

## AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, THE SOLDIER AND THE STATE IN A NEW ERA

Book Review

Fifty years after Huntington's theory on civil-military relations was published, West Point professors Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, invited a number of well-known experts on political and social sciences as well as history to analyse the characteristics of civil-military relations in the USA and identify the applicability of Huntington's concept for studying modern civil-military relations. Through the application of his theory, they studied the development and situation of American civil-military relations, particularly in the context of the events following 9/11 and the War in Iraq. The research project focused on the relations between civil and military leaders, the strategic decision making process and the role of military advice, modern relations between societal and functional imperatives shaping the military establishment, the subordination of the military to civil authorities, the characteristics of the military profession and military ethics, and the relations between the legislative and executive branches of government. The book<sup>1</sup> is an effort to provide resources on how to address such research in a methodological, analytical and interdisciplinary manner. Among others, it also provides a short outline on the development of social sciences.

This book is composed of essays written by seventeen authors who – through different approaches – discuss views on civil-military relations in the USA and evaluate the relevance of Huntington's theory in this century. The overall conclusion is that the tradition of good civil-military relations has been interrupted and that there is a need for their "repair", above all, in areas such as the strategic decision-making process, the definition of defence policy, relations between civilian and military leaders and the role and quality of military advice. Betz, for example, questions the boundary between civil and military spheres, arguing that as objective control is far from absolute in its positivity, subjective control is neither exclusively harmful.

---

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, published by The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2009, 409 pages.

Similarly, Gibson establishes the shortcomings of a complete separation of the civil and military spheres and emphasises the requirement of changing legislation and behavioural standards. Kohn agrees with Gibson's reflections on civil and military behavioural standards and questions the methods of restoring confidence between civil and military leaders.

Moten, by studying the relations between the Secretary of Defence and the Army Chief of Staff, analyses the reasons for the conflicts between civil and military leaders and how these can be avoided. Brooks complements this discussion through analysing the political engagement of generals and establishes that the consequences are not always negative. Burk discusses the limits of military obedience and the moral dilemmas that arise when obeying orders.

Feaver and Seeler, through studying the development of social sciences and analysing the methodological instruments for studying civil-military relations, confirm the relevance of Huntington's theory for future studies. These observations are joined by Desch, who discusses civil-military relations in the context of the American liberal tradition and establishes, irrespective of critiques, that the theory of objective control is still the best framework for resolving tensions between the liberal culture and the conservative ethos of the military profession. Driver explores the connection between ideology and military professionalism. He demonstrates that it is not possible to affirm whether the military is imbued with conservatism and a common ideology as a direct result of its professionalism, and concludes his essay with the observation that the shared values stem from social ones.

Schadlow and Lacquement emphasise the inadequacy of the objective control theory and argue that the nature of war today necessitates the involvement of the military in politics, especially in the context of stabilisation operations.. Segal and De Angelis, based on their analysis of the development of the military profession, demonstrate the inapplicability of applying a fifty year old theory to today's military, in which, for example, non-commissioned officers have assumed a greater role than during Huntington's times. In short, they argue that today's military has little in common with that of the past, particularly with the emergence of civilian as "managers of violence" and that this is a weakness in the theory. The need to adapt the military organisation is discussed by Murray, who stresses the significance of military education and the necessity for the intellectual development of military leaders as well as the related need to adapt military education to modern requirements.

The observations and information provided by the authors is of value to all those who study civil-military relations, civil control and the military's role in society. Although these essays focus on studying American civil-military relations, the findings are universal and discuss possible deviations in the civil-military relations of developed democracies. The book provides comprehensive information on what causes these deviations, how to recognise them and what their consequences are. It

also provides guidance for implementing military and civil behavioural standards for raising the level of civil-military relations in practice.

Particularly useful are the findings regarding today's relevance and value of Huntington's concept. Although it has been repeatedly criticised in the past (and some weaknesses have been revealed by the authors of this book), it still offers an exceptional and useful methodological framework and starting point for studying modern civil-military relations. By analysing various examples in practice, the authors expose its shortcomings and offer guidance on how to avoid them. Above all, they point out the implications of fully separating the military and civil spheres. The text is concluded with overarching observations, which articulate that the significance of the balance between the socialite and functional imperative shaping the military as an institution and the relations between civilian control and military effectiveness as well as the characteristics of the military profession covered by Huntington's work, remain relevant and viable topics to be considered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.