

David M. Kennedy (ed.), *The Modern American Military*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2013, 322 pp.

Reviewed by Karin De Angelis

After more than a decade of unsuccessful wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States military and the civilian leaders that oversee it are in a historically unprecedented position. With the exception of the Cold War, the United States has not engaged in one war, much less two, of such great length, and never has it done so without extensive reliance on conscripts. Because of this novel territory, it is imperative that service members and civilians engage in continuous, critical dialogue about the role of the military in civil and political society. In line with this broader social need, David M. Kennedy's edited book cues the audience to important questions about the state of current civil-military relations; the history, decisions, and policies that brought us to this point; and potential future pathways for a paradigm shift that challenges past assurances of a "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA) and a continued preference for conventional war-making.

Although situated in Stanford's history department, Kennedy is an interdisciplinary scholar whose past work connects history with literature, economics, philosophy, political science, social theory, and cultural studies. His approach to knowledge – that of using the perspectives and theoretical paradigms of multiple disciplines – is a needed one in the study of the American armed services. In his discussion of the book's intellectual purpose, Kennedy considers the American military's continued, and growing, prominence as an instrument of national policy. This status is largely facilitated by the military's unmatched firepower, manpower, and overall resourcing for conventional warfare. Yet, even as the military increasingly becomes the 'go-to' force for political leaders, its presence in civilian society is becoming more diminished. It is this paradox which Kennedy pursues in this collective volume, with a forward-thinking approach that stresses the broader social, technological, fiscal, historical, and demographic contexts and how these shape what the military is and what it has the potential to become. Like his own academic career, Kennedy challenges us to think beyond a specific discipline or theoretical perspective and presents a well-rounded call to reconsider the current trajectory of war-fighting and the civil-military relations that undergird it; it is this intersection of civil-military relations with doctrinal and strategic thinking that makes this book a unique find.

Each chapter in this book provides a needed piece of the broader intellectual and practical puzzle that Kennedy presents to the reader, beginning with Lawrence Freedman's

chapter, “The Counterrevolution in Strategic Affairs”. Although the broader argument of this book is more than a challenge to the military’s confidence in the now-passé RMA, this chapter uniformly situates readers into the RMA doctrine and convincingly suggests that faith in it still has an outsized influence on military strategy and tactics, unit training and configuration, and weapons procurement. Freedman’s tone is unapologetic as he challenges the preference for big, regular wars and our accompanying development of weapons systems that supersede the technological prowess of our adversaries. He reminds us that war does not follow a linear progression, as fourth-generation warfare advocates state, and that it is no longer about decisive battles, but on-going struggles where intelligence, special forces, and drones are the preferred ways to maintain pressure with minimal risk. Freedman concludes that the United States is now more cautious when it comes to global intervention and that it recognizes the limitations of what one country, even a superpower, can accomplish when faced with on-going irregular conflicts that cannot be won through conventional warfare.

Building on Freedman’s thinking about RMA and asymmetric warfare, Brian Linn’s chapter, “The US Armed Forces’ View of War,” focuses on the brain power behind the military’s shift to RMA, and its current movement toward counterinsurgency doctrine. Although there is an “*implied adaptability*” to war intellectuals – their job is, after all, to be forward-thinking –, Linn argues that this coterie of thinkers rely on inadequate historical precedents that support a short-sighted, rather than long term focus. He also challenges the central paradigm of current planning which frames victory as being achieved once the military arm of a centralized nation-state is defeated. He admits that the last decade of warfare will influence technological decisions and advances, but questions whether this same reflection will lead to an accompanying transformation in military doctrine. Yet, even as Linn focuses on the intellectual foundation of current warfare, Thomas Mahnken reminds us in his chapter, “Weapons”, that the United States cannot become complacent in its development of precision weaponry. Previous advances in technology, which are most obviously seen in the rise of machine guns and airpower, eventually are matched by counter-measures, creating new vulnerabilities. Thus, the hypothesized RMA, and its concomitant reliance on unmatched weapons systems, only remains potent with continued, cutting edge development. The time our weaponry is at the pinnacle of superiority is short-lived.

The focus on military doctrine, the RMA, asymmetric warfare, and precision weaponry provides a needed foundation to the question, “how is warfare executed?” By creating this baseline, we are then able to focus on another fundamental component of war-fighting which is, “who executes the war?” and “what are the consequences of this arrangement?” The chapters associated with these questions focus on the role and consequences of the all-volunteer force, with the work by David Segal and Lawrence Korb, “Manning and Financing the AVF”, providing an excellent baseline. As a recruited force that must compete with civilian employers and higher education for recruits, the American military is now subject to the

dynamics of the labour market and the willingness of taxpayers to support a standing force; it also must consider recruiting and retaining demographic groups who have not been actively courted in the past. Segal and Korb's discussion on fiscal costs may not be the most alluring of considerations when it comes to civil-military relations, but perhaps the most consequential. Faced with today's budget concerns, this chapter presents an especially important picture of the fiscal costs of building and maintaining a volunteer force, especially when political and military leaders fail to activate the selective service system. One way leaders have been able to avoid relying on this system is their increased reliance on contractors, which comprise more than 50 percent of personnel deployed in the Iraq and Afghanistan. In their chapter "Military Contractors and the American Way of War", Deborah Avant and Renée de Nevers discuss both the benefits and risks of relying so heavily on private military security contractors (PMSC) in terms of political accountability, social values, legitimacy, public opinion, and professionalism.

James Sheehan's chapter, "The Future of Conscription: Some Comparative Reflections" provides a historical-comparative perspective on civil-military relations, with an emphasis on conscription and its global future. Traditionally, conscription has been a part of the ideals of a modern nation-state partly because it is democratic in execution. As threats of invasion have decreased, modern nation-states, especially in Europe, have transitioned to recruited, well-compensated, smaller forces. Sheehan does not see conscription disappearing entirely, particularly for countries whose existence remains threatened. He also does not foresee the United States following the same path as many European countries. Rather, he argues that the American military fits between the two models with the result that, "*the United States is a civilian state with significant military obligations*" (p.189). Although this is the second to last sentence in Sheehan's chapter, it is his main argument and one that brings into focus the broader issue of the American military's increasingly diminished role in civilian society despite its dominance as an instrument of national power. Karl Eikenberry, in his work, "Reassessing the All-Volunteer Force", picks up the argument here and focuses on the serious liabilities currently experienced by the AVF and explains how these are grounded in the broader rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Finally, to round out the discussion of civil-military relations in the age of the AVF, Bacevich, in a chapter entitled "Whose Army?", distinguishes between two types of civil-military relations : that of elites and that of regular citizens. Although elite civil-military relations are policed constantly, Bacevich challenges the rest of the populace to consider the state of civil-military relations which he classifies as dysfunctional. He ends by challenging the public to reclaim their military and resuscitate the tradition of the citizen-soldier; what is not clear is what average Americans will view as the benefits of reclaiming their military, especially since the current manpower model privileges free will and the freedom to not be bothered with mandatory service.

Robert Goldich's chapter, "American Military Culture", focuses on the social risks of today's manpower model. His premise is that the United States' geostrategic situation is more influential on military culture than social institutions and attitudes. He argues that American service members believe they have a superior moral code to their civilian counterparts and that they are more likely to internalize the violence of the military. In contrast, civilians are becoming increasingly pacifist. Goldich's argument that military service members and civilians are diverging more in outlook is critical and one that has been measured in past studies by differences in political affiliation, religious identity, and family formation. Rather than consider distinctions by rank, service, occupation, gender, or race, Goldich argues that a uniform attitude permeates the force. He supports this perspective by arguing that the presence of an individual in the military indicates acceptance of the institution's broader mission and violent outlook. Although this may be the case with many service members, there are other well-documented reasons why individuals enlist and then stay in the military beyond a preference for violence or an "*attitude [...] that they are, in a variety of ways, better than, or superior to, civilians*" (p.93). Segal and Korb's work on the financial costs of maintaining a recruited force speaks to some of these. For some, military service really is just a job.

Michelle Sandhoff and Mady Segal's chapter, "Women in the US Military" also challenge parts of Goldich's argument. They analyze how women's roles have changed over time due to a combination of enabling factors and driving forces, such as the shift to an all-volunteer force and growing use of technology. This relationship is dialectical: the change in women's roles in the military also influences broader attitudes and behaviour about women's roles in society at large. Thus, whereas Goldich argues that the military is increasingly isolated from civilian society, Sandhoff and Segal argue that changes in the military, especially in regard to gender, reflect broader social changes. Women in the military, as well as other minority groups, are an interesting counterexample to the perspective that the military is increasingly different from the civilian population it represents. Although it's occurring at a slow pace, the military is becoming more diverse; this diversity, in turn, influences the overall "military mindset" that may not be as belligerent as Goldich suggests. The United States military, as a major social institution, shapes and is shaped by the social and historical context. Social changes, such as technological advances and women's increased presence in the paid labour market, influence the military's outlook, development, and composition. Likewise, the military, as the go-to instrument of national policy and one of the country's leading employers, shapes national response to these changes through its robust social standing and respected cultural lens. It overlaps with and influences major social institutions, such as the media and law, which are the focus of the remaining chapters in the book.

Jay Winter, in a chapter titled "Filming War", focuses on the media as the main way the public learns about the military and war-fighting. Although he discusses novels, his focus is on cinema and how it has shaped public perceptions over time, to include an individual-

level fascination with service members rather than with the broader questions of how war is executed. Certainly fiction and cinema have been critical in shaping how people think and behave; yet, with the modern American military, it is equally important to consider other types of media. Winter does not attempt to broach other forms, as he already has a hefty argument to make; however, this edited volume would be strengthened by considering other media, such as Skype, that allow for instantaneous, continuous contact, and first-person shooter games, such as Medal of Honour, that create virtual military missions for players. Social media, technology, and virtual entertainment also have serious implications for civil-military relations in the 21st century, and perhaps an even greater one than cinema and literature.

The military also has influenced and is influenced by the legal justice system. Dunlap, a retired judge advocate general in the Air Force, provides background on the intent of military law and why it is separate from civilian justice. He aims to determine which processes of justice are required to support command authority and which have become too civilianized and from his perspective, too lenient. Of particular interest is his discussion on sexual assault, where he argues that the military has made significant steps to crack down on cases to the point of harming neutrality. He sides overwhelmingly with military commanders in this regard and takes umbrage with civilian calls for greater oversight of sexual assault cases.

Taken together, each chapter in this book contributes to Kennedy's focus: the paradox that even as political leaders find it increasingly tempting and easy to resort to armed force, the military's presence in civilian society is less than it used to be. Both specialized academics and casual readers alike will be able to see how each chapter fits into the broader perspective. The Freedman and Sheehan chapters together provide an excellent in-road into the book's overall argument; the Eikenberry piece is a great single primer for any reader unfamiliar with the AVF's history and critiques about modern civil-military relations. Generally, collective volumes are susceptible to unevenness in chapter presentation, without the presence of firm, strategic editorship. This is not the case with this book; the editor's vision and argument are well-served by each chapter.

However, there are a few areas of overall critique that should be considered. First, after reading the book, it is still not clear where we are strategically in regard to the missions of the United States military. The Freedman chapter, in particular, does an excellent job exposing the continued dominance of the RMA. What is missing is a reflection on counterinsurgency doctrine, which Kennedy and Linn acknowledge as growing in importance, and a forward-thinking orientation on strategy. It is telling that as the wars wind down that we are still looking backwards at RMA, rather than moving forward. This is less a critique of the book, than the intellectual heart of the military as a whole. Well-developed books, such as this one, have the potential to forward strategic thinking away from the past and into the present and future. I also think this volume would be strengthened by including the perspective of a uniformed intellectual, as addressed in Linn's chapter. If we are considering a transformation

in weapons systems and personnel, we should also be privy to the war of ideas occurring among both civilian and military war intellectuals. Even with these critiques, I highly recommend this text because it brings together issues into a unified conceptual argument and provides rich content for service members and civilians, as well as their institutional homes, to consider in a broader dialogue.

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