

SECURING THE STATE: Reforming the National Security Decisionmaking Process at the Civil-Military Nexus, Christopher P. Gibson, Ashgate, Hampshire, UK, and Burlington, VT, 2008, 162 pages, \$89.95.

A basic tenet of American government holds that the armed forces subordinate themselves to the president, the Constitution, and the will of the people. In *Securing the State*, Colonel Chris Gibson asserts that this broadly understood concept does not specify the relationship of elected leaders, appointed officials, and senior military officers in enough detail, especially in a time of crisis. As war with Iraq loomed, for example, Gibson claims that the Joint Chiefs of Staff found themselves in such a subordinate and deferential position vis-à-vis Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that they were unable to communicate wise military advice, unfiltered by the Secretary's political and personal biases, to the president and the Congress, the nation's elected leaders. Nor were military leaders allowed to develop plans as prudent, detailed, or as fully resourced as required for success in Iraq.

Many place the blame for this at the door of an impulsive, arrogant secretary, or a reckless, mysteriously motivated president. Gibson, to his credit, moves beyond easy personal judgments to trace the historical evolution and theoretical basis of a national military command dynamic that failed to generate courses of action likely to produce victory.

Colonel Gibson argues that the U.S. government lacks sufficient institutional structures and protocols to ensure that its "civil-military nexus" functions efficiently and effectively. He identifies a pendulum-like oscillation between opposing concepts and practices during the post-World War II era. At times appointed civilian leaders, especially aggressive secretaries of defense such as Robert McNamara and Donald Rumsfeld dominated the civil-military nexus. In other periods, the military has so strongly asserted its prerogatives that its perceived usefulness to elected leaders has been negligible. Colonel Gibson cites the mid-1990s, during the ascendancy of the powerful and charismatic General Colin Powell, as a period in which the military possessed an overdeveloped sense of its own importance and independence. The result, intentional or not, was that President Bill Clinton could not count on the military's support, and consequently stopped asking military leaders to do things they didn't already want to do anyway.

To counter these dysfunctional extremes, Gibson proposes a "Madisonian approach," named in honor of founding father and fourth president James Madison. The Madisonian approach seeks to guarantee that both his senior military officer and his senior appointed official can present the president with courses of action, with both leaders accorded an equal stature within the administration. In Gibson's eyes, the current practice, that the senior officer and senior appointed official adopt a unified position when advising the president, is a recipe for stifling good ideas and ensuring that an unseemly jockeying for dominance takes place. Other ideological assumptions of a Madisonian approach include the notions that—

- The military owes its allegiance to elected, not appointed, leaders. Specifically this means the president, as opposed to the secretary of defense.
- The military is obligated to work closely with Congress, especially concerning force structure, budget, and other resource issues.
- The opinions and options offered by military leaders, minimally tainted by political considerations, are central to the decision-making process.

In practice, Gibson offers specific rearrangements of the national command structure:

- A readjustment of the Goldwater-Nichols Act to limit the power of the secretary of defense and enhance the importance of the nation's senior military officer. Gibson would not have combatant commanders report to or through the secretary. Instead, they would work directly for the nation's senior military officer. The holder of this position would neither defer to nor work for the secretary of defense. Instead, he would speak directly and in his own voice to the commander in chief, and the president would have the benefit of the most prudent military analysis and recommendations for action.
- The creation of a commanding general position to replace the current chairman, joint chiefs of staff billet. The commanding general of the military would exercise the powers outlined above, not as a senior staff officer and advisor, but as a leader in the chain-of-command.
- A wholesale revision of the joint strategic planning system into a more streamlined, productive process.
- Much more professional preparation of military and civilian leaders to function capably at the highest levels. For military personnel, this goal entails more advanced academic training and experience in Pentagon and joint positions. For civilians, Gibson recommends more education in military capabilities and decision-making processes. Gibson's recommendations would greatly increase the stature of the Pentagon's ranking military officer. Adopting them would begin with a wholesale review of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. By and large, critics of the current administration's prosecution of the Global War on Terrorism have not identified Goldwater-Nichols as a culprit for the rocky course of events in Iraq and Afghanistan, so *Securing the State*, unwittingly or not, opens up another

avenue of attack for administration opponents. However, Goldwater-Nichols will eventually merit close scrutiny for its efficacy in helping the nation win the War on Terrorism; Gibson helps define the terms the debate will take.

Written while Gibson served a fellowship at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University, and for scholars and policy wonks as well as serving military officers, *Securing the State* has a blizzard of footnotes that might bore military professionals and sometimes turgid recaps of historical precedents and theoretical positions. However, those who persevere to the end will have much to contemplate, for Gibson has constructed a complex argument leading to a bold position. Although the book ultimately seeks to enhance the influence of the military, Gibson is not afraid to criticize many of its most visible leaders of the past two decades. He maintains a respectful, objective tone, but his disappointment with both specific individuals and military officer culture in general is palpable.

In its fullest dimension, then, *Securing the State* tests the limits to which serving officers can go in criticizing national and military affairs for the sake of professional and academic debate. Currently the commander of 2d Brigade Combat Team in the 82d Airborne Division, Colonel Gibson's warfighting prowess should help him steer through whatever flak he generates. He may well get a chance to implement reforms as he rises through the ranks or becomes part of the civil-military nexus he has so closely studied. For most officers, who will never be players at the strategic level, *Securing the State's* primary lesson lies in the model of military professionalism that Gibson values and embodies. Key components of this model include intellectual vigor and courage, combined with a commitment to critique and debate, focused to best serve the Nation's elected leaders and the American people. Anything less, in Gibson's eyes, cheapens the notion of military integrity and substitutes a weak sense of loyalty for a stronger one.

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