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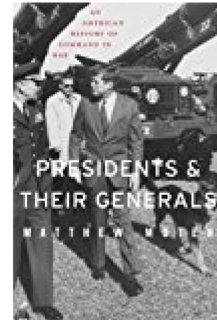

Matthew Moten. *Presidents and Their Generals: An American History of Command in War.* Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014. 456 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-05814-9.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

In *Presidents and Their Generals*, Matthew Moten, a former head of the history department at the U.S. Military Academy, examines the relationship between the national government and military leaders in wartime through twelve case studies extending in time from the American Revolution in the eighteenth century to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in the twenty-first century. Because Moten is focused on the interaction between civilians and the military at the highest levels of government, he characterizes his subject as the study of political-military relations. He contrasts this with the broader category of civil-military relations that focuses on the interactions between the military as an institution and its host civil society.

In 1957 the Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in his path-breaking *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* posited that there should be a rigid division between policymaking, the domain of the president and his advisors, and strategy, the arena in which soldiers convert policy into workable military plans and actions. Huntington theorized that the ideal civil-military relation in a democracy, what he labeled objective control of the military, involved an implicit political bargain: soldiers eschewed any interest in politics while politicians ceded them autonomy in the purely professional sphere of strategy.

Moten argues that Huntington's model constitutes an ideal type. It serves as a useful guide to good conduct, but similar to the concept of absolute zero in physics, it has never existed in nature. Instead he sees continuous bargaining between civilian leaders on the one hand and senior military people on the other that begins with the inception of a policy and continues to its completion. In his words, political-military relations involve "a process of intense and often contentious negotiation over the aims of policy, the forms of strategy to be used, the resources to be employed, and the timing of execution, to name only the most major considerations. Once execution of strategy begins, policy usually changes along with evolving negotiations, causing the process of negotiation to be constant and continuous" (p. 3). This negotiation may involve policy, strategy, the execution of that strategy at the operational level of war, and sometimes even the tactics and techniques to be employed.

Moten divides his case studies into three unequal sections. The first and largest, "Setting Precedents," examines the evolution of political-military relations between 1775 and 1863. Case studies include George Washington and the Continental Congress; John Adams, Wash-

ington, and Alexander Hamilton during the Quasi-War with France; James Madison and the War of 1812; James K. Polk's fraught relations with Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott during the Mexican-American War; and finally Abraham Lincoln's difficult relations with his principal army commanders in the East from 1861 to 1863, beginning with Irvin McDowell through George Gordon Meade. The second and shortest section, "The Politics of Collaboration," covers the period 1864 to 1945. It might be called the golden age of political-military consultation. Case studies include the Lincoln-Grant partnership in 1864 and 1865; Woodrow Wilson, Newton D. Baker, and John J. Pershing in World War I; and the association between Franklin Delano Roosevelt, George C. Marshall, and Harry Hopkins in the years 1939 through 1945. The third section, "The Perils of Partisanship," covering the years 1945 to 2006, examines the increasing tendency of supposedly apolitical military officers to become political partisans. The case studies include the Harry S. Truman-Douglas MacArthur imbroglio; the Kennedy administration and General Maxwell D. Taylor; the George H. W. Bush administration and Colin Powell; and Donald Rumsfeld, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Tommy R. Franks and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Throughout these case studies the author's strengths are on display: grasp of an often very extensive literature; a highly analytic mind; concision; a straightforward, vigorous writing style; and a gift for pen portraits. Washington, of course, set the standard for what followed, by always subordinating himself to the leadership of the Continental Congress during the American Revolution. As Moten astutely observes, the congress was an extralegal body. Real power resided in the thirteen colonial—after July 4, 1776, state—governments. By stressing his subordination to the congress, Washington not only bolstered the republican idea of military subordination but also strengthened the congress and through it the unity that the states would have to maintain to achieve military success against the British Empire. No American statesman or soldier was ever more aware than Washington that he was an actor upon a stage and that he was setting a standard for both his contemporaries and posterity. Moten begins his essay with the moment that epitomizes both Washington's statecraft and his stagecraft: Washington surrendering his commission to the Continental Congress on December 23, 1783, and retiring to private life as captured by John Trumbull's painting in the rotunda of the US Capitol.

The essay on Washington in the American Revolution is one of the strongest in the book. Also excellent are the two Civil War essays, the World War II essay, the Kennedy administration essay, and the essays on the two Bushes and their administrations. Given the scope of what the author has sought to accomplish, he obviously is stronger in some areas than others. One example is his discussion of "the decision" to permit UN forces to cross the 38th Parallel into North Korea in October 1950, if decision is the right word to characterize a situation propelled more by success on the ground than by a careful weighing of strategic consequences. Moten, however, does not consider the literature that has developed about Chinese decision making.[1] There was no guarantee that the Chinese would have remained out of the war if UN forces had remained south of the line. Mao Zedong's "military romanticism" might have led to intervention. One positive thing that can be said of MacArthur's advance is that it gave the Eighth Army and the X Corps strategic depth in which to withdraw and cushion the blow when it came.

One difficulty inherent in the case study approach is that trends that start before the case study begins and end after the study concludes may be ignored or given less weight in the analysis than they deserve. For example, in his discussion of the raising of a provisional army during the Quasi-War with France, Moten expresses some surprise that the nonpartisan Washington during the Revolution had become even more partisan than either Adams or Hamilton in the late 1790s, insisting that only Federalists receive commissions in the new force. If Moten had used the Washington administration and the Indian wars in the Northwest as one of his case studies, he might have been less stunned by Washington's reaction. After all it was his secretary of state and the leader of administration forces in the House of Representatives who secretly conspired together to oppose the administration's policies during Washington's first term, who set about organizing like-minded gentlemen in the states to cooperate with them, and who hired an editor and put him on the federal payroll to attack administration policy and even the president himself. In a larger sense, though, Washington, Adams, and Hamilton, each in his own way, had pursued the creation of a fiscally strong national government that could raise and maintain armies and navies sufficiently strong enough to protect the new nation. Thomas Jefferson's and Madison's program of a weak central government and strong state governments was the antithesis of the nationalist program. Washington could not but help view his opponents as leaving American independence exposed to the whims of the great powers and consequently a threat to the survival of the Republic. But Jef-

ferson won the election of 1800 and his vision prevailed. The broken-backed response of the Madison administration to conducting the War of 1812 represented the logical conclusion of Jeffersonian policies. In the wake of that war, a new generation of Jeffersonian Republicans without any hint of irony instituted a quasi-Federalist legislative program to make the federal government capable of waging war in the future while army officers began to think of themselves as a separate profession.

The title of the book suggests another limitation of the study. *Presidents and Their Generals* does not include admirals. In fact, Moten includes only army officers among the generals he discusses, aside from brief walk-ons by two air force officers, Curtis LeMay and Richard Myers. This approach allows the author to avoid the whole issue of service culture, aside from a brief reference to the difference between the professional circumstances of army officers in the interwar army compared to their counterparts in the Cold War army. The introduction of the atomic bomb and later the hydrogen bomb constituted a revolution in warfare. Over the next decade and a half, each service at one time or another saw its existence threatened by the new era of warfare. This fear lay behind the Marine Corps' over-the-top opposition to the creation of a Department of Defense, the navy's revolt of the admirals in 1949 over the decision by the secretary of defense to not build the first of a new generation of aircraft carriers designed to carry jet aircraft, the army leadership's opposition to a strategy of massive retaliation in the Eisenhower administration, and the internal opposition in the air force to the development of ICBMs in the 1950s. It is perhaps too much to expect any general or admiral to sign on for institutional suicide. At least, no one yet has volunteered for that role. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's response to army opposition to his administration's national strategy was to push through the National Security Act of 1958, which essentially emasculated the Joint Chiefs of Staff by removing them from the chain of command. The new system worked well as long as the commander in chief had the initials D. D. E. or equally extensive military experience. Much of what followed in the Kennedy administration was a direct result of decisions made in the preceding eight years.

As a description of what is involved in political-military relations, Moten's book is superb. It is useful for both serving officers and historians in that he notes that negotiation does not end when the president decides to use force but continues until the end of a conflict and into the postwar period. At the same time, he largely destroys the utility of Huntington's model of objective control of the military by demonstrating how permeable in practice the division of policy and strategy is for both civilians and soldiers. His book is so good because of the power of his descriptions and his analysis of their meanings. Because this is good history, it is, like life, relativistic. We only know what was intelligent or unintelligent after something succeeds or fails. Such knowledge is hardly available to policymakers and military planners at the beginning of a crisis. As a guide for future action, then, we are left only with the tattered remnants of the Huntington standard, flawed though it is.

These ruminations about the episodic nature of the case study approach, the failure to consider all the services, the avoidance of the concept of service culture, and the attenuated survival of the Huntington model are not intended as criticisms but as descriptions of the limitations of *Presidents and Their Generals.* In so doing, I hope to suggest some areas for future research. Like all very good books, Moten's causes readers to think in depth about its subject and raises at least as many questions as it answers. It ranks with the very finest literature on the history of American arms, including Walter Millis's *Arms and Men: A Study of American Military History* (1956), Russell Weigley's *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (1973), Marcus Cunliffe's *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (1968), Edward M. Coffman's *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (1986), Richard Kohn's *Eagle and Sword: The Beginnings of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* (1975), Daniel Beaver's *Modernizing the American War Department: Change and Continuity in a Turbulent Era, 1885–1920* (2006), William B. Skelton's *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (1992), Peter Karsten's *The Naval Aristocracy: The Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern American Navalism* (1972), Allan R. Millett's *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (rev. ed., 1991), Brian M. Linn's *Elvis's Army: Cold War GI's and the Atomic Battlefield* (2016), and other studies of similar quality. *Presidents and Their Generals* is a book that deserves the widest possible readership and the author our thanks for writing it.

Note

[1]. Shu Guang Zang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, Modern War Studies, ed. Theodore A. Wilson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 12-30.

The views expressed in this review are those of the author and do not represent the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Department of Defense, or the US government.

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