

Fake It Till You Make It: Military Professionalization Amongst Resistance Movements in Nazi-Occupied Europe

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Introduction

The memory of resistance in Nazi-occupied Europe has often been characterized by images of rag-tag partisans fighting for liberation against a genocidal occupying power.⁶⁵ While this imagery is accurate in certain respects, such narratives can limit our understanding of why some resistance movements of the period decided to undergo extensive military professionalization, along with the military and political consequences that these changes entailed.⁶⁶ There are notable examples of entities with aspirations for statehood undergoing military professionalization throughout the Second World War, particularly in the context of the Balkans and Western Europe.⁶⁷

For the purposes of this paper, the term “military professionalization” is best understood as the large-scale imposition of a unique collective identity along with the existence and maintenance of resistance-specific

expertise in an armed group.⁶⁸ Attempts by resistance movements to undergo forms of military professionalization should not be narrowly conceptualized as a military strategy aimed at improving combat effectiveness. Instead, military professionalization should also be understood as an important characteristic of resistance movements vying to utilize the benefits of political legitimacy during wartime and in anticipation of establishing postwar governance.

This paper is organized into five parts. After this introduction, section two examines relevant literature in political science and sociology, outlining and deriving two concepts of military professionalization in armed groups. The first concept is based on military strategy, and the second is premised on political relations, i.e. resistance groups’ relations with local communities and organizational behavior. Sections three and four are comprised of historical case studies on resistance in Yugoslavia and France, highlighting the strengths of the political relations explanation and the more limited applicability of military strategy. I end the paper with a conclusion and a quick overview.

Relevant Academic Literature and Explanations for Military Professionalization

Academic discourse concerning civil-military relations—which encompasses the topic of military professionalization—is almost always framed in the context of nation-states, with foundational works in the field being formed in capitalist militaries’ transitions to

⁶⁵ “Resistance is habitually equated with actual combat, evoking the image of the partisan fighters in the maquis... and the street fighters at the barricades during the Liberation.” Paula Schwartz, “Redefining Resistance: Women’s Activism in Wartime France” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret Higonnet, Sonya Michel, and Jane Jenson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 143. For recent examples of resistance in North American popular media, see Sledgehammer Games, *Call of Duty: Vanguard* (2021); *Allied*, directed by Robert Zemeckis (Paramount Pictures, 2016); *Inglorious Basterds*, directed by Quentin Tarantino (The Weinstein Company, 2009).

⁶⁶ See Peter Burke, “A New Paradigm” in *What is Cultural History?*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2008), 67-72.

⁶⁷ For more context on politics and resistance in Europe during occupation, see Gordon Wright, “German Rule in Occupied Europe” and “Europe’s Response to Conquest: The Resistance Movements” in *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 107-166.

⁶⁸ Tommy Ross, “Reconceptualizing Military Professionalization,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (2018), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/reconceptualizing-military-professionalization>.

all-volunteer forces.⁶⁹ Despite this background, professionalization—the social process by which occupations become publicly recognized as a profession—has been recognized as not being dependent on the existence of a traditional nation-state, albeit with the caveats of altered responsibilities between individual combatants and clients as well as the different types of skill sets called into question.⁷⁰ Scholarship on professionalization is largely premised on the concept of the professional, i.e. members employed in fields requiring distinct types of training, knowledge, and skills.⁷¹ In other words, military professionalism and professionalization should be framed as the adoption of professional attributes by individuals engaged in military activities, characterized by the construction of a collective identity facilitated through consistent

⁶⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, “Officership as a Profession” in *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (London: Harvard University Press, 1957), 8-19; Morris Janowitz, “Professionals in Violence” in *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 3-20.

⁷⁰ Patrick Finnegan, “Professionalization of a Nonstate Actor: A Case Study of the Provisional IRA,” *Armed Forces & Society* 45.2 (2019), 354; Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 47. With regards to nonstate actors, the responsibility to a client (with the client traditionally being the government) can be understood as combatants’ obligations to receive orders from the group’s command structure and/or the local populace, as Nordlinger asserts that responsibility to a client is of “near tautological generalizations...when it is used to explain the incidence of coups.” For more on the different manners in which intrastate conflicts can be fought and the skillsets which they require, see Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, “International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict,” *American Political Science Review* 104.3 (2010), 415-428; Evgeny Finkel, “The Phoenix Effect of State Repression: Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust,” *American Political Science Review* 109.2 (2015), 340-342.

⁷¹ Tony Watson, “Professions and Professionalism: Should We Jump off the Bandwagon, Better to Study Where It Is Going?” *International Studies of Management & Organization* 32.2 (2002), 93-105

arrangements,⁷² the continuation and advancement of combat-oriented information and practices,⁷³ and the dedication and corresponding discipline of individual combatants to an organization engaged in the management of violence which they hold membership in.⁷⁴

In the dissertation *Organization and Community: The Determinants of Insurgent Military Success*, then-Ph.D. candidate Alec Worsnop categorized five different thresholds of military effectiveness in non-state actors: (1) armed groups that disperse under combat conditions, (2) those that can carry out basic coordinated maneuvers in a limited manner, (3) those able to out specific orders in combat situations without direct supervision of high-level commanders, (4) those capable of carrying out coordinated military tasks, and (5) those that can readily carry out high-coordinated tasks such as combined arms.⁷⁵ While military professionalization cannot and should not be directly equated as a proxy for measuring military effectiveness, the long-term viability of armed groups facing Nazi occupiers could be contingent on certain levels of organization facilitated by professionalization. Perhaps

⁷² “True professions have codes of conduct, and the meaning and consequences of those codes are taught as part of the formal education of their members.” Rakesh Khurana and Nitin Nohria, “It’s Time to Make Management a True Profession,” *Harvard Business Review* (2008), <https://hbr.org/2008/10/its-time-to-make-management-a-true-profession>.

⁷³ Román D. Ortiz, “Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: the Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25.2 (2002), 136.

⁷⁴ Anthony King, “The Persistence of Mass” in *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 220; Elizabeth J. Wood, “The Puzzle of Insurgent Collective Action” in *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El-Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 18-19.

⁷⁵ Alec Worsnop, “Introduction” in *Organization and Community: The Determinants of Insurgent Military Effectiveness*, PhD diss. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016), 15-18, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/107534>.

resistance movements are only capable of surviving and resisting the Third Reich's relentless counterinsurgency efforts by utilizing developed command and control networks, unit-level leadership, guidelines and systems for personnel management, instruction in weapons and tactics, and shared identity among members.⁷⁶ Only then could they conduct routine activities such as skirmishes, ambushes, sabotage, and intelligence collection.⁷⁷ This line of thought forms the basis of the first concept proposed in this paper: resistance movements pursued military professionalization as a military strategy pursuant to increasing combat effectiveness.⁷⁸

There is another compelling explanation for why resistance movements underwent military professionalization in World War II: political relations between resistance movements, the local communities they relied upon, and international actors. Works of scholarship in the “new institutionalism” methodological approach to sociology have established that organizations often share similar structures and processes.⁷⁹ Within this literature, the homogenization of rational organizations is referred to as institutional isomorphism.⁸⁰ Coercive isomorphic change is

the specific mechanism resulting from political pressures and, in the context of resistance during World War II, cultural expectations on what makes militaries legitimate.⁸¹ After all, local civilians and international actors' decisions of which political actor to support are shaped by their assessments of whether the resistance group will succeed.⁸² Given the challenges posed by information asymmetries in the fog of war, appearances and readily-observed organizational behaviors can come to play the primary role in informing such assessments, insofar as such observations conform to their expectations of what a legitimate military is.

The Yugoslav Partisans, 1941-1945

Formally known as the National Liberation Army and the Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, the Partisans were an anti-fascist resistance movement in Axis-occupied Yugoslavia.⁸³ The movement, which eventually evolved into a large military force with a quasi-conventional capacity, was established through Josip Broz Tito's leadership in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the initial stages of the German invasion and occupation.⁸⁴ Throughout their development, the Yugoslav Partisans clearly demonstrated characteristics of military professionalization, e.g. its large composition and organization of regular divisions and guerrilla detachments, standardized uniforms, light and heavy weapons, and training—although the efficacy of the latter is contested in the context of female

⁷⁶ Worsnop, “A Theory of Insurgent Military Effectiveness” in *Organization and Community: The Determinants of Insurgent Military Effectiveness*, 107-109.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷⁸ Scott Sigmund Gartner, “Decision Making in War” in *Strategic Assessment in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 163. Gartner defines military strategy as a state's implemented ideas pursuant to selected strategic goals.

⁷⁹ Ellen M. Immergut, “The Theoretical Core of the New Institutionalism,” *Politics & Society* 26.1 (1998), 5-34; Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). The New Institutionalism is a methodological approach exploring how structures and norms constrain institutions.

⁸⁰ “Professions are subject to the same coercive and mimetic pressures as are organizations.” Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review* 48.2 (1983), 147-158.

⁸¹ DiMaggio and Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” 147-150.

⁸² Janet Lewis, “Civilians” in *How Insurgency Begins: Rebel Group Formation in Uganda and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 125-126; Eli Berman *et al.*, “Information-Centric Insurgency and Counterinsurgency” in *Small Wars, Big Data: The Information Revolution in Modern Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 55-81.

⁸³ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Partisan,” Encyclopaedia Britannica (2010), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Partisan-Yugoslavian-military-force>.

⁸⁴ Stoyan Pribichevich, “Tito,” *Life Magazine* (1944).

combatants.⁸⁵ This behavior is consistent with the first proposed explanation of military strategy. In fact, the timing of many of these changes coincides with the arrival of British military advisors facilitating the integration of Allied equipment and supplies, along with other forms of military guidance.⁸⁶

Notwithstanding the applicability of the military strategy explanation, important nuances in the Partisans' historical record lend itself well to the second explanation of political relations. In particular, politicized decisions with regards to women served to reduce combat manpower and effectiveness in and of itself. To facilitate the integration of women into the Partisans' frontline military forces, the resistance movement's leadership had female combatants complete a "political-military" course, cementing Tito's philosophy of political considerations as a fundamental aspect of tactics and operations.⁸⁷ If the military strategy explanation was the most consistent with the evolution of the Partisans into a professionalized fighting force, then training would be focused on the application and management of violence in an undiluted manner removed from political distractions. In addition, 1944-1945 saw the withdrawal of women from frontline positions during the Partisans' reorganization into a more

conventional fighting force.⁸⁸ The withdrawal of women occurred despite recognition of their "excellent fighting qualities" and some of the heaviest fighting occurring well into the latter sections of the war.⁸⁹

This shift can be attributed to political reasons, namely Tito's desire to craft a homogenous, traditional narrative that would neatly fit into the existing national identities of the prior Balkan States and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.⁹⁰ In conjunction, the political-military nature of training and the withdrawal of women from the frontlines demonstrate what were—in this case—intertwined yet competing mechanisms of military strategy and political relations, along with their respective roles in encouraging different patterns of organizational development. The course of events in Yugoslavia serves to highlight the Partisans' prioritization of political relations over military strategy.

Another aspect of the Partisans lending itself to the concept of political relations involves the rights afforded to lawful combatants in times of war. As mentioned earlier, the Partisans began distributing standardized uniforms in a similar manner to other sovereign states.⁹¹ This desire to appear like a professional military was at least partially tied to their claim that Partisan soldiers were official belligerents engaged in war and thus entitled to the privileges afforded to other prisoners of war.⁹² German troops would

⁸⁵ Milovan Djilas, "In the Cauldron" in *Wartime* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 232 and 277; Jelena Batinić, "The Heroic and the Mundane" in *Women and Yugoslav Partisans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 138-140.

⁸⁶ William Jones, "Chapter X" in *Twelve Months with Tito's Partisans* (Bedford: Bedford Books, 1946), 77-84; "William Morris Jones, 1895-" Hall of Valour - Temple Du Courage,

<http://www.canadaveteranshallofvalour.com/JonesWM.htm>. For more on convergence between the military development of states and non-state armed groups, see William B. Quandt, *Algerian Military Development: The Professionalization of a Guerrilla Army* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1972), 1, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD0748913.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Batinić, "The Heroic and the Mundane" in *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 139; Gervasi, "Tito," *Collier's Weekly*; Djilas, "In the Cauldron" in *Wartime*, 222.

⁸⁸ Batinić, "The Heroic and the Mundane" in *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 158-164.

⁸⁹ Jones, "Chapter X" in *Twelve Months with Tito's Partisans*, 79; Wright, "Europe's Response to Conquest: The Resistance Movements" in *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945*, 150-166.

⁹⁰ Wolfgang Hoepken, "War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia," *East European Politics and Societies* 13.1 (1999), 191-192.

⁹¹ Djilas, "In the Cauldron" in *Wartime*, 232.

⁹² "Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929," International Committee of the Red Cross, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/States.xsp?xp_viewStates=XPages_NORMStatesParties&xp_treat

frequently apply the agreed-upon rights of prisoners of war to captured troops from the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK); however, the same could not be said with their respective treatment toward captured Partisans and other insurgents operating in Eastern Europe.⁹³ This horrific dynamic could be readily observed in Milovan Djilas' recounting of Nazi Germany's Operation Schwarz, which saw the deliberate annihilation of thousands of wounded Partisans and unarmed medical workers left behind on the battlefield.⁹⁴ While the leadership of the Third Reich never came to acknowledge the war rights of the Partisans, with brutal fighting in Yugoslavia continuing well into 1945, appeals for international recognition were eventually met by the Allies in the middle of the war, thereby helping the establishment of Tito as the preeminent resistance leader in Yugoslavia.⁹⁵

Free France and the French Resistance, 1940-1944

The French Resistance was the collection of entities fighting Nazi authorities in occupied France and the collaborationist Vichy regime.⁹⁶ A distinct yet related political entity was Free France, the government-in-exile formed in June 1940 that claimed to be the

legitimate government of France. While the French Resistance had no formal overarching leadership figure, the latter was led by General Charles de Gaulle, who rejected the Franco-German Armistice in a *BBC* radio broadcast and began working as a preeminent leader in the fight against the Axis powers.⁹⁷ Relations between the Resistance and Free France were initially cold and disconnected, given the separation of the English Channel and Free France's removed nature from the day-to-day activities carried out by many members of the Resistance.⁹⁸ Pursuant to establishing a unified fighting entity, de Gaulle worked to overcome these initial challenges and institute his leadership through further radio broadcasts and discussions with Jean Moulin, the resistance leader negotiating on behalf of elements of the French Resistance.

De Gaulle's push for a unified fighting movement was—in part—based on a desire to cultivate international support. Free France worked to chip away at Vichy France's colonial possessions by means of co-optation and coercion; de Gaulle also wanted to shift the US' Roosevelt Administration from its diplomatic overtures to Vichy France pre-1942.⁹⁹ In order to generate confidence in the Free French, de Gaulle's Free France needed to fully embody its supposed status as the legitimate government of France while also being recognized by French resistance fighters as such.

Pursuant to this objective, De Gaulle convinced Moulin to coordinate the disparate

ySelected=305. The United States, United Kingdom, and Germany all ratified the treaty in the first half of the 1930s.

⁹³ "In time of war if one of the belligerents is not a party to the Convention, its provisions shall, nevertheless, remain binding as between the belligerents who are parties thereto." "Part VIII : Execution of the Convention Section I : General Provisions - Art. 82,"

International Committee of the Red Cross, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/WebART/305-430083?OpenDocument>. While the Kingdom of Yugoslavia did not ratify the 1929 Geneva Convention, a recognition by Nazi Germany of wartime hostilities against the Partisans would have legally required them to comply with the provisions of the treaty.

⁹⁴ Djilas, "In the Cauldron" in *Wartime*, 263-271.

⁹⁵ Winston Churchill, "Marshall Tito and His Gallant Bands," Report to the House of Commons (1944).

⁹⁶ Wright, "Europe's Response to Conquest: The Resistance Movements" in *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945*, 144-150.

⁹⁷ Charles de Gaulle, "Nothing is Lost," *BBC Radio* (1940).

⁹⁸ H.R. Kedward, "Resistance and Refuge, 1942" and "Hunters and Hunted, Summer-Autumn 1943," in *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1994), 1-18 and 44-72; Wright, "Europe's Response to Conquest: The Resistance Movements" in *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945*, 144-150.

⁹⁹ Robert Gale Woolbert, "Our Vichy Gamble by William L. Langer," *Foreign Affairs* (1947), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/1947-07-01/our-vichy-gamble>.

groups of the French Resistance.¹⁰⁰ Moulin parachuted into France in early 1942 and began working closely with Lucie and Raymond Aubrac of Libération, although his role of pulling resistance leaders together came to a brutal end after his and Raymond's capture in 1943.¹⁰¹ Resistance fighters were able to pull off a daring rescue operation of Raymond, and the Aubrac family was quickly exfiltrated to the UK, where Lucie Aubrac received an unexpected military citation.¹⁰² Citations and other forms of incentives are a common characteristic of military professionalization.¹⁰³ However, given that Free France did not have operational control over the conduct of Lucie Aubrac's covert activity, the awarding of said citation had little to no utility in improving the effectiveness of the Free French's military forces.¹⁰⁴ Rather than being reflective of procedures aimed at increasing military effectiveness and unit cohesion on the battlefield, the professionalization exhibited through the official awarding of the citation should be understood as a means of building political relationships, i.e. the

government-in-exile recognizing and rewarding the activities of Libération as a gesture of partnership.

Conclusion

Military professionalization in the Yugoslav Partisans and Free France can be understood through two lenses: military strategy and political relations. The professionalization of Tito's Partisans had political aspects focused on female combatants and the rules of war, and Aubrac's anecdote serves to highlight military professionalization as a tool for unity and connection. Given the limited applicability of the military strategy concept and the presence of significant political factors, both lenses are needed to more comprehensively evaluate the behavior and reforms of resistance movements in Nazi-occupied Europe.

¹⁰⁰ Jesse Beckett, "Jean Moulin Gave His Life for the French Resistance after refusing to give Intel to the "Butcher of Lyon";" War History Online (2021), <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/jean-moulin-french-resistance-fighter.html?safari=1>.

¹⁰¹ Lucie Aubrac, "Preface" in *Outwitting the Gestapo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 6.

¹⁰² Aubrac, "February 12, 1944" in *Outwitting the Gestapo*, 12.

¹⁰³ Finkel, "The Phoenix Effect of State Repression: Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust," 340-341; Román D. Ortiz, "Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: the Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25.2 (2002), 136.

¹⁰⁴ Clark R. McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Group Polarization" in *Friction: How Conflict Radicalizes Them and Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 109-124.