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Battlefield Bureaucrats: a Theoretical Analysis of the Potential Political Impact of Tactical-Level Decision-Making

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Battlefield Bureaucrats: a Theoretical Analysis of the Potential Political Impact of Tactical-Level Decision-Making

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1.   Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how decision-makers at the lower levels of military organizations, i.e. squad and platoon commanders, company commanders, fighter pilots and submarine captains, can shape foreign policy outcomes. Most of the decision-makers within these categories work at the tactical level, where they have to make a multitude of decisions in a given day. Some of these decisions have to be made under extreme pressure and considerable risk, while they carry a huge burden of responsibility for the safety of the personnel under their command and for the potential political repercussions to their nation. This paper focuses especially on the latter: as instruments of foreign policy, military units are frequently deployed abroad or in domestic conflicts, where they will face a diversity of tasks and duties. Some of the decision-makers involved in these often highly complex operations may be in their twenties with no more than a few years of professional experience, possibly even less in the case of junior NCOs. Nevertheless, they may find themselves faced with extraordinarily difficult choices to make, with cameras rolling to capture their every move. These choices, not only in a modern media environment but also the ones made in the red glow of a submarine or the pressing heat and acrid smell of a moving tank, are the focus of this paper. Among the myriads of uncontroversial routine decisions dwell a significant number of high-stakes choices that have shaped the outcome of wars or contributed to the fall of governments. The forces that shape these decisions should thus be of great interest not only for military professionals but also for the politicians who send these men and women in uniform to implement their policies. This paper is an effort to shed some light on the issue.

1.1   Purpose & Research Question

The purpose of the theory is to be understood in terms of investigating a seemingly anomalous phenomena within the realm of foreign policy, i.e. decisions by lower-level military commanders that go against the political expectations and thus produce negative consequences for political decision-makers and the higher levels of the parent military organization. I would argue that this is, at first glance, anomalous, since a commonly held understanding of military organizations is that they enforce a standard of discipline that goes beyond most, if not all, other bureaucratic organizations. Nevertheless, there are numerous empirical examples of incidents in which lower-level commanders have acted

in a manner that prompted strong reactions from the higher levels as well as from the political sphere. I argue that this is not a matter of poor individual judgment or character but rather part of a class of phenomena that are more often associated with traditional bureaucracies.

The research question that will guide the process is "**why do tactical-level commanders in military organizations make decisions that have adverse political effects?**".

1.2   Source Material Considerations

The purpose of this paper is not to add to the factual description of any given empirical case. Consequently, the main focus will be on providing theoretical insight that will add to the understanding of previously described events. With this in mind, I will primarily rely upon secondary sources, and limit the use of primary sources, doing so only when necessary. However, it is also important to emphasize that I will not take any secondary source at face value. In order to reduce the impact of any potentially biased secondary sources, I will to the extent that it can be accomplished within the scope of this paper, cross-compare all empirical material against multiple independent sources.

2.   Theoretical Framework

The theoretical section of this paper combines key elements from several theories on public administration, and adds new components tailored to fit the particulars of military organizations. For the latter part, classic military theory, specifically Clausewitz, is used.

2.1   Street-level Bureaucrats in Camouflage Uniforms

I argue that tactical commanders in military organizations have an equivalent in public administration research among the so-called "street-level bureaucrats". Comparing military organizations to bureaucracies is nothing new per se, (see for example Hummel 1994, p. 7), however, I propose to extend this perspective to the lowest levels. According to Meyers & Vorsanger (2003), "[b]y virtue of their position at the interface between citizens and the state, street-level bureaucrats have significant opportunities to influence the delivery of public policies". Meyers and Vorsanger argue that the position of the street-level bureaucrats is thus a crucial factor in their causal capacity. This view is supported by the creator of the street-level bureaucrat concept, Michael Lipsky (2010, p. 3). I argue that tactical commanders, like street-level bureaucrats, are at the lowest/most practical levels of implementation and that both categories thus have causal capacity to shape major political outcomes under certain circumstances.

The most essential components of the street-level bureaucrat concept are the interrelated concepts *discretion* and *relative autonomy from organizational authority* (Lipsky 2010, p. 13). In traditional public administration, this means that the civil servants can make independent decisions within their scope of authority, and obstruct attempts to micromanage them on behalf of the organization (Lipsky 2010, p. 13-28). I argue that the everyday challenges related to client interaction, the phenomenon that makes discretion and relative autonomy from organizational authority necessary components of street-level bureaucracies, have a military functional equivalent in the concept of friction, i.e. what von Clausewitz (1997, p. 66) describes as "an infinity of petty circumstances […] things disappoint us, and we fall short of the mark". While hierarchical control may be considerably easier to wield using the strictness of military discipline, the impact of friction inevitably creates situations that demand discretion. The adoption of mission command (*auftragstaktik*) doctrines after 1945 in the US, Israel and Sweden to mention but a few nations (see for example Smedberg 2005, p. 292; Blomgren 2007, p. 105)

illustrates the importance of flexibility, as well as the potential rewards of decentralizing command authority.

2.2   Socialization and Appropriateness

According to March & Olsen (1989, p. 38), political actions, such as the decisions made by civil servants, are institutionalized "through structures of rules and routines". I argue that these political actions carried out by civil servants in public administration are not fundamentally different from the decisions made by tactical commanders. In both cases implementation of political objectives at the lower levels of an organization are the essence of the context. The above mentioned rules and routines reflect organizational experience, but only makes the rules, not the experience per se, available to the individuals. The rules and routines bring order, but at the same time they may also bring conflict, contradiction, and ambiguity. The result is that they may produce deviation as well as conformity, variability as well as standardization. At the core of this argument is the so-called "logic of appropriateness", which states that actions are fitted to situations according to appropriateness, which is guided by identity. The rules are sustained by trust, defined as a confidence that appropriate behavior can be expected most of the time (March & Olsen 1989, p. 38). Renowned Israeli military psychologist Ben Shalit (2007, p. 120) describes how deviation by an outsider from the expected behavioral appropriateness in various military units can lead to negative responses and distancing. Of particular interest in Shalit's observation is that conduct that was appropriate within the Israeli armored corps was inappropriate among Israeli paratroopers. Shalit points out that the differences in appropriateness can be traced to organizational idiosyncrasies: where paratroopers necessarily need to be flexible and independent, tankers need to adhere to more strict routines to maintain their complex vehicles and to enable them to operate in units (Shalit 2007, p. 121-122). In the case of the tankers, Luttwak & Horowitz (1975, p. 191) claim that Israeli armored warfare innovator Israel Tal was responsible for introducing the unique culture of the armored corps, the purpose being to improve the maintenance and thus also the reliability of the tanks and equipment.

I argue that the logic of appropriateness can be a useful tool for understanding the actions of tactical-level military actors. Any given tactical commander will face numerous decisions on a daily basis. Many of these will be routine decisions, but some will be more

difficult. In a complex operational environment, he/she will be even more likely to face unexpected and puzzling situations. At that point, the tactical commander will be faced with two main junctions; make an independent decision based on one's own assessment and judgment, or, try to stick with intuitive "appropriate" decisions, even though they may not be optimal for the situation at hand. While the former requires no small degree of initiative and independence, the latter in contrast will be a rather convenient coping mechanism. This is what I would describe as a *relapse to appropriateness*. A tactical commander facing a new situation that requires difficult decisions first has to decide between these two major options; either be innovative or stick to the familiar.

2.3   Theoretical Summary

The theoretical view outlined above provides an instrument for understanding the context within which military decision-making at the lower levels takes place. While the impact of discretion differs with the stakes of the situation, the definition of "appropriate" differs between tactical units. Appropriateness in a military context is thus a combination of factors such as recruitment policy, unit purpose, collective experiences, rules, training and overall organizational doctrine. The logical conclusion from this is that in situations where lower-level commanders have to make decisions with potentially strategic consequences, a high degree of divergence between the unit definition of appropriateness and the sort of decisions related to the political requirements will increase the likelihood of a non-compliant output, and vice versa. The theory thus defines the tactical unit subculture as a potential independent variable for explaining different values on the dependent variable described in chapter 1.

3.   A Comparative Case Study Approach

The methodological approach by which I have conducted the empirical study is influenced by an ambition to illustrate the broad applicability of my theoretical framework, in order to thus provide guidelines for potential future generalizations. In order to achieve this, and to introduce a degree of control for contextual idiosyncrasies, I have chosen to draw my empirical material from a broad universe of cases, defined by the following criteria:

an event in which a tactical-level commander has made one decision or a series of decisions with immediate strategic consequences, and consequent political response, measured in terms of negative or positive feedback from the commander's own strategic or political decision-makers[1].

The underlying logic for case selection is based on Mill's "method of agreement" as defined by George & Bennett (2005, p. 153). Mindful of the warning issued by Collier & Mahoney (1996, p. 71), that selecting extreme cases will be problematic if the goal is to generalize across the full spectrum of cases, I have sought to choose cases that are "typical", i.e. not extreme in any discernible sense[2], while at the same time seeking to find cases with as many differences as possible in terms of military organizational branch, time period and setting. By "setting" I am referring to the dichotomy between traditional/conventional war and what is usually called "military operations other than war" (MOOTW), i.e. peace-keeping/peace enforcement and similar contexts in which military organization operate but no war is declared.

3.1   The Case Selection Bias Issue

In order to cope with the risk for case selection bias, I have selected cases that display variation on the values of the dependent variable, in accordance with the

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1 In this context, I have chosen to consider the strategic and political spheres as being essentially the same, due to the close relations between the highest leadership of military organizations and the political decision-makers to whom they are subordinate. This simplification is far from unproblematic in certain contexts but I argue that it will not have an significant impact on the evaluation on the cases studied in this paper.

2 Gomm et al. (2007, p. 107) argue that in order to determine what is "typical", the researcher needs to have some indication of the level of heterogeneity in the overall population as well as be able to assess the availability of this information. The selected cases all have similar incidents occurring within the same organizations and time periods, as defined in table 1, which supports the argument that they are not unique or extreme within the context of military decision-making.

recommendation presented by King, Keohane and Verba (1994, p. 149). In this paper, the dependent variable has two major possible values; compliant outcome and non-compliant outcome. I have chosen two cases to represent each of these two outcomes, for a total of four cases. The variance of values on the dependent variable should also satisfy the recommendation by Collier & Mahoney (1996, p. 67) to include a "contrast space", i.e. that the variance on the dependent value should not be narrower than suggested by the research question. In order to avoid limiting myself to what George & Bennett (2005, p. 138) call "cross-case inferences", I will also subject each case to a within-case analysis.

	Branch/type	Period	Nationality	Setting	Output
Case I	Submarine arm	1930s	Germany	Traditional	Non-compliant
Case II	Armored corps	1970s	Israel	Traditional	Compliant
Case III	Fighter squadron	1990s	US	MOOTW	Non-compliant
Case IV	Infantry[3]	2000s	Sweden	MOOTW	Compliant

Table 1: Case Selection Strategy

3.2   Within-Case Analysis

The within-case analysis sections of this paper are based on process-tracing, as defined by George & Bennett (2005). A crucial aspect of this view of process-tracing is that each case is being "asked" the same set of questions (George & Bennett 2005, p. 207). Not only does this approach produce a clear structure, it also reduces the risk of arbitrary interpretation and circular reasoning. The matter of urgency is also briefly touched upon, in terms of whether or not the situation under scrutiny required rapid action, which could make decision-making more difficult. The section concerning the political objectives attempts to establish to which extent the political objectives required offensive or cautionary postures. The section about the tactical unit subculture attempts to determine the extent to which the unit is offensive or cautionary, thus enabling the reader to assess the degree of convergence or divergence in offensive/cautionary terms.

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3   At the time of case IV, the Swedish unit for deployment abroad, *Utlandsstyrkan*, was the approximate equivalent of a light infantry unit in composition, but was not part of the regular force structure. Each unit was formed separately for each rotation and then disbanded. One of the reasons for the ad-hoc solution was that the Swedish Armed Forces did not have a sufficiently large group of employed non-commissioned officers and enlisted men from which to draw personnel for such tasks (Bolin 2008, p. 90).

4.   Case I: the S/S Athenia Incident, 1939

On the 3rd of September in 1939 the passenger liner S/S Athenia was sunk by a German submarine commanded by *kapitänleutnant* Fritz-Julius Lemp, at 7:40 pm local time. This despite operational orders that clearly forbade the sinking of civilian vessels without prior warning and unless a number of precautions were taken, intended to ensure the safety of the crew and passengers. The incident sparked a major international incident, and caused an outcry from the public in the US and UK. The whole affair was so embarrassing to Germany that a major cover-up operation was initiated (*Nuremberg Trial Proceedings, Vol. 5*). It can thus be safely assumed that the decision to sink the *Athenia* led to an outcome that was very displeasing for the German government. The day after the incident, Hitler issued a stern order forbidding any attacks on civilian passenger liners., followed by instructions from the head of the submarine arm, Karl Dönitz, emphasizing the importance of adhering to the restrictions concerning civilian vessels (Blair 2001, p. 112). The political context shifted rapidly after this incident, and in November 1939, all restrictions on submarine warfare were officially abandoned by the German Navy (*Nuremberg Trial Proceedings, Vol. 13*).

4.1   Political Objectives

At the core of the German political objectives were the order to respect the "prize rules" and the submarine protocol of 1930, signed by Germany in 1936. Hitler's political objective, which prompted the order to adhere to restricting rules, was to limit the war to Poland (Dönitz 1946, p. 4; Blair 2001, p. 93). By avoiding provocation of British and French public opinion, Hitler wanted Britain and France to take a passive role in the war and to avoid upsetting the American public (Preston 1998, p. 47). With the above factors in mind I argue that the most reasonable interpretation is that in political terms, a cautionary posture would be preferable to an offensive one in unclear situations. Avoiding the negative repercussions of an accidental sinking was far more important than destroying British ships, since exercising pressure on the United Kingdom was not a priority at the time. Exercising restraint and prudence, positively identifying each target, should have been at the top of the priority list.

4.2   Tactical Unit Subculture

The curriculum used by the German Navy to train submarine crews in the years leading

up to WWII focused on the annihilation of convoys (Blair 2001 p. 79, Tamelander & Segerstad 2005 p. 81). Each submarine carried out a large number of simulated attacks, continuously honing the procedures for attacking, and the training included repetition of attack procedures to such an extent that it pushed commanders to the edge of their endurance (Blair 2001, p. 68 & p. 74). This training was the logical extension of a culture in which the success of a submarine commander was usually measured in tonnage sunk[4]. Based on this, I argue that the tactical unit subculture was clearly offensive. The large number of attacks practiced in a relatively short time span by the submarine crews indicates that a high operational tempo was expected, which indicates that rapidity was valued. There is on the contrary nothing that points toward any emphasis on caution or other skills related to adherence to restrictions in the training schedule and doctrine used by the u-boat training methods at the time. Consequently, the procedures required by the prize rules, which emphasized thorough scrutiny of each target, as indicated by the rule requiring the manifest of each neutral ship to be investigated, would hardly have been within the boundaries of appropriate behavior within the submarine arm.

4.3   Summary: Analysis of Events

Fritz-Julius Lemp did not take enough time to confirm the identity of his target. When he approached the target and saw the extent of his mistake, he immediately realized that he was responsible for a condemnable act. This clarifies that he was himself aware of the political objectives, but failed to award them proper priority, which could have prompted him to err on the side of caution. The divergence between the tactical unit subculture and the political objectives was thus considerable. When faced with a tempting prize of a target, Lemp relapsed into appropriateness rather than exercising sound judgment, and chose to engage the *Athenia* before she could move out of range. While Lemp was not properly trained for the intricacies of restricted submarine warfare, he could still have opted to withhold fire. The decision to engage had immense political consequences and the sheer scope and intensity of the cover-up efforts clearly illustrate how unpleasant the political outcome was to the senior levels of the German Navy as well as the top political leadership.

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4   For example, Karl Dönitz' mention of the "great U-boat aces of that time" lists three examples; Günther Prien, Otto Kretschmer and Joachim Schepke, all three of whom are among the top 11 German commanders responsible for sinking the most tonnage during WWII (Uboat.net, *Commanders with more than 100,000 tons sunk*).

5.   Case II: the Battle of the Valley of Tears, 1973

During the Yom Kippur war of 1973, Israel fought against a coalition of neighboring countries, including Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, after a surprise attack launched on two major fronts. At one decisive point in time at the Golan Heights, the Israeli 7th Armored Brigade had been decimated from 150 tanks to 7, and these had on average no more than four rounds remaining for their main guns. The Syrians were in the process of launching yet another attack when Lieutenant-Colonel Yossi Ben Hannan arrived with a motley relief force comprised of 13 more or less damaged tanks manned by crews drawn from lightly wounded personnel who had discharged themselves from hospital care. Upon arriving at the scene, Ben Hannan immediately launched an attack against the numerically superior Syrian forces. After a brief engagement, the Syrians halted the attack and withdrew. According to Herzog (1975, p. 113), the Israeli commander of all forces on the Golan Brigadier General "Raful" Eytan said shortly afterward that "You have saved the people of Israel". Ben Hannan's attack was directed against a numerically and qualitatively superior enemy with hardly any prior preparation or planning. In doing so, he gambled with the very few available reinforcements. The fact that he was joined by remaining tanks from the 7th armored brigade means that failure would not only have reduced the reinforcements but also the remaining defenders. The outcome, however, was clearly much appreciated by the political decision-makers in Israel at the time since it stabilized an exposed front at a crucial point in time. Both LtCol Ben Hannan and battalion commander Avigdor Kahalani were later decorated for courage.

5.1   Political Objectives

The political objectives of the defense policy of Israel at the time were quite straightforward. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were to protect the territory of Israel against foreign invasion. The geographical area of the state of Israel along with its relatively small population created special demands on the IDF. It was crucial to repel an invader at quickly as possible, which made it necessary to go on the offensive quickly (Smedberg 2010, p. 161). The political objectives thus required considerable offensive action. The temporal factor is closely related to the offensive one in the case of Israel. The overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy forces combined with the short distances in Israel meant that a disastrous breakthrough could come quickly and that an advancing enemy, having broken through, could threaten the major population centers in

a matter of hours. Time was thus of the essence, the political objectives during the 1973 war clearly required rapidity in addition to a strong offensive spirit.

5.2   Tactical Unit Subculture

The IDF early emphasized the importance of highly skilled junior commanders, who could act independently (van Creveld 1985, p. 228). In the face of an enemy attack, the IDF prepared to re-take the initiative as soon as possible and at the earliest opportunity launch counterattacks. One officer in the 1960s summarized it by saying "when in doubt-attack" (van Creveld 1985, p. 199). The doctrine instilled in the offensive ground units of the IDF also emphasized the ability to act quickly (van Creveld 1985, p. 198). It was, for example, explicitly stated that commanders and headquarters should be able to conduct their operations while on the move (Smedberg 2010, p. 162). In the Armored Corps, Colonel (later Major-General) Israel Tal initiated extensive reforms to reshape the organizational culture. In stark contrast to the casual dress and informal discipline that characterized the paratroopers and infantry, Tal stressed the importance of regulations, down to the level of correctly worn hats and the use of prescribed boots (Luttwak & Horowitz 1975, p. 190-191). Tal's prediction that formal discipline would go hand in hand with technical discipline turned out to be correct. The general condition of tanks and equipment was significantly improved and increased reliability followed. Tal was also a proponent of mobility, long-range gunnery skills and offensive tank formations operating independently of infantry support under all conditions. Tal's argument was that tanks in Europe may need to be mindful of the threat from short-range anti-tank weapons, but under Israeli conditions there would be very few natural covers from which infantry could ambush tanks (Luttwak & Horowitz 1975, p. 188). Consequently, Tal considered mechanized infantry to be of secondary importance and that tanks should advance without accompanying infantry if necessary. Speed was not only stressed in terms of mobility, but was expressed as the guiding principle when entering battle, while coordinating plans, improvising and when facing assignments and targets for which the units were not always prepared (Luttwak & Horowitz 1975, p. 265).

5.3   Summary: Analysis of Events

The IDF was taken by surprise by the massive attack launched in 1973, but was nevertheless able to make great use of its doctrine. Yossi Ben Hannan acted in

accordance with his training, and in doing what might have seemed reckless in a different time or place did he manage to avert a potential disaster. In hindsight it may seem logical to accept higher risks when so much was at stake, but one must keep in mind that Ben Hannan cannot reasonably have known the exact disposition of enemy forces, nor the exact point in time when the next friendly reinforcements were to arrive. Faced with uncertainty and threat, he acted within the boundaries of what was appropriate in his unit culture, i.e. aggressively, quickly and with determination, in accordance with "when in doubt-attack" and the importance of speed. The desire to attack was not only limited to Ben Hannan's unit. Shortly before the reinforcement element arrived, battalion commander Avigdor Kahalani requested permission to advance against the enemy with less than 10 tanks, of which none had more than a handful of shells left (Kahalani 1992, p. 108). At the Valley of Tears, the combination of reliable equipment, long-range gunnery and fierce offensive spirit showed how a perfect convergence between political objectives and appropriately shaped tactical unit subculture can be a very powerful force multiplier.

6.   Case III: the Riot in Caglavica, 2004

The KFOR force in Kosovo had been in place for almost five years when the 2004 riots broke out. KFOR was unprepared for the level of violence it suddenly faced and the result was significant destruction of property. Several Serb villages were burned to the ground (*Failure to Protect*, 2004). One of few exceptions during the turbulent days of riots was Caglavica, in which a multinational KFOR unit under Swedish command managed to protect a Serb village and a cultural heritage site from a large mob. When the Swedish local commander, Hans Håkansson, received word that a mob was demanding free passage to the Serbian village, he mobilized every man and woman in his unit, including kitchen staff. He then ordered them to stop the mob in its tracks by forming a line across the road leading into the Serb village. A chaotic confrontation ensued, in which the mob launched a violent assault on the KFOR unit in an attempt to break through, while Serbian villagers engaged in sporadic fire against people in the mob. Hans Håkansson decided to authorize the use of deadly force and a truck driver was shot dead while trying to run over the KFOR troops (Blomgren 2007, p. 45-46). Despite the extreme violence, the unit didn't open fire on the rest of the mob while a Swedish covert special forces unit neutralized the Serbian shooters inside the village. After 12 hours of fighting, almost every member of the KFOR unit was injured and 35 Swedes had been sent to hospitals, but the village had suffered only minor damage and a valuable Serb cultural heritage site in the vicinity had been saved for future generations. Hans Håkansson was later praised for this decision in Swedish media (see for example Zaremba 2007) and awarded the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences' commendation medal in gold (Åkerström 2005, p. 29-30).

6.1   Political Objectives

The political objectives of the KFOR unit was to provide security and stability to the volatile region, preventing violence and to protect minorities (*NATO's Role in Kosovo*). In addition, the necessity to be perceived as an impartial actor meant that KFOR had to consider every action in relation to the parties (Mockaitis 2004, p. 61-62), an approach I argue requires caution rather than rapid action. Concerning the potential collision between force protection considerations and risk-taking, it is difficult to establish a clear priority list, but previous experiences from Bosnia 1992-1995 clearly illustrates the inherent danger of over-emphasizing force protection when civilians are at risk. The

unique difficulty of the 2004 riots in Kosovo was the issue of protecting property from systematic destruction and how to prioritize this in relation to the ROE and political objectives. These complex issues combined means that local commanders should ideally be able to carefully weigh priorities and assess the political aspects of any situation.

6.2 Tactical Unit Subculture

The Swedish Armed Forces, which provided the commander for the KFOR unit in Caglavica as well as a considerable portion of the personnel, was mostly comprised of soldiers and NCOs who had already served as conscripts and had been discharged back to civilian life. They then returned to serve voluntarily, usually 6-9 months, with an additional 1-3 months of preparatory and refresher training. The tactical units were thus comprised of men and women that were older than the mainstay of the territorial army units at the time, and most of them had civilian day jobs. They had all volunteered to go to Kosovo specifically and the preparatory training emphasized the complexity of peacekeeping missions, augmented with additional combat training. Consequently, the tactical unit subculture had relatively little offensive spirit and the personnel was not only trained to have a civilian perspective, they were essentially civilians themselves.

6.3 Summary: Analysis of Events

While French and German units interpreted their orders in a manner that made them withdraw to protect their forces, Håkansson risked his personnel and was willing to accept casualties in order to protect the Serb village and site. The decision to accept the risks of confrontation was influenced by the realization that there would be severe political and humanitarian repercussions if the mob had been allowed to roam freely (Blomberg 2007, p. 73). The sensitivity to these political priorities prompted Håkansson to make the decision not to put force protection above the protection of the Serb village. Within the unit culture, this was entirely appropriate. One of the company commanders, Marko Tillaeus, later explained that while they were struggling for survival, they were also determined not to permit the mob to engage in any ethnic cleansing (Blomgren 2007, p. 52). The soldiers, although they were hard pressed by having to withstand the violence of the mob for hours on end without pause or even opportunities to answer the calls of nature, remained motivated (Blomgren 2007, p. 56).

7. Case IV: the Black Hawk Fratricide Incident, 1994

In 1994, during routine operations to maintain a no-fly zone over Iraq, two US Army Black Hawk helicopters were shot down by two US Air Force fighters after a malfunction in the transponder equipment normally used to transmit identification codes. The fighters mistook the Black Hawk helicopters for Iraqi attack helicopters and both were shot down, resulting in 26 deaths. The incident led to a hearing in the House Committee on National Security, and the subsequent US Air Force investigation, which cleared all involved personnel of responsibility, was later reviewed by the General Accounting Office (GAO) after complaints by families of the victims.

7.1 Political Objectives

The Air Force flight took place within the framework of Operation Provide Comfort, an operation that had been in progress since 1991 at the time of the incident. The political objective of the operation was to provide security to the Kurdish population and protect them from Iraqi attacks (*GAO/OSI-98-4*, p. 14). The Air Force element was entrusted with the task of preventing Iraqi aircraft from operating within the no-fly zone. The operation spanned several years and had developed into routine, since the Iraqi air assets had been significantly reduced during the Gulf War and ensuing operations. Considering the vast superiority of coalition forces over the Iraqis in terms of intelligence, reconnaissance and situational awareness, it seems reasonable that caution, in order to avoid friendly-fire incidents and civilian casualties, would be preferable, since the threat level from Iraqi aircraft would reasonably have been limited.

7.2 Tactical Unit Subculture

One of the conclusions of the review by the General Accounting Office was that the pilots involved in the incident had been very keen to open fire. According to the report, the F-15 pilot community had been behaving in an undisciplined manner. The rivalry between the F-16 pilots and the F-15 crews had become intense since the former had a lead in the number of enemy aircraft shot down since operations over Bosnia (*GAO/OSI-98-4*, p. 33). The F-15 pilots were very aggressive and had been involved in another incident a week before when F-15 pilots initially ignored an order to break off an attack on an Iraqi aircraft outside the no-fly zone (*GAO/OSI-98-4*, p. 34). The F-15 pilots afterward questioned the judgement of the commander who ordered them to

stand down, asking if he was a "combat player" (*GAO/OSI-98-4*, p. 34).

7.3   Summary: Analysis of Events

The F-15 pilots were trained to be aggressive and independent. As a consequence, different units competed with each other, using kill scores to gain prestige, personally and on behalf of the unit. Repeated discipline issues indicated an unwillingness to submit to the authority of the airborne command element (*GAO/OSI-98-4*, p. 34). When the Black Hawks were encountered, the lead pilot made only a very brief attempt at a visual identification and then proceeded to open fire no more than 2 minutes later (*Aircraft Accident Investigation Board Report*, attachment 3) despite the fact that there was no reason to rush, the helicopters presented no danger to the aircraft or any other party. In addition, the pilots made their visual identification passes at speeds, altitudes and distances from which they were unable to detect the markings on the Black Hawk helicopters. Neither pilot had received recent, adequate visual recognition training (*Aircraft Accident Investigation Board Report*, p. 6). According to the GAO report, the Operations Officer stated that the F-15 pilots "had acted too hastily and should have asked more questions" and the Senior Legal Advisor said that the pilots "had an unnecessarily aggressive attitude toward the intercept and shootdown" (*GAO/OSI-98-4*, p. 34). This perceived haste was probably attributable to the fact that F-16 fighters were due to arrive in the area 10 to 15 minutes later (*ibid.*). This combination of offensive spirit and rapidity thus played a decisive role in the disastrous decision to open fire. A more cautious approach, such as making additional visual identification passes, would not have endangered the aircraft nor any other party, but could have averted the disaster. While fighter pilots may need to have a certain degree of aggressive spirit to be effective, there are also numerous pilots who patrol national airspace where they frequently have positively identify unknown aircraft, and who rarely if ever have to open fire. Such pilots would likely have been more reluctant to use deadly force and more adept at making visual identifications. It would have been less acceptable to resort to force within two minutes of making contact with the unknown aircraft, regardless of any malfunctioning IFF equipment. While the F-15 squadron may have been perfect for air-to-air combat missions, they less than ideal for patrolling airspace in which there were very few legitimate targets and many potentially risky encounters.

8.   Conclusions

For my concluding analysis, I have used an approach inspired by the deductive typological theorizing described by George & Bennett (2005, p. 244-245) to evaluate my cases. I departed from a theory that identified a number of potential alternative independent variables among the cases, which I have listed in a small typological table (see Table 1). While I have not explored every possible independent variable, I have sought to ascertain whether or not the differences in traditional/MOOTW setting or the offensive/defensive aspect of tactical unit subculture discussed in the empirical studies could alone provide necessary or sufficient conditions. The variables in table 1 represent variation in terms of traditional warfare and MOOTW offensive/defensive tactical unit subculture, and degree of urgency. The values in the columns are; offensive spirit in tactical unit (yes/no), traditional setting (yes/no, where "no" indicates MOOTW setting), convergence between tactical unit culture and political objectives (high/low) and if the decision output was compliant, in relation to the response to the outcome (yes/no).

	Off. spirit	Traditional	Convergence	Compliant
Case I	Y	Y	Low	N
Case II	Y	Y	High	Y
Case III	N	N	High	Y
Case IV	Y	N	Low	N

Table 2: Case Evaluation

While I argue that the covariance illustrated by the table above supports my argument, it should not be interpreted as being the sole basis of my conclusions regarding the causal link, i.e. it does not solely rely upon covariance in the manner of "simplistic empirical generalization", as described by Gomm et al. (2007, p. 103). The within-case analysis deployed for each individual case supports the impact of unit subculture on the decision-making of the unit commanders.

In the non-compliant cases, military units trained for aggressive combat tasks were assigned to operate under restrictions in an environment featuring significant numbers of targets that were off-limits. In both non-compliant cases the commanders interpreted the rules of engagement (or equiv.) in a manner that, given their interpretation of the

information available to them, was reasonable. Their fault was not that they transgressed knowingly or due to lacking information, training or experience per se, but that they acted hastily and aggressively in situations where the political objectives required precisely the opposite. The purpose of this paper is not place blame on these commanders but to emphasize the importance of taking tactical unit subcultures into consideration when specific military units are assigned specific duties. In addition, such awareness could also influence training and doctrine development, since top-down management of tactical unit subcultures, to the extent they can be affected, most likely require thorough planning, preparation and time. The Israeli example shows how it can be achieved, but also that it took considerable time and effort to develop the routines and procedures necessary to influence the tactical-level subcultures in the Israeli armored corps.

I argue that if the submarine commander in case I had been trained by and deployed in a unit with prior experience of the complex nature of restricted submarine warfare, in which mission accomplishment rather than kill scores had been the measure of success, the *Athenia* incident would probably never had occurred. Since no such submarine units existed in the German Navy in 1939, the prudent approach would have been not to deploy submarines at all, or to use them for intelligence-gathering purposes only (with a total ban on opening fire on any surface vessel), until the German political leadership was ready to declare unrestricted submarine warfare. Similarly, had the US Air Force deployed a unit accustomed to patrolling airspace under peace conditions, with all that it implies in terms of thoroughly identifying aircraft visually and the restraint necessary to avoid major incidents, they would most likely have been far less keen on opening fire. This could have been enough to prevent the unfortunate circumstances from causing a disaster.

While any military organization can benefit greatly from combat-capable units with expertise and experience in the destruction of enemy assets, these units are not the best candidates for taking on missions requiring caution and prudence. Attempting to combine these two diametrically opposite cultures is not likely to produce results. Relying solely on technical means or ROE is not fool-proof and reduces the extent of the benefits of mission command doctrines. In addition, it is not simply a matter of avoiding the deployment of combat units in environments with large numbers of non-

viable targets. While that may be one way of reducing the probability of incidents, it is only a partial solution. Neither will ethics training suffice to cut this Gordian knot. While shared values may be beneficial, split-second decisions must be made without lengthy brooding over abstractions. I argue that the above cases illustrate that tactical unit subcultures are a natural part of the necessarily heterogenous nature of military organizations, a consequence of specialization and experience. It is neither possible nor desirable to streamline these subcultures according to a single standard. In addition, not all politically undesirable outcomes can be attributed to differences in terms of values.

An additional potential independent variable deserves mention, being the degree of willingness to accept risk. Both compliant cases display a considerable willingness to accept risk, whereas both non-compliant cases display the opposite. Thus, this could potentially be an explanation. However, I argue that outside these four cases, such an explanation would be quickly discarded. Imagine, for example, that case II had taken place in a Swedish context, where the geographical size of the country is considerable but the population base is small, and the enemy can be assumed to be numerous. Under such circumstances, holding the border positions at all cost would not necessarily be a tactically sound decision. Thus, high willingness to accept risk cannot always be the determining factor that explains compliant decisions.

A comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon at hand can produce immense benefits in terms of making correct matches, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as shown by cases II and III. Under uncertain conditions, these commanders can be a powerful force multiplier when they are allowed to act independently using their own good judgment, in accordance with the spirit of mission command. When there's no certain way of knowing what the "right" decision is, they will have to act intuitively based on what they feel is appropriate. If the right unit is at the right place at the right time, this can be enough to produce an outcome that vastly exceeds the political expectations, possibly marking a crucial turning point. The Swedish unit in Kosovo and the Israeli reinforcements on the Golan Heights were fighting what seemed to be hopeless battles. Nevertheless, they acted on instinct, and this made all the difference. Awareness of the dynamics of tactical-level subcultures may provide the tools for making such unusual events more commonplace, to the satisfaction of military commanders on all levels as well as political decision-makers.

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