing and important to its soldiers. Simply having good leaders is not enough to have high combat compliance.

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