

The Place of the Military in the Foundation of States Up to Modern Times

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ABSTRACT: This essay explores the central and evolving role of the military in state formation, consolidation, and governance across historical epochs from ancient civilizations to modern democracies. It examines how military power has historically served as both an instrument of coercion and a foundation for political legitimacy, beginning with early states like Mesopotamia and Egypt, where military structures were deeply integrated into governance, economic management, and religious ideology. The analysis extends to classical antiquity, focusing on the militarized civic cultures of Sparta, the naval dominance of Athens, and the institutionalized military-political apparatus of Rome. In the post-colonial era, particularly in Africa and Asia, the military emerged as a pivotal actor in newly independent states, assuming roles that both stabilized and undermined political development depending on context. Contemporary democratic societies have redefined civil-military relations through principles of professionalism and civilian oversight, yet the military remains a key player in national and international governance, especially amid global security challenges. The essay concludes by highlighting the persistent tension between the military's utility in safeguarding state sovereignty and its potential to disrupt democratic norms. Through a historical and comparative lens, the essay underscores the military's enduring influence on the architecture and evolution of political authority.

KEYWORDS: Political Instability, Military, Governance

INTRODUCTION

The military has long held a central role in the formation, consolidation, and evolution of the state. From the earliest city-states of Mesopotamia to the imperial conquests of Rome, the military has served as both an instrument of coercion and a unifying force in the construction of political authority. In these early civilizations, statehood was largely contingent upon a polity's ability to exert military force over its population and territory, and to repel or dominate external threats. This pattern continued through subsequent historical epochs, with military conquest and occupation often serving as a precondition for the establishment of centralized governance. The relationship between military capability and state-building was particularly evident in the expansion of empires, where control over distant territories depended on sustained martial power and disciplined hierarchies (Centeno & Enriquez, 2020). In the post-colonial era, especially in Africa and Asia, the military played a decisive role in shaping the trajectories of newly independent states. As colonial administrations withdrew, nascent governments often lacked the bureaucratic and institutional capacities required for effective governance. In many cases, the military emerged as one of the few organized and capable institutions, thereby positioning itself as a central actor in national politics. While some militaries contributed to national integration and stability, others undermined democratic development by executing coups, suspending constitutions, and ruling through authoritarian regimes. The paradox of post-colonial militaries lies in their dual character: they have acted both as state-builders and state-breakers, depending on the historical, institutional, and political context in which they operated (Croissant, Kuehn, & Lorenz, 2018). In contemporary democratic societies, the role of the military has evolved significantly but remains deeply influential. Modern civil-military relations are structured around principles of democratic control, professionalization, and legal accountability. Nonetheless, the military continues to shape key aspects of governance, particularly in areas such as national security, intelligence, and foreign policy. The increasing complexity of global security threats ranging from terrorism and cyber warfare to pandemics and climate-related crises has necessitated a more integrated role for the military in both domestic and international governance frameworks. In some cases, this expanded role has led to the militarization of public policy and the normalization of military involvement in civilian affairs, raising questions about the balance between security imperatives and democratic accountability (Desch, 2019; Avant, 2022). The global resurgence of authoritarian tendencies and the politicization of military institutions further complicate the contemporary landscape. In various parts of the world, including emerging democracies and hybrid regimes, military elites have reasserted political influence, either by aligning with populist leaders or by directly intervening in political processes. These developments suggest that the boundary between civilian and military spheres remains contested and dynamic. As such, understanding the evolving role of the military requires a historical and comparative lens that accounts for its foundational importance in state-building as well as its potential to challenge democratic norms in the present (Albrecht & Barany, 2023). This essay therefore examines the military's role

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in state formation, consolidation, and governance from ancient to contemporary times, analyzing both the continuity and transformation of military influence in political development.

1. THE MILITARY IN ANCIENT AND CLASSICAL STATE FORMATION

1.1. Military Power in Mesopotamia and Egypt

In the ancient Near East, particularly in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the emergence of early state structures was deeply intertwined with the development and institutionalization of military power. In Mesopotamia, the formation of the Akkadian Empire (c. 2334–2154 BCE) under Sargon of Akkad represents a foundational moment in the evolution of centralized imperial authority based on military conquest. Sargon's ability to maintain a professional standing army enabled him to unify numerous autonomous Sumerian city-states under a single imperial administration. This marked a significant transformation in political organization, from fragmented polities to a consolidated state capable of sustaining long-distance control and large-scale territorial governance (Van de Mieroop, 2016).

The Akkadian military was not a loosely organized militia but a highly structured force that played a dual role in both conquest and administration. Military campaigns were conducted seasonally, with soldiers conscripted or paid, and logistics organized to support prolonged operations across diverse terrains. This military centralization allowed the Akkadians to extract tribute, enforce loyalty among vassal states, and suppress rebellions efficiently. The king's role as a warrior-leader became a central pillar of political legitimacy. Sargon and his successors used inscriptions, stelae, and monumental art to depict their military prowess and divine favor, solidifying their authority not only through force but also through symbolic representation (Trigger, 2015).

Similarly, in ancient Egypt, the pharaonic state emerged as a highly centralized polity wherein military power was indispensable to political stability and territorial expansion. The unification of Upper and Lower Egypt under a single pharaoh around 3100 BCE was itself likely facilitated by military action. Subsequently, military expeditions became a routine feature of pharaonic rule, particularly during the Old and Middle Kingdoms. These expeditions were used to secure Egypt's borders against Nubian and Asiatic incursions, control valuable trade routes, and acquire resources such as gold, timber, and slaves from foreign lands (Wilkinson, 2019).

Egyptian military campaigns were closely tied to the economic needs of the state, particularly the protection of agricultural surpluses generated by the Nile's predictable flooding. The military helped maintain irrigation infrastructure, oversaw labor conscription, and protected granaries functions essential for the survival of the centralized economy. Moreover, the Egyptian military also functioned as a policing force within the state, quelling internal uprisings and ensuring the compliance of provincial governors and nomarchs (Baines & Yoffee, 2017).

What distinguished the Egyptian case was the sacralization of military power. Pharaohs were seen not merely as political leaders but as divine intermediaries tasked with maintaining *ma'at* at the cosmic order. Military victories were thus cast not only as political triumphs but as divine acts of restoration and harmony. These victories were immortalized in temple reliefs, funerary texts, and inscriptions, reinforcing the link between martial success and divine legitimacy (Blanton & Fargher, 2020). The ideological framing of war as a sacred duty contributed to the durability of the pharaonic institution for millennia.

In both Mesopotamian and Egyptian contexts, the military was more than an instrument of external aggression; it was a core component of governance, economic management, and ideological production. It functioned as a mechanism of social control, ensuring the subjugation of conquered peoples and the loyalty of subjects. Military service also became a pathway to social mobility for certain classes, particularly in Egypt, where soldiers could be rewarded with land or administrative positions. Thus, the military served not only as the backbone of early state structures but also as an agent of socio-political integration and stratification (Mann, 2016). By consolidating power through warfare, projecting authority through military symbolism, and institutionalizing the military within bureaucratic frameworks, the rulers of Mesopotamia and Egypt created durable state systems. These systems were able to withstand internal fragmentation and external pressures for centuries, attesting to the foundational role of military institutions in the architecture of ancient statehood.

1.2. Militarization and Statecraft in Greece and Rome

In classical antiquity, the intertwining of military power and political organization was particularly evident in the civilizations of Greece and Rome. Among the Greek city-states, Sparta stood as the most vivid example of a society built entirely upon military foundations. From early childhood, Spartan males underwent rigorous military training through the *agoge* system, preparing them for a lifetime of disciplined service to the state. This militarized upbringing was not only a social expectation but a political requirement, as full citizenship *homoioi* or "equals" was granted exclusively to those who completed this training and committed themselves to military service (Cartledge, 2020). Spartan governance itself, comprised of dual kingship, a council of elders (*gerousia*), and an assembly, was structured to prioritize defense and warfare. In essence, war was the mechanism through which Spartan society preserved order, unity, and identity.

While Athens is often celebrated for its democratic experiment, military power, particularly naval strength, played a vital role in its rise as an imperial power during the 5th century BCE. Themistocles' naval reforms and the creation of a formidable fleet enabled Athens to lead the Delian League and assert dominance across the Aegean. Athenian democracy coexisted with militarism,

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especially through the mobilization of citizen-soldiers (hoplites) and rowers drawn from the lower classes, who gained political leverage through their indispensable service (Kagan, 2019). Thus, in both democratic and oligarchic Greek states, military organization was essential to the sustenance of political structures and territorial ambitions.

Rome, however, surpassed its Greek predecessors in forging an enduring link between militarization and statecraft. The Roman Republic's expansion across the Italian peninsula and beyond was propelled by a citizen-army system that emphasized discipline, loyalty, and merit. Roman legions were meticulously structured into hierarchical units, commanded by magistrates and generals who were often elected or appointed as part of the Republic's political framework. Military achievement was directly tied to political advancement, particularly in the *cursus honorum*, the sequence of public offices, many of which required or were bolstered by successful military command (Goldsworthy, 2016). The transformation into the Roman Empire under Augustus further institutionalized military power as the foundation of governance. Augustus professionalized the army, introduced fixed terms of service, and established military pensions thereby ensuring the loyalty of soldiers to the emperor rather than the Senate. Roman legions became permanent fixtures across the provinces, not only maintaining order but also constructing roads, fortifications, aqueducts, and towns. The military thus became a powerful agent of Romanization, spreading language, law, and administrative practices (Scheidel, 2021).

Moreover, the military's role in governance extended beyond the battlefield. Frontier garrisons often acted as local administrative centers, where military commanders functioned as *de facto* governors. Veterans were rewarded with land in colonized regions, fostering both economic stability and cultural assimilation. These settlements served dual purposes enhancing local economies and anchoring Roman identity in conquered territories (Ando, 2017). As the empire grew, military expenditures dominated the Roman state budget, and emperors derived their legitimacy largely from their command over the army. Military revolts and the support of legions became decisive factors in the imperial succession, illustrating the deep entanglement between political authority and military control. The *Pax Romana*, a long period of relative peace, was not a cessation of military activity but a product of overwhelming Roman military dominance. In both Greece and Rome, militarization was not incidental to political development; it was central. The ability to organize, finance, and sustain military forces shaped the evolution of institutions, the distribution of power, and the extent of imperial reach. The legacy of these ancient military-state complexes continues to influence contemporary thinking about the relationship between armed force and political order.

1.3. Discussion: Military as a Pillar of Early State Legitimacy

The historical experiences of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome demonstrate that military institutions were foundational to the emergence, development, and endurance of early state structures. Far from being merely reactive forces employed during times of war, ancient militaries were central to the everyday operation and legitimization of political authority. These states integrated military power into the core functions of governance, including tax collection, infrastructure development, territorial administration, and internal security. The military was not a separate apparatus but an organic component of statecraft.

In Mesopotamia and Egypt, early rulers such as Sargon of Akkad and the pharaohs of the Old and Middle Kingdoms derived their legitimacy not only from divine association but also from demonstrable military prowess. Their ability to conquer neighboring territories, suppress internal revolts, and maintain peace was seen as evidence of divine favor and effective rule (Trigger, 2015). Victories were immortalized through monumental inscriptions, temple reliefs, and royal annals, which did not merely record military events but served to construct and perpetuate ideological narratives about the sanctity and supremacy of the ruler.

In the classical world, particularly in Rome, military service became a defining feature of citizenship and political participation. Roman generals often transitioned into political leadership, and their military accomplishments were instrumental in shaping public opinion and elite support. The Roman military was intricately woven into the state's administrative and economic fabric. Soldiers were responsible for building roads, fortresses, and aqueducts projects that not only enhanced military mobility but also facilitated trade, communication, and governance across the empire (Goldsworthy, 2016). Garrisons served as local administrative hubs, and veterans were strategically settled to promote Romanization and loyalty in the provinces (Ando, 2017).

Furthermore, the pressures of organizing large-scale warfare catalyzed bureaucratic and technological innovations. In both Mesopotamia and Rome, the need to mobilize and sustain armies over vast distances led to the development of logistical systems, standardized taxation, record-keeping, and territorial surveys. These innovations enhanced the capacity of states to extract resources, manage populations, and project power effectively (Turchin et al., 2018). Military necessity thus accelerated the institutionalization of governance, transforming rudimentary chiefdoms or city-states into expansive, durable empires.

Symbolically, military victory was more than a practical success; it was a performative act that reinforced the legitimacy of the ruler and the cohesion of the state. In all four civilizations, public ceremonies, triumphs, and monuments served to connect military prowess with divine mandate and civic identity. War was ritualized and sanctified, and the soldier was valorized as a civic ideal. This sacralization of military power embedded it deeply in the social and political consciousness of ancient peoples. Ultimately, the military was not only a tool of domination but a structural pillar upon which early state authority was built and maintained. Its integration into economic, political, and symbolic systems underpinned the consolidation of power and the expansion of state capacity. Understanding the military's multifaceted role in early state formation sheds light on the origins of institutional governance and the long-standing relationship between violence, legitimacy, and political order. These patterns continue to resonate in the

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structures of modern states, where military institutions often remain central to national identity, state legitimacy, and the architecture of power.

2. THE MILITARY AND FEUDAL STATES IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The medieval period, spanning roughly from the 5th to the 15th century CE, was marked by significant transformations in political and military organization across different regions. As the centralized structures of the Roman Empire disintegrated in Western Europe, new forms of authority emerged that redefined the relationship between land, loyalty, and military service. While Europe developed a decentralized feudal system, other regions such as the Islamic world and East Asia adopted more centralized, bureaucratic military institutions. These contrasting models of militarization illustrate how historical, geographical, and cultural contexts shaped state formation and governance.

2.1. Europe: Decentralized Military Obligations and Feudal Hierarchies

In medieval Europe, the military was embedded within the feudal system, a socio-political structure where land was exchanged for loyalty and service. With the fall of the Roman Empire, centralized control over military forces fragmented, and kings were often unable to maintain standing armies. Instead, they relied on the fealty of nobles who pledged to provide troops in exchange for land grants, or fiefs. These lords, in turn, maintained their own private armies composed of knights and retainers (Contamine, 2018).

The feudal military order reflected and reinforced the broader social hierarchy. Knights, trained in the arts of war from a young age, were both military professionals and social elites. Castles and fortified manors became centers of localized power, often stronger militarily than the monarchs themselves. This decentralization made political unification difficult, as regional lords could resist royal authority using their own armed forces (Fouracre, 2018). Major conflicts such as the Norman Conquest or the Hundred Years' War highlight the crucial role of feudal military networks, in which shifting allegiances and inheritance disputes often determined the outcomes of campaigns. Moreover, the Church played a significant role in legitimizing feudal warfare through concepts like the "Just War" and crusading ideology. Religious sanction provided moral justification for military campaigns, both within Europe and abroad, reinforcing the connection between faith, land, and armed service (Tyerman, 2020).

2.2. Islamic Caliphates: Centralized Military Bureaucracies and Slave-Soldier Systems

In contrast to feudal Europe's fragmented military order, Islamic caliphates particularly the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 CE) developed more centralized and institutionalized military structures. While tribal forces played a role in early Islamic conquests, the Abbasids introduced professional armies composed of paid soldiers, including ghilman and mamluks military slaves trained from youth in loyalty to the caliph (Kennedy, 2017).

These centralized armies were supported by state-administered taxation systems, which funded salaries and logistics. Military service became detached from land ownership and increasingly bureaucratized. The Abbasid state implemented military registers (diwans) to track soldiers' pay and performance, reflecting the growing professionalization of the armed forces (Crone, 2015). This system allowed for greater control over diverse and expansive territories, including Persia, Mesopotamia, and parts of North Africa. The military also played a political role in the caliphate. Over time, powerful military commanders could assert influence over caliphal succession and policy, particularly as the caliphs became more ceremonial figures. Nonetheless, the centralization of military power helped the Abbasids maintain internal order and project authority across vast and culturally diverse regions.

2.3. Asian States: Bureaucratic Militarization in East Asia

East Asian states, particularly during the Song Dynasty in China (960–1279 CE), also developed centralized military institutions that contrasted sharply with Europe's feudal militarism. The Song Dynasty inherited the centralized traditions of earlier dynasties but faced significant military threats from nomadic groups such as the Khitan, Jurchen, and later the Mongols. In response, the Song government maintained a large standing army, sometimes exceeding one million troops, supported by a sophisticated fiscal bureaucracy (Ebrey, 2019). The military was managed through centralized command structures, with generals and provincial officials regularly rotated to prevent the rise of regional power bases. Recruitment was based on conscription, voluntary service, and the use of mercenaries, with increasing reliance on paid professional soldiers over hereditary warrior elites (Graff, 2016). This centralization allowed the state to maintain a degree of strategic coherence and ensured that military power remained subordinated to the civil bureaucracy.

Moreover, military institutions were integrated into the broader state apparatus. Soldiers engaged in non-combat roles such as policing, infrastructure development, and disaster relief. Military academies and examinations were developed to train officers in both martial and administrative skills, reflecting the Confucian ideal of civil-military harmony. The medieval period exemplified diverse paths of military development tied to distinct political systems. While Europe saw the rise of decentralized, land-based feudal militaries, the Islamic and East Asian worlds fostered centralized military bureaucracies undergirded by taxation, professionalization, and state control. These differences not only influenced the stability and expansion of states but also shaped enduring patterns in civil-military relations and governance.

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3. THE MILITARY AND THE RISE OF THE MODERN NATION-STATE

The emergence of the modern nation-state between the 16th and 19th centuries marked a fundamental transformation in the role and structure of military institutions. Unlike the decentralized militaries of the feudal period, the modern state developed centralized, professional armies directly controlled by the state. This period witnessed the consolidation of national borders, the rise of standing armies, and the institutionalization of military power as a central pillar of political authority, economic development, and state legitimacy.

3.1. Westphalian Sovereignty and the Monopoly of Violence

The 1648 Peace of Westphalia is often cited as a foundational moment for the modern international system. It established the principle of sovereign equality, whereby each state was recognized as having exclusive authority within its territory. This entailed a formal monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within national borders a function that fell squarely upon the military (Osiander, 2018). The Westphalian model thus elevated the military from a decentralized or hybrid institution to a national instrument of sovereignty and control. States now required permanent military establishments to enforce borders, suppress internal revolts, and deter foreign aggression.

3.2. Military Innovation and State Formation: The Cases of Prussia and France

Prussia offers a classic example of the fusion of military organization and state-building. From the 17th century, the Prussian state developed a highly efficient and disciplined standing army, where military service became a rite of passage and a civic duty. The integration of military and bureaucratic structures allowed Prussia to punch above its demographic and economic weight, influencing the trajectory of German unification in the 19th century (Clark, 2017). The Prussian model institutionalized universal conscription and the officer corps as a professional caste loyal to the state, not to regional lords or private interests.

France, under Napoleon Bonaparte, further revolutionized the relationship between the military and the nation. Napoleon's armies were products of mass mobilization, fueled by nationalist ideology and the promise of civic equality. The concept of the *levée en masse* allowed the French state to mobilize large portions of the population in service of the nation, thus linking military service to national identity and political participation (Forrest, 2019). French military victories spread revolutionary ideas and administrative reforms across Europe, reinforcing the military's role as a vector of both conquest and ideological transformation.

3.3. Colonialism and Military Expansion Overseas

The military also played a critical role in the age of European imperialism. Colonial expansion during the 17th to 20th centuries was predicated on military superiority and the strategic deployment of armed forces. Conquest, occupation, and suppression of resistance were central to European control over vast territories in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Military units often functioned as colonial administrators, overseeing taxation, infrastructure development, and law enforcement (Headrick, 2020). Colonial armies were often composed of both European officers and local conscripts, creating hybrid military systems that entrenched imperial hierarchies. These forces were used not only for defense and warfare but also to project state power and extract resources. The military thus became a crucial tool in the global expansion of the modern nation-state and its economic interests.

3.4. Bureaucratization, Technology, and the Military-Industrial State

As the modern state matured, especially by the 19th and early 20th centuries, military institutions became increasingly bureaucratic and technologically advanced. The rise of the military-industrial complex in countries like Britain, Germany, and later the United States reflected this evolution. Advances in logistics, communication, weaponry, and strategic planning were integrated into military doctrine and national economies. The professionalization of officer corps, establishment of military academies, and standardization of training regimes helped institutionalize military efficiency and loyalty to the central state (Malešević, 2021). Moreover, militaries were often at the forefront of technological innovation, influencing civilian infrastructure such as railways, telegraphs, and medicine. The modern military was no longer just an instrument of war but a central feature of national development and identity.

The rise of the modern nation-state was inseparable from the evolution of military institutions. From the principles of Westphalian sovereignty to the mass conscription of Napoleonic France and the imperial ventures of European powers, military power was foundational to state authority, territorial expansion, and national identity. The professionalization and bureaucratization of the military laid the groundwork for the centralized, rule-bound, and technologically sophisticated state systems that continue to define global politics today.

4. POST-COLONIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATES

The end of colonial rule in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia ushered in a new era of state formation marked by instability, contested legitimacy, and efforts to rapidly modernize. In many newly independent states, the military quickly became one of the few organized and disciplined institutions capable of asserting authority. This development often led to the militarization of politics, with the armed forces stepping into roles traditionally occupied by civilian institutions. In some contexts, the military served as an instrument of national unification and development; in others, it became synonymous with repression, authoritarianism, and the derailment of democratic processes.

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4.1. Africa and Latin America: The Era of Coups and Military Authoritarianism

In post-colonial Africa, the military frequently emerged as both a stabilizer and a disruptor. Following independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, many African countries lacked robust political institutions, experienced ethnic fragmentation, and suffered from economic mismanagement. These conditions created openings for the military to intervene in politics, often justified as a response to corruption, inefficiency, or national disunity. Between 1960 and 1990, Africa experienced over 80 successful military coups, with countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and Burkina Faso experiencing repeated interventions (Powell & Lasley, 2020).

For instance, in Nigeria, the military justified its first coup in 1966 as a corrective mechanism to address regional tensions and political corruption. Over the next three decades, successive military regimes ruled the country, often promising reforms but entrenching authoritarianism and weakening civilian institutions (Fawole, 2018). Similarly, in Latin America, militaries intervened in politics during the Cold War era, often with U.S. backing under the doctrine of anti-communism. Countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile saw extended periods of military dictatorship, during which civil liberties were curtailed, opposition was violently suppressed, and the military dominated policymaking (Loveman, 2019). Despite the democratic transitions of the late 20th century, the legacy of military dominance continues to influence political cultures in these regions. In some states, former military leaders transitioned into civilian politics, maintaining influence through democratic facades.

4.2. The Military in Developmental States: East Asian Experiences

In contrast to the African and Latin American experiences, some East Asian countries integrated the military into developmental state models, emphasizing state-led industrialization and economic growth. The most prominent examples include South Korea and Taiwan, both of which experienced prolonged periods of military-backed or military-led rule following internal conflicts and geopolitical crises.

In South Korea, following the 1961 military coup led by General Park Chung-hee, the state embarked on an aggressive program of industrial policy, infrastructure development, and export-led growth. The military government formed alliances with business elites, invested in heavy industries, and maintained tight control over labor and political dissent (Kim, 2017). Though politically repressive, Park's regime laid the foundations for South Korea's transformation into a high-income economy by the 1990s. The military, in this context, acted not merely as a coercive force but as a driver of national development.

A similar trajectory unfolded in Taiwan under the Kuomintang (KMT), where martial law and military dominance coincided with land reforms, state-led capital accumulation, and technological advancement. The military was deeply embedded in state institutions, ensuring internal security while facilitating policy implementation and bureaucratic coordination (Chu, 2019). Over time, both Taiwan and South Korea transitioned to democracy, but the role of the military in their developmental phases remains a defining feature of their political-economic histories.

4.3. Military as an Agent of National Unity and State-Building

In the post-colonial context, the military often took on the mantle of national integration, particularly in societies fractured by ethnicity, religion, or regionalism. In many African states, colonial borders had created artificial nations with deep divisions. The military, drawing recruits from across regions and ethnicities, was sometimes viewed as the only truly national institution. Military governments attempted to use this position to foster a unified national identity, even while suppressing dissent and centralizing power (Ayoade, 2017).

However, the conflation of military power with nation-building often came at the cost of democratic governance. Militaries lacked mechanisms for accountability, marginalized civil society, and frequently suspended constitutions and legislatures in the name of national interest. While some military regimes oversaw modernization and infrastructural growth, many others exacerbated corruption, human rights abuses, and institutional decay. The post-colonial and developmental state periods highlight the ambivalent legacy of military involvement in state formation. In Africa and Latin America, the military often emerged as a response to weak civilian rule, but over time became entrenched as authoritarian power brokers. In East Asia, militaries contributed to state-building and economic transformation, demonstrating that under certain institutional arrangements, military regimes could act as engines of development. Yet, the militarization of politics frequently undermined democratic institutions and eroded public trust. The challenge for post-colonial states has been how to demilitarize governance while preserving national unity and fostering effective state capacity. The military's transition from colonial enforcer to post-colonial powerholder remains a critical factor in understanding the political trajectories of the Global South.

In other cases, the military claimed legitimacy through appeals to nationalism, modernization, or anti-imperialism. Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, for example, came to power through a military coup in 1952 and used the armed forces as a vehicle for Arab nationalism, agrarian reform, and state-led development. His rule inspired similar military-led regimes across the Arab world and Africa that viewed the military as a revolutionary force capable of transforming society (Springborg, 2020).

5. THE MILITARY IN CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES AND GLOBAL POLITICS

In the 21st century, the military continues to be a central institution of the state and a key player in both domestic and international politics. While its role in most liberal democracies has been subordinated to civilian oversight, the military remains a critical actor in matters of national security, foreign policy, technological advancement, and, increasingly, governance. In a global context

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characterized by geopolitical tensions, transnational threats, and democratic backsliding, the military's role is both stabilizing and potentially disruptive.

5.1. Civil-Military Relations in Liberal Democracies

One of the defining features of modern democracies is the principle of civilian control over the military, which ensures that elected representatives and civil institutions, rather than the armed forces, set the direction of national policy. This norm is institutionalized through a framework of checks and balances involving parliaments, executive branches, judicial review, and independent media (Croissant et al., 2018).

In countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada, military affairs are subject to rigorous civilian oversight, including budget approvals, legal accountability, and legislative scrutiny. Civil-military relations are managed through a professional military ethos that emphasizes subordination to democratic institutions (Feaver, 2019). However, tensions occasionally surface, particularly when military leaders publicly dissent from government policies or when political actors exploit the military for partisan purposes. Scholars warn that while overt military coups are rare in established democracies, the politicization of military institutions—especially in polarized environments can subtly erode democratic norms (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). For example, the growing involvement of military personnel in domestic law enforcement, especially during crises such as pandemics or civil unrest, raises questions about the militarization of governance (Miklaucic & Flynn, 2021).

5.2. Authoritarian Resurgence and Military-Backed Regimes

Despite progress in democratic civil-military relations, a parallel trend of authoritarian consolidation is evident in several regions where the military functions as the foundation of political regimes. In Russia, the fusion of military, intelligence, and security institutions into the "power vertical" underpins the centralization of authority around the presidency (Taylor, 2018). Military parades, defense spending, and foreign interventions (e.g., Ukraine, Syria) reinforce both domestic legitimacy and international projection. China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is closely tied to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), serving as both guardian of party rule and executor of foreign policy. The military plays a key role in projecting Chinese power through territorial defense, Belt and Road initiatives, and regional deterrence strategies in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait (Scobell et al., 2020). In Egypt, the military has reasserted dominance since the 2013 ouster of President Mohamed Morsi. Under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the military controls vast sectors of the economy and bureaucracy, illustrating how armed forces can operate as a parallel state (Sayigh, 2019). These regimes utilize the military not only for external defense but also for internal control, surveillance, and regime preservation.

CONCLUSION

From ancient conquests to contemporary peacekeeping missions, the military has consistently played a central and transformative role in the foundation, development, and sustenance of states. Historically, empires and kingdoms were built and defended through military might, often legitimizing power through conquest and control. In modern times, while the overt political dominance of the military has waned in many regions, its influence remains profound albeit in more institutionalized and nuanced forms. Today, the military serves not only as an instrument of defense but also as a vital organ in maintaining internal order, responding to emergencies, and supporting civil authority during crises. Its role has evolved from that of direct rule and domination to one of institutional support, professionalization, and strategic deterrence. Despite these changes, the military continues to be a cornerstone of state power, capable of influencing political decisions, shaping national identity, and projecting strength both within and beyond borders. However, modern governance presents a complex challenge: how to harness the military's capabilities without compromising democratic values, human rights, and the principle of civilian supremacy. In fragile democracies and authoritarian regimes alike, the military can become a tool for political manipulation, potentially undermining state legitimacy and public trust. Conversely, in well-established democracies, it can serve as a model of discipline, loyalty, and service to the nation. As global politics evolve with rising security threats, transnational challenges, and shifting alliances the military's role will continue to be significant in shaping not only national security agendas but also broader questions of governance, legitimacy, and state capacity. Balancing this role with the imperatives of democratic governance, accountability, and civil-military relations will remain a key concern for policymakers and scholars alike. Ultimately, understanding the military's enduring presence and potential in statecraft is essential for appreciating both the strengths and vulnerabilities of modern political systems.

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