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# Military Reform: An Uneven History and an Uncertain Future

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Atlantic alliance. Early alliances seemed designed to be transitory. There was no need for cooperation, integration, preparation, or even friendship among Bismarckian-era allies in a multipolar world. Offensive wars were fought for territory and treasure. However, this situation was turned on its head when two superpowers developed alliance systems in an ideological struggle where contesting armies had thermonuclear weapons and needed to be ready to fight for national survival on a moment's notice. Further, NATO's members were liberal democracies empowered to take positions independent of the United States on any number of issues and were willing to air these differences in public.

The author's well-informed encapsulation of the six "fatal" crises that NATO has weathered over the years provides scholars and interested general readers insight, perspective, and juicy anecdotes. The author's technique of laying out the problem in each case and following with "what actually happened" makes for a series of intriguing and illuminating vignettes in diplomatic history. Watching them unfold in real time, without the benefit of opened archives and clear hindsight, was not nearly as satisfying or rewarding.

A second cavil with the book's title (and the more important one) is that it is conclusive only in the past tense. The book is certainly a persuasive explanation as to why NATO *endured*. It offers a plausible countertheory for the creation of successful and enduring alliances. However, only one of the crises addresses the post-Cold War world in which we find ourselves today. Indeed, many of the circumstances that

attended NATO's creation and sustenance have either vanished or are eroding. Its *bête noire* (Russia) has ceased to be NATO's enemy for two decades, and the anxieties created by imminent destruction have been replaced by lesser threats, such as transnational terrorism and crime. It remains to be seen if the "self-healing tendencies" of democracies are sufficient to enable NATO to endure in an entirely different kind of world. The reader will benefit from Thies's well argued discussion of this point.

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Wheeler, Winslow T., and Lawrence J. Korb. *Military Reform: An Uneven History and an Uncertain Future*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2009. 256pp. \$24.95

In *Military Reform*, two national security experts reflect on initiatives intended to reform defense planning across the entire enterprise. For decades Winslow Wheeler and Lawrence Korb have observed, studied, and participated in defense reform, gaining a weathered perspective on the ideas, events, and actions taken by national security organizations within government. This work describes the conditions necessary or common in the national security environment in cases where individuals or institutions have exhibited interest in reform.

Wheeler and Korb review the issues that underpinned defense reform initiatives over several decades. They describe the actions of key individuals who championed reform ideas and the issues and stakes of those who opposed or resisted.

Each reform movement that the authors study is recounted in a style like that of a novel. Wheeler and Korb take the time to develop reformers like characters in stories. The value of this approach is that the reader gains added insight into the people involved in these ideas and decisions and into the impact that their experiences, knowledge, and personalities had on the period of reform.

*Military Reform* conveys the complexity of interests and institutions that compete in national defense. Defense planning is a collaborative process that includes the armed services and agencies of the Department of Defense and Congress. Through the use of case studies of past reform initiatives, the authors capture the impact of the actions of these organizations from the perspectives of organizational behavior, process, and competing interests.

For example, chapters 2 and 3 assess the actions and influence of key members in Congress and the Congressional Military Reform Caucus, as well as of the senior leadership within the Department of Defense in the early 1980s. The authors' assessment details the actions taken to control rising acquisition costs in several defense programs. This case study illustrates the impact that politics has on defense reform, the need for a reform leader or champion, and the impact that the news media can have in amplifying reform issues.

Ultimately, the authors conclude that the realities of the political environment can trump the actions of reformers, because members of Congress are politicians and so tend to view reform issues as political challenges or opportunities for compromise or political gain. Members of Congress and

congressional committees have legislative processes and oversight authority that can significantly impact the objectives and mitigate the effects of reform. Further, though the media can amplify issues, their tendency to focus on the "newsworthiness" of reform issues results in a lack of "staying power."

Defense reform is not only impacted by Congress and the media, however. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the impact of previous defense reviews conducted by the Department of Defense, blue-ribbon panels commissioned by the executive branch, and thematic trends such as "transformation" or the "revolution in military affairs."

The organizations within the Pentagon possess a remarkable ability to resist change. Senior Pentagon officials are bureaucrats, tending to view issues and problems either as threats to established programs and funding sources or as opportunities for increases in funding. The bureaucratic management necessities of the Department of Defense and competition for budget and mission lead to perceptions that reform is a threat to the organization.

The book concludes with a description of what defense reform is and is not, in terms of budget, technology, and organizational behavior. This work takes a pragmatic approach in the study of defense reform, assessing the complex and competitive nature of the reform endeavor within government. It is also timely: the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review report, released by the Defense Department in February, and the current national security environment both reflect several of the qualities analyzed in the book.

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