

## Review - Democratic Civil-Military Relations

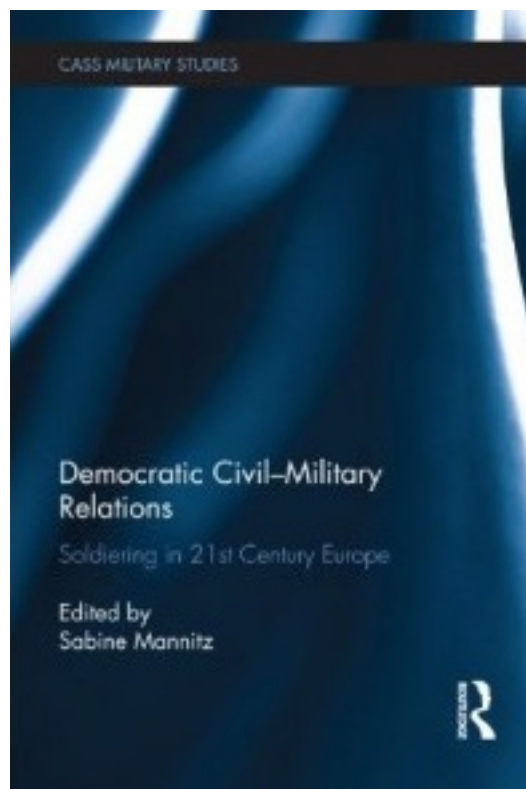
Written by Paul Chambers

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Democratic Civil-Military Relations: Soldiering in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe  
by Sabine Mannitz, editor  
Routledge, 2012.



In *Democratic Civil-Military Relations: Soldiering in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe* (edited by Sabine Mannitz), Mannitz and fifteen other authors explore how European democracies, since the end of the Cold War, have witnessed transformations in their civil-military relations. In addition, the authors analyze how such relations have been influenced by both internal and external factors. The demands placed on European democracies have been staggering. Traditional national security doctrines have been extended to include international crisis management, peace-keeping deployments, defending a Western-postulated transnational value community, and nation-building. These re-prioritized values are reflected in a changing role, mission, and ethos for the armed forces.

The authors conduct in-depth empirical research on twelve European democracies, focusing upon how a national military ideal-type translates into the institutional socialization of soldiers and how members of the armed forces understand their roles. Moreover, there is a differentiation of case studies based upon type of democracy: *traditional*, *consolidated*, *post-socialist*, and *semi-democracy*. Such a variance—derived from a difference in the history and timing of democracy in each case—corresponds with a higher level of institutionalized democratic civilian control over the armed forces. As such, there is a path-dependence in the development of what the authors refer to as “political-military cultures” (Mannitz, 2012:6). The authors offer an original contribution to the

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literature on democratic civil-military relations in that they present an ethnographic focus upon the armed forces as a social institution. A major question is the following: how do militaries resolve the dilemma of being adequately prepared to use force and wage war while at the same time maintaining subservience to civilian means for conflict resolution? The answer at the end of the study is the adequate maintenance of a “covenant” (explained below) between civilians and soldiers. The study is based upon Immanuel Kant’s notion of Democratic Peace, which assumes that civilians, as opposed to autocrats, are more likely to seek non-violent solutions to conflicts. It is thus a socially-constructed, political-military culture. That construction exists in cooperation with other democratically-maintained militaries, which has undergirded democratic civil-military relations and relative peaceability across European democracies.

The authors’ case studies demonstrate that some democratic states use conscripts, others all-volunteers. Yet, others are hybrids of the two with an increasing tendency to contract out. Some case studies make their armies more beholden to parliament, some require a special mandate for international operations, and still others forbid soldiers from becoming members of political parties. The book shows that idiosyncratic path dependent histories account for such differences. Meanwhile, the authors stress that civilian control has become more difficult where soldiers are increasingly involved in missions geared to the interests of guarding international society rather than national sovereign interests. Ultimately, the book examines how normative designs for militaries across different national contexts converts into institutional regulations and socialization processes which then affects the individual soldier. The authors show that rather than one singular all-European idea of soldiering, in Europe there have been “simultaneous convergences and divergence” as well as “a segmented heterogeneity” of democratizing and/or democratic civil-military relations (Mannitz, 2012:20).

After examining the case studies, the authors conclude that there have been varying degrees of obstacles for European democracies seeking to institutionally regulate militaries and to ideationally subsume soldiers within a culture of democratic control. The authors emphasize that events following the end of the Cold War have involved seven transformations.

- 1) Transformation towards greater democratization in the world.
- 2) The end of bipolarity and an evolution towards a more complex international system.
- 3) An alteration in NATO such that the alliance was enlarged and came to possess objectives beyond simply defending Europe from attack.
- 4) A transition in society toward the inclusion of women and homosexuals to coexist in the gender mainstream.
- 5) Continuing transformations in military technology, specifically in terms of information technology.
- 6) A general, growing transformation from a conscript to all-volunteer military force.
- 7) Finally, a transformation in the character of missions, with a previous stress on missions of defense being replaced with a new objective of missions to restore international order, buttress international law, and guarantee human rights in countries sometimes far away from Europe.

For all cases examined in this study, these seven transformations have exacerbated environmental complexity, undermined the identities of individual soldiers as well as institutional identity, resulting in stress for European armed forces. Such transformations, in raising pressures on soldiers, have made the ideal type of the democratic soldier (a mixture of honesty, professionalism, diligence, military comradeship, obedience) more difficult to achieve as it might overtax the capabilities of military personnel.

The authors describe a “covenant” between citizens, soldiers, and government that requires militaries to perform specific duties. Although there are limits in what civilian leadership should expect from them. Yet soldiers sometimes feel underappreciated at home, and are at times sent into harm’s way—with potentially enormous

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losses—in the interests of badly considered missions. Thus, the question arises whether civilians are adequately playing their part under the covenant.

The authors conclude by observing that the covenant needs to be much better maintained in order to avoid any crisis between civilian leaderships and militaries. This observation appears quite prescient indeed considering the growing amount of stress on soldiers owing to the aforementioned seven transformations. Though soldiers in Europe have generally succeeded in being transformed from defenders of autocratic systems to ‘democratic soldiers,’ a growing number of non-defense-oriented ‘missions of choice’ have created new obstacles for soldiers in the post-Cold War era. Civilian politicians must recognize that if they do not exercise caution in sending soldiers out on what could potentially become fruitless missions, they risk alienating soldiers at large. The book concludes with the ironic reflection that it is in the best interest of the military as an institution to be under truly democratic control—that is, where all other means have truly been exhausted, where the mission is not ill-advised, highly-reckless, overly costly, against the will of the polled majority, and definitely the only means to achieve a goal in the public interest. Thus, thorough democratic control of the armed forces prevents any excesses not only by military officers themselves but also by civilian political elites, who must refrain from sending soldiers out on hastily conceived missions. The result, in the final analysis, is a strengthened covenant, which might better maintain equilibrium between civilian overseers and soldiers who must fight their wars.

This book is extremely valuable as it offers a pioneering study concerning the current challenges in democratic civil-military relations across Europe from an anthropological standpoint. Using ethnological methodology, it analyzes the path dependent histories of soldiering in twelve countries of Europe and then looks at the post-Cold War challenges facing soldiers in each of these nations as they strive to do their military duties while satisfying the requirements of soldiering in new missions based not on national defense but on more complex international objectives. There are similarities and differences among the cases. While the book does not examine every country case in Europe (France, Italy, Bulgaria, and the Scandinavian countries are notably excluded), it does offer cases from each European region (southern, western, central, eastern, northern), while presenting cases of different variants of democracy. All in all, this study is timely, rich in comparative detail and well worth reading.

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