

**Tomas Kucera, *The Military and Liberal Society : Societal-Military Relations in Western Europe*, Abingdon, New York, Routledge (Cass Military Studies), 2017, 215 p.**

*Reviewed by Gerhard Kimmel*

The volume recently published by Tomas Kucera, Assistant Professor of Security Studies at Prague's Charles University, squarely challenges a classic of civil-military relations studies, namely Samuel P. Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*. Kucera sums up Huntington's approach by pointing out that his "*strategic and societal views are intrinsically antithetical*", which implies that "*the armed forces have to adopt some of the societal requirements in order to survive within society, but simultaneously this normative convergence towards society may undermine the very function of the military organisation*" (p.2). Contrary to Huntington, then, Kucera assumes that a liberal State and a liberal society may well go hand in hand with functional armed forces that are fully equipped to adequately deal with the strategic demands imposed on them. Derived from this (at least potentially) conflicting relationship between external/ strategic and internal/ ideological demands, the research question that structures the book is formulated by its author as follows: "*To what extent and in what ways does the liberal ideology of Western European societies determine their military policies?*" (p.3).

To answer it, Kucera organizes his subject-matter into seven chapters. After a short introduction, the second chapter is devoted to an explication of his theoretical approach. This is followed by four more, in which the author presents the case studies he has selected. The book closes with a concluding chapter that sums up the findings. Kucera's theoretical treatment is a critique of Huntington's portrayal of civil-military relations. The author discusses at length Huntington's analysis and, with the help of liberal thinkers such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Emerich de Vattel, John Rawls, and others, convincingly deconstructs it, thus opening the perspective that "*liberal societies are adequately ideologically equipped to provide for their own strategic needs*" (p.24).

The empirical part of the book is destined to provide a litmus test for this assumption and consists of three cases studies – Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden – spread over four chapters due to the fact that Kucera devotes two chapters (consuming 70 pages) to the German case, whereas the Swedish (35) and British (45) cases are dealt with in one chapter each. The special attention paid to Germany thus makes it central to his demonstration. The empirical focus of each case study traces "*the processes through which broad ideological principles are translated into rules and institutions, such as major military reforms and their implementations, and the agents that have the power to promote liberal policies, for example a minister of defence or the constitutional court*" (p.4). As a consequence, military policy, subdivided into three constitutive elements – mission, composition and institutional culture – is the main research focus of the book.

The first chapter on Germany covers the aftermath of the Second World War and the formative years of the new Bundeswehr. Crushing defeat, the ensuing occupation of the country's western parts by the United States, the UK and France, and an international context that witnessed the emergence of the East-West-conflict are seen as the factors that led to the creation of a democratic State in West Germany, the rearmament of its Federal Republic in the mid-1950s as part of NATO, and the adoption of the concept of 'Innere Führung' as the normative framework on which to build armed forces compatible with and well-connected to a democratic society. That this was in fact the case was evidenced by the support enjoyed almost from the start by general conscription and (albeit more gradually) by conscientious objection. Though Kucera is right in arguing that German society in these formative years "*can hardly be referred to as a genuinely liberal society*" and in perceiving "*West German liberalism (...) [as] an elite-driven project*" (p.65), the impact of liberal ideology upon the rearmament of Germany and the creation of the Bundeswehr cannot be denied.

The second German chapter begins in 1989-90 and details the reorientation of the Bundeswehr from the military of a civilian power that it was until then to an expeditionary force capable of conducting military missions abroad in the cause of international peace and stability. The Germany of that time can be portrayed as an established liberal democracy in the throes of dramatic change both in terms of domestic politics (unification) and of international politics (systemic change). The new security/ political environment required effective adjustment to the challenges it raised, including a military transformation that eventually led to the 2011 shift from conscription to an all-volunteer force. Despite discussions about its appropriateness for the new times, – 'Innere Führung' remained on the books as an adequate normative foundation for the new 'miles protector' military.

The third empirical chapter bears on the case of Sweden, a neutral country (as such non-aligned all through the days of the East-West-conflict) and one that has enjoyed peace for more than two centuries to date. The systemic change in international politics at the end of the 1980s did not leave it unaffected and induced a profound transformation of the Swedish Armed Forces. In this process, the citizen army of the past, based on general conscription and geared to an invasion-defence concept that made external security a task not just for soldiers but for everybody, ultimately turned into an all-volunteer force oriented towards solidarity and mutual help in Europe. The Swedish military was thus 'denationalized' and 'internationalized' (p.131) into some "*kind of international policy force*" (p.132).

The last case study focuses on the British Armed Forces. Here, the country's traditions and long history as a great power with global outreach play a considerable role, leading to an "*apparent detachment and even isolation of the UK armed forces from their parent society*" (p.148) and a perspective that stresses the military's status as a mere tool in the hands of government. Hence, it is no surprise that the UK, for most of its history, has had an all-volunteer force based on the regimental system. Conscription, to the debate on which Kucera devotes a substantial part of the chapter on the British case, has thus been a rare exception rather than the rule. Even there, however, the introduction of conscription

on the eve of the Second World War and the way in which this was done are proof of the influences of liberal ideology on military politics. Yet, in the end, Kucera states that the “*British military culture appears to be capable of preserving, to a significant extent, its autonomous military ethos and exceptionalism*” (p.184).

Kucera sums up his empirical findings by way of conclusion, and argues that the case studies...

reveal that specific policies, institutions and practices are preferred because of their association with liberal principles. Sometimes a reference to liberal norms was used to advocate an otherwise necessary policy or institutional design, universal conscription at the time of emergency being one of these cases. For certain policies and institutions, nonetheless, liberal principles can be identified as the most relevant causal factor. The existence of the right to conscientious objection, for example, resting almost exclusively on liberal ethics, is a case in point (p.194).

The author sees this finding as all the more robust since the three national cases under study are very different from one another. This being the case, Kucera feels justified in contending that “*this book may demonstrate that more often than not a meaningful incorporation of societal imperatives into the military policy of liberal states is functionally beneficial to their military security*” (p.194). Put differently, in terms of organizational effectiveness, to go liberal is not as bad for armed forces as Huntington had made it out to be: it may even recommend itself.

True democrats may be naturally inclined to buy Kucera’s argument right away. Yet, some caveats are in order. That liberal ideology was a decisive factor in fashioning the three countries’ armed forces is at times far from entirely clear. The British introduction of conscription in the Second World War no doubt owed much to a dire need for more military manpower that was obvious to all in the face of a vital threat. Likewise, the rearmament of Germany and the establishment of the Bundeswehr as an army of conscripts was ambivalent: while the societal preference for a close relationship between the military and society was undoubtedly present, even more pressing was the requirement for high force levels in the context of an East-West conflict that had turned into a hot war in Korea only a few years earlier. As for the Swedish case, a plausible explanation may be that responding to societal preferences is easier and less costly when no clear and present danger seems to threaten the country and its people.

All in all, then, while Kucera’s book has asked a very important question, more systematic analyses are needed. This volume is a very good starting point on its subject. It certainly is of presumable interest to academics and students of military sociology in general and civil-military relations in particular, as well as to students of security studies, international relations, and Western European politics.

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