2

Divided Armies

A THEORY OF BATTLEFIELD PERFORMANCE
IN MODERN WAR

Is there anything worse for a state than to be split and disunited?
Or anything better than cohesion and unity?

PLATO, *THE REPUBLIC*, 381 BC

WHILE WE OFTEN PAY lip service to the notion that war is a human endeavor, the soldiers that march and die in our theories of war and battle are typically treated as faceless agents, at once universal and anonymous. We write of battlefield outcomes in terms of the quantity of soldiers in battle or the quality of their weapons; the properties of their political systems, whether democratic or authoritarian; and of the strategies and tactics adopted by commanders and followed, more or less stoically, by their soldiers. Despite periodic warnings from historians,[1] our theories have largely abstracted away the human element of war in search of generalizable insights that, now wrenched free of historical context, can be applied to explain the performance of armies and their interchangeable soldiers across time.

This, I argue, is a mistake. Armies are not uniform, nor are soldiers universal. Indeed, once we peer inside the "black box" of armies, we find that they are shot through with internal contradictions and inequalities, the legacy of prewar nation-building policies enacted by leaders seeking to construct collective identities to legitimate their rule. More specifically, if leaders choose to rule by exploiting ethnic cleavages within their societies, then their armies will also reflect these ethnic inequalities within the ranks, creating inefficiencies and friction that undermines battlefield performance. To tweak Clausewitz,

---

1. Keegan 1976; Lynn 2003; Freedman 2017.

war is viewed here as an extension of domestic identity politics by other means.[2] As a consequence, most armies arrive on the battlefield not as highly optimized and lethal killing machines that our theories expect but instead as hobbled political creatures seeking to fight and survive while trapped within straitjackets of their own devising.[3]

This chapter takes up the challenge of theorizing how prewar military inequality shapes battlefield performance in modern war. Inequality matters in two ways. First, the prewar creation of ethnic hierarchies by leaders, along with their enforcement by the state, creates divided armies as individuals from lower-status groups are folded into the military machine. As a result, these armies are marked by disaffected soldiers among these targeted ethnic groups, shattered interethnic trust across soldiers from groups of different status, and dense intraethnic networks that facilitate collective resistance to military authorities. Second, battlefield management strategies used to triage these problems offer only partial solutions; in some cases, they actually intensify the consequences of inequality. While intended to prevent the breakdown of cohesion, these measures represent self-imposed constraints on tactics and operations that end up hamstringing combat power. In turn, efforts to manage inequality create new vulnerabilities that can be exploited by enemies on the battlefield, increasing the danger of military defeat. Divided armies are, in the end, flawed by design.

The argument is summarized in figure 2.1. To detail each step in the causal argument from prewar inequality to battlefield outcomes, I proceed as follows. First, I examine how national leaders construct political communities for legitimacy purposes. Some collective identities are inclusive, according equal status to all ethnic groups within society. Others, however, use ethnicity as a political cudgel, erecting status hierarchies that stratify membership in the political community along ethnic lines. Second, I discuss how these top-down communal visions enforce the incomplete citizenship of targeted ethnic groups through two kinds of collective punishment, ethnic discrimination and collective violence. Third, I explore how exposure to state-orchestrated collective punishment hardens ethnic identification among coethnics, creating a series of downstream consequences for an army's discipline and cohesion when these groups are incorporated in the army. The intuition here is simple but important: an army's fate is set well in advance of the war, meaning that a too-narrow focus on combat dynamics alone will miss the deeper underlying structural forces at work in constraining battlefield

2. Clausewitz 1984.

3. On the assumption that armies maximize military effectiveness over political considerations, see, for example, Vagts 1959, 13; Millett and Murray 1988; Biddle 2004; Greitens 2016, 31.
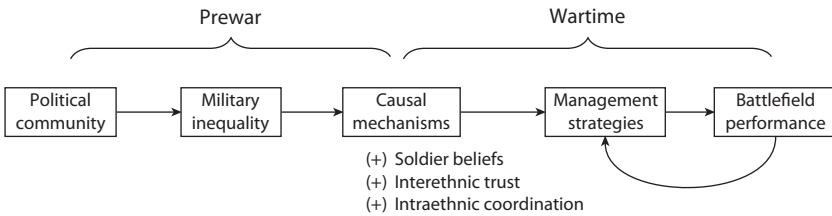
FIGURE 2.1. The Argument

performance. Fourth, I detail the three mechanisms through which hardened ethnic identities set in motion the processes that erode an army's performance once war begins. Fifth, I detail the set of strategies that commanders use to manage the dilemma of difference arising from inequality within their divided armies. I also derive a cluster of testable claims about how military inequality affects the two facets of battlefield performance, namely, combat power and cohesion. Finally, I refine the theory by relaxing core assumptions, including the belief that coethnic solders share uniform preferences and that military inequality is unchanged by wartime dynamics or long-term evolutionary processes.

2.1.   Political Communities and Their Hierarchies of Membership

Political leaders face the same basic governance problem: how to construct, and then sustain, a vision of the political community that transfers the primary allegiance of the population from various subnational ("subordinate") group identities to a collective ("superordinate") one and the political organization that claims to represent it.[4] In the modern era, the need for national identification arose from the shift from indirect to direct forms of rule that occurred around the time of the French Revolution.[5] Driven by advances in communication and transportation, this shift to direct rule raised new demands on leaders and subjects alike. Political centralization made it possible for regimes to impose additional burdens on their subjects (and then citizens), including

4. I use the clunky term "political organization" because the post-1800 time period is still home to empires, principalities, duchies, tribal confederations, and other polities, not simply national states. I set aside the (fascinating) question of whether inequality's effects also hold before 1800.

5. Wimmer 2013; Hechter 2000; Mann 1993; Weber 1976; Tilly 1975. On the modernist school of nationalism, see Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1991.

increased taxation and expectations of military service.[6] For their part, leaders were forced to devise new forms of allegiance that might bind citizens to the state, thereby lowering the costs of rule by dissuading uprisings among an increasingly supportive, nationalistic populace. Military power, too, could be enhanced if leaders could find a way to harness this nationalism behind their war efforts.[7] In exchange, the population would receive a sense of belonging and purpose, a view of a larger collective that defined their place in the world and that established expectations about how leaders would treat them.[8] In the end, these collective identities aimed to supplant existing allegiances with the promise of membership in a broader community that would elevate the station of those who came to identify with (and as) the national identity.

How leaders answer this challenge becomes crucial for the creation of military power. Perhaps the most important question in crafting these collective identities is the simplest: who belongs? Or, more properly, how narrowly should the boundaries of the political community be defined? We can imagine a spectrum that begins with full inclusion for all members of the political organization (see figure 2.2). In this space, all individuals are full (or "core") citizens: their identities are enmeshed with, or absorbed by, the broader political community. These identities often draw on civic conceptions of the community that are stripped of specific group characteristics in favor of a more accessible, perhaps substantively thinner, national identification. Other communal visions, however, are exclusionary, and establish hierarchies of membership that define some groups as incomplete (or "non-core") citizens.[9] Incomplete citizenship can take two forms. Some communal visions, for example, treat targeted groups as second-class citizens, a status enforced by state-imposed restrictions on rights and obligations. Other visions, however, push toward a more extreme outcome, viewing targeted groups as peripheral to, or even outside, the broader community even as they remain within its political boundaries. State rhetoric here is often less than subtle, casting these groups in dehumanizing language like "alien" or worse. Nation-building is thus an exercise in power and the top-down categorization of groups into durable and persistent status hierarchies.[10]

6. Prior colonial legacies can therefore also play an outsized role in shaping ethnic hierarchies for newly independent states.

7. Reiter 2007; Posen 1993; Rosen 1972.

8. Appiah 2018. Instrumental motives, such as access to employment opportunities, may also be at work (Laitin 1998).

9. On "semi-citizens" in democracies, see Cohen 2009.

10. Bendix 1964; Strauss 2015; Wimmer 2018. Status hierarchies shape both equality of opportunity and outcome for ethnic groups (Atkinson 2015).

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│ Political community  │
└─────────────────────┘
        ↙           ↘
┌────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ Inclusive  │   │ Exclusionary │
└────────────┘   └──────────────┘
                      ↙
              ┌──────────────┐
              │ Second class │
              └──────────────┘
                      ↓
              ┌──────────────────┐
              │ Outsiders/Aliens │
              └──────────────────┘
```
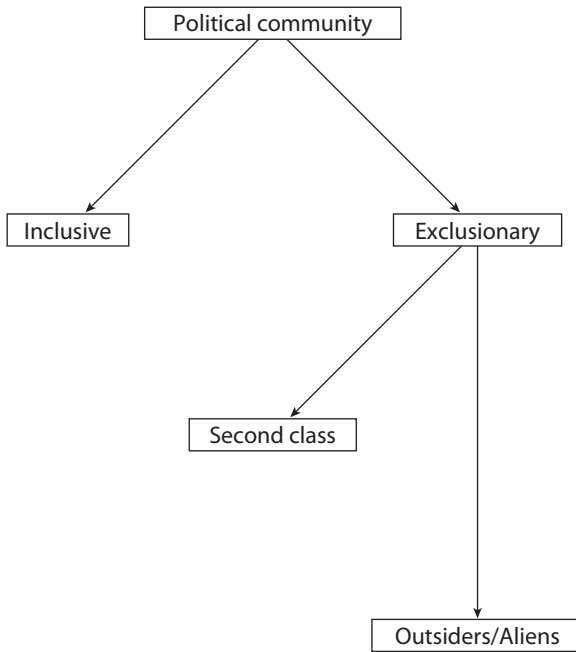
FIGURE 2.2. Political Communities and Their Ethnic Group-Based Status Hierarchies

Leaders can choose from a wide array of possible identity categories or cleavages to construct their status hierarchies, including religion, class, ideology, gender, and region. I focus on ethnicity and its close cousin, race, as the basis for status hierarchies. Ethnicity can be a powerful device for building a political community.[11] As a set of ascriptive traits, ethnicity provides would-be rulers with a template for quickly identifying potential supporters and possible enemies. Exploiting ethnic divisions can also generate powerful us/them dichotomies that rally coethnic supporters to the regime's side.[12] Coethnic networks offer a means for mobilizing supporters against non-coethnic challengers, helping to ensure regime safety. Ethnicity also facilitates the construction of coethnic coalitions that can ensure both the capture of the state and the favorable distribution of resources and services to coethnics.[13] Drawing on ethnic differences also helps leaders render their own societies "legible" for conscription purposes. That is, ethnicity can provide a shorthand for distant rulers to categorize their populations, if only partially, creating

11. Wimmer 2018; Horowitz 1985.
12. Simmel 1898; Coser 1956; Tajfel 2010; Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel 1970.
13. Riker 1962.

the possibility of monitoring and policing their citizens.[14] Inequality is thus ethnic group-based and state-imposed, rather than arising out of competition between individuals or households, and centers around the relative status possessed by each group in the regime's vision of the political community.[15]

Ethnic hierarchies, rather than inclusion, might be an attractive option for leaders for several reasons. Downgrading the status of potential ethnic rivals can help maintain control over the distribution of scarce resources, for example.[16] Second-class status might also complicate the ability of rivals to mobilize opposition by restricting access to political and economic levers of influence.[17] Leaders may be driven by cultural motivations such as ethnonationalism that lead to the construction of the state along narrow lines that favor one's own group.[18] Marginalizing non-coethnics can also be a strategy for consolidating power in weak states, where shaky leaders seek to coup-proof their regimes by increasing the costs of rebellion.[19] Leaders might simply be guided by idiosyncratic attitudes that give rise to prejudices dictating the relegation of others to an inferior status in the broader community.

Recognizing the diverse origins of ethnic hierarchies, I take no stake in this debate. What matters here is that some leaders will reach for ethnic cleavages as the architecture for the political community and that substantial variation exists within and across states over time in the nature (and presence) of their ethnic hierarchies. Leaders are not completely free agents in their choice of social identities, of course; they cannot construct hierarchies from whole cloth. Instead, they are constrained somewhat by existing societal cleavages and experiences of the populations they seek to mold. That said, these hierarchies are typically viewed by leaders and population alike as salient and meaningful, bestowing a set of rights and obligations across different groups depending on their position within the community.[20]

Hierarchy is not synonymous with ethnic diversity, however. There is no necessary correlation between diversity, defined as the number of ethnic groups within a population, and a leader's imposition of incomplete citizenship as a tool of rule. Only two groups are needed for a hierarchy to

14. Scott 1998; Blaydes 2018.

15. On the need to treat inequality as group-based ("horizontal"), see Tilly 1999; Stewart 2008; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013.

16. Riker 1962; Bates 1983; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012.

17. Fearon 1999.

18. Cederman, Wimmer and Min 2010; Wimmer 2013.

19. Roessler 2016, 83.

20. This view of identity as fluid and constructed is squarely in the constructivist camp; Anderson 1992, Brass 2003, Chandra 2012. Status hierarchies are backed by political power, however, and so can acquire a sense of permanence until state policies change.

be constructed; conversely, multiple ethnic groups may coexist without a state-imposed ranking. At bottom, my argument is a political one about how (and whether) ethnic heterogeneity is defined, ranked, and enforced by political leaders, not a story about how ethnic diversity drives the underprovision of collective goods and services (in our case, battlefield performance) due to linguistic issues, divergent ethnic preferences, or other transaction costs.[21] It is ultimately a political decision about whether to activate ethnicity as a salient cleavage for the construction of the broader community.[22] These cleavages also revolve around relative group status, not group size. As a result, non-core groups may actually represent a majority of the population, despite their lesser status. Ethnic diversity, in other words, is not destiny, at least on the battlefield.

Nor can these hierarchies be reduced to mere by-products of a state's attributes and factor endowments. Some of the weakest states in the Project Mars dataset—tiny Bukhara, once nestled within contemporary Uzbekistan's borders, had less than a million inhabitants when defeated by Russia in 1873—along with some of the strongest, including the Soviet Union, had high levels of ethnic inequalities. Ethnic inequalities have also been imposed in regime types of various stripes. Democracies, though nominally predisposed toward inclusive notions of citizenship, have nonetheless exhibited durable ethnic and racial hierarchies. The United States meshed formal democratic institutions with persistent discrimination and collective violence against African-Americans for much of its history, for example.[23] Nationalizing democracies like Poland and Czechoslovakia enacted policies bent on "cleansing" ethnic minorities during the 1920s.[24] Two short-lived democracies, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the Democratic Republic of Armenia, devoted much energy to the repression and expulsion of each other's coethnics in the early 1920s despite meeting the requirements for possessing democratic political institutions.[25] Autocracies, too, have exhibited considerable variation in their levels of prewar inequality. In short, we are on safe ground in considering inequality as an independent factor in

21. Alesina and LaFerrara 2005; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Alesina, Baqir and Easterly 1999.

22. See Posner 2005, 2004. How do we know when ethnicity is salient? Following the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset, ethnicity is deemed salient when either (1) significant actors claim to act for the group's interests in the national political area, or (2) the group faces systematic discrimination or outright repression by the state in political and economic life. See Wucherpfennig et al. 2011.

23. Foner 1999; Smith 1999.

24. Brubaker 1996.

25. Geukjian 2012; Isgenderli 2011; Hovanissian 1971.

explaining battlefield performance rather than a derivative of other state attributes.[26]

2.2.   When Prejudice Becomes Policy: The Role of Prewar Collective Punishment

Ethnic identities provide meaning and assign roles for individuals as they navigate their daily lives. They also define how others, the state included, treat them. Once political leaders answer the question of who belongs in a community, they face a natural follow-on: what to do with the populations that already have strong attachments to subordinate group identities? Here, I view state policies toward ethnic groups as flowing from their relative status and position in the official communal vision propagated by state leaders. Some leaders, for example, anchor their regimes in an inclusive vision in which individuals do not face a choice between national and group identities, either because they are the same or ethnic identities are not politically relevant. Ethnic groups, to the extent they are seen as salient, are not singled out as the basis for official discrimination, let alone violence.

Regarding certain ethnic groups as lower status opens the possibility that the regime will use state resources to institutionalize and maintain these ethnic hierarchies, however. The targeting of lower-status groups can take two broad forms, discrimination and repression. A group's second-class status, for example, can be established and maintained using various discriminatory policies. Access to the state's central decision-making institutions, and the political arena more broadly, may be restricted or blocked entirely. Discrimination can also take on economic shape. Public goods and services might be asymmetrically distributed by the state, for example, while access to market opportunities might be allocated according to ethnic criteria. Discrimination here is viewed as a top-down, state-orchestrated process that can edge up to, but does not include, the use of violence against a particular ethnic group. Rather, the relative distribution of status across ethnic groups is created and reproduced by deliberate state action in service of a broader vision of the political community.

Groups defined as outside the communal vision ("aliens") face the prospect that their low status creates greater latitude for the regime to enforce ethnic hierarchies through collective violence. Relegated to the margins of the community, these groups are often subject to ethnically motivated

---

26. I also use statistical analysis to probe for connections between belligerent attributes and levels of military inequality using Project Mars data. These robustness tests are provided in the online appendix.

TABLE 2.1. Political Communities and Their Prewar Treatment of Non-Core Ethnic Groups

	Inclusive	Exclusionary	
		Discriminatory	Repressive
Citizenship	Citizens	Second class	Outsiders/aliens
Collective Punishment Regime	None	Discrimination	Violence
Military Service	No restrictions ("Meritocratic")	Some restrictions ("Glass ceiling")	Severe restrictions ("Cannon fodder")
National Security	Public good	Club good	Private good

massacres, forced displacement within the state's borders, deliberate famine and starvation, and even genocide. For the regime, violence becomes a management tool, one that maintains the prevailing ethnic hierarchy while also systematically destroying the group's ability to push for greater inclusion. These state-orchestrated campaigns need not destroy the group entirely. Instead, they aim to reduce the likelihood that these low-status groups would find themselves in a position where they could overturn the existing ethnic hierarchy, leading to a status reversal for the dominant core groups.

We can use this inclusion-discrimination-violence typology as shorthand for thinking about how state power maintains status hierarchies within the population (see table 2.1). In this framework, punishment by the state is collective in nature. Given the weakness (or absence) of cross-cutting ethnic ties across core and non-core groups, the regime has limited means for penetrating these groups and selectively targeting specific individuals. Incomplete citizenship reduces the legibility of the non-core population in the eyes of the regime; it can only paint in broad brush strokes because it has truncated ties to non-core populations.[27] Monitoring these populations is by necessity both costly and incomplete. As a result, regimes will employ collective discrimination and repression against these lower-status groups, at once trying to maintain order while also inadvertently hardening ethnic identities as the basis for countermobilization.

Exposure to prewar regime-orchestrated collective punishment has several important effects on targeted groups. It strengthens perceptions that coethnics share a common fate, increasing intragroup solidarity. Collective punishment forces targeted groups to turn inward, finding solace and safety in coethnic ties. Dense networks of ties between coethnics are the result; these same networks will provide the means for escaping surveillance and organizing collective action in wartime. As it stands, the reinforcing of ethnic

27. Habyarimana et al. 2009; Lyall 2010; Roessler 2016; Blaydes 2018.

ties complicates the state's task in monitoring these populations, deepening the problem of identifying problematic individuals for selective punishment and instead forcing the state to rely on indiscriminate actions.[28] Collective punishment also naturally creates grievances against the regime; disaffection, even hatred, becomes commonplace, creating a landscape in which the regime's legitimacy is variable across ethnic groups within the population.[29] Interethnic trust is also a casualty of state-led punishment as state actions generate an us-versus-them dynamic. Differential access to power and wealth, and even freedom from violence, only further drive a wedge between groups as these asymmetries become clear markers of group status. State actions thus construct a framework in which individuals can compare the status of their group against others, highlighting the tangible realities of the official ethnic hierarchy.

Discrimination and violence do not have exactly the same effects on ethnic identification, however. Inflicting harm and property damage on targeted ethnic groups creates stronger group bonds and a sense of collective grievance than does discrimination alone. To be sure, discrimination leads to disaffection and disillusionment with the regime and its communal vision.[30] But collective repression induces a far higher sense of fear among targeted coethnics by demonstrating that group survival, not just status, is at stake. Ethnic identification should be highest among individuals who have directly experienced the state's indiscriminate violence, followed by those that have encountered discrimination. Individuals may have multiple identities, but suffering harm at the hands of the state should lead individuals to emphasize their ethnicity given its external implications. Grievances, a desire for revenge, and a willingness to subvert or escape the state's policies, should all be manifest among individuals who have been violently harmed.[31]

The timing of the collective punishment is also an important part of the story. Scratch the surface of any country's history, even liberal democracies,[32] and one is sure to uncover past exclusionary practices. Rather than emphasize past transgressions, I instead focus on how recent exposure to state-directed

28. Greater solidarity also means that coethnics can police themselves more efficiently, reducing the leakage of information to non-coethnics (see Fearon and Laitin 1996).

29. Enloe 1980.

30. The magnitude of discrimination may also hinge on its form, whether political, economic, or cultural. I treat discrimination as having uniform effects here, leaving aside the question of heterogeneity to future work.

31. At the individual level, we should expect the effects of violence to be largest among those directly victimized, followed by those who have experienced indirect harm (e.g., family or close relatives), and then individuals who are angered by harm done to the entire ethnic group.

32. Marx 2003.

collective punishment shapes group identification. More specifically, I argue that what matters most is whether soldiers and their respective ethnic groups have experienced, or are currently enduring, collective punishment a year before the outbreak of a given war.[33] This narrow temporal window ensures that coethnics have recent exposure to the effects of state policies and that the mechanisms associated with their transfer to battlefield conduct are at work. The argument does not assume that past injustices are carried forward through intergenerational transfers, though these could be present. Soldiers from these targeted groups thus enter battle with the memories of recent injustice, not ancient grievances, on their minds.

2.3. Building Armies: The Military Inequality Coefficient

We now have the building blocks in place to construct a measure of inequality within the military itself. Individuals, for example, import their identities, relative group status, and treatment by the state into the armed forces as they become soldiers. They are carriers of their identities, so to speak, and come laden with the weight of the state's treatment of their respective groups before they enter the ranks. For their part, political leaders and military commanders must decide on the army's ethnic composition. Together, these two components—the share of soldiers represented by each ethnic group, and their prewar treatment by the state—constitute the Military Inequality Coefficient (MIC).

Formally, the MIC defines the degree to which ethnic groups within the military enjoy full membership in the political community or, conversely, are subjected to state-directed collective discrimination or repression. Generated by a simple equation,[34] the MIC takes values from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). As discussed below, the 1 represents the theoretical maximum amount of inequality possible within a given army but one that is rarely approached in the real world. The equation itself is flexible: it can be applied equally to entire armies or individual formations within them. There are multiple paths to particular MIC scores, depending on how a belligerent has structured its army and treated its various ethnic groups. Values beyond

---

33. The statistical tests in chapter 4 and supplemental analyses posted online use 1-year, 5-year, and 10-year windows before war initiation as temporal windows for the measurement of the military inequality coefficient.

34. The formula is $\sum_{i=1}^{n} pt_i$, where p is an ethnic group's share of an army's prewar strength, t represents the regime's prewar treatment of each group, with possible values (0, 0.5, 1) denoting inclusion, collective discrimination, and collective repression, and n indicates the number of ethnic groups within the belligerent's forces.

the midway point of the MIC scale (about a 0.40) can only be attained when a belligerent has engaged in prewar repression of at least one of its army's constituent ethnic groups, however.[35]

The MIC is built around a regime's prewar treatment of ethnic groups within the population. Ethnic hierarchies do not vanish once individuals find themselves within the military, however. Armies themselves are sites for the reproduction of these ethnic inequalities (see table 2.1). Notions of the combat roles that are deemed appropriate for certain ethnic groups (but not others) flow from the cleavages enshrined in the regime's official narrative of the political community. Assumptions about the political reliability and presumed loyalty of these groups also take their direction from the state's treatment of them. Groups that enjoy full inclusion in the political community, for example, are unlikely to face obstacles to their military service once they join the ranks. Civic national identities accommodate, even venerate, ethnic differences, rather than exploiting them for political gain. As a result, inclusive identities are associated with equal opportunities for all groups within the military, an officer corps drawn more or less proportionately from all groups, and service branches accessible to all groups. Contemporary Western democracies such as Canada reflect these practices. Some authoritarian states also rely on patriotism to foster allegiance to their regimes that cross-cut ethnic cleavages.[36]

Groups facing officially sanctioned discrimination will find their paths rocky once their members become soldiers. Suspicions about their motives and loyalty will lead commanders to restrict their roles and responsibilities. These ethnic groups may be underrepresented by design, whether within the officer corps or across the general rank and file, and often experience a "glass ceiling" beyond which they cannot advance. China, for example, passed a Military Service Law in 1984 outlining military service as a duty for all citizens regardless of race and religious creed; Article 55 of its constitution also defines military service as a "sacred duty" and "honored obligation" for all citizens to uphold. Yet Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other ethnic minorities who serve remain few in number. Marginalized groups may also find their roles circumscribed, often shunted into less-prestigious logistical or labor

35. To see why, consider a belligerent that has drawn a maximal 80 percent of its army from an ethnic group that has suffered discrimination but no repression. The coefficient would be calculated $(0.80 * 0.5) + (0.20 * 0)$ for the marginalized non-core and favored core group, respectively, generating a MIC of 0.40.

36. Some groups may not wish to participate in military service. Inclusion is compatible with categorical exclusion if it is consensual, as with ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, who do not serve in the Israeli Self-Defense Force by explicit agreement from both parties.

units that remain segregated from the army. The nascent Pakistani military embraced these practices, for example.[37] Bengalis were largely barred from senior positions in the military hierarchy, and were vastly underrepresented in the military as a whole; West Pakistani elites felt Bengalis were "effeminate" and ineffective soldiers because of their presumed closeness to Hindu peoples. By 1959, for example, Bengalis only occupied 2 percent of the military's command positions but represented an estimated 56 percent of the population in the 1951 census.[38] Those few Bengali units that did exist were isolated and received minimal training.[39]

Members of repressed ethnic groups will face even greater restrictions on their military service. They may be relegated to the role of cannon fodder on the battlefield, pushed forward in human wave attacks designed to swamp enemy defenses. Their perceived disloyalty might also lead to their consignment to duties in rear areas, their presence on the front lines proscribed by fears of defection. These groups will be subject to intensive monitoring, and will receive only rudimentary (if any at all) training for fear that military skills and firearms might diffuse to their coethnics in the general populace. Access to weapons may also be restricted; live-fire training exercises are often denied to these groups as well. Armenian soldiers, for example, were withdrawn from frontline combat duties and placed in labor battalions at the rear to facilitate their surveillance by Turkish officers during World War One. Non-Bamana ethnic groups were also driven in near suicidal attacks against Tukulor defenses by trailing Bamana officers during the 1855 war between the Bamana and Tukulor empires.

The unequal treatment of ethnic groups by the regime and within the military raises an important implication for how national security is understood in these countries. Political scientists frequently cite national security as the quintessential "public good," one that is non-excludable (meaning that all share it) and non-rivalrous (use by one individual does not reduce availability to others). Indeed, scholars from Adam Smith onward have cited national security as a pure public good.[40] Implicit in this claim is the assumption that societies, and the militaries that are drawn from them, are cohesive, and that all individuals view their government as the legitimate guarantor of safety and security (a Leviathan) and that the state acts to provide national security to *all* its citizens equally and evenly. This is true for inclusive societies with no or low levels of military inequality. Discrimination, however, changes

---

37. Brass 2003; Talbot 1998; Jalal 1995, 1990.

38. Rahman 1996, 121.

39. Cohen 1998*b*, 42fn11-44, fn13.

40. Samuelson 1954; Smith 2003, part 5, chap. 1.

national security from a public to a club good, where security from external and internal threats is rationed according to the group's relative status.[41] In these instances, the state's commitment to national security still extends to the broader population (i.e., non-rivalrous) but it will do so unevenly, as befitting the relative status of groups within the regime's collective vision. Finally, state-led repression and the divisions it creates changes national security to a private good. Under these conditions, national security is both excludable and its production (or use) can come at the expense of others. Ethnic groups repressed by the state, for example, are not only excluded from the state's protective umbrella but find that the security of the core group is being purchased at the expense of their coethnic soldiers' security and well-being. At high levels of military inequality, national security becomes a private good, one enjoyed by favored core groups while brutally denied to non-core groups.

2.4. Why Not Exclude Non-core Groups from Military Service?

We can anticipate that inviting non-core groups into the military could have potentially disastrous ramifications for battlefield performance. Why, then, do belligerents not simply restrict military service to the core group? Total exclusion, it would seem, is the safe bet, and should be the default position of all non-inclusionary belligerents. Morale among core soldiers might surge, for example, if they are positioned as defenders of the nation against external threats and internal subversion, a boost that might outweigh any reductions in manpower caused by excluding non-core groups.[42] Virulent scapegoating against fifth columnists at home—real or imagined—can exhort soldiers to ever greater sacrifices as the last line of defense.[43] Restrictive manpower policies would also allow militaries to do away with extensive control mechanisms, recouping lost resources that would otherwise be sunk into policing non-core soldiers. Exclusion also eliminates second-order consequences for social order, including the diffusion of combat skills (and possibly weapons) to the non-core population that might fuel anti-regime rebellions. Excising these groups should be especially attractive for regimes with revisionist aspirations toward neighbors that share ties with non-core ethnic groups.[44]

Yet this "radical surgery" option has been relatively infrequent historically. States have typically crafted multiethnic armies, seeking to manage, even

41. Buchanon 1965.

42. Castillo 2014, 11–12.

43. Reiter 2007; Rosen 1972.

44. Mylonas 2012.

exploit, these differences rather than expunge them. Ancient history abounds with examples of multiethnic armies. The Roman Imperial Army *auxilia* included non-citizen soldiers who fought alongside Roman legions.[45] Persia assembled vast multiethnic armies, including that of the much-maligned Darius III, whose forces were crushed by Alexander the Great at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC.[46] And the Mongol Army incorporated defeated populations into its forces using a sophisticated levy system.[47] Heterogeneity, not homogeneity, has been the historical baseline for belligerents for centuries.

There are two main reasons—one pragmatic, one political—why belligerents are unlikely to exclude non-core groups from military service.

Pragmatically, excluding non-core groups completely represents a self-imposed restriction of available manpower, leaving belligerents at a disadvantage relative to rivals. Belligerents may tinker with the ethnic composition of their armies, of course, but likely face mobilization pressures that override exclusionary impulses, especially once the war begins.[48] Unless the non-core group represents only a small fraction of the population, military authorities must opt for managing potential problems rather than shrinking the recruit pool. Leaving behind substantial populations of aggrieved non-core groups while the core-group staffed army sallies forth to wage external war also creates opportunities for domestic unrest. And substitutes for non-core groups carry significant downsides that usually outweigh the troubles associated with incorporating non-core groups. Mercenaries are often unpredictable and unreliable. As Machiavelli famously warned, mercenaries "are useless and dangerous ... for they are disunited, ambitious, and without discipline, unfaithful, valiant before friends, cowardly before enemies.... They are ready enough to be your soldiers whilst you do not make war, but if war comes they take themselves off or run from the foe."[49] Slave soldiers raise similar questions of morale and skill as non-core groups but also generate negative externalities in the form of continual slave-raiding. Both the Asante and Bambara empires relied on forced impressment to staff their armies, for example, a practice that fueled near continual wars with neighboring states as slave-raiding campaigns to acquire soldiers sparked new conflicts.[50]

Pragmatic motivations are not cynical enough by half, however. Using non-core soldiers also has a clear political payoff. From the regime's perspective,

45. Cheesman 1914.
46. Rahe 2015; Briant 2015.
47. Peers 2015; May 2007.
48. Enloe 1980.
49. Machiavelli 1999, chap. 12.
50. McCaskie 1995; Roberts 1987; Bazin 1975.

the lives of non-core soldiers are, by definition, cheaper than those of core soldiers. As a result, non-core soldiers can be employed in less discriminating ways—as "cannon fodder"—without incurring the same political costs as casualties among core soldiers. Shifting the burden to non-core soldiers allows regimes to fight more protracted wars by insulating themselves from domestic opposition among core group supporters. Internal correspondence by Saddam Hussein, for example, illustrates how he maneuvered to protect (core) Sunni soldiers by forcing (non-core) Shia soldiers to advance in bloody frontal assaults against Iranian forces. "The losses should be divided," he ordered, "so that the less courageous [i.e, the Shia] must have a share in them."[51] Foreign battlefields are merely an extension of domestic identity politics; the culling of non-core soldiers by adversaries actually strengthens the regime's nation-building efforts at home.

Given the value of these non-core groups for their militaries, total exclusion should happen only under a fairly narrow set of circumstances. Strong states with capable bureaucracies, small non-core groups, and such overwhelming relative military strength that they can absorb the associated manpower penalties, are the most likely candidates for exclusionary policies. In practice, total exclusion can be extremely difficult to achieve. The canonical example is Nazi Germany's *Wehrmacht*, which barred Jews or those with partial Jewish descent (*Mischlinge*, or "half-caste") from military service under the 1935 Nuremberg Laws. No exceptions were granted; Jews were barred equally from rear area and frontline duties. Still, an estimated 150,000 soldiers of Jewish descent entered German service during World War Two.[52]

Setting these reasons aside, it is also important to examine the direction of the bias that might arise from political leaders and military commanders building their armies in anticipation of fighting certain enemies. Imagine, for example, that rigging the internal composition of armies is commonplace, and that the most disloyal elements are either pulled from the front lines or purged completely. In this case, militaries have "selected" themselves into a lower bracket of military inequality. If true, then the empirical findings that flow from my claims underestimate the true extent of military inequality's debilitating effects by lopping off the top part of the inequality spectrum. Again, while the total exclusion of large non-core groups is rare historically, if this practice were indeed more widespread, then the statistical and qualitative

51. "Transcript of Meetings between Saddam Hussein and Iraqi Officials Relating to Tactics," 28–29 December 1980, National Defense University Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC), document no. SH-SHTP-D-000-624.

52. Rigg 2002.

evidence gathered in subsequent chapters are actually conservative estimates that are biased against my own argument.

2.5. Creating Bands of Brothers: Causal Mechanisms

Prewar exposure to state-orchestrated discrimination or repression sets the table for potential problems on future battlefields. What we need, however, is an account of how prior exposure to these state policies affects non-core soldiers once they are sent into battle. I argue that three mechanisms are at work: (1) *soldier beliefs* about whether a "shared fate" exists between their ethnic group and the broader political community; (2) *interethnic trust* between core and non-core groups within the army; and (3) *intraethnic coordination*, the degree to which soldiers possess strong network ties with coethnics inside the military. These mechanisms are conditioned by the magnitude of collective punishment these soldiers faced in the prewar era: the harsher the treatment, the more salient these mechanisms will be, and the greater the army's deviation away from a baseline of optimization for warfare against external foes.[53] Together, these mechanisms drive a process of identification in which coethnics become bands of brothers capable of organizing collective resistance against military authorities. Under conditions of inequality, then, soldier allegiance is to the ethnic group, not a unified "band of brothers" forged through war, as prewar victimization places obstacles on the path to interethnic cooperation. These mechanisms are summarized in table 2.2.

2.5.1. Soldier Beliefs about Shared Fate

Soldier beliefs about a shared fate between his ethnic group and the broader political community provide the initial microfoundations for the effects of inequality. More specifically, do soldiers believe that the consequences of the war's outcome, as well as the costs of fighting, will be shared equally across ethnic groups within the military? Do they share a common fate, or can the war's expected outcome be met with indifference since it will not alter his group's relative status? Inclusive societies and armies are best positioned to draw a connection between the political community and the individual soldier, driving home the importance of fighting well for the common cause.[54] Soldiers need not agree with the stated purpose for the war; instead, soldiers can draw a link between their performance and eventual war outcomes, and

53. The effects of prewar victimization should therefore be felt most keenly among those who experienced collective violence, followed by those subjected to discrimination (but not violence) by the state.

54. Moskos 1975, 297.

TABLE 2.2. From Inequality to Battlefield Performance: Causal Mechanisms

Mechanism	Exposure to Prewar Collective Punishment		Wartime Effects
Soldier beliefs about shared fate	Bolsters ethnic solidarity	⇒	Reduces combat motivation Stokes disaffection and grievances Erodes reciprocity and fairness norms
Interethnic trust	Erodes interethnic bonds	⇒	Restricts interethnic information flows Lowers interethnic cooperation Weakens (or eliminates) diversity bonus
Intraethnic coordination	Strengthens intraethnic networks	⇒	Improves in-group policing Improves intraethnic capacity for collective action Increases state's monitoring costs

that these outcomes matter for the political community as a whole. Exposure to collective punishment, however, shreds the idea of a shared fate. Punishment hardens ethnic identities, bolsters group solidarity, and drives a wedge between the regime's efforts to proclaim a common cause and the non-core groups. Cries of "not our war" capture this severing of non-core group interests from that of the broader political community. These doubts about the existence of a shared fate across ethnic groups produces several negative consequences for battlefield conduct.

First, the combat motivation of non-core soldiers plummets once non-core soldiers become convinced that their postwar fate will remain unchanged.[55] Why undertake costly and dangerous action on the battlefield for a regime that has denigrated their group and blocked their individual advancement within the army? Victory itself might be insufficient for the regime to recast its views of the political community and upgrade their relative status. Nor can regimes sitting astride identities credibly guarantee to honor the sacrifices made by non-core soldiers. Their incentives are to valorize the contributions of core soldiers while downplaying those of non-core soldiers, thus minimizing any possible status gains non-core groups might make.

55. Following Lynn (1984, 34–35), I argue that prewar "sustaining" motivation carries into wartime to shape soldiers' combat motivation. On theories of morale, see especially Wilcox 2015, 4–14.

Second, and related, unequal treatment within the military reinforces existing grievances against the regime. Discrimination stokes a new round of dissatisfaction: collective violence, even deeper resentment against the regime, and even less willingness to take risks on its behalf.[56] Past and present injustices thus collide to create motivation for non-core soldiers to subvert military authorities and to organize escape from the battlefield. Far from a will to fight, these soldiers, chafing at their unequal status, are primed by state policies to have a will to flee if these opportunities can be manufactured.[57] Finally, collective punishment erodes norms of fairness and reciprocity across core and non-core soldiers. Altruism, the willingness to contribute and sacrifice without expectation of material gain, becomes increasingly conditional in these environments as soldiers become unsure that non-coethnics will reciprocate.[58] Collective punishment thus encourages the crowding out of altruism in favor of in-group parochialism, leading non-core soldiers to believe that self-preservation rather than risk-taking should be the dominant framework for understanding one's role on the battlefield.

2.5.2. *Interethnic Trust*

Equality sets the preconditions for the development of strong bonds and bridges across soldiers drawn from different ethnic groups. Inequality, however, along with exposure to collective punishment, has the opposite effect: it inhibits the formation of interethnic bonds by eroding interethnic trust. Soldiers from lower-status ethnic groups with firsthand experience of discrimination or repression at the hands of core soldiers will find it difficult to trust non-coethnic soldiers. Stereotypes, prejudices, and grievances combine to form a noxious brew that inhibits the formation of interethnic trust. In turn, low levels of trust deter interethnic cooperation, reducing the ability of units or formations to reach assigned goals cooperatively. Ethnic mistrust lowers task cohesion within a given unit or army.[59] Indeed, evidence from behavioral experiments indicate that exclusionary attitudes toward other groups not only predict prejudicial behavior but that individuals from high-status groups

56. On the connection between exposure to violence and risk-taking, see Jakiela and Ozier 2019.

57. For a survey of the vast literature on will to fight, see McNerney et al. 2018.

58. Bowles 2016.

59. I view inequality as reducing social cohesion of a unit, thereby also reducing task cohesion, so the distinction is somewhat artificial between the two. For a review, see MacCoun 1993; MacCoun, Kier and Belkin 2006; Cohen 2016, 26–28.

are willing to forgo gains to maintain their position in the hierarchy.[60] As a consequence, the growth of ethnic mistrust within divided armies can lead to suboptimal behaviors that undermine battlefield performance.

Mistrust, for example, can restrict information flows across core and non-core groups by crowding out opportunities to share news and rumors. Even modest amounts of hesitancy in sharing information has been shown to have major implications for how quickly news travels through networks, especially if individuals are drawn from different ethnic groups.[61] In particular, unwillingness to share across ethnic lines reduces the speed of information sharing, creating battlefield vulnerabilities. A unit's reaction time to surprises, for example, can be lengthened if soldiers are not sharing information or if commanders do not trust their non-core soldiers with critical information. Ironically, initial mistrust may be compounded by commanders who, seeking information about their non-core soldiers, may order enhanced monitoring, heightening mistrust even further. Low interethnic trust, along with pervasive stereotypes unchallenged by new information, also undercuts interethnic cooperation by lowering willingness to work with non-coethnics. Both sides clearly benefit from cooperating to produce military power. Yet mistrust can lead to the underprovision of both combat power and cohesion as parochial biases lead to suboptimal solutions for complex battlefield problems. This mistrust is not necessarily a function of ethnic or linguistic diversity. Instead, its origins lie in the nature of the state's prewar treatment of non-core groups and their relative position in the reigning status hierarchy. Soldiers can be ordered to cooperate, of course, but such cooperation may be partial, slipshod, and accompanied by foot-dragging not found among inclusionary armies.

Generalized mistrust also leaves divided armies unable to access one of the most powerful benefits of inclusion: the diversity bonus. Organizations that possess diversity of identities prove more adept at complex problem-solving because they are able to harness different life experiences and mental models. Identity diversity tracks closely with the creation of new conceptual approaches and tools while also reducing the risk of groupthink. Diverse teams are also better at innovation as well as predicting future patterns and outcomes.[62] Given its highly complex nature, combat is another arena in which diversity could reap dividends. Ethnic mistrust, however, destroys the culture of a shared mission (or fate) that is required to motivate soldiers and

60. Enos and Gidron 2018; Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013. Intriguingly, these studies suggest that poor individuals from high-status groups are most likely to succumb to prejudices, suggesting an intraethnic role for class.

61. Larson and Lewis 2017.

62. Page 2017, 5–15, 214.

teams to collaborate in collective problem-solving. Moreover, the top-down nature of military authority, coupled with prevailing status hierarchies, also means that there are few outlets for input into decision-making by members of lower-status ethnic groups. The steeper the inequality, the smaller the incentive to invest in developing new innovative tactics or promoting new solutions since they might upend the existing hierarchy. Mistrust, then, is corrosive of both task cohesion and complex problem-solving, leaving divided armies vulnerable to quick changes on the battlefield.

2.5.3. *Intraethnic Coordination*

Prior exposure to collective punishment also strengthens intraethnic networks among targeted groups once they enter military service. Violence, in particular, not only increases in-group solidarity through shared experiences but also alters the density of ties between coethnics. That is, violence can rewire coethnic networks by increasing the ratio of links between individuals to the total number that could possibly be present among coethnic individuals.[63] The formation of denser ties acts partly as a defense mechanism, allowing information, including rumors, to flow faster and more freely between coethnics. Denser in-group ties, coupled with mistrust of non-coethnics, accelerate the sharing of information within a group, improving intraethnic coordination.[64] Born from state-directed violence, information asymmetries between targeted coethnics and their non-coethnic minders can organize more responsive and larger collective action than might have otherwise been obtained. Robust networks therefore enable intraethnic coordination around non-cooperative behavior that can subvert battlefield performance.

More specifically, these dense networks produce at least three wartime effects. First, they improve the ability of targeted ethnic groups to police their own members.[65] Dense network ties can thwart the leakage of sensitive information about planned collective acts like desertion to non-coethnics by increasing the likelihood that any would-be leaker would be identified and quickly punished by coethnics. The deterrent effect of network ties in turn boosts the odds of successful coordinated subversive acts against military authorities. Second, these ties enable a larger number of soldiers to participate in collective disobedience. State violence supercharges mass indiscipline; under these conditions, desertion or defection will involve sizable groups of

---

63. Larson and Lewis 2017, 356.

64. On the crippling effect that hesitancy to share across ethnic lines can have on the diffusion of information within networks, see Larson and Lewis 2017, 351.

65. Fearon and Laitin 1996.

soldiers, and sometimes whole units, rather than one or two opportunistic soldiers. These ties act as highways of information about recent battlefield outcomes, prior successes in abandoning the fight, anticipated punishment for trying, and impending attacks or other emerging opportunities that might precipitate preemptive desertion or defection. Taken together, this information increases the odds of successful mass indiscipline among non-core soldiers. Finally, these ties increase the difficulties that military authorities face in tracking soldier attitudes and sanctioning their behavior. As military inequality increases, divided armies will be forced to invest heavily in surveillance and other monitoring mechanisms to counteract the strengthening of coethnic ties that are themselves the legacy of prior state punishment.

2.6.   Why Do Inequalities Persist within Armies?

The account offered here assumes that prewar identities and inequalities persist—indeed, are reinforced—within the army. This view stands outside the conventional take on military socialization, however. Militaries are traditionally seen as hothouses of conformity, where a combination of top-down indoctrination and basic training strips away preexisting identities and molds new ones around national values.[66] Prevailing theories emphasize how realistic training exercises can forge new bonds among soldiers from different backgrounds by preaching teamwork, creating allegiance to a primary group (a "band of brothers") that outweighs ethnic or racial identities.[67] In a similar vein, contact theory, first devised by Gordon Allport after observing mixed US Divisions in World World Two,[68] argues that individuals drawn from different groups can break down stereotypes and prejudices through repeated interaction and collective effort at solving a common task. The pressures of combat are also often cited as forcing soldiers to set aside their differences and create strong bonds that compel them to fight hard for one another. These tight-knit groups drive combat behavior more so than ideology or material incentives since they satisfy an individual's needs for recognition, self-esteem, and friendship.[69] Given this combination of prewar indoctrination and training, along with wartime dynamics, it appears unlikely that preexisting attachments could even survive, let alone provide the bases for action, once coethnics find themselves on the battlefield.

66. On the role of ideology, see especially Lynn 1984; Posen 1993; McPherson 1994; Levi 1997; Krebs 2004; Reiter 2007; Castillo 2014; Sanin and Wood 2014.

67. Strachan 2006; Grossman 1996; Goffman 1961; Ardant du Picq 1904.

68. Allport 1954.

69. Marshall 1947; Shils and Janowitz 1948; Stouffer et al. 1949; Henderson 1985; Stewart 1991; Watson 1997; Wood 2003; Weitz 2005; Hamner 2011.

Yet the preconditions for intensive socialization and the recasting of ethnic identities are missing in divided armies. Rather than simply assume top-down ideological indoctrination has uniform effects across all soldiers, we need to consider the possibility that ideology's effects on soldier beliefs and ethnic relations are conditional on a soldier's group allegiance, falling unevenly across soldiers depending on their group status. The same is true, too, when forging a band of brothers; many of the preconditions necessary for transcending interethnic tensions are absent in divided armies.

Contact theory, for example, suggests that intergroup biases and prejudices are overcome only under a narrow set of circumstances. Groups must interact on an equal basis, share goals, be urged to cooperate by an impartial authority, and not be competing with one another.[70] These conditions neatly describe inclusive armies, where the barriers to the formation of primary group bonds and camaraderie are lowest. Divided armies, by contrast, share none of these traits. A legacy of inequality, coupled with the military's own reliance on ethnic hierarchies to establish appropriate roles and duties for its soldiers, all represent serious checks on the emergence of strong intergroup bonds, let alone the recasting of identities of soldiers drawn from groups that have suffered discrimination or repression. Moreover, experimental evidence to date suggests that interventions designed to reduce ethnic or racial prejudice generate substantially weaker effects than other forms of discrimination.[71] Ethnic identities may therefore be particularly stubborn, and any intergroup bonds that do manage to form will be weaker than coethnic ties.

Efforts to socialize non-core soldiers through top-down ideological indoctrination will also meet resistance. Indeed, ideological campaigns can inadvertently reinforce group identities among soldiers who reject the official narrative about the political community and their relative status within it. Heavy-handed indoctrination can actually increase ethnic polarization within the ranks as everyday reminders of their diminished status accumulate. Communication within a polarized environment will fuel additional polarization, leading to a spiral of intergroup competition that leaves each group's boundaries entrenched.[72] Soldiers from groups that have experienced prewar repression will be especially prone to reject or challenge the state's ideology as exclusionary. Socialization efforts can thus backfire, creating an underground river of resentment and apathy that reinforces ethnic identities at the expense of the state's own preferred narrative. Fearing punishment, non-core soldiers

70. Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, 346.
71. Paluck, Green and Green 2018, 24.
72. Enos and Gidron 2018.

may dissemble and hide their true sentiments.[73] Far from broken, however, these coethnic ties will persist below the surface, frustrating the military's monitoring of its soldiers' attitudes and behavior.[74]

Preexisting inequalities can also compel states to forgo opportunities for bridge-building across ethnic divides. Some armies avoid realistic peacetime training for fear of transferring combat skills to restive populations. Segregating units, or otherwise fielding units where non-core groups are minorities, will render intergroup contact fleeting, with just enough frequency to reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them. Inequality-induced trade-offs can increase casualties in these units, leading to such high turnover among soldiers that they never have a chance to form strong bonds or overcome prejudices.[75] Finally, belligerents may not even have standing armies that can act as sites of socialization. Indeed, nearly one-third of all 285 belligerents in the Project Mars dataset, including large powers such as the Sokoto Caliphate and Rabah Empire, had no standing armies or were forced, much like Ecuador (1820) and the Republic of Venezuela (1810), to build their armies during the first days of the war.

In short, soldiers are not blank slates to be stamped into conformity by the regime and its military. They carry their ethnic identities and histories with them into the army, where their coethnic ties not only survive but thrive. Militaries are less engines of blind socialization than contested grounds where antipathy, even hatred, of a regime and its communal visions is nourished. Soldiers also have far more agency than top-down accounts of socialization give them credit for.[76] Soldiers can and do resist indoctrination, often emerging from their initial exposure to military institutions with their group identities reinforced, not recast.

2.7.   Managing Divided Armies on the Battlefield

Politicians and commanders are not blind to the drawbacks of incorporating non-core soldiers in the ranks. True, they may lack complete information about the magnitude of these problems, especially without recent wartime experience as a benchmark for future performance. Still, it is plausible that they retain a sufficiently nuanced assessment of their own capabilities and shortcomings to enter war with reasonably accurate expectations about their

73. Kuran 1997.

74. Coethnic soldiers therefore have a "hidden transcript," in James Scott's felicitous phrasing. See Scott 1992.

75. Bartov 2001.

76. On the need for theories of socialization to allow for agency, see Checkel 2017.

TABLE 2.3. Battlefield Management Strategies and Their Trade-Offs

Strategy	Intent	Potential Problems
Manipulate unit composition ("Blending")	Improve monitoring Reduce intraethnic coordination Build interethnic bonds	Hardens prejudices/ stereotypes Disperses core soldiers Imposes tactical constraints
Hide units ("Masking")	Reduce escape opportunities	Creates battlefield vulnerabilities
Sanction commanders	Increase unit discipline	Increases casualties
Fratricidal violence	Increase unit discipline Restore tactical flexibility Manufacture cohesion	Increases casualties Destroys "shared fate" Reinforces intraethnic bonds Reduces interethnic trust

performance. Indeed, we know commanders are concerned about these inequality-induced problems because they invest in battlefield management strategies designed to mitigate or hide the weaknesses of their divided armies. In particular, military commanders have historically adopted four broad strategies for increasing the cohesion of their armies. These include: manipulating the ethnic composition of their units to find an appropriate balance between core and non-core soldiers; hiding (or "masking") the location of non-core soldiers on the battlefield; sanctioning commanders for perceived battlefield failure; and fratricidal violence designed to generate cohesion through fear of punishment. These strategies, along with their strengths and drawbacks, are summarized in table 2.3.

These strategies share the same basic flaw: they all represent second-best solutions to the problem of fielding lethal, coherent armies. Compared to inclusive armies that have little need for such efforts, belligerents with divided armies are forced to adopt these measures to ensure that their armies arrive and fight on the battlefield as cohesive entities. Doing so, however, carries significant downside risk, and even in the best case, these strategies impose constraints on tactical and operational choices that diminish combat power. As Stephen Rosen has noted, some states choose "to be less powerful than they otherwise might be,"[77] a situation that neatly describes belligerents with high levels of inequality. The sometimes ponderous, even tortured, nature

77. Rosen 1996, 1995, 6.

of these battlefield strategies is the direct result of trying to generate combat power within the constraints imposed by military inequality.[78] The higher the inequality, the more severe these battlefield management strategies become, and the farther the belligerent is pushed away from reaching its fullest potential on the battlefield. In short, these strategies may prevent belligerents from crashing into the basement of their (worst) battlefield performance, but at the cost of ensuring that they never reach their ceiling of (best) performance either.[79]

The need to field core soldiers to enforce these management strategies helps explain why military inequality never reaches its formal ceiling of 1. Perfect inequality would represent an army composed entirely of non-core soldiers from repressed ethnic groups, a recipe for surefire battlefield unreliability. In practice, military inequality is subject to a "possibility frontier" that imposes a limit on how high inequality can reach given the need to field some core soldiers to maintain discipline.[80] To anticipate the empirical findings in chapter 4, armies top out at a 0.80 value for military inequality, though individual units can break this ceiling even if the overall army average is lower (see chapter 8). Similarly, short of a robot army devoid of ethnic attachments, it is likely that the floor of perfect equality is also unlikely to be obtained by any belligerent. What matters here, however, is that the state is not officially promoting ethnic discrimination or violence; it does not rule out the possibility of cleavages arising from soldiers informally, which would not be captured by the military inequality coefficient.

Peering inside the military machine to examine these management strategies offers a useful corrective to theories that privilege interaction between armies to the exclusion of interaction between commanders and their soldiers *within* them. Moreover, these strategies help fend off the charge that structural explanations that privilege national level attributes cannot explain battlefield performance within armies because these factors are constant (or nearly so) during war.[81] While it is true that some variables of interest—say, democracy—do not vary across an army's units, that is not the case for military inequality. Variation in the nature of these battlefield strategies

78. On the distinction between combat potential and available combat power, see DuBois, Hughes and Low 1997, 74.

79. There are two implicit counterfactuals here: (1) All else being equal, how much better would a belligerent's battlefield performance be if it had lower military inequality? And (2) How much worse would its performance be if these management strategies were not adopted to prop its army up?

80. On the inequality possibility frontier for income, see Milanovic, Lindert and Williamson 2011.

81. See, for example, Talmadge 2015, 2; Kalyvas 2006. For an exception, see Balcells 2017.

generate clear predictions about unit-level behavior. The ethnic composition of units in particular provides an important bridge between prewar inequalities and the concrete form they take in specific units within the army.[82] Constructing military inequality coefficients for specific units allows us to anticipate the severity of the effects of inequality, the temporal nature of indiscipline (which units will desert or defect first?), and spatial components (where on the front lines are units most likely to break? where are blocking detachments more likely to be deployed?) of battlefield performance right down to the smallest formation. These strategies thus perform double duty: they impart dynamism to the argument in the form of repeated interaction between (wary) commanders and their (reluctant) soldiers while also transmitting the constraining effects of prewar inequality down to the various units and formations that comprise an army.[83]

2.7.1. *Manipulate Unit Composition*

"The darkest fear of every commander," John Keegan once remarked, "is that the latent crowd within his army should be set loose by panic or defeat."[84] Such fears are heightened for commanders of divided armies, who enter battle knowing that elements of their forces are reluctant to fight (at best) and predisposed toward flight (at worst). How to integrate non-core soldiers thus looms as an especially thorny problem. Historically, armies have embraced four different ways of rigging the ethnic composition of their units in a bid to maximize combat power while avoiding breakdowns in cohesion. Some armies settle on one of these approaches; others mix-and-match, experimenting with different solutions across, and sometimes within, wars. Each method represents a new set of opportunities and constraints for how commanders can employ their units on the battlefield; commanders are, in a sense, choosing their own poison, as these strategies are only partial solutions to the problem of cohesion within divided armies.

Broadly speaking, these methods can be arrayed across a spectrum from high to low levels of non-core soldier integration. At one extreme, armies have assembled "blended" units that apportion ethnic representation according to a quota system. Homogenous units are avoided; officers may draw from all ethnic groups. Tsarist Russia fielded blended units on a limited scale after

82. McLauchlin 2015, 678.

83. This approach is somewhat in tension with existing microlevel studies of civil war. It recognizes the importance of explaining sub-army variation, but argues that we need theories and research designs that avoid a too-narrow focus on combat dynamics to the exclusion of broader structural factors that shape and constrain these processes.

84. Keegan 1976, 173–74.

universal conscription was introduced in 1874. Units were mandated to be at least 75 percent Slavic, with non-core soldiers drawn from other regions according to their share of the population.[85] Second, belligerents can choose to set core and non-core units against one another in a "cross-guard" strategy that leans into inequality. Under this scenario, subunits (say, regiments) are ethnically homogenous but are folded into the same large organizational umbrella (say, a division). India's fixed-class units, for example, consist of battalions of four ethnically homogenous companies. Each battalion possesses companies from at least two different ethnic groups to counterbalance one another.[86] Third, further decreasing heterogeneity, militaries can construct segregated "national" units composed solely of non-core soldiers but commanded by core group officers. Both Red and White revolutionary armies fielded national units staffed by Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and "Tatar-Muslims," during the Russian Civil War.[87] Finally, militaries can adopt "live and let live" policies, taking no special precautions to offset possible poor battlefield performance. Non-core groups are organized in their own units, nominally subordinate to the overarching military hierarchy but without special sanctioning or monitoring systems. They typically retain their own officers as well. The Qing Empire's Army, for example, was segregated ethnically, with Manchu, Han, and Mongol units, and then further divided into regional commands; no unified army existed. In fact, Qing China fought its 1894–95 war against Japan with only the Beiyang Army (and Navy), as its appeals to other regional forces went unanswered.[88]

Several advantages flow from hugging non-core soldiers to the bosom of their higher-status comrades. The ability of commanders to monitor the attitudes and behavior of non-core soldiers improves as more core soldiers are introduced into the mix, for example. Enhanced surveillance, particularly among the rank and file, can provide tips about possible plots and collective action by non-core soldiers seeking to escape. It may also force non-core

85. Alexiev and Wimbush 1988, 16–18.

86. Even guard duty schedules were apportioned along ethnic lines to ensure soldiers from two different companies held watch at the same time. In the Indian Army, "class" refers to the religious, regional, or caste category used to define recruitment to particular units in the infantry, armored corps, and artillery (Wilkinson 2015, 39, 62).

87. Smele 2015; Mawdsley 2005; Figes 1990.

88. Paine 2005; Elleman 2001. Creating monoethnic units gambles that coethnics will fight harder for each other than non-coethnic commanders, increasing their combat power, and that undisturbed intraethnic networks will not be employed to promote mass indiscipline. Militaries will often resort to national units when they lack the resources for extensive monitoring; better to field these units and hope they fight (and obey commands) than to not have them at all.

soldiers to be more clandestine in their coordination for fear of premature discovery. As a consequence, coordination around collective action will become more difficult, and the number of individuals fewer, as would-be plotters draw their circle of conspirators more closely to avoid detection. Replacing non-core soldiers with core ones will also weaken intraethnic networks simply by removing the number of coethnic nodes and the density of ties among coethnics. This, too, will decrease the likelihood of successful mobilization as well as place limits on the number of participating individuals. Blending these soldiers together also creates the possibility that close quarters and combat conditions will forge new interethnic bonds. A new sense of solidarity might in turn dampen prejudices, convincing non-core soldiers to overlook their past treatment at the state's hands, leading to improvements in their will to fight.

Despite these advantages, some armies have refused to countenance meaningful integration, on the grounds that it dilutes the morale and combat power of the core soldiers involved. Best, it was thought, that units remain segregated, for fear that core soldiers, as the army's backbone, would be dragged down to the level of their lower-status comrades. In 1940, for example, the United States War Department issued explicit instructions that commanders were "not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations" since "to make changes would produce situations destructive to morale."[89] Prejudice can run deep, taking some options for battlefield management off the table. There is also no guarantee that increased interaction between groups of different status will break down barriers. Stereotypes and prejudices might simply be reinforced instead. This is especially likely if core officers and soldiers use their own notions of superiority to guide their daily conduct. If new bonds do not form, and if soldiers continue to eye each other warily from their respective ethnic corners, then combat power will suffer even if cohesion is maintained. Without interethnic trust, battlefield cooperation will flag, forcing the adoption of simplified tactics and operations that restrict initiative in the name of solving command and control problems. Cross-guarding during wartime, for example, increases coordination difficulties and places a premium on command and control; if disrupted, these homogenous subunits could flee en masse since their coethnic networks remain undisturbed. This danger is especially acute in national and segregated units, where intraethnic bonds remain strong and monitoring weak. Seemingly mundane issues like the replacement of casualties also become of exceeding importance for mixed units since ethnic balances within

89. President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services (22 May 1950) 1950, 48.

and across formations must be maintained.[90] This fragility can lead to cumbersome manpower policies and snarled delays in sending reinforcements. In turn, uneven exposure to combat by an army's constituent groups creates additional grievances among those forced to plug gaps in the front lines because appropriate replacements could not be found.

2.7.2. *Hide Units*

A second method of managing divided armies revolves around the spatial deployment of selected units on the battlefield. Commanders, fearful that adversaries will exploit interethnic differences, can elect to hide ("mask") their vulnerabilities by keeping problematic units out of harm's way. In addition, skillful commanders can even draw on terrain features and interlocking patterns of deploying their units to generate more cohesion.

Perhaps the simplest approach is to shunt non-core soldiers into logistics or labor battalions far from the front lines. This arrangement avoids many, though not all, of the drawbacks of fielding non-core soldiers. Defection, for example, becomes much harder, since would-be turncoats must pass through the full extent of "friendly" forces just to arrive at possible defection routes between the two armies. Many of the tactical restrictions associated with reluctant non-core soldiers are also removed in this model. Pre-1874 Tsarist Russia, for example, fielded national units (*inordnye voiska*) of Kalmyks, Bashkirs, and Tatars that were assigned specific tasks such as protecting rear lines of communication.[91] But this practice does carry risks, including increasing the odds of successful desertion from the rear. Relegating non-core soldiers to support roles obviously diminishes the overall pool of soldiers available for fighting, especially if reliable units staffed by core groups are required to overwatch these logistical units. And if unrest breaks out within these units, belligerents will find themselves with disrupted logistics that circumscribe or rule out certain types of operations. At the extreme, mass desertion, or even widespread passive resistance, from these units can collapse logistics and cripple military operations, imposing delays and driving up casualties among frontline units. Pakistan's war effort in 1971 was hamstrung by the absence of Bengali speakers in the military and the fact that Bengali soldiers took the opportunity to protest their second-class status by deserting,

90. The loss of the few soldiers capable of bridging interethnic divides, often due to their language skills, becomes especially damaging for mixed units. This represents a critical vulnerability that enemies can exploit.

91. Alexiev and Wimbush 1988, 16.

crippling logistical systems, especially in the Air Force, where they had been confined to support operations.[92]

Most armies field non-core soldiers with the expectation that they will perform frontline duties. In these instances, the location of their battle-field deployment becomes especially important. Some armies, for example, emplace their problematic units in the first echelons, backstopping them with more reliable units who follow behind. Natural terrain features such as rivers, mountains, and narrow defiladed positions can also be used to hem units in, foreclosing possible desertion and defection routes. Such practices have a long history; Sun Tzu himself noted that "if I am in encircled ground, and the enemy opens a road in order to tempt my troops to take it, I close this means of escape so that my officers and men will have a mind to fight to the death. Throw the troops into a position from which there is no escape and even when faced with death they will not flee."[93] Armies often resort to manufacturing their own obstacles to cut down escape routes. Germany's *Wehrmacht* sowed mines around Romanian and Hungarian positions in the later stages of fighting on the Eastern Front to prevent these formations from fleeing.[94] Commanders may also elect to station units with high levels of military inequality on the flanks to avoid exposing them to the enemy's main effort. This is a risky gambit, however. Enemies, if aware of the ethnic composition of these units, can specifically target them for destruction. Romania's Third and Fourth armies, parked on the flanks of Germany's Sixth Army at Stalingrad, were singled out by Soviet commanders who believed these formations would collapse quickly if struck hard. Their collapse allowed Soviet forces to envelope the Sixth Army from the north and south, encircling and then destroying it.[95] More generally, these actions underscore the absence of a shared fate between core and non-core soldiers, creating additional grievances about the unfair nature of burdens being shouldered by each group.

Compounding these difficulties is the fact that problematic units may find themselves deployed in their own homelands. In these situations, coethnic ties to local populations can facilitate the flow of information, including rumors, as well as fugitives. Non-core units might also be infected by localism and slip away to ensure the safety of their families and property, creating a pull factor that might drive already reluctant soldiers to mobilize and escape. During World War One, for example, the Ottoman Army lost over 500,000 men to desertion, most from non-Turkish units, dwarfing its 175,220

92. War Inquiry Commission 2000, 89, 118, 124.
93. Sun-tzu 2009, 133–34.
94. Shils and Janowitz 1948, 291–92.
95. Samsonov 1989.

combat fatalities.[96] Deserters were so ubiquitous, especially among Ottoman Greeks, that they were known informally as "roof battalions" because of their tendency to hide in their (coethnic) houses' roofs to avoid conscription.[97] Armies are thus enmeshed in social terrains, some of which may lower obstacles to desertion among marginalized soldiers. Local inhabitants, if subjected to state discrimination or repression, may also prove unwelcome hosts for the army, a key consideration for many nineteenth-century armies fighting at the end of very long logistical trains. In some cases, the army may actually drag its own social terrain along. A key conduit for would-be deserters in the nineteenth century was the camp followers who trailed the regular army. These extended families followed behind their soldiers to cook food and provide services; in some cases, the number of camp followers dwarfed the main army itself. Black deserters fighting for the Piranti Republic against Brazil during the Farroupilha Revolution (1835–45) were smuggled away through coethnic networks of camp followers, for example.[98] Commanders must therefore not only manage the ethnic composition of their respective units but also their deployment, which can intensify or decrease the trade-offs and inefficiencies associated with military inequality.

2.7.3. Sanction Commanders

As military inequality rises, so too does the temptation to impose a system of strict sanctions to punish commanders for their failures. These measures, designed to heighten commanders' awareness of the dangers of indiscipline, can take several forms. Battlefield autonomy may be reduced; decisions may have to be authorized by more senior officers at distant headquarters or by specially appointed regime proxies such as commissars embedded within specific units. Ahmad Shah Massoud's Northern Alliance built a simple, and widely despised, system of commissars to police unit commanders during the 1992–96 anti-Taliban war, for example.[99] All armies sanction their commanders for poor performance (or should), of course. What separates out these additional measures is their drastic, often extrajudicial, nature. Arrests, forced suicide, and even executions have all been employed as sanctions for commanders who failed to maintain discipline over their soldiers. The Islamic State provides an extreme illustration: it executed dozens of senior and junior commanders after failed desertion attempts, allegedly by feeding them to

---

96. Erickson 2001, 208–15, 240.
97. Beşikçi 2012, 254.
98. Flores 1995, 63.
99. Giustozzi 2009, 288.

dogs.[100] Fearing sanction, commanders will take extraordinary steps to stiffen the resolve of their men, reduce opportunities for indiscipline, and seek better integration of units during operations to mask or compensate for limitations imposed by the ethnic composition of their units. This top-down tightening of control might be especially effective at preventing laxity or excessive familiarity by officers drawn from non-core groups toward their coethnic soldiers.

Sanctioning commanders for failure carries significant downsides, however. With the threat of punishment hanging over their heads, commanders will embrace simple, conservative tactics that offer better odds of maintaining control of their formations. They may resist the decentralization of authority to their subordinates, restricting their ability to maximize terrain and other advantages. Certain tactics that require high discipline, including night attacks, may be prohibited. More difficult to measure, but no less important, are opportunities lost because the need for authorization led to delayed reaction times. Military authorities might forbid their soldiers from pursuing beaten enemy forces, for example, out of concern that their own soldiers will escape amid the confusion and noise of a sudden advance.[101] Tactical withdrawals might also be ruled out, despite their military necessity, leading to the overrun of defensive positions and needless casualties. On the outskirts of Stalingrad in September 1942, General Vasily Chuikov recounted how "we immediately began to take the harshest possible actions against cowardice [i.e., retreating]. …I shot the commander and commissar of one regiment, and a short while later I shot two brigade commanders and their commissars. We made sure news of this got to the men, especially the officers."[102] Fear of failure can breed conservatism; better to muddle through with inefficient but proven tactics than to risk one's head for innovative approaches that might not work.[103] Enhanced control over their units comes at the cost of groupthink among commanders and a diminished appetite for risk-taking that produces too-predictable tactics and operations.

The unintended consequence of threatening commanders is needless casualties. Seeking to avoid perceived failure at all costs, commanders will exhibit a higher tolerance for casualties, especially if their troops are drawn from marginalized or repressed ethnic groups. Similarly, a reliance on simplified tactics will generate higher losses as these formations suffer from greater exposure to enemy fire. At the extreme, commanders will rely on massed

---

100. "The Islamic State Executes 9 Commanders," *Difesa and Sicurezza*, 31 August 2018.

101. Wesbrook 1980, 250.

102. Quoted in Hellbeck 2015, 273.

103. Dixon 2016.

frontal assaults that simplify command and control as the solution to cracking enemy defenses. Such crude attacks only create more grievances among non-core soldiers as their cannon fodder status clearly illustrates the absence of a shared fate between unequal ethnic groups. Commanders' incentives to deflect blame for disastrous performances can ignite another round of interethnic recriminations and possible sanctions that undermine the broader war effort. In one graphic example, Enver Pasha blamed his disastrous showing at the Battle of Sarikamish (December 1914–January 1915) on traitorous Armenians in his army (and among locals) during the Ottoman Army's ill-fated Caucasus campaign against Russia. His false testimony added momentum behind plans to unleash genocidal violence against Armenians within the Ottoman Empire.[104]

2.7.4. Fratricidal Violence

Finally, armies can turn their weapons on their own soldiers to maintain cohesion. While scholars tend to be skeptical that such "arid" methods can actually work,[105] belligerents can find themselves entrapped in the seductive logic that cracks within the ranks can be papered over with the liberal use of coercion. The greater the inequalities within an army, the more likely we are to witness commanders investing resources in the erection of a scaffolding of violence and fear aimed squarely at their own soldiers. As Keegan has noted, the fear of punishment can be a powerful motivator: "kill or be killed is the logic of battle, to which the military adds a rider, risk being killed by the enemy or else risk being killed by your own provost-marshall."[106] Indeed, concern over cohesion can reach near-absurd heights, with armies resorting to the deployment of specialized blocking detachments behind regular forces to prevent their desertion, lethally, if necessary.

Napoleon's armies, for example, were accompanied by *colonnes mobiles*, a combination of regular troops, gendarmerie, and other agencies that set about combating the "scourge" (*fléau*) of desertion (*insoumission*) "like a giant posse." On occasion, deserters were executed in front of their units to dissuade future mischief.[107] The Qing Dynasty used dedicated "anti-retreat formations" to backstop their own forces while combating the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851–64), a war that consumed an estimated twenty million lives.[108] The Zhili Clique, which controlled Beijing and the northern

104. Erickson 2013.
105. Henderson 1985; Wesbrook 1980; Castillo 2014; Keegan 1997, 6.
106. Keegan 1997, 6.
107. Blanton 2009, 17–18, 177; Forrest 1989, 169.
108. Platt 2012; Spence 1996.

province of Zhili (now Hebei) of the Republic of China, leaned heavily on the same anti-retreat units during their 1922 and 1924 wars against the northern Fengtian Clique during China's Warlord Era. These battles would be some of the largest, if still nascent, combined arms operations the world had witnessed until the Spanish Civil War, involving armies reaching a quarter of a million soldiers and hundreds of tanks and aircraft.[109]

On paper, blocking detachments offer a lifeline for divided armies. Stationed in rear areas, blocking detachments create an immediate and credible threat of punishment, reducing both incentive and opportunity for soldiers to escape. For armies wracked by desertion or defection, even a partial screen provided by blocking detachments can make the difference between staying upright and complete disintegration. Tactics and operations that were previously ruled out by reason of indiscipline might be restored to an army's menu of options if blocking detachments restore discipline. The threat of sanction should also compel soldiers to fight harder, perhaps gaining a significant edge over adversaries unable or unwilling to resort to such cruelties. Blocking detachments, for example, can drive near-suicidal frontal attacks that swamp an enemy's defenses. A cattle prod of sorts, these formations push reluctant, exhausted soldiers past their natural breaking points, becoming a key asset in attritional contests. These formations also permit armies to shortchange training, sacrificing quality for quantity by using threatened violence rather than socialization as the glue holding units together. Blocking detachments thus provide a framework for action that does not hinge on soldiers' skill, training, or strong bonds, but that generates combat power quickly, if crudely, a kind of exoskeleton for low-skill soldiers that heightens resolve through fear of sanction.

But fratricidal violence is, of course, wildly inefficient, imposing costs in the form of self-inflicted casualties. Iraq, for example, killed hundreds of its own soldiers for desertion in 1984 alone, charging families the cost of the bullet for doing so.[110] The Iranian Army, too, began executing retreating soldiers as early as 1983 to staunch desertion and defection.[111] Beyond increasing casualties, blocking detachments also deepen some of the tensions between combat power and cohesion inherent in divided armies. These formations are hated by soldiers, creating new grievances among them while graphically demonstrating the absence of a shared fate between core and noncore groups. Commanders armed with blocking detachments can be (even more) carefree with their soldiers' lives, feeding a cycle of recriminations

109. Chi 1976; Chan 1982; Waldron 1995.
110. Murray and Woods 2014, 232.
111. Razoux 2015, 268.

and crackdowns that divert increasing resources into disciplining soldiers. These punitive units are typically staffed by highly loyal and skilled soldiers, stripping them from the front lines and leading to diminished performance in combat with enemy forces. The need to maintain close physical proximity to blocking detachments also undercuts the ability of attacking armies to seize opportunities, especially during exploitation operations after breaking through enemy positions.

Fratricidal violence can sometimes slip beyond the boundaries of the battlefield to engulf a state's non-core population. Indeed, embattled regimes saddled with high military inequality frequently open a new front against non-core populations, seeking to hold them hostage to ensure the good performance of their soldiers during wartime. Threats and actual punishment can deter families from encouraging their sons to desert, or from sheltering them when they flee. Moving under the cover of war, some embattled regimes will unleash repressive campaigns against these populations to squash any possible rebellions, real or imagined. These actions, however, only stoke additional grievances among coethnic soldiers, further deflating their morale. Discipline issues will mount as soldiers head for home in the hopes of safeguarding their families or gleaning information about their safety. Efforts to address problems stemming from inequality within the ranks can therefore collapse the distinction between the front lines and the homeland, as the effects of violence are transmitted through networks that bind soldiers, families, and the broader coethnic community.

As resources are shifted from the front to repression on the home front, and as more resources are required to maintain discipline within the ranks, belligerents can find themselves prosecuting two intertwined wars ("double wars") simultaneously, a state of affairs unlikely to contribute to efficient battlefield performance. Take, for example, the case of Ahmadu, ruler of the Tukulor Empire that once stretched across much of today's Mali. Seeking to beat back a French invasion in 1893, Ahmadu found himself in a precarious position. His army's non-Tukulor contingents had begun melting away even before meeting French forces, while unrest among these same peoples threatened to undo the stitches of his patchwork empire. He chose to divert combat power to the task of repressing both his soldiers and their families in a desperate, and ultimately futile, bid to save his rule.[112] Iran, too, found itself not only beating back Iraq's initial foray into Arab-populated Khuzestan that opened the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War but also repressing the local population simultaneously to prevent their anticipated, but never realized, defection to Iraq.[113]

112. Oloruntimehin 1972, 303–5.
113. Razoux 2015, 121–22, 259.

On occasion, this categorical violence can swell to genocidal levels, as with the Armenian Genocide and Saddam's pursuit of the al-Anfal campaign.[114] Excluding these "double wars" from our analysis of battlefield performance risks overlooking an important feedback mechanism for worsening performance among certain belligerents. It also truncates a range of wartime behaviors, including civilian victimization and forced population displacement, that stem from the decision to nation-build on unequal foundations.

2.7.5. *Indiscipline Is Infectious: The Vulnerability of Core Soldiers*

These management strategies understandably focus principally on non-core soldiers. But core soldiers are not immune from their effects, either. To be sure, core soldiers, motivated by the twin imperatives of protecting their nation and their place in its hierarchy, are more likely to exhibit greater resilience and lower rates of indiscipline. They are also more likely to be motivated by ideological and nationalist appeals that provide a "cause of doing"[115] than their non-core comrades. Yet the inefficiencies and distortions produced by these management strategies can also render even the most committed soldiers vulnerable to breakdowns in cohesion.

For example, mass indiscipline among non-core soldiers provides core soldiers with information about several aspects of the war effort. Events like mass desertion and defection will cause core soldiers to update their beliefs about the effectiveness of management strategies and, in particular, the likelihood of being caught and punished if one chose to escape. Non-core soldiers are, in effect, canaries in the mineshaft, providing evidence of the dangers and feasibility of flight. Prior collective action by non-core soldiers will also influence soldiers' judgments about the resolve of their own units, raising questions about whether it would hold together under similar conditions that broke non-core units. Fed by rumor mills and nourished by direct experience with these non-core units, core soldiers, though nominally loyal to the regime, will begin to question the ability and willingness of their fellow soldiers to fight and die under worsening conditions.

Most importantly, if these management strategies fail to contain mass indiscipline, then core soldiers will revise their estimates of the probability that the war can be won.[116] The greater the share of soldiers represented by non-core ethnic groups, the more damaging this indiscipline will be perceived by core soldiers, and the worse the anticipated odds of victory. Core soldiers in turn will draw on their own networks to mobilize collectively to

---

114. Strauss 2015; Black 1993.
115. Wesbrook 1980, 254.
116. Rosen 2005.

abandon the battlefield. Indiscipline is thus a contagion that can jump the firebreaks between core and non-core soldiers in a dynamic, self-reinforcing process.[117] Management strategies might deter or slow these processes. But even if non-core units are completely segregated, their frontline performance cannot be hidden for long from core soldiers. And while frontline experiences are the most comparable, the collapse of non-core units in rear areas can also shape beliefs about the likelihood of victory. Core and non-core soldiers are therefore tied together by an invisible tether of information in which awareness of prior collective action by second-class soldiers diffuses to core soldiers, sapping resolve and making thinkable their own indiscipline. Ironically, belligerents might find themselves forced to apply the same measures against their own favored ethnic groups to prevent this cascade from consuming the entire army.

Taken together, these four management strategies act as a quarantine of sorts to prevent the contagion of indiscipline and defeatist thinking from infecting core soldiers. Since this quarantine cannot be perfect, we should observe a clear sequence of indiscipline that cascades from first movers in homogenous non-core units to blended units that can blunt collective action for a time before succumbing to laggard units staffed solely by core soldiers. The greater the share of an army that is drawn from non-core populations, and the weaker the management strategies, the faster the diffusion of learning across (and within) units and the more likely we are to see processes like desertion and defection infect core soldiers, too. How quickly indiscipline cascades across units is an empirical question: battlefield proximity, the state of communications technology, ruthlessness in suppressing non-core collective action, and the ethnic composition of units will all shape the diffusion of collective indiscipline from non-core to core soldiers.[118]

2.8.   Turning the Screws: Combat Dynamics and Feedback Loops

Spotlighting the debilitating effects of prewar military inequality can have the unintended consequence of relegating enemy forces to a minor, offstage role. Yet combat is jointly produced; it is the result of the interaction of two armies seeking to impose their wills on one another through

117. Lehmann and Zhukov (2019) argue that mass surrender follows a logic of contagion: soldiers are more likely to surrender if others have done so recently.

118. Diffusion could occur within the same battle, for example, or it could unfold sequentially over a series of them.

violent means.[119] Divided armies therefore enter the arena not only with self-imposed constraints but also facing an adversary bent on exploiting these internal schisms for battlefield advantage. Worse, combat dynamics can amplify inequality's negative effects, cinching an army's straitjacket even tighter, in two ways.

First, political leaders and commanders have long resorted to propaganda and other ploys designed to seize upon grievances in opposing armies. General George Washington, in an 11 May 1776 letter to Congress, mused that "may it not be advisable and good policy, to raise some Companies of our Germans to send among them [British Hessian regiments], when they arrive, for exciting a spirit of disaffection and desertion?"[120] During the Mesopotamian campaign of World War One, British officers specifically targeted non-Turkish units with anti-Ottoman propaganda that called attention to past injustices.[121] Similar Russian efforts to sway Armenian soldiers within the Ottoman Army led Turkish officers to take drastic action. Contemporaries reported that Armenian conscripts were placed in chains and escorted under arms to the front line to prevent their desertion.[122] More recently, American forces dropped millions of leaflets over Iraqi troop concentrations on the eve of the 2003 war, urging Shia soldiers to reject Saddam while providing explicit instructions on how to surrender.[123]

Second, opposing armies can take direct action that targets non-core soldiers in the belief that they will not stand firm. Armies can structure their offensives around delivering a crushing blow along salients held by non-core soldiers, for example. Sometimes subversion over the long haul is preferred. France stoked fires inside the Tukulor army and wider population by supplying non-core groups, notably Bamaman animists who had suffered forcible conversion, with arms during the 1850s–60s. The end result was chronic unrest and mass desertions, making France's eventual conquest of the Tukulor empire much easier.[124] In other cases, adversaries have encouraged defection, folding these fugitive soldiers into their own ranks to bolster their strength at the enemy's expense. During the War of 1812, fought between the United States and the United Kingdom, American commanders encouraged desertion from already undermanned British naval forces by playing upon Irish anti-British grievances—as well as promising "cheap alcohol"—to pry

---

119. Clausewitz 1984; Kalyvas 2006.
120. "To the President of Congress," in Fitzpatrick 1932, 36.
121. McMeekin 2015, 341–64.
122. Reynolds 2011; Erickson 2001, 98–105.
123. "US Army Chief Says Iraqi Troops Took Bribes to Surrender," *Independent*, 24 May 2003.
124. Oloruntimehin 1968.

them from military service.[125] British officers returned the favor by targeting the fault line in American society between white Americans and African-American slaves. Promoting desertion among black auxiliaries as well as chattel slaves became a cornerstone of British strategy to fan the flames of a wider slave revolt. Defectors who managed to reach British ships were mustered into a Corps of Colonial Marines that scouted and fought in several major battles.

Even seemingly minor tactical decisions about the timing and location of British raids were guided by identity considerations. For example, Admiral of the Fleet Sir George Cochrane ordered Admiral Cockburn in April 1814 to stir up slave revolts:

> Let the Landings you make be more for the protection of the desertion of the Black Population than with a view to any other advantage. … The great point to be attained is the cordial Support of the Black population. With them properly armed & backed with 20,000 British Troops, Mr. Madison will be hurled from his Throne.[126]

The violence of the battlefield establishes a feedback loop between non-core soldiers and the methods of control used by their commanders to enforce discipline. Combat accelerates many of the processes already set in motion by prewar inequalities: the disaffection with the government, the sabotaging of interethnic trust, the renewal of grievances about the war's unfairness, and the strengthening of intraethnic bonds that can facilitate collective escape.[127] For their part, commanders will clamp down even tighter, returning to their toolbox of repressive measures to ensure that non-core soldiers continue to fight. The result is an army at war with itself and with its opponent, seeking to hold itself together long enough to deliver a decisive blow against its foe.

Not every opponent will be able to take full advantage of these internal contradictions. Much depends on the depth of the intraethnic inequalities that plague divided armies. Enemies can overlook these ethnic cleavages or fail to devise compelling enough propaganda to convince soldiers to defect. They may also be wracked by their own inequalities, and thus unable to maneuver with sufficient speed and finesse to exploit these weaknesses. Finally, enemies can make mistakes that foreclose these opportunities.

125. Taylor 2014, 198.

126. Quoted in Taylor 2014, 212–13.

127. Evidence from lab, field, and lab-in-the-field experiments converge on the view that exposure to violence can bolster in-group bonds while hardening antipathy toward the out-group (here, the regime and favored core group). See, for example, Lyall, Blair and Imai 2013; Zeitzoff 2014; Canetti and Lindner 2014.

Battlefield savagery, including the killing of prisoners and scorched earth campaigns against civilians, could motivate non-core soldiers to put aside their hatred of their own regime and concentrate on the task of defeating enemy forces. Divided armies may therefore be saved from their own past mistakes by those of a too-eager adversary.

2.9. Battlefield Performance: Hypotheses

Gathering these threads together, the proposed argument generates a set of testable propositions (hypotheses) about the relationship between inequality and battlefield performance in modern war. Drawing on the book's twofold conceptualization of battlefield performance, I derive two sets of empirical expectations about inequality's effects on combat power and cohesion. In addition, I propose a fifth hypothesis that examines how rising inequality causes wartime pathologies to accumulate across these two dimensions, as measured by the combined battlefield performance index (see chapter 1). These hypotheses share the core intuition that as belligerents climb up each rung of inequality, moving from low to extreme values, their battlefield performance should decrease in similar fashion.[128] These hypotheses are couched in terms of outcomes in a specific battle; belligerents with higher military inequality coefficients will have a greater probability of observing these negative outcomes in their performance in any given battle compared to similar belligerents at lower values of military inequality. Yet since battles in wars are not truly independent, and have effects that carry over between them, these hypotheses could also be interpreted as referring to aggregate performance across all the battles of a given war. These hypotheses also take armies as their starting point, but could equally be applied to specific formations and individual units within the broader army.

Beginning with combat power, we should expect that the greater a belligerent's prewar level of military inequality, the lower the tactical and operational sophistication of its army in battle. A combination of low motivation among non-core soldiers, interethnic friction, and the ability of non-core groups to threaten desertion and defection should force commanders to reduce the complexity of their movement to maintain cohesion.

These self-imposed limitations should manifest themselves in several ways.[129] As belligerents shift from lower to higher values of military inequality, we should observe them increasingly struggle to integrate different combat

---

128. Again, "low" is defined throughout the book as a military inequality coefficient between 0 and 0.20; "medium," from 0.21–0.40; "high," 0.41–0.60; and "extreme," 0.61 and above.

129. Not all of these issues need be present at the same time, however.

branches. Decentralization of command authority should also become increasingly rare. Kept on a tight leash, soldiers will struggle to use terrain features for cover and concealment; instead, commanders will favor more straightforward tactics that do not lose sight of their soldiers. Commanders and soldiers alike will be marked by low initiative and risk-taking and an over-reliance on a narrow set of tried-and-true approaches when better solutions are present. Commanders will rule out certain options like night marches or envelopment operations out of fear of encouraging indiscipline. Complicated efforts, including exploitation operations that require independent decision-making and commander autonomy, will be avoided, if not ruled out completely. For armies waging large campaigns, coordination across multiple fronts, as well as across units on the same front, will be inhibited as precautions taken to prevent cohesion problems by each unit complicate planning.

Military inequality also creates observable implications for a belligerent's loss-exchange ratio, the second component of combat power. All else equal, a shift from lower to higher values of military inequality should be associated with reduced capacity to kill enemy soldiers and a decreased ability to safeguard one's own soldiers. More specifically, casualty rates should fall from favorable (above parity) loss-exchange ratios to parity and then to unfavorable (below parity) as military inequality increases.[130]

The argument also suggests two hypotheses about inequality and cohesion. First, as a belligerent's prewar military increases, so too does the likelihood that wartime mass indiscipline will occur within its army. More specifically, we should expect to observe mass desertion and defection as military inequality rises from low to extreme values. The greater the share of soldiers represented by marginalized or repressed soldiers, the greater the numbers of soldiers that should engage in mass desertion and defection. These forms of mass indiscipline should follow the same pattern: units composed of non-core ethnic groups should break first, followed first by mixed units and then units staffed solely by soldiers drawn from core groups. We should also expect variation in the timing of mass desertion and defection to track with whether the non-core group was exposed to collective discrimination or repression. Given the role of violence in hardening ethnic identities and strengthening coethnic networks, groups that have suffered collective repression should be in the vanguard of efforts to desert or defect.

Second, as prewar military inequality rises, belligerents will increasingly turn to formal coercive institutions and practices to maintain soldier discipline on the battlefield. A shift from low to extreme military inequality will result in several steps being taken to deter (or minimize) mass

130. Fractional loss-exchange ratios (FLERs) could also be used to measure relative casualties.

TABLE 2.4. Inequality and Battlefield Performance: Indicators and Expectations Summarized

Indicator	Measure	Expected Relationship with MIC
Qualitative		
Tactical-operational sophistication	Perceived solutions available for battlefield problems ("Commander's playbook")	Higher MIC, lower sophistication
Quantitative		
Loss-exchange ratio	Relative battlefield fatalities	Higher MIC, worse LER
Mass desertion	Unsanctioned return home by ≥10 percent of total deployed forces	Higher MIC, greater probability of mass desertion
Mass defection	≥10 percent of total deployed forces switches sides	Higher MIC, greater probability of mass defection
Fratricidal violence	Wartime deployment of blocking detachments	Higher MIC, greater likelihood of fratricidal violence
Battlefield performance index (BPI)	Quantitative measures combined	Higher MIC, lower BPI score

indiscipline among non-core soldiers and to prevent its diffusion to core soldiers. These measures include the deployment of blocking detachments; the use of extrajudicial punishment against soldiers, including executions; the construction of penal battalions drawn from arrested soldiers that are assigned exceptionally dangerous missions as a form of punishment; and, at high or extreme levels of military inequality, the launching of campaigns against non-core groups within the belligerent's own population ("double wars").

Finally, these empirical implications suggest one final hypothesis: as military inequality increases, we will observe the accumulation of these individual pathologies in a belligerent's battlefield performance. The battlefield performance index captures this intuition by measuring a belligerent's performance across four partially correlated pathologies: below-parity loss-exchange ratios; mass desertion; mass defection; and the use of blocking detachments. At low levels of inequality, most of the pathologies, if not all, should be absent. At extreme levels, however, all, or nearly all, of these deficiencies should be observed, reflecting the difficulties that the belligerent is having in maintaining cohesion and the sacrifices to combat power that result. These suboptimal behaviors, in other words, should cluster predictably at high or extreme levels of military inequality. These indicators and expectations are summarized in table 2.4.

Some of these hypotheses are amenable to testing with quantitative data; others will require careful close-range judgment using qualitative evidence. All of these claims are falsifiable, however. For example, if belligerents with low and extreme values of military inequality turn in the same battlefield performance, then the argument is clearly incorrect. Of course, no theory can perfectly capture every nuance of battlefield performance across hundreds of belligerents. Some low inequality belligerents will still exhibit pathologies, while some belligerents with extreme inequality may be able to escape some or most of these battlefield deficiencies. Too many of these cases, however, raises red flags about military inequality's ability to explain battlefield performance.

2.10.   Relaxing Assumptions

This discussion so far has relied on three implicit assumptions that deserve closer scrutiny. First, coethnics have been treated as possessing uniform preferences, rendering group boundaries fixed. Second, military inequality is viewed as cemented in the prewar era and thus remains unchanged by endogenous wartime dynamics. Third, the structural nature of military inequality appears to rule out change over time, barring perhaps a crushing defeat that wipes the slate clean for a foreign occupier or successor government. All of these assumptions can be relaxed, however. I discuss the implications of doing so below.

2.10.1.   *Coethnic Preferences and the Role of Positive Inducements: Fighting for the Future*

For simplicity's sake, I have assumed that coethnic soldiers share preferences over outcomes as well as decision-making dominated by coethnic considerations. The argument need not rest on such strong assumptions, however. Indeed, it is flexible enough to allow for mixed motives and opportunism by non-core soldiers that can lead to behavior that sometimes cuts across the grain of their ethnic identities. Inequality predicts overall patterns, but does not necessarily capture each individual's microlevel motives for action. Only if the majority of coethnic soldiers consistently act against their ethnic identities and interests when given a choice would we question the argument's microfoundations.

By relaxing the assumption that a non-core soldier's decision-making is always dominated by coethnicity, we create space for considering the role that material incentives play in driving combat motivation. After all, not every non-core soldier deserts or defects, for several reasons. Military service

may represent an avenue for economic advancement, either individually or collectively, for non-core soldiers. They may also be attracted by the prospect of battlefield spoils. Fighting also provides the opportunity to seek revenge against an invading force that inflicted greater harm against a soldier, his family, or his ethnic group than his own government. Revenge-seeking is especially likely if the front lines coincide with the non-core group's "homeland."

Allowing for mixed motives in turn suggests the possibility that ethnic group boundaries are not fixed. Factionalism can indeed appear within ethnic groups during wartime. Some non-core soldiers, along with their respective political elites in the broader population, may view fighting and resulting sacrifices as the road to revising the social contract and improving their group's postwar status. African-Americans, for example, used their military service during the Second World War to advance their claims for redress of grievances and greater equality, particularly in the South, once they returned home.[131] A subset of non-core soldiers may therefore be willing to fight hard to secure a better postwar future. Crafty regimes will fan these hopes, holding out promise that battlefield success will translate into higher status and better treatment in a revised postwar order. Tsarist Russia floated proposals to make Poland and Turkestan independent entities if their populations rallied to the standard during the First World War.[132] Regimes also have incentives to elevate token non-core commanders and soldiers as a means of weakening intraethnic solidarity. In one such example, China's People's Liberation Army has promoted a handful of Tibetans and Uyghurs as deputy commanders, serving under Han officers, in their home military districts.[133]

From a theoretical standpoint, factionalism should appear when the war is going poorly for the regime but victory is not yet out of reach. This Goldilocks situation represents the moment when non-core soldiers have maximal leverage and when the regime is primed for making deals. Conversely, if the war is going well, the regime has little incentive to offer concessions, while a looming defeat might make the regime turn to coercion, not concessions, to maintain the army's cohesion. This loyalist faction should still represent only a subset of the overall non-core soldiers. Many, perhaps most, non-core soldiers are unlikely to overlook past injustices and violence at the government's hands. Nor is interethnic trust between soldiers of favored and second-class groups high, helping quell a cascade of pro-loyal sentiment. Factionalism is also much more likely to appear among volunteers than conscripts due to self-selection into the military. As a result, the presence of some hard-fighting loyalists

131. Parker 2009.
132. Sanborn 2003, 75–77.
133. "Ethnicity factors strongly in PLA promotions," *Asia Times*, 9 September 2017.

should not surprise us. They should, however, remain at best a minority of non-core soldiers unless that group is facing an existential threat from the opposing army.[134] Units with a loyalist contingent should fight better than ones without since these soldiers are motivated to fight harder. The presence of loyalists can also dampen the flow of information within these units since they, too, can access coethnic networks, thus reducing the probability of mass indiscipline.

2.10.2.   *Wartime Commitment Problems*

The possibility of factionalism within non-core groups raises a second puzzle: why don't leaders simply shift prevailing norms of citizenship in a more inclusive direction to unlock additional military power during the war? The discussion so far has treated military inequality as static in nature, set in concrete before the war and unchanged throughout. Yet we can relax this assumption to explore the possibility of war-induced change to the regime's collective vision and resulting military inequality. It is indeed possible that wartime pressures will force leaders to revisit the ideational bases of their rule. But their ability to enact sweeping reform is likely seriously circumscribed by a credible commitment problem.[135] Rattled leaders, for example, may pledge major reforms in the postwar era, subject to non-core groups fighting hard against the enemy in the present. But these groups will be inherently suspicious (and rightly so) of the regime's willingness to uphold any wartime promises once danger has passed. Non-core groups, for their part, seek to use their leverage during wartime to extract meaningful concessions. Such efforts, however, might empower the non-core groups to overturn the existing ethnic hierarchy that the regime sits atop. Neither side, then, can credibly commit to upholding any wartime deal once the war ends. As a consequence, any concessions made by the regime during wartime will be tactical and limited in nature, representing modest gestures toward greater inclusion but not deeper structural changes.

We should see, then, embattled regimes resorting to grand rhetorical flourishes about greater inclusion, a search for frames that draw non-core groups more closely to the center of the political community, and the extolling of shared hardships imposed by a common (foreign) enemy. Tokenism, too, might be stepped up. Saddam Hussein ordered "distinguished" families— those who lost between three and seven immediate family members—to be recognized with a cash award and medal as a means of acknowledging

---

134. Of course, loyalist motives may not be altruistic. They may seek better assignments, higher salaries, or a prominent position in the new postwar order.

135. Fearon 1995.

the disproportionate share of casualties suffered by the marginalized Shia during the Iran-Iraq War.[136] Substantial overhauls of the existing ethnic hierarchy should be rare, however, and are likely to occur under a very narrow set of circumstances. We should observe extensive reform when the costs of monitoring or repressing non-core groups during wartime is high; when the probability of defeat and violent overthrow by the enemy is high; and when the non-core group is large, compounding the costs of continued repression but also offering promise of additional soldiers, and improved motivation among them, if the group's status is improved.[137] Regimes with discriminatory communal visions are also more apt to shift than those with past histories of collective violence; the credible commitment problem should be less severe in these circumstances. Still, it is likely that there will be more wartime bargaining failures between the regime and its non-core population than successes given the fear of future reneging by both sides.

We cannot assume, however, that war-induced changes will always be more inclusionary. Some leaders, especially those who have maintained their rule through collective violence against non-core groups, may double down, renewing their commitment to high inequality. Wartime might provide the perfect cover for stepping up the collective punishment of targeted groups under the guise of protecting national security. The desire to maintain inequality might also simply trump military necessity, rendering the option of inclusive reform unthinkable. An extreme example of this logic is provided by the Confederate States of America. Rare among belligerents, the Confederacy excluded a large share of its population, African-American slaves, from military service.[138] Despite an unfavorable military balance and mounting casualties, Confederate leaders refused to consider one obvious solution to their worsening battlefield performance: emancipate and enlist African-Americans. Years would pass before the subject was even broached. Finally, in January 1864, Patrick Cleburne, a major general commanding the Army of Tennessee, gathered his senior military advisors and broke the taboo, openly calling for their enlistment. His written assessment of the situation, signed

136. Blaydes 2018, 94–99.

137. The logic here is similar to the granting of democratic institutions by autocratic rulers: it dampens unrest while securing their access to decision-making in the future (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, 23–30).

138. Excluding slaves from military service also generated unintended consequences for Confederate battlefield performance. Fear of slave revolts at home ("the black waits but the opening fire of the enemy's battle line to wake it, like a torpid serpent, into venomous activity" (Alger 1898, 588) led even committed soldiers to desert to ensure that their families and farms were safe (Weitz 2005, 58–59, 71–72; McPherson 2014, 31).

by thirteen of his brigadier generals, pointed squarely to how slavery, and the Confederacy's guiding principles themselves, were proving catastrophic on the battlefield.

> Slavery, from being one of our chief sources of strength at the commencement of the war, has now become, in a military point of view, one of our chief sources of weakness.… The immediate effect of the emancipation and enrollment of negroes on the military strength of the South would be: To enable us to have armies numerically superior to those of the North, and a reserve of any size we might think necessary; to enable us to take the offensive, move forward, and forage on the enemy. It would open to us in prospective another and almost untouched source of supply, and furnish us with the means of preventing temporary disaster, and carrying on a protracted struggle. It would instantly remove all the vulnerability, embarrassment, and inherent weakness which result from slavery.[139]

That it seems far-fetched, even impossible, to conceive of the Confederacy fielding large numbers of African-American soldiers underscores the persistence of ethnic and racial hierarchies even in wartime. Indeed, upon hearing of Cleburne's report, President Davis ordered all copies to be destroyed; as one critic lamented, the proposal "would ruin the efficiency of our Army and involve our cause in ruin and disgrace."[140] But as disaster closed in, Davis relented, broaching the possibility of purchasing 40,000 slaves for non-combat roles, to be emancipated after service, in a message to Congress on 7 December 1864. The modest proposal sparked a firestorm of criticism. "The existence of a negro soldier is totally inconsistent with our political aim and with our social as well as political system," wrote the *Richmond Examiner*, while Brigadier General Howell Cobb argued "if slaves will make good soldiers—our whole theory of slavery is wrong."[141] A watered-down proposal eventually succeeded, but only two companies mustered before the war's end. By contrast, the Union accepted African-American volunteers by July 1862. Some 180,000 eventually took up arms, representing 10 percent of total Union forces while suffering an almost 21 percent casualty rate.[142]

139. Reproduced in *Operations in: Southwestern Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, West Florida, and Northern Georgia, January 1, 1861–June 30, 1865,* 1/v. 52, part 2, serial number 110 in Alger 1898, 590.

140. Quoted in McPherson 2014, 230.

141. Quoted in McPherson 2014, 231, 234.

142. Cornish 1987; McPherson 1997, 125–28.

2.10.3. Persistence, Not Permanence: The Dynamics of Inequality Over Time

The book's argument derives much of its explanatory weight from the fact that prewar structures of inequality are persistent. This assumption does not rule out change over time, however. There are several pathways outside of direct wartime pressures that could produce dynamic, often wrenching, changes in a country's notions of political community and military inequality.

Victory in war, for example, might bring about the conquest of new territories and populations that radically alter a belligerent's internal demography. Victory could also prove disruptive as returning veterans from non-core groups organize for greater political rights and complete citizenship. Similarly, victory might increase the status of the superordinate identity, convincing non-core groups to pursue assimilation as a way of improving their own societal position.[143] Defeat, too, carries consequences. The regime itself might be overthrown, leading to the emergence of a new core group, possibly tied to a foreign intervener, and the imposition of a new communal vision that scrambles the existing ethnic hierarchy. Defeat might also set in motion the search for scapegoats, intensifying collective punishment of targeted groups and increasing inequalities. Even before Germany's defeat in World War I, the ground had been prepared for the legend of the *Dolchstoss* ("stab in the back"), as right-wing politicians and soldiers singled out Jews as responsible for turning the home front against the war. Ominously, a special census was commissioned of Jews in Germany's armed forces to check if they were shirking military service.[144] Finally, defeat might also discredit the dominant communal vision, laying the foundation for the construction of a new national architecture of identities.

Change might also be propelled by gradual waves rather than earth-shaking cataclysms. Rising levels of education, intermarriage, and economic development might all contribute to changing societal norms that recast, or dismantle, ethnic hierarchies. Immigration, too, can reshape categories of membership and belonging in a given political community. Groups may also find their relative positions in the status hierarchy fluctuating over time. The Mahars in India, for example, represented 15 percent of all Indian soldiers in 1875;

143. Sambanis, Skaperdas and Wohlforth 2015.

144. Adam Hochschild, "A Hundred Years After the Armistice," *Atlantic Monthly*, 5 November 2018. The fact that non-core groups have a higher probability of deserting and defecting should not be read as supporting nationalist narratives of traitorous minorities. These accounts typically are silent on how the state's own victimization of these groups set the stage for future battlefield indiscipline.

then were dropped as a "martial" race and by 1892 totally excluded from the Bombay Army; then recruited into a segregated Mahar regiment in World War I, only to be disbanded in 1922, before being reconstituted for service in World War II.[145] Returning veterans from non-core groups may also quietly organize for genuine citizenship, seeking to use their military service as a vehicle for social change. Processes of assimilation may lead to the weakening of ethnic identities or a blurring of the once-harsh boundaries between different ethnic groups with histories of conflict. In short, while ethnic hierarchies and inequalities are backed by political power and thus persistent, they are not permanent, and can exhibit considerable variation over time.

Past inequality, then, is not necessarily a prologue for future inequality. But there is no guarantee that democratization or modernization will propel states along a more inclusive path. While it is possible that mature democracies place limits on the upper bounds of inequality, these gains have been hard fought, often bestowed grudgingly, and are subject to backsliding in the face of populism or xenophobia, even in these favorable conditions. Ethnic inequalities, just like economic ones, are certainly compatible with high levels of economic development; indeed, inequalities of wealth and status may actually be the defining feature of modern capitalist economies.[146] Belligerents will therefore express different levels of military inequality over time, subject to both exogenous shocks and internal dynamics that reshape their societies and their military organizations.

2.11.   Conclusion

This chapter has made the case for viewing prewar military inequality as an important driver of battlefield performance in modern wars. The argument has a clear sequential logic, moving from the prewar construction of the political community and the regime's treatment of ethnic groups through to military service. The effects of state discrimination and repression of targeted ethnic groups are felt across three mechanisms that govern soldier conduct within the military: their beliefs about the war; interethnic trust; and intraethnic coordination. Recognizing the negative effects of inequality, military authorities deploy a variety of battlefield management strategies designed to mitigate its downstream consequences. These efforts hold out promise of restoring some, but not all, of the state's lost military power by reinforcing the army's cohesion, albeit at the expense of its combat power.

145. Wilkinson 2015, 72–73.
146. Piketty 2013.

The argument therefore anticipates a general proposition: the higher the pre-war inequality, the more distorted the military machine, and the worse its battlefield performance, whether measured in terms of casualties or different facets of discipline like mass desertion and defection. In this view, militaries are political constructions that reflect domestic concerns and inequalities rather than calculations of maximum efficiency imposed by the demands of survival in a threatening international environment. And while focused on a prewar structural trait of belligerents, the argument is flexible enough to generate predictions about the behavior of units at different levels of analysis, ranging from entire armies to individual units and even small formations. Dynamism can be imparted to the analysis by tracking the changing ethnic composition of specific units over time. Fighting, in other words, reflects prior political decisions about the nature of political communities, their degree of inclusion, and how these norms of citizenship motivate (or fail to) the soldiers that make up an army. While bringing our attention back to the human element of war, the claim here is meant to be generalizable, allowing us to compare within and across armies over time. Whether it succeeds is a matter of empirical investigation, a task I begin in the next chapter.