An Analytical Framework for Assessing Religion as a Factor in Military Effectiveness: Islam as a Case Study

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Abstract of Thesis

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This paper provides an analytical framework for understanding the mechanisms by which religion can and does influence a state's military effectiveness in certain cases, so as to be able to recognize similar, though not identical, phenomena elsewhere and to hedge against the challenges or leverage the opportunities that accompany it, as the case may be. Specifically, this paper analyzes how Islam might affect unit cohesion and morale, mobilization of national resources, the integration of tactics and strategy, and organizational policies.

Chapter I: Introduction

Theologians, social scientists, historians, and scholars of many disciplines have extensively studied religion as a cause of conflict or war. Indeed, in an era of rising political Islam and several active religious insurgencies, that there is some link between religion and conflict appears to be more commonly accepted than any time in recent history. Even in such an environment, however, there is a dearth of scholarly literature on the role of religion once a conflict has started. This is especially true for conventional militaries in religious polities; where scholars may easily describe the effect of religion on religious insurgents, there is an obvious gap in the literature on religion in conventional militaries.

Social scientists have analyzed almost every other characteristic of a government– from regime type, culture, morale, strategic processes, organizational practices, history, economy, to level of technology, and many others -- as a factor influencing the level of a military's effectiveness, so it is curious that religion, even where accepted as a fundamental characteristic of certain governments, is neglected. There are several possible explanations for this gap. First, it is at best very difficult, and at worst, impossible, to isolate religion as an independent variable. Social scientists may shy away from those factors which are not easily assessed in isolation for fear that they cannot prove a direct causal mechanism. Defining religion and divorcing it from other possible factors is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Second, the topic of religion and conflict is politically sensitive, especially insofar as one wants to make qualitative judgments about the effect of religion on violent conflict. However, neither of these explanations renders

an analytical study on religion as a factor of military effectiveness impossible or undesirable. Culture also cannot be isolated from many other characteristics of society, but it is still viewed as an influencing factor on a state's military. Indeed, if religion cannot be isolated from culture, culture cannot be discussed without addressing religion.

If indeed military effectiveness is influenced by governmental characteristics such as a country's civil military relations[1] or by its organizational policies[2] then if religion influences these areas, then it can be accepted that religion has some influence on military effectiveness. Surely, in a state where the political unit, the citizen, is highly religious, or where the government is professedly of one religion or another, religion has a profound effect on those areas, and therefore religion should have some influence on military effectiveness.

An analytical framework is crucial to determining whether, and subsequently, how, religion can and does influence military effectiveness. This research is an attempt at creating such a framework, using Islam as a case study. Specifically, it looks at religion's effect on unit cohesion and morale, mobilization of national resources, the integration of tactics and strategy, and organizational policies. The research will illustrate the mechanisms by which religion, specifically Islam can and does influence a state's military effectiveness in certain cases, so as to be able to recognize similar, though not identical, phenomena elsewhere and to hedge against or leverage the opportunities or challenges that accompany it, as the case may be.

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[1] See Risa Brooks' *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2008.
[2] See Caitlin Talmadge's *Explaining Military Effectiveness: Threat Perceptions, Organizational Practices, and Battlefield Performances*. N.p.: Manuscript, 2012.

Chapter II: Scope and Focus of the Framework

The objective of the analysis is to demonstrate that religion as a factor warrants further study and analysis, and has been largely overlooked by the current literature. Further, it is to illustrate the mechanisms by which religion could, in certain cases, affect how well a military does on the battlefield and in war.

The analysis is inherently qualitative in nature and not intended to be quantitative; it will describe what kind of effect religion could have, rather than how much. That is to say, the goal is not to render a judgment of how much religion influences effectiveness versus other relevant factors, or whether the overall effect is positive or negative, but to identify the mechanisms by which it could influence military effectiveness.

Further, the focus of this research is on the effectiveness of conventional militaries, that is, a nation state's military. While still important, the influence of religion on battlefield effectiveness of non-state actors is beyond the scope of this research. Indeed the mechanisms by which an unconventional fighting group's battlefield effectiveness would be affected by religion would be wholly different, as their structures and fighting mechanisms are unique. However, the influence of religion on conventional militaries fighting against religious non-state actors is addressed.

This case study uses Islam to illustrate how the framework might be applied. While Islam is chosen for its unique characteristics, which can emphasize and highlight some of the mechanisms described, this general framework for analysis can be used for other religions as well – and should be. Because of each religion's specific and unique characteristics, however, it would be impossible to build a general model that can be

applied in every case. Of note, Islam here is Islam as the religion manifests itself in society and the state, and does not look at Islamic law, teachings, or religion in its pure, literal form. Rather, it looks at how militaries in societies that are predominately Muslim could be affected by the religion as practiced by the members of its society. Further it includes both states who are expressly religious, as in Bahrain or Saudi Arabia, and those who are secular, but have large Muslim populations, as in Turkey.

The scope of this study is narrow, but its findings have important implications for the study of modern militaries; if religion can influence effectiveness, steps should be taken to mitigate its negative effects and harness its potential positive effects.

Chapter III: Significance of the Framework

Such a framework for understanding how religion influences military effectiveness is not only helpful, but also has several crucial implications for the study and conduct of war.

First, if a government understands how religion degrades or enhances its own military's effectiveness, it can leverage opportunities and avoid pitfalls. The assessment of one's own capabilities and those of one's enemies and allies drives decision-making, and it is therefore crucial that the state understands what affects military capability. In "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters," author Stephen Rosen writes, "If the United States is to gauge its position in the world accurately and to develop appropriate forces and strategies, we must understand the military power that can be generated by societies with which we are not so familiar..."[3] Similarly, in Sun Tzu's classic *The Art of War*, the military theorist writes:

> He who knows the enemy and himself will never in a hundred battles be at risk; He who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes win and sometimes lose; he who knows neither the enemy nor himself will be at risk in every battle.[4]

If a military does not understand its adversary, it risks projecting it own decision-making rationale onto its enemy and risks coming to ill-conceived conclusions. For example, in

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[3] Rosen, Stephen Peter. "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters." *International Security* 19.4 (1995): 5-31.

[4] Ames, Roger T. and Sun Tzu. *Sun Tzu - The Art of Warfare: the first English translation incorporating the recently discovered Yin-ch'üeh-shan texts*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993. Print. P. 113

Edward Shils and Morris Janowtiz's work on cohesion in the Wehrmact during World War II, they studied Allied use of propaganda. They explain that where the Allies understood the motivation of German Soldiers, their propaganda was effective in causing disintegration, but where the Allies did not understand how to appeal to the German armed forces' values (i.e. what motivated them to keep fighting), they largely failed.[5] The influence of religion can cause governments, militaries, units or even individual soldiers to make decisions differently, just as a state's particular historical experience or particular culture can do the same. Understanding what influences a particular military's decision-making, how it conducts war, and what its strengths and weaknesses are, is of paramount importance – understanding the military's relationship with religion is part and parcel of this important effort.

Similarly, militaries engaged in advising missions will be better suited to help allied forces if the advisors understand the context in which the advisee fights, its strengths, limits, and weaknesses. The United States is engaged in such advising missions, several of which are for militaries in religious states.[6] The United States, if it is to be successful in its advising missions, must understand how religion affects the decision-making and effectiveness of the militaries that they advise. For example, the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) may fight differently due to religious practices or observances, such as Ramadan or five times daily prayer, or make different operational decisions (for example, not attacking a mosque) due to religious beliefs. The

[5] Shils, Edward A., and Morris Janowitz. "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12.2 (1948): 281.
[6] By religious states, I refer both to states whose governments are expressly religious as well as states whose governments may not be religious, whereas their publics are

United States must understand how religion affects the ANSF in order to advise it and assist in increasing its effectiveness.

Third, understanding the role religion plays in militaries is even more critical when militaries are fighting religious insurgencies, as they currently are around the world. In such situations, the religious legitimacy of the military can play a key role in countering the insurgency. In an insurgency, one of the keys to victory is winning over the population: if the population is extremely religious, and the insurgents are using religion to win the population over, the military must not only avoid neglecting religion, it may, on the contrary, need to embrace it to be sure not to isolate the population from its cause.

Finally, understanding how religion influences effectiveness can present several opportunities for militaries that come at a minimal cost. In an era of decreasing defense budgets and scarcer resources, minimizing costs can be the difference between failure and success. Militaries spend a lot of time and resources on measuring the effectiveness of their weapons and equipment, but measuring the effectiveness of intangible factors is just as, if not more, important. For example, a military might expend large amount of resources on training and support to further unit cohesion, when instead the military could simply change its language and current training to increase religious rhetoric to improve cohesion. Particularly in countries where soldiers come from different tribes and areas of the country, religion may be the one thing the soldiers have in common. Using rhetoric and framing that enhances these ties may be the solution to unit cohesion there. Intangible factors, even if harder (or impossible) to measure are important to understanding military effectiveness, and must be analyzed appropriately.

Chapter IV: Is Islam Unique?

Many of the mechanisms described here – that is, how religion can affect those areas that influence military effectiveness – are not unique to Islam. Unit cohesion and morale, mobilization of national resources, the integration of tactics and strategy, and organizational policies can all be affected by other religions through similar mechanisms. Though Islam is not the only religion that can influence military effectiveness, it is an illustrative case study due to several of its characteristics that highlight and emphasize some of the mechanisms described: namely, the role of religion in the modern Muslim world, and the confluence of the political, religious, and military spheres in Islam.

In Islamic law there is generally no distinction between the political, military, and religious spheres, which does not particularly lend itself easily to the modern secular nation-state (though, of course, religious scholars and politicians have found ways to reconcile the two). In Islam, neither the politician nor the soldier is exempt from Islamic law. Scholar of Islam John Esposito noted that amidst a worldwide trend toward a modern secular state, the resurgence of Islam in Muslim politics and society has in fact "signaled a retreat from the secular path."[7] While of course it is not the case that every Muslim society is non-secular, or vice versa, Esposito notes that even those Muslim countries that are considered more secular, are heavily influenced by Islamic law.[8] With the increasing role of Islam in politics in some states, Islam arguably has more influence

[7] Esposito, John L. "Rethinking Islam and Secularism." *ARDA Guiding Paper Series*. State College, PA: The Association of Religion Data Archives at The Pennsylvania State University, 2010. http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp.
[8] Esposito, John L. "Rethinking Islam and Secularism."

over many states than does Christianity or any other major religion at this time, and so has a more direct connection to military effectiveness than another religion might.

Further, the military and religious spheres of Muslim societies are often tightly intertwined, as Jihad, commonly defined as "struggle" or "resistance," is one of the five pillars of Islam.[9] While not all Muslims believe Jihad means military struggle or conflict, it is often interpreted, at the very least, as the defense of the Umma, or Muslim community, from foreign invaders. Muslim rulers have invoked jihad as justification for war for hundreds of years, regardless of whether religious leaders have supported its legitimacy from a religious standpoint. The Ottoman Sultan's declaration that fighting in World War I was a matter of Jihad to garner support from the Muslim population for the war is just one of many examples of how Islam was used in justifying war throughout history.[10] The Quran covers not only when war is justifiable, but also addresses how it is to be conducted. The Quran even addresses how Muslim fighters can undertake international peace agreements:

> If two, of the believers take up arms against one another, make peace between them. If either of them commits aggression against the other, fight against the aggressors until they submit to God's judgment. When they submit make peace between them in equity and justice. God loves those who act in justice.[11]

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[9] The others are faith, prayer, fasting, and charity.
[10] Aboul-Enein , Youssef H. and Zuhur, Sherifa, "Islamic Rulings on Warfare," Strategic Studies Institute. October 2004. http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB588.pdf
[11] From the Quran, verse 49:9

Therefore it is not surprising that military and religious matters are often tightly linked in Islam.

Islam is not a unique case study because the religion is inherently more violent or prone to conflict. No such judgment is made here, and in fact, such sensitive issues might be why scholars have shied away from analyzing religion as a factor in military effectiveness. It does not follow that if religion enhances or degrades military effectiveness that it is more or less prone to conflict. In fact, most of these concepts apply to other religions as well. Christianity has been invoked to justify war for thousands of years as well. The fact that many of these concepts apply to several religions and Islam is perhaps not that unique, not only does not weaken the argument, it strengthens it: because Islam is not the only religion to affect militaries, religion in general must be analyzed as a factor.

Chapter V: The Gap in Existing Literature

Scholars of military power and effectiveness have tried to find a single explanatory factor for the full range of military effectiveness. By building models off of a single factor, such as GDP, regime type, or technology, scholars have tried to predict which armed forces would be more powerful than others.[12] In some of these cases, the scholars are guilty of cherry picking data to support their case; in most cases, the theories have failed to explain variances in effectiveness or victory when applied across the board.

Political scientists who study military effectiveness also tend to build models and do systematic analysis for those factors that they can easily quantify—namely, material factors such as weaponry, defense budgets, GDP etc. However non-material factors, such as civil-military relations, unit cohesion, training, and force employment, among other factors, are just as important and should not be neglected just because they are harder to quantify, isolate, and evaluate. Dr. Stephen Biddle's work on military power takes a step in that direction. He applies systematic analysis and rigor to the assessment of force employment as the explanatory factor in military effectiveness.[13] However, his work does not explain why some states excel at implementing the modern system while others do not, leaving room for other explanatory factors of military effectiveness. One of those factors may be the role of religion in the nation state.

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[12] See Henderson, Errol A., and Reşat Bayer. "Wallets, Ballots, or Bullets: Does Wealth, Democracy, or Military Capabilities Determine War Outcomes?"*International Studies Quarterly* 57.2 (2013): 303-17

[13] Biddle, Stephen D. *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004. Print.

A combination of the systematic analysis and rigor applied to tangible material factors, as well as the flexibility to allow for multiple explanatory factors is critical to a comprehensive understanding of military effectiveness. Religion is not *the* explanatory factor on which the analysis of effectiveness should be based; rather, systematic analysis of an intangible element, religion, should be analyzed as one of many explanatory factors. This analysis can help fill the gap in existing literature and takes steps towards a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what influences military power and effectiveness.

Chapter VI: Defining Elements of the Framework

Religion. Religion is a set of beliefs usually surrounding a higher power, and a set of common values, practices, and a sense of community – or any combination of those elements therein.

Military Effectiveness. Alan Millet and Williamson Murray, in their research on the topic, define military effectiveness as "the process by which armed forces convert resources into fighting power. A fully effective military is one that derives maximum combat power from the resources physically and politically available." [14] Political scientist Ken Pollack is more specific, describing military effectiveness as the "ability of soldiers and officers to perform on the battlefield, to accomplish military missions, and to execute the strategies devised by their political-military leaders"[15] What is crucial here, is to distinguish military effectiveness from military success or victory. A state's military can be very effective, but still lose a war due to other factors (see Chapter 7, Figure 1). Military effectiveness is one of several factors that will determine an outcome in a war.

Types of Effectiveness: Tactical, Operational, and Strategic. When Ken Pollack defines effectiveness, he refers to three capabilities of a military: performing on the battlefield, accomplishing missions, and executing strategies. Without explicitly saying so, he is eluding to three types of effectiveness – namely, tactical effectiveness, operational

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[14] Millet, Alan R., and Williamson Murray. *Military Effectiveness. Vol. 1*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988. Print. p. 2

[15] Pollack, Kenneth M. *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska, 2002. Print.

effectiveness, and strategic effectiveness. The three types of effectiveness combine to make a military effective or ineffective over all. It is important to look at all three components in isolation, however, as a military can, for example, be very tactically effective, and be taken for a highly effective military, when in fact its operational and strategic ineffectiveness renders it completely ineffective. For example, the German military in World War II was highly tactically effective, but strategically ineffective and unable to choose a strategy which it could successfully carry out with the resources at its disposal. If a scholar was just to look at the German military's tactics on the battlefield, he or she could be forgiven for assuming that the German military was highly effective. The framework is thus divided to look at effectiveness at the three levels.

Chapter VII: Mapping the Mechanisms

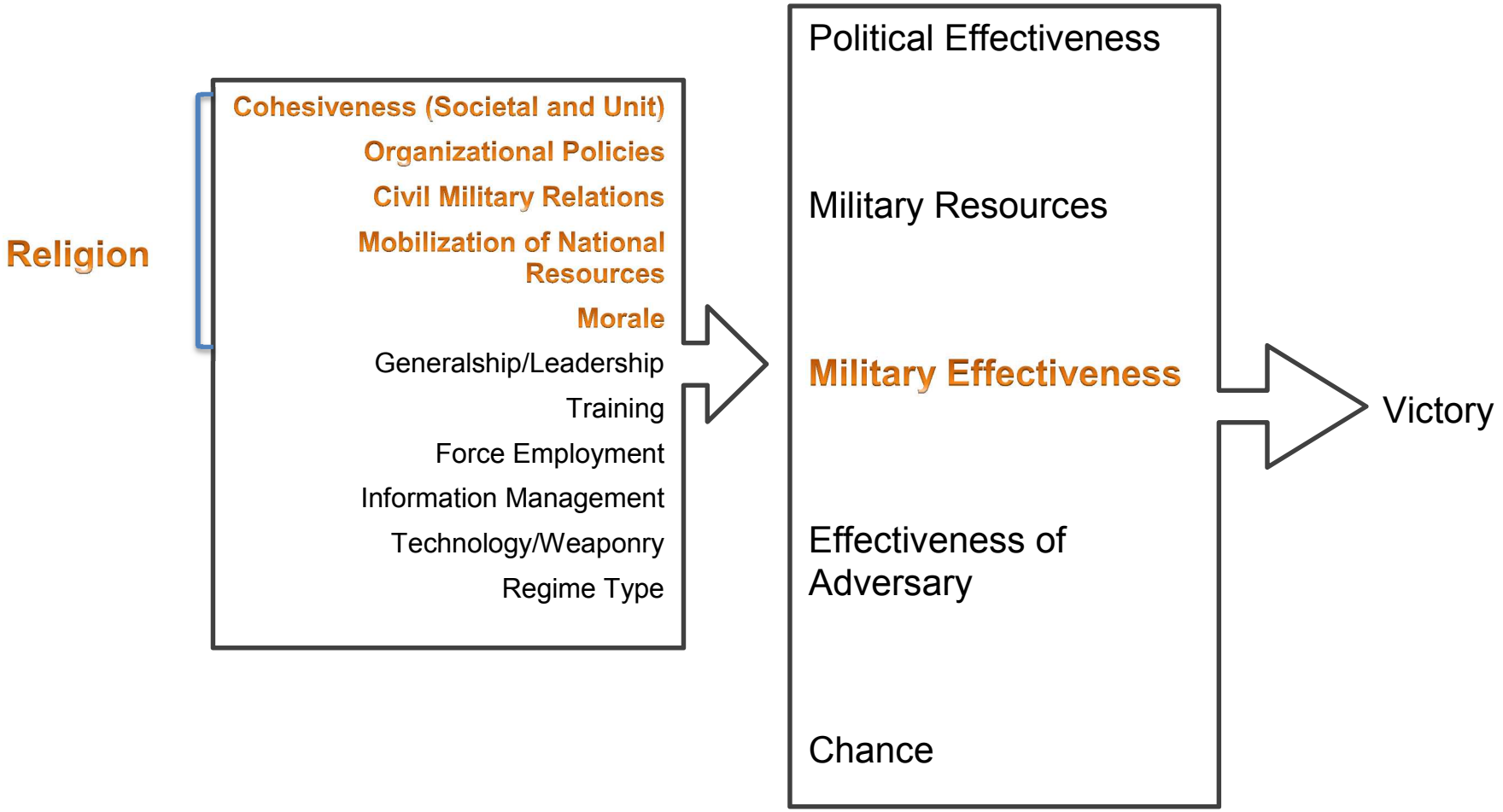

Figure 1. Map of the relationship between religion, military effectiveness, and battlefield victory.

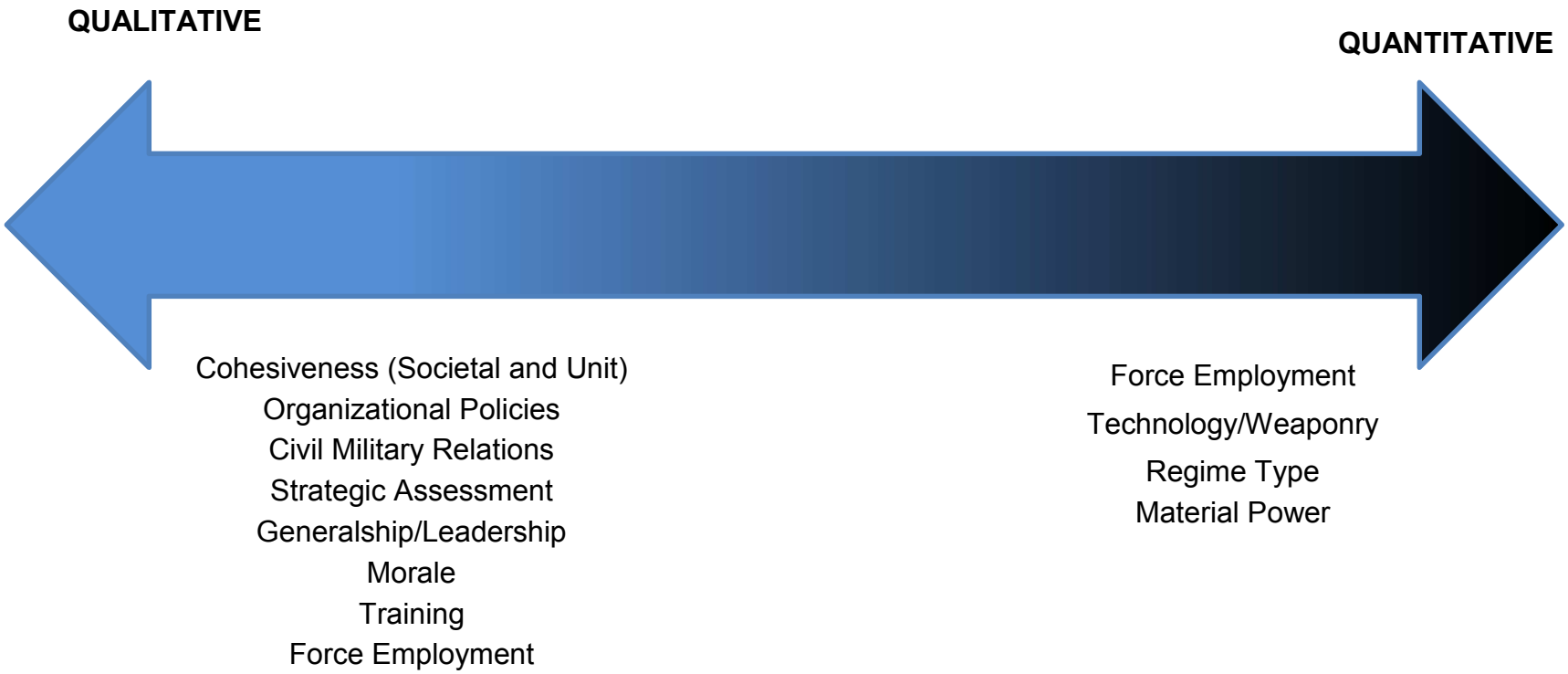

Figure 2. Some social scientists tend toward quantitative factors when assessing factors of military effectiveness, while others tend toward qualitative factors when attempting to explain military effectiveness or ineffectiveness

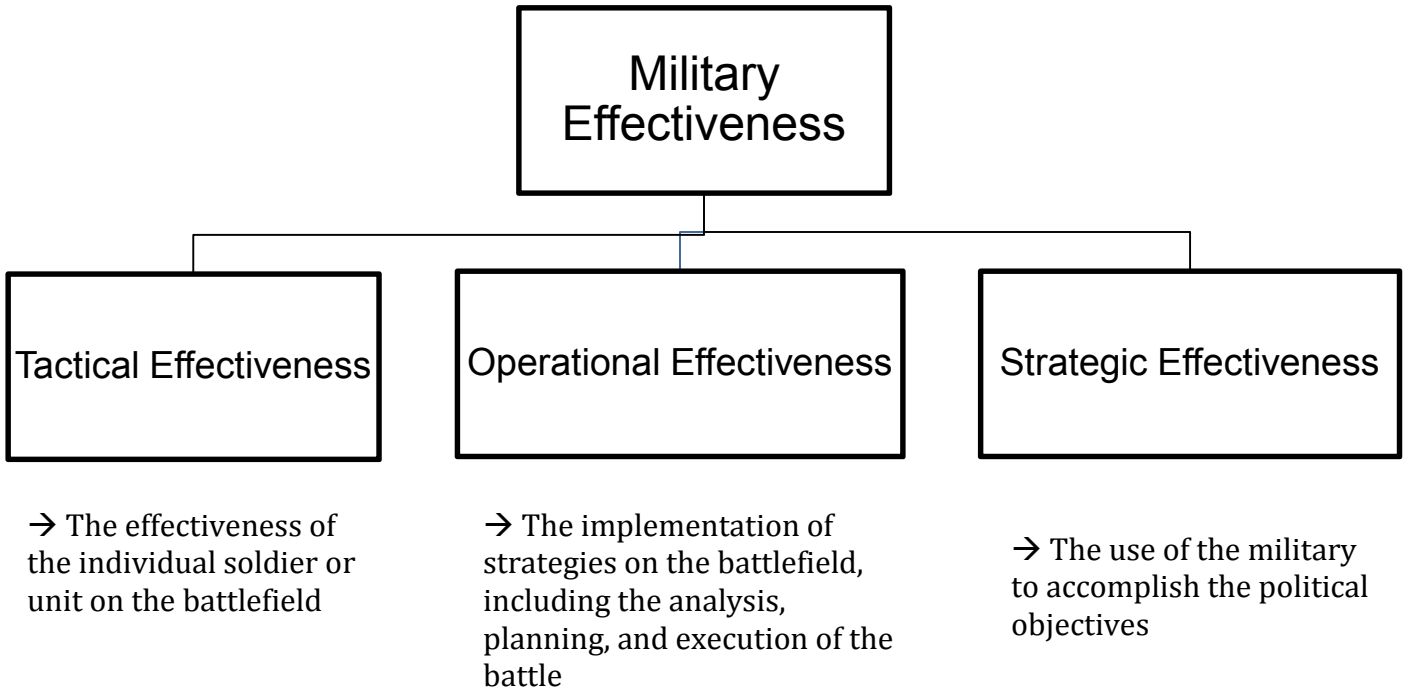

Figure 3. Military effectiveness must be analyzed at three levels: the tactical, operational, and strategic. A military's ability to function at each of these levels is critical to overall effectiveness. Social scientists tend to look at only one or two of these at a time.

Chapter VIII: The Effect of Religion on Unit Cohesion

Prussian General and military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz explains that where strategy is the use of engagements for the object of war, tactics is "the use of armed forces in the engagement."[16] Tactics are the skills employed by soldiers on the battlefield. Tactical effectiveness refers to the ability of the individual soldier or his unit to accomplish its mission.

One primary factor affecting tactical effectiveness is the cohesiveness of the unit. In "Morale and Cohesion in Military Psychiatry," U.S. Army Colonel and Medical Service Corps officer Dr. Frederick Manning explains:

> One constant in the ever-changing nature of warfare over the centuries has been the recognition that success on the battlefield involves more than the appropriate disposition of men and weapons. Whether this unknown factor X be called soul, spirit, heart, or morale, it refers to the enthusiasm and persistence with which soldiers carry out the prescribed activities of their unit. Since World War II we have known that it is crucial not only to success, but also to survival itself. [17]

Millet and Murray underscore the importance of unit cohesion in their work:

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[16] Clausewitz, Carl Von, Michael Howard, and Peter Paret. *On War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976. Print, p. 128

[17] Manning, Frederick J, *Military Psychiatry: Preparing in Peace for War.* National Academy of Sciences. https://ke.army.mil/bordeninstitute/published_volumes/military_psychiatry/MPch1.pdf

> There have been several high-quality studies as well as much historical anecdotal evidence pointing to the value of close relationships between soldiers within combat units… Military organizations that neglect this prerequisite of combat power pay a price in terms of tactical effectiveness.

Germany in World War II is an illustrative example of how unit cohesion served to enhance tactical effectiveness. In "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," authors Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz explain unit cohesion and the importance of it on the German armed forces in World War II:[18]

> In the army, when isolated from civilian primary groups, the individual soldier comes to depend more and more on his military primary group… For the German soldier in particular, the demands of his group, reinforced by officially prescribed rules, had the effect of an external authority. It held his aggressiveness in check; it provided discipline, protection, and freedom from autonomous decision[19]

The authors explain that primary group cohesion was more powerful in keeping the soldiers fighting together than the national values that the German army claimed to espouse, that of the National Socialist system.[20] The authors assert: "Where conditions were such as to allow primary group life to function smoothly, and where the primary

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[18] Though Shils and Janowitz's work is notable for its emphasis on the importance of unit cohesion, their specific study may have several fundamental flaws (such a biased sample) that undermine its conclusions

[19] Shils, Edward A., and Morris Janowitz. "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12.2 (1948): 285.

[20] Shils, Edward A., and Morris Janowitz. "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II." p. 285

group developed a high degree of cohesion, morale was high and resistance effective or at least very determined"[21] Unit cohesion has the ability to raise morale, keep soldiers disciplined, and keep them from deserting their units, which would have an obvious effect on any armed forces' ability to perform successfully on the battlefield, and therefore has a heavy influence on tactical effectiveness.

Religion can both positively and negatively affect unit cohesion; in some states, religion has the potential to bring units together and enhance the discipline of soldiers. It can both raise morale and serve to foster loyalty between soldiers. In other states, differences in religion can degrade unit or societal cohesion, causing grave tactical ineffectiveness.

Time and again Muslim states (and other religious states, as well) have used religious symbols, ideas, and even decrees as a call to action; those symbols and ideas serve to boost morale among soldiers and commit them to the cause of fighting for the nation. The Iranian government used Islamic symbols to commit soldiers to the Shiite fight against the Sunni infidels in the Iran-Iraq war.[22] In one poster used by the Iranian government during the war, Shia religious leader Imam Husain is depicted fighting one of the early battles for Islam, the battle of Karbala. The poster's inscription reads: "Every Day is Ashura and Every Soil is Karbala."[23] "Ashura" refers to Shia Muslims commemoration of Husain's martyrdom with self-flagellation and mourning. By comparing the Iran-Iraq war to the battle of Karbala, the Iranian government was

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[21] Shils, Edward A., and Morris Janowitz. "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II." p. 314

[22] Arabic word for apostate

[23] "The Graphics of Revolution and War: Iranian Poster Arts," The University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/webexhibits/iranianposters/newkarbala.html

attempting to liken participation in the war to a religious duty with the greater purpose of defending the Umma, or Muslim community. There are countless posters recording the use of religious symbols by the Iranian regime to garner support and raise the morale of its troops in battle. This was likely a somewhat effective method, at least in the beginning, as Iran was able to recruit thousands of volunteers into its military and its revolutionary corps, the IRGC, and maintain their loyalty for some time.[24] Iran is not the only Muslim country to use Islamic symbols to boost morale and enhance cohesion among its troops. Turkey, Pakistan, Yemen, and others have attempted to increase their respective military's cohesion by invoking religious symbols and ideas; however not all of them have been successful.

Religion can also have an adverse effect on unit cohesion. Where soldiers are from different religions and the state highlights these differences by using religious symbols or ideas, or where the officer corps and enlisted rank and file are of different religions or denominations, this can serve to degrade unit cohesion and therefore tactical effectiveness. Bahrain's military may experience degraded unit cohesion where the officer corps is mostly Sunni Muslim, but where there are many Shia enlisted soldiers. Where soldiers may distrust their leaders, and leaders their soldiers for religious reasons or otherwise, tactical effectiveness can be diminished.

[24] Samuel, Annie Tracy. "Attacking Iran: Lessons from the Iran-Iraq War," Policy Brief, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, December 2011.
http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/21698/attacking_iran.html

Chapter IX: The Influence of Religion on Integration of Tactics and Strategy in Religious Insurgencies

Religion can influence effectiveness if the tactics and strategy of a military fighting a counterinsurgency are not aligned. A military fighting a religious insurgency will need to coordinate with religious leaders and comply with religious norms and values of the society. If the military does not do this, it risks executing tactics that degrade the military's effectiveness at the strategic level.

An insurgency is a conflict between a non-ruling group and the state for control over politics, using violence and coercion, with the goal of eventually becoming the ruling group or succeeding from the state and becoming autonomous. In an insurgency, legitimacy is central to the fight. Either side is only as successful as the population believes it to be the legitimate ruling power. In a religious insurgency, where the goal of the insurgents is to establish a different type of, or wholly new, regime, the insurgents try to win the population over by appealing to their religious faith and belief system; the insurgents may claim that the current ruling establishments are apostates or heretics. In order to counter this, the government may need to establish is religious bona fides, and demonstrate to the population that it is also a religiously legitimate government. Further, it will need to ensure that its tactics on the battlefield are not perceived as heretical. A similar mechanism is true for a military occupying a religious state. If the occupying

military is seen by the population as illegitimate, for religious reasons or otherwise, it will have a much more difficult time achieving its strategic objectives.[25]

This concept became crucially important for the U.S. military fighting the insurgency in Afghanistan. Journalist Kevin Seiff of the *Washington Post* wrote in September 2011 that Afghan insurgents were declaring the Afghan National Army "godless, fake Muslims." Seiff goes on to write that Islam had become central to the counterinsurgency and raising the religious credentials of the Afghan National Army became crucially important.[26] So, for example, if insurgents were launching attacks from a mosque, it might ordinarily seem tactically prudent to destroy that mosque. However, doing so may cause the population to perceive the military that launched the operation as "un-Islamic." Here, it is necessary to ensure that what seems tactically effective is not implemented for reasons of strategic effectiveness. This can be very difficult for militaries, but poor coordination between the two at the operational level can severely degrade military effectiveness overall.

Additionally, religious insurgencies may require new operational approaches that otherwise might otherwise not be necessary, and those operations may need to happen in coordination with religious leaders, further complicating the security landscape. Seiff explains that the Afghan National Army constructed a large mosque in one town and large billboards were constructed across the country with religious messaging, to

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[25] Unless of course their strategic objectives are not to further advance the State in which they are occupying, but rather to cause chaos, disrupt, or otherwise cause damage to the occupied society. For this research, we refer to more likely objectives of occupying militaries – to establish law and order, or bring territory under certain control.

[26] Sieff, Kevin. "Afghan Army Fights to Prove Its Religious Credentials." *Washington Post*. N.p., 06 Sept. 2011. Web. <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-09-06/world/35272914_1_afghan-army-afghan-soldier-afghan-commanders>.

demonstrate the commitment of the Afghan National Security Forces to Islam.[27] The operational plans not only necessitated modification in light of the religious tendencies of the population, in fact many operations were based on the religious factor. Information operations became central and paramount to the fight. The Afghan National Security Forces' operational effectiveness was, to some extent, a reflection of how well it is able to raise and maintain its religious credentials; and this is true of many conventional armies fighting religious insurgencies among a religious population.

Religion can severely affect a military's effectiveness when it is fighting a religious insurgency: if the military does not coordinate with religious leaders, or does not adhere to religious norms and values, the strategic effectiveness of the military can be severely diminished. However, to the extent the military is able to adhere to religious values and customs and ensure that tactical decision-making does not interfere with strategic objectives, religion can enhance a military's effectiveness when countering a religious insurgency.

[27] Sieff, Kevin. "Afghan Army Fights to Prove Its Religious Credentials."

Chapter X: Influence of Religion on Mobilization of National Resources and a Bias Towards Attrition Strategies

One of Millet and Murray's major insights from their comprehensive study of military effectiveness was the "extraordinary difficulty that political leaders and their generals and admirals have at assessing strategic issues." But they found that the process that might be the most difficult might also be the most important. They write, "Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected (admittedly at a cost). But political and strategic mistakes live forever."[28] Clausewitz describes strategy in detail:

> Strategy is the employment of the battle to gain the end of the War; it must therefore give an aim to the whole military action, which must be in accordance with the object of the War; in other words, Strategy forms the plan of the War, and to this end it links together the series of acts which are to lead to the final decision, that, is to say, it makes the plans for the separate campaigns and regulates the combats to be fought in each.

Strategic effectiveness, then, is how well the military is employed to accomplish the political objectives. Religion can affect the military's ability to accomplish its political objectives in two main ways. First, it affects the states ability to mobilize one national resource, namely, manpower, for the cause. Relatedly, it also can cause a bias towards choosing certain strategies that may be suboptimal. Specifically, the relative ease of mobilizing a state's population can bias it towards strategies of attrition, when in fact

[28] Millet, Alan R., and Williamson Murray. *Military Effectiveness. Vol. 1*. pp. xvii-xviii

there are other strategies that the state can implement, which would accomplish the political goals more efficiently or effectively.

First, a religious glorification of martyrdom can improve the state's ability to mobilize the population, and further, as mentioned before, the use of religious symbols and rhetoric can provide the motivation needed for young soldiers to enter the fight. In this way, religion can be an asset to military effectiveness. As John Mearsheimer points out in his research on great power politics, a state's military power is not equal to the size of its wealth and population. Rather, its military power is derived from how well it leverages these assets and turns them into fighting power.[29] Access to manpower is a necessary prerequisite for effective operations; without willing and able soldiers, the state would not be able to execute its military mission. Aside from population sizes, states also vary in their ability to motivate soldiers and therefore leverage this national resource. National resources (in this case, population) are only helpful insofar as the state is able to leverage and use that resource to its advantage; greater or lesser access to the population can affect operational decision-making. One tool states use to increase this access is nationalist ideology; another one is religion. Religion can be helpful in mobilizing national power, insofar as the leaders are able to use religious rhetoric and symbols to convince the population that the war is a religious duty or calling.

Because one of Islam's five pillars, Jihad, is often translated as a holy fight, leaders find Islam particularly useful in motivating their soldiers to fight. Political leaders who need to leverage their populations in wartime may frame the conflict in religious terms, glorify Muslim historical figures that have been martyred, and speak of the war as

[29] Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton, 2001. Print, p. 55

a holy duty. For example, an oft quoted phrase from the Quran, Sura 3:169, states: "And do not think those who have been killed in the way of Allah are dead; they are living with their lord, well-provided for." You see a glorification of death and martyrdom – not necessarily by Islam itself (that is debated), but by the leaders who use Islam to further their own political goals.

No time in history has the use of religion to justify going to war and even martyring oneself in the war been so prevalent as in the Iran-Iraq war. One historian, explaining what motivated the Iranian soldiers, wrote,

> For devout Muslims, to die while doing battle in the cause of Islam is martyrdom, which assures immediate entry into heaven. This belief sustained the Revolutionary Guards and other equally devout fighters on the front with Iraq and gave them the courage necessary to withstand repeated assaults and nearly incessant shelling. For the less devout, though, Islamic fervor could not provide the same spiritual sustenance. The desire to defend the Iranian homeland became the primary factor that enabled them to put up a tenacious defense against the Iraqi invaders.[30]

Here we see that either nationalism or religion motivated the soldiers to stay put in some of the most difficult of circumstances. This access to the population, though, can affect decision-making. Because the soldiers may have been more willing to martyr themselves for the greater good, the Iranian military leadership may have been biased towards a certain strategy: human waves. It is possible that the Iranian regime neglected to perform sound analysis or an assessment of the situation to chose the best strategy, but

[30] Hickman, William F. "How the Iranian Military Expelled the Iraqis," *The Brookings Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3. Spring, 1983, p. 21

instead took the approach to which they were biased because of the ease and the willingness of the young soldiers to go to war and die in battle. This could have been exacerbated by the relative access the leaders had to manpower versus other resources, such as technology and weaponry.

The Iranian regime was unashamed of its approach and unabashedly touted it as a war against infidels. A historian of the Iran-Iraq war writes, "the political deadlock is compounded by a military stalemate, now a war of attrition… Here again Iran has an important advantage: while Tehran assumes full responsibility for the war against the "infidel" and the sacrifices this demands, Baghdad has sought to disguise the cost of the war…"[31] Here, religious fervor and the way it was used by the Iranian regime may have degraded effectiveness by causing the military establishment to favor one approach. Even though Muslim militaries may tend towards strategies of attrition, it does not follow that they are good at them. In fact, it could be that the strategy was not well suited to accomplish the political objectives.

Here, religion can influence military effectiveness both negatively and positively. Religion can enhance military effectiveness by making it easier for political leaders to mobilize its national resources, namely manpower, but it can also degrade it by causing leaders to tend towards approaches, such as attrition strategies, that might seem easier, but are suboptimal. Both can have a real effect on a military's effectiveness and must be analyzed.

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[31] James, Diane and Salameh, Ghassan. "Checkmate in the Gulf War," *MERIP Reports*, No. 125/126, The Strange War in the Gulf, Jul. - Sep., 1984. pp. 15-21

Chapter XI: Influence of Religion on Organizational Policies

Political Scientist Caitlin Talmadge, in her work on battlefield effectiveness, notes that traditional theories of military effectiveness do not explain the differences in effectiveness between Iran and Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, and within each country over time, throughout the war. Instead, she posits that internal threat perception and organizational policies explain the discrepancies in effectiveness. Talmadge notes "as Saddam rose to power in the 1970s, he had focused almost solely on political loyalty as the key criterion for officer selection and advancement." This, she goes on to explain, diminished the amount of experience, training, and overall professionalism of Saddam's military, which in turn critically degraded the Iraqi military's effectiveness.[32]

Perceptions of religious loyalty, or lack thereof, can cause leaders to skew promotion patterns and therefore degrade effectiveness. For example, in Bahrain, the majority of the population is Shia Muslim, but the security forces are almost all Sunni Muslims (as is the royal family), especially in the top ranks. Where Shia do serve in the Bahraini defense forces, they are mostly relegated to administrative non-combat positions.[33] Similarly, in Turkey, the majority of the population is Muslim, but the military is aggressively secular. A soldier in Turkey might be denied promotion if the higher ranks believe the soldier to be too religious and therefore a threat to the secularism

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[32] Talmadge, Caitlin. *Explaining Military Effectiveness: Threat Perceptions, Organizational Practices, and Battlefield Performances*. N.p.: Manuscript, 2012. Print,
[33] Katzman, Kenneth. *Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*. Rep. no. 7-5700. N.p.: Congressional Research Service. Print. p. 2

of the military.[34] Both of these phenomena result in biased promotion practices that prevent the professionalization of the military. It rewards loyalty over training, experience, and merit, and therefore degrades the military's overall effectiveness.

[34] Jenkins, Gareth. "Turkish Military Expels Officers for Alleged Islamic Activity." *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. The Jamestown Foundation, 6 Aug. 2007. Web.

Chapter XII: A Critique

One of the potential critiques of this study is that religion as an independent variable is very hard to isolate. For example, poor civil-military relations could be due to the confluence of the political, religious, and military spheres of Islam, or it could also be due to cultural tradition and perhaps regime type. However, just because you cannot easily isolate them from each other does not mean that they shouldn't be studied as factors; in fact, important lessons can be gleaned from studying the mechanisms, even if you cannot determine for certain whether or not regime type, culture, or other characteristics also play a role. Religion is part and parcel of culture, and both can have effects on regime type. To help mitigate this flaw, several countries of different regime types and cultures were used as case studies.

A second critique could be that the framework addresses both the direct and indirect influence of religion without distinguishing between the two. In some cases the influence of religion is direct – for example, the religion of the military can affect the military's ability to conduct information operations and to "win hearts and minds" when fighting against a religious insurgency in a religious society. In other cases, the influence of religion on effectiveness is indirect – for example, religion could affect a state's ability to carry out strategic assessment, which in turn has an effect on military effectiveness. Here, these two methods are intertwined and treated as equally important, as both serve to illustrate that religion does indeed affect militaries; but that is not to say that both affect to the same degree.

Another potential critique relates to the case study of Islam. Of course, the practice of Islam varies from place to place and community to community. There are deep divisions in the religion, and it is far from a monolithic religion. It is therefore a difficult case study, since the practice of Islam can vary so widely. For example, the use of Islamic rhetoric to mobilize a population might be more heavily relied upon in Shia societies, and not as much of an issue in Sunni societies. This study is only meant to broadly illustrate the mechanisms, rather than detail specifically how Islamic law, variations in practice at the local level, or other more detailed discrepancies effect a particular military.

Further, the framework doesn't distinguish between Islam itself and Islam as a political tool. That is to say, it doesn't distinguish between what is an inherent characteristic of the religion and what leaders claim it to be for their own political purposes. One political scientist observed that in modern time "political action under the banner of Islam has become a widespread phenomenon shared by many actors in Muslim societies" and expanded on this by quoting a Muslim political activist: "No political party can ignore the Islamic issue and not use it in the political struggle without suffering a tremendous loss by being isolated from the broad masses."[35] Islam, perhaps more than other religion in current times, is used as a political tool in Muslim societies to garner support and influence society. The leaders themselves may not even be very religious, but as the political scientist aptly points out, political leaders find it difficult to neglect the Islamic issue. This framework does not distinguish between what is inherent to the

[35] Karawan, Ibrahim A. "Political Islam," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* Vol. 524. Nov 1992, p. 104

religion and how it is used, as both are important to the study and influence military effectiveness.

Finally, a critic of this research could claim that religion itself cannot explain the variance in military effectiveness of different states. However, this work does not claim that religion is the main determinant in military effectiveness. While most studies of military effectiveness attempt to find the main, or primary, explanatory factor of military effectiveness, this research aims only to explain a supplementary influencing element that needs to be considered and studied further. Further, this analysis could supplement other works on military effectiveness to give more explanatory power to other factors. For example, religion could explain why some states are better at implementing the modern system than others, which itself can explain military effectiveness.[36]

[36] See Biddle, Stephen D, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle.*

Chapter XIII: Conclusion

Religion affects military effectiveness in several key ways: it can enhance or degrade unit cohesion; it can affect the coordination of tactics and strategy and necessitate increased consistency; religion can increase a leader's ability to mobilize its population; it can cause leaders to tend toward certain strategies; and finally, it can influence organizational policies such a promotional patterns, which affect military effectiveness.

Because religion can both degrade and enhance military effectiveness, it is unclear whether the overall effect is negative or positive. This research did not attempt quantify that effect and leaves the issue to be further analyzed and researched. However, because religion can have a critical effect on tactical, operational, and strategic effectiveness by affecting those factors that have been shown to influence military effectiveness, it is important that the factor is considered when studying a state's military effectiveness. The research provides an analytical framework for analyzing the mechanisms by which a military could be influenced by the religion of its soldiers, leaders, population, adversary, or any combination thereof.

By considering religion a factor in military effectiveness, a state can better assess the decision-making of its religious allies or adversaries, and begin to understand how it might differ from a secular military's decision-making. Additionally, it will allow the state take advantage of the opportunities where they present themselves. For example, if a religious state is suffering from poor unit cohesion, it might use religious symbols and rhetoric to enhance the cohesion of its soldiers and units.

States must not only leverage the opportunities that religion presents it, but must also embrace it where it is crucial. When fighting a religious insurgency, for example, it is crucial that the military aligns its tactics with its strategy, to ensure that tactics are not perceived as heretical, and therefore detrimental to the overall strategy.

Finally, states must mitigate the negative consequences of religion's effect on military effectiveness. If religion skews promotion patterns or has a negative effect on civil-military relations, the state must implement corrective institutions and initiatives.

Most importantly, this issue necessitates further study. Religion is not the primary factor of military effectiveness, but it does have some effect, and quantifying that effect and establishing whether the overall effect is positive or negative will require further analysis and research. This research provides the framework for beginning to look at the issue of religion as a factor in military effectiveness and illustrates that the topic warrants further study and analysis.

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