

Taiwan's Changing Military Covenant and the Armed Forces' Institutional Autonomy*

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Introduction

This article represents an analysis of Taiwan's changing military covenant and its impact on the institutional autonomy of the Republic of China's (ROC) armed forces. The military covenant refers to that set of (usually implicit) expectations that mark the relations and exchange between the military on the one hand and society and the state on the other (Forster 2006, 2012). Institutional autonomy denotes the discretion allowed the military to make independent decisions regarding such things as use of budgetary allocations, professional training and operational matters (Cruz 1998; Olsen 2008; Pion-Berlin 1992). An analysis proceeding from a focus on the military covenant goes beyond the "usual" focus of scholarly work on civil-military relations centered on control of the armed forces or the formal and informal division of labor between civilian and military decision-makers. It does so since it extends to questions of national identity, the legitimacy of using armed force, or factors influencing resilience, training, recruitment and retention, that is, issues not normally covered under the analytic rubric of civil-military relations.

The majority of previous studies of the ROC, overwhelmingly situated in political science, have dealt with the place of the armed forces in the process of democratization and nationalization (*guojiahua*) in handling their difficult past or in creating and maintaining their democratic nature (Hung et al. 2003; Kuehn 2013; Mattlin 2011). Our sociological study utilizes the finding of these studies to deal with a complementary set of issues that can shed further light on the process of democratization and the state of the armed forces today. One seemingly similar recent study by Karalekas' (2018) offers an analysis of the Taiwanese military in terms of the model of post-modern military (Moskos et al. 2000). However, like all investigations using an ideal-type universal typology, this research lacks an analysis of the processual nature of the bargaining between different groups in the armed forces, civil society and that state and does not underscore the historically unique character of the ROC.

Let us explain. Every country possessing an armed force has a "military covenant" (derived from the wider "social contract") that, at its simplest, focuses on the willingness of military personnel to make personal sacrifices (including death), forgo some rights enjoyed by those outside the armed forces and in return expect recognition of their important social role, fair treatment for them and their families and commensurate terms and conditions of service. More widely, such agreements include expectations about preparation for and pursuit of armed conflict, civilian control over the armed forces, the force's institutional autonomy, the loyalty and commitment of soldiers to the country, and the professional (a-political) orientation of the armed forces. The covenant is a "contract" that while not legally binding, nevertheless has strong normative power and is seen by actors to be morally

obligatory. Hence, when the terms of the covenant are breached social protest, negative media reports, parliamentary debates or judicial proceedings may eventuate.

The terms of Taiwan's contemporary covenant (emerging since the late 1980s and itself constantly negotiated) are the outcome of wide-ranging changes that are international-political (the rise of China as a superpower, the growing political isolation of Taiwan), domestic-political (democratization, mediatization, juridification, political polarization), economic (rising incomes and development), and social (increasing acceptance of neo-liberal and post-material values). As a consequence of these developments and the particular nature of the ROC's democratization, there is a marked decrease in the military's institutional autonomy. The autonomy of the armed forces is crucial for its "unique" professionalism centered on the management, preparation for, and use of legitimate (if sometimes contested) organized state violence (Boene 2000).

In this sense, the military is both like other large organizations or public institutions and qualitatively different from them given its wielding of organized state violence. In fact, this exceptionality explains many classic military features such as strict hierarchy, firm discipline, emphasis on correct procedures, and willingness of its members to risk life and limb. To reiterate, while the military can be analyzed like "any" large organization or public-state bureaucracy, its specialization in organized violence implies that unique analytical lenses also be used to study it (Hung et al. 2003). Being charged with a state's coercive means implies, however, that the armed forces potentially pose a threat to any political system since they have the means to take it over from civilian politicians. While decreased institutional autonomy is important from the point of view of democratization (since it entails greater civilian control of military matters), it may also be problematic for the force's development and competence in the use of organized martial force. In other words, too much external intervention in the military's autonomy may harm its ability to train properly, experiment with new technology and organizational forms, and motivate its members.

A note on methodology. This research is based on the following sources. First, twenty-five formal interviews (lasting between an hour and three hours) with serving and retired officers, academic experts, journalists, civil servants, a member of the National Security Council, and a former member of the National Security Bureau. Second, numerous conversations over dinners, lunches and coffees with serving and retired officers. Third, visiting think tanks, discussion groups, museums, and memorial rites and giving lectures in military programs and universities. Fourth, a close reading of secondary scholarly literature on the Republic's armed forces. And fifth, a systematic review of news outlets.

The Military Covenant

The idea of the military covenant allows us to understand how current-day preparations for and execution of armed conflicts are experienced,

comprehended, negotiated about *and* acted upon by a variety of actors in the industrial democracies (Ben-Ari 2013; Forster 2006, 2012; Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 2012; Lomsky-Feder and Sasson-Levy 2015; Rubin 2012). These informal "contractual" accords cover mutual expectations between civilian groups, the state and the armed forces about war, war preparation, and military service. All military covenants center on the preoccupation of the military with organized state violence.

Concretely, the relationship between soldiers and society and the state is based on the following understandings: soldiers promise to be willing to sacrifice their bodies and lives, show absolute obedience to military hierarchy, commit to professionalization (holding expertise), subscribe to an a-political orientation), express loyalty to the country, internalize society's overall civilian values and democratic ground rules, be accountable to political democratic overlords (supremacy of civilian constitutional power), be transparent to a degree, and act according to globally accepted normative ways of using organized violence. In return, society (often through the state) pledges to provide a monopoly over coercive state power, symbolic acknowledgement of the military's importance. institutional and professional autonomy for the military, allowance for a separate military sub-culture (a right to be different), training and proper equipment, care and support for troops and their families (especially casualties) and suitably commemorating fallen soldiers.

Thus, military covenants cover much more than agreements between military personnel and the armed forces about concrete workplace-related issues since they include issues such as the legitimacy of using armed force and the ways in which the sacrifice of soldiers are handled and remembered. These accords form *prisms* through which the circumstances of service, methods of preparation for armed conflict or deployment of martial force are interpreted by soldiers and civilians. The covenant is important for operational reasons as well. First, it governs expectations about preparations for war covering not only technology and equipment and their utilization but the kind of education and training soldiers receive. Second, the covenant is central for marking out the limits of the military's institutional autonomy – that space or leeway for the military to make independent professional choices about what kind of risks to take and the acceptability of legitimate mistakes. Indeed, without risk-taking and acceptance of mistakes there is no innovation and no adaptation and change. This is not just an issue of individual psychology – the presence of risk-takers - but of a wider organizational climate that accepts risks or is risk-averse. In sum, for operational reasons the military needs independence to socialize soldiers to the use restrained violence, needs a space for developing expertise in organizing violence and needs room to innovate (take risks, make legitimate mistakes and to come up with bad ideas).

Historical and Cultural Legacies

The ROC's contemporary covenant should be understood against its historical and cultural background. During the martial law period, the

covenant was closely related to the fact that the military operated as a system within a system, that is, with its own set of rules and norms (Hung et al. 2003). It was a period when the Republic was a “nation-in-arms” and marked by a general consensus about national defense with both citizens and most members of the military convinced of a real and credible threat from mainland China (Edmonds 2003: 234). Indeed, a number of our older interviewees emphasized that they or their acquaintances who served during the 1960 and 1970s still remember the wide acceptance of the idea that Taiwan was under real threat. Recalls a retired Major-General”

I joined we were willing to sacrifice ourselves for our country and this was especially the year I joined which was a year after CKS passed away so it was a dangerous time. And in my education in the mil academy and my professors – usually mentioned that we would sacrifice our lives a few years later. We didn’t hope for war but if there is one we were ready to sacrifice our lives.... During my military service I really thought that there would be a war. We believe strongly that there would be one.

More widely, Edmonds (2003: 236) argues that conscription was a major way of socializing the population to this emphasis.

During this period, the covenant governed the close KMT-military nexus, and the country’s armed forces were expected to take on nation and state-building roles in infrastructure projects or by creating veterans as future cadres of managers and dependable employees (Hung et al. 2003). Chiang Kai Shek’s idea was to utilize military veterans who were discharged at a relatively young age but with little income as pool of labor and management. A central expression of this expectation was establishing multiple military businesses including farms, factories or commercial firms. No doubt, the economic investment in these enterprises was also motivated by political considerations of heading off any dissatisfaction and potential protest veterans could wage.

As Taiwan began to democratize, the military covenant began to change. Beginning in the late 1970s, the emergence of a new covenant began in earnest with the country’s democratization and “nationalization” (*guojiahua*) in the 1980s (Tzeng 2009 Chap 2). Based on models existing in the United States and Western Europe the first democratic government put in place the formal and legal framework for civilian control of the military and the National Defense Law and National Defense Reorganization Law were promulgated in the early 2000s (Hung et al. 2003; Kuehn 2013; Stokes 2006).

Beyond the new legal frame, three more contextual factors affected the covenant. First, the military has had to deal with its problematic past as parts of it participated in the repression of the population during martial rule. The distrust this created was exacerbated by the negative experience of many members of the population during conscription with the military stereotypically labelled as being “punitive, dogmatic and unproductive” (Yuan 2017:4). Indeed, this point was brought out in numerous conversations,

media reports and historical accounts we encountered. Hence one journalist told us that for decades conscripts “were told to do some really stupid things for two or three years like “sit at that post” like what my son did. Chop those vegetables for the officers”. And another former officer noted that many soldiers were occupied by “make-do” work. This negative legacy continues to an extent in framing some debates about trusting the armed forces and issues of recruitment and retention.

Second, while hard to gauge, there appears to be a lingering Chinese cultural idea that military service should be taken up only if there are no other alternatives (Edmonds 2003: 233; Yuan 2017: 3). As one retired officer told us, in traditional views there is a very low status to soldiers and they are looked down upon “There is a Chinese saying that says that a good man does not join the military... That is a traditional Chinese perception that only the losers join, they join gangs because they know how to fight so they also join the military. It’s very hard to change that. While the attitude is changing it is still strong.” It is in this light that many members of the military sometimes lament the present low status of the country’s military and its reduced social standing. From our point of view, this idea combined with the suspicions about the military’s dark past create rather negative expectations of the armed forces that are expressed in public debates and shape the motivations for joining and remaining in the institutions.

Third, and this point is crucial for the military’s role as defender of the Republic, there is a rather wide-spread perception that mainland China does not post a credible daily threat to the Republic’s citizens. Another retired senior officer observed:

The situation now is different and people join the military for different reasons; In my estimation most of active military officers, perhaps, don’t believe it will ever come to war in their lifetime.

While there is an awareness of the PRC’s overwhelming military power, for the majority of the population this threat is not directly relevant to their lives. This situation is one outcome of the “liminality” of the country Corcuff (2012): somehow caught between and betwixt different identities, economic systems and personal ties and identities. Indeed, while there are official and media reports about the rhetoric of Communist leaders and various actions that the PRC’s military undertake (missile launches, large-scale maneuvers or the development of advanced hardware, for example), since the launching of missiles near the shores of the country in 1996, there has not been one serious action that could be interpreted as hostile. Moreover, the fact that the ROC military has not participated in any combat or international joint military exercise in over fifty years and the perception of only a remote chance of war has led to generational changes in attitudes to the armed forces (Yuan 2017: 4). Hence, it could be argued that the “unique” aspect of the military – preparation and waging of armed conflicts – is attenuated in contemporary Taiwan. And if so, then we can ask whether the countries armed forces have become “just like” any other large public bureaucracy.

We now go on to the contemporary military covenant by focusing on a number of key clusters of issues.

Abiding by Democratic Ground Rules

With the country's political changes, the most significant question was whether the military would accept the ground rules of the new democracy. In this respect, the scholarly consensus is that the ROC's military has successfully transformed into an institution that plays by the rules and norms found in other democracies: it has fully accepted public expectations that it be a democratic institution.

As holding the means of organized state violence, the question of subservience to elected civilian officials was a primary one during the early years of democratization, what Croissant and Keuhn (2009) call "first generation" problems of democratization. This issue was especially acute because democratization was a potential threat against those mainlanders who had dominated much of politics and the military during the martial rule period. While one could conceivably argue that Chiang Kai Shek had already thoroughly "domesticated" the military during his rule (Karalekas 2018), the crucial test in the new ROC democratic polity was its subservience to the incoming democratically elected president and the new regime. And indeed, the ROC has democratized successfully especially when compared to other East and Southeast Asian countries (Edmonds 2003; Fravel 2002; Lee 2007; Lin and Chan 2017; Keuhn 2008, 2013; Nam 2019; Stokes 2006; Tzeng 2009).

There are numerous indicators of military leaders' ritual and actual obedience to civilian politicians: in official statements of senior commanders, in carrying out orders and decisions made by civilian decision-makers, or in accepting the military's role in advisory capacities during policy-making. In addition, all of our interviewees without exception (and both within and outside the armed forces) observed that Taiwan's forces had fully accepted this democratic relationship. In addition, the military's deferential attitude is expressed in such symbolic gestures as the positioning of generals in ceremonies, the military's diminished role in Independence Day celebrations, or the appearance of civilian elected officials at the center of many public photographs where senior generals are included.

Similarly, after going through a number of critical events during the transition to democracy (Karalekas 2018; Tzeng 2009: Chap 5), the loyalty and commitment (not only subservience) of the country's armed forces to the constitutional power is now uncontested. Crucial in this respect was the initiative of the armed forces to swear an oath of obedience to the state thereby assuring the transition between different party-led governments (Hung et al. 2003). Further indicators of this feature are pledges to the country's flag. However, from time to time there are occurrences that seem to question this loyalty as the following examples underscore. First, over the years a number of retired officers have symbolically "gone over" to the side of the PRC by praising Xi Jinping and participating in formal events centered on the CCP. Second, a number of espionage cases involving serving military

officers (including military signals, intelligence, or weapons acquisition) have been uncovered (Karalekas 2018). And third, occasional scandals involving the sale of military equipment and technology are uncovered (Setzenkorn 2014) and cases of smuggling are uncovered. At the very least, these examples raise questions about the military's commitment among the general public and how they provide "fodder" for political contestation.

Closely related to subservience and loyalty is the acceptance on the part of the military of a politically neutral stance, a feature that is important in newly democratizing countries in general and in Taiwan in particular especially given the historical rent between mainlanders and native Taiwanese. Here again, the wide consensus is that "Stay out of politics" has been accepted in all ranks in Taiwan (Kuehn 2013; Tzeng 2009, 2016). Today however, this kind of stance has become ever more difficult given the country's highly polarized politics between the Green and the Blue camp (Mattlin 2011), and the "abuse" of oppositional politics to block initiatives that have a consensus behind them but are used for party advantage (Croissant and Keuhn 2009; Keuhn 2008).

Perhaps this is the reason why the Republic's military leaders appear so rarely on the public stage in regard to the issues at the center of the military covenant since joining any public discussion can be instantly politicized. In fact, while in other countries senior commanders appear in public forums to explain or discuss such issues as training accidents and suicides, equipment provided to soldiers or problems of recruitment, in Taiwan they are generally absent. Indeed, as we shall presently see, this public absence relates back to the complete subservience of the military to civilian politicians.

Perhaps more essential to gaining the trust of the general public (and thereby its support) is the actual and perceived transparency and accountability of the armed forces. In this respect, not only has it become acceptable to criticize the military but a host of mechanisms of monitoring its actions and demanding its answerability have developed (Cheng 2001). These include institutional processes (government and parliamentary oversight or checks by political parties) and extra-institutional means used by families of soldiers, a highly active media and civil society groups (Feng 2016; Karalekas 2018; Stokes 2006; Tzeng 2009 Chap 4; Yuan 2017). A very instructive event in this respect was the apparent abuse and eventual death of a conscript in 2013 (Yuan 2017). That event led to mass protests and a public apology by top generals. It also led to a decision (perhaps hastily taken) by the then president to take the courts-martial system out of the military.

The response of the public at that time is instructive since protests did not come with any call for not carrying out military service. Rather, this case, and many previous and subsequent protests, underscore three points. First, the response of the military's top brass is indicative of the perceived breach of a central element of the military covenant: caring for soldiers' lives. In fact, the reaction of parts of the population underscore how while not legally binding, the "military covenant" (as a set of mutual promises) is nevertheless seen by

many groups to be obligatory in terms of its moral force (Forster 2006, 2012; Cook 2004). Taiwan is no exception in this regard. Around the world, a prime form of dissent against the military involves bereaved relatives criticising representatives of the military blaming it for the death of "their" soldier and thereby undermining the very reciprocity at base of the military covenant (Ben-Ari 2005). Further, veterans and bereaved families occasionally mobilize networks, social movements, the media and various alliances in and around the benefits and acknowledgement they feel they are their due (Dandeker et al. 2006; Kaplan 2008; Moss and Prince 2014: 208; Wong 2005).

Second, this case underscores the process of what can be called the "judicialization" or "juridification" of the armed forces that is related to the spread of a global human rights regime centered on military actions (Rubin 2002; also Forster 2001, 2012; Cohen 2011). In other militaries one expression of this trend is that lawyers have taken on a central role in decision making during operations carried out by national security agencies (Goldsmith 2009; Cohen and Ben-Ari 2014). In terms of the covenant, what is important is that the use of the legal arena (or its threatened use) provides a resource that families can bring to bear on their negotiations with the armed forces.

Third, this case also illuminates another key development, the mediatization of the actions of the armed forces (Shavit 2017). The omnipresence of media and speed of reporting means that almost any action can be quickly transmitted to both the new and the older media. Moreover, the scrutiny of the military by the media includes not only operational matters but also racism, bullying, sexism, employment practices or health and safety conditions. In Taiwan, an especially strong media that often reports on negative issues tends to frame public understandings of the armed forces in just these terms (Yuan 2017). For a long period, until the country's forces learned to work with, rather than against or limiting, the media, the situation meant that commanders rarely appeared in public to express views thus reinforcing the way parts of the public imagine what is going on inside it. Even today, we have heard observations about how there is relatively little information about how things have improved in the military. One exception, noted by some of our interviewees is the portrayal of the forces' participation in disaster with scores of reports about the help provided by units. In fact, given the lack of overt armed conflict, this kind of emphasis underscores the contribution of the military to Taiwanese society, thus fulfilling its role of helping during times of crisis brought about by nature.

What Does the Military Receive?

Since the military covenant governs the exchange between the armed forces and their society and state we now move onto the question of what does the military receive in return for its loyalty, commitment, political neutrality and transparency and contribution to society?

An answer to this question via the issues of incentives and care illuminates the character of today's covenant. The most significant change, as in most of the world's industrial democracies (Boene 2009; Burk 1992; Haltiner 1998; Leander 2004) has been, since 2008, the radical shortening of conscription to four months and the decision to move, *in effect*, to an All Volunteer fully professional force. By only suspending conscription and not terminating it, the idea is that when the need arises it could be reinstated with no need for an extended legislative process. The result is a mixed system of increasingly smaller numbers of conscripts and the rest of the military comprised of volunteers (Yuan 2013, 2017). Unsurprisingly, the move to such a force composition has been, again like other armed forces, the intensification of a process of "contractorisation" meaning the introduction of civilian models of business efficiency into the workings of the military (**Lambert 2009**), an increase in material rewards (salary, pensions, job training, aid for higher education) in addition to symbolic rewards (respect, acknowledgement), and the ability to convert military experience to other resources (such as work placement) (**Levy 2007**). Indeed, one expression of this increasing emphasis has been, as in other armed forces, a strong rhetoric of marketing by the military. Along these lines, Levy (**2003; 2007; 2008; 2010**) argues for the appearance over the past years of a new kind of relationship between the armed forces and social groups outside it, a contractual militarism centered on bargaining – rather than republican voluntarism - at base of contemporary ties between troops and the state.

The ROC is very much part of these trends with the armed forces enlarging their public relations efforts, waging marketing campaigns for potential recruits, and initiating a host of new incentives for maintaining personnel numbers. For example, the Ministry of National Defense has formally emphasized a combination of pay, family benefits and care, and veterans' care as the major incentives for recruitment and retention (Yuan 2013: 2012). All these efforts should be understood, again like other countries, as reflecting the difficulties of enlisting new members to the volunteer force. Yuan (2013, 2017: 5 ff.) demonstrates empirically that while successful in recruiting and retaining women and members of Taiwan's aborigines (that comprise little more than two per cent of the population) the armed forces have faced a continued problem of recruitment (with volunteers having an average educational level lower than conscripts) and especially retention. To follow Yuan (2017), the sociological implication of this situation is of a nation defended by the poor (usually from the geographical peripheries) and the minorities.

The move to a contractual basis for the relations between the potential recruits and the armed forces are empirically based. A large-scale survey carried out by the Ministry of National Defense found that the major reasons for staying in the military were job stability and economic pressures (Yuan 2017: 6). And this finding was echoed time and again in our interviews where we found that a major, if not the major, set of incentives for joining and remaining in the forces is instrumental. Similarly, successive marketing campaigns waged by the military emphasize that it provides skills that can later be utilized in civilian jobs, good educational opportunities funded by the

services, improving conditions for retired veterans, yearly bonuses, or even support and provisions for civilians harmed by military actions (Hung et al. 2003).

Given the uniqueness of the military things are, however, more complex. The case of the pension reform the country recently underwent, illustrates the combination of instrumental and symbolic elements involved in the relations between soldiers, the military and society. One retired colonel speaking about the reform linked risk, future promises and symbolic acknowledgement of soldierly efforts:

Last year we had a major pension reform for all civil servants. But we feel betrayed because when I joined the military you told me that you are going to pay me this but how come you are now changing the conditions. Well... if you are in still in active duty you can tell people that you are going to change the conditions and they can choose what to do, leave or stay and accept the conditions. But the retired people, they had the promise. That's a lot of money. I have to admit that in the late 1990s our economy became less prosperous and civil servants had good salaries. But today the economy is not so good and our salaries are not the same as twenty years ago. But it's not our fault. The young people talk about retirees as greedy, as taking everything and.... I agree that we can negotiate, talk, no problem.

But that was a promise. And may people when they joined the military they were stationed in offshore islands, like Kinmoi, ...and didn't see their family for a long time, and they sacrificed a lot. ... If you are in the Navy or Army you go everywhere. They had a hard time and how come people say to them "You are the greedy people". That majority says that. So the public say those military, like government employees, teachers from the government schools; they cut our pension.

This passage illuminates the expectation that fair and open negotiations be carried out in regard to the terms of the covenant; that the exceptional risks and effort involved in military service be taken into account; that recognition as well as tribute be paid for this uniqueness; and the intense emotional reaction of soldiers and veterans to perceived breaches of the contract. In fact, we occasionally heard voices arguing that this earned right to expect material and symbolic acknowledgement extends even to parliamentary oversight of the military. One, rather enthusiastic former officer contended that,

we have young members of parliament and even a pop-singer who did not even serve and he always points to the generals that they should do this and do that but he never joined the military. To me, as a veteran he is not qualified, you don't know anything about the military so how can you point to the general and tell him what to do. But as a democracy we have to say "Yes Sir" but that is bullshit.

Our point, of course, is not deny or denigrate the right of civilians to criticize and monitor “things military” but to underscore how the move to contractual terms leads to perception of the military as similar to any other public body. And just as civil servants have no real advantage over others in voicing critique of the government, so military service does not grant any advantage.

We heard some observers who scoffed at such comments, attributing them to veterans as dissatisfied workers that do not appreciate the problems that the country faces in financing its pension systems. Interestingly, the reform eventuated in some, limited, dispensations for veterans that in effect, dampened protests and some of our interviewees voiced the opinion that the special dispensation to military veterans was accepted since they had made sacrifices and had to travel to remote places. One serving colonel observed that while there was much outcry about the cuts, there were relatively few complaints about the fact that the military was included in the reform in a much more graduated manner than other civil servants. When we asked him about the reason for this acceptance, he attributed it to people’s understanding “that while teachers and others may receive overtime, military people do not; their jobs are different – they may be asked to work on weekends for no compensation.” And another serving officer recalled that there was a real apprehension that deeper cuts to the military would have eventuated in a leaving of the service of those good quality officers. Notice that it is the effort involved that justifies the dispensation given to veterans and not the fact that they put their lives on the line. Formalizing and making relations with troops more instrumentally contractual reduces the voluntary republican agreement underlying service. As ‘mere’ employees of the military they no longer be perceived as having the same citizen-mandated *republican* right to express their political voice in the name of their contribution to the military.

Further, a close reading of previous analyses reveals that this new form of contractual militarism is not only instrumental in nature. Research on the motivation of troops in democracies to serve abroad reveals other bases of motivation not captured in Moskos’ (1986) typology of institutional/occupational. Indeed, post-material values, not to be confused with acquisitiveness and privatization, are important around the world with soldiers talking about “self actualization” as something they seek in military service. Thus, studies have documented how “doing good” is among the motivations and bases of self-identity reported on by many troops of the industrial democracies whose units have carried out peacekeeping and reconstruction (Mannitz 2012). While Taiwan has not been on overseas missions, these emphasis on “doing good” or “meeting challenges” is, as mentioned, closely related to the military’s role in aid and support during disasters. As a member of the NSC told us: “We emphasize that the military also does very good things. They are responsible for disaster relief and rescue...they do this as a support force, as a supportive mission... We are taking steps to persuade our society to accept that our armed forces do good things.”

Hence, the contractorization of the military does not mean a linear move to economic incentives but rather a change in the *relationship* between soldiers

and the armed forces. What we see emerging here is a sort of exchange relation between individuals and families and the military: when the military does not meet people's expectations then they may withdraw emotionally and physically and look for other frameworks where their desires – for material and symbolic rewards, for self-actualization of meaningful activities - can be met (say higher education, workplaces, leisure activities, for example) (Levy, Lomsky-Feder and Harel 2007).

Institutional Autonomy and a Risk-Averse Culture?

These developments have implications for the institutional autonomy of Taiwan's armed forces. Institutional autonomy, to recap, refers to the leeway left to an organization for discretionary authority, self-monitoring and the creation and maintenance of expertise and action that, ideally, is harnessed to the service of a higher order that it does not determine (Pion-Berlin 1992). In concrete terms, military autonomy means the scope allowed the forces to develop military professionalism, prepare and train for armed conflict, and innovate new organizational forms and technology. From the point of view of external regulating bodies, such latitude awarded to an armed force foremostly carries political risks.

Virtually all commentators agree that the decrease of the autonomy of the military has been essential for the ROC's democratization. Kuehn (2013) sees this in the weakening of the bargaining power of the armed forces and its capacity to resist organizational change. As a consequence of media and civil society initiatives, the involvement of the judicial system and the legislature, the increased transparency and accountability of the forces, the ceremonial marginalization of military symbols, and the advent of a contractual militarism the ROC is marked by a steep decrease of the military's institutional autonomy. As explained however, there is still a need for some kind of separate culture to both nurture and control the destructive potential of military power (Edmonds 2003: 237; Croissant and Keuhn 2009). This essential separateness of the military from civilian society is essential for training, education, inculcating discipline and hierarchy, and cultivating soldiers' willingness to put themselves in harm's way.

Across the world, military actions suffer from an especially acute case of politicians' "execution anxiety" because when missions fail the political and diplomatic consequences can be severe (Friend 2017). This anxiety is part of what Shaw (2005) calls risk-transfer warfare because of political costs to the politicians and senior commanders perhaps and seems especially important today when even small events can be broadcast on global platforms in very short time frames and tactics can have major diplomatic implications. This trend is heightened by what Shaw (2005: 75-6) calls global surveillance: the growing transparency and monitoring of contemporary armed forces to external agents such as political leaders, the media (local and global), pressure groups, and international non-state institutions such as the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International. Perhaps provocatively, we suggest that in Taiwan "execution anxiety" has been generalized from operational matters to all military performance including training, the behavior of troops outside

camps, and the experimentation with new technologies and equipment. Given the country's political polarization almost any mistake has become very risky for commanders and senior politicians (Mattlin 2011).

Let us provide a few examples. When we talked about the placing of the discipline system outside the military, a retired officer with over thirty years of service observed:

So now if I as a soldier disobey or fight with the company commander, I don't go to the military court martial court but do go to the civilian court. And civilian judges see things differently – they judge things but according to theory and not reality. But an offense in the military is not a civilian crime.... So, it's hard for the young officers (company or battalion commanders). They want nothing to happen so that they can get promoted. No one dies, they don't lose a bullet and they don't lose a gun and there is no accident.

Taking the disciplinary system out of the military implies not only the practical difficulties of disciplinary problems forwarded to civilian courts (and subject to the same restrictions and time periods as "any" civilian case) but resonates with wider issues centered on careers and making mistakes. The mention of fear of losing a bullet (or even spent shells) was something we heard time and again. When asked about what they feared most when going to a rifle range, former conscripts and members of the academy said that it was more worrisome to lose the casing of a bullet (the exact number of casings has to be brought back for every bullet shot) than having a poor performance in terms of their shooting ability. Put starkly, it is more worrying not to fulfill bureaucratic procedures than showing a lack of professionalism. This general orientation is compounded by stories we heard of tactical leaders dreading casualties during training not only because of the loss of life, but because the military's civilian overlords and the media coming down hard on those commanders within whose units these happened. Another officer told us:

So [civilians] see things differently, so it's hard for the officers like company or battalion commanders. They want nothing to happen so that they can get promoted. No one dies, they don't lose a bullet and they don't lose a gun and there is no accident. That is fine, but in normal daily life they don't really train the soldiers.

To be sure, commanders must make every effort to assure the safety of troops during drills and maneuvers but mistakes happen - that is always a part of training. But the problem as a former colonel told us is intensified by lack of backing by senior officers:

Get back the courts marital system because it will help company commanders for example. And the generals should support the junior officers more, telling them you train the soldiers and don't worry about these things.

In terms of the military covenant, potential sacrifice on the part of soldiers, conscripts and volunteers, extends not only to war but to preparations for war (training). To make crystal clear, the expectations of soldiers, families, and civilians are that every effort be made to minimize mistakes and to punish unacceptable errors but the responsibility of senior commanders is also to explain that accidents are an inevitable part of any training that involves weaponry, heavy vehicles, and at times extreme weather conditions.

The general anxiety of not causing problems to seniors and the military in general is seen in the custom of troops, even senior officers, wearing civilian clothes when leaving camps and bases. Indeed, to external observers this custom is akin to soldiers and commanders “disguising” themselves as civilians when leaving their military posts. This point may seem trivial but it actually touches directly on issues of military identity and pride in one’s service and more widely, the place of the military in Taiwanese society. In terms of the military covenant, these customs center directly on the expectation that civilians acknowledge the role and importance of troops. When we asked our interviewees to explain this behavior they usually attributed it to one of two reasons: a small minority attributed it to the bad image of the military since the period of martial law while the majority ascribed it to the fear of making mistakes and embarrassing the armed forces. And indeed, one occasionally sees new media postings of soldiers in uniform ordering food at McDonald’s or coffee at Starbucks with comments about how they are wasting money being away from camps. Along these lines, one officer, relatively recently retired from the military told us:

When we go outside, if I have to leave the office to buy something for the office I would grab some civilian clothes because I don’t want the civilians to see that I go out in the middle of the day: we don’t want to get into any trouble because of this; some time ago, a soldier took a bus for some reason and he fell asleep and he opened his mouth, like that, so some people took a picture. “A soldier, as soldier sleeps like that”.

Taken together, these are all signs, we suggest, of a culture of risk-aversion marked by a self-imposed limitation on actions given perceived negative consequences and low returns.

Undeniably, risk-averseness is a feature of any military since the career orientation of officers involves the understanding that making mistakes may jeopardize their chances for promotion. Thus, the fact that having a job and job security in the military is a primary motivation for service, and that promotion for officers being very competitive, it is not surprising that the ROC’s armed forces tend to be, like many militaries, risk-averse. But what is particular to Taiwan is the combination of a disciplinary system that has been taken out of military (thereby denying lower level commanders many tools for command), their fear of being punished perhaps in civilian courts, the political polarization turning every action of the armed forces into a potential case of contention and a generally harsh (at times sensationalist) media coverage of many “things military” (Karalekas 2018; Tucker 2005: 157). But the problem is that without risk-taking there is no innovation and no

adaptation and change. The point we are making is that seen from the point of view of the military covenant, innovation is not only a question of new technology or even tactics but of personal growth and organizational development. Thus, in other militaries, senior commanders not only understand that top management's job is not to prevent risk but to build capability to recover from failure, but attempt to clarify this both to politicians and to civilian publics.

In fact, in this light, the importance of the covenant goes further down to operational considerations of troop morale (Karalekas 2018) especially in the context of hybrid warfare (Hoffman 2007). Because the covenant centers on loyalty, citizenship, and ownership or responsibility for one's country, when potential enemies focus on precisely these things, the sentiments and behavior expected of troops become very important. In other words, given that the PRC may attack not only with weaponry and offensive operations but with media warfare (including the new media) the loyalty and commitment to the constitutional power are all the more important.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let us emphasize three points. First, our model of the military covenant focuses on ongoing processes (such as bargaining, negotiation, opposition, and transaction) that allow us to trace the effects of war and in Taiwan's case war-preparation on both military and society. A processual emphasis is important because it comes closest to how groups and individuals actually experience, evaluate, ascribe motivation, and prescribe action in relation to armed conflict. In addition, it emphasizes how the country's armed forces have, over time, lost much of their power to parlay with their civilian overlords.

Second, the model carries us out beyond a limited focus on troops to how wars and war-preparation reverberate and resonate with all members of society (albeit to differing degrees). Thus, the process of "nationalization" – expressed in the oath members of the ROC's forces swear in allegiance to the democratically elected president – is a central element of the covenant. Similarly, we showed how the changing morale and motivation of soldiers and their well-being are related to the symbolic and material rewards they receive for service in war.

Third, the model allows us to trace out the effects of war when the covenant is breached and may lead to the emergence of internal organizational resistance within the military or opposition by civilian groups outside it. In other words, if we understand the terms of mutual expectations regarding the military, we can understand actions taken up in terms of violations of them. In the future, perhaps this is the most important indicators of change in the relations between the armed forces and society in Taiwan.

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* Thanks are due to participants at a seminar presented at the Institute of International Relations at National Cheng-Chi University, June 2019. The author would also like to thank the Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs for granting him a Taiwan Research Fellowship.

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