

Theorizing Desecularization of the Military: The United States and Israel

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Abstract

This article addresses scholarly deficiencies in identifying the conditions under which the desecularization of militaries takes place. To theorize this process, two militaries are studied, the United States and Israel. Arguably, six drivers sequentially generate the desecularization of the militaries: (1) Militaries largely mirror the growing influence of religion in the broader society. However, intramilitary drivers play their role in promoting/mitigating the extra-military mechanisms of desecularization. Thus, (2) organizational interests along with external constraints drive militaries to promote religious diversity, which may (3) lead to the empowerment of religious actors, and thereby to further desecularization through religious intolerance, and to (4) reliance on the spiritual and religious services provided by military chaplains, and jointly stimulate (5) the use of religion to motivate military sacrifice. By religiously increasing the symbolic value of military sacrifice, (6) religiosity becomes more naturally associated with good soldiering, thereby reshaping intramilitary hierarchies and, hence, further triggering desecularization.

Keywords

deprivatization, desecularization, religious diversity, military religious

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Introduction

In the post–Cold War era, there are indications that religious authorities (chaplains, rabbis, and churches) have expanded their influence within specific militaries, leading to growing interference in military affairs and provoking political debates. In the United States, for example, in contrast to declining religiosity during the Vietnam War Era (Hassner, 2016b, pp. 2548–2785), evangelical chaplains are now wielding significant power within the military and are challenging the norms of religious diversity (Hansen, 2012, p. 199). This reached a peak during the Iraq War, and in 2005, allegations were voiced against religious intolerance at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Indeed, a formal group, tasked to investigate this issue, found “a religious climate that does not involve overt religious discrimination, but a failure to fully accommodate all members’ needs and a lack of awareness over where the line is drawn between permissible and impermissible expression of beliefs” (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2005, p. i).

In Israel, growing religiosity in the armed forces, promoted by the increasing presence of religious soldiers (Libel & Gal, 2015), has led to increased involvement by external religious authorities in the management of military affairs (Levy, 2016). Acknowledging this process, in 2011, the Head of the Manpower Directorate warned against allowing the empowerment of religiosity within the ranks to erode the joint service of religious and secular soldiers (Harel, 2011).

Indeed, students of civil–military relations have acknowledged that at the very least this new issue deserves scholarly attention. In the introduction to his book comparing the religious environment in which various militaries function, Hassner (2014) lamented, “. . . scholars of the military have yet to assemble the tools required for understanding the roots, characteristics, or consequences of religious practices in the armed forces” (p. 14). Attempting to remedy this lacuna, Hassner’s collection analyzed military–religious relations from different perspectives. Thereafter, Hassner (2016a) offered several hypotheses about the role of religion in the military but still left several significant gaps.

As Hassner (2014) and Patterson (2014) indicate, the military reflects and replicates the relations between religious and nonreligious groups and institutions in civilian society. Nevertheless, in assessing this reflection and the diffusion of religious values in the military, we should consider variations in their level and extent. For example, alongside its task to defend national sovereignty, the military is the most prominent tool for promoting national socialization, and this distinguishes it from society at large. In this regard, it may socialize its soldiers toward sacrifice in ways which are imbued with nationalist and religious sentiment. Another example pertains when the military’s organizational needs, related mainly to human resources, constrain its policies and lead it to diverge from its broader society (see Michalowski, 2015, on the case of the French Armed Forces, in which shortfalls in human resources led it to accommodate the needs of religious soldiers to a greater extent than in the public sphere).

It follows that relations between the military and religion cannot be attributed exclusively to the surrounding society. Scholars should analyze how the military internally reinforces or undermines the extra-military social-cultural dynamics of these relations, thereby reinforcing or weakening religious influence within its ranks. To this end, it is necessary to map and identify the drivers of this increasing or decreasing influence.

My empirical point of departure is that desecularization of the military occurs in both the United States and the Israeli armed forces, as the examples above demonstrate. Furthermore, as indicated by the findings drawn from nine different militaries, in “religiously homogeneous and religiously pluralistic societies, and in religious and secular states, religious practices in the military continue to fluctuate, bedevil decision makers, and provoke heated debate” (Hassner, 2014, p. 10). However, even if desecularization is not the dominant process, analysis of the drivers promoting secularization or desecularization is required. Furthermore, analysis of each driver and its impact will assist in operationalizing desecularization.

Desecularization of the military is conceptualized in accordance with Casanova’s (1994) influential argument about the “deprivatization” of religion that has become more apparent since the 1980s. The deprivatization of religion refers to “the process whereby religion abandons its assigned place in the private sphere and enters the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society to take part in the ongoing process of contestation, discursive legitimation, and redrawing of the boundaries” (pp. 65, 66). Berger (1996) went even further, concluding that “[t]he assumption that we live in a secularized world is false: The world today, with some exceptions attended to below, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever” (p. 3).

As part of this process, religious institutions and movements may try to assume prominent public roles in the military. Desecularization of the military, therefore, comprises a strengthening of religious elements in the military’s culture, symbols, ethics, and conduct. Note that desecularization refers to a *process*, a transition from a lower to a higher level of religious influence rather than a final position. Note also that there is a dispute about whether the revival of religion reflects world events or a change in political scientists’ assumptions about this development (see Eroukhmanoff, 2016). However, this debate is less intense regarding Western societies, and I will focus on how actors translated this revival into practice rather than on the material impacts of world events.

It is argued that six drivers (see Figure 1) sequentially generate the desecularization of the militaries. (1) Militaries largely mirror the growing influence of religion in the broader society. However, intramilitary drivers play their role in promoting or mitigating the extra-military mechanisms of desecularization. Thus, (2) organizational interests along with external constraints drive militaries to promote religious diversity, which may (3) lead to the empowerment of religious actors (groups and chaplains), and thereby to further desecularization through religious intolerance, and to (4) reliance on the spiritual and religious services provided by military chaplains, and jointly stimulate (5) the use of religion to motivate military sacrifice.

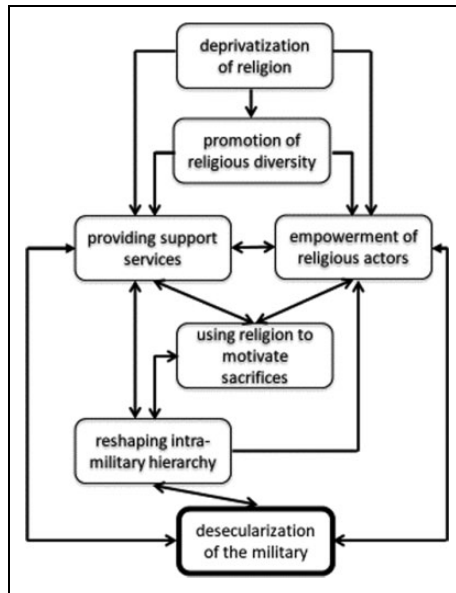


Figure 1. The process of desecularization.

By religiously increasing the symbolic value of military sacrifice, (6) religiosity becomes more naturally associated with good soldiering, thereby reshaping intra-military hierarchies and, hence, further triggering desecularization. As I will demonstrate, military religion is not a unified culture, but in each sequence of the process, it is being reinterpreted and harnessed militarily.

Methodologically, the goal of this article is to develop a (middle-range) typological theory about the desecularization of the military rather than to offer a grand theory or to test existing models. A typological theory is one which:

... specifies independent variables, delineates them into the categories for which the researcher will measure the cases and their outcomes, and provides not only hypotheses on how these variables operate individually, but also contingent generalizations on how and under what conditions they behave in specified conjunctions or configurations to produce effects on specified dependent variables. (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 235).

Such theories “specify the pathways through which particular types relate to specified outcomes,” although the same outcome (in this case, desecularization) can arise through different pathways (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 235).

In this spirit, my focus is on the desecularization of democratic fighting militaries, specifically those of the United States and Israel, to develop (rather than test) hypotheses about the conditions under which desecularization advances. I selected

these militaries for three reasons. First, in both cases, there is ample research into the relations between religion and the military which provides a good starting point for theory building. Second, both meet a specific set of conditions: They are democracies without strict constitutional rules regarding the privatization of religion (unlike France, for instance), inevitably making their militaries susceptible to religious influences; they have engaged in the politically controversial use of force on a large scale, deploying religiously diverse and apolitical militaries. Thus, they are particularly appropriate for studying how religious groups leverage religiosity to affect the entire military culture and increase their intramilitary power as motivators and legitimators of conduct and sacrifice. Such conditions are less likely among armies involved mainly in small-scale peacekeeping missions rather than significant external armed conflicts (such as the Indian Army since the 2000s), or when they are less susceptible to religious influences. Third, these countries differ in terms of culture, legal frameworks institutionalizing state–church relations and models of recruitment (the draft in Israel vs. the All-Volunteer Force in the United States).

However, it is precisely this difference that helps us develop hypotheses about the drivers of desecularization. This is the “method of agreement,” in which “the analyst explores cases with different characteristics and similar values on the study variable, looking for other similarities between the cases, and nominating these similarities as possible causes or effects of the variable” (Van Evera, 1997, pp. 247–249). Comparing extreme cases, moreover, can yield insights about principles that might be applied elsewhere (Patton, 2002, pp. 232–234, 581).

The ability to generalize from the two cases is probably limited; these two militaries may be experiencing unique processes, while many other militaries are secularizing. However, by mapping the drivers, we can also understand the conditions under which desecularization will *not* occur. Note that this discussion is about the diffusion of religious values into the military; assessment of the impact of the military on society in general, and on religiosity in particular, is beyond the scope of this study. The next section presents the drivers of desecularization and is followed by an empirical analysis of the two militaries.

Drivers of Desecularization

As can be inferred from the existing literature on the relations between religion and the military, six sequential drivers lead to desecularization of the military in democratic societies in the post–Cold War era.

Driver #1: The deprivatization of religion. Since the 1980s, modern religion has returned to the public sphere in Western societies, or in other words, it is becoming deprivatized (Casanova, 1994). As posited earlier, intramilitary factors (drivers) reinterpret and modify this phenomenon, as follows.

Drivers #2 and 3: Promoting religious diversity and empowering religious actors. Deprivation of religion may drive religious groups to legitimately extend their agenda of desecularization of the public sphere to the military; at the same time, it encourages militaries to emulate processes of desecularization and thus enhance their legitimacy in the broader society. Militaries, then, may promote religious diversity as a layer of diversity management (Driver #2), which refers to “the rhetoric and formal and informal practices for dealing with the needs and demands of groups that are socially defined as distinct” (Lomsky-Feder & Ben-Ari, 2013, p. 194). In the case of religiosity, armies accommodate religious requests and recognize individuals’ right to practice their religion by providing chaplains, respecting dietary rules, permitting religious apparel, and allowing time off for religious observance (Michalowski, 2015).

However, the character and boundaries of diversity are largely determined by the bargaining power of the groups involved, while their expectations and claims are mainly defined by the nature of their general agenda (Lomsky-Feder & Ben-Ari, 2013). Rather than solely being acknowledged for their diversity, religious groups may seek to reshape military culture. Furthermore, given that cultural conflicts in society at large are reflected in the military, extra-military religious actors (such as churches and other religious associations) may seek to gain a foothold within the military and thus an advantage over other groups. In any case, policies of diversity operate within a legal context of state–religion relations.

Finally, the promotion of diversity may yield the opposite result of religious intolerance (Driver #3). This happens if religious actors, legitimized by the principle of diversity, try to assume prominent roles in the military to take advantage of their power.

Driver #4: Providing support services. The enhanced, diversity-driven presence of chaplains and their reinforced status within the ranks may lead them to assume new roles (with mutually reinforcing impacts). Such roles are related to ethical dilemmas that have emerged following the changing nature of warfare: growing military engagement with noncombatants in urban warfare, counterinsurgencies, and combat against terrorism, especially among Muslim communities. Military chaplains stepped into the ethical vacuum created by these dilemmas, providing spiritual care and answering both soldiers’ and commanders’ questions (Todd & Butler, 2013). After all, the ethics of the just war were traditionally rooted in theological writing, and in the post–Cold War era, moreover, chaplains engaged with ethical issues and were trained to respond to ethical problems (Rock, 2011). At the same time, chaplains expanded their traditional roles as providers of psychological services in an era of increased sensitivity to the human costs of wars and served as a liaison during the fighting among Muslim communities (see more below).

Driver #5: Using religion to motivate self-sacrifice. The presence and power of religious actors and the values they disseminated within the ranks may be used to motivate

sacrifice. Wars of choice—the nonexistential wars fought by the West since World War II (even those initiated as wars of necessity)—offer wide scope for domestic debates about their success, alternatives, risks, and costs (H. Smith, 2005, p. 495). A growing reluctance in society at large to sacrifice life in war has resulted in increased casualty sensitivity. Thus, militaries seek ways to justify such sacrifices, especially death (Ben-Ari, 2005). Furthermore, since the 1990s, postmodern values have increasingly permeated the military in many industrialized democracies challenging the traditional model of military culture that values comradeship, service to the nation, obedience, conformity, and sacrifice (Patterson, 2014, pp. 235, 236). This conflict is even stronger in light of the tension between military values and those promoted by powerful business organizations. The logic of business is distinctly consequentialist or teleological, while the military's logic is oriented toward cultivating virtue, irrespective of instrumentality (Todd, 2009, p. 80).

Religion can thus motivate military sacrifice by portraying war to the ranks and the public as religious, while capitalizing on the existing availability of religious actors. The new global security discourse signifies a postmodern return to religious wars (Bigo, 2012, p. 209) in the sense that religious motivations and symbols play a more prominent role. Although such a religious resource has always been required, particularly in wars of a more existential nature (see Herspring, 2001, pp. 39–42, on World War II), it becomes increasingly crucial as nonexistential wars become harder to justify. Moreover, in the post–Cold War era, religiosity in general is used in the public sphere to motivate sacrifice, not only in the military as traditionally assumed by military chaplains.

In general, the religious portrayal of wars enhances the willingness to sacrifice by using religion to define what constitutes a threat (Hassner, 2014, p. 5) and by training soldiers to believe in the absolute logic of right versus wrong (Eroukhmanoff, 2016, p. 372). Religion can take the sacrifice out of the cost-benefit equation (Johnson & Reeve, 2013, p. 76), especially since “the sufferings of the soldier are endured because the benefits of the social entity he dies for exceed the cost of his life” (Brænder, 2009, 27).

To this end, religion sharpens the distinction between “us” and “them” as belonging to conflicting societies and underpins social bonding (Appleby, 2000, pp. 302–308; Hervieu-Leger, 2000, p. 165). At the same time, religion helps make the enemy nation seem inferior by extolling one's own as possessing superior virtues. Mobilization for war can be based on symbolic exclusions, marking and legitimating ethnic boundaries and hierarchies (see Gorski & Türkmen-Dervişoğlu, 2013, pp. 202, 203). Particularly instrumental is the religious idea of a nation as chosen by divine promise, engendering a sense of exclusivity and superiority (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 48), thus justifying sacrifices and making the war socially meaningful. In a religious war, sacrifice is not required for the protection of land or economic resources, but for the very identity of the fighting nation and its God-given moral beliefs. In turn, as religion is a symbolic resource used to motivate sacrifice, the status of actors possessing this resource is further elevated.

Driver #6: Reshaping the intramilitary hierarchy. With the increasing symbolic value of military sacrifice and socialization by the chaplaincy, Driver #5 impels the reshaping of the intramilitary hierarchy. If military sacrifice is religiously praised publicly and in the military discourse, the status of those whose sacrifice is associated with the military's perceived religious mission is appreciated more than that of soldiers from military or civilian secular groups (assuming the public can distinguish between groups according to their religiosity).

By associating religiosity with good soldiering, not only do the religious networks disseminate their religious values, but they also use their religious faith as what Bourdieu (1986) termed "symbolic capital," claiming recognition of their military authority and competence. Practices of classification, demarcation, and hierarchies are thus created within the military. They can affect the actual status of specific groups, or at least bolster their self-esteem and substantiate their claim to higher status or recognition vis-à-vis other groups. Note that the issue here is not the formal promotion of members of a specific group, but rather their social and symbolic status within the organization. In turn, whenever secular authorities in the military acknowledge this linkage, their motivation to accommodate increasing religiosity and those who promote its values to the soldiers is higher, thus reinforcing the former drivers.

Consequently, desecularization takes place and further reinforces the drivers by bolstering the status of religiosity and its promoters in the military. In the next section, the empirical cases will be used to further develop these hypotheses.

The Case of Desecularization in the U.S. Military

As part of the deprivatization of religion in America (Driver #1), the 1980s saw the public reemergence and mobilization of evangelical Protestantism as well as the transformation of American Catholicism from a defensive private to an assertive public denomination (Casanova, 1994, p. 8).

As early as World War I, the military reinforced a policy of religious diversity within the ranks which was strengthened during World War II and its aftermath (Driver #2). This policy involved accommodating the needs of new religious groups, promoting universal and pluralistic content, and diversifying the social sources of the chaplaincy (Stahl, 2017, pp. 13–18). By promoting religious diversity during World War II, the state even "used religion to streamline its diverse and ethnically fragmented citizenry into more manageable groups" (Stahl, 2017, p. 17). From a legal standpoint, with the prohibition on state-sponsored religion and partial separation between church and state (Michaelson, 2010, pp. 814, 815), the institution of religious diversity in the military was developed by leaning on the First Amendment's guaranty of the free exercise of religion (Sandhoff, 2017, p. 172).

Since the 1970s, with the agenda of promoting their conservative values in the public sphere, evangelicals (of the various streams) leveraged diversity policies to increase their influence within the military. This, despite, or perhaps because,

American society had become more religiously diverse and more secular (Loveland, 2014, pp. 17–19). There was a significant presence of chaplains from conservative evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal churches within the military. As Bacevich (2005, pp. 139–144) maintained, evangelicals filled the vacuum created by the dwindling number of mainstream Protestant military chaplains during the unpopular Vietnam War. Subsequently, and even more during the Reagan administration in the 1980s, the armed forces aligned with the evangelical movement, just as the politics of the officer corps became more conservative and Republican following the war. The evangelical movement, argued Bacevich, had a clear purpose to reduce the emerging division between soldiers and society encouraged by the liberal elites' show of disrespect for the military. Therefore, military commanders encouraged the growing involvement of evangelical chaplains to inspire and educate the troops.

This demonstrates that the military does not always reflect societal trends. Extra-military processes, such as liberalization, may actually encourage religious groups to enhance their position in the military, on the assumption that, as a conservative organization, it would be more attentive than others to religious and nationalist values.

The growing presence of evangelicals, however, diversified religious beliefs but did not promote diversity in the U.S. military (Driver #3). In the United States, a chaplain's nomination requires church endorsement, and it is to their churches that most clergy owe their primary loyalty (Hansen, 2012, p. 163). So, believing that their particular faith was the only "true Christianity," the evangelicals regarded their military chaplains as fulfilling a missionary agenda aimed, *inter alia*, at converting military personnel to their faith. In this spirit, the evangelicals challenged military programs such as the Protestant General Service, which was adapted to the religious needs of a broader audience, and incorporated their own sectarian beliefs into the services they provided (Loveland, 2014, pp. 25, 26). Committed to the obligation to promote religious diversity, the military allowed evangelical chaplains to conduct separate services, departing from the previous, unified curriculum (Loveland, 2014, pp. 170–188).

Since the 1990s, evangelical and secular trends have increased simultaneously, and the military has mirrored this development. However, seeing those trends as both an opportunity and a threat, evangelical chaplains have leveraged them to further combat secularism in the military and disseminate their beliefs (Loveland, 2014, pp. 170–188). Reaching a climax with the accommodation of homosexuality in the military in the 1990s, liberalization further galvanized the evangelicals' agenda (Hansen, 2012, pp. 169, 170). Since the 1990s, for the first time, proselytizing became an issue in the military when the evangelical chaplains claimed the right to evangelize under the guise of the free exercise of religion, while simultaneously defending their right to incorporate sectarian content in public prayers (Loveland, 2014, pp. 170–188).

By 2012, evangelicals had taken over 60% of the military chaplaincy posts, while only about 17% of service members identified as evangelical (Military Association

of Atheists and Freethinkers, 2012) and evangelical Protestants comprised around 25% of the population in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2015). About 20% of active-duty members identified as Catholics—more or less reflecting their proportion of the population (Sandhoff, 2017, p. 171)—but unlike their evangelical peers, Catholic chaplains accommodated religious diversity rather than intolerance (Hansen, 2012, pp. 119–163).

Tensions regarding evangelical proselytizing, allegedly promoted by officers and faculty at the U.S. Air Force Academy, came to a head between 2005 and 2006 and culminated in a formal inquiry. The allegations, many of which were confirmed, claimed that public prayers had become a mandatory, routine part of meetings, meals, ceremonies, and other events. In the debates that erupted, both sides mobilized their churches, and the rights of chaplains to freely practice their religion clashed with those of adherents of minority faiths and nonbelievers. Loveland (2014) described this debate as a “culture war,” which was partly mitigated in 2006 but nevertheless emerged again in similar complaints by service members against intolerance, especially in deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan (pp. 231–235). As Sharlet (2009) noted, officers who endorsed specific religious organizations used their positions to religiously socialize their subordinates. Evangelicals, he argued, even fomented “a quiet coup within the armed forces” (p. 33). However, the military establishment, albeit hesitantly and insufficiently, contained the religious discrimination and proselytizing (Banerjee, 2008; Hansen, 2012, p. 197; Michaelson, 2010). Indeed, the issue raised tricky questions, such as what exactly constituted proselytizing (Hansen, 2012, pp. 188–189).

Nonetheless, deviation from the principles of religious diversity was apparent. Rather than a tolerant cultural environment for the various groups, intolerance and exclusion prevailed. The motivation of the military command to deviate from the principles of religious diversity cannot be explained solely in terms of human resource needs, for favoring one group over another risked slowing the inflow of recruits from the latter. Rather, the motivation may be explained by the command’s increasing reliance on the resources provided by religious actors. Hence, Driver #4 came into play: The critical presence of chaplains and their reinforced status led to their provision of resources.

As part of their traditional, spiritual, semipsychological roles (Hassner, 2016a, p. 9; Herspring, 2001, p. 46), chaplains increasingly provided a variety of therapeutic resources. The novelty was not necessarily in the services *per se*; rather, it was in their increasing value to the military as it became more concerned with psychological issues in society, arising from increasing intolerance of the sacrifices demanded in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chaplains created group rituals and consultative sessions that offered soldiers psychological support by developing a sense of cohesion, camaraderie, and an emotional outlet through which they could manage their fears, traumas, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (Hassner, 2016a, pp. 13, 14). Ceremonially, the chaplains often laid their hands on the shoulders of soldiers, highlighting the power of touch as a part of healing (Walden, 2011, pp. 33–37).

As one chaplain testified about the meaning of touch to desperate soldiers: "They hunger for someone to point them to the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. They long for a relationship with God" (Walden, 2011, p. 35).

This kind of service does not necessarily involve religious issues, especially when offered to soldiers of different faiths. "Spirituality," an ambiguous concept, has become meritoriously associated with physical resilience and ethical attitudes (which American commanders reinforced when the counterinsurgency strategy was launched in Iraq and Afghanistan). Two of the three dimensions of individual spirituality are prayer/personal piety and connection to a faith community (the third is spiritual worldview, see Wester, 2014); thus, the lines between spirituality and religion are blurred. It follows that chaplains are further empowered by providing spiritual care and possessing religion as a resource correlated with spirituality. To some extent, spirituality may even appear as a softer, and hence less controversial, form of religion.

However, the religious resources were even more significant in that they legitimized aggressiveness. Again, what is novel is not the service, but its significance in the era of new ethical dilemmas. President George W. Bush argued that the September 11 attacks required a "crusade," and this perception was reflected in the rhetoric of many commanders (Joyce, 2009; Marsden, 2011, pp. 338, 339). Officers described America's enemy as spiritual, against which a battle of religious values was required (Millonig, 2006, pp. 6–7). It was a clash between American values and Islamism (Marsden, 2011, pp. 338, 339), with "Jesus Killed Mohammed" as one of its symbols (Sharlet, 2009). The mission was theologized by even more extreme views, such as one colonel's statement that, "The coalition [in the Iraq War] was merely a tool used by God to liberate Iraq from Saddam's tyranny" (cited by Anonymous, 2011, p. 94). This religious rhetoric used to portray the war in Iraq and Afghanistan legitimated aggressive actions that claimed the lives of enemy civilians (Sharlet, 2009).

Religious socialization, partly by chaplains, even encouraged anti-Muslim socialization in the military and undermined the administration's efforts to prevent Muslims from interpreting these campaigns as an anti-Muslim crusade (Cook, 2014, pp. 191, 192). At the same time, religion helped portray the enemy's nation as inferior by extolling the superior virtues of one's own. Indeed, the Taliban were dehumanized for worshipping a different, "false" God rather than the West's "true" God (Toros & Mavelli, 2014). Notoriously, in 2008, chaplains even encouraged soldiers to spread messages of Christian faith among Afghanistan's Muslim population (Pike, 2009, pp. 9–10).

The partial desecularization of American politics that has occurred since the 1970s, and the evangelical churches' growing ties to the Republican Party and neo-conservatives (Cook, 2014, p. 184), strengthened by their promotion of an aggressive foreign policy and "peace through strength" (Millonig, 2006, p. 13) were instrumental to this link between religion and politics.

Again, the military did not simply mirror these cultural, societal trends; the existing evangelical presence in the armed forces was able to imbue the military even more with its religious values. I do not suggest that the United States coherently perceived the wars as religious; but once prominent voices echoed religious inspiration, they provided an additional tailwind to desecularization of the ranks, especially as this served the military's needs.

Even without sliding into religious extremism, American military chaplains could play a key role in legitimizing violence. If moderate chaplains failed to restrain soldiers by encouraging them to prevent brutality, they nonetheless listened to soldiers' expressions of guilt in a confessional context. Thus, chaplains assumed the role of legitimators by consoling the guilty and reassuring them that their actions were justified and their guilt unwarranted. They even helped combatants confront the collective and metaphysical guilt that war leaves in its wake, a service not offered by military psychologists (Carlson, 2009, pp. 58–61). Thus, ultimately, the soldiers were better prepared to perpetrate violence.

To the extent that the ethical dilemmas that soldiers face, including those developed post-factum, are dealt with and even rectified within the units rather than publicly or within the civilian communities from which the soldiers come, the legitimization of violence was less questioned. A good example arises in *Breaking Ranks*, which contains the testimonies of six veterans who turned against the war in Iraq. They described how, when doubts arose, their commanders directed them to consult chaplains who often unequivocally justified the way the military used force (Gutmann & Lutz, 2010). Therefore, it is safe to assume that chaplains were more effective in allaying many other soldiers' reservations about their mission, thus confining potentially subversive testimonies to barracks. Hence, the empowerment of the chaplains was in the military's interest.

The official guidelines of the U.S. military clearly expect chaplains to act as moral safeguards, including criticizing commanders' policies and decisions and reporting immoral practices during combat. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that chaplains have ever acted in that capacity (Hassner, 2016b, pp. 2017–2020). Formally, demonstrations of misconduct (such as the torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib that came to light in 2004) encouraged commanders to utilize the chaplaincy to promote training programs aimed at improving ethical conduct (Van Dyken, 2008). The rise in spirituality that the chaplains impart is correlated with the likelihood that soldiers will report misconduct, an issue which has troubled U.S. commanders since Abu Ghraib (Wester, 2014, pp. 147, 148, 162). Yet the issue is not only the clear distinction between lawful and unlawful conduct, on which military lawyers advise, but also the gray areas where, apparently legal, excessive use of fire increases the collateral killing of enemy civilians, triggering debates, and unrest among the soldiers. In any case, little is known about how or whether the chaplains' advice in the field actually restrains soldiers' actions, especially in those gray areas between lawful and unlawful conduct. As Hassner (2016b) concluded, many of the chaplains' conservative attitudes are attributable to the self-selection of and

socialization among clergymen volunteering for service (pp. 2041–2043). Even those who believe that the chaplaincy can serve the state and God at the same time admit that the work of the U.S. military chaplain involves tensions that cannot easily be resolved (Kammer, 2008).

Another religious resource resulting mainly from the uniquely religious aspect of deployments among Muslim communities during the 2000s was the liaison role of U.S. chaplains that has since been expanded. Chaplains were tasked with communicating with local religious leaders to build trust and establish good working relations. As part of this policy, chaplains even worked to resolve tensions following confusing incidents that might otherwise have ignited hostilities (Carlson, 2009, pp. 54–57). In 2009, this expanded role was established as part of military doctrine (Patterson, 2011, pp. 99, 100).

Liaison roles empowered the chaplaincy in several ways. First, the commanders increasingly relied on their services. Second, the chaplains' role extended to advising commanders about religious issues (Gutkowski & Wilkes, 2011, pp. 114–118). Third, the chaplains' engagement with local religious leaders and communities enabled them to gather intelligence, which empowered them further but also raised ethical problems (Carlson, 2009, p. 57; Gutkowski & Wilkes, 2011, pp. 114, 115). Fourth, the role of religious liaison enhanced the chaplains' position as legitimators of violence as initially their engagement in Iraq was designed to mitigate conflicts and improve the U.S. image as respecting the local population (Hassner, 2016b, pp. 3146–3152). In other words, the chaplains helped legitimate U.S. control by presenting a softer view of it.

In sum, chaplains filled a vacuum created by the combination of a new type of warfare and growing sensitivity to the troops' human needs. Chaplains possessed a resource that could not easily be provided by other military institutions. Once their role as motivators had been historically established (Hassner, 2016a, p. 9), chaplains could extend their services beyond what had originally been envisaged by commanders and politicians; at the same time, enhanced religious diversity resulted in more military chaplains and an expansion of their engagement with soldiers. For example, Sharlet (2009) states that military personnel "forfeit their rights to legal and medical privacy; chaplains are the only people they can turn to with problems too sensitive to take up the chain of command" (p. 39). Hence, it was in the command's interest to empower the chaplaincy by creating new gray areas of operation. As their influence and access to soldiers increased under the command's auspices, the chaplains' ability to religiously socialize them also increased.

The prevalence of religion and the way the new wars were distorted with religious meaning were extended to legitimize sacrifices, not only aggression (Driver #5). Thus, evangelical chaplains portrayed the war in Iraq and Afghanistan as religious, requiring unquestioned sacrifices (Cook, 2014, pp. 191, 192; Sharlet, 2009).

Indeed, as posited in the theoretical description of Driver #5 above, in an era of wars of choice, when societies are more averse to military sacrifice, portraying wars as religious can motivate sacrifices, imbuing them with new meaning related to the

very identity of the nation and its God-given moral beliefs rather than to territorial or economic interests. Religion even helped rebuild a sense of solidarity, replacing the waning power of ideological rivalry between East and West on which the Cold War had been based (Sharlet, 2009, p. 42). There is good reason why the combination of conservatism and religiosity enhances young people's motivation to join risky combat units (Burdette, 2009) and why regions with higher proportions of evangelical Protestants consistently show higher enlistment rates than those with predominantly mainstream Protestants and Catholics (Maley & Hawkins, 2018).

As religiosity has left its mark on the value of sacrifices and on those who make them, it has helped to reshape new intramilitary hierarchies (Driver #6). The turn to evangelical Christianity in the U.S. military helped replace race with religion as a more legitimate social category with which to set religious, White, male soldiers apart from the general society (Sharlet, 2009, p. 42). Belonging to this group created a sense of superiority over the rest of society, which was viewed as weak and corrupt, and over soldiers from other origins. Evangelicals thus fought a war on two fronts with mutually reinforcing impacts: externally, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and internally, in a spiritual war against the rest of society. As an army lieutenant colonel explained, "Christian soldiers must always consider themselves behind enemy lines, even within the ranks, because every unsaved member of the military is a potential agent of 'spiritual terrorism'" (Sharlet, 2009).

Associating religiosity with good soldiering and thus creating symbolic capital contributes another layer to building hierarchy. Many officers associate Christianity with courage and see value in it being an antidote to trends of gender equality (Millonig, 2006, p. 8), a method for combating the perceived immorality of the ranks, and a means of addressing stress, loneliness, fear, and guilt. Christianity is also associated with respect for authority and the belief that spirituality is a trait of good military leadership (Anonymous, 2011, pp. 113–120, 129–131). Therefore, military commanders encourage the growing involvement of evangelical chaplains in educating the troops about the good Christian values inherent in soldiering and officership (Bacevich, 2005, pp. 139–144).

Furthermore, the dominant us-versus-them discourse of conflicts waged by the United States in Muslim nations shapes the military experiences of Muslim service members. Many of them have reported a questioning of their loyalty, discrimination, public disrespect, and even sanctions (Curtis, 2016, pp. 53–68; Sandhoff, 2011). In other words, the religious framing of the use of force affects the status of various social groups within the ranks. This is in sharp contrast to the draft era, when other categories, such as race, shaped intramilitary hierarchies. Then, the promotion of religious diversity within the ranks—inspired by pluralistic and universalist visions that permeated American life—led groups to claim the extension of their religious rights, gained by military service, to the civil sphere (Stahl, 2017, pp. 9–10). In sum, these six drivers cumulatively nudged the U.S. military toward desecularization. They are having a similar impact in the case of Israel.

The Case of Desecularization in the Israeli Army

There is no separation between church and state in Israel and the state grants Jewish *halakhic* law a monopoly over marriage and divorce (Barak-Erez, 2008). Although, in contrast to the Western experience, there was never an overall privatization of religion, the trend of deprivatization has developed since the 1980s (Driver #1). Its main engine was the religiously motivated Jewish settlement project in the populated areas of the West Bank during the 1970s, led by the National ultra-Orthodox wing (*Haredi-Leumi*). This wing rose from the Orthodox, national-religious communities who link religion with a vision of the national mission and who differentiate themselves from the ultra-Orthodox Jews (*Haredim*, religious observants who reject the modern secular culture and are partly exempted from the military). A decade later, this wing established networks of educational institutions advocating strict religious practices and propagating nationalistic and messianic theology (see Leon, 2010). Establishing a presence in the military was part of this endeavor.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a growing number of Orthodox conscripts (particularly national-religious) in combat units. This hitherto culturally marginalized group became motivated to use the military as a vehicle for social mobility and influence. Facing a human resources shortage, caused by a decline (generated by liberalization) in the motivation of the secular middle class to serve in combat roles, the military command encouraged the establishment of religious premilitary academies and yeshivas (dominated by the National ultra-Orthodox wing) in order to prepare religious males to integrate into the ranks without compromising their Orthodox faith or practices. To achieve that aim, the military command also took steps to increase religious diversity by promoting the enforcement of dietary laws and Sabbath observance for all soldiers (Levy, 2014; Driver #2). Thus, as in the American case, while the Israeli military was mirroring the process of liberalization and secularization in Israeli society (reflected, e.g., in allowing unrestricted service by homosexuals), it was also aligning with religious groups seeking to establish a stronghold in the armed forces (see Lebel, 2013). Extra-military processes inversely affected intramilitary dynamics.

Paradoxically, however, the promotion of religious diversity also generated intolerance (Driver #3). With the growing presence of religious soldiers came increasing demands by National ultra-Orthodox rabbis (who head the premilitary academies and yeshivas) to reshape the military's culture and policies to conform to more stringent religious norms. The command acquiesced to these demands and, most significantly, it even agreed to limit intergender equality to allay religious male conscripts' fears of violating norms of modesty. Therefore, the command accepted rabbis' demands that religious men and secular women serve separately in field units. Consequently, favoring the needs of religious soldiers when the latter enjoyed a significant majority, this policy unintentionally excluded women from many significant roles and created female-free zones on many bases (Levy, 2016).

The presence of motivated religious soldiers in combat units gradually promoted the association of religiosity with good soldiering. From 2000, for the first time, the military formally defined its collective identity as the armed forces of the Jewish democratic state, committed to strengthening Jewish identity among its troops and enhancing their links to their land, values, heritage, and people. This trend bolstered the association between soldiering and Jewishness, as shown in the statement by the former Chief of Staff that, “Soldiers must have deep roots to know what they are fighting for” (Sorek, 2006, p. 2). This also thus privileged the status of religion in the military and the influence of rabbis: The view that they had the appropriate tools to reeducate secular soldiers was translated into the provision of new resources (Driver #4; Levy, 2016, p. 322).

In practice, since the beginning of 2000, the Military Rabbinate’s traditional role of providing religious services was expanded to include religiously socializing secular soldiers (Cohen, Kampinsky, & Rosman-Stollman, 2016). To this end, it recruited a new generation of young ex-combatant rabbis who could be accepted by many soldiers as a military-religious authority (Cohen, 2013, pp. 10, 11).

In addition to socialization, rabbis also provided the military with quasi-psychological resources. This new role was evident in *Operation Cast Lead* against the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip in December 2008–January 2009. Military and civilian rabbis, led by the Chief Military Rabbi, joined the troops to “elevate” them “spiritually.” The rabbis helped soldiers manage their fears about fighting in the densely populated neighborhoods of Gaza. In this regard, casualty sensitivity affected Israel as it did other Western societies (Levy, 2016, pp. 315, 316). According to one soldier’s testimony, a rabbi addressed the troops saying: “While going in there [Gaza], we should know there is no accounting for sins in this case” (Breaking the Silence, 2009, p. 43). The soldier interpreted the rabbi’s words as follows:

When a rabbi says “there’s no accounting,” the meaning is that when a person enters a zone that is naturally very dangerous and everyone is afraid to enter and no one knows what will happen, what the future has in store for us, of course, there are fears . . . and naturally there is always that primal fear that this is the place where all my sins will be paid for. So, in view of this, that rabbi [gets] up and says: don’t worry . . . there’s no accountability. (Breaking the Silence, 2009)

Thus, the rabbi attempted to alleviate the soldiers’ anxieties. This testimony reflected the field rabbi’s new role as a self-assigned community rabbi, providing, inter alia, psychological support to the soldiers and blurring the boundaries between the rabbi and the military psychologist (Seinfeld & Roseman, 2010).

Again, the similarity with the American case is apparent. The power of chaplains and rabbis comes into play since the soldiers’ expression of fear is perceived as a deviation from the masculine norm of military courage, and seeking psychological support services may mark the soldier as deviant or problematic. Nevertheless, chaplains and rabbis legitimize the soldiers’ right to be fearful by listening to them

empathically through what can be seen as confessional sessions and addressing these fears by using a semireligious toolkit which also includes public prayers and body practices, like laying-on of hands.

In tandem, desecularization of the public sphere (Driver #1) further reinforced the former processes leading to desecularization of the military. Desecularization of politics expanded after another failure in 2000 to settle the Palestinian–Israeli conflict diplomatically, which was followed by the Second Intifada. In the course of this conflict, Jewishness was “transposed entirely from a ‘religion of a nation’ to a ‘national religion’” (Ram, 2008, p. 69). With the growth in the number of religious combatants and the empowerment of the Military Rabbinate, a theological discourse was disseminated throughout the military which, since 2008, has played a significant role in Israel’s wars against Gaza both by legitimizing violence (Driver #4) and justifying sacrifices (Driver #5).

In *Operation Cast Lead* (2008), rabbis portrayed the battles in Gaza as a campaign against the modern incarnation of Amalek, the first biblical clan that attacked the tribes of Israel after their exodus from Egypt. For this sin, God commanded that Amalek and his name should be eradicated without sparing the women or children. In this spirit, the rabbis legitimized the use of an aggressive fire policy against enemy civilians, by encouraging the soldiers not to show any mercy toward the Gazan enemy, especially when the lives of Israeli soldiers were at stake. Rhetoric of this kind escalated during *Operation Protective Edge* (2014) when a religious brigade commander unprecedentedly issued a “battle order” calling his soldiers “...to wipe out an enemy...[which] curses, blasphemes and scorns the God of Israel.” He thus presented the battle against Gaza as a religious war (Levy, 2016, pp. 315–317).

To reiterate, this kind of portrayal helps enhance the social willingness to sacrifice by using religion to define what constitutes a threat (Hassner, 2014, p. 5) and by training soldiers to believe in the absolute logic of right versus wrong (Eroukhmanoff, 2016, p. 372). No wonder that this association between religiosity and soldiering has been reflected in an extremely high level of military motivation among the religious younger generation since the 1980s (Levy, 2016).

Charged with strong motivation to sacrifice, religious conscripts and their institutional system of yeshivas and premilitary academies envision a nostalgic return to an authentic military spirit and commitment to decisive victories. At the same time, they challenge the military’s secular hegemony, accusing it of corrupting the founding ideals of the armed forces by accepting the restraining intervention of the court system and civil-rights organizations. As they become more visible in combat units, religious groups convert religiosity into symbolic capital. They portray themselves as a new elite, a vanguard at the service of Jewish national missions, in contrast to the perceived weaker, older, secular, liberal, elite (Lebel, 2013). Religiosity has thus become the marker of the new hierarchy, replacing former markers such as ethnicity and class (Driver #6). In sum, the six drivers have cumulatively moved the Israeli military toward desecularization.

Table 1. Religiosity and Chaplaincy Roles in the Military by Era.

#	Driver	The Cold War Era (1940s–1980s)	The Post–Cold War Era
1	Deprivatization of religion	Religious groups accepted the marginal and privatized role	Deprivatization of religion
2-3	Promoting religious diversity and empowering religious actors	Pluralistic religious diversity	Heightened intolerance of religious groups
4	Providing support services	Traditional semipsychological roles	New spiritual, ethical, liaison, and psychological roles (affected by new types of warfare and more sensitivity to one's own human costs)
5	Using religion to motivate sacrifice	Mainly secular national symbols motivated sacrifices	Use of religious symbols to counter aversion to sacrifice
6	Reshaping intramilitary hierarchy	Intramilitary religious diversity permeates society. Ethnic, race, and class categories shaped intramilitary hierarchies	Religiosity as symbolic capital and a factor in building intramilitary hierarchies

Conclusions

My point of departure was the need to deal with the scholarly gaps in analyzing the forces driving the desecularization of militaries. Although it is safe to assume that over time militaries in democratic societies cannot be significantly desecularized unless they reflect larger social processes, the levels of diffusion of values from society into the military vary, as do the circumstances or timing in which society and the military dissimilate. Thus, intramilitary drivers which were the focus of this study play their role in promoting or inhibiting extra-military mechanisms of desecularization.

All six drivers of desecularization, defined and detailed above, were found to apply to the U.S. and Israeli militaries. In both, religiosity and the chaplaincy underwent processes of change, moving from the traditional roles which they fulfilled mainly during the Cold War era (1940s–1980s), to new roles in the post–Cold War era, as shown in Table 1.

Some of the processes, roles, and resources are new, and others became more valuable following changes in the social environment within which militaries have operated in the post–Cold War era. These drivers generated the desecularization of the armed forces in both cases. This is expressed in religious intolerance, increasing influence of chaplains, theologizing military deployments, using religiosity to motivate sacrifice and justify violence, associating good soldiering with religiosity, and

in the impact of religiosity on the intramilitary's hierarchy and the production of symbolic capital. In both cases, the most radical religious groups, evangelicals and the National ultra-Orthodox, respectively, were the promoters of desecularization.

It is worth emphasizing that using religiosity to motivate sacrifice and impact the military hierarchy is not simply the result of the significant presence of religious groups and powerful chaplains within the ranks. The military is an arena in which groups struggle to make their worldview dominant. Thus, to the extent that religious actors can confer religious meaning on military missions, they can bolster the association of soldiering with religiosity and hence also advance the status of religious groups and the power of chaplains. For religious actors, losing this struggle over meaning and the possession of symbolic capital risks their status within the military. Hence, this struggle is accompanied by rhetoric (for the U.S. and Israeli forces, see, respectively, Anonymous, 2011; Lebel, 2013). The drivers are mutually reinforcing.

As this article shows, military religion is not a unified culture; it is reinterpreted and militarily harnessed in each process generated by the drivers. It is a general cultural-spiritual trend in the public sphere (Driver #1) that may promote religious diversity by accommodating religious beliefs and practices with similar content to those in the civil sphere (Driver #2). Drivers #3–#6 translate religiosity into a military religion which becomes a valuable cultural, symbolic, and professional resource and even a form of symbolic capital. Furthermore, the more military religion morphs into multiple forms, thereby expanding its domains of influence, the higher the level of desecularization of the military. Thus, by analyzing each driver, we can also evaluate its impact.

Do these drivers affect conscript and volunteer forces differently? Conscript militaries reflect religion in society to a greater extent as they are more susceptible to religious influences and more committed to tolerating the religious needs of their recruits (Rosman-Stollman, 2008, p. 617). However, my analysis of the empirical cases shows that the differences are not as critical as one would imagine because, ultimately, the discussion is not only about accommodating religious beliefs but also about using religion for broader goals. Therefore, despite their different modes of recruitment, as democracies involved in prolonged warfare, both the militaries in this study have undergone similar processes.

The merit of comparing different militaries and societies inheres in this “method of agreement” for developing hypotheses about the drivers of desecularization. Methodologically, the goal of this article was to develop a middle-range theory, limited in its scope, by focusing on the sequence of conditions through which desecularization is most likely to develop. The U.S. and Israeli militaries cumulatively substantiate these conditions by depicting the six drivers and, as such, help develop (rather than test) the hypotheses.

From this conclusion, we can draw several insights. First, each driver can generate either desecularization or secularization of the military; a weaker driver of desecularization may reduce its level. Given the criteria for case selection detailed in the Introduction section, it comes as no surprise that the United States and Israel

demonstrate a high level of desecularization, with the six drivers operating cumulatively in the same direction.

Thus, these two cases do not represent the entire spectrum. For example, religious actors vary in their attitudes toward violence, which are described by Appleby (2000) as “ambivalence.” While religion motivates and justifies violence in the United States and Israel today, in societies where it plays a more restraining role (such as Britain), the level of desecularization is probably lower. We can posit that the more war-prone the religious actors are, the more likely the military command is to use religious resources. While the military can use its own apparatus to socialize the troops toward a moderate code of ethics, religious actors offer more valuable, apparently legitimate, and less interchangeable tools with values supporting sacrifice and violence. It follows that by mapping the drivers, we can also understand the conditions under which desecularization will *not* occur.

Second, given this background, even those who argue that desecularization is not the dominant process in the militaries studied may agree that the drivers are relevant variables for promoting either secularization or desecularization.

Third, the vectors in this process work in both directions, as Figure 1 shows. Therefore, this sequential process is reversible. Reversal of each driver may affect the overall process. For example, as mentioned above, containing religious discrimination and proselytizing following events at the U.S. Air Force Academy, which disempowered religious actors, may have slowed down the entire process. A harsher reaction might even have reversed it toward secularization. This model can thus be tested by showing how the six drivers, varied in their intensity and even direction, cumulatively determine the military’s level of desecularization.

These insights highlight the importance of this study for setting the stage for future empirical inquiry that would test the hypotheses, with special attention given to militaries where the conditions leading to desecularization are less likely to arise.

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