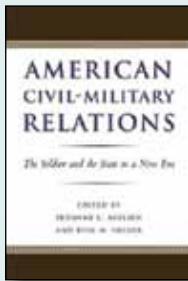


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American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era

Edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider
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Reviewed by
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Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* identified the critical importance of civil-military relations at the early stages of the Cold War while discussing how to balance national security requirements within the context of democratic society. He identified influencers that shape the military's role in society and that require the military to remain capable of defending the Nation while staying subordinate to civilian authorities and to conform to societal norms and ideologies. Huntington also identified two means of civilian control over the military: *subjective control*, which includes an integration of the military into civilian political spheres, and *objective control*, characterized by an apolitical and separate professional military. Over 50 years after *The Soldier and the State* was published, West Point professors Suzanne Nielsen and

Don Snider have compiled a number of essays that discuss both the relevance and shortfalls of Huntington's concepts.

This book was the result of a research project focused on creating an updated resource for civil-military relations classes at West Point and includes chapters from a number of well-known scholars. The text lends support to Huntington's contention that the relations between the armed forces and society must be examined objectively through both theoretical and pragmatic frameworks. In the first chapter, Nielsen and Snider contend that Huntington's concepts provide the basis for an examination of the relationship between America's military and political institutions that "follows the trail that Huntington blazed" (p. 2).

The first section examines Huntington's theories from a historical perspective and how his views helped shaped civil-military relations discourse over the past 50 years. Included are a chapter by Richard Betts on the state of American civil-military relations since 9/11, Matthew Moten's in-depth analysis of the Donald Rumsfeld–Eric Shinseki conflicts in 2002, and Peter Feaver and Erika Seeler's assessment of civil-military relations literature both before and after *The Soldier and the State*.

The next portion discusses Huntington's concepts of the societal and functional characteristics (imperatives) that shape the military as an institution. Michael Desch discusses Huntington's contention that the overall ideological views of the military (conservative) and those of American society (liberal) are often incompatible, while Williamson Murray discusses the need for military officer education reform. In the third part of the book, the civil-military partnership is examined from the perspective of the military's

participation and responsibilities. James Burk discusses the requirements of officers to obey civilian orders and the concept of "blind versus responsible obedience" (p. 154), while David Segal and Karin De Angelis examine the definition of the military as a profession and how it has evolved since Huntington wrote *The Soldier and the State*.

The final section includes a discussion by Risa Brooks on the hazards of military participation in politics, and Richard Kohn examines the importance of personalities and relationships in civil-military relations. The editors conclude the text with a number of overarching observations from their research and the contributing authors and clearly articulate that while there may be disagreements on the theoretical details in *The Soldier and the State*, Huntington's work remains relevant and a viable framework to consider modern American civil-military relationships.

The strengths of this book include a frank discussion of the difficulties inherent in civil-military relations. While the overall text argues that Huntington's theories and observations remain relevant, the chapters contain candid and well-supported arguments that incorporate other contending theorists, to include Morris Janowitz and Eliot Cohen, and do not hesitate to criticize the concepts presented in *The Soldier and the State*. Moten's detailed discussion of Rumsfeld's dismal relations with military leaders provides an excellent narrative of the civil-military difficulties during America's current overseas conflicts. Another excellent, albeit controversial, discussion is Brooks's logical analysis of the benefits and risks of military participation in civilian political affairs and the conclusion in favor of limiting political activities by active and retired military

personnel. Finally, Richard Kohn contributes the most important chapter, which provides detailed guidance on how senior military and civilian leaders should participate in efforts to ensure America's national security. Kohn notes that the military is the institution with the most continuity (elected leaders will come and go) and thus the most responsibility to maintain positive relations.

At the same time, this book does suffer from a few flaws. Many of the chapters rehash the same background information on Huntington as the introduction, and the book gives the impression of a collection of distinct journal articles rather than a coherent discussion of civil-military issues. The most significant problem is Williamson Murray's critique of officer education, which is both dated and anecdotal; he describes, for example, the Joint Forces Staff College as having a "high school curriculum" without providing citation or evidence (p. 346). Murray's analysis fails to recognize that the post-9/11 American military has made significant strides in improving both its education system and combat doctrine in response to the current security environment.

Yet these issues are minor and do not diminish the overall value of this book to a wide audience of scholars, military and civilian leaders, and even the general public. While Huntington's text began as an effort to provide a resource for teaching civil-military relations at the university level, it resulted in a useful examination of the enduring relationship between the American political and defense institutions. For decades, his theories have been central to scholarly discussions of civil-military issues; this book clearly demonstrates that the concepts presented in *The Soldier and the*