

VOLUME XII, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2011/12

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Algis
Valiunas:

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Wallace**

Colin
Dueck:

**How
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Martha
Bayles:

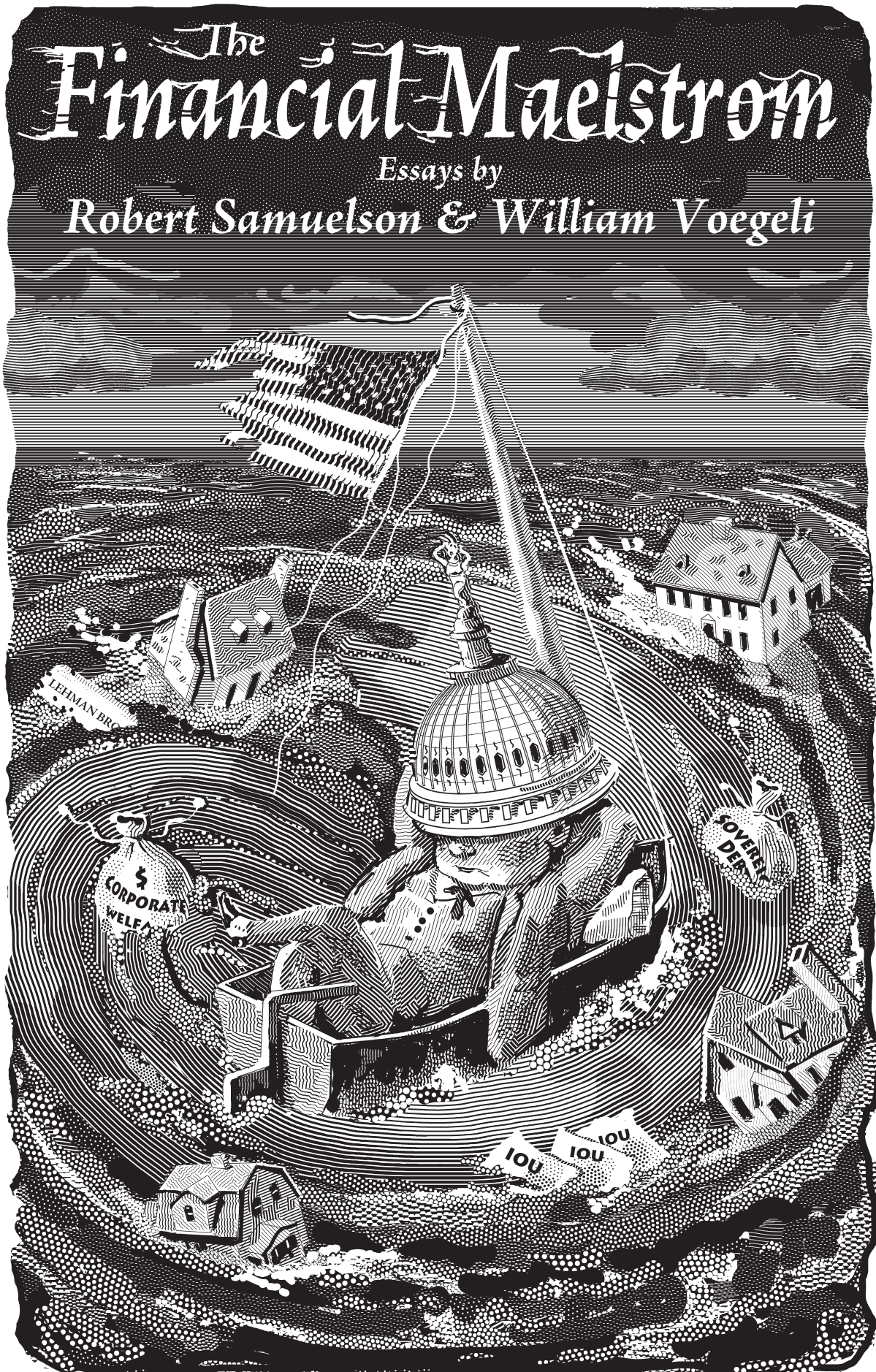
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Hollywood**

Robert P.
George:

**Conservative
Blitz**

Diana
Schaub:

Malcolm X



David
Pryce-Jones:

**Christopher
Hitchens,
RIP**

Michael
Nelson:

**Soldiers &
Citizens**

Edward
Feser:

**Scientism's
Folly**

Bradley
C.S.

Watson:

**The Law
School Racket**

In Memoriam:

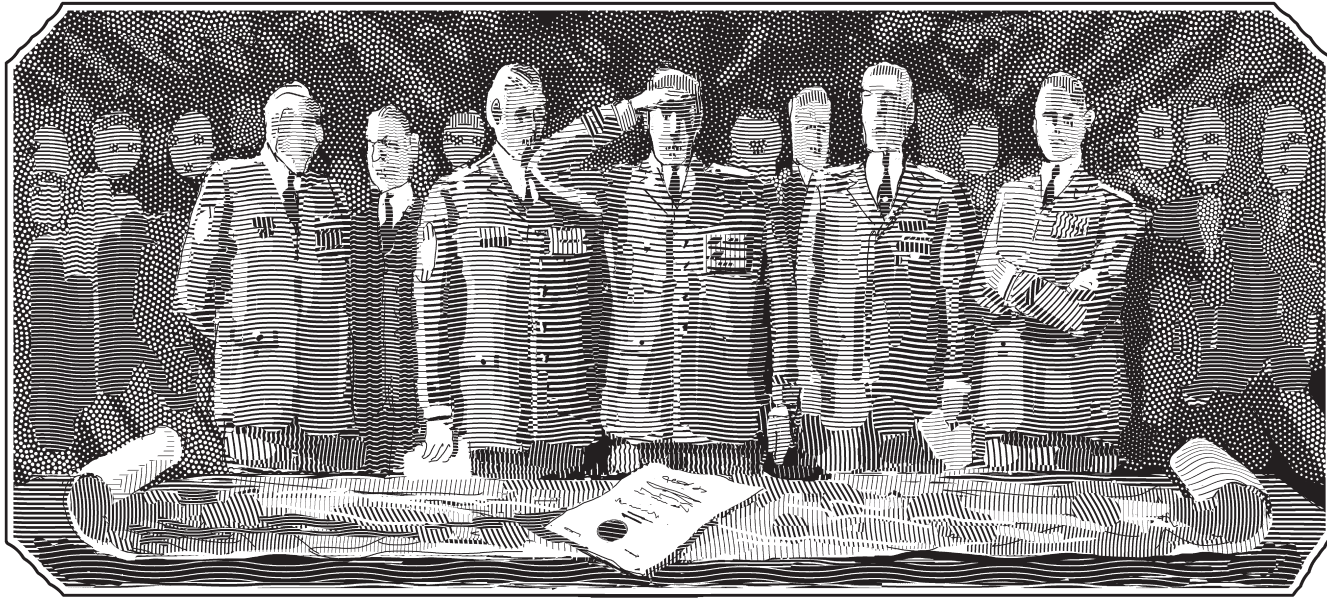
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Essay by Michael Nelson

SOLDIERS AND CITIZENS



THIS YEAR MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY of two best-selling Cold War thrillers, each playing on growing public concern that civilian authorities would lose control of the military. In *Fail-Safe*, Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler based their fictional president's loss of control on a combination of technical failure and military Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). The technical failure occurred when an attack order was mistakenly sent to an American bomber armed with nuclear weapons and bound for Moscow; the SOP required the pilot to ignore a presidential order to turn back, counterfeit commands being just the sort of trick the Soviets would employ. Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II's *Seven Days in May* offered an equally nightmarish account, describing a plot by a charismatic air force general in league with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to seize power from the president, who had just negotiated a nuclear disarmament agreement with the Soviet Union. In 1964 the two novels were made into well-crafted motion pictures, but both of them were overshadowed by yet another film released that year: *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. *Dr. Strangelove* had it all—the runaway bomber, the irreversible SOP, the out-of-control general—and was darkly funny to boot.

Truman and MacArthur

IT'S HARDLY COINCIDENCE THAT THESE STORIES appeared and flourished when they did. After the Second World War, the new nuclear age and the newly permanent standing army had made citizens nervous. President Harry S.

Truman's removal of Douglas MacArthur (a real-life charismatic general) from command of allied forces in the Korean War—and the ensuing political firestorm—were barely a decade old.

In hindsight, everything about the controversy, which has received its best treatment in Michael D. Pearlman's *Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown* (2008), seems unlikely. Truman's intense study of history had disposed him to defer to generals, not confront them. "Of all the military heroes Hannibal and Lee were to my mind the best," he wrote in his diary in 1934. "They won every battle [but] lost the war due to crazy politicians." As head of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program during World War II, Truman had focused on contractors rather than generals, lest his legislative colleagues adopt the kibitzing style of the Civil War-era Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. For his part, MacArthur had little interest in defending South Korea. Seventeen months before North Korea invaded in June 1950, he wrote that such an invasion would "force abandonment of any pretense of military support." The general's main interest was in protecting the Chinese island of Formosa against the mainland's new Communist regime, and in helping the deposed government of Chiang Kai-Shek use Formosa as a base to regain power.

Ordered by the president to save South Korea from defeat, MacArthur engineered the daring Inchon landing behind enemy lines and, with a green light from Truman, drove through North Korea toward China, provoking a massive Chinese counterattack. Seeing an opportunity to overthrow China's Communist

government, MacArthur pressed Truman for permission to invade. In March 1951, after the president refused, the general wrote a letter to House Republican leader Joe Martin praising a speech in which Martin argued that Chiang's army should be unleashed to create "a second front on China's mainland." Martin released the letter and Truman fired MacArthur, a wildly unpopular decision that helped make the general the most admired man in the country.

MacArthur did his best to translate the admiration of his countrymen into a presidential candidacy in 1952, but with little success. As Pearlman, a former professor of history at the United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, points out, there's a reason some generals succeed in politics while others don't. "Zachary Taylor, Ulysses Grant, and [Dwight] Eisenhower were known for informality in dress and manner along the lines of citizen-soldiers," he writes. "They stood in stark contrast to generals not selected: Winfield Scott ('Old Fuss and Feathers'), George McClellan ('the Young Napoleon'), or Douglas MacArthur, apparently too daunting to carry a national nickname." People admired MacArthur, but nobody called him "Mac," or even "Doug." In contrast, "GIs felt no qualms waving 'Hi, Ike' to a grinning five-star general waving back."

Military-Industrial Complex

EISENHOWER'S TWO TERMS AS PRESIDENT (he was elected in 1952 and reelected in 1956) should have allayed the worries about excessive military power that MacArthur's popular defiance of Truman



Books mentioned in this essay:

Fail-Safe, by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler. Harper Perennial, 288 pages, \$14 (paper)

Seven Days in May, by Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II. HarperCollins, 341 pages, out-of-print

Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown, by Michael D. Pearlman. Indiana University Press, 376 pages, \$29.95

Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Military-Industrial Complex, by James Ledbetter. Yale University Press, 280 pages, \$17 (paper)

American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider. Johns Hopkins University Press, 432 pages, \$67 (cloth), \$36.95 (paper)

Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam, by H. R. McMaster. Harper Perennial,

480 pages, \$16.99 (paper)

America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force, by Beth Bailey. Harvard University Press, 352 pages, \$29.95

Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security, edited by Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn. MIT Press, 550 pages, \$38

Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide: What Each Side Must Know about the Other—and about Itself, by Bruce Fleming. Potomac Books, 296 pages, \$27.50

Known and Unknown: A Memoir, by Donald Rumsfeld. Sentinel, 832 pages, \$36

US Civil-Military Relations: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain, by Mackubin Thomas Owens. Continuum, 224 pages, \$95 (cloth), \$22.95 (paper)

Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment, by Risa A. Brooks. Princeton University Press, 320 pages, \$31.95

Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime, by Eliot A. Cohen. Anchor Books, 320 pages, \$16 (paper)

Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry, by P.W. Singer. Cornell University Press, 360 pages, \$19.95 (paper)

had aroused. In addition to ending the war in Korea, Ike's main goal as president was to shrink defense spending, which comprised 60% of the federal budget at the time he took office. Congress's seemingly uncritical acceptance of every new proposed weapons system "distresses me greatly," Eisenhower said in 1949, while serving as president of Columbia University, because it will "damage the country financially and without adding to its defensive strength." During his tenure in the White House, Ike resisted pressure from his generals to intervene on behalf of France in Indochina, and from Democrats to close what he knew was an imaginary "missile gap" with the Soviet Union. He fumed at aviation companies like Boeing and General Dynamics that lobbied for expensive new weapons, at retired officers for joining their ranks, and at Congress for succumbing to their blandishments. "Increasingly," writes James Ledbetter, editor of Reuters.com, in *Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Military-Industrial Complex* (2011), "in 1958 and 1959, he became frustrated and annoyed at the incompetence, disloyalty, and outright insubordination he perceived among military officials ostensibly under his command."

It was in this context that Eisenhower chose to devote much of his January 17, 1961,

farewell address to warning "against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex," an influence he claimed "is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government" and, consequently, may "endanger our liberties or democratic processes." Eisenhower was expressing his ongoing frustration with wasteful spending on expensive new armaments that he thought did nothing to keep the nation secure. But his rhetoric far outstripped his intended meaning, calling to mind the specter of a military that, in combination with major corporations, might seize control of the government.

In 1962 the founders of the newly formed Students for a Democratic Society joined the authors of *Fail Safe* and *Seven Days in May* in reading Ike's speech this way. As Ledbetter shows, SDS's founding manifesto, the Port Huron Statement, invoked Eisenhower as a prophet foretelling "cataclysm, the general militarization of American society." And in summer 1962, President John F. Kennedy, who had read *Seven Days in May*, speculated to his friend Red Fay that a military takeover "is possible":

If there were another Bay of Pigs, the reaction of the country would be, "Is he too young and inexperienced?" The

military would almost feel that it was their patriotic obligation to stand ready to preserve the integrity of the nation and only God knows just what kind of segment of democracy they would be defending... Then, if there were a third Bay of Pigs, it could happen.

Second-Guessing

CONCERNS ABOUT TOO LITTLE CIVILIAN control of the military ebbed during the 1960s presidencies of Kennedy and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, but only temporarily. Kennedy brought in Robert McNamara as secretary of defense to micromanage the armed services, adopting quantitative techniques borrowed from his work in the air force during World War II and subsequently at the Ford Motor Company. As Columbia political science professor Richard K. Betts writes in his chapter in Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider's well-crafted anthology *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (2009), "Tensions simmered close to the boiling point...when a youthful president, a technocratic secretary of defense, and a brashly confident clique of defense intellectuals came to manage a military establishment led by officers who had already been generals in World War II." When the



Vietnam War—a civilian initiative—heated up in mid-decade, McNamara and Lyndon Johnson famously leaned over the generals' shoulders to second-guess their choice of appropriate bombing targets. In *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (1997), H.R. McMaster, an award-winning teacher at West Point, blasted McNamara and Johnson for bullying the Joint Chiefs of Staff and, even more severely, took the chiefs to task for allowing themselves to be bullied.

Apprehensions about the dangers of unaccountable military power revived in a new form with the election of Richard Nixon in 1968. Less than three weeks before Election Day, Nixon proposed abolishing the draft that had prevailed since the eve of World War II and replacing it with an all-volunteer army. Nixon's purpose was political—public support for the draft had waned as both cause and consequence of declining support for the war in Vietnam—but as Beth Bailey, a professor of history at Temple University, shows in her excellent *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (2009), the idea had deep intellectual roots among free-market economists like Milton Friedman and Martin Anderson. Their argument, which Anderson brought into the White House as a young Nixon aide, was that the government should build an army not by forcing young people to serve, but by making pay and benefits so attractive that they would want to. One powerful fear that advocates had to overcome was that “an all-volunteer force would be alienated from civilian society, thus undermining civilian control of the military and increasing the likelihood of a coup d'état.” But so deep was the unpopularity of the draft on the antiwar Left, the libertarian Right, and, in Nixon's case, the rough political center, that it yielded rather easily to the new All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973.

The All-Volunteer Era

THE AVF HAS TURNED OUT TO BE A GREAT success, so much so that no one calls it the AVF anymore; it's just “the army.” But it took a while to get on its feet. By the end of the 1970s, Bailey writes, “Quality, as measured by test scores and high school graduation rates, was plummeting.... Re-enlistment rates were poor,” and more than one third of enlistees did not even complete their initial three-year commitment. In 1980 army chief of staff Edward “Shy” Meyer publicly lamented that the United States had a “hollow army.”

It took President Ronald Reagan, elected later that year, to turn the situation around.

During his two terms in office pay and benefits rose dramatically, the army launched its brilliant “Be All You Can Be” campaign (“one of the great advertising slogans of the twentieth century,” writes Bailey), and by 1992 only 2% of enlistees lacked high school degrees. “The army offered more opportunity to racial minorities and to women than almost any segment of civilian society”—not, Bailey notes, because of “notions of social good,” but rather in pursuit of “its primary mission...national defense.” Contemporary liberal critics like Representative Charles Rangel of New York get it wrong, she shows, when they argue that wars are now fought on the backs of the poor and members of minority groups. Because most poor people can't meet the army's qualification standards, “America's army—even its enlisted ranks—is fairly solidly middle class.” And of those dying in Iraq, “a disproportionate majority, 2,106 [out of 2,825 by April 2008], were white.”

Even as the all-volunteer army took solid root in the 1980s, the stage was being set for a new wave of concern about the adequacy of civilian control of the military. This concern pervades Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn's *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (2001). The October 1983 terrorist slaughter of 241 Marines and naval personnel, camped on the tarmac of the airport in Beirut, Lebanon, as part of an ill-conceived peacekeeping deployment, revived all of the military's post-Vietnam resentment of vague civilian-imposed missions with inadequate resources. The result was the 1984 Weinberger Doctrine (after Reagan's secretary of defense, Caspar Weinberger) which held that the United States should only commit force, in overwhelming numbers, to carry out clearly defined missions in which vital national interests are at stake and for which there is “reasonable assurance” of public and congressional support—the opposite, in every particular, of the Beirut deployment. Colin Powell, when serving as Joint Chiefs' chairman in the early 1990s, added “clear exit strategy” to Weinberger's criteria, and journalists called it the Powell Doctrine.

Reagan generally respected the Weinberger-Powell restraints, and President Bush followed them to the letter when sending half a million troops to drive the Iraqi army out of Kuwait (and no more) in 1991, winning kudos from the military. In planning Operation Desert Storm, Bush later wrote, “I did not want to repeat the problems of the Vietnam War (or numerous wars throughout history), where the political leaderships meddled with military operations.”

Bill Clinton's election in 1992, in contrast, was highly unpopular among the uniformed

services. This was partly because of their disrespect for Clinton—“the pot-smoking, draft-dodging, skirt-chasing commander-in-chief,” in the intemperate words of one air force general—and their fury when one of his first acts as president was to order, without consultation, the integration of gays and lesbians into the military. Powell, backed by Congress, stared down the president, delaying integration for nearly two decades, and even then only after intense discussion up and down the ranks.

Clinton was a Democrat, too, and the officer corps was becoming increasingly Republican. As Betts points out in his chapter in the Nielsen-Snyder volume, the military has long been disproportionately Southern and conservative. What changed during the late 20th century was that the Democratic Party became an uncongenial home to Southern conservatives, and uniformed officers fled to the GOP as part of the general migration. On top of that, officers bitterly associated antiwar protests with the failure in Vietnam, and antiwar protesters with the Democrats.

Even when Democratic politicians learned their lesson and started praising the military, they did so with a tin ear, which is one reason why a recent survey of 4,000 army officers by Major Heidi Urben found that self-identified Republicans outnumber Democrats in the officer corps by 60% to 18%. “When liberals try to ‘defend the troops’ by insisting that troops not be sent in harm's way,” argues Bruce Fleming, a professor in the U.S. Naval Academy's English Department, in his sparkling *Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide: What Each Side Must Know about the Other—and about Itself* (2010), “they're almost always surprised by the troops' apparent insistence that they *want* to be in harm's way. That's what they trained for, after all. At least they don't want to be defended by liberals. It makes them seem weak.” In 1999, an extensive survey of military officers by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (the basis for much of the Feaver-Kohn collection and generally confirmed by Major Urben's more recent survey) found that a majority of officers believed that it had become the duty of senior military leaders to “insist”—not just “advise” or “advocate,” much less “be neutral”—that civilian leaders defer to them on matters like “setting rules of engagement,” “developing an ‘exit strategy,’” “ensuring that clear political and military goals exist,” and “deciding what kinds of military units (air versus naval, heavy versus light) will be used to accomplish all tasks.”

But the tension between Clinton and the armed services wasn't all personal and partisan. The end of the Cold War in 1990, by removing the military's sole, near-half century-



long mission of deterring Soviet aggression, gave presidents a freer hand both to deploy troops in local or regional conflicts (as Bush did in Panama and Somalia and Clinton did in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo) and to assign them a wider variety of peacekeeping and humanitarian assignments. In place of the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, the army was charged with multiple MOOTWs—Military Operations Other Than War—a term that by itself reflects the military’s dislike of them. “Between 1991 and 1999 alone,” Darrel W. Driver, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, observes in his chapter in *American Civil-Military Relations*, “the United States undertook fifty-four operations for such purposes as drug interdiction, restoring domestic order, peacekeeping, infrastructure development, disaster relief, and rescuing foreign nationals, along with traditional combat operations.” Meanwhile, the collapse of the evil empire was leading Congress to shrink the army from 785,000 to 480,000—more missions; fewer soldiers to execute them.

The War on Terror

EVIDENCE THAT CIVIL-MILITARY TENSIONS were more than a matter of hostility to Clinton in particular and Democrats in general came after the election of George W. Bush in 2000. To be sure, Bush had campaigned on the theme that the military was underfunded and stretched too thin. Officers listened to this general expression of sympathy rather than to his September 1999 speech at the Citadel: “Our military is still organized more for Cold War threats than for the challenges of the new century—for industrial-age operations, rather than information-age battles.... Our forces in the next century must be agile, lethal, readily deployable, and require a minimum of logistical support.” Donald Rumsfeld, Bush’s secretary of defense, has been faulted by critics and former colleagues for selectively recounting events in his *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (2011). But Rumsfeld gets at least one thing right: the “Revolution in Military Affairs” that he launched immediately on taking office in 2001—to the “harrumphing, protest, and consternation” of the military—was Bush’s policy as well as his own.

“Rumsfeld took his marching orders on transformation from the president,” Mackubin Thomas Owens, Professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Naval War College, rightly observes in his thoughtful and comprehensive *US Civil-Military Relations: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain* (2011). “A transformed military would substitute information, speed, and flexibility of action for

mass on the battlefield.” The president and defense secretary’s “vision,” writes Risa A. Brooks, assistant professor of political science at Northwestern University, in *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (2008), “posed a direct challenge to the army’s organizational concept of how war should be fought: with lighter forces more reliant on technology than boots on the ground, versus with heavy reliance on ground forces and mass armies.”

Rumsfeld and Bush appeared to be vindicated after 9/11, when they brushed aside Joint Chiefs’ chairman Hugh Shelton’s claim that it would take months to ramp up an invasion of Afghanistan. Instead they worked with Gen. Tommy Franks, the head of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and Central Intelligence Agency director George Tenet to insert a small number of CIA and military special forces operatives backed by precision air power—and lots of cash to buy support

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from local warlords. Their approach to the spring 2003 war in Iraq, similar in spirit, appeared equally successful at first. Bush asked for a plan, the generals responded with what Rumsfeld calls “Desert Storm on Steroids,” and back and forth they went before agreeing on an invasion force of about 200,000 that was clearly more than sufficient to topple Saddam. When it came to defeating the enemy’s army, the “unequal dialogue”—Eliot Cohen’s term—between civilian and military leaders seemed to be working. As rendered in Cohen’s *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (2003), unequal dialogue is “a dialogue, in that both sides express views bluntly, indeed, sometimes offensively, and not once but repeatedly,” but it’s unequal “in that the final authority of the civilian leader is unambiguous and unquestioned.”

The problem in both Afghanistan and, especially, Iraq was that neither party to this dialogue was much interested in discussing what would happen after the wars were won. In Iraq, Owens points out, “while CENTCOM spent eighteen months, beginning in November 2001, on the war plan for MCOs [Major Combat Operations], no real postwar

plan was developed before February 2003 and not completed until April, a full month after the war began and even then it was only ‘power point deep.’” Why? Because the military prefers fighting wars to peacekeeping and nation-building, and because Rumsfeld, like the rest of the Bush Administration, assumed that when Saddam was gone, Iraq would sort itself out.

In November 2006, after nearly four years of insurrectionary chaos in Baghdad and its environs, Bush fired Rumsfeld and launched the “surge”: 20,000 additional troops on a newly-defined counterinsurgency mission to “clear and secure neighborhoods” and then “protect the population.” “To an extent unmatched since Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War,” Owens writes, “President Bush assumed responsibility for the strategy and conduct of the war.” Bush found his Grant in counterinsurgency maestro David Petraeus, as would President Barack Obama later when he charged the general to bring order to Afghanistan, which had grown equally chaotic.

A Careful Balance

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IS ONE OF those things that a country has to get right. Too strong a military creates at least a potential threat to the regime, and too weak a military exposes the nation to invasion. Without meaning to, Brooks’s book shows how hard getting the relationship right can be. Focusing just on “strategic assessment”—“the process through which relations between a state’s political goals/strategies and military strategies/activities are evaluated and decided”—she offers eight case studies from the past century. Brooks rates just one example—Great Britain from 1902 to 1914—as completely successful. Even then the success lasted only until the outbreak of the Great War and the emergence of cracks in the civilian governing coalition, which tipped the balance from the civilian-led “unequal dialogue” she basically favors to the strategy driven by the generals: a disastrous war of attrition along the western front.

Complicating matters further, especially in the contemporary United States, is the recent and increasing reliance on civilian contractors to perform traditional military tasks, which is the subject of P.W. Singer’s seminal *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (2007). Although most of what these contractors do involves the logistics of keeping an army in the field—food, construction, sanitation, transport, electric supply, and the like—the scope of contractor assignments in post-occupation Iraq swelled



to include “the training of the post-Saddam police, paramilitary, and army” and even shooting assignments like “convoy escort and protection of key bases, offices, and facilities from rebel attack.”

The consequences of relying on private contractors, the National Security Fellow at the Brookings Institution observes, are political as well as military (and economic: the typical contract employee, whose value is based on training received while in uniform, is paid double or more what the army pays). When Clinton sent troops to the Balkans, contracting out logistics meant not having to take the controversial step of calling up National Guard and Reserve units. By 2007 in Iraq, a defense department study showed, what seemed like 160,000 American troops—a barely sustainable figure from a political standpoint—was really 340,000 when contract employees were counted. When Obama pulled out the last army unit from Iraq in December 2011, about 16,000 Americans remained: 2,000 from the state department and 14,000 contract employees. As Singer argues, “If an operation cannot deploy without privatized assistance because it lacks both public and congressional support, then perhaps the original rationale deserves further debate.” In other words, counting the cost should mean counting the real cost.

These caveats aside, it’s worth celebrating that no one is writing (or, perhaps more accurately, reaching the bestseller lists with) *Seven Days in May-* and *Fail Safe-* style dystopias today. Sure, the military has ways of making its occasional unhappiness with civilian control felt, most of them of the passive-aggressive variety. Examples that come up in several of these books include the army’s deciding not to teach counterinsurgency warfare after Vietnam, hoping to deny civilian decision-makers that option; and the 2006 “revolt of the generals” (more precisely, ex-generals channeling many serving generals’ opinion) calling on Rumsfeld to resign for what former general Barry McCaffrey describes in *American Civil-Military Relations* as “arrogance, disingenuous behavior, and misjudgments.” More recently, an Obama favorite, General Stan-

ley McChrystal, was fired from command of coalition forces in Afghanistan because of indiscreet comments some of his aides made about Vice President Joseph Biden and other administration officials in earshot of a *Rolling Stone* reporter.

That said, the tense relationship between military and civilian authorities during the 1990s and 2000s did not lead to anything resembling insubordination—any more than Truman’s firing of MacArthur or Eisenhower’s warning about the military-industrial complex did. During the Clinton years, an unpopular president (at least as commander-in-chief) “prevailed most of the time,” writes Owens, successfully mandating “the involvement of the military in ‘constabulary’ operations (the Balkans and Haiti), substantial force structure cuts, the loss of several weapons systems, and the opening of many military specialties to women, all contrary to the preferences of the military establishment.” Clinton’s successor, George W. Bush, faced grumbling from the military over his embrace of Rumsfeld’s Revolution in Military Affairs and Iraq war plan. In deciding to hasten the pace of withdrawal from Afghanistan in June 2011, Obama overruled Petraeus, after which the general gritted his teeth, publicly saluted, and even joined the administration as CIA director. One could reasonably argue that the civilians were wrong and the military was right about any or all of these decisions. But there’s no denying that they were made in proper constitutional fashion.

Obeying the Law

IN TRUTH, LOTS OF THINGS KEEP EVEN THE professional military created by the All-Volunteer Force from becoming an aggressive, invasive tumor within the body politic. In their chapter in the Nielsen-Snyder volume, David R. Segal and Karen DeAngelis point out that “the average length of service of all American military personnel is only about ten years”—an important chunk of an adult life, but not necessarily the dominant one. Nearly half of the uniformed personnel in Iraq, they note, were reservists—that is, part-time war-

rriors with full-time civilian occupations. Even when deployed, phone calls, e-mails, and numerous forms of social media keep soldiers in closer touch with their civilian lives than any army in history. These facts alone are reason enough to ignore *Time* magazine’s alarmist November 21, 2011, “An Army Apart” cover story, with its dire warning that “the military community” has become “a garrison culture” that is “drifting away from mainstream American society.”

Among those officers and soldiers who do choose the military as their profession, the fidelity to civilian control is perhaps greatest. Every year or so, as a guest speaker in West Point’s introductory American government course (a course required of all cadets), I am struck anew by how much more time they spend studying the importance of civilian control of the military than students do in my own intro course at Rhodes College. Eventually it occurred to me that one of the reasons I and other professors at civilian colleges can pass over this subject so lightly is that the West Point faculty do not. And the lesson they impart extends beyond the classroom. It is prominently displayed on the wall of one of the loveliest and most-trafficked spots on post, Constitution Corner. Titled “Loyalty to the Constitution,” the central plaque on the wall reads:

The United States boldly broke with the ancient military custom of swearing loyalty to a leader. Article VI required that American officers thereafter swear loyalty to our basic law, the Constitution.

While many nations have suffered military coups, the United States never has. Our American code of military obedience requires that should orders and the law ever conflict, our officers must obey the law.

Words for civilians to sleep well by.

Michael Nelson is the Fulmer Professor of Political Science at Rhodes College and a senior fellow at the University of Virginia’s Miller Center of Public Affairs.

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