

The Un (Objective) Civilian Control Model

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Abstract

There is a constant debate around whether or not the military should be allowed to rule a country with complete autonomy or not. Samuel Huntington came up with the concept of the objective civilian control as per which the civilian aided the military in order to professionalize them to the maximum extent possible. However, at the same time, the military was given complete autonomy to take whatever actions they deemed best. In contrast, there was the subjective civilian control wherein the military was a tool of the civilian and did exactly as they were asked to do. This paper discusses Pakistan's example of governance to explain why Samuel Huntington's argument that the model of objective civilian control is the best is not very convincing. It also highlights why this model of civilian control can never exist in reality due to the many inherent flaws of the model. This can be supported by history as well-the objective civilian control model has never completely existed in any country. This paper discusses the example of Pakistan as it is one of the few countries where the governance portrayed certain characteristics of this model.

Keywords: Civil; Social; Humanity

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A wide area of academic research centers around analyzing and understanding the different relationships between political leaderships and militaries of countries. The paradox inherent in civil-military relations is precisely what makes it important-the nation should not only be able to provide its citizens protection by the military but also from the military. On one hand, controlling the military by imposing severe civilian control, weakens the military and increases the possibility of external threats. On the other, strengthening the military to fight against external threats can diminish civilian control, reducing internal security and stability. It is essential to construct civil-military relations in a way that simultaneously ensure national security and military control. Samuel Huntington, in his work, *The Soldier and the State*, provides a solution to this dilemma by constructing, what he calls, 'objective civilian control'-a "military which maximizes professionalism by isolating soldiers from politics"¹. This paper begins by breaking down Huntington's core argument which emphasizes his claim that 'objective civilian control' is the preferred form of civilian control. It then goes on to bring out the shortcomings of his argument vis-à-vis other existing literature to argue that the model of 'objective civilian control' is not very convincing. This is because first, a clear division of powers and responsibilities between the civilian and the military is difficult, and, arguably, impossible. Second, contrary to Huntington's case, 'objective civilian control' is more likely to reduce, rather than improve military effectiveness. Third, this model could be counter-productive as it may reduce civilian control and increase military dominance, thereby destroying the purpose of civilian control. Further, the case of Pakistan demonstrates how the very characteristics

that define 'objective civilian control' result in damaging outcomes such as a dangerous civil-military merger and reduced national security and civilian control [1-5].

Literature Review

Huntington argues that military power can be reduced either through subjective or objective civilian control². Under 'subjective civilian control', the military is denied an independent sphere and is given a role in setting national priorities since it shares the political ideologies of the present leadership. Huntington claims that ensuring ideological consistency of the kind that this model requires is difficult, thereby questioning its plausibility³. This is primarily because either the soldiers or their political ideologies will have to be transformed with every consequent change of government. Therefore, Huntington constructs a new model called 'objective civilian control' wherein professionalizing the military and denying it any and all forms of meddling with politics is essential. It is about keeping the civilian and the military completely different, thereby allowing the military to function freely. Huntington argues that this is precisely why 'objective civilian control' is preferable⁴. He claims this on the grounds that unlike 'subjective civilian control', this would ensure maximum efficiency as neither will the identity of the military weaken, nor will its responsibilities get diluted as a result of its interests expanding into non-military spheres. Military efficiency will be enhanced as it will be able to devote undivided attention to its tasks and have complete control over its actions. This, according to him, would ensure effective civilian control as well as a strong military, capable of ensuring national security. However, can the military ever completely and absolutely stay out of political matters?

¹ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, New York: The Free Press, 2002, See pp. 4-5.

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military*

³ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, See pp. 83.

⁴ Ibid.

Arguably, while Huntington's affirmation of the existence of a correlation between civil-military relations and the effectiveness of the military is noteworthy, his model of a sharp divide between the two is problematic. One must credit the fact that his position stating that excessive civilianization of the military is likely to weaken national security resonates to a certain extent. However, the essential flaw in Huntington's model of 'objective civilian control' is that it divorces the responsibilities for national security policy and strategy. In my judgment, division in this sense is not worthwhile. This paper aims to prove that, given the realities within which statesmen and soldiers operate, the 'objective civilian control' model is insubstantial because of the extent of civil-military division it demands⁵. It will do so by presenting Clausewitz's and Cohen's arguments elucidating that civil and military must not only interact to enhance efficiency but that more importantly, some degree of interaction between them is inevitable [6-8].

The nature of war illustrates the difficulty in separating the political and the military into two distinct, isolated spheres. Carl von Clausewitz highlights this by stating that war is not simply an act of policy; it is the "continuation of policy by other means"⁶. This illustrates that there cannot be any military action that does not have a political motive behind it and/or a resultant political consequence⁷. Taking this into account, it becomes important to acknowledge that strategy cannot simply be the autonomous implementation of policy by the military. Strategy-making is about relating political objectives and military means. Clausewitz claims that the construction of any major proposal requires thorough knowledge of political factors by the military as purely military decisions, in vacuum of political objectives, are likely to have catastrophic results⁸. In turn, "a certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy"⁹. This is because policies must be constructed by accounting for the consequences that war may have in order to ensure that its effects are in consonance with the broader political motive. According to Clausewitz, the very form of war, necessitates interaction between the civilian and the military as the purposes of the policy and the strategy that are thereby constructed must be in congruence with one another. Therefore, this undermines the possibility of the existence of independent civil and military structures [9,10].

Clausewitz claims that "the concept of war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous"¹⁰. This emphasizes that, according to him, there is no definite line dividing civil-military responsibilities and both must work in tandem to achieve the larger common goal. This is contradictory to Huntington's solution to the civil-military relations paradox which claims that the best form of ensuring civilian control and national security is to construct two distinct classes of specialists-one for policy-making and the other for executing the policy orders. The nature that war takes and the process

of strategy-making deems Huntington's model of civilian control, based on a clear division between the civilian and the military, impossible. Hypothetically, if Clausewitz acknowledged the likelihood of the existence of a perfect divide between the duties and responsibilities of the civilian and the military, he would arguably contest that this separation makes the military less effective. Huntington's claim that soldiers' undivided attention to military matters makes them more effective could presumably be contested by asserting that the military disconnect from policy makes military action seem "pointless and devoid of sense", thus, in fact making it less efficient¹¹. Further, it may possibly have the opposite effect that the policy aimed towards achieving, thus failing to attain the larger goal which drove military action in the first place¹². Clausewitz concludes by stating that due to the constant transformation of warfare arising out of change in politics, the civilian and the military can never be disassociated from each other. The actuality of the way in which war plays out proves their "indissoluble connection"¹³. Therefore, the civilian and the military are bound to collaborate to construct an effective strategy that echoes the political objectives of the war [11-15].

Moreover, debatably, when the civil and the military do not operate as disconnected autonomous structures, it makes it easier for military means to meet political ends, thereby making the military more effective. Cohen stresses upon the interplay of the political and military because he too believes that war cannot exist in vacuum. One could view Cohen's argument as an extension of Clausewitz's claim that war is simply a continuation of a policy and that every military action has some level of political consequence. Cohen posits that what appears to be the case at the outset of war unavoidably changes as the war proceeds¹⁴. This would thereby require the military to constantly fine-tune its tactics in a way that serves the political goals. Therefore, debatably, Cohen's argument is an improvement of Huntington's argument as it accounts for the political character of war. This demonstrates that the collaboration of the civilian and the military is not only certain but also makes the military more effective [16].

Along similar lines, Clemenceau claims that war is too important to be completely left either to the military or to the politicians¹⁵. However, a consequent problem of the intersection of the civilian and the military is lack of expertise. With increasing complexities of modern warfare and policy making, it is nearly impossible for a person to maintain a high level of expertise in both the spheres. However, Cohen contends that this should not limit the civilian or the military from interacting with one another. Important decisions must be taken after duly considering the exchange of ideas between statesmen and soldiers. He argues that instead of the civilians giving the military "as free a hand as possible", as Huntington advances, they should intervene in a limited capacity¹⁶. Civil-military relations should comprise of a 'dialogue of unequals,' wherein the civilian interjects to probe and prod

⁵ Military effectiveness-better able to provide internal as well as external security.

⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, See pp. 28.

⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, See pp. 29.

⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, See pp. 255.

⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, See pp. 256.

¹⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, See pp. 252.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Clausewitz, *On War*, See pp. 256.

¹³ Clausewitz, *On War*, See pp. 258.

¹⁴ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, See pp. 14.

¹⁵ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, See pp. 15.

¹⁶ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, See pp. 4-5.

the military. Yet, it does not decisively dictate military action¹⁷. This ensures a balance since the lack of technical expertise of the civilians does not hamper military capabilities but the extent of intervention is just enough to be able to keep the military in check. In stark contrast, Huntington claims that 'objective civilian control'-that does not allow for the interference of the civilian in military matters and vice versa-"is the healthiest and most effective form of civilian control"¹⁸. Cohen's major point of dissent on Huntington's model, which he terms as 'the normal theory', is that the kind of separation that he presents, "free[s] politicians of real responsibility for the gravest challenges a country can face"¹⁹. Rather than ensuring civilian control of the military, he believes that this eliminates possibilities of supervision and control²⁰. Therefore, in practice, 'objective civilian control' undermines the control of the military by the civilians, failing to achieve one of the core goals of any nation [17,18].

The congruence of civil-military does not imply that the shared responsibility is also equivalent. Feaver states, "the very term civil-military relations assumes that there is something called civilian and that it is different from the thing called military"²¹. The crux of the aforementioned arguments is that civil-military should not exist as independent and isolated institutions. Additionally, what is important is that the final policy-making decision must lie with the civilians. At no given point of time should the soldier attain so much power so as to be in a position to take primary policy-making decisions. Arguably, Huntington's 'objective civilian control', does exactly that. By professionalizing the military and giving it complete autonomy, the military may gain sufficient power to dictate politics, thus, increasing its role in civilian matters. This would defeat the purpose of civilian control, that is, "to make military subordinate to the larger purposes of the nation, not the other way around"²². While Huntington supports 'objective civilian control', the case of Pakistan will delineate how the military that is born out of its characteristics is ineffective and the resultant civil-military relations are dangerous and undesirable.

Professionalizing the Pakistani military and granting it complete autonomy- two core features of the 'objective civilian control' model-made it believe that its efficiency and vigor compel it to take the lead in maximizing national interests²³. This attempt by the Pakistani Army to play an active role in 'safeguarding national interests' encouraged it to operate beyond its 'defined' realm of expertise. Since the very beginning, the Pakistani military inherited apolitical professionalism

from the British Indian Army. However, owing to this very professionalism, "within a few years of independence, the Pakistani army had developed a political orientation"²⁴. Huntington's theory of 'objective civilian control' states that "professionalism enhances military political abstinence because it gives the soldiers the autonomy needed to focus on the state's external enemies, which fosters apolitical attitudes and behavior in the officer corps"²⁵. However, this theory did not play out in the case of Pakistan. Instead of depoliticizing and strengthening the Pakistani army, professionalism and autonomy of the soldiers stimulated the military's interest in civilian affairs. Thus, blurring the civil-military divide and rendering the military ineffective in carrying out its duties²⁶.

Initially, the military was content with performing martial duties and obeying the civilian executive²⁷. However, the Pakistani Army's formative institutional experiences-rapid professionalization and perceived threat of war from India-moulded its beliefs, triggering the development of a political orientation²⁸. The process of professionalizing the military began in the 1950s which comprised of "military training, expertise and armaments that Pakistan received for allying with the United States"²⁹. Alongside, the military also imbibed the colonial view that politicians were untrustworthy³⁰. Its decision to intervene and actively assume civilian roles to ensure national security was further bolstered because of extreme political instability and the inability of the politicians to design robust policies to strengthen security from external threats³¹. The military internalized the belief that it was "the ultimate watchdog of national interests" which advanced its confidence to take any steps it thought necessary to preserve those interests³². This assumed responsibility, born out of intense professionalization, eventually led to a military coup in October 1958. The army undertook the responsibility of saving the nation from 'chaos' and 'disruption' by directly governing the state and involving itself in civilian matters. Therefore, professional training and giving the military "as free a hand as possible" concluded to be counter-productive. Together, they constructed a dangerous overlap of the civilian and military with the military dominating over the civilian³³.

While extensive professionalization of the military gave it the confidence to undermine civilian institutions, we also believe that granting it complete autonomy gave it the liberty necessary to intervene with the political workings of the country³⁴. In 1958, the

¹⁷ Cohen, Supreme Command, See pp. 14.

¹⁸ Cohen, Supreme Command, See pp. 4-5.

¹⁹ Cohen, Supreme Command, See pp. 15.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Peter D. Feaver, 'Civil-Military Relations', Department of Political Science, Duke University, 1999, See pp. 228

²² Aqil Shah, The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014,

See pp. 11

²³ Professionalization-high standards of discipline, strict hierarchy, regimental loyalty and obedience to legally constituted authorities.

²⁴ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 33

²⁵ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 5

²⁶ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 6

²⁷ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 257

²⁸ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 34

²⁹ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 17

³⁰ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 9

³¹ Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 17

³² Shah, The Army and Democracy, See pp. 202

³³ Cohen, Supreme Command, See pp. 4-5.

³⁴ Raza Habib Raja, 'Why Is Military So Powerful In Pakistan?', Huffington Post, 2017.

military captured state power by justifying its acts in response to the apparent national insecurity. Although, literature reveals that “there was no catastrophic danger of internal fragmentation at the time of the coup”³⁵. However, the military assessed the situation and established it to be harmful which gave it the opening that it required to subordinate the civilian, thereby triggering military intervention. Contestably, the military was able to “end divisive politics, install a military government, and create a new, partyless democracy” because nobody questioned its decisions and actions³⁶. It had enormous resources and the power to deploy them as it largely operated as an independent institution. Perhaps, the “complete freedom and high priority given to the [Pakistani] military” made it easier for it to intervene in the politics of the nation³⁷. One may claim that it reaped maximum benefits out of its autonomous identity as it refused to give power to the civilians in matters of national defense, foreign policy and national security³⁸. The civilians were thus unable to provide any significant direction to or exert any substantial control over the military. Therefore, ‘objective civilian control’, as defined by Samuel Huntington, arguably, reduced civilian control instead of enhancing it.

While there was an absence of recommendations from the civilians, the other factor that needs to be considered is whether this model of civilian control enhances military effectiveness. Put simply, effectiveness means carrying out one’s duty in a way that achieves the desired result. In that sense, military effectiveness would include ensuring internal as well as external national security. While Huntington argues that soldiers, when subject to objective control, fight more effectively³⁹, we contend that the subsequent military that comes into force would be ineffective. Over time, the notion that the Pakistani military, owing to its professionalism, had a broader sphere of responsibility, became ingrained in the hopes and beliefs of succeeding generations. This is precisely what gave it “organizational acceptance and legitimacy”⁴⁰. As a result, it became directly involved in running governmental affairs under the rule of General Ayub Khan⁴¹. While the welfare initiatives undertaken by the military created a positive image, military effectiveness is measured by its ability to maintain national security. Hence, owing to the 1965 and 1971 crisis, we argue that military effectiveness decreased under Ayub Khan’s apparently stable and successful rule. As discussed, one of the major reasons the Pakistani Army took control over civilian matters was because it believed it was more capable of protecting the nation from the threat, or attack, of war from India. However, the 1965 war revealed that the war was lost essentially due to the “failed military operation against India”⁴². The leading causes behind Pakistan losing the war were the “weaknesses and incoherence in the Pakistani Army’s

command and execution skills”⁴³. Therefore, in my judgement, contrary to Huntington’s argument, professionalization of the army and giving it an autonomous status does not always translate into making it more effective in safeguarding the nation against external enemies.

Moreover, the military was also ineffective in ensuring internal security and stability — another factor which determines military effectiveness. The civil war of 1971 was triggered and aggravated due to the poor law-and-order situation in East Pakistan. While the East Pakistanis were agitated with the daily abuse that they faced at the hands of the military, the last straw proved to be the decision to use military force against them⁴⁴. Huntington argues that when politicians leave military matters to officers, outstanding military organizations emerge⁴⁵. However, this was not the case in Pakistan—a highly professionalized and autonomous military resulted in a dominant military rule which was less effective and less accountable. Moreover, Huntington’s solution of ‘objective civilian control’ to the civil-military relations paradox proves to be counter-intuitive. The 1971 war is one of the many instances in which the civilians suffered a considerable loss by virtue of the dominant military rule. In 1971, military action took a heavy toll on human lives—“ranging from 300,000 to 3 million dead”⁴⁶. It therefore became increasingly important for the nation to ensure protection of the civilians not only by the military but also from it. In this sense, professionalization and independent decision-making powers of the military further heightened the civil-military paradox. According to Huntington, “the essence of ‘objective civilian control’ is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism”⁴⁷. The Pakistani military’s experiences, in my opinion, demonstrate how these very principle features often weaken civilian control and national security.

Further, Huntington’s model of ‘objective civilian control’ is not convincing since as previously demonstrated, the nature of war and strategy-making make a clear divide between the statesman and the soldier impossible. This factor, appended to the training and independence granted to the Pakistani army gave it a dominant status in the nation. The major problem that occurred in Pakistan was not that there was military involvement but that the final decision was made by the military. As Clausewitz and Cohen assert, while civil-military collaboration is essential, the final policy-making decision should always lie in the hands of the civilians. However, in the case of Pakistan, “the army calls the shots and runs the show”⁴⁸, which is an undesirable type of civil-military relations. As explained, the proper and smooth functioning of a nation and the construction of an effective strategy require an ‘unequal dialogue’ between the two. Even

³⁵ Shah, *The Army and Democracy*, See pp. 93

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Raja, ‘Why Is Military So Powerful In Pakistan?’.

³⁸ Raashid Wali Janjua, ‘Civilian control of the military’, *Daily Times*, 2017.

³⁹ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, See pp. 265

⁴⁰ Shah, *The Army and Democracy*, See pp. 114

⁴¹ Shah, *The Army and Democracy*, See pp. 115

⁴² Christopher Jaffrelot, *The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience*, Gurgaon: Random House India, 2015, See pp. 216

⁴³ Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, See pp. 124

⁴⁴ Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, See pp. 171

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, See pp. 265

⁴⁶ Jaffrelot, *The Pakistan Paradox*, See pp. 123

⁴⁷ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, See pp. 83

⁴⁸ Abhishek Chakraborty, ‘Pakistan’s Army Has “Mastered The Art Of A Non-Coup Coup”’: Former Top Diplomat’, *NDTV*, 2018.

in the case of Pakistan, one notes that “formal integration of the military into national defense policy making will help enhance coordination and reduce misperceptions between civilians and military”⁴⁹. However, the final decision-making power of implementing a strategy must lie with the civilians while the ultimate judgment of the tactics to be used in war must lie with the military.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper argues that Huntington’s model of ‘objective civilian control’ is not convincing because first, owing to the nature of war and strategy-making, a clear divide between the two can never exist. Second, the aspects of this model which are meant to make the military more effective actually reduce its effectiveness due to unchallenged power and lack of coherence. Third, the very characteristics that define it are what subvert it: professionalism and autonomy of the military are the leading reasons behind the excessive military interference in political matters and the unfavorable civil-military convergence. Therefore, instead of insisting on a clear civil-military divide, it is more helpful to acknowledge that the two ought to converge-either informally, violently and dangerously or formally, compromisingly and peacefully. Both civilian and military operate as two arms of the same body. If responsibility is not shared, something dangerous is likely to evolve from the disconnect in the understanding of the common goal. Or worse still, there may arise a situation where both fight to subordinate the other, thereby hampering the overall working of the nation. Therefore, while Samuel Huntington’s design of ‘objective civilian control’ may seem ideal in theory, it is unrealistic and therefore practically unattainable.

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⁴⁹ Shah, *The Army and Democracy*, See pp. 286