



More Isn't Always Better

Air Force Autonomy for Policy Decision-Making and Implementation from Divided Executive and Legislative Branches

Marie T. Harnly



AIR UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES



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MARIE T. HARNLY

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Director, Air University Press
Dr. Paul Hoffman

Project Editor
Jeanne K. Shamburger

Illustrator
Catherine Smith

Print Specialist
Jonathan Marks

Air University Press
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Please send inquiries or comments to

Commandant and Dean
School of Advanced Air and Space Studies
125 Chennault Circle
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112
Tel: (334) 953-3155
DSN: 493-3155
saass.admin@us.af.mil

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About the Author

Lt Col Marie T. Harnly, USAF,¹ is a graduate of Stanford University, where she majored in mechanical engineering, product design, and Spanish. She holds master's degrees from the Air Force Institute of Technology in engineering management and Harvard University in public administration. During her career as a civil engineer, Lieutenant Colonel Harnly has served in a variety of leadership positions at the flight, squadron, group, wing, and Headquarters Air Force levels, to include as the aide-de-camp for the twentieth and twenty-first chiefs of staff of the Air Force. She currently commands the 316th Civil Engineering Squadron, Air Force District of Washington.

¹Lieutenant Colonel Harnly was a major at SAASS when she wrote this paper, selected for the Drew Paper series.

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Abstract

Similar to a homeowner hiring an electrician to complete work in their home, the United States government delegates its national security to the military. American civil-military relations are characterized by two government principals, the executive and legislative branches, overseeing the military services. These government branches can be divided when their policy preferences for the military agent do not align. Scholarly principal-agent literature claims that a military agent's autonomy increases when principals are divided because the military agent—in this case, the Air Force—is able to play the executive branch off of the legislative branch, gaining latitude for its policy preference. This research effort examines three cases with divided principals to test the conventional wisdom: the proposed retirement of the A-10 (2013–16), the creation of the Space Force (2017–19), and the repeal of the combat flying ban for women (1991–93). Three new contributions to principal-agent and civil-military relations literature resulted from this research. First, agents do not reliably receive more autonomy from divided principals. This finding disconfirms the prevailing principal-agent theory hypothesis concerning divided principals. Second, conditions other than those classically understood by civil-military relations contributed to a variation in agent autonomy. Whether the government principals share authority for a policy decision or one principal maintains sole authority, geographic impacts, partisan differences, and robust coalitions either constrained or increased agent autonomy. Last, agents do not always desire more autonomy. In fact, there was an instance where the Air Force preferred less autonomy to implement a policy. These contributions offer insights for practitioners developing military strategy, especially in divided principal situations. Military officers should develop strategies that account for these nuances of American civil-military relations to effectively pursue political objectives.

Chapter 1

Introduction

When building a house, homeowners contract carpenters, electricians, and painters to accomplish specific tasks based on their expertise. The homeowners hiring skilled labor to construct their kitchen, for instance, are counting on the labor to know and employ the proper trade techniques to build the kitchen. The homeowners' search for the right skilled labor reflects these worries. They are paying for skill but are unsure if they will receive a knowledgeable craftsman. The principal-agent theory captures this contractual dynamic between the principal, who contracts the work, and the agent, who performs the work.¹ An analogous arrangement occurs between the United States government and military. The government or "principal" delegates national security tasks to the military or "agent." The military, using its knowledge of defense and security, completes these tasks according to the government's preferences. The government monitors the work and provides rewards or punishments after its completion.² Scholars have tailored the principal-agent theory to these contractual dynamics between the government and military.³ Principals can be conceptualized in singular or plural terms—a singular or unified principal may unilaterally contract for services, whereas a "divided" principal reflects situations in which contractual authorities are distributed among at least two parties or where preferences between the principals diverge. In the case of the United States, two principals exist in the decision authority and oversight roles legally assigned—the executive branch and legislative branch.⁴ These two principals maintain policy decision-making and oversight responsibility for the military agent.

The preponderance of scholarly literature on civil-military relations claims that divided principals—in this case, a preference disunity between the executive and legislative branches—create a less responsive agent, resulting in more agent autonomy.⁵ Agents with divided principals are hypothesized to play the principals off of one another, providing increased latitude to implement the agent's option. Yet, the proposed retirement of the A-10 (circa 2013–16) and the creation of the Space Force (2017–19) suggest the theorized outcome might not be the case. In both cases, the viewpoints and policy prescriptions of the executive and legislative branch principals differed, but the Air Force agent nevertheless received *less* autonomy during the decision-making process. The Air Force proposed to retire the A-10 to modernize its fleet, yet Congress blocked this proposal.⁶ The Obama administration objected to congressional

provisions restricting the divestiture of the A-10 since this divestiture reallocated funds to higher-priority programs.⁷ Congressional authorization and appropriation language, presently exist prohibiting the retirement of the A-10, resulting in less autonomy for the Air Force despite having divided principals.⁸

Similarly, after the initial proposal to create a separate Space Force, the Air Force advocated maintaining space operations under its organizational purview.⁹ Congress resisted the creation of a Space Force for two years due to concerns over an expanding defense bureaucracy and its budget.¹⁰ However, the president established a combatant command for space, United States Space Command, and signed Space Policy Directive-4, which drove a formal proposal to create the Space Force as a separate military branch.¹¹ Congress ultimately approved this proposal, resulting in less autonomy for the Air Force again.¹² These cases suggest that the purported impacts of a divided principal hypothesized by civil-military relations scholars may be incorrect. This paper seeks to rectify that error or at least qualify their claims about the degree to which an agent's autonomy varies with the principals' division.

Research Questions

The principal-agent framework can be applied to civil-military relations using the government as the principal and the military as the agent.¹³ Policy decision-making and oversight responsibility for the military agent are allocated between the executive and legislative branches.¹⁴ The Constitution outlines their different authorities as principals, creating the structural context within which they act.¹⁵ The legislative branch is responsible for authorizations and appropriations, and the executive branch is responsible for policy.¹⁶ The situational context, on the other hand, unifies or divides the preferences of the principals. Prominent civil-military relations scholars define *divided principals* as a preference disunity between the principals, specifically the executive and legislative branches.¹⁷ These scholars also define *agent autonomy* as the military possessing an independent sphere of action as far as the ability to decide what tasks to accomplish and how to accomplish those tasks.¹⁸

The prevailing literature generally claims that divided principals share authority for the agent and disunity between the two principals allows the military agent to play the principals off of one another, leading to more agent autonomy.¹⁹ The conventional wisdom also assumes that the military agent always desires more autonomy.²⁰ The principal-agent relationship between the executive branch and legislative branch principals and the Air Force agent requires examination because there may be conditions under which divided principals constrain agent autonomy, challenging hypothesized impacts from

prominent civil-military relations scholars. To investigate this principal-agent relationship, this research explores the following research questions: *Under what conditions do divided principals create greater autonomy for the agent rather than less autonomy? How might divided principals constrain, rather than increase, agent autonomy?*

Purpose

This research argues that conditions in which principals are divided generate variation in agent autonomy and an agent's preference for autonomy, challenging the claims that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals.²¹ This argument has implications for principal-agent theory and American civil-military relations. Specifically, with respect to principal-agent theory, this research suggests that agents do not always receive *more* autonomy from divided principals, and additional potential outcomes should be considered under conditions of divided principals. Recognizing these different outcomes allows the principal to adjust their strategies of monitoring, rewards, and punishments to account for agent autonomy and an agent's preference for autonomy in each situation.²² Identifying these additional outcomes also allows the agent to tailor their preferences to the variation in autonomy they receive from divided principals. This contribution to scholarly literature expands our understanding of principal-agent relations to account for the spectrum of agent autonomy outcomes and preferences that can result from divided principals.

This research also asserts that several contributory variables related to the executive branch and legislative branch principals cause the variation in agent autonomy. The prevailing literature does not account for these variables that play a role in divided principal situations for American civil-military relations. The government principals' authorities, political party differences, geographic impacts, information preferences, the extent of presidential powers, coalition formation, and cabinet consensus impact autonomy for the military agent.²³ Understanding the situational context for divided principal issues and the variables influencing agent autonomy offers insight into military strategy development. Distinguishing how context enables or constrains agent autonomy helps military officers develop strategies that account for this dynamic and effectively use the armed forces to pursue political objectives.

Methodology

This research endeavor has two objectives. First, it aims to test the prevailing hypothesis that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals.²⁴ Analysis of several divided principal cases seeks to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis. These include the proposed retirement of the A-10 (2013–16) and the creation of the Space Force (2017–19), which may not reflect greater agent autonomy, and the repeal of the combat flying ban for women (1991–93), which may reflect greater agent autonomy. The policy prescriptions of the executive branch and legislative branch principals differed in these cases. As a result, divided principal scenarios affecting agent autonomy emerged in all three cases. The enactment of the Air Force's position determined agent autonomy in the decision-making process. The amount of latitude the Air Force receives to execute the principal's policy determines agent autonomy during implementation. The outcomes of the decision-making and implementation phases are compared to the conventional wisdom to determine whether the case aligned with the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature. Selecting two cases that potentially deviate from the prevailing hypothesis and one that possibly aligns with the preponderance of literature allows this effort to investigate variation in agent autonomy.

Second, this research aims to identify variables, other than the structural relationship dividing principals, constraining or enabling agent autonomy. Analysis of several potential contributory variables—such as the principals' authorities, partisan differences, information preferences, coalition formation, geographic impacts, cabinet consensus, and executive powers—strives to illuminate variables that result in decreased agent autonomy from divided principals.²⁵ These variables change in the three selected cases to determine how their varied conditions affect agent autonomy.

The selected cases also occurred after the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 and reflect the same Department of Defense structure that exists today.²⁶ The three cases transpired under different presidents, during different congressional sessions, and with various Air Force secretaries and chiefs of staff. These variables minimize the effects of specific personalities, relationships, budgetary hardships, and wars. Congressional hearings, executive orders, budgetary submissions, and policy documents serve as records of evidence for the case study analysis. These records document the positions of the executive branch and legislative branch principals and the Air Force agent as well as the enacted position, policy, and legislation for each case. These records also serve as evidence of the contributory variables to determine their presence and influence in each

case. Evaluating cases that vary across political and structural contexts offers a high potential for valid insights useful for military strategists.

Chapter Outline

This research effort discusses agent autonomy from divided principals in seven chapters. Chapter 2 explores the existing literature pertinent to this research effort. It examines the economics origin of principal-agent theory, establishing the basis of this framework.²⁷ It also reviews Peter Feaver's principal-agent application to American civil-military relations, with the government as the principal and the military as the agent.²⁸ The discussion incorporates agency problems that the government principal faces and mechanisms that this principal uses to combat these problems.²⁹ Chapter 2 defines divided principals and discusses the prevailing literature on agent autonomy from divided principals. This chapter further examines the structural context of the executive branch and legislative branch principals since the Constitution outlines different authorities for these two branches.³⁰ This structure remains constant while the situational context and allocation of government principal authority varies with each issue. It looks at the two phases, advisory and implementation, of the principal-agent relationship involving policy decision-making and execution, where agent autonomy presents itself. Moreover, it examines various theories that suggest the potential contributory variables and provide contextual understanding, including unitary executive theory and cabinet theory for the executive branch, distributive theory and informational theory for the legislative branch, and coalition theory and partisan theory for both branches.³¹ A notional model depicts how these theories potentially influence agent autonomy. Last, the discussion turns to the creation and authorities of the Air Force agent.

Chapter 3 outlines the case study methodology and discusses its applicability to this research effort. The analysis focuses on three case studies—the proposed retirement of the A-10, the creation of the Space Force, and the repeal of the combat flying ban for women—and their selection criteria. This discussion explains how agent autonomy will be examined for policy decision-making and implementation in all three cases. This chapter elaborates on the sources of record and research method to determine if the cases reinforce the claims from prevailing literature or deviate from these claims. It also identifies the potential contributory variables for agent autonomy to determine if they result in a variation in agent autonomy. Last, chapter 3 establishes the connection between the case study methodology and answers to the research questions.

Chapters 4 to 6 present the cases and discuss the results of the case study analysis. Chapter 4 investigates the proposed retirement of the A-10 case. The

government principals split on policy prescriptions.³² The Air Force aligned with the executive branch, but the legislative branch's preferences prevailed.³³ This chapter examines if the hypothesis from the preponderance of scholarly literature was confirmed. Finally, it identifies contributory variables that constrain agent autonomy for the policy decision and its execution.

Chapter 5 investigates the creation of the Space Force case. Again, the government principals divided on policy preferences.³⁴ The Air Force advocated for a similar outcome as the legislative branch initially, but the executive branch signed a policy directing a formal proposal to establish the Space Force as a separate military branch.³⁵ Similarly, this chapter tests the prevailing hypothesis from divided principal literature and identifies variables that produce variation in agent autonomy for decision-making and implementation.

Chapter 6 investigates the repeal of the combat flying ban for women case. The government principals once again differed on policy preferences.³⁶ Congress enacted the Air Force's policy prescription, which aligned with the legislative branch's viewpoint.³⁷ This chapter investigates a case that seemingly aligns with the conventional wisdom about divided principals. It also examines the contributory variables throughout the advisory and enactment phases to determine their impact on a case that may confirm the prevailing hypothesis.

Chapter 7 concludes the research effort and provides three new contributions to scholarly literature about divided principals and their impact on agent autonomy. This chapter addresses the significance of this research for principal-agent theory. The results are generalizable to principal-agent relationships outside the government sector and, thus, contribute to the body of knowledge on principal-agent theory. Chapter 7 also discusses the implications for American civil-military relations. The situational context of divided government principals; their different authorities, geographic impacts, and partisan differences; and the existence of coalitions impact agent autonomy. These factors frame military strategy development and help military officers build optimal strategies to achieve political objectives.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

1. Eisenhart, "Agency Theory," 57–74.
2. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 68–95.
3. Feaver, 54–58.

4. Brooks and Stanley, *Creating Military Power*, 82–83.
5. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
6. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on the Posture of the Department of the Air Force in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2017 and the Future Years Defense Program*, 114th Cong., 2d sess., March 3, 2016, 5, 9; and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. 113-66, § 143.
7. Obama, Statement of Administrative Policy: S. 1376 – National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2016, 4–5.
8. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. 114-328, §§ 134–135. (Editor’s note: Since this paper was written, the USAF has begun retiring its A-10s. See Mabeus-Brown, “Davis-Monthan Air Force Base Begins Retiring A-10 Fleet.”)
9. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Military Space Organization, Policy, and Programs*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., May 17, 2017, 19, 60.
10. Gould, “No Space Force for Trump in Big Pentagon Policy Bill.”
11. “Establishment of United States Space Command as a Unified Combatant Command,” memorandum from the president to the secretary of defense; and Space Policy Directive-4.
12. Erwin, “Trump Signs Defense Bill Establishing U.S. Space Force.”
13. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 97–99.
14. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 21–48.
15. Avant, “Are the Reluctant Warriors Out of Control?,” 53–54.
16. Rapp, “Civil-Military Relations, 13–26.
17. Donnithorne, “Principled Agents,” 431.
18. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 17–18; and Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 143.
19. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
20. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 64.
21. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
22. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 68–95.
23. Martorano, “Balancing Power,” 205–34; and Hammond and Knott, “Who Controls the Bureaucracy?,” 123–24.
24. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
25. Martorano, “Balancing Power,” 205–34; and Hammond and Knott, “Who Controls the Bureaucracy?,” 123–24.
26. Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, Pub. L. 99-433, § 151.
27. Eisenhart, “Agency Theory,” 57–74.
28. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 54–58.
29. Feaver, 68–95.
30. National Archives, “The Constitution of the United States.”
31. Martorano, “Balancing Power,” 205–34; and Hammond and Knott, “Who Controls the Bureaucracy?” 123–24.

32. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. 113-66, § 143; and Executive Office of the President, H.R. 4435 – Howard P. ‘Buck’ McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2015, May 19, 2014, 4–5.

33. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. 114-328, §§ 134–13.

34. Grisales, “Space Force Closer to Launch”; and White House, “Trump Is Building the United States Space Force.”

35. Statement of General David L. Goldfein, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, in Senate Armed Services Committee, *Military Space Organization, Policy, and Programs*, 19, 60; and Space Policy Directive-4, 6049–52.

36. Parham, “Quiet Revolution,” 385–87.

37. Parham, 387–88.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Principal-Agent Theory, Divided Principals, and American Civil-Military Relations

The pertinent literature on principal-agent theory, divided principals, and American civil-military relations establishes the foundation of this research. It also forms the reference point this research effort expands upon. The following survey of scholarly literature on principal-agent theory presents its economic origin and key concepts.¹ Discussing the principal-agent theory from an American civil-military relations perspective provides an understanding of the dynamics between the government principals and military agent.² The divided principal literature offers the prevailing hypothesis that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals.³ Aside from the prevailing hypothesis, this literature survey discusses additional theories that impact the dynamics between the government principals and military agent in American civil-military relations.⁴ This chapter also presents a notional model depicting the connections between these additional theories and agent autonomy.

Principal-Agent Theory

Economists developed the principal-agent theory in the 1960s to explain contractual relationships between parties.⁵ One party, the principal, delegates work to another party, the agent, to perform.⁶ The agent completes specific tasks due to the principal's lack of time or knowledge to accomplish those tasks. The principal aims to hire an optimal agent according to specified criteria, such as within a budget or with a particular level of expertise.⁷ The principal monitors the agent to ensure that the agent completes the tasks satisfactorily. Typically, the agent receives payment or incentives from the principal in exchange for accomplishing the tasks according to the principal's standards. Principal-agent theory also involves risk-sharing between individuals or groups when the cooperating parties have different attitudes toward risk.⁸ A trade-off occurs between the cost of monitoring the agent's behavior and the risk of transferring the tasks to the agent.⁹ Principal-agent theory, therefore, revolves around the preference gap between the principal and agent for how to perform tasks, the principal's monitoring of the agent to complete those tasks, and the rewards and punishments the agent expects to receive.¹⁰

Problems between the principal and agent arise when the principal and agent have different goals and when the principal possesses different information than the agent. Scholarly literature refers to this difference in information as information asymmetry.¹¹ The principal and agent share common information about situations, but there is also information that the agent possesses because of the agent's expert status that the principal does not have access to. The agent, therefore, retains an information advantage over the principal when accomplishing tasks.¹² The greater the information asymmetry between the principal and agent, the higher the likelihood that the agent uses this asymmetry advantageously.¹³ The principal, on the other hand, retains information from the agent to assess risk, situational outcomes, and agent performance.¹⁴

Divergent preferences and information asymmetry between the principal and agent produce two agency problems: moral hazard and adverse selection.¹⁵ Moral hazard refers to a change in behavior due to risk mitigation methods.¹⁶ An example is an electrician recommending unnecessary repairs or not performing work according to code for a homeowner who knows nothing about the subject. Situations of moral hazard give the agent the opportunity to depart from the principal's intent by being shielded from risk. The prospect of gain can induce the agent to assume additional risk that negatively affects the principal.¹⁷ Moral hazard in the principal-agent relationship ensues from agent actions the principal cannot observe or monitor.¹⁸ Thus, the agent is motivated to perform the minimum amount of work for the same pay, resulting in tasks barely satisfying the agreed-upon contract. These hidden actions, such as lack of effort on the agent's behalf, stem from information asymmetry between the principal and the agent.¹⁹ Because these actions are difficult to monitor, the principal creates mechanisms to control the agent, such as rewards and punishments. In the previous scenario, the customer might tip the electrician for exceptional repair work.

Agency problems of adverse selection stem from the principal's lack of knowledge about the agent's skills to perform the tasks or differing desires for task outcomes.²⁰ For instance, an employer hires an employee based on a resume, but the employer cannot verify all the submitted information. Instances of adverse selection emanate from the agent's misrepresentation of their ability.²¹ Adverse selection also occurs when the principal possesses information about the agent's preferences prior to the contracting period that does not match reality. Information asymmetry between the principal and agent results from hidden information in the form of the agent misrepresenting skills or desired outcomes.²² Since this information is challenging to verify and the agent has incentives to inflate skills or desires, the principal uses

mechanisms to monitor the agent to gauge performance and ability, such as Angi for home repair services.²³

The principal institutes monitoring mechanisms to observe and evaluate the agent's behavior to combat agency problems of moral hazard and adverse selection. Monitoring the agent provides the principal with control in the form of information about the agent and the agent's actions. Monitoring also requires resources from the principal; consequently, the principal attempts to accomplish monitoring mechanisms efficiently and strikes an optimal trade-off between control and costs.²⁴ Besides monitoring, the principal enacts rewards and punishments when difficulty monitoring the agent occurs and the outcome exceeds expectations or is inferior. The principal uses these monitoring tools, rewards, and punishments to ensure the agent completes the tasks the principal prefers and accomplishes them in the desired manner.

Principal-Agent Theory in American Civil-Military Relations

Scholars first tailored the principal-agent theory to political science in 1975 and discovered that this theory provides a new perspective on government and its policies.²⁵ Almost three decades later, Peter Feaver applied the principal-agent theory to American civil-military relations to better understand this relationship.²⁶ The military agent presents recommended preferences to the government principal, who translates these preferences into national security policy.²⁷ The government principal delegates national security functions to the military agent due to expertise, freeing the government principal to focus on other tasks.²⁸ The relationship between the government principal and military agent creates unique dynamics since the military requires strength to protect society, but the military cannot be so powerful it destroys the society that it intends to protect.²⁹ This relationship, as a result, encompasses distinctive agency problems.

Information asymmetry occurs between the government principal and military agent because the principal maintains less experience with military-related activities, like combat, and possesses a lower degree of knowledge about these activities.³⁰ A shared understanding of situations diminishes with distance, such as the government principal's understanding of a battlefield that the military agent operates on. Information classification creates secrecy and information barriers between the government principal and the military agent, producing information asymmetries.³¹

Information asymmetry creates moral hazard because the government is not able to fully observe or monitor the military's actions in combat. The military maintains incentives to deviate from the government's policies because

the lethal risks faced by service members sent to the battlefield are not felt by the government. The government principal measures the military agent's readiness to perform these tasks of protection through indicators, such as training exercises and weapons purchases.³² The agent's performance in simulations serves as a proxy for military effectiveness.³³ Additionally, the military agent is not afforded the opportunity to practice warfare. Exercises and simulations come close to this reality, but these rehearsals incentivize the agent to accomplish the tasks according to a minimum standard.

Information asymmetry between the government principal and military agent produces another agency problem—adverse selection. Adverse selection occurs when the government selects a military branch to perform particular tasks, such as the Air Force conducting search and rescue missions. The Navy and Coast Guard also conduct these types of missions. Yet, each branch touts its superior abilities, misrepresenting the actual skills it possesses.³⁴ Adverse selection also emerges when the government principal evaluates military proposals, such as budget requests, without knowing the agent's desires for these outcomes.³⁵ The military agent possesses different information than the government principal and receives incentives to misrepresent policy proposals. Because of the difficulty the government principal faces in verifying information, these proposals may undermine society instead of increasing the military's ability to protect it.

Civil-military relations generate unique agency problems that the government principal combats with tailored monitoring mechanisms, rewards, and punishments. The monitoring mechanisms exist on a spectrum of intrusiveness.³⁶ The least intrusive monitoring mechanism involves restricting the scope of delegation to the military agent. This mechanism determines the level of autonomy the military agent possesses to decide what tasks to accomplish and how to accomplish those tasks.³⁷ The military agent traditionally prizes autonomy and prefers less intrusive monitoring mechanisms.³⁸ The military agent also desires incentives and avoids consequences. Liberal rewards and minimal punishments give the military agent the autonomy to determine what tasks to complete and how to complete them. The level of agent autonomy decreases with higher levels of anticipated consequences and lower levels of incentives.

In addition to monitoring, rewards, and punishments, the gap in preferences between the government principal and military agent contributes to agent autonomy. Feaver describes how closely military agents satisfy the government principal's intent by using the terms "working" and "shirking."³⁹ A military agent is working when the agent accomplishes tasks according to the government principal's criteria. The government principal rewards working

agents with greater levels of autonomy. On the other hand, a shirking agent accomplishes tasks according to the military agent's preferences versus those of the government principal. The government principal punishes shirking agents by reducing the level of autonomy. Shirking agents also require extra monitoring for specific tasks the principal prioritizes because the agents are unwilling to accomplish the tasks otherwise. The government principal uses autonomy to incentivize the military agent and minimize adverse selection and moral hazard.⁴⁰ Military agent autonomy, therefore, depends on the preference gap between the government principal and military agent, the level of monitoring by the government principal, and the rewards and punishments expected by the military agent.⁴¹

One Government Principal or Two?

Feaver's application of principal-agent theory simplifies the government as one unified principal.⁴² Feaver acknowledges the reality of multiple principals and multiple agents but focuses on a single principal and agent to formulate his model. Deborah Avant expands Feaver's model using the executive and legislative branches as government principals for the military agent.⁴³ Articles I and II of the Constitution create divided principals for the military agent.⁴⁴ The Constitution establishes civilian control of the military and outlines separate institutions, the executive branch and legislative branch, which share oversight of the military but possess different authorities.⁴⁵ The executive branch is responsible for military policy, while the legislative branch is accountable for military authorizations and appropriations. The executive and legislative branches monitor the military agent to ensure that the military performs national security activities satisfactorily.

The executive branch receives formal and informal powers over the military agent. The president formally serves as the military's commander in chief and decides how to use military force.⁴⁶ To select a military course of action and make effective decisions, the executive branch assesses information from various departments and intelligence agencies. The executive branch also informally influences public opinion on foreign policy and military matters.⁴⁷ The statements of the president and cabinet members influence citizens' views on how to handle situations with other countries. These formal and informal powers establish the authority of the executive branch and its role in American civil-military relations.

To balance the powers of the executive branch, the Constitution designates power to the legislative branch to declare war, raise and support armies, and provide and maintain navies.⁴⁸ Congress maintains the ability to engage in

hostilities through the formal declaration of war. The power of the purse also resides with the legislative branch. Congress exercises these authorities through the National Defense Authorization Act that permits activities for the military and the Appropriations Bill that provides funds for the military.⁴⁹ The Senate and House oversee these authorities through committees: the Senate Armed Services Committee, House Armed Services Committee, House Appropriations Committee on Defense, and Senate Appropriations Committee on Defense. These constitutional powers outline the legislative branch's role in American civil-military relations.

The executive branch and legislative branch retain their separate authorities to balance power, and the military agent has duties to both principals. The structural context, dividing responsibilities of these principals for the military agent, remains constant. The situational context colors the perspective of each principal, unifying or dividing the executive branch and legislative branch further. Situational context varies for the issue at hand, layering these dynamics on top of the invariable structural context.

Divided Principals in American Civil-Military Relations

Avant elaborates on her discussion of two government principals by categorizing them as unified or divided on issues.⁵⁰ Unified principals agree on how the agent performs tasks, what tasks the agent performs, how to monitor the agent, and what the incentive or consequence structure should be; divided principals result from a disunity between the principals for these areas.⁵¹ Disparate principal viewpoints and preferences require more compromise by the principals, leading to less optimal outcomes.⁵² Outcomes resulting from principal concessions are conservative and less efficient for the agent. Additionally, the agent has incentives to play the divided principals off of one another to gain support for the agent's option.⁵³ Therefore, agent preferences are most influential when principals disagree and are divided.⁵⁴

In American civil-military relations, disunity between the executive and legislative branches causes divided principals.⁵⁵ This disunity stems from structural and situational contexts. The separate authorities of the executive and legislative branches encourage disagreement and require the participation of both principals to achieve national security objectives.⁵⁶ The military agent aligns with the government principal that possesses the closest preference to the agent's preference.⁵⁷ The military agent walks a fine line in these instances to continue to obey both government principals. The split authorities of the government principals also generate different monitoring mechanism preferences and structures for rewards and punishments, causing further disagreement.⁵⁸

The military agent mostly prefers monitoring mechanisms, rewards, and punishments that provide the most autonomy but abides by the rule sets of both principals enough to comply. Government principal oversight of the agent thus becomes more complex with divided principals.

Military advice drives policy and the budget more so when the executive and legislative branches are divided.⁵⁹ Divided government principals also face difficulty enforcing military compliance and controlling the military agent.⁶⁰ This lack of oversight creates a less responsive agent.⁶¹ Under these circumstances, the military agent retains the ability to decide what tasks to accomplish and how to accomplish those tasks.⁶² The military agent, therefore, tends to receive more autonomy from divided government principals, according to most of the scholarly literature.

Divided Principals with Different Authorities

Scholarly literature on civil-military relations generally assumes that divided principals share authority for an agent. Both principals maintain oversight of the agent and possess the ability to determine what tasks the agent accomplishes and how the agent accomplishes those tasks. In American civil-military relations, however, the Constitution outlines different authorities and competing powers for the executive and legislative branches.⁶³ These enduring authorities establish the structural context, which impacts the divided principal dynamic.

The situational context also plays a role for divided principals. Policy disagreements between the executive branch and legislative branch principals often lead to conflicting direction for the military agent.⁶⁴ The government principals compete for power over the military agent and embed their preferences in policies that each branch controls. Depending on the issue, a policy can clearly fall within the authority of one principal instead of spanning both the executive and legislative branches. Approving the budget for each service is one such instance, where the authority is the sole responsibility of Congress.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the president possesses the sole authority to create a unified combatant command.⁶⁶ The executive branch and legislative branch principals may leverage their different authorities to enact their policy prescription and ensure the military agent performs tasks in accordance with that course of action. A government principal may also unilaterally decide on a way forward for the military agent if the executive or legislative branch maintains sole authority over that issue. The scholarly literature on divided principals does not adequately consider these different authorities and their situational factors. This gap accounts for why a variation in agent autonomy may exist.

Military Agent Autonomy in Advisory and Implementation Phases

In addition to discussing different authorities for divided principals, a distinction needs to be made for the two phases—the advisory phase and implementation phase—where agent autonomy is at play.⁶⁷ In his modification of Feaver’s principal-agent model, Jeffrey Donnithorne focuses on the temporal distinction between advising and implementing a policy.⁶⁸ During the advisory phase, the military agent provides a recommended course of action based on the best military judgment.⁶⁹ The government principals often encourage alternative viewpoints to arrive at an optimal policy solution. The military agent derives its autonomy in the advisory phase from the principal enacting the agent’s preferred policy. However, if the government principals enact a prescription that opposes the military agent’s advice, the principals expect the agent to comply with the decision. Ultimately, the government principals and the military agent are working toward the same goal of providing security for the nation. As Donnithorne argues, because of this shared vision, the dynamics between government principals and the military agent in the advisory phase are unique and differ from traditional principal-agent consultation interactions.⁷⁰ The military serves as the agent and expert advisor to the legislative and executive branches. The government principals encourage opposing views during policy debates, but when a policy decision occurs, the military shifts to complying with that decision. The principals’ and agent’s preferred courses of action to accomplish tasks might differ and, as a result, lead to implementing policies that oppose the agent’s advice. But the goal of national security remains constant.

The advisory phase informs the implementation phase and the amount of slack an agent anticipates receiving to enact the policy in its preferred manner. In Donnithorne’s model, four attributes of the policy itself determine the latitude a military agent maintains to determine how to accomplish tasks after government principals have determined a particular course of action.⁷¹ The specificity of the language narrows the agent’s trade space, as opposed to vague language that can be interpreted in a variety of ways.⁷² The time frame for the policy to start also impacts the military agent’s ability to maneuver. The more immediately a policy is enacted, the less time there is to adjust it to the agent’s preferred option.⁷³ The durability of the policy determines whether the prescription is fleeting or enduring. Policies, such as laws, that require additional actions to change or undo them tend to last longer than policies that change when leaders turn over.⁷⁴ Last, the enforceability of a policy drives how closely an agent complies with the direction. A policy backed by an influential coalition

or powerful stakeholders has a higher likelihood of agent compliance.⁷⁵ These four attributes—specificity, imminence, durability, and enforceability—shape the degree of agent autonomy during the implementation phase.⁷⁶ A policy in the form of a fleeting instrument with vague language that takes effect years in the future and is difficult to enforce results in more agent autonomy. However, a policy in enduring form with specific language that initiates immediately and is clearly enforceable constrains agent autonomy.

One of the surprising finds in Donnithorne’s framework is that the amount of autonomy an agent desires differs in the implementation phase depending on the outcome of the advisory phase. This notion is at odds with the conventional wisdom about agent autonomy that assumes agents always desire more autonomy.⁷⁷ In the case where government principals enact the agent’s policy, the agent should prefer the implementation of it to be specific, immediate, binding, and enforceable, which restricts agent autonomy in the implementation phase.⁷⁸ Conversely, if the government principals enacted a policy that opposes the agent’s preferred course of action, the agent should prefer a policy instrument to be vague, delayed, short-lived, and unenforceable.⁷⁹ The military agent might not have its preferred policy enacted in the advisory phase but may still have enough implementation slack to advance its preferred policy anyway. This dynamic should result in the agent receiving autonomy in execution from the implementation slack. Agent autonomy and the agent’s preference for autonomy can, therefore, vary between the advisory and implementation phases.

Additional Theories Impacting Military Agent Autonomy

Scholarly literature identifies several theories regarding the executive and legislative branches that impact military agent autonomy aside from principal-agent theory. These theories establish variables that differ from situation to situation for the government principals. Two theories, cabinet theory and unitary executive theory, revolve around the executive branch.

Cabinet Theory

Cabinet theory addresses the trade-offs between a well-balanced cabinet and an efficient cabinet for executive branch decision-making.⁸⁰ A well-balanced cabinet represents the American people and assembles individuals with varied backgrounds and perspectives.⁸¹ It tends to garner more public support and develop solutions considering diverse aspects of American life. This wide range of vantage points makes consensus for policy and decision-making challenging. An efficient cabinet, on the other hand, is more unified in background and perspec-

tives.⁸² It streamlines policy and decision-making and functions coherently. Although reaching a consensus is easier in an efficient cabinet, the solution development does not consider the entirety of the American population and tends to produce a less-than-optimal outcome.⁸³ Presidents strive for equilibrium between a well-balanced and efficient cabinet to enact policy prescriptions that achieve strategic objectives for the nation.

Unitary Executive Theory

Unitary executive theory separates the president's powers into inherent powers provided by the Constitution and implied powers assumed by the position.⁸⁴ Twenty-first-century presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden asserted greater authority than their predecessors to establish singular control over the executive branch.⁸⁵ They demonstrated that the president as a unitary element possessed the authority to implement domestic and foreign policies.⁸⁶ Additionally, the designation and oath of the commander in chief of the armed forces to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution give the president immense latitude to act in accordance with these roles.⁸⁷ The president exercises this latitude by issuing executive orders and removing cabinet members without agreement or approval from Congress.

Switching to the legislative branch, two theories—distributive theory and informational theory—pertain to this government principal and influence military agent autonomy.

Distributive Theory

Distributive theory accounts for constituents and their geographic locations that legislative branch members represent.⁸⁸ This connection and relationship between congressional members and those who elect them shape preferences. These preferences do not reflect the policy prescriptions of the majority but are influential in congressional committees.⁸⁹ Four committees are the primary interface between the legislative branch principal and the military agent: the Senate Armed Services Committee, House Armed Services Committee, House Appropriations Committee on Defense, and Senate Appropriations Committee on Defense. They authorize and appropriate the military budget each year and generate legislation concerning military activities. As a result, the chairpersons and ranking members of these committees are highly influential in military affairs. The geographic significance and its influence on preferences varies not only with the situation at hand but also with the members and leadership of these committees.

Informational Theory

Informational theory discusses the need for the legislative branch to obtain information about particular issues. Policy and budget issues are increasingly complex, competing for resources and becoming more specialized.⁹⁰ Committees provide this specialization and expertise on issues, which reduces costs to gather information and decreases the uncertainty of outcomes.⁹¹ The open rule of informational theory stipulates that the committee presents multiple recommendations to the entire legislative body, which decides the policy prescription from all possible solutions.⁹² The closed rule allows the legislative body to select between the status quo and the sole committee-recommended way forward.⁹³ The open rule produces more optimal outcomes that reflect the American people, where the closed rule limits policy options and perspectives.⁹⁴ The approach of the committees, open or closed, changes with each policy issue and influences decision-making.

Lastly, two theories—coalition theory and partisan theory—involve both the executive and legislative branches.

Coalition Theory

Coalition theory influences the situational context for both branches and designates a group of individuals advocating for specific military policies.⁹⁵ These individuals form a coalition to promote and enact their policy preferences. The executive branch forms a coalition of integral entities, such as the secretary of defense and national security advisor, to drive policy to the military agent.⁹⁶ The legislative branch creates coalitions among members of national security committees to implement their military policy prescription. Coalition members bargain with and recruit noncoalition members to gain greater consensus.⁹⁷ The coalition's strength differs depending on the number of coalition members, public declarations about the policy, and legislative actions. The executive and legislative branches leverage coalitions against the other branch's preferences to control the military agent and enact the branch's preferred policy.⁹⁸

Partisan Theory

Partisan theory states that political parties promote policies aligning with their constituents' core beliefs, causing political parties to have different views of domestic issues and national security.⁹⁹ These divergent perspectives result in impasses within the legislative branch and between the legislative and executive branches. A Congress with different political parties between the

House of Representatives and Senate faces more difficulty reaching a consensus on appropriations and authorizations for the military than a Congress with the same political parties.¹⁰⁰ In turn, different political parties between the legislative branch and the president further divide the government principals, where the same political party serves to unify these government principals.¹⁰¹ These partisan dynamics have the potential to change every two to four years with congressional and presidential elections.

The six theories discussed are not all-inclusive of situational factors but represent the prominent variables along with various authorities for the government principals that affect military agent autonomy.

Synthesis of Theories

Portraying these six theories and the principals' different authorities in a notional model allows for synthesizing their connections and influence on agent autonomy. The intent of this model is to concisely depict the theories and authorities discussed to better explain their impact on preference gaps, monitoring, and rewards and punishments. The military agent's behavior is a function of the preference gap between the government principals and the military agent, the government's monitoring of the military, and the rewards and punishments the military expects to receive from the executive and legislative branches.¹⁰² The theories pertaining to the executive and legislative branches and the principals' different authorities feed into the principal-agent concepts of the preference gap, monitoring level, and rewards and punishments. These three aspects of agency theory ultimately shape agent autonomy and its variations.

Unitary Executive Theory

Unitary executive theory affects the military's expectation of rewards and punishments. The more frequently cabinet members are removed and policies are dictated in the form of executive orders, the higher the military agent's anticipation for punishment. These expectations make the military agent less likely to exercise autonomy in implementation because of the desire to closely adhere to the executive branch's prescriptions. Conversely, if the executive branch issues a small number of executive orders and removes fewer cabinet members from office, the military agent does not anticipate punishments. The exercise of agent autonomy likely increases in this case because the military has trade space to operate within.

Coalition Theory

Coalitions shape the agent's anticipation of rewards and punishments because the strength of a coalition in the executive or legislative branch allows that principal to increase incentives or consequences. The expectation of rewards and punishments drives the military agent to closely comply with the policy preference of the government principals and accomplish tasks as they prescribe. Strong coalitions have the political capital to institute these incentives and consequences, restricting the exercise of agent autonomy. Conversely, military agents do not have the same expectation of rewards and punishments from weak coalitions. This lower level of anticipation allows the military to complete tasks how it sees fit and generally permits a greater exercise of agent autonomy.

The power of a coalition also shapes the principal's level of monitoring. Agent scrutiny increases as coalition strength increases. Strong coalitions are more invested in issues and, thus, have a greater desire to monitor the military agent. This higher level of monitoring reduces agent autonomy. Weak coalitions are not overly concerned about an issue or invested in it. Agent monitoring decreases when weak coalitions exist, providing the military agent with latitude to perform tasks in the manner of its choosing, which increases agent autonomy.

Informational Theory

The quantity of information available to the congressional body at large drives the level of monitoring. A military agent presenting more options and information conveys transparency and decreases the government principals' monitoring. This reduction in monitoring gives the agent more latitude to accomplish tasks how the agent sees fit, producing agent autonomy. The military agent providing only one option and little information receives a higher degree of monitoring from government principals. This increased level of monitoring constrains agent autonomy because the principals are overseeing what tasks the agent accomplishes.

Different Authorities for Government Principals

The different authorities of the executive and legislative branches generate different preferences depending on the issue at hand. According to the Constitution, the executive branch wields authority for policy, and the legislative branch maintains authorization and appropriation authority for funding. Each government principal approaches an issue with this perspective in mind. The executive and legislative branches leverage their different authorities to

ensure the enactment of their policy prescription and that the military agent performs the tasks of each principal's choosing. Unless one government principal possesses sole authority for an issue, this gap in preferences can produce autonomy for the military agent. However, if one principal has the authority to unilaterally make decisions about policy preferences and how the military agent performs tasks, then these dynamics constrain agent autonomy.

The executive and legislative branches' different authorities can also result in disparate monitoring mechanisms for the military agent. The executive branch focuses on ensuring the military agent complies with policy, whereas the legislative branch concentrates on the spending of federal funds in the prescribed manner. Monitoring mechanisms are more stringent, reducing agent autonomy, when one government principal possesses the sole authority to monitor how an agent accomplishes tasks. If both government principals have authority to oversee how the military completes tasks, agent autonomy increases because these circumstances give the agent latitude to play the principals off of one another.

Partisan Theory

The differences in political parties of the House, Senate, and president drive disparities in policy preference between the executive branch and legislative branch principals and within Congress because of the political parties' different ideologies. These different political viewpoints increase the gap in preferences, giving the agent more autonomy to enact its preferred option and determine the tasks to perform to secure the nation. If the House, Senate, and president are from the same political party, the gap in preferences shrinks, constraining the agent's ability to decide how to complete tasks and, ultimately, its autonomy.

Political party differences also determine the level of agent monitoring. The cohesion of political parties in the executive and legislative branches raises the level of monitoring because the government principals align on how the agent accomplishes tasks, which reduces agent autonomy. Differences in political parties decrease the level of monitoring. Government principals are unable to agree on how to oversee the agent, providing more agent autonomy.

Cabinet Theory

The diversity of the president's cabinet affects the preferences among the departments. A more homogeneous cabinet maintains similar preferences, whereas a more heterogeneous cabinet tends to possess dissimilar views. The converging viewpoints of a homogeneous cabinet allow its members to easily

reach consensus, decreasing gaps in preferences. The diverging perspectives of a heterogeneous cabinet make agreement difficult, leading to a larger preference gap. Larger preference gaps provide more autonomy for the agent to have its preferred policy enacted and determine what tasks to accomplish, whereas smaller preference gaps decrease agent autonomy.

Additionally, homogeneous cabinets are more likely to agree on monitoring mechanisms for the military agent. Monitoring mechanisms from homogeneous cabinets oversee the agent to ensure the agent performs tasks in the agreed-upon manner, constraining agent autonomy. Heterogeneous cabinets, on the other hand, have a more difficult time determining how to monitor the agent. Heterogeneous cabinets produce disparate monitoring mechanisms, leaving the agent with latitude to determine how to accomplish tasks. This latitude fosters autonomy for the military agent.

Distributive Theory

Geographic areas influence the preference gap when issues affect specific districts or states. Congressional members from those districts or states usually maintain different outlooks than members viewing the issue from a whole country perspective. The military agent, charged with securing the nation, views issues from a whole country perspective as well. These incongruent viewpoints can drive gaps in preferences, providing the military agent with latitude to negotiate a preferred outcome. Instances can arise where the preference between congressional members from states affected by an issue and the whole of the legislative branch align. Preference gaps within Congress are minimal in this case, decreasing agent autonomy.

The notional model presented in figure 1 on the next page provides a framework to understand conditions that result in varying levels of agent autonomy. The notional model also fuses principal-agent theory with additional theories that principal-agent theory does not adequately consider the principals' different authorities. Table 1 that follows summarizes these additional theories and their impact on agent autonomy.

Four contributory variables that link to the principal-agent concept of a preference gap function in the advisory phase. Different authorities of the government principals (different authorities), political party differences (partisan theory), cabinet demographics (cabinet theory), and geographic impacts (distributive theory) inform the disparity between the government principals' preferred course of action and the military agent's option. These variables potentially explain the variation in agent autonomy during the advisory phase. In the implementation phase, different explanatory variables determine how the gov-

ernment principals monitor the military agent and provide rewards and punishments. The president wielding implied powers (unitary executive theory), strong advocates (coalition theory), transparency in information (informational theory), different authorities of the government principals (different authorities), political party differences (partisan theory), and cabinet demographics (cabinet theory) determine the level of monitoring of the military agent and expectations of rewards and punishments. The variation in agent autonomy during the implementation phase can potentially be explained by these variables.

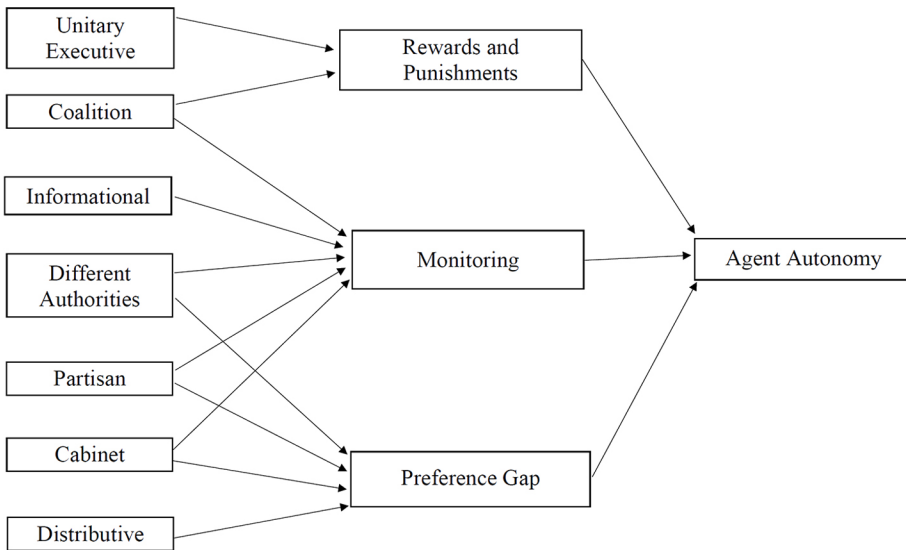


Figure 1. Notional model of potential variables impacting agent autonomy

Table 1. Summary of theories for notional model

Theory	Principal-Agent Mechanism	Increased Agent Autonomy	Reduced Agent Autonomy
Unitary executive	Rewards and punishments	Small number of fired or resigned cabinet members; small number of executive orders	Large number of fired or resigned cabinet members; large number of executive orders
Coalition	Rewards and punishments; Monitoring	Weak coalition	Strong coalition
Informational	Monitoring	Two or more options	One option

Table 1 (continued)

Theory	Principal-Agent Mechanism	Increased Agent Autonomy	Reduced Agent Autonomy
Different authorities	Monitoring; Preference gap	Both government principals have authority	One government principal has authority
Partisan	Monitoring; Preference gap	Political party differences	Political party cohesion
Cabinet	Monitoring; Preference gap	Heterogenous cabinet	Homogenous cabinet
Distributive	Preference gap	No impacts to particular states	Impacts particular states

Creation of the Air Force Agent

After the extensive principal-agent theory and American civil-military relations discussion, which agent matters to this research endeavor? The National Security Act of 1947 created the national military establishment as it is known today with the secretary of defense leading the organization.¹⁰³ This act also established the Air Force as a new military service.¹⁰⁴ The Air Force, as a separate military branch, maintains its own budget and receives authorizations and appropriations from the legislative branch. As for all military services, the executive branch is responsible for Air Force policy. The National Security Act of 1947, therefore, created a new military agent, the Air Force, for the government principals of the executive and legislative branches.

This act designates the leadership of the Air Force and prescribes its roles and responsibilities. A civilian, the secretary of the Air Force, leads this service and exercises command over the Air Force along with a military officer, the chief of staff of the Air Force.¹⁰⁵ Both individuals are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate, reinforcing the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches.¹⁰⁶ This act also designates the chief of staff of the Air Force as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and outlines the JCS as military advisors to the president and secretary of defense.¹⁰⁷

The secretary of the Air Force and chief of staff of the Air Force have the duty of executing the lawful orders and directions of the government principals. The secretary and chief assume the responsibility of organizing, training, and equipping ready forces for sustained offensive and defensive air operations.¹⁰⁸ They also have the charge to prepare the Air Force for war, conduct joint operations, and accomplish peacetime missions. The Air Force, as a military agent, accomplishes these tasks for the government principals. The executive and legislative

branches monitor the Air Force's accomplishment of these tasks and institute rewards and punishments to ensure their intent is satisfactorily met. The Air Force strives for autonomy in the budget arena by setting limits and maintaining the freedom to spend its funds within the established limits.¹⁰⁹ The Air Force seeks autonomy in the policy arena by convincing the government principals to enact prescriptions that align with its preferences.¹¹⁰ Scholarly literature suggests that the Air Force receives more autonomy from divided government principals, especially when the viewpoints and policy prescriptions of the executive and legislative branch principals differ.¹¹¹ However, recent cases—such as the proposed retirement of the A-10 and the creation of the Space Force—present evidence that appears incongruent with this scholarly consensus. The three case study chapters in this paper seek to explore that incongruity.

Conclusion

Principal-agent theory stems from the economic field as a framework to explain the dynamics and incentives of delegated work.¹¹² Scholars tailored this framework to civil-military relations to clarify roles and their impacts on political behavior.¹¹³ The Constitution designates two government principals—the executive branch and the legislative branch.¹¹⁴ The National Security Act of 1947 established the Air Force as a military agent.¹¹⁵ This structure and the situational context serve to unify or divide the government principals. The prevailing hypothesis from the civil-military literature suggests that divided principals result in greater agent autonomy.¹¹⁶ The principal-agent literature concerning American civil-military relations does not adequately account for the aspects of political party differences, geographic impacts, information preferences, the extent of presidential powers, coalition formation, cabinet consensus, and different authorities of the government principals that influence military agent autonomy. This research tests the prevailing hypothesis from principal-agent theory, considering additional theories and the principals' authorities, and determines the conditions that constrain rather than produce agent autonomy.

Notes

1. Eisenhart, "Agency Theory," 57–74.
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3. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
4. Hammond and Knott, "Who Controls the Bureaucracy?," 123–24; and Mar-
torano, "Balancing Power," 205–34.
5. Eisenhart, "Agency Theory," 58.

6. Petrina, "Agency Theory View of the Military Advisor," 6.
7. Petrina, 6.
8. Eisenhart, "Agency Theory," 58–59.
9. Eisenhart, 61.
10. Donnithorne, "Principled Agents," 486.
11. Mishra, Heide, and Cort, "Information Asymmetry," 277–95.
12. Petrina, "Agency Theory View of the Military Advisor," 7.
13. Petrina, 8.
14. Husted, "Moral Problems in Business," 177–95.
15. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 72.
16. Ruachhaus, "Principal-Agent Problems," 874–75.
17. Eisenhart, "Agency Theory," 61.
18. Miller, "Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models," 205–7.
19. Ruachhaus, "Principal-Agent Problems," 873–74.
20. Ruachhaus, 875–76.
21. Eisenhart, "Agency Theory," 61.
22. Petrina, "Agency Theory View of the Military Advisor," 8.
23. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 73–74.
24. Jost, "Monitoring in Principal-Agent Relationships," 517–18.
25. Mitnick, "Theory of Agency," 385–87.
26. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 54–58.
27. Bakhtiari, "Agency in Action," 19.
28. Feaver, "Agency Theory Explanation," 2–3.
29. Feaver, "Civil-Military Problematique," 151–52.
30. Blankshain, "Primer on US Civil-Military Relations," 3–4; and Gibson and Snider, "Civil-Military Relations," 197.
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32. Krause and O'Connell, "Can Bureaucratic Leadership Mitigate?," 5.
33. Nielsen, "Civil-Military Relations Theory," 62–65.
34. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 74.
35. Feaver, 75.
36. Feaver, 86.
37. Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 143.
38. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 76–78.
39. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 24.
40. Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 143.
41. Donnithorne, "Principled Agents," 64.
42. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 56–58.
43. Brooks and Stanley, *Creating Military Power*, 82–83.
44. Rapp, "Civil-Military Relations," 13–26.
45. Neustadt, *Presidential Power*, 29.
46. Crabb and Holt, *Invitation to Struggle*, 19–23.
47. Berman, *Constitution and National Security*, 117–18.

48. Amos, Taylor, and Mazarr, *American National Security*, 124.
49. Crabb and Holt, *Invitation to Struggle*, 42.
50. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 21–48.
51. Donnithorne, “Principled Agents,” 431.
52. Avant, “Are the Reluctant Warriors Out of Control?,” 58.
53. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 21–48.
54. Avant, “Are the Reluctant Warriors Out of Control?,” 58.
55. Donnithorne, “Principled Agents,” 431.
56. Williamson, *Organization Theory*, 116–19.
57. Owens, “What Military Officers Need to Know,” 71–72.
58. Avant, “Are the Reluctant Warriors Out of Control?,” 57.
59. Stevenson, *Warriors and Politicians*, 207.
60. Babcock-Lumish, “Politics of Wartime Multinational Command,” 26–31.
61. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 21–48.
62. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 17–18; and Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 143.
63. National Archives, “The Constitution of the United States.”
64. Brooks and Stanley, *Creating Military Power*, 80–81.
65. Rapp, “Civil-Military Relations,” 13–26.
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67. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 25–27.
68. Donnithorne, 25–28.
69. Donnithorne, 26.
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78. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 27.
79. Donnithorne, 28.
80. Fenno, “Balance in the Cabinet,” 19.
81. Fenno, *President’s Cabinet*, 7–9.
82. Fenno, “Balance in the Cabinet,” 20.
83. Fenno, “President-Cabinet Relations,” 402.
84. Pontz, “Presidency First,” 1.
85. Pontz, 2.
86. Yoo, “Executive Powers Run Amok.”
87. Yoo, “Continuation of Politics by Other Means,” 167–305.
88. Strom, “Congressional Policy Making,” 711–35.
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90. Krehbiel, *Information and Legislative Organization*, 5–8.

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93. Battaglini et al., 56.
94. Martorano, "Balancing Power," 206–7.
95. Tsebelis and Ha, "Coalition Theory," 331–57.
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98. Davidson, Brooking, and Fernandes, "Mending the Broken Dialogue," 3–5.
99. Carlsen, "Rational Partisan Theory," 64.
100. Binder, "Partisanship and Procedural Choice," 1095.
101. Martorano, "Balancing Power," 212.
102. Donnithorne, "Principled Agents," 64.
103. National Security Act of 1947, Pub. L. 80-253, § 201.
104. National Security Act of 1947, Pub. L. 80-253, § 207.
105. National Security Act of 1947, Pub. L. 80-253, §§ 207–208.
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111. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
112. Eisenhart, "Agency Theory," 58.
113. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 54–58.
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Chapter 3

Methodology

Case studies serve as the method of analysis to accomplish the two objectives of this research effort. First, this research aims to test the prevailing hypothesis that military agents have more autonomy in choosing and executing their tasks when their government principals are divided in viewpoint.¹ Second, it seeks to identify variables, other than the structural relationship dividing principals, that result in differences in agent autonomy or contribute toward agents receiving less autonomy from divided principals. The chapter begins with an overview of the case study methodology and its selection as an analysis tool. Next, it describes the thought process behind choosing these specific cases and how they vary in the unity or division of government principals. The remaining discussion and primary focus is on the manner of testing the prevailing hypothesis and operationalizing the potential contributory variables that constrain agent autonomy.

Case Study Methodology

Qualitative research seeks to understand and explain complex concepts constructed by society.² The case study method is a well-known framework for conducting qualitative research.³ Case studies focus on answering “how” and “why” questions and explore contextual conditions relevant to the concepts being studied.⁴ According to Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon, this method involves a “detailed analysis of concepts within their context” to develop explanations.⁵ In their authoritative text on case studies, Alexander George and Andrew Bennett claim that case study research examines “particular aspects of historical episodes from multiple perspectives” to test a hypothesis.⁶ This method’s purpose thus aligns seamlessly with the research objectives—to test the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature and explore how new variables might constrain or produce agent autonomy.

Case Study Methodology Strengths

George and Bennett detail four core strengths of the case study method—achieving conceptual validity, deriving new hypotheses, exploring causal mechanisms, and addressing causal complexity—highlighting the usefulness of this method for theory development.⁷ Autonomy is a theoretical concept that is socially constructed and cannot be quantitatively defined. One strength

of the case study method is its ability to refine concepts that cannot be measured and consider their contextual factors in detail. Case studies observe patterns and identify outcomes based on those patterns, which can validate the concepts being studied.⁸ Conceptual validity allows researchers to use indicators for theoretical concepts and provide explanatory conclusions.

Case study analysis derives new hypotheses and identifies new variables, the second strength of this research method.⁹ Researchers study cases that deviate from prevailing hypotheses and can discover variables not limited to quantifiable factors or defined datasets.¹⁰ These outlier cases illuminate contexts and variables that differ from established theory. From this analysis, researchers test unexamined evidence, develop alternative explanations about concepts, and identify variables that contribute to the alternative explanations.

Causal mechanisms operate under certain conditions, which produce contextual factors.¹¹ The case study method accounts for and examines the situational context and its variables. The third strength of case studies is exploring when conditions are present to activate these variables or causal mechanisms.¹² Researchers explore causal mechanisms through case study analysis and arrive at conclusions about how contextual factors produce and shape outcomes. Because causal mechanisms are critical to causation, understanding them allows researchers to develop explanations.¹³

The last strength of case studies is the ability to assess complex causal relationships and interaction effects. Researchers examine different facets of relationships and interactions, allowing them to develop alternative views of events. This research method produces generalizations from assessing complex relationships and interactions, resulting in awareness of behavior rarely explained by one theory. Thus, when applied to this research, the four strengths of case studies validate concepts of agent autonomy, develop a new hypothesis for divided principals, identify causal mechanisms for agent autonomy, and assess complex relationships between the executive and legislative branches. This research leverages these strengths to examine agent autonomy in the context of divided principals using a variety of data sources.¹⁴

Case Study Methodology Weaknesses

George and Bennett also highlight the limitations or weaknesses of the case study method: case selection bias, causal weight of variables, and lack of representativeness.¹⁵ Case selection bias occurs when researchers purposely choose cases that illustrate their argument. This approach may appear to prove the researcher's argument but "overstates or understates the relationship" between the dependent variable and independent variables.¹⁶ Researchers mitigate case

selection bias by including a surprising or seemingly contradictory case, an instance where a situation did not appear to conform to the theory about it.¹⁷ Another technique for minimizing case selection bias involves varying the conditions of independent variables.¹⁸ Researchers can then assess how variation in the independent variables impacts the dependent variable. To minimize selection bias, this research consists of one case that appears to support the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature and two cases that appear to deviate from this hypothesis. The independent variables change in these selected cases to determine how these varied conditions affect the dependent variable.

Case studies assess whether and how variables matter as opposed to *how much* variables matter.¹⁹ Case studies determine if causal mechanisms exist and if variables contribute to an outcome.²⁰ The case study method does not determine how much causal mechanisms or variables impact an outcome. This limitation does not significantly affect this research since it seeks to test a prevailing hypothesis and identify the variables contributing to differences in agent autonomy.

The case study method involves trade-offs between analyzing cases deeply and maintaining a manageable number of case studies for any research endeavor.²¹ As a result, the cases do not represent the universe of all cases involving divided principals.²² To control for a lack of representativeness, the cases selected span several decades, presidential administrations, and legislative bodies. An essential caveat in interpreting the results of this study is to avoid overgeneralizing them to the universe of divided principal cases. Recognizing the three limitations of case studies and minimizing their effects allows this research to use the case study method to test the prevailing hypothesis and develop explanations about agent autonomy.

Case Study Selection

This study examines three cases with divided principals or preference disunity between the executive and legislative branches.²³ The executive branch specifically refers to the president and secretary of defense, who are primarily responsible for executive branch oversight of the military agent. The four congressional committees pertaining to national security compose the legislative branch. The Senate Armed Services Committee, the House Armed Services Committee, the House Appropriations Committee on Defense, and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Defense predominantly interact with and provide legislative direction to the military agent. The Air Force serves as the military agent to these two government principals since the executive branch

establishes policies by service, while the legislative branch authorizes and appropriates funding for each military branch.

Agent autonomy—the military’s ability to decide what tasks to accomplish and how to accomplish them—varied among the three cases examined.²⁴ The first case, the proposed retirement of the A-10 (2013–16), demonstrates an instance where the executive branch aligned with the Air Force’s proposal to retire the A-10 to modernize its fleet.²⁵ However, Congress blocked this proposal and created a divided principal condition, resulting in less autonomy for the Air Force during the advisory phase.²⁶ Congress wrote strict restrictions into legislation banning the retirement, divestiture, and storage of the A-10 fleet, further constraining the Air Force’s autonomy.²⁷ The creation of the Space Force (2017–19), the second case, exemplifies an instance where Congress initially supported the Air Force’s policy proposal.²⁸ The Air Force advocated to maintain space operations under its purview.²⁹ The president, however, signed an executive order on space policy that drove Congress to create the Space Force as a separate military branch.³⁰ This policy decision opposed the Air Force’s option. The congressional provisions outlining how the Air Force implemented the stand-up of this new military service gave the Air Force the latitude to accomplish this task.³¹ These cases present different principals aligning with the military agent. Both instances enacted policies that opposed the Air Force’s preference in the advisory phase. The A-10 case also reduced agent autonomy in the implementation phase, indicating that agents might not receive more autonomy from divided principals.

The final case, the repeal of the combat flying ban for women (1991–93), typifies another instance of divided principals. Congress enacted the Air Force’s policy prescription to repeal the flying ban and allow women to fly combat aircraft despite the executive branch’s stance to maintain the ban.³² This decision reflects greater agent autonomy in the advisory phase since Congress implemented the Air Force’s proposed policy. The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal years 1992 and 1993 permitted—but did not require—female pilots to be assigned to combat units.³³ This flexibility in the policy provided agent autonomy during the implementation phase and allowed the president to restrict combat flying assignments to males only. This case serves as a counterbalance to the proposed retirement of the A-10 and the creation of the Space Force cases, as the Air Force agent saw its preferred course of action enacted and received trade space to execute the policy. These outcomes reflect the prevailing literature claims that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals.³⁴

The cases selected for this research effort fulfill numerous criteria from the case study methodology and American civil-military relations perspectives.

The cases are relevant to the research topic and its objectives to test principal-agent theory.³⁵ Divided principal scenarios that impact agent autonomy emerged in all three cases. Selecting two cases that deviate from the prevailing hypothesis in scholarly literature and one that aligns with the preponderance of literature allows this effort to investigate variation in agent autonomy. The independent variables also differ in condition and are present in these three cases. These contextual changes facilitate the examination of the dependent variable, agent autonomy. Last, primary and secondary sources for the cases exist. Their analysis allows for the development of explanations and conclusions.

The three cases occurred after the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 and reflect the same Department of Defense structure that exists today; the act refined the advisory role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and reorganized staffs under the secretary of the Air Force and the chief of staff of the Air Force.³⁶ The selected cases also occurred under different presidents, congressional sessions, secretaries of the Air Force, and chiefs of staff of the Air Force, helping to minimize the effects of specific personalities, relationships, budgetary hardships, partisan influences, and wars. The central issues of these cases occurred at the Air Force level and required policy decisions from the government principals. Congressional hearings, executive orders, budgetary submissions, policy documents, and official press briefings serve as records of evidence to analyze the cases.

Prevailing Hypothesis Test

Analysis of the three divided principal cases—retiring the A-10, creating the Space Force, and repealing the combat flying ban for women—seeks to test the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals.³⁷ The viewpoints and policy prescriptions of the executive and legislative branches differed in these three cases, establishing the divided principal context. This analysis examines agent autonomy according to the two phases introduced by Jeffrey Donnithorne: the advisory phase, prior to a policy decision, and the implementation phase, after a decision's enactment.³⁸ The following section defines agent autonomy for each of the two phases of the principal-agent policy process.

Advisory Phase

In the advisory phase, an enactment of the Air Force's position produces agent autonomy, demonstrating support for the prevailing hypothesis. However, if the principal's policy prescription is implemented in opposition to

the military's preferred outcome, these events represent constrained agent autonomy because the agent is not able to determine what tasks to complete. In cases where agent autonomy is constrained, a deviation from the outcome most easily explained by scholarly literature exists.

Implementation Phase

For the implementation phase, four attributes of a policy—specificity, imminence, durability, and enforceability—help to determine the Air Force's anticipated implementation slack.³⁹ These aspects indicate the latitude military agents have to accomplish tasks as they choose. A specific, immediate, binding, and enforceable policy decreases agent autonomy. A vague, delayed, short-lived, and unenforceable policy, on the other hand, gives the agent more autonomy. As explained in chapter 2, the prevailing literature assumes that an agent always desires more autonomy, but such might not be the case.⁴⁰ If the agent's policy was enacted, the Air Force might prefer policy implementation that is specific, immediate, binding, and enforceable to ensure this preferred course of action endures, which decreases agent autonomy. In the event a policy opposed to the agent's preference is enacted, a vague, delayed, short-lived, and unenforceable policy gives the Air Force trade space to determine how to implement it, increasing agent autonomy. The policy decision in the advisory phase thus drives whether agent autonomy is desired in the implementation phase, so the two phases cannot be appraised independently.

Potential Contributory Variable Operationalization

If some of these cases appear to depart from the established hypothesis in American civil-military relations literature, what else might be going on? What other factors or variables might affect military agent autonomy in ways the predominant literature tends to overlook? Analysis of several potential contributory variables in the three case studies strives to illuminate situational factors that result in constrained agent autonomy from divided principals.⁴¹ The seven variables that this research examines stem from the theories presented in chapter 2. These theories pertain to the executive and legislative branches and their different authorities that affect military agent autonomy.⁴² The situational factors provided by the unitary executive theory, coalition theory, cabinet theory, partisan theory, distributive theory, informational theory, and the principals' authorities are not an all-inclusive set of variables; they represent the prominent variables affecting agent autonomy. The principal-agent

literature for civil-military relations does not generally account for these variables in its prevailing hypothesis about divided principals.⁴³

Advisory Phase

The advisory phase begins during the fledging stages of discussion about an issue and concludes when the government principals enact a policy preference. The preference gap between the executive and legislative branches and the military is the key principal-agent factor during this phase. The preference gap determines how closely aligned the government principals' and military agent's perspectives are on what tasks the military should accomplish. Four potential contributory variables—authority allocation, diverse cabinet, geographic distribution, and partisan cohesion—affect the preference gap between the government and military, as depicted in figure 1 (see chap. 2). Since these variables are conceptual, proxy indicators have been identified to determine how the variables presented themselves in each case.

Different authorities for government principals. The different authorities of the executive and legislative branches dictate their span of control over military issues. The Constitution outlines the president's role as commander in chief.⁴⁴ Informally, the president influences public opinion on foreign policy and military matters. The Constitution grants the legislative branch the power to declare war, raise and support armies, and provide and maintain navies.⁴⁵ Thus, the executive branch maintains policy authorities over the military agent, such as creating a unified combatant command.⁴⁶ The legislative branch, however, possesses funding authorities for authorizations and appropriations for the military agent.⁴⁷ The Air Force's annual budget is one example of Congress's authority. The government principals share authorities for each case, or the authority for sole decision-making resides with one principal. The authority allocation variable determines if one or both government principals retain the authority to decide on a policy. If one government principal maintains sole authority over the decision, the divided principal context is less relevant to the outcome. That principal can unilaterally enact its preferred prescription, reducing the military agent's autonomy. When both principals share authority for policy decision-making, the gap in their preferences drives the divided principal context. In a shared authority situation, the military agent requires both the executive and legislative branches to enact a unified prescription. The military can leverage differences in government principal preferences to gain more autonomy. Investigating this variable for the three cases illustrates its connections to agent autonomy variation.

Cabinet theory. Cabinet theory addresses the background and perspective of the cabinet members involved in decision-making processes.⁴⁸ In his work studying the role of the presidential cabinet, political scientist Richard Fenno argues that cabinets fall into the categories of well-balanced or efficient.⁴⁹ A well-balanced cabinet represents the spectrum of the American people and develops broad-based solutions. An efficient cabinet consists of individuals with similar perspectives, which streamlines decision-making and tends to produce less optimal outcomes.⁵⁰ The demographics and backgrounds of the cabinet members determine a well-balanced or efficient cabinet. The diverse cabinet variable influences how the executive branch develops policy prescriptions. The number of cabinet members from a different political party than the president, female cabinet members, and minority cabinet members indicates a well-balanced versus efficient cabinet. Compared to other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act administrations, these proxies allow for investigating the type of cabinet that existed during each case. An efficient cabinet reaches a consensus more readily than a well-balanced cabinet because of the cabinet members' similar perspectives. A well-balanced cabinet with disparate viewpoints tends to deliberate over possible solutions longer and has a larger gap in policy preferences. The military agent can leverage these dynamics to gain latitude and determine what tasks to perform. An efficient cabinet, on the other hand, reduces agent autonomy because the gap in preferences tends to be minimal. Examining this variable on a scale of a well-balanced to efficient cabinet for the three case studies establishes its contributions toward constraining or producing agent autonomy.

Distributive theory. In his research, scholar Gerald Strom develops the distributive theory to explain how constituents' geographic location shapes the policy preferences of the legislative member.⁵¹ The members of the four national security committees represent the legislative branch on national security issues and develop policy prescriptions for the military agent.⁵² The geographic area that the legislative member represents establishes this variable. Taking the four national security committees into account, the number of committee members representing states impacted by the issue at hand serves as the variable's indicator. This number determines if the issue affects a majority or minority of each committee from a constituent and geographic perspective. An issue affecting a majority of committee members for any of the national security committees has enough support to propose legislation in the National Defense Authorization Act and Appropriations Bill. This amount of political capital reduces agent autonomy to determine which tasks to complete. If an issue captures the attention of a minority of national security committee members, agents receive more autonomy to act in accordance with

their preference because the minority does not have the support to make policy decisions. The chairman and ranking member are also examined to determine if they are from states affected by the issue. Committee leaders wield tremendous influence over the national security committees and can introduce legislation that aligns with their policy preferences. This power constrains an agent's autonomy to determine what tasks to accomplish. Conversely, a lack of influential committee leaders produces agent autonomy, allowing the agent to enact its policy preferences. Analyzing the geographic distribution variable determines if it results in agent autonomy variation.

Partisan theory. Partisan theory, developed by scholar Fredrik Carlsen, considers political party differences that cause divergent viewpoints on domestic issues and national security.⁵³ Carlsen highlights how the core beliefs of Democrats and Republicans illustrate the differences between these parties. The political parties of the president, House of Representatives, and Senate influence consensus building. Political party similarities unify these entities. However, political party differences further divide these entities, resulting in impasses within the legislative branch and between the legislative and executive branches.⁵⁴ Political parties steer ideological differences but do not automatically generate disunity about issues. The political parties of the president, House of Representatives, and Senate for the three cases determine if a partisan split exists. The partisan cohesion variable illuminates the existence of predisposed ideological differences. Differing political parties between the executive and legislative branches may result in disparate policy preferences. This preference gap gives the military agent the latitude to enact their preferred policy. The same political party in the White House and Congress shrinks the gap in preferences between the government principals. The agent receives less autonomy in this instance because the legislative and executive branches agree on the policy to enact. Analysis of this variable provides evidence of its contribution to constraining or producing agent autonomy (table 2).

Implementation Phase

The implementation phase begins when the policy goes into effect. Monitoring and the expectation of rewards and punishments are the key principal-agent factors during this phase. The government principals monitor the military agent to ensure tasks are being completed in the preferred manner. The military receives rewards and punishments based on how its tasks are accomplished. Six potential contributory variables—assertive executive, authority allocation, diverse cabinet, information dissemination, partisan cohesion,

and robust coalition—influence the level of monitoring by the legislative and executive branches and the amount of rewards and punishments the military anticipates. Figure 1 in the previous chapter illustrates the relationship between these variables and agent autonomy. Proxy indicators were selected for each of the potential contributory variables to determine how the variables appeared in each case.

Table 2. Potential contributory variables and their operationalization for agent autonomy during the advisory phase

Variable	Principal	Operationalization	Indicator	Unit of Analysis
Authority allocation	Executive/legislative branches	Government principals' authorities for policy enactment	Shared vs. sole	Alignment of policy decisions with authorities
Diverse cabinet	Executive branch	- No. of members from a different political party than president - No. of women members - No. of minority members	Well-balanced vs. efficient	Compare numbers across post-Goldwater-Nichols administrations
Geographic distribution	Legislative branch	- No. of national security committee members with geographic impacts - Chairman or ranking member with geographic ties to issue	Committee majority vs. minority; influential vs. non-influential	Majority in the four national security committees; committee leaders
Partisan cohesion	Executive/legislative branches	- Political parties of president, House of Representatives, & Senate	Similarities vs. differences	Party split between & among government principals

Unitary executive theory. Unitary executive theory describes the extent to which a president is more or less assertive in wielding presidential powers. In his work examining presidential power, political scientist Benjamin Pontz claims that the number of executive orders and the number of cabinet members who left their positions are indicators of how a president uses authority.⁵⁵ Fewer executive orders and fired or resigned cabinet members signify a president abiding by the inherent powers provided by the Constitution, whereas more executive orders and fired or resigned cabinet members denote a president exercising implied powers. These numbers serve as a proxy for the control that a president asserts to implement domestic and foreign policies.⁵⁶ The analysis

compares the number of executive orders and fired or resigned cabinet members during each case to each post-Goldwater-Nichols Act administration to determine the president's level of implied power. A president using implied power constrains agent autonomy because the military agent expects a high level of punishments and directive instructions about policy implementation. An agent anticipates less severe punishments and instructions open to interpretation from a president employing the powers granted by the Constitution. This latitude allows the military agent to determine how to accomplish tasks, increasing agent autonomy. Examining the assertive executive variable for the three case studies determines the variable's influence on agent autonomy.

Different authorities for government principals. Similar to authorities for policy enactment, the different authorities of the executive and legislative branches determine their control over policy enforcement. The constitutional authorities remain constant for the government principals. The executive branch concentrates on enforcing policy that pertains to commander-in-chief roles.⁵⁷ Oversight of a new combatant command falls within the executive branch's responsibilities, for instance. Enforcing the agent's compliance with authorizations and appropriations is the focus of the legislative branch.⁵⁸ Budget execution management is one example of congressional authority. The government principals either share authorities for policy implementation or one principal maintains sole authority for policy oversight during the implementation phase. The authority allocation variable determines if one or both government principals retain the authority to enforce a policy. If one government principal maintains sole oversight authority, the divided principal context is less relevant to the outcome. One principal possessing the authority to unilaterally enforce the policy decreases agent autonomy for the military. The situation differs when both principals share authority for policy implementation. Both the executive and legislative branches manage policy enforcement in a shared authority situation, creating latitude for the military to perform tasks how it chooses. Investigating this variable for the three cases illuminates its relationship to agent autonomy variation.

Cabinet theory. Cabinet demographics contribute to policy development and management.⁵⁹ Fenno's concept of a well-balanced or efficient cabinet establishes the trade space that the military agent operates within to determine how to complete tasks.⁶⁰ The diverse cabinet variable during the implementation phase influences how the executive branch oversees policies. The indicators determining a well-balanced versus efficient cabinet—the number of cabinet members from a different political party than the president, the number of female cabinet members, and the number of minority cabinet members—are the same for policy decision-making as policy enforcement. These

proxies are again compared to other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act administrations. An efficient cabinet reaches a consensus more readily on how an agent should complete tasks than a well-balanced cabinet. A well-balanced cabinet tends to mull over these items longer and have varying viewpoints on what tasks require monitoring and the incentive structure for performance. The military agent leverages this latitude by playing the different opinions of one principal off of the other, producing agent autonomy. An efficient cabinet, on the other hand, constrains agent autonomy because oversight and rewards and punishments are streamlined. Analyzing this variable for the three case studies explains its contributions toward variation in agent autonomy.

Informational theory. Informational theory developed by political scientist Keith Krehbiel addresses how the legislative branch obtains information about particular issues.⁶¹ Krehbiel, who analyzed information flows in Congress, argues that within legislative processes, information falls into the categories of open or closed rule. An open rule allows the legislative committees to present recommendations, and the legislative body selects from all possible solutions, generally producing more optimal outcomes.⁶² A closed rule allows the legislative body to select between the status quo and one committee's recommended way forward, streamlining decision-making and limiting policy options.⁶³ The quantity of information the agent presents determines an open or closed rule for information dissemination. The number of policy proposals presented by the agent to the four national security committees determines whether open or closed information dissemination occurred. One proposal indicates closed communications, whereas two or more proposals reflect open communications. With only one policy proposal, the national security committees monitor the agent more closely because not all available information is presented. This binary choice between the agent's preferred option and the status quo increases monitoring, restricting agent autonomy. A military agent presenting all possible options to the national security committees conveys transparency, which tends to decrease the monitoring by the government principals. This reduced monitoring gives agents more latitude to accomplish tasks how they see fit, producing agent autonomy. The information dissemination variable influences how the legislative branch implements policy prescriptions. Investigating open or closed information dissemination for the three case studies illustrates how it decreases or increases agent autonomy.

Partisan theory. The different beliefs that form the foundations for each political party affect policy decisions and policy oversight. Fredrik Carlsen's research finds that these divergent perspectives generate different viewpoints for Democrats and Republicans on domestic issues and national security.⁶⁴

Therefore, the political parties of the president, House of Representatives, and Senate can unify or divide these entities and determine if partisan cohesion exists in the three cases.⁶⁵ Ideological differences between the executive and legislative branches can result in different oversight philosophies and consequences and incentives for the military agent. This difference in management and rewards and punishments gives the military agent the latitude to complete tasks in the manner of their choosing. The same political party in the White House and Congress tends to align monitoring and incentive structure preferences for the government principals. Agent autonomy decreases as a result of this agreement. Examining the partisan cohesion variable provides evidence of its impact on agent autonomy.

Coalition theory. Coalition theory, conceived by political scientists George Tsebelis and Eunyong Ha, designates the individuals in the executive and legislative branches who band together to promote and implement their policy preferences.⁶⁶ In their work studying coalitions in the executive and legislative branches, Tsebelis and Ha argue that coalitions derive their power from the number of members in them. The number of coalition members represents the level of influence a coalition possesses to enforce policy prescriptions. A large coalition provides leverage against legislative or executive branch preferences, allowing the other branch to control the military agent.⁶⁷ The number of official policy statements by the president relating to each case serves as a proxy for the strength of the executive branch coalition. Similarly, the number of committee hearings for each case represents the strength of the legislative branch's coalition. One or more statements of administrative policy from the president or congressional hearings regarding the case indicate a strong coalition in each respective branch. The political capital required for either action signifies that a robust coalition existed in the executive, legislative, or both branches. A robust coalition limits the latitude the military agent has to perform tasks in the manner of its choosing. A weak coalition, conversely, does not wield the political capital to enforce policies, which grants more autonomy to the military agent. Analyzing these coalition aspects for the three cases reveals the robust coalition variable's impact on agent autonomy. Table 3 summarizes the potential contributory variables and their influences on agent autonomy during the implementation phase.

Table 3. Potential contributory variables and their operationalization for agent autonomy during the implementation phase

Variable	Principal	Operationalization	Indicator	Unit of Analysis
Assertive executive	Executive branch	- No. of executive orders during presidential term - No. of fired or resigned cabinet members during presidential term	Constitutional vs. implied powers	Compare numbers across post-Goldwater-Nichols administrations
Authority allocation	Executive/legislative branches	- Government principals' authorities for policy enforcement	Shared vs. sole	Alignment of policy decisions with authorities
Diverse cabinet	Executive branch	- No. of members from a different political party than president - No. of women members - No. of minority members	Well-balanced vs. efficient	Compare numbers across post-Goldwater-Nichols administrations
Information dissemination	Legislative branch	- Number of policy proposals agent presents	Open vs. closed	More than one proposal
Partisan cohesion	Executive/legislative branches	- Political parties of president, House of Representatives, and Senate when policy goes into effect	Similarities vs. differences	Party split between & among government principals
Robust coalition	Executive/legislative branches	- No. of presidential official policy statements - No. of committee hearings	Strong vs. weak	One or more policy statements and/or committee hearings

Through analysis of the context of the policy issue, this research seeks to determine if these variables influence agent autonomy.

Conclusion

The case study method allows researchers to analyze multiple perspectives to test a hypothesis and develop explanations.⁶⁸ It was selected for this research due to its alignment with the study's purpose and suitability for leveraging the method's strengths while mitigating its limitations. This project examines three cases with divided principals—the proposed retirement of the A-10, the creation of the Space Force, and the repeal of the combat flying ban for women. For each of these, the case study analysis will test the prevailing hypothesis that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals for both the advisory and implementation phases.⁶⁹ Analyzing seven potential contributory variables establishes the divided principal conditions that may constrain, rather than produce, agent autonomy.

Notes

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4. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 1–2.
5. Cassell and Symon, *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods*, 323–33.
6. George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 5.
7. George and Bennett, 19–22.
8. Rebolj, “Case Study as a Type of Qualitative Research,” 36.
9. George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 20–21.
10. Rebolj, “Case Study as a Type of Qualitative Research,” 37.
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12. George and Bennett, 21.
13. Falleti and Lynch, “Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Science,” 1143–66.
14. Baxter and Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology,” 544–45.
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16. George and Bennett, 24–25.
17. George and Bennett, 22–23.
18. George and Bennett, 83–86.
19. George and Bennett, 26–27.
20. George and Bennett, 25.
21. George and Bennett, 31.
22. George and Bennett, 32.
23. Donnithorne, “Principled Agents,” 431.
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25. Executive Office of the President, S. 1376 – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, 4–5; and Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2017*, 114th Congress, 2d sess., March 3, 2016, 12–25.
26. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 5, 9.
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32. Parham, “Quiet Revolution,” 385–87.
33. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993, Pub. L. 102-190, §§ 531–549.

34. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
35. George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 83.
36. Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, Pub. L. 99-433, § 151.
37. Martorano, “Balancing Power,” 205.
38. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 25–26.
39. Donnithorne, 27.
40. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
41. Martorano, “Balancing Power,” 205–34.
42. Hammond and Knott, “Who Controls the Bureaucracy?,” 123–24.
43. Martorano, “Balancing Power,” 205.
44. Crabb and Holt, *Invitation to Struggle*, 19–23.
45. Amos, Taylor, and Mazarr, *American National Security*, 124.
46. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, 29.
47. Amos, Taylor, and Mazarr, *American National Security*, 124.
48. Fenno, “Balance in the Cabinet,” 19.
49. Fenno, 20.
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51. Strom, “Congressional Policy Making,” 711–35.
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58. Amos, Taylor, and Mazarr, *American National Security*, 124.
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Chapter 4

Proposed Retirement of the A-10

The proposed retirement of the A-10 attack aircraft (2013–16) is the first case examined. This case consists of divided principals, with the executive and legislative branches possessing different policy preferences for continuing the A-10 in military service.¹ The Air Force agent advocated for retiring this aircraft to modernize its fleet. This position aligned with the executive branch's preference but varied from the ultimate decision still in effect.² This chapter first reviews the proposed retirement of the A-10 and then analyzes the advisory and implementation phases, which both constrained agent autonomy. Analysis of the seven contributory variables identifies those that result in a variation in agent autonomy for each phase. The A-10 case demonstrates that divided principals can reduce agent autonomy, which appears to be at odds with the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals.³

Case Overview

The proposed retirement of the A-10 fleet must be understood within the larger context of budget challenges faced by the United States military in 2013. Congress enacted the Budget Control Act on August 2, 2011, due to soaring federal spending and plummeting revenues.⁴ This act established budget limits until 2021, with different caps for defense and nondefense portions of the discretionary budget.⁵ The defense portion required budget cuts of a trillion dollars over ten years. The Budget Control Act purposefully delayed the implementation date of the budget caps to give Congress time to find an alternative. On March 1, 2013, budgets that exceeded their caps triggered sequestration, an automatic process that instituted a series of spending cuts.⁶ This sequester drove a 7.7 percent reduction in defense spending or \$42.7 billion for fiscal year 2013 alone.⁷ As a result, the military decreased its aircraft purchases by \$4 billion, operations by \$17.1 billion, and research by \$6.1 billion.⁸ To reduce its 2013 budget by \$12 billion, the Air Force cut its aircraft inventory by 10 percent, separated 25,000 service members, and decreased the number of flying squadrons. These cuts ultimately impacted the Air Force's combat readiness since many flying squadrons were unable to train at the rates required to maintain currency.⁹

With sequestration scheduled to last until 2021 and a total defense budget decrease of \$470 billion estimated, Air Force leaders needed to find additional

cost savings with minimal impact on combat capability. Gen Mark Welsh, chief of staff of the Air Force, scrutinized the Air Force's five missions—air and space superiority; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); rapid global mobility; global strike; and command and control—to determine where spending decreases were feasible with the least impact to operations.¹⁰ ISR and global strike were off limits. Shortfalls already existed in ISR missions, so further reductions would only increase those shortfalls.¹¹ In the global strike arena, the Air Force did not maintain the authority to decrease its nuclear capability budget, and those possessing that authority were not willing to reduce its footprint.¹² Additionally, the Air Force was the only service capable of conducting theaterwide command and control operations.¹³ The Air Force also offered the only capability for rapid equipment, aircraft, and military personnel transportation as well as refueling capabilities.¹⁴ Therefore, the other services did not support cuts to Air Force command and control or rapid global mobility operations, leaving the air and space superiority mission as the lone viable option for sequestration budget cuts. The Air Force was already committed to its F-35 production; cutting the F-15s and F-16s before the F-35s were fully operational forced the Air Force to incur extra costs.¹⁵

General Welsh concluded that none of the Air Force's cost-cutting options were ideal but that retiring the A-10 had the least operational impact.¹⁶ From his perspective, the A-10 was an aircraft built for a specific threat environment that performs a single-mission role as an exclusive air-to-ground aircraft. While the A-10 performed well in the decades leading up to the 2013 sequester, the aircraft was thought to be ill-suited for the most likely threat environments of the future.¹⁷ The belief persisted among Air Force leaders that the service needed to eliminate entire fleets of aircraft to reach the congressionally mandated budget-cut levels. Cutting an entire fleet removes the need for personnel with knowledge of that particular airplane, maintenance costs of upgrades and parts, and infrastructure requirements—like airfields and hangars. The Air Force estimated a cost savings of \$4.2 billion through fiscal year 2019 by divesting the A-10 fleet, which became its policy recommendation to its executive and legislative branch principals.¹⁸

General Welsh advocated for this tough decision through reports to Congress and during a hearing to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) on September 18, 2013.¹⁹ By divesting the aging A-10 aircraft, the Air Force intended to modernize its fleet with multirole aircraft that excel at multiple missions. Reinvesting savings from the A-10 into the F-35 would provide the Air Force with combat capability for a conflict against more advanced adversaries like China.²⁰ General Welsh argued that the F-35 performs close air

support missions on par with the A-10 and possesses additional capabilities, such as stealth and enhanced speed.²¹ Air Force leaders—including General Welsh and Eric Fanning, the acting secretary of the Air Force—consistently advocated for A-10 divestiture, insisting that this option allowed the service to balance its budget with the least impact on operations overseas.²²

According to the Constitution, Congress has the authority to approve and appropriate funds for military activities; the proposed divestiture of the A-10 therefore fell directly under its purview. In response to the Air Force's proposal, thirty-three congressional members from the four national security committees drafted and sent correspondence to the secretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff arguing against this proposal.²³ These legislative members, predominantly senators and representatives with Air Force bases in their states and districts, expressed their opposition to the divestiture of the A-10 since it created a capability gap and endangered service members in future conflicts.²⁴ Several senators from this group of lawmakers generated an amendment for the fiscal year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act prohibiting the Air Force from divesting the A-10 until the planned replacement was fully operational and actively flying combat operations.²⁵ This amendment restricted the secretary of the Air Force from retiring, planning to retire, or storing the A-10 prior to December 31, 2014.²⁶ Additionally, the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act barred the Air Force from using funds appropriated by Congress to change manning levels or budgets associated with the A-10 fleet, maintaining the status quo.²⁷ The House of Representatives and the Senate approved this legislation that differed starkly from the Air Force's position.

Executive branch entities joined together to oppose the congressional restrictions, from the president to the secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the service chiefs, and combatant commanders. The executive branch held constitutional authority to generate policies regarding the A-10 and supported the Air Force's position to divest this fleet. President Barack Obama repeatedly announced the executive branch's preference through statements of administrative policy in May 2014 and June 2015.²⁸ These statements strongly objected to the congressional provisions restricting retirement and storage of the A-10 since this divestiture reallocated funds to higher-priority programs. The administration also opposed Congress providing additional funding to continue A-10 operations overseas. While President Obama did not pass any executive orders for the A-10, he voiced the executive branch's alignment with the Air Force position.

Similarly, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel concurred with the Air Force's preferences to phase out the A-10 to satisfy budget cuts and to continue acquiring

the more versatile F-35.²⁹ In fact, Secretary Hagel declared in a 2014 Pentagon press briefing that the Air Force would retire the A-10.³⁰ The DOD carefully weighed this budget decision so as to maintain the United States' technological edge against adversaries and keep the defense budget balanced.³¹ Hagel believed this divestiture was necessary to satisfy the sequestration budget cuts, increase combat readiness, and modernize the Air Force fleet by accelerating the plan to replace the A-10 with the F-35. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, who followed Secretary Hagel, continued to recommend retiring the A-10 in congressional hearings and press briefings throughout 2015 and 2016, reaffirming the Air Force's policy position.³²

Gen Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the combatant commanders advocated for this same position. In congressional hearings from 2013 to 2015, General Dempsey stated that the Department of Defense considered ground commanders' input and combatant commanders' expertise to develop the annual budgets, which included divestiture of the A-10.³³ Since 2006, the A-10 flew 20 percent of close air support combat missions, while other aircraft flew 80 percent of these combat missions.³⁴ DOD leaders claimed that retiring the A-10 allowed the department to enhance its multirole aircraft capabilities across multiple mission sets for the combatant commands while saving resources. The executive branch principal repeatedly expressed support for retiring the A-10, but key elements in the legislative branch remained unconvinced.

Throughout the case's three-year duration, Congress's most vocal members had A-10 bases in their states. Senator John McCain of Arizona, who served as the ranking member and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, adamantly opposed retiring the A-10.³⁵ This aircraft injected \$1.5 billion of economic impact annually into the Tucson area around Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.³⁶ Then-representative Martha McSally, whose district included Tucson and Davis-Monthan, dissented by discussing her experience as a former A-10 pilot and the first female pilot to fly in combat.³⁷ Senator Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, a Senate Armed Services Committee member, argued against the A-10 divestiture due to its \$500 million economic impact in Valdosta, Georgia.³⁸ Numerous House and Senate Armed Services Committee members allied with Senator McCain, Senator Chambliss, and Representative McSally to thwart the A-10 retirement. Consequently, congressional authorization and appropriation language to stop the A-10 phaseout began in fiscal year 2014 (and exists as of this writing), resulting in less autonomy for the Air Force.³⁹ The Air Force, as the expert military agent, was prohibited from determining which aircraft to fly to best execute its missions and how to internally adjust its

budget priorities in the case of the A-10 fleet; instead, specific legal restrictions constrained the task of reducing its budget.

Prevailing Hypothesis Test

This study examines the Air Force's autonomy during the advisory and implementation phases of this case to determine if the agent received more or less autonomy than hypothesized by the preponderance of civil-military relations literature. The prevailing theory suggests that the Air Force should have received *more* autonomy as a function of the divided policy preferences of its principals. Instead, the findings indicate that the Air Force did not get more autonomy to enact or implement its preferences under the conditions of divided principals.

Advisory Phase

In the case of the proposed retirement of the A-10, divided principals existed both structurally and situationally. The executive branch established A-10 policy through statements of administrative policy, while Congress authorized and appropriated funds for the A-10 fleet through legislation. The Air Force agent proposed divesting the A-10 to meet fiscal constraints.⁴⁰ The executive branch supported this policy prescription and advocated for retiring the A-10.⁴¹ However, the legislative branch opposed this position and acted to block this proposal, ensuring the aircraft continued to fly in combat.⁴²

The preponderance of scholarly literature claims that divided principals tend to allow for a less responsive agent, resulting in more agent autonomy.⁴³ When multiple principals disagree and are at odds with one another, the principal-agent theory explains, the agent can exploit the different preferences to find latitude for its preferred course of action. In this case, however, key elements in Congress clearly opposed the Air Force's policy preference and effectively blocked the proposed A-10 retirement. These actions resulted in less autonomy for the Air Force, which appears to deviate from the prevailing literature's hypothesis. Instead of the Air Force finding a way to divest the A-10 and manage its own budget shortfalls, Congress implemented a policy that opposed the military agent's proposal.

Implementation Phase

Congress blocked the A-10 fleet's retirement by writing amendments into the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act that became law. The provisions associated with the A-10 prohibited its retirement, preparation for retirement,

and storage.⁴⁴ Changing manning levels for personnel dedicated to the A-10 fleet was also unauthorized. This act required a report from the secretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 180 days after it took effect on the status and future of A-10 aircraft. Funds authorized and appropriated for A-10 missions during fiscal year 2014 were to be spent only on those operations and could not be used for divesting the A-10. Similar language existed in the National Defense Authorization Acts years after it first appeared in 2013 (and was effective as of this writing.)⁴⁵

Scholarly literature claims that agents always desire more autonomy from government principals and that divided principals provide additional autonomy.⁴⁶ In the case of the A-10, the congressional policy to maintain the status quo limited the Air Force's ability to retire its fleet. The policy did not allow for implementation slack because it employed all four attributes—specificity, imminence, durability, and enforceability—that restrict trade space for the agent to negotiate how to complete tasks.⁴⁷ The language in the National Defense Authorization Acts specifically prohibits certain actions associated with retiring the A-10. The law became effective immediately after a majority in Congress passed it. Congress has written A-10 fleet restrictions into national security legislation for eight years now, signifying their durability. Because Congress is responsible for defense funding, the provisions for A-10 divestiture are enforceable. These four attributes resulted in little implementation slack and less autonomy for the Air Force, which again seems to deviate from the prevailing literature's hypothesis. Instead of the Air Force determining how to divest the A-10 and manage its own budget, Congress dictated policy implementation that decreased agent autonomy.

Potential Contributory Variables

In this case of divided principals, the Air Force agent found itself with less, not more, autonomy in the advisory and implementation phases. Why might this be the case? What other variables or causal mechanisms not considered by principal-agent theory may have shaped this outcome? The following analysis examines the seven potential contributory variables described in chapter 3 for the A-10 case to illuminate their connection to and influence on agent autonomy.

Advisory Phase

The advisory phase in the A-10 case involves four potential contributory variables—authority allocation, diverse cabinet, geographic distribution, and partisan cohesion. These variables influence the preference gap—or how

closely aligned the government principals' and military agent's preferred policies are—on what A-10 fleet tasks the Air Force should accomplish. This analysis examines the indicators for these four variables to determine how they presented themselves in this case.

Authority allocation variable. During the A-10 case, the government principals subscribed to their respective authorities outlined in the Constitution. President Obama attempted to craft policy pertaining to the fleet with his statements of administrative policy, but the executive branch did not possess the authority over this particular issue of funding.⁴⁸ Sequestration was a budgetary challenge, and decisions surrounding the proposed solution to the challenge of the divestiture of the A-10 fleet rested with the legislative branch. Congress maintained the authority to authorize aircraft retirement, appropriate funds for such activities, and increase funding for other programs after the Air Force realized savings. The authority allocation variable therefore reflects one principal possessing sole authority over the case, influencing the outcome for the A-10 fleet. Divided principal literature assumes that the government principals share authority for the agent and the ability to decide on policy preferences. A gap in preferences between principals can give the agent opportunistic latitude to determine what tasks to accomplish. In this case, however, the legislative branch maintained unilateral authority and thus constrained agent autonomy since policy decisions required only one government principal instead of two.

Diverse cabinet variable. This case occurred during President Obama's last three years in office. President Obama appointed two Republicans to his cabinet, which crossed political party lines and was an unprecedented number of individuals from the opposing party.⁴⁹ Further, a third of his cabinet were women (36 percent) while 41 percent were minorities.⁵⁰ These percentages are higher than any other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act president. Combined, the gender, party, and minority demographics in the Obama cabinet reflect a well-balanced one, supporting the characterization of the cabinet as falling at the extreme end of the diverse cabinet variable spectrum. Agents expect to receive more autonomy from diverse, well-balanced cabinets since the variety of perspectives hinders the cabinet from converging on a policy preference all members support. Agents negotiate the trade space among the cabinet members' different viewpoints to accomplish the tasks the members choose. The well-balanced nature of President Obama's cabinet, therefore, produced autonomy for the Air Force during the A-10 case.

Geographic distribution variable. Air Force A-10 units reside in nine states: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, and Nevada.⁵¹ These units include active duty, guard, and Reserve personnel.⁵² The

113th Congress served from 2013 to 2014 and the 114th Congress from 2015 to 2016.⁵³ The 113th Congress HASC had sixty-two members, including ten from states with A-10 units.⁵⁴ Eleven of the fifty-one House Appropriations Committee on Defense (HAC-D) members represented states with A-10 units.⁵⁵ Neither the chairman nor ranking member of the House of Representatives national security committees were from states with A-10 units.⁵⁶ The Senate Appropriations Committee on Defense (SAC-D), on the other hand, had three of its twenty-nine members from states with A-10 units, including the chairman.⁵⁷ Seven of the twenty-six Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) members hailed from states with A-10 units, including the chairman.⁵⁸

In the 114th Congress, a similar pattern emerged. Eleven of sixty-three HASC members and twelve of fifty-one HAC-D members were from states affected by the A-10 issue, whereas two of thirty SAC-D members and four of twenty-six SASC members were from these states.⁵⁹ The ranking member from the SAC-D and the chairman of the SASC had constituents in states with A-10 units.⁶⁰ While a minority of the legislative members on the four national security committees in both the 113th and 114th Congresses hailed from states impacted by the A-10 issue, the ranking members and chairs of the Senate committees wield a tremendous amount of influence. Committee leaders can introduce legislation that aligns with their policy preference and decide what tasks the Air Force performs. On a scale from minority to majority and uninfluential to influential, the geographic distribution variable thus reflects an influential minority where a few individuals impacted the outcome of the A-10 issue. An influential minority is likely to constrain agent autonomy due to the political capital committee leadership having to shape congressional policy.

Partisan cohesion variable. Throughout this case, President Obama, a Democratic president, led the executive branch. The 113th Congress comprised a Republican majority in the House of Representatives and a Democratic majority in the Senate.⁶¹ The Republican party held the majority in the House and Senate during the 114th Congress.⁶² Even with this political party cohesion in the legislative branch, the government principals remained split along partisan lines. The political party makeup of the executive and legislative branches from 2013 to 2016 signifies partisan differences for the partisan cohesion variable. Different political parties within the legislative branch spark difficulty uniting on preferences for national security issues. Similarly, political party differences between the legislative and executive branches seem to cause impasses when deciding on policy prescriptions. The Air Force, as a result, gained more agent autonomy from these differences in political parties to enact its preferred option.

A neutral level of agent autonomy is expected from table 4—an equal number of variables predicted more and less autonomy. By enacting a policy that opposed the Air Force’s option, Congress actually constrained the Air Force’s autonomy in the advisory phase of the A-10 case.

Table 4. Potential contributory variables for proposed retirement of the A-10 case during the advisory phase

Variable	Outcome	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy
Authority allocation	Sole authority	Less
Diverse cabinet	Well-balanced cabinet	More
Geographic distribution	Influential minority	Less
Partisan cohesion	Partisan differences	More

Implementation Phase

The A-10 case’s implementation phase consists of six potential contributory variables—assertive executive, authority allocation, diverse cabinet, information dissemination, partisan cohesion, and robust coalition—that affect how the Air Force completes tasks associated with the A-10 fleet. These variables influence the monitoring of the military agents and the Air Force’s expectation of rewards and punishments. Investigating the indicators for each of these six variables determines how the variables appeared in this case.

Assertive executive variable. During his eight years in office, President Obama instituted 276 executive orders with 129 occurring in his second term.⁶³ On average, President Obama signed thirty-two executive orders per year during his second term in office, a lower per year average compared to every other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act president.⁶⁴ The turnover rate in President Obama’s cabinet was 71 percent.⁶⁵ Thirty-eight of fifty-three members of his cabinet resigned or were fired. This turnover rate is the third lowest for this era; President George W. Bush’s turnover rate was 63 percent, and President George H. W. Bush’s turnover rate was 66 percent.⁶⁶ Presidents Reagan, Clinton, and Trump all had higher turnover rates than President Obama, indicating a moderate number of fired or resigned cabinet members for President Obama’s cabinet. The low number of executive orders and the average turnover rate for cabinet members suggest that President Obama used his constitutional powers more than implied powers compared to other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents. His executive action, therefore, should be characterized as at the lower end of the assertive executive variable spectrum. Less assertive executives are hypothesized to in-

crease agent autonomy because agents do not anticipate being fired or receiving policy directives from the president. This latitude allows the agent to accomplish tasks in the manner of its choosing. The Air Force, thus, received more autonomy from President Obama's less assertive executive action.

Authority allocation variable. The government principals retained their same authorities during the A-10 case as outlined in the Constitution. President Obama drafted an administrative policy statement in June 2015 after restrictions on the A-10 fleet's retirement became effective.⁶⁷ After this one attempt, President Obama was resigned to the fact that the executive branch did not have authority over this issue that revolved around funding. The legislative branch wielded the power to authorize and appropriate funds for A-10 activities including fleet divestiture. Congress also maintained the authority to pass legislation on the A-10, and the legislative branch did just that from 2013 to the date of this project's writing.⁶⁸ Although the two government principals differed on policy implementation preferences for the A-10, only the legislative branch had the authority to execute policy. The authority allocation variable reflects one principal possessing sole authority over A-10 policy implementation, which influenced the outcome of the case. The assumption of scholarly literature—that divided principals share authority to monitor the agent and enforce an incentive structure—does not apply in the A-10 case. Typically, principals that share monitoring authority and authority to dole out rewards and punishments provide the agent with latitude to determine how to accomplish tasks. The legislative branch maintained sole authority for A-10 policy execution, constraining agent autonomy since its implementation required only one government principal, not two.

Diverse cabinet variable. The A-10 policy implementation occurred during President Obama's last two years in office. President Obama's cabinet had the same demographics during this time as during the A-10 policy decision—two Republicans, 36 percent women, and 41 percent minority members.⁶⁹ These numbers remained the highest for any post-Goldwater-Nichols Act president, indicating a diverse, well-balanced cabinet for this variable. The variety of perspectives tends to hinder the cabinet from converging on a way forward for policy implementation. Agents expect to receive more autonomy from well-balanced cabinets to determine how their tasks are performed. President Obama's well-balanced cabinet, therefore, increased the Air Force's autonomy.

Information dissemination variable. From 2013 to 2016, the Air Force offered the solution of A-10 divestiture to combat the budget cuts of sequestration.⁷⁰ The proposed retirement of the A-10 fleet would have eliminated the aircraft, maintenance, infrastructure, and personnel associated with the

airframe. Congressional hearings on the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal years 2014, 2015, and 2016 reveal the Air Force advocating for the divestiture of the A-10.⁷¹ The Air Force justified this decision with data and supporters, forcing a binary decision from the congressional national security committees to retire the entire fleet or maintain the status quo.⁷² As a result, the four committees decided to maintain the status quo of the A-10.⁷³ This solution, originally written into the National Defense Authorization Act in fiscal year 2014, persists to the date of this project's writing.⁷⁴ The Air Force proposed only one solution to the national security committees, reflecting a closed form of information dissemination. This proposal did not offer smaller-scale divestiture options or additional solutions for the Air Force to reach its sequestration budget cuts. With only one policy proposal, the national security committees elected to monitor the agent more closely because all available information about the A-10 was not presented. The closed information dissemination variable drove policy implementation that did not offer flexibility in the A-10's fleet, force size, or budget for eight years and counting. Since the Air Force offered a binary choice between its preferred option and the status quo, Congress restricted the agent's autonomy.

Partisan cohesion variable. Throughout the implementation of A-10 policy, President Obama served in office. A Democratic president thus ran the executive branch. The legislative branch, though, was led by the opposing Republican political party.⁷⁵ The Republican party held the majority in the House of Representatives and Senate during the 114th Congress. The government principals split along partisan lines, providing evidence for different political parties for the partisan cohesion variable. Political party differences between branches appear to increase agent autonomy because the government principals find it difficult to reach a consensus on how the agent should perform tasks and what rewards and incentives the agent should receive. The agent leverages this latitude to gain more autonomy and accomplish tasks as it chooses. Therefore, the Air Force gained autonomy in the A-10 case due to a lack of political party cohesion.

Robust coalition variable. The executive and legislative branches formed coalitions advocating for their respective policy preferences. In 2014 and 2015, the president released two administrative policy statements outlining the prescription to retire the A-10 fleet.⁷⁶ They reflected a strong coalition within the executive branch since enough agreement and support existed to formulate policy preferences. The four national security committees of Congress held twelve hearings from 2013 to 2016 in which Air Force leaders discussed the A-10 divestiture issue.⁷⁷ This level of support from congressional committees and time commitment from legislative members indicated a strong coalition amassed in the legislative branch around blocking the A-10

divestiture. A strong coalition in the executive and legislative branches signals the high end of the robust coalition variable spectrum. Reduced agent autonomy results when only one principal has a strong coalition because that principal possesses enough support to monitor the agent and institute rewards and punishments in the manner it selects. In this case, both government principals had strong coalitions, giving the Air Force latitude to execute its preferred option and ultimately increasing agent autonomy.

The contributory variables in table 5 predicted more autonomy for the Air Force during the implementation phase of the A-10. In reality, Congress eliminated the Air Force’s implementation slack with its specific, imminent, durable, and enforceable legislation, which reduced the Air Force’s autonomy.

Table 5. Potential contributory variables for proposed retirement of the A-10 case during the implementation phase

Variable	Outcome	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy
Assertive executive	Constitutional powers	More
Authority allocation	Sole authority	Less
Diverse cabinet	Well-balanced cabinet	More
Information dissemination	Closed options	Less
Partisan cohesion	Partisan differences	More
Robust coalition	Strong coalition	More

Analysis of Findings

The prevailing hypothesis predicted that the Air Force would receive more autonomy in the advisory and implementation phases. The outcomes are at odds with this conventional wisdom. Table 6 contrasts the hypothesized versus actual outcomes of agent autonomy from this examination of potential contributory variables. For the A-10 case, the variables did not correctly predict the outcome for either phase.

Table 6. Agent autonomy predictions and outcomes for the A-10 case

Phase	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy	Actual Agent Autonomy
Advisory	Neutral	Less
Implementation	More	Less

The variables associated with the A-10 case provide possible explanations for why the divided government principals constrained the Air Force’s autonomy in

the advisory and implementation phases—an outcome not generally predicted by the baseline theory. Two variables during the advisory phase—authority allocation and geographic distribution—are potential causes of this reduced agent autonomy. The two Senate national security committees hold more influence than the two House of Representatives national security committees. Throughout this case, the chairman or ranking member of the Senate committees hailed from states with A-10 units, which is striking given that the legislative branch maintained sole decision-making authority.⁷⁸ These committee leaders used their influence to initiate legislation blocking the retirement of the A-10. Because Congress held unilateral authority to determine A-10 policy, a bill prohibiting A-10 divestiture became law.

Other contributory variables—authority allocation and information dissemination—are potential explanations for a reduction in agent autonomy in the implementation phase. Congress monitored the Air Force closely because it provided only one potential option to manage its reduced sequestration budgets. This lack of transparency resulted in tighter congressional oversight mechanisms. Congress, once again, maintained sole authority for managing A-10 policy implementation since it concerned funding. The legislative branch established restrictions prohibiting numerous A-10 activities—the retirement, divestiture, and storage of the A-10—to force compliance and maintain the status quo.⁷⁹ These restrictions became law because of the strong coalition amassed in the legislative branch. Although the Air Force should have received more autonomy from the strong coalitions both government principals formed, such was not the case because Congress wielded sole authority for policy implementation. The strong congressional coalition was able to pass restrictive measures for the A-10 fleet.⁸⁰ These provisions have existed in law for at least eight years running.⁸¹

The A-10 case may not be a fair test of principal-agent theory since stronger contributory variables determined the outcome during the advisory and implementation phases. In this divided principal case, Congress—which operates by rules of positional power and strong geographic interest—maintained unilateral authority to decide and implement A-10 policy. In proposing the retirement of the A-10, the Air Force encountered the perfect storm of influential chairpersons and ranking members in the Senate who had a vested interest in the A-10 issue because of their constituents. These powerful committee leaders opposed the Air Force's position and worked to block it. With such strong forces driving Congress in a particular direction, the Air Force's chances of securing its preferred position in the advisory phase were remote. These forces transformed into a robust coalition during the implementation phase, causing Congress to enact strict oversight of the A-10 fleet. These situational dynamics

severely hampered the Air Force's chances of receiving implementation slack during policy execution. No amount of division between the executive and legislative branch principals could override the forces of congressional constituent interest and a strong coalition, especially when Congress maintained sole authority for policy decision-making and enactment.

Conclusion

The proposed retirement of the A-10 case had a divided principal scenario with disunity between the executive and legislative branches over policy preferences. Since Congress enacted an opposing prescription to what the Air Force advocated for, the agent received less autonomy in the advisory phase. Congress endorsed an A-10 policy that was specific, imminent, durable, and enforceable, restricting the Air Force's implementation slack. This form of policy execution constrained agent autonomy during the implementation phase. Both outcomes deviated from the prevailing hypothesis in scholarly literature that an agent receives more autonomy from divided principals.⁸² Analysis of seven potential contributory variables identified key linkages to agent autonomy variation for each phase, establishing conditions that constrain rather than produce agent autonomy. Congress's sole authority to decide on a policy prescription for the A-10 and the influence of Senate committee leaders from states with A-10 units limited agent autonomy in the advisory phase. The Air Force's provision of one solution option, a strong congressional coalition, and Congress wielding unilateral power to enact policy reduced agent autonomy in the implementation phase of the A-10 case. Comparing this case to the creation of the Space Force case—another divided principal situation—illuminates patterns about agent autonomy variation and informs conclusions about agent autonomy from divided principals.

Notes

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30. Hemmerdinger, "How Hagel Spending Plan Will Transform US Military."
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recently began downsizing its A-10 force, with plans to retire all A-10s by 2029. The Air Force “retired 21 A-10 aircraft in fiscal 2023 from the 122nd Fighter Wing at Fort Wayne Air National Guard Base, Indiana.” In February 2024, the first A-10s “from the 355th Wing at Davis-Monthan . . . moved to the boneyard after nearly a half-century of flight.” Mabeus-Brown, “Davis-Monthan Air Force Base Begins Retiring A-10 Fleet”; and Losey, “US Air Force Wants to Retire All A-10s by 2029.”)

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41. Obama, Statement of Administrative Policy: S. 1376, 4–5.

42. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub L. 114-328, 130 Stat. 2000 (Dec. 23, 2016), §§ 134–135.

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44. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. 113-66, 127 Stat. 672 (Dec. 26, 2013), § 143.

45. Senate Armed Services Committee, Report 116-236, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*, § 155. (Editor’s note: Since this writing, the Air Force has recently begun to downsize its A-10s. See Mabeus-Brown, “Davis-Monthan Air Force Base Begins Retiring A-10 Fleet; and Losey, “US Air Force Wants to Retire All A-10s by 2029.”)

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59. House, History, Art, and Archives, *List of Standing Committees and Select Committees and Their Subcommittees of the House of Representatives of the United States, One Hundred Fourteenth Congress*, 4, 7; and Senate, *Committee and Subcommittee*

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61. Senate, “Party Division”; and House, History, Art, and Archives, “Party Divisions of the House of Representatives, 1789 to Present.”

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78. Senate, *Committee and Subcommittee Assignments for the One Hundred Thirteenth Congress*, 3, 6; and Senate, *Committee and Subcommittee Assignments for the One Hundred Fourteenth Congress*, 3, 6.

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80. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. 113-66, 127 Stat. 672 (Dec. 26, 2013), § 143.

81. Senate Armed Services Committee, Report 116-236, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*, § 155. (Editor’s note: See note 39 for the recent implementation of phasing out the A-10s.)

82. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.

Chapter 5

Creation of the Space Force

The second case used to test the effect of divided principals on agent autonomy is the formation of the United States Space Force (2017–19). Similar to the A-10 case, this case consists of divided principals, with the executive and legislative branches possessing different policy preferences for the Space Force.¹ In 2018, President Donald Trump proposed creating a separate Space Force that maintains, protects, and expands the number of military satellites.² The Air Force agent advocated to maintain space operations under its purview.³ Congress initially supported the Air Force's position, creating a divided principal context. Ultimately, however, a separate space-focused military branch was established.

After an overview of the Space Force's formation, this chapter presents an analysis of the dynamics of American civil-military relations in terms of the advisory and implementation phases. In the advisory phase, the outcome appears to deviate from the prevailing hypothesis that agents receive more autonomy from divided principals.⁴ Analysis of the implementation phase, however, reveals that the Air Force received more autonomy to establish the Space Force in the manner of its choosing, aligning with conventional wisdom. Examining the same seven potential contributory variables as the A-10 case identifies the variables that constrain and produce agent autonomy in each phase of the Space Force case. This case once again demonstrates that divided principals can constrain agent autonomy. However, it contrasts with the A-10 case by showing that when government principals enact policy opposing the agent's preference, the agent may prefer more autonomy to execute the policy in a manner close to its prescription.

Case Overview

The establishment of the Space Force needs to be discussed within the greater context of providing space security for the nation. A July 2016 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report highlighted vulnerabilities within the DOD hindering its ability to secure space.⁵ This report noted over sixty stakeholder organizations across the department with space acquisition, oversight, or operational responsibilities.⁶ A single individual or office with oversight for the entire space program did not exist. This lack of a centralized leadership function slowed decision-making, creating a disunity of effort and an absence of accountability for the country's space capabilities.

The GAO report also identified other space-related issues in the military services. The services historically promoted military space professionals at a lower rate than pilots in the Air Force, infantry officers in the Army and Marines, and surface warfare officers in the Navy.⁷ The report perceived these lower promotion rates as the DOD valuing space professionals less.⁸ The services also prioritized funding for space requirements below aircraft requirements in the Air Force, ship requirements in the Navy, tanks in the Army, and amphibious vehicles in the Marine Corps.⁹ This report highlighted that military branches cut budgets for space-related activities by a substantially larger percentage after the 2013 sequester, and those cuts remained in effect for space requirements when the GAO published its 2016 report.¹⁰ Funding for aircraft increased by 50 percent once the Air Force budget rebounded from sequestration, but space funding declined an additional 17 percent in this same period.¹¹ Ultimately, the report's information refocused the executive and legislative branches on national space security within the Department of Defense.

Rep. Mike Rogers, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's (HASC) subcommittee on strategic forces, took up the national space security mantle and became its champion. In a 2017 address at the Space Symposium, which brings together space leaders to discuss the future of this domain, Representative Rogers outlined current problems associated with the DOD's fragmented space organization, disjointed decision-making, underprioritized funding requirements, and inadequate space professional development.¹² These issues stemmed from the 2016 GAO report and provided the foundation for his recommendation to create a Space Force as a separate military branch, which would have placed space on par with other domains of conflict and sustained a cadre of space professionals.¹³

Chairman Rogers (from Alabama—home of one of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's [NASA] largest centers and one of the DOD's largest space bases) and the ranking member, Rep. Jim Cooper (from Tennessee), introduced legislation from the HASC subcommittee on strategic forces. This bill, an addition to the fiscal year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, called for the creation of a Space Corps as a new military service responsible for national security programs pertaining to space.¹⁴ This bill also created a subunified command for space under Strategic Command with a four-star general commander.¹⁵ From the Constitution, Congress holds the authority to create military branches under its responsibilities to raise and support armies and to provide and maintain navies.¹⁶ While a vocal minority preferred establishing a separate military branch to focus on the space domain, this Space Corps proposal met stiff resistance from the majority of Congress for two years due to concerns over an expanding defense bureaucracy and its budget.¹⁷ The

fiscal year 2018 and 2019 National Defense Authorization Acts did not require the Pentagon to create a space-centric military service, reflecting the preferred policy of the legislative branch—bolstering space functions in the Air Force.¹⁸

Aligning with Congress, the Air Force preferred to maintain space operations within its service's responsibility. On May 17, 2017, Gen Dave Goldfein, the chief of staff of the Air Force, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee's (SASC) subcommittee on strategic forces and voiced his opposition to creating a separate military branch for space.¹⁹ He stated that space had transformed from a benign environment to a warfighting domain.²⁰ Further, he asserted that a massive organizational change would slow the DOD's ability to apply tactics and techniques from land, air, and sea to space.²¹ General Goldfein testified that "any move that actually ends up separating space as opposed to integrating space . . . is a move in the wrong direction."²² The Air Force's focus was integrating space and enhancing warfighting capabilities, not separating space into its own military branch.

Besides this hearing, Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson and General Goldfein testified before subcommittees of the Senate Appropriations Committee on Defense, HASC, and SASC within the span of three months in 2017.²³ They highlighted improvements the Air Force had implemented in the space arena, such as establishing joint publications for space directing strategy and policy, naming the secretary of the Air Force as the principal DOD space advisor to provide organizational accountability, and creating a deputy chief of staff for space operations in the Air Force to speed decision-making.²⁴ During these hearings, Secretary Wilson and General Goldfein reinforced their position to maintain space capabilities under the Air Force.²⁵ General Goldfein testified against creating a separate space corps during a period when the Air Force was reviewing its "operating construct and normaliz[ing] joint warfighting."²⁶

The Pentagon is a complicated bureaucracy, and both Air Force leaders believed that adding to that in the form of another military service was not the best solution.²⁷ The Air Force estimated that standing up a separate space-centric military branch and sustaining it for five years would cost \$13 billion.²⁸ This future bill concerned Air Force leaders, as it would arrive at the same time the service was increasing its combat forces to better prepare for Chinese and Russian threats.²⁹ These concerns about expanding bureaucracy and budgets strengthened the Air Force's case to maintain space operations under its purview.

To refocus the nation on space, President Trump signed a series of executive orders targeted at space. The first revived the National Space Council on June 30, 2017, to advise the president on space policy and strategy for the country.³⁰ The council's initial task entailed providing recommendations to

address the issues the GAO report exposed.³¹ The council recommended several changes, which became a series of executive orders entitled Space Policy Directives. Some directives pertained to NASA, such as the first directive signed in December 2017 that reinvigorated human space exploration, while others affected various departments in the administration.³² On March 13, 2018, President Trump announced his proposal to create a separate military branch for space, the United States Space Force, during a speech to Sailors and Marines at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.³³ This announcement occurred ten days before President Trump unveiled his National Space Strategy and proclaimed space a warfighting domain requiring protection and increased military capability.³⁴

Although the executive branch did not possess the authority to establish a separate military branch, President Trump held the authority to create combatant commands as the commander in chief of the armed forces.³⁵ President Trump signed an executive order on December 18, 2018, establishing the United States Space Command as a functional unified combatant command.³⁶ This executive order transferred space responsibilities previously held by United States Strategic Command to United States Space Command and outlined an operational role for this new combatant command.³⁷ President Trump leveraged his authorities to establish a combatant command for space, continuing the Space Force discussion and building momentum for a new space-focused military branch.

The belief persisted in the executive branch that services are domain-centric—land for the Army, air for the Air Force, and sea for the Navy. The services focus on their primary domain, relegating space to a secondary or supporting function.³⁸ President Trump signed Space Policy Directive-4 in February 2019, dictating that the DOD develop a plan for Congress to establish a United States Space Force as a branch of the US Armed Forces within the Department of the Air Force.³⁹ The Space Force would be charged with organizing, training, and equipping military forces to operate in the space domain, similar to the responsibilities of the Air Force, Army, and Navy for their respective domains.⁴⁰ This detailed directive also outlined the organizational structure of the Space Force, its budget process and source, scope of responsibility, and operational authorities.⁴¹

Aside from President Trump, key members of the executive branch, including Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, expressed support for establishing a separate space-focused military service. While Secretary Mattis voiced concerns over determining the optimal organizational structure and budget for the Space Force, he supported establishing this new military branch and developing more service members

dedicated to space operations.⁴² In a 2018 speech, Secretary Mattis stated that a United States Space Force was necessary to protect American assets in space from adversaries like China and Russia and would transform the DOD's approach to space.⁴³ He stated that this action would elevate space's role in national security, consolidate space functions into one service, denote responsibilities for space, and develop space professionals for an increasingly contested domain that is no longer a sanctuary. Similarly, Secretary Shanahan released a memo on September 10, 2018, explaining the DOD's plans to reorganize its space activities and expressing support for a separate space-centric military branch.⁴⁴ These views reinforced the executive branch's policy preference to establish a Space Force.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, General Goldfein and Secretary Wilson continued to advocate for improving space activities while maintaining their functions under the Air Force.⁴⁵ The DOD delivered its proposal for a separate space-focused military branch according to Space Policy Directive-4. The fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act included language in the House and Senate versions to create a Space Force.⁴⁶ This new military service became law on December 17, 2019, when the legislation passed in Congress. Congress outlined the provisions of the Space Force in seven short pages, including its leadership structure and nesting it under the secretary of the Air Force—mirroring the Marine Corps. This legislation prohibited additional authorizations for military personnel and budget increases beyond those outlined in the bill. However, Congress ultimately created a separate military branch focused on space, resulting in less autonomy for the Air Force.⁴⁷ In the case of the Space Force, the Air Force, as the military agent, did not determine what space functions to perform and how to better accomplish space operations in the Air Force; instead, a new service assumed most of these tasks.

Prevailing Hypothesis Test

This research investigates the Air Force's autonomy during this case's advisory and implementation phases to determine if the military agent received more or less autonomy over Space Force policy enactment and implementation than when principals had unified preferences.

Advisory Phase

Divided principals existed structurally and situationally in the creation of the Space Force case. President Trump established his preferred policy to create a separate space-centric military service through executive orders and

public addresses, while Congress initially blocked the formation of the Space Force by removing the wording from legislation. The Air Force agent advocated maintaining space operations, acquisition, and personnel under its service responsibilities.⁴⁸ The executive branch opposed this position and acted to sustain the focus on space as a warfighting domain and generate momentum toward creating a new military branch for space. Although the majority of Congress initially prevented this prescription from being enacted, a large enough group of space supporters amassed in the legislative branch two years later and created the Space Force.⁴⁹

The prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature claims that divided principals result in a less responsive agent, granting more autonomy to the agent.⁵⁰ According to principal-agent theory, the agent can leverage the different principals' preferences to find latitude for its preferred course of action when multiple principals disagree with one another. In this case, however, key entities of the executive branch clearly opposed the Air Force's policy preference and continually progressed toward creating a space-focused military service. The executive branch leveraged its authorities to establish the United States Space Command as a functional unified combatant command and to drive a Space Force plan that was submitted to Congress.⁵¹ Instead of the Air Force finding a way to improve space activities and maintain the responsibility for space functions, Congress ultimately established a space-centric military service. This policy opposed the military agent's proposal, constraining agent autonomy in a manner that seems to be at odds with the preponderance of scholarly literature.

Implementation Phase

During the creation of the Space Force case, the executive branch became a vocal advocate for establishing this new military service. However, Congress maintained the authority to create the military branch through legislation. The 2020 and 2021 National Defense Authorization Acts contain just ten pages outlining the Space Force's organizational structure and operational authorities, specifying only a few items concerning the budget.⁵² These documents dictate that the creation of the Space Force authorizes no additional military billets but do not specify how many individuals would transfer to the new military branch.⁵³ The bills do not allow or require the relocation of any facilities or infrastructure to support the Space Force.⁵⁴ The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act did not contain a separate budget for the Space Force, as Congress provided the funds for this new service to the Air Force.⁵⁵ The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act authorized \$15.2 billion to the

Space Force—but only in the form of acquisitions, operations, maintenance, research, and development funds—compared to the Air Force’s authorization of \$153.4 billion.⁵⁶ The Air Force still receives the funding associated with Space Force military and civilian personnel and base support functions (at the time of this writing).⁵⁷ Congress also required the chief of staff of the Air Force and the chief of space operations to jointly brief the congressional national security committees every sixty days from February 18, 2020, to March 31, 2023, on the implementation of the Space Force.⁵⁸ Aside from these specifics, the language outlining the Space Force’s implementation is vague. The deadline to have certain offices stood up by or functions established by is (was) October 1, 2022, providing time to renegotiate these terms in future National Defense Authorization Acts.⁵⁹

The provisions in the 2020 and 2021 National Defense Authorization Acts provide wide latitude for the Air Force to enact the Space Force. The policy provided implementation slack since it lacked three of the four attributes—specificity, imminence, and enforceability—that restrict trade space for the agent to determine how to complete tasks.⁶⁰ Specificity in what tasks the Air Force agent needs to accomplish to create the Space Force and how the Air Force needs to accomplish these tasks is absent. While the 2020 bill immediately established a new military branch for space, the transfer of personnel is not a requirement, and numerous deadlines associated with the Space Force extend years into the future. These acts are legislation and, as a result, are durable since modification of these laws requires additional legislation. The laws’ provisions, aside from the existence of a new space-focused military service, are difficult to enforce due to their vague wording or absence of guidance. Therefore, the Air Force gained autonomy to establish the Space Force in the way it preferred. Since Congress implemented a course of action that opposed the Air Force’s option, the agent prefers more implementation slack to execute the Space Force in a way that comes close to the Air Force maintaining space operations, acquisitions, and personnel under its purview. The implementation slack associated with creating a new space-centric military service provided the Air Force the autonomy to do just that, coinciding with the preponderance of scholarly literature.

Potential Contributory Variables

In this case of divided principals, the Air Force agent found itself with less autonomy in the advisory phase and more autonomy in the implementation phase. Since the findings from the advisory phase are at odds with the prevailing hypothesis, what other variables does principal-agent theory not

consider? What causal mechanisms potentially shaped this outcome? The following analysis examines the seven potential contributory variables described in chapter 3 to draw connections to their impact on agent autonomy during the Space Force case.

Advisory Phase

Four potential contributory variables—authority allocation, diverse cabinet, geographic distribution, and partisan cohesion—are investigated to determine their influence on agent autonomy variation. This examination intends to answer questions about why the Air Force received less autonomy during the advisory phase of the Space Force case, an outcome at odds with the prevailing literature.

Authority allocation variable. The government principals maintained their respective authorities outlined in the Constitution during the Space Force case. President Trump attempted to gain momentum by crafting policy on military functions in the space domain and issuing directives related to national space security. Although the president had the authority to stand up a functional unified combatant command and did just that for space—United States Space Command—the executive branch did not possess the authority to create a new military branch.⁶¹ The authority to establish a military service rests with the legislative branch. Congress maintained the authority to create the Space Force and authorize and appropriate funds for its operations. Even though these two principals were divided on preferences for the Space Force, only the legislative branch had the authority to enact policy prescriptions for its initiation. The authority allocation variable thus reflects one principal possessing sole authority over policy decision-making. Divided principal literature assumes that government principals share both authority for the agent and the ability to enact policy preferences. This division between principals grants the agent latitude to determine what tasks to accomplish and how to accomplish them. The legislative branch having unilateral authority in the Space Force case constrained agent autonomy since policy enactment required only one government principal instead of two.

Diverse cabinet variable. The creation of the Space Force occurred during President Trump's first three years in office. Regarding the demographics of his cabinet, President Trump did not appoint any individuals from the opposing political party to his cabinet.⁶² Women and minorities each comprised 19 percent of President Trump's cabinet.⁶³ The percentage of women is the third highest during the post-Goldwater-Nichols era; President Bill Clinton's cabinet was 29 percent females, and President Barack Obama's was

36 percent.⁶⁴ Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush had lower percentages of women in their cabinet than President Trump. The percentage of minorities in Trump's cabinet is the second lowest, with President Reagan appointing minority individuals to 10 percent of his cabinet positions. President George H. W. Bush's percentage of minority cabinet members tied that of President Trump.⁶⁵ Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama had higher percentages of minority individuals in their cabinets than President Trump. These numbers reflect that Trump's cabinet emphasizes being efficient over being well-balanced, providing evidence for the lower end of the diverse cabinet variable spectrum. Agents expect cabinet members holding similar perspectives to formulate solutions and reach a consensus more easily. Congruent perspectives allow the cabinet to converge on a policy preference all members support. The efficient nature of President Trump's cabinet therefore constrained the Air Force's autonomy during the Space Force case.

Geographic distribution variable. Air Force space bases reside in California, Colorado, and Florida.⁶⁶ Virginia and Alabama are also key states for space, as the Naval Space Command and Army Space and Missile Defense Command reside in these states, respectively.⁶⁷ The 115th Congress served from 2017 to 2018, and the 116th Congress served from 2019 to 2020.⁶⁸ In the 115th Congress, the HASC consisted of sixty-two members, seventeen from military space-centric states.⁶⁹ Eleven of the fifty-two members of the House Appropriations Committee on Defense (HAC-D) represented key military space states.⁷⁰ Neither the chairman nor ranking member of the House of Representatives' national security committees were from states impacted by the Space Force issue.⁷¹ By contrast, four of the thirty-one members of the SAC-D committee—including the chairman—were from states with a military space focus.⁷² Two of the twenty-seven SASC members hailed from states with space bases.⁷³

A similar pattern emerged in the 116th Congress. Fifteen of fifty-seven HASC members and twelve of fifty-three HAC-D members were from states affected by the issue, whereas four of thirty-one SAC-D members and three of twenty-seven SASC members were from states with military space missions.⁷⁴ The SAC-D chair had constituents in military space-focused states.⁷⁵ A minority of the legislative members on the four national security committees in the 115th and 116th Congresses were from key military space states. While the chair of the SAC-D had tremendous influence in Congress, this committee is only one of the four national security committees. The geographic distribution variable thus reflects an uninfluential minority, where a few individuals concerned with the Space Force issue did not wield enough political capital to enact their policy preference initially. An uninfluential

minority is likely to possess different prescriptions than the majority. However, the preferred policy of the majority overrules it, or the majority of Congress is not concerned with the issue. These actions produced agent autonomy since the congressional majority was not invested in the Space Force issue enough to dictate policy preferences and what tasks the agent performs.

Partisan cohesion variable. President Trump, a Republican president, led the executive branch throughout the creation of the Space Force case. The 115th Congress had a Republican majority in the House of Representatives and Senate.⁷⁶ The Republican party held the majority in the Senate, whereas the Democratic party held the majority in the House of Representatives during the 116th Congress.⁷⁷ Until January 2019, the executive and legislative branches were cohesive from a political party standpoint. Subsequently, the Senate and president maintained political party cohesion. This political party makeup indicates alignment for the partisan cohesion variable. Even when different political parties existed within the legislative branch, the more influential entity, the Senate, had the same political party as the president. Similar political viewpoints shrink the preference gap between the executive and legislative branches and within the legislative branch. Consensus is easier to attain on policy preferences and what tasks the agent needs to complete when there is political party cohesion, which resulted in less agent autonomy for the Air Force.

From the hypothesized agent autonomy outcomes in table 7, the military agent expects less autonomy during the advisory phase of the Space Force case. Congress reduced the Air Force autonomy by passing legislation that created a separate space-centric military branch, the Space Force.

Table 7. Potential contributory variables for creation of the Space Force case during the advisory phase

Variable	Outcome	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy
Authority allocation	Sole authority	Less
Diverse cabinet	Efficient cabinet	Less
Geographic distribution	Uninfluential minority	More
Partisan cohesion	Partisan cohesion	Less

Implementation Phase

Next, this analysis examines six potential contributory variables—assertive executive, authority allocation, diverse cabinet, information dissemination, partisan cohesion, and robust coalition—for the implementation phase of the

Space Force case. These variables indicate the level of agent monitoring and the Air Force's expectation of rewards and punishments. The Air Force received more autonomy in the execution of the Space Force. However, the answer as to what variables led to that outcome explains why this situation aligned with the preponderance of scholarly literature.

Assertive executive variable. During his four years in office, President Trump instituted 220 executive orders—more than any other president in one term in the post-Goldwater-Nichols Act era.⁷⁸ He signed a yearly average of fifty-five executive orders, also the highest during this period.⁷⁹ The turnover rate in President Trump's cabinet was 92 percent.⁸⁰ Sixty of sixty-five cabinet members resigned or were fired—the highest turnover rate of any post-Goldwater-Nichols Act president.⁸¹ These percentages for the number of executive orders issued and cabinet turnover rate indicate that President Trump used his implied powers more than constitutional powers, suggesting the high end of the assertive executive variable. The military agent expects a higher level of punishment and monitoring from more assertive executives. This anticipation of policy direction from executive orders and removal from office based on the number of departed cabinet members constrains agent autonomy. The Air Force thus received less autonomy from President Trump's more assertive behavior.

Authority allocation variable. During the Space Force case, the government principals maintained the same authorities outlined in the Constitution.⁸² The executive branch drafts policy for the Space Force as it would for any other armed forces service. As commander in chief, President Trump oversees military space activities for the Space Force. The legislative branch wields the power to authorize and appropriate funds for military space functions. Congress, possessing the power of the purse, establishes an annual budget for the Space Force. Although the two government principals differed on policy preferences for the Space Force, both retained oversight authority as they do for every other military service. The authority allocation variable reflects two government principals possessing shared authority over Space Force implementation. This shared authority influenced policy execution and aligns with the assumption made by scholarly literature that divided principals share authority to monitor the agent and enforce an incentive structure. Agents receive latitude to determine how to accomplish tasks from principals that share monitoring authority and authority to give rewards and punishments because the divided principals have differing viewpoints about the issue. The executive and legislative branches sharing authority for Space Force policy execution produced agent autonomy because its implementation required both government principals.

Diverse cabinet variable. The execution of the Space Force occurred during President Trump's last year in office. President Trump's cabinet had the same demographics during this time as during the Space Force policy decision—no Democrats, 19 percent women, and 19 percent minority members.⁸³ The lack of opposing political party members was fairly common for post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents. The number of women and minority members remained at a moderate level compared to the other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents. These numbers indicate a more efficient cabinet and similar perspectives among the cabinet members. The members' aligned viewpoints help the cabinet converge on a way forward for policy implementation. Agents expect to receive less autonomy from efficient cabinets to determine the manner in which their tasks are performed because of the consensus the cabinet members easily reach. President Trump's efficient cabinet, therefore, reduced autonomy for the Air Force.

Information dissemination variable. From 2017 to 2019, the Air Force advocated keeping space operations, acquisition, maintenance, and personnel under its service responsibilities.⁸⁴ This option would have maintained the status quo since these functions were under the purview of the Air Force at that time. While the Air Force wanted to maintain the status quo with space as its preferred option, it also explored other policy prescriptions, such as a separate category similar to military medical personnel for space professionals.⁸⁵ The Air Force claimed that the transition from space as a sanctuary to a warfighting domain induced a multitude of changes. Thus, introducing the additional changes of a new military service, its organizational structure, and budget would not facilitate the transition of space capabilities to a warfighting domain at that moment.⁸⁶ The Air Force did not discount a new department, service, or corps in the future but viewed this transition period as inopportune for such a change. This approach of providing a recommended option and discussing the spectrum of possible solutions reflects an open form of information dissemination. The proposals offered smaller-scale buildups to bolster military capabilities in space, including acquisition and oversight authority improvements. Principals tend to give agents that provide a wide array of options more autonomy. Agents that present all possible solutions convey transparency and a willingness to find an optimal solution. Because the Air Force offered flexibility in its approach to strengthen national space security, the open information dissemination variable increased the agent's autonomy.

Partisan cohesion variable. During the initial implementation of the Space Force, President Trump, a Republican, served in office. The legislative branch of the 116th Congress was politically split.⁸⁷ The Republican party held the majority in the Senate, while the Democratic party held the major-

ity in the House of Representatives. Even with the political parties' differences in the legislative branch, the more influential entity, the Senate, had the same political party as the president. The government principals were more aligned than split along partisan lines, which provides evidence for some cohesion for the partisan cohesion variable. Political party similarities between branches tend to decrease agent autonomy. In this case, the president and Senate have the political capital to reach a consensus on how the agent should accomplish tasks and what rewards and incentives the agent should receive. These similar perspectives raise the level of oversight because the government principals align on how the agent accomplishes tasks. During the Space Force case, the Air Force, thus, received less autonomy from political party cohesion.

Robust coalition variable. Coalitions formed in the executive and legislative branches advocating for their respective policy Space Force preferences. The president revived the National Space Council, issued five space policy directives, and established the United States Space Command in hopes of inching closer toward a space-focused military branch.⁸⁸ These actions reflect a strong coalition in the executive branch with enough alignment and political capital to institute these policies. From 2017 to 2019, the four national security committees of Congress held nine hearings where Air Force leaders discussed the creation of the Space Force.⁸⁹ This level of support from congressional committees and time commitment from legislative members indicates a coalition amassed in the legislative branch around the issue of national space security. The coalition initially met stiff resistance from the majority of Congress, which blocked the proposal to create a separate space-centric military service. This coalition became increasingly stronger in the legislative branch, enabling the decision to establish a Space Force. A strong coalition in the executive and legislative branches signals the high end of the robust coalition variable spectrum. Reduced agent autonomy results when only one principal has a strong coalition because that principal possesses enough support to implement their policy preferences and determine how the military agent performs tasks. In this case, both government principals had strong coalitions, providing the agent latitude to execute its preferred option and ultimately increasing agent autonomy.

A neutral level of agent autonomy is expected from table 8, below—an equal number of variables predicted more and less autonomy for the Space Force's implementation phase. The flexibility that the Space Force legislation provided created implementation slack, in turn producing agent autonomy.

Table 8. Potential contributory variables for creation of the Space Force case during the implementation phase

Variable	Outcome	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy
Assertive executive	Implied powers	Less
Authority allocation	Shared authority	More
Diverse cabinet	Efficient cabinet	Less
Information dissemination	Open options	More
Partisan cohesion	Partisan cohesion	Less
Robust coalition	Strong coalition	More

Analysis of Findings

Although the Air Force’s autonomy increased during Space Force execution, which the prevailing hypothesis predicts, investigating the contributory variables for the advisory and implementation phases allows for comparing the Space Force and A-10 cases. Table 9 compares the hypothesized agent autonomy with the actual autonomy the Air Force received in the advisory and implementation phases. The potential contributory variables predicted one of the outcomes correctly.

Table 9. Agent autonomy predictions and outcomes for the Space Force case

Phase	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy	Actual Agent Autonomy
Advisory	Less	Less
Implementation	Neutral	More

By analyzing the variables associated with the Space Force case, possible explanations emerge for why the divided government principals constrained the Air Force’s autonomy in the advisory phase but increased it in the implementation phase. Three variables—authority allocation, diverse cabinet, and partisan cohesion—potentially caused variation in agent autonomy during the advisory phase. The president, who influences foreign policy decisions, garnered support for the Space Force and leveraged his commander-in-chief authorities to institute changes to national space security. Throughout this case, the idea of the Space Force gained traction, and more supporters joined the president’s camp. The president used his influence to rally his cabinet and Republican members of Congress to create a space-centric military service. Given that the legislative branch maintained sole decision-making authority, Congress switching its initial decision and ultimately establishing the Space Force

is unusual. In the end, a bill establishing the Space Force became law under Congress's unilateral authority to decide on creating a new military branch.

Three contributory variables—authority allocation, information dissemination, and robust coalition—possibly explain an increase in agent autonomy during the implementation phase. Congress introduced monitoring mechanisms into the law for items, such as personnel levels and budgets, that the legislative branch oversees. Because Congress maintained the sole authority for deciding on the policy, the language in the National Defense Authorization Act was tailored to the authorities Congress retained during execution. The executive branch is responsible for policy oversight, as with all military services, but did not draft the implementation laws. The transparency and good faith the Air Force showed during the advisory phase also resulted in looser congressional oversight mechanisms for Space Force areas outside of personnel and budgets. The strong coalitions that amassed in both the legislative and executive branches advocated for their position, allowing the policy execution to arrive at a solution satisfactory to both parties—creating a Space Force with no manpower or budget increases. This compromise between government principals has existed in law for two years and counting.⁹⁰

The Space Force case seems to be a fair test of principal-agent theory. The contributory variables predicted that the agent would receive less autonomy in the advisory phase, leading to the creation of the Space Force. This predicted outcome is congruent with the outcome of that phase but at odds with the prevailing hypothesis. Because the policy decision opposed the Air Force's option, the agent prefers implementation slack to execute the policy in a manner close to the agent's option.⁹¹ In this divided principal case, the Air Force desires a vague, delayed, short-lived, and unenforceable policy to execute the Space Force, which is close to the outcome the Air Force received. Stronger contributory variables helped determine the outcome of the implementation phase. The government principals sharing oversight of the Space Force creates the same principal-agent dynamics that every military branch has. Because the Space Force implementation did not drive changes of interest for most constituents—creating or eliminating new jobs and increasing or decreasing military missions in specific locations—Congress focused on specifying personnel levels and budgets. The other details concerning the Space Force that the president oversees were absent from the law or vague, potentially to provide the executive branch with an opportunity to shape policy how it sees fit. This compromise left all options open and the Space Force without any support personnel for finance, logistics, or engineering. The Air Force performs these functions along with assigning military members to specific locations, causing the Space Force to rely on the Air Force to conduct operations. These situational

dynamics overrode the other forces at play and expanded the Air Force's likelihood of gaining implementation slack. The Air Force, as a result, was able to dictate how to stand up the Space Force.

Conclusion

The creation of the Space Force case exemplified a divided principal situation where there was disunity in policy preferences between the executive and legislative branches. The Air Force received less autonomy in the advisory phase because Congress enacted an opposing prescription to what the Air Force advocated for. This outcome is at odds with the conventional wisdom in scholarly literature that an agent receives more autonomy from divided principals.⁹² Since the Air Force received implementation slack to execute the Space Force stand-up, the Air Force gained autonomy in the implementation phase. The outcome of this phase parallels the prevailing hypothesis. Examining the seven potential contributory variables identified key connections to agent autonomy variation for three variables in each phase. These variables established the conditions that constrained, rather than produced, agent autonomy. Congress's sole authority to decide on a Space Force policy prescription and the group of supporters the president rallied limited agent autonomy in the advisory phase. The government principals sharing authority to monitor the Air Force and enact a rewards and punishments structure provided more agent autonomy. The Air Force providing multiple solution options and strong coalitions for both government principals also contributed to increasing agent autonomy in the Space Force implementation phase. Analyzing these two cases and yet another divided principal situation, the repeal of the combat flying ban for women for which the Air Force's preference was adopted, highlights trends about agent autonomy variation that challenge scholarly insights about these relationships.

Notes

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4. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
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6. GAO, 2.

7. Rogers, "Remarks to the 2017 Space Symposium," 3.
8. GAO, *Space Acquisition Management and Oversight*, 2–5.
9. Harrison, *Why We Need a Space Force*.
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21. Goldfein, statement, 22.
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35. Yoo, "Continuation of Politics by Other Means," 167–305.
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44. Erwin, “New Pentagon Memo Lays Out Action Plan to Establish Space Force by 2020.”
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47. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Pub. L. 116-92, §§ 951–961.
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52. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, §§ 951–961; and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, Pub. L. 116-283, §§ 921–931.
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Chapter 6

Repeal of the Combat Flying Ban for Women

The third and final case examined is repealing the combat flying ban for women (1991–93). Divided principals are at the heart of this case, just as for the proposed retirement of the A-10 and the creation of the Space Force.¹ The performance of women in “combat support” roles in Panama and Iraq in the late 1980s and early 1990s sparked the legislative branch to craft an amendment repealing the combat flying provisions for women.² The president, secretary of defense, and most service chiefs, however, strongly opposed this repeal, stating that removing the ban would harm combat effectiveness and distract male service members.³ Within the executive branch, the chief of staff of the Air Force supported expanding roles for women in the military and held firm that the organization did not believe in barring anyone from doing any job.⁴ Ultimately, Congress’s position won the day, the combat flying ban was repealed, and women have been serving capably and honorably in combat roles since.

This case study reviews the events and context surrounding the repeal of the combat flying ban for women. It also analyzes the advisory and implementation phases of this case. The advisory and implementation phases appear to align with the prevailing hypothesis by providing the Air Force more autonomy from divided principals.⁵ For each phase of this case, investigation of the same seven potential contributory variables analyzed in the A-10 and Space Force cases identifies the variables that restrict and enable agent autonomy. The repeal of the combat flying ban case demonstrates that when government principals decide on a policy mirroring the Air Force agent’s preference, the agent may prefer to receive less autonomy to execute the policy.

Case Overview

The repeal of the combat flying ban for women was at the core of a much larger discussion involving the role of women in the military. When the United States military became an all-volunteer force in 1973, the roles of females in the military mirrored those of society.⁶ Laws outlined particular jobs for male and female service members. A Supreme Court case in 1981 assessed whether women should continue to be excluded from selective service.⁷ The highest court in the nation ruled that women are not eligible for combat, which reinforced restrictions for female service members.⁸ Even with these provisions in place, when the nation found itself in military conflicts during the late 1980s and early 1990s, women in uniform helped achieve its military objectives.

Eight hundred female service members participated in the invasion of Panama during Operation Just Cause.⁹ They served in “combat support” roles, including helicopter pilots.¹⁰ During these operations, female service members were caught in hostile firefights, led forces in battle, commanded assaults on opposing force strongholds, and earned air medals for combat-related missions.¹¹

Similarly, 41,000 women deployed to Iraq, 7 percent of all military personnel involved in the Persian Gulf War.¹² During this conflict, sixteen women died, and two women became prisoners of war.¹³ A Pentagon report about this war highlighted the vital role women played and their professionalism.¹⁴ These events blurred the lines between a combat job and a support role. A noncombat job was no longer a guarantee of safety. The notion that Americans will not tolerate women being killed in action or becoming prisoners of war was proven to be inaccurate by the operations in Panama and Iraq and the media coverage that surrounded them.¹⁵ These military conflicts occurring so close together and involving women in hostile-fire situations precipitated the formal discussion about combat roles for women in the military.

The after-action reports for these operations lauded the role of female service members. Based on the many reports praising women and to honor those female service members who perished, in April 1991, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services recommended repealing the law that excluded women from combat status.¹⁶ This committee was launched in 1951 to investigate ways to increase the recruitment and retention of women in all military services.¹⁷ Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney did not throw his support behind this recommendation.¹⁸ Instead, he waited for responses from the president and Congress.

In light of these events, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s subcommittee on manpower and personnel, called for reevaluating the law prohibiting combat assignments for women.¹⁹ To Senator McCain, this antiquated law did not reflect the reality of the battlefield, where smart bombs, aircraft, and Patriot missiles erased the distinction between the front lines and the rear.²⁰ The issue was one of capability for Senator McCain. If women could do the job, the military would expand the recruiting pool for combat jobs rather than denying them to half the population.

The House Armed Services Committee fired the first challenge to the law barring women from combat. In May 1991, Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-CO), the first woman to serve on the HASC, introduced an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act repealing the prohibition barring women from flying Air Force aircraft engaged in combat.²¹ Additionally, Rep. Beverly Byron (D-MD), the first woman to fly aboard an Air Force SR-71 aircraft,

proposed a similar amendment to repeal the Navy and Marine Corps combat flying bans.²² Congress met these legislative proposals enthusiastically and incorporated them into the draft NDAA for fiscal years 1992 and 1993.

The four service chiefs testified before the SASC's subcommittee on manpower and personnel about these proposed amendments that would allow female service members to fly in combat.²³ Three of the four service chiefs opposed making women eligible for combat, while one, Gen Merrill McPeak, chief of staff of the Air Force, advocated for allowing equal opportunity to battlefield assignments.²⁴ General McPeak endorsed integrating women into combat flying roles amid a military and DOD culture resisting this change. His belief that the military reflected the best aspects of society was foundational to his support of expanding military roles for physically qualified women.²⁵ General McPeak also pointed out that women are superior to men in taking G-forces while flying fighter jets.²⁶ He brought two female Air Force pilots to the hearing, who testified that they had undergone the same training as their male counterparts but were denied opportunities due to their gender, not their capabilities.²⁷

Like most service chiefs, President George H. W. Bush was not keen on the idea of allowing women to serve in combat flying roles. Realizing that the legislative branch wields the power to repeal the law, President Bush avoided making public statements endorsing one stance or another.²⁸ He could instead leverage his commander-in-chief policy authority during implementation. As a result, President Bush asked Congress to stand up a presidential commission to study the issue of women in combat roles. He proposed making his final determination after the commission compiled an exhaustive report with recommendations.²⁹

Sen. William Roth, a Republican from Delaware, introduced a bill in the Senate repealing the statute that barred women from combat in an aircraft.³⁰ The Senate incorporated this bill into its version of the NDAA for fiscal years 1992 and 1993.³¹ With Congress possessing sole authority over legislation, this act became law on December 5, 1991, and repealed the combat aviation exclusion for females.³² Although the combat flying ban no longer existed, the NDAA allowed but did not mandate assigning females to operational units with fighter or bomber aircraft or helicopters.³³ This legislation ultimately eliminated the combat exclusion for women in aircraft, aligning with the Air Force's preferred policy.

The NDAA for fiscal years 1992 and 1993 established a presidential commission, as requested by President Bush. This act charged the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces to study and make recommendations on issues surrounding servicewomen and their roles with a focus on combat assignments.³⁴ The Department of Defense, with presidential

support, elected not to assign female military members as combat pilots until the commission presented its findings.³⁵ The commission delivered its final report to President Bush in November 1992, recommending that women continue to be excluded from air and ground combat.³⁶ The final report also advised codifying these prohibitions into law.³⁷

The Department of Defense refused to assign females to combat units once the repeal took effect and continued prohibiting women from combat assignments as a result of these findings. The Air Force began sending females to pilot training to fly fighter and bomber aircraft at the beginning of 1992, but these women taught at pilot training courses after they completed training because of this DOD policy.³⁸ Since the enacted National Defense Authorization Act covered fiscal years 1992 and 1993, Congress did not have a legislative mechanism to force the issue until the fall of 1993. President Bill Clinton took office in January 1993 and decided to arbitrate the different perspectives between the legislative branch's repeal and the recommendation of the presidential commission.³⁹ President Clinton, in his commander-in-chief role, ordered the military branches to open combat aviation to women.⁴⁰ Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, who also took office in January 1993, established a policy in response to President Clinton's actions. Secretary Aspin's policy permitted women to compete for assignments where aircraft are engaged in combat missions.⁴¹ The legislation repealing the combat flying ban for women enacted the Air Force's preferred option and gave the executive branch the flexibility to determine how to implement this task.

Prevailing Hypothesis Test

This study analyzes the Air Force's autonomy during this case for the advisory and implementation phases. The analysis examines whether the military agent's autonomy increased or decreased for policy enactment and implementation of the combat exclusion repeal for women.

Advisory Phase

The disunity in preferences created a divided principal dynamic for the repeal of the combat flying ban for women case. Both the structure and situational context divided the executive and legislative branch principals, as in the previous cases. Congress initially proposed repealing the combat exclusion for women.⁴² The Air Force agent was the only military branch to support the ban's repeal, which aligned with Congress's legislative amendments.⁴³ President Bush made his policy prescription known by asking for a presidential commission to

study the roles of women in combat.⁴⁴ He preferred to keep the combat exclusion in place. Rather than opposing Congress head-on, President Bush handled the divided principal situation more delicately given how politically charged the issue was. With overwhelming support, Congress repealed the combat flying ban for women, allowing women to fly fighter and bomber aircraft.⁴⁵

The conventional wisdom from scholarly literature asserts that agents can be less responsive to divided principals and therefore gain more autonomy.⁴⁶ The agent leverages the disunity between principals and plays one principal off the other according to principal-agent theory. The executive branch opposed the legislative branch's policy preference. Although the other services' preferred option aligned with the executive branch, the Air Force's preferred option aligned with the legislative branch. Congress, having sole authority over the repeal of laws, removed the combat flying exclusion for women. This action enabled agent autonomy for the Air Force because its policy preference was enacted. After the contributions women made to operations in Panama and Iraq, the Air Force could recruit male and female combat aviators. Thus, Congress implemented a policy aligning with the Air Force agent's position, reinforcing the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature.

Implementation Phase

During the repeal of the combat flying ban for women, the president employed a different tactic than opposing the legislative branch head-on. President Bush realized that Congress maintained the authority to pass legislation and focused on the details of that legislation. He requested a presidential commission to study the removal of combat exclusions for women to provide latitude for policy enactment. Congress wrote the provisions of the commission into the NDAA for fiscal years 1992 and 1993.⁴⁷ The president was to appoint the commission's fifteen members within sixty days of the law being passed.⁴⁸ The commission was to produce a final report outlining recommendations for the roles of servicewomen in combat and deliver it to the president by November 15, 1992.⁴⁹ The law also called for the president to transmit the report's recommendations for future legislative actions to Congress by December 15, 1992.⁵⁰ Additionally, this legislation permitted but did not require women to be assigned to combat units, which created an allowance, not a requirement.

The provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act provided wide latitude for policy implementation. The president requested this flexibility due to his initial position on women in combat roles. The repeal of the combat flying ban for women provided implementation slack since three of four attributes—specificity, imminence, and enforceability—were absent from this

policy.⁵¹ The agent gained trade space during implementation to determine how to accomplish the task of eliminating the combat flying exclusion for women. The vague language did not specify that the military had to assign females to combat flying roles. This flexibility allowed the military services to train female fighter and bomber pilots but did not require these servicewomen to be assigned to combat units.⁵² Due to this ambiguous language, the DOD was able to prohibit females from combat assignments. Although the repeal of the combat flying ban for women was effective immediately, the law's provisions gave the presidential commission—a group of individuals hand-selected by the president—a year to study this issue, providing time to renegotiate these terms.⁵³ The National Defense Authorization Act is legislation and is durable since alteration of the law requires additional legislation. Aside from the repeal of the combat flying ban for women and the commission details requested by the president, the law's terms are difficult to enforce given their absence of guidance. The Air Force, therefore, determined the manner in which it expanded combat aviation to servicewomen. The implementation slack the legislation provided produced agent autonomy, aligning with the prevailing literature's hypothesis.

Because Congress implemented a course of action that aligned with the Air Force's option, the agent might prefer less implementation slack to execute the repeal of the combat flying exclusion through a more specific, immediate, binding, and enforceable policy.⁵⁴ After Congress repealed the flying ban, General McPeak testified before the SASC, showcasing Kelly Flynn, the first mission-qualified female fighter pilot.⁵⁵ General McPeak lauded her accomplishments and advocated that females be assigned combat roles. Because of the implementation slack provided by Congress, the executive branch could establish policy that came close to maintaining female combat exclusions. The preponderance of scholarly literature claims that agents always desire more autonomy, which might not be the case.⁵⁶ This case appears to confirm Jeffrey Donnithorne's unconventional hypothesis that when an agent's preferred option is enacted, the agent may prefer its autonomy to be constrained.⁵⁷

Potential Contributory Variables

During this case of divided principals, the Air Force agent found itself with more autonomy in the advisory and implementation phases. However, the Air Force might have preferred less autonomy during the implementation phase to ensure its preferred option was etched in stone. Since this idea conflicts with much of the conventional wisdom, what other variables does principal-agent theory fail to consider? What causal mechanisms helped shape this outcome?

The following investigation studies each of the seven potential contributory variables described in chapter 3 to analyze their impact on agent autonomy during the repeal of the combat flying ban for women case.

Advisory Phase

In the advisory phase, four potential contributory variables—authority allocation, diverse cabinet, geographic distribution, and partisan cohesion—influenced agent autonomy. This investigation studies the level of impact of these variables on the Air Force receiving more autonomy for policy decision-making in this case. This outcome reinforces the prevailing literature’s assessment that agents gain autonomy from divided principals.⁵⁸

Authority allocation variable. The authorities for each principal outlined in the Constitution remained intact during this case—policy for the executive branch and authorizations and appropriations for the legislative branch. Congress proposed an amendment to legislation repealing the combat flying exclusion for women.⁵⁹ Instead of vehemently opposing this proposal, President George H. W. Bush requested a year to study the issue with a presidential commission.⁶⁰ The legislative branch wields the authority to repeal laws. Recognizing this fact, President Bush advocated for inserting flexibility into the implementation versus fighting the policy decision. Although the government principals divided on preferences for women in combat roles, only the legislative branch had the authority to eliminate the law and initiate its policy prescription. As a result, the authority allocation variable reflects only one principal possessing unilateral authority for policy decisions in this case.

Conventional wisdom assumes that the executive and legislative branches share authority for policy enactment and for the military agent. When principals disagree, the agent can play the principals off one another to enact its preferred option. Because one principal, Congress, wielded sole authority, the agent expects its autonomy to be constrained. In this case, both government principals utilized the authorities available to them—Congress passed a law, and the president requested a commission to study the repeal of the combat flying ban for women. The legislative branch’s ultimate decision coincided with the Air Force’s option. However, the legislation seemed to be a compromise, where Congress received credit for repealing the law while providing permissive terms that did not force a conflict with the president.

Diverse cabinet variable. President Bush was in office throughout the duration of this case. The demographics of the cabinet he appointed reflect the lack of diversity of thought and perspectives of its members. President Bush did not appoint any individuals from a different political party, or Democrats,

to his cabinet, which is not atypical but can limit opposing viewpoints.⁶¹ Fourteen percent of President Bush's cabinet consisted of women, and 19 percent were minorities.⁶² These numbers represent the second-lowest percentage of women and minority members in a cabinet compared to other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents. Only President Ronald Reagan's cabinet had fewer females and minorities.⁶³ These three numbers indicate President Bush had an efficient rather than a well-balanced cabinet. These numbers also place the diverse cabinet variable on the low end of the spectrum because of its efficient makeup. Cabinet members possessing similar backgrounds and perspectives tend to generate like solutions and reach consensus quickly. This convergence of thought exemplified in President Bush's efficient cabinet was expected to constrain the Air Force's autonomy during the repeal of the combat flying ban for women case.

Geographic distribution variable. The Air Force dispersed its combat units across the United States. Combat units resided in twenty-one states at the time of this case: Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia.⁶⁴ Even with this wide geographic reach, the repeal of the combat flying ban did not adjust manning levels or the number of aircraft at each location. The combat exclusion outlined who flew the aircraft, while missions in particular locations and budgets remained the same. Consequently, while geographic context was not likely a significant factor in this case, it is still analyzed.

The 102nd Congress served from 1991 to 1992.⁶⁵ When examining the four national security committees of this Congress, the HASC had twenty-five of its fifty-nine members from the twenty-one states with combat units.⁶⁶ Twenty-six of the fifty-four House Appropriations Committee on Defense (HAC-D) members hailed from states with Air Force combat aviation.⁶⁷ Neither the chairs nor ranking members from the House of Representatives national security committees called one of these twenty-one states home.⁶⁸ Twelve of the twenty-eight SASC members were from states with combat units.⁶⁹ The SASC chairman, Sen. Samuel Nunn Jr., and the SASC ranking member, Sen. Theodore Stevens, resided in states focusing on Air Force combat aviation.⁷⁰ Thirteen of the thirty Senate Appropriations Committee on Defense (SAC-D) members were from states with combat units.⁷¹ The ranking member of the SAC-D had constituents in states affiliated with Air Force combat aviation.⁷² A minority of the legislative members on the four national security committees in the 102nd Congress hailed from key states with combat units. The leadership of the SASC and SAC-D wield a tremendous amount of influence in Congress. Committee leaders

can introduce legislation according to their policy preferences and decide what tasks the Air Force performs. This congressional committee makeup represents an influential minority for the geographic distribution variable, where few individuals impacted the outcome of the repeal of the combat flying ban issue. An influential minority tends to constrain agent autonomy due to the political capital of committee leaders to enact their policy prescriptions. In this case, however, the agent's option and Congress's policy preference aligned. Gen Jeanne Holm, the first female two-star general in the armed forces, claimed in her congressional testimony that the repeal of the combat flying ban was more an issue of conservative versus progressive ideals.⁷³ As a result, a variable tied to partisan beliefs is expected to play a larger role than a variable tied to specific locations.

Partisan cohesion variable. Throughout the repeal of the combat flying ban for women, the government principals split along political party lines. President Bush, a Republican, led the executive branch, while a Democratic majority led the House of Representatives and the Senate during the 102nd Congress.⁷⁴ This division of government principals indicates differences in the partisan cohesion variable. Conflicting political viewpoints tend to increase the preference gap between the executive and legislative branches. Consensus is more difficult to reach when the government principals hold different ideological foundations because of their political parties. Because agreement between the government principals is not easy to attain, they are unable to decide on a policy preference and what tasks the agent needs to complete. This dynamic produces latitude for the agent to enact its preferred option, which increases agent autonomy. In this case, the underlying social issues exacerbated partisan differences. Repealing the combat flying ban struck at conservative versus progressive social visions for America.

The contributory variables in table 10 predicted less autonomy for the Air Force during the advisory phase of repealing the combat flying ban. Congress, however, decided on policy that aligned with the Air Force's preference.

Table 10. Potential contributory variables for repeal of the combat flying ban for women case during the advisory phase

Variable	Outcome	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy
Authority allocation	Sole authority	Less
Diverse cabinet	Efficient cabinet	Less
Geographic distribution	Influential minority	Less
Partisan cohesion	Partisan differences	More

Implementation Phase

This analysis turns to examining the implementation phase's six potential contributory variables—assertive executive, authority allocation, diverse cabinet, information dissemination, partisan cohesion, and robust coalition. These variables reflect the amount of agent monitoring and the Air Force's expectation of rewards and punishments in this case. Although the Air Force received more autonomy in the execution of the repeal of combat exclusions for women, the variables that led to this outcome provide insight into how this case aligned with the preponderance of scholarly literature.

Assertive executive variable. President Bush signed 166 executive orders during his four years in office.⁷⁵ This number averages forty-two executive orders yearly, typical for post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama had lower averages, whereas Presidents Reagan, Clinton, and Trump initiated more executive orders per year.⁷⁶ The turnover rate in President George H. W. Bush's cabinet was 66 percent with thirty-eight of its fifty-seven members resigning or being fired.⁷⁷ Compared to other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents, this was the second-lowest turnover rate. President George W. Bush had the lowest turnover rate at 63 percent.⁷⁸ President Donald Trump had the highest turnover rate at 92 percent, so there does not seem to be a connection between turnover rates and political parties.⁷⁹ The moderate number of executive orders and low turnover rate for cabinet members reflect President Bush's use of constitutional powers more than implied powers. These indicators reveal an assertive executive variable slightly on the lower end. The military agent anticipates slightly less punishment and monitoring from this type of executive because policy direction is not overly dictated by executive orders and cabinet members are infrequently removed from office. This trade space allows the agent to accomplish tasks in the manner of its choosing. The Air Force, thus, expected to receive more autonomy from President Bush's less assertive nature.

Authority allocation variable. Throughout the duration of this case, the government principals had the same constitutional authorities.⁸⁰ The executive branch drafted policy relating to women in combat roles. In this instance, the president prohibited females from being assigned to combat units until the presidential commission completed its review and delivered its final report and recommendations.⁸¹ The DOD allowed women to train in combat aviation, but they could not be assigned to combat units after training.⁸² On the other hand, Congress provided funding resources for the presidential commission and any adjustments to the aircraft and training programs required for female pilots.⁸³ The legislative branch also received the final report

from the presidential commission, which included legislative recommendations associated with combat roles for women.⁸⁴ Both government principals thus shared oversight authority for policy implementation, reflected by the authority allocation variable. This shared authority shaped policy execution and aligns with the assumption made by scholarly literature that divided principals share authority to monitor the agent and enforce rewards and punishments. Principals with different perspectives on sharing authority can, at times, provide agents with latitude to accomplish tasks in the manner of their choosing. These divided principals enable agent autonomy since policy implementation requires both the executive and legislative branches. In this case, Congress and the president shared authority to execute the repeal of the combat flying ban policy, producing agent autonomy.

Diverse cabinet variable. The implementation of the repeal of combat exclusions occurred during President Bush's last two years in office. The cabinet had the same demographics during the advisory and implementation phases—no Democrats, 14 percent women, and 19 percent minority members.⁸⁵ The lack of opposing political party members was fairly common for post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents. The representation of females and minority members remained at the low end of the spectrum compared to other post-Goldwater-Nichols Act presidents. These demographic levels reflect a cabinet with similar perspectives and backgrounds. The cabinet members tend to reach a consensus easily due to their like viewpoints. This dynamic indicates an efficient cabinet for the diverse cabinet variable. Efficient cabinets appear to constrain agent autonomy and tend to dictate how agents perform tasks versus the agent deciding that. President Bush's efficient cabinet was therefore expected to reduce autonomy for the Air Force.

Information dissemination variable. The policy decision portion of this case moved quickly and only spanned several months in 1991.⁸⁶ The Air Force advocated for equality in battlefield assignments as long as women met the standard, aligning with Congress's preference.⁸⁷ However, President Bush supported keeping the combat exclusions in place but also offered other options, such as establishing a presidential commission to study the issues of women in combat roles.⁸⁸ These options examined various policy prescriptions versus just a binary decision of repealing or maintaining the combat flying ban, allowing the exploration of multiple solutions. The executive branch's approach provided a recommended option, even with that option opposing Congress's preference, and allowed for discussion of the spectrum of possible solutions. The president and secretary of defense included the Air Force with the other military branches for these proposals, reflecting an open information dissemination variable. Principals tend to increase autonomy for

an agent who provides more than one solution aside from the status quo. Agents presenting multiple options convey transparency and a willingness to seek an ideal solution for the principals. In this particular case, because the executive branch proposed several options for repealing the combat flying ban, the Air Force expected more autonomy.

Partisan cohesion variable. The government principals' political party split remained the same. President Bush led the executive branch during the implementation of the repeal.⁸⁹ He represented the Republican party, whereas the Democratic party had a majority in the Senate and the House of Representatives.⁹⁰ This makeup split the government principals along partisan lines, providing evidence for political party differences for the partisan cohesion variable. Political party differences between branches tend to increase agent autonomy because it is difficult to reach an agreement on how the agent should accomplish tasks and what rewards and incentives the agent should receive. During the repeal of the combat flying ban case, the Air Force anticipated more autonomy from a lack of political party cohesion, especially with this case highlighting social issues of conservative versus progressive outlooks for America.

Robust coalition variable. Coalitions with strong positions formed in the executive and legislative branches. The president and the DOD's senior leaders supported retaining the combat flying ban for women. Executive branch leaders promoted this policy prescription during congressional hearings and in media outlets.⁹¹ Congress had a coalition of individuals seeking to repeal the combat flying exclusion for women. This coalition included members of Congress with close ties to the military, women in groundbreaking national security roles, and those impressed by the actions of servicewomen who fought in Panama and Iraq.⁹² Congress's four national security committees held three hearings in 1991 where military leaders discussed repealing the combat flying ban for women.⁹³ This level of support from congressional committees and time commitment from legislative members indicate a strong coalition amassed around this issue. The coalition in Congress was strong enough to create a bill repealing the combat flying ban for women and pass that bill into law.⁹⁴ However, Congress's approval of permissive language in the legislation reflects a hesitancy to enact a resolute policy against the president, potentially indicating that the congressional coalition was not as strong as the executive branch coalition.

Once the legislative branch repealed combat exclusions, the executive branch established a policy prohibiting females from being assigned to combat units. This action exhibited a strong coalition in the executive branch with enough political capital to institute this policy. Powerful coalitions in the executive and legislative branches signal the high end of the robust coalition variable spectrum. When only one principal has a strong coalition, agent autonomy de-

creases because that principal has enough support to implement its policy preference and determine how the military agent performs tasks. In this case, although both government principals had strong coalitions, the flexibility baked into the legislative language indicates that the strength of these coalitions was not equal. The Air Force, in the end, gained latitude from this dynamic, which increased agent autonomy.

The military agent expected to receive more autonomy during the implementation phase of the repeal of combat exclusions based on the contributory variables in table 11. This prediction matched the outcome since Congress's permissive legislation increased the Air Force's autonomy.

Table 11. Potential contributory variables for repeal of the combat flying ban for women case during the implementation phase

Variable	Outcome	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy
Assertive executive	Constitutional powers	More
Authority allocation	Shared authority	More
Diverse cabinet	Efficient cabinet	Less
Information dissemination	Open options	More
Partisan cohesion	Partisan differences	More
Robust coalition	Strong coalition	More

Analysis of Findings

Investigating the contributory variables for the advisory and implementation phases provides a comparison between this case and the Space Force and A-10 cases. Although the Air Force received more autonomy during the policy decision and execution of the repeal of the combat flying ban for women, the predicted outcomes do not reflect the actual outcomes. Table 12 contrasts the hypothesized outcomes of agent autonomy with the actual autonomy the Air Force received in the advisory and implementation phases. The potential contributory variables correctly predicted one of the outcomes and the opposing outcome for the other phase.

Table 12. Agent autonomy predictions and outcomes for the repeal of the combat flying ban for women case

Phase	Hypothesized Agent Autonomy	Actual Agent Autonomy
Advisory	Less	More
Implementation	More	More

The Air Force's greater autonomy during both phases appears to align with the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature; however, analysis of the potential contributory variables provides possible explanations for this occurrence, given the divided principal context of this case. The partisan cohesion variable strongly influenced the outcome because of the social issue at hand, centered on conservative versus progressive visions for the American military. The context that also played more of a role was Congress's sole authority to decide on a policy. The legislative branch had unilateral authority in this case, and the Air Force's position aligned with Congress's preference. However, in possessing this sole authority, Congress also demonstrated restraint by allowing but not mandating combat assignments for women. After the perceived military victory in the Persian Gulf War, Congress might have been hesitant to dictate combat flying assignments for women and potentially impact combat effectiveness.

The world events of Panama and Iraq also provided a window of opportunity to capitalize on the actions and sacrifices of servicewomen in these conflicts. The Democratic majority in Congress seized this chance to create more equality in the United States armed services, and the Air Force leveraged these events to expand its pool of fighter, bomber, and helicopter pilot candidates. Although the president and most of the executive branch did not support repealing the combat flying ban, President Bush recognized that Congress held sole decision-making authority to remove the ban and focused on the implementation instead. Ultimately, a bill repealing the combat flying ban for women passed and became law, allowing women to fly combat aircraft—but not *requiring* the Air Force to implement the law.

Five contributory variables—assertive executive, authority allocation, information dissemination, partisan cohesion, and robust coalition—possibly explain an increase in the Air Force's autonomy during the implementation phase, but some variables held more influence than others. By sharing authority for implementation, each government principal used the authorities available to them to enact a decision close to their preference. Congress repealed the ban but left most of its execution to the executive branch. The law *permitted* rather than required assigning women to combat units. President Bush used the latitude this language provided to develop a policy prohibiting women from assignment to combat units. The secretary of defense doubled down on this policy, instituting punishments for branches that assigned women to those units. The split in political parties between the legislative and executive branches and the strong coalitions that amassed in each branch reinforced their respective positions. Congress stood behind its decision to remove the combat flying exclusions, while the president and secretary of de-

fense enacted creative ways to maintain the status quo that existed prior to the repeal. The results of the presidential commission, which recommended keeping women out of combat roles and reinstating the combat exclusions through law, only strengthened the executive branch's position. This compromise between government principals and dance between their shared authorities transpired over a year. Although Congress repealed the combat flying ban, women were not assigned to units with a combat mission until President Bush and Secretary Cheney left office.

Like the Space Force case, this case seems to be a fair test of principal-agent theory. The contributory variables predicted that the agent would receive less autonomy in the advisory phase. The Air Force actually received more autonomy during this phase but only because the agent's option coincided with the preference of the government principal wielding sole decision-making authority. The contributory variables predicted the agent would gain autonomy during the implementation phase. This is the outcome that occurred. The government principals sharing oversight of the repeal of the combat flying ban for women resulted in Congress ensuring the agent implemented the law, while the executive branch established barriers for assignments to combat units. The Air Force, as a result, trained women to be proficient in combat aircraft to comply with the law but kept them in the training pipeline as instructors to insulate them from combat. These outcomes coincide with conventional wisdom about agents gaining more autonomy from divided principals.⁹⁵

These situational dynamics also reinforce a key point at odds with scholarly literature. The claim that agents always want more autonomy does not hold true in this case.⁹⁶ Because the policy decision enacted the Air Force's preferred option, the Air Force agent would have preferred little to no implementation slack so that the policy would be permanent and more difficult to change.⁹⁷ General McPeak highlighted the accomplishment of the first mission-qualified fighter pilot, Kelly Flynn, while advocating for combat assignments for women as evidence of his preference.⁹⁸ In this divided principal case, the Air Force would have desired a more specific, immediate, binding, and enforceable policy to execute the repeal of the combat flying ban for women, the exact opposite of what the Air Force received. The Air Force would have preferred to train women and send them to combat aviation assignments as it advocated. Instead, it was training women as combat aviators only to have to find support or training roles for them afterward. This approach created a logjam and decreased the number of qualified aviators going to combat units.⁹⁹

Conclusion

The repeal of the combat flying ban case epitomizes a divided principal situation where there is disunity in policy preferences between the executive and legislative branches. The Air Force was in the strange position of having its preferred position enacted by Congress but then effectively blocked by its executive branch principal. Congress enacted the prescription that the Air Force advocated for. Still, the implementation slack embedded in the legislation gave the president and secretary of defense the necessary latitude to block the Air Force's ability to implement what Congress permitted. Counterintuitively, the Air Force received *too much* implementation slack to execute the integration of women in combat aviation.

These outcomes coincide with the prevailing hypothesis from scholarly literature but not through the causal mechanism of playing the principals off one another that the literature most frequently predicts.¹⁰⁰ The seven examined variables identified key connections and established the conditions that produced agent autonomy. Congress's sole authority to decide on a policy prescription for repealing combat exclusions and the differences in political parties increased agent autonomy in the advisory phase. The government principals sharing authority to monitor the Air Force and enact a rewards and punishments structure provided more agent autonomy in the implementation phase. The executive branch created policies that leveraged its authorities in an attempt to maintain some semblance of the ban. The political party split along government principal lines, and strong coalitions in each branch reinforced the position of each government principal for this social issue. These dynamics also increased agent autonomy for the Air Force. Analyzing these three cases of divided principals highlights varying patterns in agent autonomy, especially for a case like this that seemingly aligns with conventional wisdom but does not produce an outcome that the agent prefers. Comparing all three divided principal cases allows for the development of conclusions and implications going forward.

Notes

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3. Parham, 387.
4. Schmitt, "Ban on Women in Combat Divides Four Service Chiefs."
5. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
6. Schaefer et al., *History of Integrating Women into the U.S. Military*, 10.
7. Schaefer et al., 11.

8. Rostker v. Goldberg, 453 U.S. 57 (1981).
9. Parham, "Quiet Revolution," 384.
10. McSally, "Women in Combat," 1025.
11. Rafels, "Women and Combat," 11.
12. Schaefer et al., *History of Integrating Women into the U.S. Military*, 12.
13. Holm, *Women in the Military*, 453.
14. Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, 740.
15. Campbell, "Combatting the Gender Gulf," 65, 84.
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17. Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, "DACOWITS History."
18. Lichtblau, "Panel on Women in Combat Calls for Lifting of Ban."
19. Anderson, "War May Recast Roles in the Military."
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21. Knight, "Women in Combat?"
22. Holm, *Women in the Military*, 476.
23. Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993*, 102d Cong., 1st sess., June 18, 1991, 481 (hereafter *Hearing FY 1992 and 1993*).
24. Healy, "Three Service Chiefs Oppose Women in Combat Role."
25. Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearing FY 1992 and 1993*, 839–40.
26. Parham, "Quiet Revolution," 387.
27. Holm, *Women in the Military*, 483.
28. Decew, "Combat Exclusion," 70.
29. Donnelly, "Constructing the Co-Ed Military," 827.
30. Parham, "Quiet Revolution," 388.
31. Holm, *Women in the Military*, 502.
32. Grant, "Quiet Pioneers," 35.
33. Stephens, "Combat Exclusion," 18.
34. Stephens, 18.
35. McSally, "Women in Combat," 1026.
36. MacKenzie, "Let Women Fight," 37; and United States and Herres, *Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces*, 24–29.
37. Gordon, "Panel Is Against Letting Women Fly in Combat."
38. Grant, "Quiet Pioneers," 35.
39. Parham, "Quiet Revolution," 389.
40. Schaefer et al., *History of Integrating Women into the U.S. Military*, 14.
41. Aspin, "Policy on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces," 1–2; and Aspin, "Women in Combat."
42. Knight, "Women in Combat?"
43. Healy, "Three Service Chiefs Oppose Women in Combat Role."
44. Decew, "Combat Exclusion," 70.

45. Holm, *Women in the Military*, 483.
46. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
47. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993, Pub. L. 102-190, 105 Stat. 1290 (Dec. 5, 1991), §§ 541–550 (hereafter NDAA FY 1992 and 1993.)
48. NDAA FY 1992 and 1993, § 541.
49. NDAA FY 1992 and 1993, § 542.
50. NDAA FY 1992 and 1993, § 543.
51. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 27.
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53. NDAA FY 1992 and 1993, § 542.
54. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 27.
55. Parham, “Quiet Revolution,” 391.
56. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 64.
57. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 25–28.
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81. McSally, “Women in Combat,” 1026.

82. Grant, "Quiet Pioneers," 35.
83. Decew, "Combat Exclusion," 70.
84. NDAA FY 1992 and 1993, §§ 542–543.
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86. Parham, "Quiet Revolution," 386–88.
87. Healy, "Three Service Chiefs Oppose Women in Combat Role."
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92. Parham, "Quiet Revolution," 384.
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94. NDAA FY 1992 and 1993, § 541.
95. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
96. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 64.
97. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 27.
98. Parham, "Quiet Revolution," 391.
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100. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

American civil-military relations offers a unique application for principal-agent theory, where the government employs the military to provide national security for the country.¹ Scholars tailor this theory and their research to the specific dynamics between the US government and its military.² In the United States, the two principals—the executive branch and legislative branch—have policy decision-making and execution authority over the military agent.³ This study examined three cases where the principals were divided over their preferred outcome—the proposed retirement of the A-10 (2013–16), the creation of the Space Force (2017–2019), and the repeal of the combat flying ban for women (1991–93). Three new contributions to conventional wisdom resulted from this research effort. First, agents do not reliably receive more autonomy from divided principals. This finding refutes the prevailing hypothesis in principal-agent literature concerning divided principals. Second, variables other than those classically understood by civil-military relations contributed to a variation in agent autonomy. Some contributory variables, such as whether the government principals share authority for a policy decision or one principal maintains sole authority, mattered more than others in constraining or enabling agent autonomy. Other variables indicating geographic preferences, partisan differences, and coalition strength were highly influential depending on the context of the case. Last, agents do not always desire more autonomy. In fact, there may be instances where the military agent prefers less autonomy in the implementation phase. This chapter discusses the significance of these notions that are at odds with the preponderance of scholarly literature and their implications for principal-agent theory and American civil-military relations.

New Contributions to Conventional Wisdom

This study offers three new insights into the dynamics of divided principals and agent autonomy, specifically for American civil-military relations. First, the prevailing hypothesis from Deborah Avant's model claims that divided principals—in this case, a policy disunity between the executive and legislative branches—create a less responsive agent, resulting in more agent autonomy.⁴ The proposed retirement of the A-10 and the creation of the Space Force, however, yielded a different outcome. Using Jeffrey Donnithorne's framework to distinguish between advisory and implementation

dynamics reveals that although these cases had divided principals, Congress enacted an opposing policy to the military agent's preference during the advisory phases. Similarly, the Air Force's autonomy decreased during the implementation phase of the proposed A-10 retirement. These outcomes illustrate that agent autonomy looks different on either side of a policy decision. Autonomy during the advisory phase operates differently than autonomy during implementation. In both phases, however, these cases suggest that divided principal scenarios do not consistently produce more autonomy for the military agent, which disconfirms the prevailing principal-agent hypothesis from civil-military relations literature.

Second, Avant's baseline model assumes that when there are two principals, they share authority over the agent.⁵ This idea is key to the agent receiving more autonomy from divided principals because the agent plays the principals off one another to gain latitude for its preferred option. Since the Constitution outlines different authorities for the government principals—policy for the executive branch and authorizations and appropriations for the legislative branch—there are instances where one principal maintains sole authority even though a divided principal situation exists for policy preferences. The proposed retirement of the A-10 case demonstrates this dynamic, with Congress maintaining sole authority for policy decision-making and execution. The dynamics of principals maintaining sole or shared authority distinguishes American civil-military relations from classic divided principal scenarios. In sole authority situations, the government principals may use the tools at their disposal to drive their preference being realized in policy or law. In the Space Force case, for instance, the legislative branch possessed sole authority to create a new military branch; however, the president established United States Space Command and directed the Air Force to submit a plan for the Space Force to Congress. The executive and legislative branches may share authority in certain situations, but those authorities are different due to the separation of powers cemented in the Constitution. In the implementation of the Space Force decision, Congress is responsible for authorizations and appropriations to a new military service, where the executive branch establishes policy for this space-centric military branch. Consequently, divided principal scenarios in American civil-military relations do not reflect the classic dynamic. Instead, the principals have complementary authorities, where one or both branches of government possess decision-making authority or authority over policy execution.

Third, traditional principal-agent theory as expressed in Peter Feaver's civil-military model assumes that agents always prefer more autonomy.⁶ As the cases in this study suggest, however, this assumption does not always hold true in American civil-military relations. When a principal enacts the military

agent's preferred policy option, that agent may want *less* implementation autonomy for itself and all others in the policy space. This dynamic is especially relevant in the case of a divided principal when one principal has the authority to *enact* a policy decision while the other has the authority to implement it. The repeal of the combat flying ban for women illustrates this possibility. Congress possessed unilateral authority for policy decisions and repealed combat exclusions, which aligned with the Air Force's preferred policy option. But the specifics of the enacted legislation did not bind the executive branch to a specific pathway of implementation, offering instead wide flexibility for execution. This flexibility enabled the other principal, the executive branch, to erect barriers—a combat assignment restriction—during policy execution. The Air Force would have preferred that the decision-making principal give its agent *less* autonomy in the implementation phase to lock in its preferred option. Instead, the decision-making principal allowed its policy intention to be overridden by the wide latitude granted to the implementation principal. Therefore, agents do not always desire more autonomy in the implementation phase. There are situations where the military can prefer less autonomy to solidify its preference for the foreseeable future.

Contributory Variables Impacting Agent Autonomy

This study also argues that several contributory variables related to the executive and legislative branch principals contribute to the variation in agent autonomy. The prevailing literature does not account for these variables that influence divided principal situations specifically for American civil-military relations. The seven potential contributory variables examined in this research effort are assertive executive, authority allocation, diverse cabinet, geographic distribution, information dissemination, partisan cohesion, and robust coalition.⁷ They derive from prevalent theories in the scholarly literature that affect American civil-military relations but do not account for all the contextual factors of the case studies. Although this study examined these seven variables, only four strongly influenced agent autonomy—authority allocation, geographic distribution, partisan cohesion, and robust coalition.

Agent Autonomy Predictions and Outcomes

For the six outcomes from the advisory and implementation phases of each case, the contributory variables correctly predicted two of the actual outcomes. Two predictions from the contributory variables were neutral—an equal number of variables indicated more autonomy and less autonomy. Two

outcomes reflected the opposite of the agent autonomy predictions from the contributory variables. The differences between predictions and outcomes provide evidence that some variables impact agent autonomy in the hypothesized manner more than others (table 13).

Table 13. Agent autonomy predictions and outcomes for the case studies

Case	Advisory Phase Prediction	Advisory Phase Outcome	Implementation Phase Prediction	Implementation Phase Outcome
Proposed retirement of the A-10	Neutral autonomy	Less autonomy	More autonomy	Less autonomy
Creation of the Space Force	Less autonomy	Less autonomy	Neutral autonomy	More autonomy
Repeal of the combat flying ban for women	Less autonomy	More autonomy	More autonomy	More autonomy

Shared versus Sole Authority

One key variable that deserves a focused discussion is the authority allocation variable—whether the government principals share authority or whether one principal maintains sole authority—because this variable is the one fairly consistent contributory variable in all three cases and across the two phases. This variable predicted the actual outcome in five of six instances, demonstrating a compelling influence on agent autonomy. The one instance when authority allocation did not predict agent autonomy resulted from the Air Force’s option aligning with the preferred preference of Congress. This instance occurred during the advisory phase of the repeal of the combat flying ban for women case, where Congress maintained sole decision-making authority for the policy.

Aside from this one instance, sole authority situations tend to constrain agent autonomy. The A-10 case demonstrates this dynamic. Because Congress had sole authority in both the advisory and implementation phases, the legislative branch did not need to account for the executive branch’s preferences. Congress unilaterally enacted its policy preference to maintain the A-10 and wrote this prescription into law. Congress implemented binding A-10 legislation that provided the Air Force with no flexibility, ultimately reducing its autonomy.

The legislative and executive branches also seem to use the policy tools available to them in sole authority situations. Because Congress held the authority to establish a new military branch, President Trump wielded his authority to craft policy that pushed Congress in the direction of a space-focused military branch. President Trump, as a result, created United States Space Command and crafted Space Policy Directive-4, instructing the Air Force to develop and submit a Space Force plan to Congress. President Bush also used the authority at his disposal to establish a presidential commission regarding the repeal of combat exclusions legislation. Congress maintained the sole authority to repeal the combat flying ban for women. Instead of opposing Congress on a sensitive social issue, the president requested a commission study the roles of women in combat in attempts to drive his preference. Although one government principal can possess sole authority due to the separation of powers granted by the Constitution, the other government principal will leverage their available policy instruments to push toward their preferred option.

Depending on how authority is allocated—shared versus sole—the government principals can tailor their strategies in both the advisory and implementation phases. There are instances where one principal in the advisory phase sets up another principal for action in the implementation phase. During the repeal of the combat flying ban case, Congress held policy enactment authority, but the executive branch implemented the policy. The permissive language in the law provided the president with the flexibility to restrict combat assignments, which continued to prevent women from flying in combat. Congress similarly set the president up to produce policy for the Space Force. The legislation covered the areas of congressional authority—budgets, basing, and manpower—and left the remaining details associated with standing up a new military branch to the president and secretary of defense. Sole versus shared authority, thus, produces dynamics that require the government principals to navigate their authorities in the advisory and implementation phases. These dynamics distinguish American civil-military relations from traditional divided principal scenarios and greatly influence autonomy for the military agent.

Geographic Impacts

Besides authority allocation, the contributory variable of geography influenced agent autonomy for the issues of basing decisions, manpower adjustments, or budget distributions in certain states. Congressional preference tends to be strong in these instances, which the proposed retirement of the A-10 reflected. By eliminating this combat aircraft, the money flowing to several states

and the number of government jobs on particular bases would decrease. Influential individuals from those states fought hard to ensure these changes did not occur. Not only was the retirement of the A-10 blocked, but the detailed legislation required the monetary levels, number of aircraft at each location, and personnel associated with the A-10 to remain the same. The executive branch preference, on the other hand, tends to be weak on issues involving monetary or personnel impacts to specific bases. In the A-10 case, the executive branch issued two statements outlining the president's position but did not issue an executive order or craft policy for this combat aircraft. Geography will not impact every divided principal case. The Space Force's creation and combat flying ban repeal dealt more with organizational and social change. But when geography is a factor, congressional actions seem to influence agent autonomy.

Partisan Cohesion

Partisan cohesion influences agent autonomy when the issue concerns organizational or social change. The repeal of the combat flying ban demonstrated the dynamics associated with partisan differences. Opening combat flying roles to females revolved around conservative versus progressive views for America. Congressional preference tends to be weak in these instances, as demonstrated in the repeal of combat exclusions, which opens the door for the executive branch. Although Congress eliminated the flying ban, the permissive language allowed the president to execute the legislation in a manner close to the combat exclusions being in place. Congress was aware of the executive branch's strong preferences and crafted a compromise where the legislative branch received a victory for repealing the law and the president implemented a policy restricting women from combat assignments. For social changes such as removing the flying ban, the executive branch preference tends to be strong because the president and secretary of defense oversee policy for the military and operationally lead the military from a commander-in-chief and chain-of-command perspective. Establishing the presidential commission to study the roles of women in combat represents these strong executive branch preferences. Like geography, conservative versus progressive views will not always be a factor, but when they are, partisan cohesion will affect the military agent's autonomy.

Robust Coalitions

The level of interest the government principals have in an issue is key to its outcome and can be reflected by the strength of coalitions. The government principal with the stronger preference seemed to prevail in each case—Congress blocked the retirement of the A-10, a president pushed for the Space Force, and

a president maintained a restriction on combat assignments for women. The coalitions mirrored these preferences and rallied around the government principals to support their position. These preferences are also interwoven into the dynamics of authorities, resulting in the executive or legislative branch waiting their turn for action to express their strong preference. Congress displayed its clear-cut position on the A-10 by prohibiting its storage, divestiture, and retirement and maintaining its infrastructure and personnel. President Trump built momentum for a space-centric military branch by establishing a space combatant command and directing the Air Force to submit a Space Force plan to Congress. President Bush exhibited his views to maintain combat exclusions by requesting that a presidential commission study combat roles for women and enacting a policy that restricted women from combat assignments. Since the government principals possess limited political capital and determine how to spend it, the government principal with the stronger preference and, in turn, more robust coalition seems to prevail.

Agent Autonomy Preference in Advisory and Implementation Phases

Most principal-agent and American civil-military relations literature focuses on the military executing the government principals' policy. This literature does not distinguish the military roles of policy advisement and policy execution. However, Donnithorne's model differentiates between the advisory and implementation phases.⁸ Agent autonomy can differ in the two phases as evidenced by the creation of the Space Force case. The Air Force's option was not enacted during the policy decision-making process, but the legislation provided more autonomy during policy implementation.

As all three cases demonstrate, the government principal's policy decision during the advisory phase sets conditions and informs decisions for the agent's autonomy preference in the implementation phase. The policy decision to create the Space Force, for example, opposed the Air Force's option, creating the foundation for the Air Force to prefer more autonomy in the implementation phase to execute establishing the Space Force in a manner close to its preferred option.

Conversely, Congress's decision to repeal the combat flying ban for women aligned with the agent's option. This decision established the baseline for the Air Force to desire less autonomy in the implementation phase to solidify the repeal of combat exclusions. Instead, the agent received more autonomy to execute the flying ban repeal, leading to policies barring females from combat assignments. If Congress constrained agent autonomy in the implementation

phase, the Air Force's option would have been cemented in legislation, eliminating the flexibility to erect such barriers. With the constant changes in American politics—two- to six-year terms for Congress and four-year terms for the president—policy changes seem inevitable, but creating, modifying, or eliminating laws is much more difficult. Thus, there are situations where agents want less implementation autonomy to lock in their preferred option. Less autonomy may especially be desired in divided principal scenarios where one principal has the authority to enact a policy while the other has the authority to execute it.

To distill these examples into general rules, if the government principals enact the agent's preference, the agent seems to prefer *less* autonomy in the implementation phase to solidify the decision. The reverse is also apparent. If the principals enact an opposing preference to the agent's option, the agent tends to prefer more autonomy to implement the policy in a manner close to the agent's prescription. Thus, agents do not always desire more autonomy in the implementation phase; the agent's preference for autonomy can differ and depends on the policy decision in the advisory phase.

Answers to Research Questions

This research explores the following questions: *Under what conditions do divided principals create greater autonomy for the agent rather than less autonomy? How might divided principals constrain, rather than increase, agent autonomy?* In answering the first question, the proposed retirement of the A-10 and the creation of the Space Force provide evidence to disconfirm the prevailing hypothesis. These cases illustrate that agents do not reliably receive more autonomy from divided principals. Additionally, this study identifies seven conditions or contributory variables that potentially constrain agent autonomy in American civil-military relations. The four previously discussed variables—authority allocation, geographic distribution, partisan cohesion, and robust coalition—provide the conditions that refute the hypothesis from a preponderance of scholarly literature. In divided principal situations, several scenarios could arise that constrain agent autonomy: one principal has sole authority for decision-making or policy execution, geography influences preferences, social or organizational issues divide conservatives from progressives, or one government principal feels more strongly about an issue and amasses a more robust coalition. The agent might also prefer reduced autonomy in the implementation phase when the government principals enacted its policy prescription in the advisory phase. Therefore, this study answers the

research questions and identifies a range of possible outcomes for agent autonomy from divided principals.

Implications for Principal-Agent Theory and American Civil-Military Relations

This project's three contributions have implications for principal-agent theory and American civil-military relations. For principal-agent theory, the literature should recognize that the division of principals does not always, or even reliably, lead to greater autonomy for an agent. Thus, principal-agent literature should outline circumstances where divided principals contribute to constraining agent autonomy. Principal-agent literature should also address divided principal situations where principals have complementary authorities or when one principal maintains sole authority. The assumption that principals share authority does not encompass the entire range of principal authority arrangements. Finally, expanding the conventional wisdom to account for instances where agents prefer less autonomy allows principals to adjust their strategies of monitoring, rewards, and punishments. Principals can tailor their strategies to account for an agent's preference for autonomy in each situation.⁹ These scenarios provide for a richer discussion and acknowledge the spectrum of agent autonomy outcomes, incorporating additional nuance into principal-agent theory.

The contributions from this research also have implications for American civil-military relations, especially for the Air Force's policy advocacy and execution. Since the executive and legislative branches both serve as government principals for the Air Force agent, the interactions between these branches and their dynamics that differ from classic divided principal scenarios influence agent autonomy outcomes. The Air Force can adjust its policy prescriptions to account for the power of divided principals to enable or constrain its autonomy. It can develop military strategies for policy advisement and implementation with the consideration that government principals will not always share authority. Further, strategy development should include the influences of geography, partisan differences, and the strength of coalitions. Since the executive and legislative branches tend to leverage the tools at their disposal, the Air Force can consider this practice. Recognizing that one principal can set another up for action allows the Air Force to navigate the distinct dynamics of American civil-military relations. The Air Force, in turn, can convey its desired level of autonomy and work with the government principals to draft policy or legislation.

These three contributions to scholarly literature—variation in agent autonomy from divided principals, shared versus sole government principal authority, and differing agent preference for autonomy—expand principal-agent theory and American civil-military relations in explaining the spectrum of agent autonomy outcomes. These contributions offer insights for practitioners developing military strategy, especially in divided principal situations. Military officers can develop strategies that account for these nuances of American civil-military relations to effectively pursue political objectives.

Notes

1. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 68–95.
2. Feaver, 54–58.
3. Brooks and Stanley, *Creating Military Power*, 82–83.
4. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*, 130–41.
5. Avant, 130–41.
6. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 64.
7. Martorano, “Balancing Power,” 205–34; and Hammond and Knott, “Who Controls the Bureaucracy?,” 123–24.
8. Donnithorne, *Four Guardians*, 27.
9. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 68–95.

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