



GENEVA CENTRE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF  
ARMED FORCES (DCAF)

WORKING PAPER SERIES – NO. 47

**MODELS OF DEMOCRATIC CONTROL  
OF THE ARMED FORCES:  
A MULTI-COUNTRY STUDY COMPARING ‘GOOD  
PRACTICES’ OF DEMOCRATIC CONTROL**

*Hans Born, Fellow, Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of  
Armed Forces, Switzerland*

*Marina Caparini, King’s College, London, UK, and*

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Geneva, July 2002

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**DCAF Working Papers Series**

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**MODELS OF DEMOCRATIC CONTROL  
OF THE ARMED FORCES:  
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OF DEMOCRATIC CONTROL<sup>1</sup>**

*Hans Born, Marina Caparini, and Karl Haltiner*

**Introduction: Goal and Relevance**

Basically, the subject of democratic control of the armed forces refers to the question ‘Who guards the guards?’ This enduring question was raised as long ago as in the classical Roman world by Juvenal<sup>2</sup>. Democracy always implicitly presumes unlimited civilian supremacy over the command of the armed forces – anything short of that defines an incomplete democracy<sup>3</sup>. But what exactly is democratic control, and how can we conceptualise it? Generally speaking, we see a state’s system of democratic control as being a product of its system of government, politics, history and culture. And as there are many different cultures and political systems, many different norms and practices of democratic control exist as well. Consequently, and for better or worse, there is no single, definitive normative model for democratic control. At least several models are present, some of which appear to contradict others. In this research project we want to address the question ‘how can democratic control be conceptualised?’ by developing and exploring alternative models for democratic control. By using the plural form “models”, we acknowledge that many countries exercise control in different yet legitimate ways. Therefore the research goal is to develop several models for democratic control by exploring the practice of democratic control in several countries. The end goal is not a beauty contest of democratic control models, but to collect practices and norms of democratic control in several countries and to search for patterns that lie behind those

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<sup>1</sup> Paper prepared for the 4<sup>th</sup> International Security Forum organized by the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces held 14-19 November 2000, in Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Sed quis custodiet ip sos custodies?’, Juvenal. *Omnia Romae*, VI, 347.

<sup>3</sup> Edward N. Luttwak. ‘From Vietnam to Desert Fox: civil-military relations in modern democracies’. In: *Survival*, vol. 41, 1999, no. 1, Spring, p. 99.

practices. The relevance of this research project consists in its identification of models of democratic control that may contribute to efforts in governing, advising and educating on this vital topic.

## **Points of Attention for Studying Democratic Control**

A consensus exists that democratic control implies at least civilian supremacy and parliamentary control. However, leaving this bottom line, one encounters many contrasting views on democratic control. A previous literature search<sup>4</sup> identified the following contrasting perspectives:

### a. Scope:

Authors may use a narrow versus a broad scope for studying democratic control. The narrow scope focuses on civilian supremacy and parliamentary control. The broad scope takes the complete civil-military relations into account, focusing on integrating the military into society.

### b. Actors:

In line with the scope, a narrow approach involves only the parliament, government and the military. In addition, the broad scope involves societal institutions or actors as well. Some authors regard the relation between the politicians and the military as a hostile one, whereas others see control as a matter of shared responsibility between the political and military leaders.

### c. Types of Control:

Different types of control exist, such as vertical, horizontal and self-control. Firstly, democratic control refers to top-down vertical control: parliaments and governments controlling the armed forces. Secondly, horizontal control refers to democratic control exercised by other societal institutions like the media, unions and research institutes. This is called horizontal democratic control because social institutions are not

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Born (2000). *The transformation of political-military relations and democratic control in the post - Cold War era*. Royal Military Academy: Breda.

hierarchically positioned vis -à-vis the armed forces and their influence is generally informal. A third type of democratic control is self-control. Democratic self-control refers to the internalisation of societal values in the mind of the military professional.

Another distinction of different types of democratic control is the momentum or timing of democratic control. We may distinguish reactive, proactive and *dumque* democratic control. Firstly, democratic control might be reactive, taking place *ex post* or after decisions have been made and implemented. An example is reviewing the budgetary expenditures of the MoD in the year after the fiscal year concerned. This type of control may be referred to as audit. In addition, control can be proactive or *ex ante*. In this way, the political leaders do not check and correct the military afterwards, but try to anticipate future events and requirements. Formulating strategic security documents may be regarded as a form of proactive democratic control. Thirdly, democratic control may take place during a military operation. This type of democratic control (operational or *dumque*) implies in fact that politicians may interfere with the command of military operations.

d. Civilian Control Does in Itself Not Equate With Democratic Control:

The civilians can be non-democratic elected leaders, such as the communist leaders. The presence of substantively democratic processes and institutions, then, is necessary.

e. Power Bases:

Democratic control refers to the relative power position of the military in society, especially in relation to the political leaders. The relation between the politicians and the military can be regarded as a simple command relation, in which the military is subordinated to the politicians. In such a relation, the politicians order and the military simply implement those orders. However, the politico-military relation can be regarded as an asymmetrical power relation as well. Roughly speaking, the political leaders possess formal power whereas the military leaders possess information, expertise and relational power (connections, alliances). In such an asymmetrical power relation, a negotiating or tit-for-tat relation may arise in which politicians and military leaders exchange desired goods (funding, information, relations, actions/policies).

## Models for Democratic Control

The preceding discussion demonstrates that democratic control encompasses many variables and views. However, only a few authors have attempted to construct comprehensive models. The predominant scholar in this field is, without a doubt, Samuel Huntington.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the fifties, during the height of the Cold War, he wrote his classic book *The Soldier and the State*, putting forward objective civilian control and subjective civilian control as two contrasting models for democratic control. Huntington perceived objective civilian control as the only proper type of democratic control. This type of control is aimed at maximisation of military professionalism by separating political and military decision-making. The political leaders formulate the end goals and some broad conditions for military operations and the military commanders carry out the ordered military operations. The political leaders do not interfere in military operations while military commanders do not intervene in the policy process. According to this point of view, the military officer is a neutral and autonomous professional who carries out the political goals *sine ira et studio*.

Subjective control is aimed at the maximisation of the power of the governing political party. Political leaders try to control the armed forces by appointing high-ranking generals who are political friends. The criterion for occupying a high military position is not military professionalism but political loyalty.

Huntington devalued subjective control because he believed that it tends to corrupt the professional quality of the armed forces.

Huntington has, to a large extent, influenced the way Americans think about civil-military relations. For decades, officers of the US armed forces had to learn the ideas of Huntington by heart. Because the US is a superpower with global reach and relations, it has influenced the way of thinking about civil-military relations in many other countries

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Huntington (1957, reprinted 1964). *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. New York: Vintage.

as well. From these accounts, objective civilian control would seem to be the only accepted way of looking at civil-military relations.

We question for several reasons the validity of the claim that objective civilian control is the only proper way of controlling democratically the armed forces. A first reason is that some countries do successfully practice a type of democratic control that is very close to subjective civilian control. A well-known example is Switzerland. Karl Haltiner illustrates that the Swiss model of civil-military relations makes use of subjective control. Switzerland is a federal state, one of the oldest democracies and civil societies in Europe, where people traditionally have an aversion to centralised state power and a 'deeply rooted mistrust of military professionalism'<sup>6</sup>. In peacetime, Switzerland does not have a military commander-in-chief. In times of crisis the Parliament will appoint for a fixed period a general and it 'is almost evident that not only military but also political and lingo-cultural aspects play a role in the parliament's election of the military commander in chief.'<sup>7</sup> The Swiss case of politico-military relations illustrates that subjective civilian control can be a legitimate means of dealing with the military in a democracy.

A second reason for doubting the general validity of objective civilian control is that Huntington developed this model during the height of the Cold War. The US and the USSR were engaged in a perpetual arms race, resulting in increasingly effective weapons of mass destruction. In those days, it was important to resolve satisfactorily the civilian-military paradox, i.e. to guarantee that democratic society possessed a strong protection force while preventing that force from becoming too dominant in society.<sup>8</sup> In terms of internal security too, the requirements of the national security became predominant in many countries, i.e. prioritising of military security and limiting human

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Haltiner (1999). *Civil-military relations: separation or concordance? –The case of Switzerland*. Paper presented at the ERGOMAS interim meeting, Birmingham, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Haltiner o.c., p. 5. The commander in chief is called a general-elect. An interesting case of subjective civilian control is the appointment of the Swiss commander in chief during World War Two. Although the German speaking Swiss are by far the largest ethnic group in Switzerland, in 1939/40 for obvious reasons the Swiss government chose to appoint French speaking Henri Guisan as Supreme Commander of the Swiss armed forces.

<sup>8</sup> Peter D. Feaver (1996). *Delegation, monitoring and civilian control of the military: agency theory and American civil-military relations*. Cambridge MA.: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies (Harvard University) p. 3-8. Hans Born, Rene Moelker and Joseph Soeters (eds.). *Krijgsmacht en samenleving: klassieke en eigentijds inzichten (Military and society: classical and contemporary viewpoints)*. Tilburg: University Press, p. 87.



rights and civil liberties for the sake of the security of the state. It is not difficult to imagine that in the post-Cold War period, with the passing of the bipolar competition for world hegemony and the deadly arms race, this paradox is becoming less acute. Other paradoxes and challenges of civil-military relations have to be addressed as well. By the early 1960s Morris Janowitz<sup>9</sup> had predicted that armed forces would transform into constabulary forces, i.e. international police forces. These armed forces do not attempt to win a war at all costs, but to establish peace in inter/intranational disputes. In Janowitz' view, the integration and not the separation of the military and the political system guarantees the alignment of political and military goals. The military and political leaders decide together about direction and implementation of military goals because the politicians and military leaders are depending on each other. In this view, it is not realistic, as Huntington proposes with his objective civilian control, to make a distinction between policy and implementation or between government and administration. The reason is that during military operations, especially peace missions, military commanders have to make many military decisions with political implications. Therefore, it makes sense to question the general validity of objective civilian control and to search for alternative models for democratic control as well.

## **A Methodology For Exploring and Developing Models For Democratic Control**

A method for exploring and developing models is induction. According to the inductive method, abstract categories and general rules are derived from empirical evidence and practical experience. Induction can be understood as a scientific interpretation of 'lessons learned', and provides the advantage of taking stock of what has already been done in the field of democratic control.

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<sup>9</sup> Morris Janowitz (1960). *The professional soldier: a social and political portrait*. New York: Free Press.

Based on the principle of induction, the methodology of the research process encompasses two phases. In the first phase the practices of democratic control in 10 to 15 countries are examined. These countries should be democracies or consolidating democracies, because it does not make sense to study democratic control in a dictatorial regime. Preferably, the countries should be situated in several continents or cultural contexts in order to guarantee as much variation as possible, i.e. Anglo-American countries, post- Communist countries, Latin countries, Scandinavian countries or countries in the Far East. The same set of questions should serve to guide each inquiry into the democratic control practised in those countries. Only in this way might the results of the various country inquiries be systematically compared.

In concreto, the following countries could be researched (NB: this is a tentative list):

1. Switzerland (small, neutral, federal)
2. Sweden (Nordic, small, neutral, highly involved in peace missions)
3. Canada (Anglo -Saxon, highly involved in peace missions, small)
4. Hungary (in transition, Central Europe, post Communist)
5. Czech Republic (idem)
6. Rumania (starting transition, Central Europe, post Communist)
7. Argentine or Guatamala (Latin America, former dictatorship)
8. France (continental tradition of democratic control, medium power)
9. Denmark (Nordic, small, highly involved in peace missions)
10. The Netherlands (mixture of Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, continental, small)
11. Germany (medium power, Central Europe, federal, Innere Fuehrung)
12. Russia (large power, transition country)
13. Georgia (transition country)
14. Ukraine (transition country)
15. Nigeria
16. Spain or Portugal (former dictatorship)
17. South Africa (transition, African democracy)
18. Israel (constant military threat)

In addition, one might argue that in the post-Cold War era it could be relevant to research intergovernmental and supranational organisations as well, since considerable military activity is now channelled through such organisations. Therefore, the list could be continued with:

19. NATO

20. EU (WEU)

21. UN

This list is probably too big for one single research project. The list will be further refined as we proceed to identify representative cases.

In the second phase of the project, efforts are made to construct general categories or models. The results of the research in each country or international organisation are compared, looking for similarities and dissimilarities. We will try to distinguish patterns that enable us to generalise about the key factors and sets of relations at work. We expect that several models will probably result, linked to their specific (cultural, national or regional) contexts and that we use the broad approach, as mentioned on page 1.

### ***Using Fixed Research Questions in International Comparative Research***

It is crucial to define questions, which will be used for the survey in each country. In the last 5 years several other international research projects into civil-military relations were carried out using 'local researchers' and a fixed set of research questions or themes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A first recent example is the international research project carried out by Charles Moskos and an international team of researchers. Based on Moskos' occupational-institutional model, they tried to 'measure' whether the military in various countries is a unique institution in society or a just another job like other occupations. A second example is the international comparative research project, lead by Juergen Kuhlmann and Jean Callaghan of the US Marshal Center in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, aimed at describing the civil-military relations in various Western European and transatlantic countries as well as Central and Eastern European countries. A third example of an international research project, using a large team of researchers coming from various countries and using a fixed set of questions, is 'Warriors in peacekeeping: points of tensions in intercultural relations' initiated by Mathias Schoenborn and Jean Callaghan. This research project identifies the lessons learned of peace missions within the field of intercultural relations between the national armies working together and between the intervening armies and the local population.

Following this research tradition, in comparing (inter) national experiences in democratic control, we want to co-operate with local researchers who will use a fixed set of research questions as their framework of analysis. Regarding democratic control, the following categories of questions could be addressed. Again, the list is preliminary and exploratory.

## **A. Context of Democratic Control**

1. Changing Perceptions of Security. Within this theme we explore the perceptions of the actors with regard to national security requirements and the roles of other actors, and the impact such changes have on processes of democratic control. *How do the civilian authorities and the military perceive security and the role of the guardians of the state within the post -Cold War security context?* There is much here to explore and at various levels, including similarities and differences of opinion among political elites; among military specialists; between the military and political leaderships; and between different countries' political leaderships. What are the formal and informal processes of consultation and building consensus on the state's security requirements? When disagreements persist, how are they mediated (if at all) and how do they influence relations of control? We could also explore apparent disjunctures in how elites and publics perceive security, such as in many C&EE states where political elites' perceptions (who tend to see security in terms of joining NATO, lending support for traditional military missions) often diverge from those of their publics (who tend to see security as public security against rising criminality, maintaining law and order). Also the increased complexity and ambiguity of threats now: What has been the impact on public discourse and concrete decisions of leaders and opinion-leaders on security? What effect has the air campaign over Kosovo had on these perceptions, and on the perceived missions and roles of the military? Kosovo seems to have convinced some NATO governments that more money is needed for defence, but has it convinced publics? This category of questions could also tap more narrowly into specific sectors, like emergence of RMA and information warfare concepts and how national responses will affect democratic control and civil-military relations. We might also include the

privatisation of security and growth in professional mercenary groups here, as well as civil-military relations in the context of peace operations (how do aid and humanitarian agencies interact with military forces, both at the policy-making level domestically, and on the ground in theatre).

2. Internationalisation of Democratic Control. Militaries are no longer solely a national concern. Increasingly militaries interact internationally in peacetime, in the fields of strategy, doctrinal development, planning, production, training, outreach, defence diplomacy, and implementation of force (in preparing to meet requirements of interoperability, both in terms of peace operations and coalition operations). Few countries, if any, remain completely sovereign when it comes to the management of the monopoly of violence. For example, the entry of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic into NATO had major consequences for their respective armed forces. Their parliaments had to adopt new laws and strategy documents, increase defence budgets, and their militaries had to undertake major reforms in organization, ethos, as well as the training of the soldiers. We might ask, then, *What is the influence of internationalisation of the militaries for the democratic civilian oversight of the military?* This question is not only relevant for the former communist countries, but for the Western countries as well. For example, the recent NATO air campaign over Kosovo in 1999 revealed several points of tension between the smaller member states and NATO HQ, where it was decided when and how the air campaign would be carried out. This theme would give insight into the international pressures that may be eroding the traditional monopoly of violence of nation-states.

## **B. Dimensions of Democratic Control**

3. Vertical Democratic Control. The most well known form of democratic control is parliamentary control and civilian supremacy. This type of control can be defined as vertical control because it implies topdown control. The relevant question in this field is a rather descriptive one: *how is vertical democratic control arranged in the constitutional and legal framework in terms of powers, roles, and checks and balances,*

*and mechanisms of accountability?* It would be important to include in the analysis a critical evaluation of the parliamentary control and civilian supremacy in terms of effectiveness, transparency and legitimacy. In fact, this question refers to the status quo of the political primacy in the countries concerned.

4. Dimensions of Democratic Control: Horizontal Control. As argued above, democratic control can be divided into vertical parliamentary control, societal/ horizontal control, and self-control. The theme horizontal control refers to the question *What are viable alternative methods of democratic control aside from the vertical/hierarchical control of the political leaders?* This question addresses the role of civil society and especially the media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with regard to military affairs. There are not many studies on this topic. Addressing this question might be one of the most useful studies in practical terms, indicating the constraints and opportunities that local and foreign media, civilian experts, and NGOs have experienced in promoting security awareness, monitoring the military, holding executives, legislatures and bureaucracies up to public scrutiny et cetera. Democratic control and the public/political agenda. *To what extent is democratic control perceived as a real problem within society?* This question addresses whether political parties and the media pay attention to issues of democratic control or if democratic control is regarded as a minor, non-important issue. In this regard the position of the media is important and how they cover politicalmilitary relations.

5. Another Alternative Type of Democratic Control Is Democratic Self-Control. Democratic self-control refers to the internalising of societal values in the mind of the military professional. The military soldier is a professional wo/man to whom the political leaders have delegated important aspects of the management of the monopoly of violence. Autonomy and self-discipline are the pillars of the military professional. In terms of democracy, it is relevant to study the internalisation of societal and democratic values in the mind of the military professional. It would be interesting to research *to what extent are internal safeguards present within the military, fostering the democratic orientation of the soldiers?* A democratic education of officers, the right (or duty) to disobey certain military orders or an ombudsman could be factors that

enhance a democratic attitude of the soldiers and by which a 'Befehl ist Befehl' attitude may be avoided.

However we could also turn the spotlight on the values and expectations of the political leadership and public with regard to the armed forces as a politically contested domain. That is, to what extent are liberal, pluralistic democratic values held by these groups when it comes to defence policy and the military? How do they react to dissenting views within government and outside it concerning roles, missions, resource allocations, etc? To what extent do compromise and consensus-building exist in the policy process surrounding the armed forces? In these sorts of questions, we would attempt to understand the political culture underpinning a country's system of democratic control.

### **C. Problems of Democratic Control**

6. Democratic Control and Armed Forces Restructuring. This is an interesting theme because nearly all militaries in the post-Cold War period have been confronted with budget cuts, lay-offs of military personnel as well as changing tasks and missions. The processes are not per se in the interest of the militaries or concordant with the traditional role and culture of the military. Militaries are not that keen on becoming smaller or being tasked to fulfill the new peace missions. *What was the impact of the restructuring of the armed forces on democratic control? Were the civilian authorities confronted with explicit opposition of the military? Or were the civilian authorities facing organisational inertia, which is common in large bureaucracies?* These questions could be approached on several levels.

7. The Problem of Double Subordination. *How is the problem of double subordination<sup>11</sup> addressed, i.e. whether soldiers should obey the state (constitution) or a particular government that is in office?* Regarding this problem, Huntington identifies several

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<sup>11</sup> Based on Michael Howard (1957). *Soldiers and governments: nine studies in civil-military relations*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoods, p. 12

potential conflicts between political and military leaders, in which it is in some cases justified that a soldier disobeys his/her political leaders, i.e.:

- When political orders are incompatible with military professionalism,
- When political orders are illegal or
- When political orders are incompatible with basic morality.<sup>12</sup>

It would be interesting to know how these dilemmas are addressed in the countries concerned.

8. Impact of Post Cold War Peace Missions on Democratic Control. *To what extent and how do the post Cold War peace missions influence politico-military relations, in comparison with politico-military relations during the Cold War era?* Bernard Boëne and Christopher Dandeker predict that the political control of the armed forces will be both more complicated and problematic due to the social transformation in civil-military relations. They state that 'the future will see a return to radical professionalism, due mostly to the restoration of prestige, more frequent opportunities for military action, drastically reduced military establishments, and societal contexts for which the 'post-modern' label provides a convenient short-hand description. The consequences in civil-military relations will include stronger identities, more forcefully expressed interests, and less flexibility on the military side, while politicians, as is already the case in a number of countries, will exhibit a degree of diffidence, or at least less assurance, in dealing with military matters'<sup>13</sup>.

9. The Erosion of the Primacy of the Politics. *To what extent is the military an important political power in the political decision making process?* Montesquieu developed the idea of the *Trias Politica*, i.e. dividing the different powers of the state into three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch and the juridical branch. Montesquieu influenced the constitutional framework of many states, notably the constitution of the US. However, already in the 1970s concerns were voiced about the

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<sup>12</sup> Huntington (1964), o.c. ,p. 70-78.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Boëne and Christopher Dandeker (2000). 'Armed forces, state and society in Sweden: a view from a wider European perspective'. In: Christopher Dandeker and Alice Weibull, eds. (2000). *Facing uncertainty, report no. 2*. Karlstad.



power of civil servants resulting in a Fourth power, next to the three constitutionally acknowledged powers.<sup>14</sup> The argument is that the span of control of a minister is no match for the enormous ministry and the complex work of the permanent civil servants. A minister doesn't have the time, the energy and the knowledge to control the work of all the civil servants. Because of the complexity of the tasks, a civil servant is not only responsible for the implementation of the policy, but for the development, decision-making and evaluation of the policy as well. Increasingly the civil servants have to take over work from the politician<sup>15</sup>. Such a trend can be witnessed with regard to the military as well. Military commanders enjoy discretionary powers and have to take decisions with major political consequences.

Hence, we could characterise political-military relations as a relation between actors, each with a different set of power sources. The political leaders possess the constitutional power to command the armed forces, whereas the military leaders possess expertise power, information power, delegated authority power as well as the command of influential relations.<sup>16</sup> In addition, political-military relations could be characterised as asymmetrical because of the two actors possess different types of power bases.

10. The Last Question is an Open and a Summarising Question: *What are the strengths and weaknesses related to the way democratic control is exercised in the country involved?* This question would give a researcher the opportunity to discuss aspects of democratic control which are not covered by the previous questions.

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<sup>14</sup> C. Crinice le Roy (1976). *De vierde macht: een hernieuwde kennismaking (The fourth might: a renewed introduction)*. Den Haag: VUGA.

<sup>15</sup> Ed van Tijn et al. (1998). *De sorry-democratie: recente politieke affaires en de ministriële verantwoordelijkheid*. Amsterdam: Van Gennip, p. 9-11.

<sup>16</sup> Comparable with Arthur Ringeling's reflections on the power of civil servants. See...Arthur Ringeling, "Democratie en bureaucratie (Democracy and bureaucracy)". In: J.J.A. Thomassen, ed. (1981). *Democratie: theorie en praktijk (Democracy : theory and practice)*. Alphen a/d Rijn: Samson, p. 269.



Established in 2000 on the initiative of the Swiss government, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), encourages and supports States and non-State governed institutions in their efforts to strengthen democratic and civilian control of armed and security forces, and promotes international cooperation within this field, initially targeting the Euro-Atlantic regions.

The Centre collects information, undertakes research and engages in networking activities in order to identify problems, to establish lessons learned and to propose the best practices in the field of democratic control of armed forces and civil-military relations. The Centre provides its expertise and support to all interested parties, in particular governments, parliaments, military authorities, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, academic circles.

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