“The military factor in contemporary international relations”

Introduction

The term "military relations" refers broadly to the interaction between the armed force of a state as an institution, and the other sectors of the society in which the armed force is embedded. It is an intensely interdisciplinary area of research, reflecting the work of political scientists, military sociologists, and historians. Arguably, the field of military relations really took off – at least in the United States – as social scientists became part of the war effort in World War II. Much of this early military relations research focused on the individual service member and small unit cohesion

Subsequently, there have been several “waves” of military research (Desch 1999:2). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Samuel Huntington (1957), Morris Janowitz (1960), and Samuel Finer (1962) reoriented research away from individuals and toward the relationships among military institutions, societies, and governments in the post–World War II period.

A second wave emerged in the 1970s in response to the belief that US–Soviet détente might create the conditions for international peace (Betts 1977; Perlmutter 1977; Nordlinger 1977).

A third wave broke with the end of the Cold War and continues to this day. For the most part, those who study military relations take for granted that there are significant differences between the leaders, institutions, values, prerogatives, attitudes, and practices of a society at large, on the one hand, and those of that society's military establishment, on the other.

The basis of military relations is a dilemma: what Peter Feaver has called the civil–military problematique, which requires a given polity to balance two concerns. On the one hand, it must create a military establishment strong enough to protect the state. On the other, it must somehow ensure that this same military establishment does not turn on the state that e).

In response to the critique of the United States in the aftermath of Vietnam, civilian and military analysts revisited the topic of strategy and reexamined the classical theorists and historians such as Clausewitz and Thucydides.

Luttwak 2001, Gray 1999, and Collins 2001 place modern military strategy in the post-Vietnam and Cold War contexts. In the post-9/11 world, more attention is paid to what is commonly referred to as the "spectrum of conflict," including and conventional and unconventional warfare, terrorism, and emerging transnational threats that have become issues of security and military strategy. Buley 2008 and Loo 2008 look at more contemporary issues of military strategy, including the notions of revolutions in military affairs, defense transformation, and current warfare.

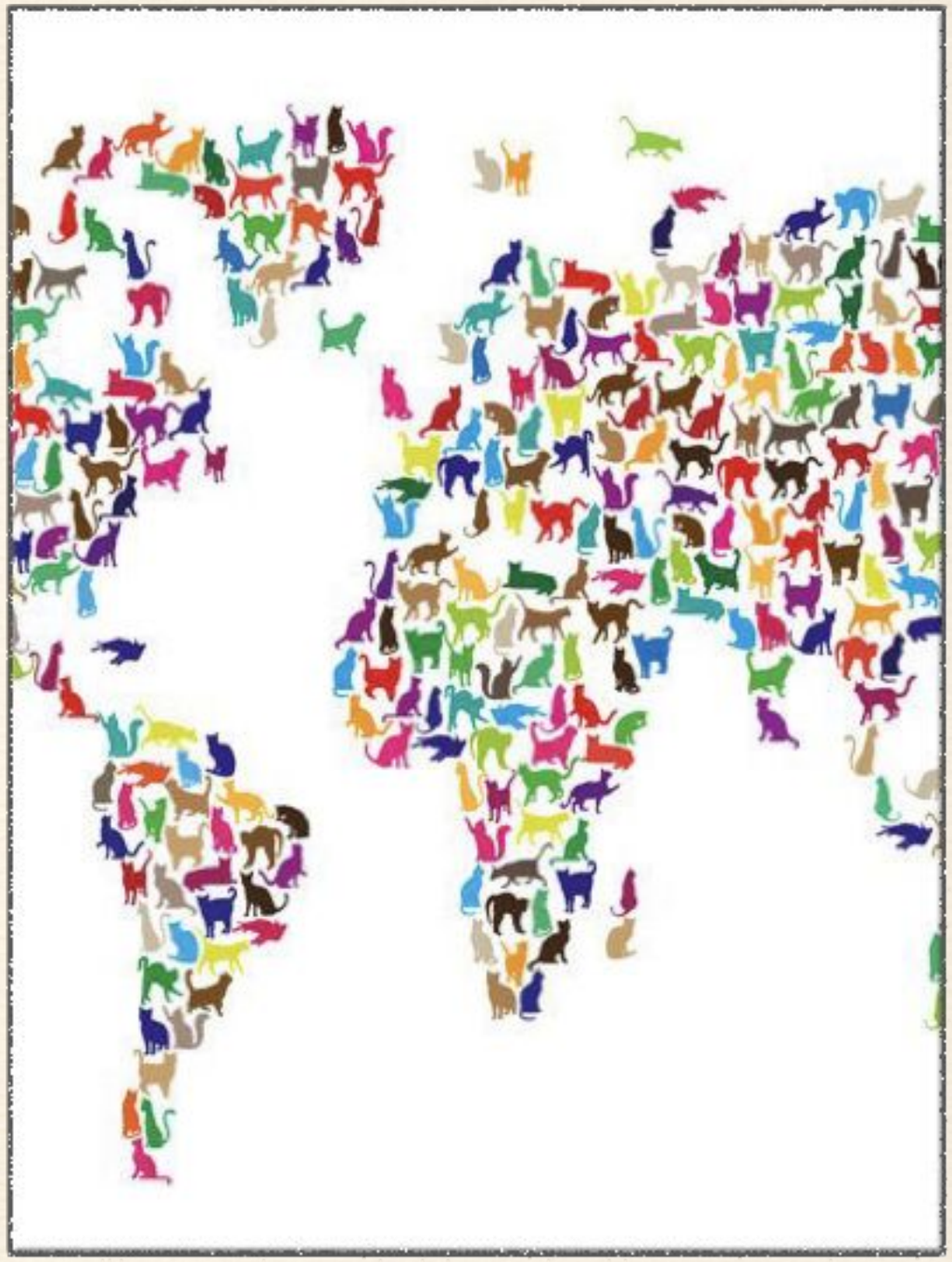
From time to time throughout the history of a polity, certain circumstances – political, strategic, social, technological, etc. – change to such a degree that the terms of the existing military bargain become obsolete. The resulting disequilibrium and tension lead the parties to renegotiate the bargain in order to restore equilibrium.

There are five sets of questions that lie at the heart of the military bargain at a given time (Owens forthcoming).

The first category concerns the issue of who *controls the military*, and how. In authoritarian or praetorian states, the question is largely moot.

The second question is closely related to the first. What degree of *military influence* is appropriate for a given society? To what extent does or should the military intervene in domestic affairs? The extreme form of military influence is a coup d'état. Another form of military intervention in domestic politics is praetorianism. How does the government avoid or limit military intervention? For the most part, advanced liberal societies have avoided these forms of military intervention.

The third question concerns the *appropriate role* of the military in a given polity. Is it to fight and win the nation's wars or engage in constabulary actions? What kind of wars should the military be preparing to fight? Should the focus of the military be foreign or domestic? States have answered this question differently at different times and under different circumstances.



.**Fourth**, who serves? Is military service an obligation of citizenship or something else? How are officers accessed and promoted? Is the accession and promotion of officers based on merit and achievement or political affiliation, social class, ethnicity, or religion?

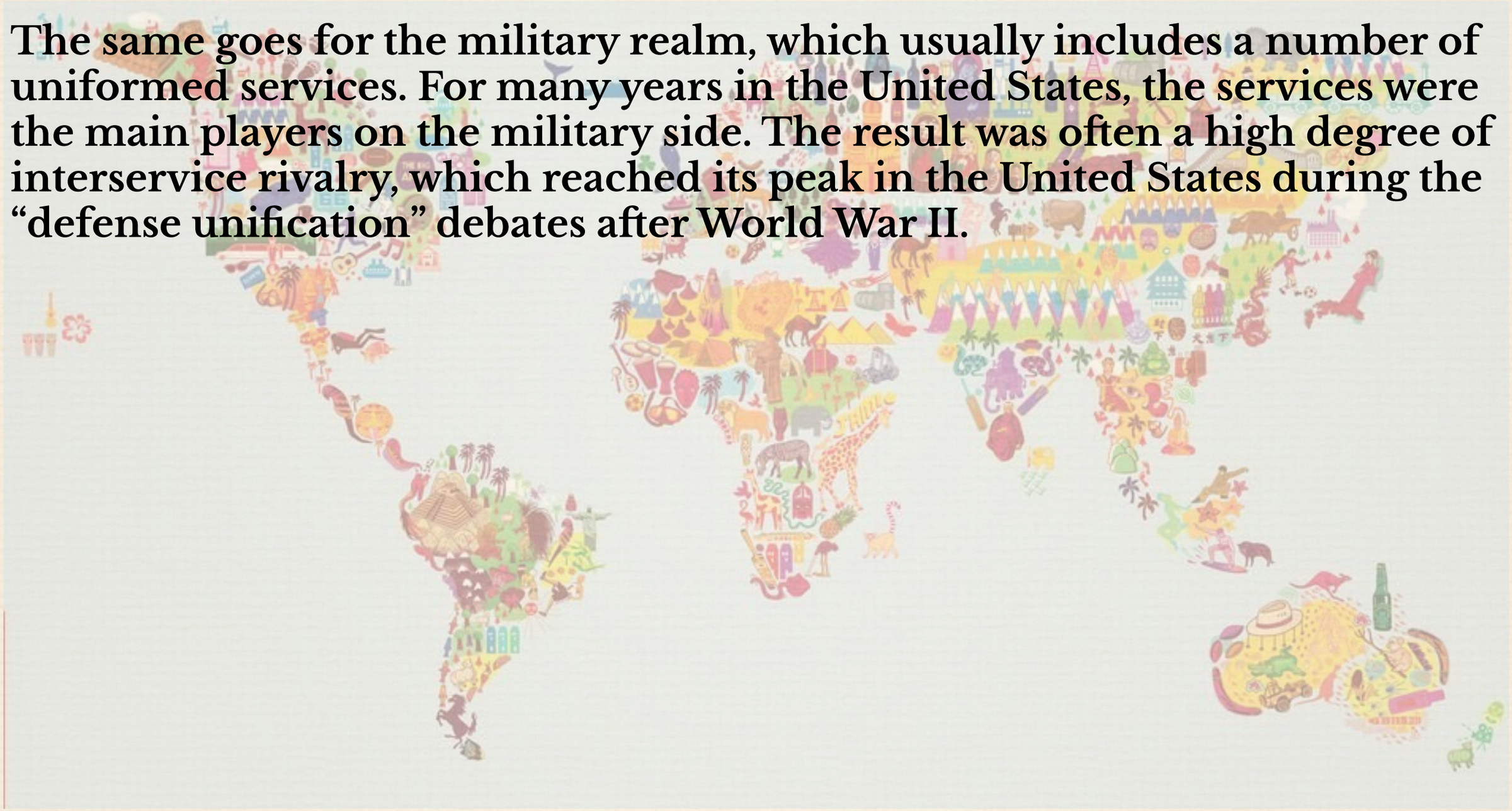
Finally, how effective is the military instrument that a given pattern of military relations produces? All of the other questions mean little if the military instrument is unable to ensure the survival of the state. If there is no constitution, the question of constitutional balance doesn't matter. Does effectiveness require a military culture distinct in some ways from the society it serves? What impact does societal structure have on military effectiveness? What impact does political structure exert? Is the effectiveness of militaries in some developing states degraded as a result of their primary role in ensuring domestic security and regime survival? What impact does a given pattern of civil–military relations have on the effectiveness of strategic decision making processes (Brooks 2008; Desch 2008)?

In general, there are two lenses through which to examine these questions. The first is the institutional lens, which focuses on how the actors in a polity, including the military as an organization, interact within the institutional framework of a given polity's government. The most influential institutional theory of military relations was advanced fifty years ago by Samuel Huntington in his seminal work, The Soldier and the State (1957).

The second lens is *sociological* or *cultural*. This lens focuses on the broad question of military culture vs. liberal society; the role of individuals and groups, e.g. women, minorities, enlisted servicemen and women within the military and the relationships among them; the effectiveness of individual service members in combat; small unit cohesion; the relationship between military service and citizenship (to include the civic republican tradition); the nature of military service (occupation, profession, etc.); and the relationship

The political institutions of a state also exert a strong influence on its military relations by allocating relative power to civilian and military leaders. Clearly, different regime types will exhibit different patterns of military relations. The military may be dominant, subordinate to civilian control, or share power (Brooks 2008:33–4). Even in highly militarized regimes, the military may only be one constituent part. For example, in the Soviet Union, the military had to compete against the Communist Party apparatus and the state security system, the KGB, for influence (Nichols 1993). The People's Liberation Army (PLA) faces similar challenges in China.

The same goes for the military realm, which usually includes a number of uniformed services. For many years in the United States, the services were the main players on the military side. The result was often a high degree of interservice rivalry, which reached its peak in the United States during the "defense unification" debates after World War II.



Risa Brooks argues that patterns of military relations affect national security because of their impact on strategic assessment. Brooks identifies two variables that determine the pattern of civil–military relations: (1) the intensity of preference divergence between political and military leaders with regard to corporate, professional, and security issues; and (2) the balance of power between political and military leaders (political dominance, shared power, military dominance). These two variables interact, generating "logics" that affect the institutional features of strategic assessment (Brooks 2008:2–34).

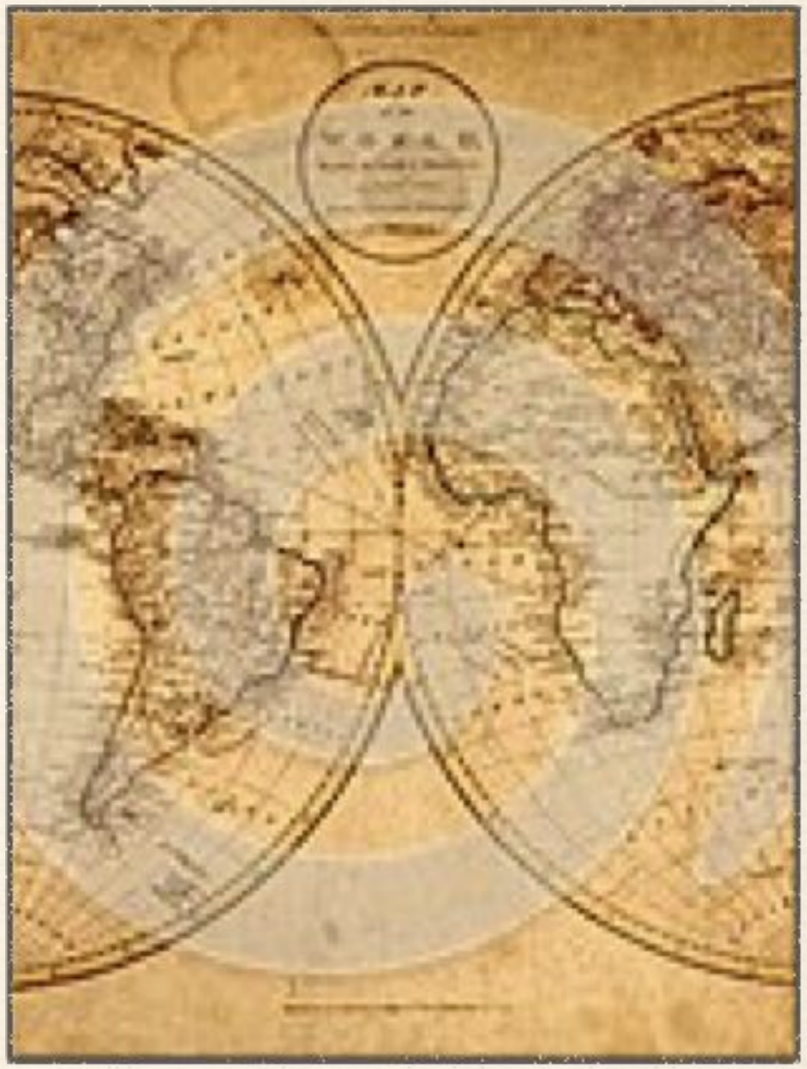
Next she identifies four sets of institutional processes that constitute the element of strategic assessment..

The first is the routine for information sharing

The second is strategic coordination regarding the assessment of strategic alternatives, risk and cost, and the integration of political and military policies and strategies.

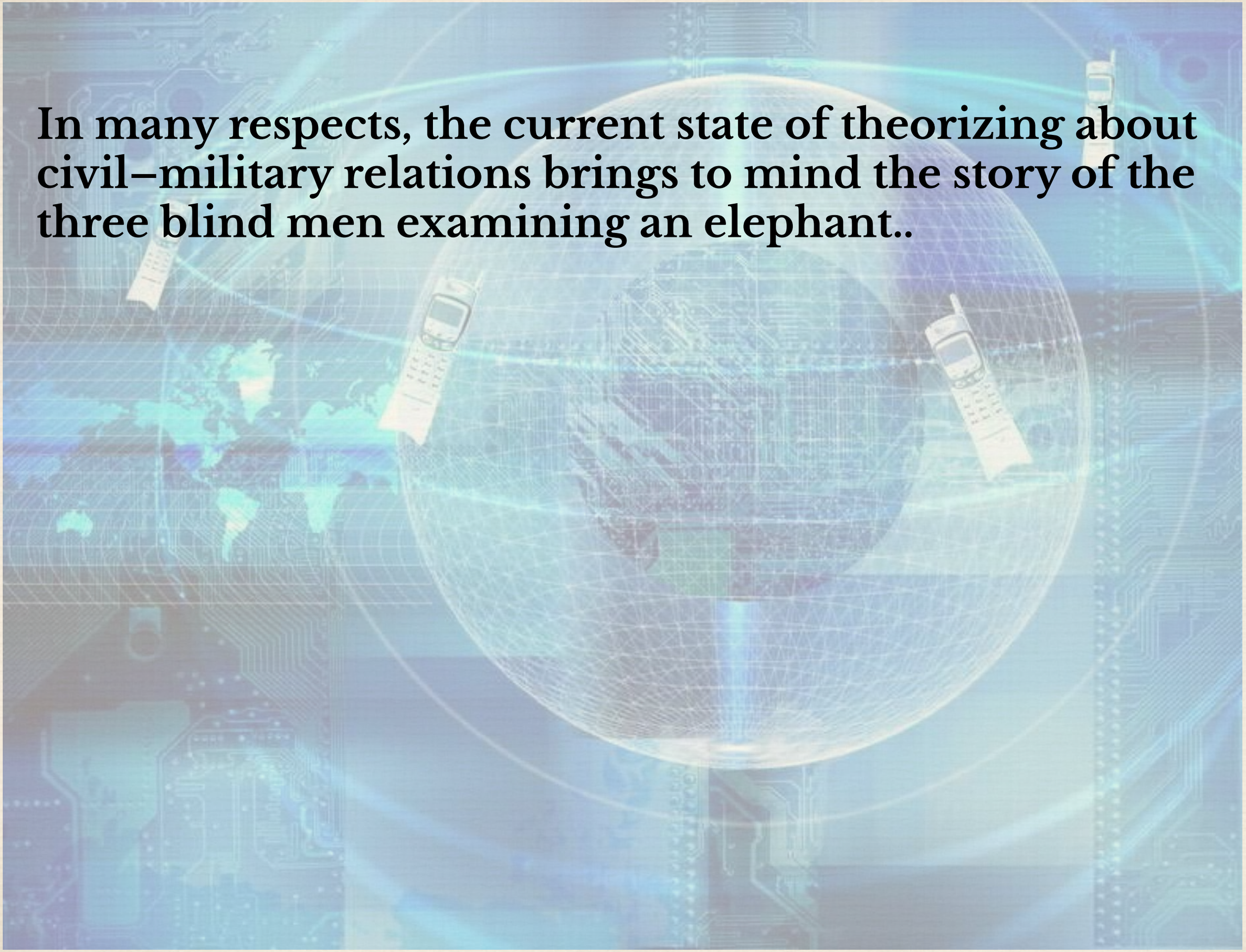
The third is the military's structural competence in conducting sound net assessment.

The fourth is the authorization process for approving or vetoing political-military actions (Brooks 2008:34–42).



Brooks then hypothesizes how the various configurations of power and preference divergence affect the quality of strategic assessment, using case studies to illustrate the relation between various patterns and strategic assessment.

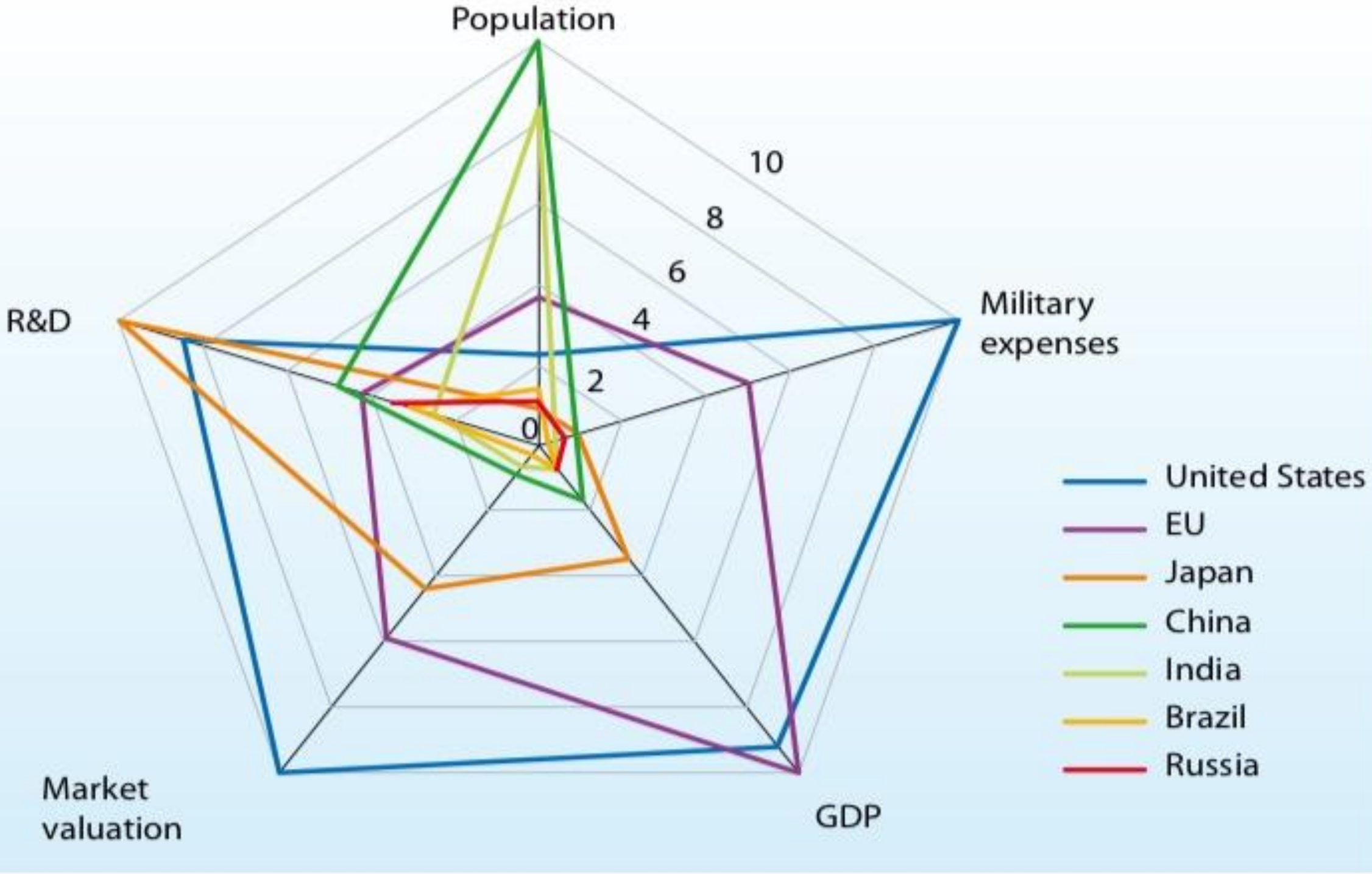
Of course, the quality of a state's strategic assessment is not the only determinant of a state's success or failure in the international arena. The competing strategies of other states and other exogenous factors may well trump even the best strategic assessment. Michael Desch has employed a similar methodology to show that the alleged military advantage of democratic states in international relations is overstated


In many respects, the current state of theorizing about civil–military relations brings to mind the story of the three blind men examining an elephant..

Since each can only sense what he is touching (the trunk, a leg, and the tail) and has no concept of the elephant as a whole, each concludes that the beast is something different from what it really is. Despite the lack of an overarching framework for analyzing civil–military relations, the various areas of the field offer many rich “pastures” in which researchers may graze

Research agendas might well include: additional examination of the emerging civil–military patterns of such emerging powers as China, Russia, and Iran; ascertaining a theory of civil–military relations of Muslim states; follow-up work to Risa Brooks's excellent study of the impact of civil–military relations on strategic assessment; the military implications of the expanded roles of contractors on the battlefield and increased reliance on special operations forces; the military implications of the increased utilization of airstrikes by unmanned aircraft; the impact of popular will on effectiveness in various sorts of warfare, e.g. counterinsurgency; and further research into the impact of an increasing "civilianization" of the military on military effectiveness.

Power factors, hard power / soft power



Conclusion

.There is no more important question facing a state than the place of its military relative to civil society and the roles that the military exercises. The coercive power that a military institution possesses always makes it, at least theoretically, a threat to the regime. Clearly, there are many possible patterns of military relations that provide different answers to the five questions posed at the beginning of this essay.

As the survey of contending theories of military relations suggests, there is no "general" or "unified field" theory that successfully explains all of these patterns (Bland 1999). Nor, given the variety and complexity of civil–military patterns is one likely or desirable.

References

Soldiers: Citizenship, Culture, and Military Service." *Parameters* 31, 18–22.

Find this resource:

Avant, D. (1994) Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral War. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Find this resource:

Bacevich, A.J. (2005) The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War. New York: Oxford University Press.

Find this resource:

Betts, R.K. (1977) Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Find this resource:

Bland, D.L. (1999) A Unified Theory of Civil–Military Relations. *Armed Forces and Society*, 26, 7–26.

Find this resource:

Bland, D.L. (2000) Who Decides What? Civil–Military Relations in Canada and the United States. *Canadian-American Public Policy* 41, 1–22.

Find this resource:

Boettcher, T.D. (1992) First Call: The Making of the Modern US Military, 1945–1953. Boston: Little, Brown.

Find this resource:

Brooks, R.A. (2008) Shaping Strategy: The Civil–Military Politics of Strategic Assessment. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Find this resource:

Builder, C.H. (1989) The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Find this resource:

Burke, J. (1993) Morris Janowitz and the Origins of Sociological Research on Armed Forces and Society. *Armed Forces and Society*