

Review - Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations

Written by Aurel Croissant

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AUREL CROISSANT, SEP 20 2013

The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations
By: Thomas Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (eds.)
New York and London: Routledge, 2013

As the editors of the *Handbook of Civil-Military Relations* state in their introduction, civil-military relations are a central feature of political life in all nations-states that maintain military organizations (p.2-3). Despite more than five decades of political science research on civil-military relations there is not a single comprehensive work that would provide a thorough and contemporary examination of the field and the various central questions within it. The *Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations* not only fills this important lacuna, but offers up-to-date empirical analyses of civil-military relations in functioning democracies, newly democratized countries, and in non-democratic regimes in the Americas, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa through the collection of 29 chapters written by 18 scholars.

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In the introduction (and followed by more in-depth discussions in Part I of the handbook), the editors forcefully propose a new framework for the analysis of civil-military relations which goes beyond the issue of control. Instead their conceptual framework consists of the three dimensions of (1) democratic civilian control; (2) operational effectiveness of the military in implementing its roles and missions; and (3) the efficiency of the military and other security services in their use of public resources. While the first and second component resonate with what Felipe Agüero dubbed the “double challenge” of creating and controlling democratically usable security services,[1] the third component goes beyond any existing conceptualization of civil-military relations in the literature and is clearly inspired by discussions in public policy and security policy circles about the right balance between security spending and security gains, especially in the US, but also in many European countries.

The remainder of the handbook is organized in three parts. Part I includes six chapters by Tom Bruneau, Cris Matei, Timothy Edmunds, and José Olmeda, in which the authors critically surveying key concepts, theoretical approaches and methodologies employed in the field of study politics and assessing the possibility of constructing a new conceptualization of civil-military relations in the early twenty-first century. It is here, that Bruneau and Matei present their critique of Samuel Huntington’s model of ‘military professionalism’ and ‘objective control’ as the ‘dominant theoretical paradigm in civil-military relations, especially the study of American civil-military relations’,[2] and develop their three-dimensional framework for the study of civil-military relations. Their criticism of the Huntingtonian paradigm is supported by José Olmeda’s description of prevalent conceptualizations and operationalizations, research methodologies and strategies of theory-building in the field of civil-military studies as they can be found in the field’s flagship journal, *Armed Forces & Society*. Furthermore, the editors invited UK-based scholar, Timothy Edmunds to compare the major similarities and differences between their three-dimensional framework and the concept of security sector reform, which is currently dominating much of the more policy-oriented debates among students of military politics and security issues in Europe.

This critical evaluation of the state-of-the-art in civil-military studies sets the agenda to the systematic exploration of the workings and consequences of civil-military relations in authoritarian political regimes. The six chapters in Part II explore civil-military relations in North Korea, Egypt, Russia, Venezuela and Iraq. The focus of four of these contributions is mostly on the issue of political control over the military and the strategies (Harold Trinkunas on Venezuela), the institutional mechanisms (Jangalsai Khan Mendee on North Korea) or the consequences of (failed) political control (Robert Springborg on Egypt) for the inner workings and persistence of non-democratic regimes. The remaining two chapters on Russia (by Mikhail Tsyarkin) and Iraq (by Abbas Kadhim) also focus on issues of control, but in the broader context of (failed) reforms in the security sector during transitions from a clearly non-democratic regime to a “hybrid” or semi-democratic political order.

Part III is organized around two of the three main components of the new conceptualization of civil-military relations developed by Bruneau and Matei. Four country studies examine the institutionalization and practice of democratic control over the military in the three new democracies of Argentina (Bruneau and Matei), Slovenia (Matei), and Spain (Matei and Olmeda) as well as the “established” democracy of India (Anslu N. Chatterjee). The following six contributions analyze the effectiveness of the military in implementing a wide spectrum of roles and missions in the United States (Bruneau), France (Hélène Dieck), Hungary (Matei), Mongolia (Bruneau and Mendee), Lebanon (Anne Marie Baylouny), and South Africa (Jessica Piombo). The final section of Part III presents case studies of six countries whose political leaders have achieved “that rare combination of democratic civilian control and effectiveness” (p. 8): Portugal, Chile, Romania and Moldova as well as Austria and, somewhat surprisingly, Germany.

There are four major contributions of this handbook and its individual chapters to the study of civil-military relations. First of all, through the application of the novel approach suggested by Bruneau and Matei the contributions in this handbook go beyond the narrow focus on civilian control. Even though control is one, if not the most important issue of civil-military relations in many modern states, an exclusive focus on the control aspect will necessarily fall short of a complete understanding of civil-military relations as defined in the handbook. Moreover, in her contribution, Cris Matei convincingly argues that the military’s ability to successfully perform its social functions (i.e., the “effectiveness in fulfilling roles and missions”) and the material and human resources it consumes in fulfilling these functions (i.e., the “efficiency in the use of resources”) are of outstanding importance for the survival of society and the legitimacy of

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both the political order and the military institution in all countries.

Second, bringing issues of military effectiveness and the relationship between democratic control and the military effectiveness back in the comparative analysis of civil-military relations makes it possible to address challenges of civil-military relations that are actually relevant for functioning, democracies such as the United States and the EU member states. In these countries, politicians, parliaments and democratically legitimated governments do not struggle to institutionalize democratic control over the military. But they need to find answers to the problems of how to achieve, consolidate or strengthen military effectiveness and efficiency under increasingly strong budget pressures, and how to modernize and transform their armed forces so they can effectively meet the security challenges of the early twenty-first century.

A particular strength of the handbook is that it unites empirical analyses of three different types of political regimes on five different continents. Most books and edited volumes focus either on the consolidated democracies in Europe or the United States, or on democratizing countries, mostly in Latin America or Eastern Europe, and, despite its obvious relevancy, only very few books attempt to study civil-military relations in contemporary authoritarian regimes. In this book, however, the authors strive to apply a uniform analytical framework to very dissimilar regime types. Even though I am not equally convinced by all arguments and conclusions about the civil-military relations in, for example, North Korea (the analysis tends, I believe, to overestimate the current functionality and relevance of the mechanisms of party control over the military), and I feel it is regrettable that most of the case studies (except Venezuela and Egypt) in this part of the book do not relate to the current research on the importance of civil-military relations for the performance, persistence, and survival of authoritarian regimes and their leaders, readers will find these chapters very timely and useful.

Finally, the volume includes a number of so far understudied cases, such as Mongolia and Lebanon which for different reasons are promising for further research. For example, it would be interesting to test whether there is anything unique about the case of Mongolia or if the explanations given for the strong commitment of Mongolian soldiers and civilians to participate in international and multilateral operations can also be found in other relatively "small" countries such as Fiji, Nepal or Bangladesh.^[3] Moreover, it would be extremely interesting to compare the experiences with building an ethnically integrated military in a post-conflict society such as Lebanon, where political elites are still divided and elite settlement has not taken place (so far) with other, seemingly similar cases, such as Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, there remain a few shortcomings. For example, the editors advance a new conceptualization of civil-military relations which combines three components or dimensions, but almost all contributions in the book (except for Bruneau's chapter on "Efficiency in the use of resources") limit their attention to the aspects of democratic control and/or military effectiveness. Other key concepts utilized are a bit too vague. For example, it is not clear what parameters are used to distinguish low levels of military effectiveness (or even ineffectiveness) from high levels and the conceptual framework lacks clearly specified indicators and thresholds by which different states of success or failure of achieving democratic control or military efficiency can be differentiated. More importantly, what is missing in the volume is a systematic analysis of the causal processes that explain the establishment of democratic control and effective militaries. Free from an overarching theory of civil-military relations, the book benefits from the editors' and the authors' extensive experience 'in the field', including personal experience with interacting with military officers and civilian policy makers. However, the lack of an explicit theoretical argument and the randomly selected sample of cases mean that the conclusions presented by the editors in the final chapter of the book are wedded to the cases analyzed. This limits the contribution of the handbook to theory-building in the field of comparative civil-military studies. Finally, while the case studies contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of civil-military relations and the relationship between democratic control and military effectiveness in individual cases, the final chapter hardly helps to unveil under what circumstances common patterns and trends can be identified, and the editors' conclusions that "political will and interest are vital to institutionalizing civil-military relations" (p. 346), will not surprise experts on civil-military relations.

Overall, however, this is a very useful book that deserves a wide readership. The book's cross-regional comparisons of cases from Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe are both valuable and unusual in this field of study and there is

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more than enough material here (including detailed references) to keep scholars and bring graduate students completely up to date. Moreover, the strong concern of the editors for practical issues in institutionalizing civilian control, military effectiveness, and military efficiency, makes this book also highly recommendable for practitioners in the fields of military, defense and security policies.

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[1] Felipe Agüero, „The New „Double Challenge“: Democratic Control and Efficacy of Military, Policy, and Intelligence“, *Democracies in Danger* (ed. by Alfred Stepan), Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, 59-75.

[2] Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 7.

[3] Relatively small not in terms of population size, but in terms of their status as political actors in regional and/or international politics.

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