

The military mind versus the civilian mind: a review

Harry L. Coles, (ed.), *Total War and Cold War*

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The Romans had a saying for it, "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" The Greeks had a word for it too; Plato asked, "Would it not be a monstrous thing to keep watchdogs who, from want of discipline or some evil habit, might turn on the sheep and devour them?" Civilization has "progressed" over the centuries but we have yet to find an adequate leash for the military watchdog. We have, at best, managed to complicate the problem considerably. The fear in some quarters in America is less that we will be devoured by the watchdogs (although some say we are being nibbled to death) than that we will all become sacrificial lambs in the melee that could result from the threatening posture maintained toward the neighboring watchdogs and their flocks. Many of the sheep complain about the expense of maintaining the watchdog, they object to the amount of influence he has with the shepherd, and they resent being pressed into service whenever the watchdog wants to show other watchdogs how prepared he is to fight.

The book edited by Coles is a collection of essays, by various authors, dealing with this subject of civil-military relations in an era of total war and cold war. The papers cover a set of topics so wide-ranging that at first glance it is difficult to view them all as pieces in the same puzzle, yet, somehow, they seem to fit together. Separate papers on

Churchill, Roosevelt, Hitler, DeGaulle and the excruciating difficulties of a coalition command in World War II make up one section of the book, various civil-military relations (inter-service competition, the occupation of Germany, and the popular desire for peace as a factor in military policy) make up a second section, while civil-military policy in the Communist states comprises the final section of the book. What is missing is the presence of a truly summative paper that analyzes the current complex situation in America in which a politico-economic-technological-military-industrial elite has evolved into a force to be reckoned with.

Just as Syracuse called on the technical genius of Archimedes when the city-state was under siege, we find ourselves confronted with the specter of coordinating unlimited physical power by means of a limited political process. The age of the technological expert has been imposed on the age of the military expert, and the medievalist axiom that "what touches all should be agreed to by all" has suffered more than a little distortion. What touches all can now no longer be comprehended by all and the dilemma has proved to be equally perplexing to the civilian as well as military mind. For the military, the outcome has been one of charges of coddling and/or mistreatment of the new scientist-intellectual soldier who

proves to be quite verbal and more than an accomplished logician and debater. The civilian ruling group has side-stepped the issue, as Murray reveals (1960), by reliance on the peculiar device of establishing an adviser class and independent commissions as sort of a "headless fourth branch" of the government to regulate the impact of science on policy. When this new technology clashed with the military on the Manhattan Project in the early days, the depth of the breach and mutual incomprehension was apparent in the flurry of accusation and counter-accusation in which the military maintained the scientists could never have achieved their goal without the discipline and organization of the professional soldier-administrator and the scientists insisted that their own boldness in cutting red tape and evading military rigidity and stupidity won the day. Somewhere between the two lies the truth and the truth heralds the dawn of a new era—a new era in which there is some realistic anxiety that we may be on the threshold of a time in which the age of Caesar will merge with the Age of Pericles with disastrous results for humanity. At worst, this merger could produce the situation described by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1937) in which the Army industrializes itself, industry militarizes itself; the Army absorbs the nation: the nation models itself on the Army. Implicit, here, is the feeling that a totalitarian regime may be more than a logical extension of total mobilization—a making permanent of what was necessary in wartime.

Today, political control of the military is similar to political control of the scientists and civil servants, but with a crucial difference. Today, the effective formulation of national policy must increasingly take military implications into consideration. The papers describing the problems of Winston Churchill and the British War Cabinet (by

Norman Gibbs), of Roosevelt as War Leader (by Maurice Moltoff), of Hitler and the Wehrmacht (by Andreas Dorpalen), and of The Third Republic and the Generals (by Richard Challener), are fascinating accounts, but from our new thermonuclear perspective World War II is beginning to look like the last of the gracious and charming wars.

Throughout Coles' collection of papers, runs the theme of the military mind. A Department of State Mentality, a Pentagon Mentality, and a Joint Chiefs of Staff Mentality are implied and while no attempt is made to trace this focused set of motives to its origin, it clearly seems to exist as a "thing apart." It is true that something of the massiveness of "the establishment" can be experienced simply by surveying the scene at the Pentagon at quitting time but there is an additional factor to be considered. Somehow, the mystical assumption of the devil incarnate has rubbed off on the scientist-advisers to the military. The image which comes to mind most clearly is that of Herman Kahn (labeled by Etzioni [1962] as the semi-official spokesman for the Pentagon) attempting to present an account of his reasoning to the typical academic "armament-is-madness" group. The effective isolation of the military mind from the peacemongering mind is such that both are shocked and perhaps repelled by direct confrontation. In this regard we are made acutely aware of the probability that a peacemonger will lose his integrity as well as his soul if he comes in too-close contact with the military mind ("they brainwash you at Rand") but the rational-lovers-of-peace hold out little hope that they can effect a similar conversion of the avowed militarist. It seems clear that the "two cultures" of C. P. Snow are divided only microscopically when compared with the gap between the military and the peace establishment.

The tug-of-war between the military and

the civil sides of our society reached no higher degree of expression than in the MacArthur-Truman collision and in the Eisenhower-U-2 incident. According to the terms of the Constitution, a president could take actual command of our armed forces if he so desired. While this is an outside possibility for the distant future (one day we may have nuclear-powered PT boats), the clear assertion of the doctrine of civilian control of the military appeared most dramatically in stripping MacArthur of his command. Again, the apprehension that the tail of intelligence can come to wag the dog of policy was most apparent in the ill-timed continuation of the U-2 flights in the face of summit-level conferences. Despite these dramatic demonstrations of the loose ends of our current arrangements, there have been few designs for a new mix of military-civilian control of policy and no formula for the psychological "straightening" of the military mind. The best that society has been able to produce has been the Nuremberg threat that unreasoning compliance with military or civilian directives is a hanging offense.

As Huntington (1957) points out, control of the military takes either an "objective" or "subjective" form. The objective method is to professionalize the military, set it apart from the rest of the society, and teach it to execute but not formulate policy. The subjective method requires that the armed forces be indoctrinated with the ideology of the ruling class or that some form of direct party control exist either through the assignment of political officers to the units or through the staffing of key military positions with loyal party members. To critics such as C. Wright Mills (1958), the American means of controlling the military has failed miserably with the result that, "Military men have entered political and diplomatic circles; they have gone into the higher echelons of the corporate economy; they

have influenced higher educational institutions; they are operating a truly enormous public-relations and propaganda machinery" (p. 54). The "warlords of Washington" are a grim reality to some observers weaned as they were on a history of national independence won and protected by a citizens army. The days when President Wilson appointed a Quaker as his Secretary of War and a pacifist as his first Secretary of State seem unbelievably distant to those who view the modern scene with alarm.

Other social systems fare better in the struggle of the civilian and the military but at a price our society feels is exorbitant. We are not even certain such systems work since the relationship of the generals and the party leaders in Communist states is mostly a matter of speculation and strained inference. Raymond Garthoff's article on Soviet Civil-Military Relations in the Postwar Period and Harold Hinton's analysis of Political Aspects of Military Power and Policy in Communist China are attempts to piece together what evidence exists, but it is a tortuous task. Still, it could be worse. The embarrassment of riches in Western society in the form of an inundation of memoirs and "inside" reports tends to overload the informational system to such an extent that an almost equal confusion about the "facts" seems to result. It is evident that for the Communist states war is indeed too important to be left to the generals. In the People's Liberation Army in China, for example, a program of "rectification" in 1957 not only involved lengthy indoctrination of the officers but required them to serve in the ranks one month out of each year. Additional control of the military occurs by having a political officer assigned to all units down to and including the company. Since he stands on an equal footing with the commander, countersigns all reports and orders issued, and is responsible for the political reliability of the commander, there

is little opportunity for deviationist activities. If you can imagine for a moment the impact of having every third office in the Pentagon occupied by a similarly empowered member of the John Birch Society, you can begin to appreciate the effectiveness of this device.

At a level somewhat less far-reaching than national and international policy, civilians and soldiers regularly come into conflict when they try to work together. Zink's account of American Civil-Military Relations in the Occupation of Germany is replete with instances of mutual irritation, resentment, and friction ranging from the PX to policy. The blame for this deterioration of relationships undoubtedly must be shared by both parties since each came to the situation with a feeling of intrinsic superiority. During World War II masses of civilians were inducted into the armed forces but few were fully sensitive to the subtle psychological transformation which shortly produced in them a feeling of superiority over the civilians they had left behind. This low level conversion from the civilian to the military mind was easily reversed following discharge since people quickly adapt to and identify with the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the group in which they find themselves immersed. Some self-selection is, of course, inevitable and it is this combination of the choice of a way of life that is congenial to already established values and the prolonged reinforcement of these values by association with others of like mind that produces a military or civilian "mentality." In this respect "the military" as a reference group has much more homogeneity and visibility than the amorphous and diverse "civilian" group. As a consequence, the internal social pressures in military groups act to fashion a clear and focused set of attitudes and to enforce an unusual degree of conformity to them.

Almost every feature of the military way of life is a force pushing toward in-group

cohesion and perhaps the best indication of the effect of this form of social organization is to be found in the bitterness of interservice rivalry. The articles by Huntington (on Interservice Competition) and by Morton (on Interservice Cooperation) neatly underscore this dilemma. When interservice competition for funds and areas of responsibility waxes hot, it is not surprising that the civilian populace begins to feel that the military establishment has lost sight of its primary purpose. Even more disconcerting is the reaction of the military when its plans are being thwarted by the civilian population. Coles reports that during hearings before the House Committee on Appropriations in 1948 one War Department consultant on Universal Military Training declared that its chief opponents were "parents, church groups, educators, subversive groups and a large section of the public which does not think" (p. 206). A statement like that sort of makes you think, doesn't it?

The emergence of a scientist-technologist adjunct to the military scene, the broad extension of the need for secrecy to an ever increasing number of realms, the catastrophic destructiveness of modern weapons, and the prospect of prolonged agonistic behavior between two great cultures are factors which promise only that the relationship of the civilian to the military will balloon into a sharpening conflict whatever the direction our international policy takes. So few forces are working to understand or relieve this mutual strain that a showdown seems inevitable. If actual disarmament or intensive arms control comes into being, it will be followed by some of the most spectacular in-fighting our culture has ever been privileged to witness.

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