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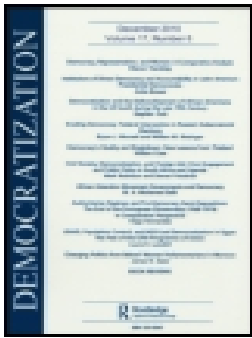
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# Democratically consolidated, externally threatened, and NATO aligned: finding unexpected deficiencies in civilian control

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## ABSTRACT

It has long been presumed in the literature that consolidated democracies that face serious external threats or are NATO-aligned should feature strong, civilian control institutions and personnel. This study of Israel, India, Taiwan, Spain and Poland reveals otherwise. Utilizing biographical data compiled by the authors, we researched civilian personnel within each country's defence ministry – the organizational hub of civil-military relations. Rather than finding evidence of strong civilian control, what we found instead were ministries with serious deficiencies: they did not have effective power; they failed to engage in defence planning or provide strategic guidance to the armed forces; they were led by military personnel and staffed by civilian employees not properly qualified to handle defence affairs. To explain these discrepancies, we argue that long-standing deficits in civilian expertise spur the delegation of ministerial defence positions to more knowledgeable officers. Comparisons are made with benchmark states that have achieved civilian ministerial control.

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**KEYWORDS** Democracy; consolidation; NATO; civilian control; civil-military relations; military; ministry of defence; delegation; expertise

## Introduction

It is often presumed that the more advanced, developed democratic states in the world have the most stable civil-military relations (CMR). Officers are subordinate to civilian leaders, the proof being that these states have not been subject to military coups. Though these officers may disagree with political leadership over the best courses of action, they and the troops they command will respectfully fall in line and execute the policies demanded of them. One of the reasons they do so is that they are subject to long-standing, well institutionalized systems of civilian control which limit their ability to contest policies they oppose. Consolidated democracies have had longer gestation periods to not only craft good civilian control institutions, but to instil in officers stronger norms of compliance.

Consolidated democracies facing serious if not existential security threats from abroad should have additional advantages in the realm of civilian control of the

military. According to some scholars, a threatening external security environment invites a greater unity of purpose, causing soldiers to stand behind their governments at all costs in the face of a greater peril.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, democratic nations that are members of the NATO alliance should, all else equal, have advantages as well. Not only is NATO a defensive alliance, formed to prepare against a near-external threat in the former Soviet Union and now Russia, but its membership requirements also compel nations to make reforms enhancing democratic civilian control over their armed forces. Taken separately or combined, democratic consolidation, a high external threat environment and NATO membership should greatly enhance the prospects for civilian control. But is that always the case?

This study of five consolidated or consolidating democracies demonstrates that contrary to prevailing wisdom, democratic consolidation, NATO membership and existential threats from abroad do not provide the context for a strengthened system of civilian control over the military. These states – Israel, India, Taiwan, Spain and Poland – should be ideal candidates for the best CMR. Each state is solidly democratic and is either subject to grave external threats or is a member of NATO. Consequently, we should find very strong civilian control mechanisms in place, especially within the defence ministries – the core institutions by which governments dictate defence policy and priorities to the military. While these five nations do exhibit a few of the expected traits, we also find many serious deficiencies, particularly in their ministries of defence. These deficiencies include limits on defence ministerial power and the absence of well-informed civilians within leadership roles of those agencies. Too often, the responsibility to craft defence plans, strategy, and policy gets delegated to military experts. Civilians, for their part, take a hands-off approach and only sparingly exercise their oversight powers.

The article will proceed as follows. Theories on civilian control will be analysed, with attention paid to contextual elements that are thought to have a decisive influence on prospects for institutionalized civilian control. We will then search for evidence of enhanced civilian control within each country's ministry of defence – the organization that constitutes the institutional hub of CMR. We then specify what the empirical indicators for stronger civilian control within defence ministries should be. This is followed by an in-depth investigation into the five countries to see to what extent they fulfil these enumerated conditions, relying on data compiled by the authors regarding ministerial personnel, and qualitative survey responses from country experts. Those nations will be compared to benchmark states – the U.S., the United Kingdom, and France – that are thought to have strong civilian control systems in place. The article concludes by putting forth a rival explanation that could account for why so many civilian control deficiencies are present in countries where we would least expect them. We argue that long-standing deficits in civilian expertise spur the delegation of ministerial defence positions to more knowledgeable officers. In the conclusion, some clues are unearthed from our five cases, but additional research is warranted to flush out the alternative account.

## **Democratic consolidation, external threats and military alliances**

Scholars have long studied the conditions for improving civil-military relations and civilian control within democratic states.<sup>2</sup> The notion that soldiers must be subordinate if governments are to endure and remain stable is now widely accepted. So too is the

idea that civilian control should be institutionalized. Governments need a longer-term, structured relation that induces stable, supportive encounters between political officials and military personnel. For this, they need formal institutions, which translates into a set of strong, well-staffed, civilian-led organizations that can devise and oversee defence policies and military operations.<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons, it is important to pay careful attention to a nation's ministry of defence in assessing the robustness of its civilian control. The ministry of defence is, according to Bruneau and Goetze, indispensable for establishing civilian control. As they say: "The Ministry of Defense (MOD) structure has become widely viewed as the best solution to the classic paradox, 'Who guards the guardians?'"<sup>4</sup> These same authors note that one of the primary purposes of defence ministries is to "structure the power relationships between democratically elected civilian leaders and the armed forces command."<sup>5</sup>

What conditions would enhance the prospects for strengthened civilian stewardship and oversight within defence ministries? The causes of civilian control have been studied extensively, and the explanatory candidates are numerous. One of the more important ones is the contextual dimension.<sup>6</sup> In politics, actors are usually assumed to be strategic, and their choices matter. Civilian defence specialists within the ministry can act in calculated ways to enhance their authority over the armed forces. But they make those choices within an environmental context that either enables or constrains them. As Croissant et al have explained,

[while] civilian actors can freely choose from the outlined menu of strategies in principle, they do not decide for or against a certain strategy ... in a historical or social vacuum. Rather, civil-military relations take place within an environmental context that provides resources, opportunities and limits to the civilian's strategy choices.<sup>7</sup>

The above authors and others look at political and security environments, examining how these should "influence the chances of institutionalizing civilian control."<sup>8</sup> There are three environments we will focus on: a nation's democratic system, its external security environment, and military alliances. It is not coincidental that some of the strongest civilian control systems reside in the older, more established democratic nations.<sup>9</sup> As the democratic system matures, political leaders, fortified by stronger societal support, gain the confidence they need to tackle second-generation problems of governing the defence and security sectors, where attention turns to state capacity building.<sup>10</sup> In short, a consolidated democracy should help strengthen institutionalized civilian control measures.

Regarding the external security environment, a few influential theorists contend that a menacing threat from abroad is conducive for civilian control.<sup>11</sup> The need to prepare defences against a formidable foreign adversary should forge unity of purpose, meaning military elites will work with the political authorities, not against them. The military will demonstrate respect towards civilians who, under conditions of heightened external security risks, come to the job well prepared in defence and national security affairs – as they must – if they are to effectively confront a foreign adversary.<sup>12</sup> One clear implication of the theory is that key defence institutions such as ministries should be populated with capable civilian directors and staffers who can demonstrate leadership in the face of crisis. The risks of not doing so are high.

Likewise NATO countries have a heightened awareness of the perils of defence vulnerability. The alliance was forged to contain the threat posed by the Soviet Union, and

the need for military preparedness has been emphasized ever since. But members must also commit themselves to strengthening their democratic civilian control systems. With admission comes greater pressures to conform to the group, and incentives to abide by NATO standards derived not just from the added security that comes with alliance protection, but from the technological aid and cost-sharing arrangements that help make defence reforms possible. Many scholars have argued that NATO membership has been beneficial for fortifying civilian-led defence institutions which subordinate the military.<sup>13</sup> In sum what justifies a theoretical and empirical comparison between high threat countries and NATO members is the acute awareness of security threats, the priority attached to preparing strong defences against those threats, the need for civilians to get better prepared, and the expectation that militaries will be subordinate.

These are contextual conditions that scholars assert should promote better institutionalized civilian control. Any one of these factors should alone be beneficial. We will stack the deck in favour of the conventional view, analysing countries with *two* of these elements present. The studied cases are Israel, India, Taiwan, Spain, and Poland. All are consolidated or consolidating democracies. Also, the first three face existential external threats, and the final two are NATO members. If any five nations should exhibit strong, institutionalized civilian control systems, these five should.

The countries under review qualify as strong democracies, though some backsliding has occurred in Poland in recent years.<sup>14</sup> They all moved well beyond transitional stages years ago and have had uninterrupted competitive rule ever since. They range in age from 25 to 69 years, with the mean age being 45. Freedom House and Polity IV scores (Table 1) place them squarely within the democratic category. Israel, India and Taiwan also face serious external threats. Israel has been at war with neighbouring states numerous times, has undertaken invasions of Lebanon, and continues to face security challenges posed by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have been at loggerheads for decades. To this day, the PRC does not recognize Taiwan's existence as an independent country and remains hostile to any efforts by it to claim sovereignty. India's nemesis has long been Pakistan. The two have gone to war against each other four times (1947, 1965, 1971, 1999) and both are nuclear powers. Security forces in the disputed territory of Kashmir remain on heightened alert. Spain and Poland are NATO members. Spain was admitted to NATO in 1982, and Poland joined NATO in 1999.

### **Evidence of enhanced ministerial civilian control**

These five nations are democratic, and either face high external threats or are NATO aligned. We would expect to see solid evidence that defence institutions are in place that facilitate a democratic government's control over its armed forces and its defence policies. In particular, a ministry of defence must be situated in the chain of operational command, with direct supervisory authority over the armed forces; be headed by a politically appointed civilian; have a leadership structure dominated by civilians, along with a sizeable, well-educated and trained civilian staff who carry out vital functions such as planning and strategizing.

Conversely, the virtues of democratic consolidation, external threat and NATO membership would be seriously challenged were we to find defence ministries that (a) did not have unambiguous, unchallenged, and direct operational command over the armed forces; (b) were not equipped to oversee a multitude of key defence

**Table 1.** Independent variable scores: democracy, external threat and NATO membership.

		Israel	India	Taiwan	Spain	Poland	USA	UK	France
Democratic Consolidation	Age	69	67	25	39	26	208	137	48
	FH Score <sup>a</sup>	2	2.5	2	1	1.5	1	1	1
	Polity Score <sup>b</sup>	7	9	8	10	10	8	10	9
External Threat		High	High	High	Low	Low	Yes	Yes	Yes
NATO Member		No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

<sup>a</sup>FH = Freedom House Score (2017) combines coding for political rights and civil liberties, ranging 1–7 with 1 being most free.

<sup>b</sup>Polity Scores (2017) code levels of democracy, ranging from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest and scores of 6–10 qualifying as democracies.

responsibilities; (c) were military-led, with active duty or retired officers in charge of the ministry and its departments; (d) had civilian staffers without adequate education and training in defence affairs.

Obviously, there are other indices that could be added to the list. Ministries should have ample control over the defence budget and oversight on organizational military affairs (bases, procurement, promotions and appointments, other personnel issues, etc.). A democratized civil-military relation should have strong legislative defence commissions. The inclusion of these variables would expand the study well beyond reasonable bounds and could more reasonably be the subject of a follow-up study. We are confident that the issues that have been included here are among the most essential.

### ***Is the ministry of defence within a singular chain of command?***

If a ministry of defence is to carry out policies on behalf of the executive, it must be situated squarely within an operational chain of command. This is so that a nation's political leader can call on his defence minister to faithfully convert his preferences into orders that are sent down the chain of command to the armed service branches and their troops. This placement also ensures that the ministry is *the* agency at the service of the president's defence priorities.

The defence ministries in India, Taiwan and Spain are properly situated within the hierarchy; the ministries in Israel and Poland are not. In Israel, the ministry resides *alongside* the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), not above it. The defence minister is in the direct line of authority below the Prime Minister and just above the military chief of staff. However, his *ministry* is off to the side, pulling no bureaucratic weight. Institutionally, the IDF and its general staff have more influence within the political hierarchy than the ministry of defence itself. Senior officers have direct access to political elites, and the IDF routinely shows up for cabinet meetings, as well the more specialized Inter-Ministerial Committee on Defence. While there, it presents its own plans, without the permission or guidance of the defence minister. Though he is present, the defence minister does not represent the IDF before the cabinet; the IDF represents itself. This gives the IDF undue influence and excessive vertical authority within the political structure of the state.

In Poland, there is a dual chain of command that creates an ambiguous, often confusing state of affairs. This is a by-product of Poland's development as a semi-presidential system, fuelled by reoccurring rivalry between the President and Prime Minister, with one line of authority running from the President to the armed forces, while the other is running from the Prime Minister to his defence minister and on to the

armed forces. The President and his National Security Bureau (BBN) can at times dominate defence and security policymaking. At other times they are supplanted by the PM and ministry of defence. This structure has limited the role of the ministry of defence and has allowed the military to play those two centres of power against each other, weakening civilian oversight.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Ministry of defence leadership: is it military or civilian dominated?***

Any organizational scheme that does not enhance the position and control of democratically elected officials and their civilian appointees has failed at one of its principal tasks.<sup>16</sup> This concretely means having nonuniformed personnel in key leadership positions. The purpose of defence ministries is to prepare the armed forces to serve the policy goals of government, and not the other way around. Should active duty or retired military officers occupy top positions within the defence sector, they may exhibit divided loyalties. While they are sworn to serve the constitutionally elected government, they are occasionally tempted to betray that oath by obliging the institution they were part of and loyal to for so many years. Civilianized leaders must be in place to stand vigilant against efforts to push an armed forces agenda at the expense of a national agenda.

Even if these military personnel are devoted first to serving the government, having too many in leadership positions could result in the crowding out of alternative points of view. This results because officers are often like-minded in their approach to defence, having been conditioned to adhere to one set of ideas in a hierarchical organization.<sup>17</sup> What is most conducive to good defence policymaking is to have some balance of perspectives that encourages a vigorous give and take between civilian and military defence specialists, with the understanding that ultimate policy decisions rest with elected officials. But all of this is mute if enough civilians are not in enough positions of authority to have their voices heard.

Except for Taiwan and Israel all these countries do regularly appoint civilians as defence ministers. Since the transition to democracy, all of Spain's defence ministers have been politically-appointed civilians, as have India's, while 85% of Poland's ministers have been civilian. By contrast, 88% of ministers in Taiwan since the transition to democracy have been active or retired officers; in Israel it has been 67%.

As far as other leadership positions are concerned, there is a much greater cause for concern. From deputy ministers on down to department heads, four of these five countries have defence ministries dominated by soldiers. As shown in Table 2, the number of military heads exceed civilian heads in every case except India. If we were to exclude the mandatory military MOD positions from the count, even then a minority of leadership positions are staffed by civilians in Israel and Taiwan, with Spain showing an even split. We know these civilian proportions are low, as we can compare them to benchmark states – ones long regarded as models of civilian control. As shown in Table 2, in the United States, The United Kingdom, and France, the average civilian leadership presence within the defence ministries (or its equivalent) is 87% (excluding necessary military posts).

The Polish number of 67.9% must be taken with a grain of salt. Though a majority of the ministry's 18 departments are listed as having civilian heads, appearances may be deceiving. Some experts have concluded that most of the personnel listed as civilian were actually military – many of them retirees changing into civilian apparel.<sup>18</sup> It is



**Table 2.** Civilian vs. military leadership in the defence ministry.

Attribute	Israel	India	Taiwan	Spain	Poland	USA	UK	France
Total MOD leadership	24	47	28	46	41	127	23	35
Number of necessarily military positions <sup>a</sup>	0	9	11	28	13	37	7	14
Number of military personnel	17	13	23	37	22	67	7	16
Number of civilian personnel	7	34	5	9	19	60	16	19
% Civilian (including necessarily military positions)	29.2	72.3	17.9	19.6	46.3	47.2	69.6	54.3
% Civilian (excluding necessarily military positions)	29.2	89.5	29.4	50.0	67.9 <sup>b</sup>	66.7	100	90.5

Note: Military = Active Duty + Retired Military Personnel.

Sources: Original dataset compiled by the authors. It is available from the authors upon request. The dataset was compiled using official MOD sources, official gazettes, and government transparency websites. If the individual profiles of leaders were not available on official government websites, they were checked online in local press outlets and professional network websites such as LinkedIn and local Wikipedia (while verifying additional sources).

The list of most heavily used websites is as follows: Israel (<http://www.mod.gov.il/>), India (<https://mod.gov.in/>, <http://www.spsmilitaryyearbook.com>, and <https://www.indianbureaucracy.com>), Taiwan (<https://www.mnd.gov.tw/>), Spain (<http://www.defensa.gob.es/> and <http://transparencia.gob.es/>), and Poland (<http://en.mon.gov.pl/>); US: <https://dod.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Senior-Defense-Officials/>; UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/people>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence>; France: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/>.

<sup>a</sup>Positions occupied only by military personnel within the defence ministry, such as chief of staff, deputy chief of staff or army, navy and air force commanders.

<sup>b</sup>This number may overstate the civilian presence. See text below for explanations.

active duty officers who dominate most of the directorates within the Polish Ministry of National Defence (MoND),<sup>19</sup> reflecting a serious imbalance in the ratio of military to civilian staff, as there is with Israel, Taiwan and Spain.

The results of our analysis on MOD leadership in Spain are surprising, considering how much progress had been made in other respects. The MOD leadership is largely militarized. In 2018, out of 46 positions listed as “defence leadership,” 80.4% are occupied by retired or active-duty military officers, leaving 19.6% of posts for civilians, indicating a reversal of a trend pointed out by a 1990s study of the Spanish case.<sup>20</sup> In 2018, there were at least 10 positions that could have been occupied by civilians and were headed by military officers instead. These include the Secretary-General of Defence Policy – who is the deputy minister, Director of infrastructure and equipment, the Director of the CSEDN (Center for National Defence Studies), and many other deputy posts.

### ***Are defence ministries involved in defence planning?***

The Israeli MOD does very little in the way of actual defence planning. It is the IDF’s Planning and Policy Directorate that handles this.<sup>21</sup> In fact, there seems to be a near monopoly on planning by the IDF.<sup>22</sup> The IDF – not the ministry – has real authority on other matters as well, including military size and structure, intelligence-gathering, training, doctrine, logistics and personnel.<sup>23</sup>

In India, Huntington’s division of civil-military labour is taken to extremes. Civilians leave the military alone to formulate their own plans, while barring the military from accessing key political figures or participating in government-level decisions. The MOD provides no guidance to the armed forces who chart their own course of action based on their own doctrines. The military-developed “Cold Start” doctrine, for instance, relies on the quick thinking of regional commanders along India’s

border with Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> Under this doctrine, local commanders have the autonomy to determine when escalation is necessary and at what level.<sup>25</sup> Clear civilian direction and oversight is missing, and planning is left entirely to the service branches.<sup>26</sup>

And in Poland, the MoND does not do any military planning. That function is reserved for the military General Staff, while the MoND does something called “non-military planning.” This is not tantamount to defence, and it is unclear to one well-informed scholar exactly what it is.<sup>27</sup> What is clear is that some of the most important national defence documents have emanated from the National Security Bureau (BBN), including the 2012 National Strategic Security Review, the 2013 White Book on National Security, and the 2014 National Security Strategy for Poland. Arguably, the MoND should have at the very least, collaborated on these documents. Thomas-Durell Young says, “They [civilians in the MoND] don’t really have the authority to do defence planning nor do they have access to financial data-bases from which they could plan.”<sup>28</sup> The armed forces have kept important data close to the cuff, often barring civilians from gaining access.

### ***Do civilians provide the military with strategic guidance?***

Military plans, whether in peacetime or war, should be drawn up with strategic guidance in mind, provided by civilians in the democratically elected government. A military plan without strategic guidance behind it is akin to aiming blindly. Military plans only make sense if they fulfil defence plans which in turn derive from an overarching security strategy developed at the highest political levels. Defence ministers and their staff convert national security strategies into defence policies that will guide military action. And yet, many civilians do not provide their militaries with such guidance.

In Israel, the Defence Force (IDF) formulates its own strategic objectives, without the benefit of governmental input. The IDF is “considered the only reliable, professional and objective source of information and policy recommendation.”<sup>29</sup> Israeli politicians and civilian defence officials from the MOD come to the table woefully unprepared. In India, the military conduct operations without strategic guidance from the government. Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta refer to this as “arming without aiming.”<sup>30</sup> There is a total absence of dialogue between government civilians and the military, and this impairs effectiveness. There is a noticeable lack of well qualified civilian defence specialists within MoND in Poland. Those pure civilians that reside in the non-military planning directorates of the ministry are more akin to administrators, and do not provide any strategic guidance for the armed forces.

In Taiwan, the MOD does provide strategic guidance, but this is handled by *military* personnel – not civilians. The latter are largely relegated to administrative and other non-critical tasks.<sup>31</sup> Lastly, in Spain, the formulation of defence strategy occurs within the National Security Council which answers to the government’s Council of Ministers.<sup>32</sup> Such formulation does not occur in the MOD, which suffers from a harmful trickle-down effect from political party elites who either think civilian expertise is unnecessary given the ample supply of knowledgeable military personnel, or who show limited interest in defence matters.<sup>33</sup> These prejudices seep down to the MOD, creating civilian qualification problems.

### ***Are civilians within MOD well educated in defence affairs?***

It is not enough to simply bring civilians into an MOD. If they are to perform valuable leadership functions, they should come to the job with expertise in hand. It is not likely

that civilians will ever achieve perfect parity with the military on defence wisdom, nor is that necessary.<sup>34</sup> Instead, civilians must have sufficient expertise to quiet military apprehensions and contribute constructively to the crafting of policy. For this to occur, there must be ample educational opportunities availed to civilian candidates within universities and other research outlets. Then there must be a merit-based selection process such as a career track that ties educational institutions to the government, facilitating the recruitment of highly trained graduates. If not, then ministries often rely on the state civil service system or political appointees to find staffers. While these individuals may have general knowledge and solid administrative skills, they are usually not trained in defence or security affairs.<sup>35</sup>

Israel's civilian community of defence experts – outside of government – is large and very well informed. The country has an established programme in National Security Studies at the University of Haifa and a research Institute for National Security Studies at Tel-Aviv University. ten faculty are associated with the former, and some 80 researchers with the latter.<sup>36</sup> However, few of them make their way into the MOD. For example, of the 39 *senior* directors and researchers at Tel-Aviv's Institute for National Security Studies, only five have had any association with the MOD in their entire careers, *and* all of those are former high-ranking officers. 56% of the researchers at the Institute are civilians, but none have held any positions within the MOD.<sup>37</sup> As of 2018, none of the civilian MOD top leadership has any association with those two programmes, nor does it have any background in national security or defence affairs.

In India, civilians within MOD are bureaucrats, chosen either from the India Administrative Service (IAS) or its Central Secretariat Service (CSS). These are federal agencies that test aspiring applicants interested in defence on “general ability” (or knowledge), English, and math, not specific understandings of defence or security.<sup>38</sup> Taiwanese civilians who staff the MOD are administrative civil servants who come to the job without defence education or training. Efforts to allow better-trained civilians in by circumventing the civil service were blocked by the civilian bureaucracy itself. As David Kuehn argues, that reinforced the military's view that defence policymaking best be left in the hands of the military, since bureaucrats are not interested in attracting a skilled work force.<sup>39</sup> Taiwan does have a few think tanks, associations (e.g. the *Chinese Strategy Study Association*) and university research centres (*National Chengchi University's Center for Security Studies*) focused on military and defence issues. While they produce excellent scholars, those scholars are seldom recruited by the MOD.

The central problem in Spain seems to be a lack of career opportunities for civilians in defence,<sup>40</sup> and few opportunities to get on the job training.<sup>41</sup> Of all civilian employees in the MOD, only 32% have joined the government as a career choice (*estatutarios* or *funcionarios*).<sup>42</sup> There are centres dedicated to the study of defence such as the *Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado* or the Center for National Defence Studies, but out of the 2424 faculty members hired by the MOD and the branches of the armed forces, only 150 or 6% are civilians.<sup>43</sup> At the Center for National Defence Studies, 67 individuals are listed as faculty members, but none of these are civilians.<sup>44</sup> Instead, these opportunities are seized by military officers who want to boost their CVs.<sup>45</sup> The few civilians who graduate from these programmes are rarely recruited to work for the MOD.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, there are Polish universities that teach “strategic studies” of a sort and knowledge producing think tanks produce first-rate analysts. The military academic

institutions are open to civilian students. The difficulty is that those well-trained analysts do not find their way into government. There is no carefully devised plan to recruit and retain civilians. Moreover, there are not only stiffer qualification requirements for civilians than military, but also poorer salaries and benefits than for officers. As a result, many civilian defence specialists prefer to first enter the military, and only then seek staffing positions within the ministry as officers.<sup>47</sup>

As shown in Table 3, these five democratically advanced states, facing serious external threats or having joined NATO, have failed to establish sufficiently strong, civilian populated defence ministries. None of the countries fulfil all the conditions, while only Spain and India fulfil half of the conditions. Even in the older democracies, with long traditions of military subordination, such as Israel and India, civilians not only fail to provide general strategic guidance to their armed forces, but they by and large do not participate in the crafting of defence related policies. Instead they delegate these key tasks to the military, or do not object should the armed forces assume these responsibilities for themselves.

By contrast, evidence suggests that our benchmark cases – The United States, the United Kingdom and France – have established a robust, civilian presence within their respective defence ministries (see Tables 2 and 3). As shown in Table 2, the proportion of leadership positions assumed by civilian personnel in those benchmark states is substantially higher than that found in four of the five other countries. Probing beneath the surface we can further discriminate between civilians who are in charge of strategic (essential) vs. non-strategic tasks. The former refer to all those involved in the development of defence policy, planning, strategy, doctrine – all directly related to the application of force. The latter refer to those in the supportive areas of administration, finance, legal affairs, personnel, etc. Of the 60 civilians in top positions within the U.S. Department of Defense in 2018, 37 (61%) were in essential, strategic positions, and 23 in non-strategic positions. In the U.K., ten of sixteen civilians (62.5%) were in those essential, strategically relevant positions. And in France, 12 of 19 (63%) civilian personnel in the ministry of defence are in those same key positions. Thus, almost two-thirds of the civilians in the top echelons of the benchmark state defence ministries not only have a bureaucratic presence but hold positions that are vital to the conduct of warfare.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, the benchmark states can draw on broad pools of civilian talent from the outside to inform defence policymaking on the inside. Of the United States, Thomas Bruneau has written,

**Table 3.** Ministry of defence (MOD): indicators of strength.

	Israel	India	Taiwan	Spain	Poland	USA	UK	France
MOD in a singular, operational chain of command?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
MOD minister a civilian?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No <sup>a</sup>	Yes	Yes
MOD leadership mostly civilian?	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
MOD does defence planning?	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
MOD civilians provide strategic guidance to the military?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
MOD civilians sufficiently educated in defence?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Strength Indicators Fulfilled	1/6	3/6	2/6	3/6	1/6	5/6	6/6	6/6

<sup>a</sup>True during the tenure of General James N. Mattis as SECDEF (2017–2018), who has since stepped down.

[it] is possible to write with confidence that by far larger sectors of US civil society and the media follow, investigate, and seek to influence policy on issues of national security and defence, than in any other country in the world.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, France has a strong pool of civilian experts, bringing in experts from a broad sector of society, including civilian academics in crafting defence strategy, procurement and expenditures.<sup>50</sup> In the United Kingdom, parliament and civilian experts outside of government take part in the planning, overseeing and implementation of overseas operations.<sup>51</sup>

To sum up, clearly democratic consolidation will not account for disparities in civilian control since the bench mark states do well while the other democracies do not. If the process of strengthening democratic norms and practices had a positive impact on civilian presence within defence ministries, it should have showed up in all eight countries under review. Moreover, neither membership in NATO nor high-levels of threat can account for the remarkable and unexpected deficiencies in civilian knowledge and ministerial control we encountered. Rather than discovering strong ministries populated with civilian experts commanding leadership positions, we encounter ministries either without teeth or dominated by retired and active duty military officers. The following section will explore an alternative explanation for why the more positive outcomes have not materialized.

### **A rival explanation: knowledge deficits, path dependence, and delegation**

We surmise that what connects late-NATO joiners (Spain and Poland) with nations facing existential threats (Israel, India and Taiwan) are not only the obvious security concerns they all share, but also the presence of wide gaps between military and civilian expertise.

Numerous scholars concur that civilians must demonstrate some competence in defence and security affairs if they are to assume leadership roles.<sup>52</sup> Clausewitz himself said that “[a] certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy.”<sup>53</sup> Knowledge confers authority on leaders, translating directly into decision-making influence. But for nations whose civilians have serious and persistent knowledge deficits, governments will be motivated to delegate key tasks to their more informed armed forces personnel. Why is this so?

NATO puts a premium on defence readiness, assuring that aspiring members improve their military capabilities as the price for admission. Aspirants must commit to developing forces that are fully capable of contributing to collective defence and participating in the full range of NATO missions.<sup>54</sup> Aspirants must adopt new norms of defence as designed by the older founding members of NATO. Not to adapt could result in membership denial, not to mention the loss of economic and technological benefits that would derive from being accepted into the “club.”<sup>55</sup> Once enrolled in NATO, there are pressures to maintain standards and readiness so that members can productively participate in NATO missions.

By contrast, NATO demands for improved civilian control are quite vague, with no penalties for non-compliance.<sup>56</sup> NATO’s Membership Action Plans, devised for each aspirant, only say that prospective members should “establish appropriate democratic and civilian control of their armed forces.”<sup>57</sup> Nowhere is there a rubric set out as to how they should set up their defence ministries, whether it should be civilian-led,

what the ratio should be between military and civilian staff personnel, or what level of expertise is required among civilians who work at the ministry. Once in, new members can do as much or as little as they wish, and there are no provisions for either sanctioning or expelling members for non-compliance.<sup>58</sup>

Accordingly, late-joining nations, pressured into enhancing their defence readiness, prepare their soldiers by enrolling them in academic programmes designed to improve their knowledge of defence and taking advantage of NATO's own education and training programmes.<sup>59</sup> But there was less need for governments to invest in civilian defence education and training, and who could instead, free ride on the accumulated wisdom of soldiers. As a consequence, late-joining nations have seen the knowledge-gap between civilians and militaries actually widen with the passage of time.<sup>60</sup> In this scenario, it is inviting for governments to delegate more and more defence ministerial functions to officers.

A related phenomenon occurs in those non-NATO countries which face existential threats. In Israel, India and Taiwan, grave risks emerged very early in the nation-building process and have remained with those nations ever since. Taiwan inherited the Chinese threat as a legacy of Chiang-Kai-Shek's retreat from the mainland in 1949. Israel immediately entered a geopolitical environment where it was surrounded by hostile states, as did India. In the instance of border incursions, missile strikes, and even threats of invasion from a hostile neighbouring state, there is little time for deliberation, or margin for error. Mistakes are costly, and those with greater defence wisdom are less likely to make mistakes, all else equal.

In such circumstances, we argue that incentives to delegate assignments and positions to the military are quite high. If military officers are more knowledgeable on defence in such circumstances, then civilians concerned with preserving the nation in the face of existential perils will see delegation as not only beneficial, but essential. This is especially true when deficits in civilian expertise are sizeable and long-standing, as they have been in our cases (see the conclusion below). To overcome those deficits would take a considerable amount of time, and time is a resource in short supply for nations facing serious external threats.

Certainly, a benchmark state like the United States faced existential perils of its own. But the threat posed by the Soviet Union and the fear of nuclear conflagration prompted civilians to invest *very early on* in nuclear defence expertise.<sup>61</sup> By the early 1960s, the U.S. had assembled a team of civilian defence planners and strategists who "exerted their authority [over the military] with vigor."<sup>62</sup> Civilians maintained their level of expertise for the duration of the Cold War and beyond. There was much less of a knowledge gap, and thus less need to delegate defence planning and strategizing to the generals, out of fear that the nation would be unprepared to confront its adversaries.

In both sets of countries, a path-dependent process is set in motion.<sup>63</sup> Military officers are better prepared, making delegation of ministerial positions to them enticing. The more tasks that are delegated, the more ownership the military assumes over its newfound duties, allowing it to lock in advantages by claiming only it has the wherewithal to carry out the defence tasks it has been assigned.<sup>64</sup> The longer this goes on, the more difficult it becomes for civilians to claw back positions and duties they had given away. The military's accumulation of expertise makes it increasingly implausible that civilians could ever catch up, especially if knowledge gaps were sizeable to begin with. There does not exist a set of incentives strong enough to induce governments to close the gap by supplying the institutional resources to invest in training an

entire cadre of civilian defence specialists. Instead, those governments would rather invest their scarce resources in other pursuits.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

This study suggests that to be democratically consolidated, externally threatened or NATO aligned will not individually or jointly suffice to induce institutionalized civilian control. What our rival explanation suggests instead is the need for additional research into the conditions under which early deficits in civilian understanding of defence may have put some nations on a path-dependent track towards military domination over defence policy and defence ministerial posts.

For instance, Israel's military had long ago established a firm reputation for battlefield prowess and strategic acumen, earning for itself unrivalled status. But this was reinforced by the turn of the new century, when the asymmetric war with Palestinians posed unforeseen challenges, prompting the generals to devise new modes of strategic thinking to counter the perceived threat. The military became, according to Kobi Michael, "epistemic authorities" on asymmetric conflict while civilians never mounted their own knowledge-building effort.<sup>66</sup> This widened the knowledge gap between military and political echelons, allowing the former to dominate which in turn weakened civilian control on an institutional level.

In India, as early as 1951, civilians in the ministry of defence proved unresponsive to military requests for direction.<sup>67</sup> Though civilians had official control, they had no expertise in defence or security to draw on, which hampered their ability to communicate with their officers, let alone provide any strategic guidance to them.<sup>68</sup> That lack of guidance led to the creation a law in 1958 that not only enshrined military autonomy but went so far as to grant legal impunity for soldiers operating in emergency zones (article 6).<sup>69</sup> This has been the state of affairs ever since.

Like many other members of the former Eastern bloc, Poland's military remained subordinate to civilian principals immediately after the transition to democratic rule. But in conformity with the old Soviet penetration model, those principals knew how to enforce political-ideological control but lacked any knowledge of defence and security affairs. As a consequence, they preferred to delegate responsibilities to officers while letting the military reform itself – a pattern which has persisted to this day.<sup>70</sup> In Taiwan, military figures held important posts within the Kuomintang (KMT) Party that ruled the nation for decades, and they enjoyed autonomy in the making and implementation of defence policy.<sup>71</sup> An over-reliance on officers to hold down key policy positions ever since has been traced to a "lack of civilian experts qualified to assume these positions," according to M. Taylor Fravel.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, in Spain, civilians had to play catch up with military experts. According to Narcis Serra, at the time of the transition, civilian political parties were only just beginning to study defence and security issues.<sup>73</sup> But as mentioned before, at those centres currently dedicated to the production of defence knowledge, very few of the faculty and students are civilians. Hence, the civilian defence knowledge deficits persist.

These are but small, tantalizing clues to as to why civilian control deficits loom large in countries where we might not expect it. More research will be needed to determine the exact causal mechanisms that lead our countries down a path toward weaker civilian control. All of this is not to suggest that external threats or NATO membership are irrelevant, but rather that they influence outcomes in an unexpected direction. Where a



very high premium is placed on defence readiness, as it is for these five high threat/and NATO cases, then it is essential that knowledgeable ministerial personnel be in place. If civilians come to the job unprepared, and do not have the proper incentives to overcome their knowledge deficits, then more capable officers will stand ready to fill the gap. Delegation of ministerial positions to the military will result, and civilian control will suffer as a consequence.

## Notes

1. Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military*.
2. Civil-military relations encompass the broad study of the military's role in politics and society. This study hones in on the politics inside the state, and specifically what it takes for civilians to achieve control over defence policy and policymaking.
3. For a defense of this proposition, see Pion-Berlin, "Defense Organization and Civil-Military Relations."
4. Bruneau and Goetze Jr., "Ministries of Defense and Democratic Control," 71.
5. *Ibid.*, 78.
6. On the importance of international contexts, see Bruneau and Trinkunas, "Democratization as a Global Phenomenon."
7. Croissant et al. *Democratization and Civilian Control in Asia*, 51.
8. *Ibid.*, 52.
9. Diamond, and Plattner (eds.), *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy*, xxxiii.
10. Cottey, Edmunds and Forster, "The Second Generation Problem," 40.
11. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*; Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military*. This thesis is controversial and has been widely disputed, but nonetheless remains the single most important theory that traces civil-military changes to a nation's security environments. Secondly, the thesis has not been subjected to the kind of test performed here, having to do with the strengthening and civilianization of the defence ministry.
12. *Ibid.*, 13.
13. On NATO benefits, see Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster, "Civil-Military Relations in Post-Communist Europe," 1–16; Barany, *The Soldier and the Changing State*, 34–35, 221; Vučković, Vučinić, and Đorđević, "Partnership for a Secure Future," 602–25.
14. This includes the degrading of judicial and media independence.
15. Rohr-Garztecki, "The Long Shadow of History," 23–40.
16. Among the many who concur are Agüero, *Soldiers, Civilians and Democracy*; Trinkunas, *Crafting Civilian Control*; Bruneau and Tollefson, *Who Guards the Guardians and How*.
17. On how military academies mold like-minded officers within carefully controlled educational environments, see Pion-Berlin and Martínez, *Soldiers, Politicians, and Civilians*, 212–13.
18. Rohr-Garztecki quotes a noted Polish defence authority, Professor Antoni Kaminski, who says, "Even in the civilian departments of the MoND the military constituted an absolute majority of personnel, some of them retirees but the rest just swapped uniforms for suits temporarily." Rohr-Garztecki, "The Long Shadow of History," 35.
19. Thomas-Durell Young, email response to qualitative survey, June 4, 2018.
20. Agüero, *Soldiers, Civilians, and Democracy*.
21. Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, 48.
22. *Ibid.*, 234.
23. Freilich, *Zion's Dilemmas*, 22.
24. Cohen and Dasgupta, *Arming Without Aiming*.
25. *Ibid.*, 64–65.
26. Reforming the National Security System: Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security (New Delhi: Government of India, 2001), 97–117; Mukherjee, "Fighting Separately," 6–34.
27. It is unclear to Thomas-Durell Young, despite having spent time in the directorate of non-military planning in the MoND. Response to survey questionnaire, June 4, 2018.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Freilich, *Zion's Dilemmas*, 67



30. Cohen and Dasgupta, *Arming Without Aiming*.
31. David Kuehn, email response to qualitative survey, April 19, 2018; Evans Chen, email response to qualitative survey, April 16, 2018.
32. José Olmeda, email response to qualitative survey, March 13, 2018.
33. Rafael Martínez, email response to qualitative survey, March 1, 2018; José Olmeda, email response to qualitative survey, March 13, 2018.
34. Bruneau, "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America."
35. Staniland and Narang, "State and Politics," 6–9.
36. The other major academic center is the National Defence College within the IDF, but that is for soldiers only.
37. On the University of Haifa programme, see <http://securitystudies.haifa.ac.il/index.php/about/faculty-and-staff>; On Tel-Aviv see, <http://www.inss.org.il/team/>. One or two civilian researchers have been consultants to the defence ministry.
38. Union Public Service Commission, "Previous Year Question Papers," <http://www.upsc.gov.in/examinations/previous-question-papers>
39. Kuehn, *Institutionalizing Civilian Control*, 297; Kuehn, "Democratization and Civilian Control of the Military in Taiwan," 885–86.
40. Rafael Martínez, email response to qualitative survey, March 1, 2018.
41. Felix Arteaga, email response to qualitative survey, March 8, 2018.
42. <http://www.defensa.gob.es/gabinete/notasPrensa/2018/08/DGC-180801-subsecretario-reunion-sindicatos.html>.
43. <https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/estadistica-de-centros-de-ense-anza-cursos-y-estudios-2016.html>, 6.
44. Ibid., 16.
45. Felix Arteaga and José Olmeda, email qualitative survey responses March 8 and March 13, 2018.
46. Antonio Díaz, email response to qualitative survey, March 6, 2018.
47. Thomas-Durell Young, email response to qualitative survey, June 4, 2018.
48. These percentages calculated from data found at respective country websites indicated in Table 2.
49. Bruneau, "Reforms in Professional Military Education," 196.
50. Dieck, "Redefining Defense Strategy."
51. Auerswald, "Legislatures"; Avant, "Political Institutions."
52. Gibson and Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence"; Bruneau, "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America"; Downs and Murtazashvili, *Arms and the University*.
53. Clausewitz, *On War*, 608.
54. NATO Summit, Membership Action Plan, 24 April 1999. <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-066e.htm>.
55. Clunan, "Globalization and the Impact of Norms."
56. NATO, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, September 3, 1995, Chapter 1. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_24733.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm).
57. NATO press release, April 24, 1999, p. 3. <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-066e.htm>.
58. This is perhaps best evidenced in the persisting membership of Turkey, which despite failing to meet the democratic requirements of NATO (set in 1952), remains in the alliance. Also, see Dzebisashvili, "Conditionality and Compliance"; Matei, "Balancing Democratic Civilian Control."
59. See NATO, "Education and Training," [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49206.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49206.htm).
60. Many Polish officers went to the West to get further educated, but civilians did not follow suit, reinforcing pre-existing imbalances in civil-military competence. Young, *Anatomy of Post-Communist European Defense Institutions*, 191.
61. Feaver, *Guarding the Guardians*.
62. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 19.
63. Pierson, *Politics in Time*.
64. A key study of the U.S. decision-making process revealed that with shared defence duties, the knowledge either side brought to the table translated into real influence. Gibson and Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence."
65. Krebs, "Armed Forces and Polity," 15.
66. Michael, "Military Knowledge."
67. Rhagavan, "Soldiers," 120.

68. Wilkinson, "Army and Nation," 129–30.
69. Human Rights Watch, "Getting Away with Murder." <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/2008/india0808/india0808web.pdf>.
70. Cottey, "The second generation," 49; Busza, "Transition and Civil—Military Relations," 176–77.
71. Kuehn, *Institutionalizing Civilian Control*, 249.
72. Fravel, "Towards Civilian Supremacy," 82 fn 26.
73. Serra, *The Military Transition*, 124.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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