



# Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations

By Peter D. Feaver

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**Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations** By Peter D. Feaver

How do civilians control the military? In the wake of September 11, the renewed presence of national security in everyday life has made this question all the more pressing. In this book, Peter Feaver proposes an ambitious new theory that treats civil-military relations as a principal-agent relationship, with the civilian executive monitoring the actions of military agents, the "armed servants" of the nation-state. Military obedience is not automatic but depends on strategic calculations of whether civilians will catch and punish misbehavior.

This model challenges Samuel Huntington's professionalism-based model of civil-military relations, and provides an innovative way of making sense of the U.S. Cold War and post-Cold War experience--especially the distinctively stormy civil-military relations of the Clinton era. In the decade after the Cold War ended, civilians and the military had a variety of run-ins over whether and how to use military force. These episodes, as interpreted by agency theory, contradict the conventional wisdom that civil-military relations matter only if there is risk of a coup. On the contrary, military professionalism does not by itself ensure unchallenged civilian authority. As Feaver argues, agency theory offers the best foundation for thinking about relations between military and civilian leaders, now and in the future.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Peter Feaver advances the study of civil-military relations to a new level of understanding. By dissecting the choices of, and influences on, civilian and military leaders, and interpreting their conduct against the backdrop of a practical theory of political behavior, he unmasks the reality behind the rhetoric of civilian control of the military in the United States. His book will immediately become indispensable not only for students and scholars, but for every military officer, politician, staffer on Capitol Hill, civil servant in the executive branch, and judicial officer in the nation's court system who participates in national defense. (Richard Kohn, former Chief of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1981-1991)

Feaver's formulation of the challenge of civil-military relations as being analogous to the problems faced by managers in firms or political appointees in the Federal bureaucracy is not only appropriate. It is a useful corrective to the all-too-common view that civil-military relations are fine if there is no real danger of a *coup d'état*. Feaver also provides a very rich and nuanced account of Cold War and post-Cold War American civil-military relations, particularly emphasizing how civilian control has changed regarding use of force issues. (Michael Desch, author of *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment*)

Feaver offers an exhaustive review of the literature on American civil-military relations in the Cold War and post-Cold War period, and points out an important empirical puzzle for Samuel Huntington's argument about civil-military relations during the Cold War. (Deborah Avant, author of *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons From Peripheral Wars*)

Peter Feaver's excellent new book, *Armed Servants*, sheds much-needed light on civil-military relations in the U.S.; indeed, it may come to supplant Samuel Huntington's classic 1957 study of American civil-military relations, *The Soldier and the State*. *Armed Servants* should be read not only by academic specialists in national security, but also by military professionals--it will change the way they think about these issues. (Mackubin Thomas Owens *National Review* 2003-07-14)

Feaver has written one of the best books on civil-military relations in several years...*Armed Servants* was largely completed before September 11th and published before the second Gulf War, but its implications for both are clear. Agency theory must now be accounted for in civil-military relations, thanks to Feaver. (C. E. Welch *Choice* 2003-11-01)

The current paradigm of the study of civil-military relations is dominated by some well written and carefully considered works that date from the Cold War...It is interesting to see a new challenge to that paradigm. Feaver has been a rather prolific author, with a number of books and articles on civil-military relations as well as American foreign and defense policies. *Armed Servants* genesis spans his academic career, and it represents a very well synthesized compilation of his earlier works...Feaver has presented a strong challenge to the existing paradigm. He provides a comprehensive review of the dominant civil-military relations theories as well as a well argued counterpoint to those theories. (Major James R. McKay *Canadian Army Journal*)

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backdrop of a practical theory of political behavior, he unmasks the reality behind the rhetoric of civilian control of the military in the United States. His book will immediately become indispensable not only for students and scholars, but for every military officer, politician, staffer on Capitol Hill, civil servant in the executive branch, and judicial officer in the nation's court system who participates in national defense. (Richard Kohn, former Chief of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1981-1991)

About the Author

Peter D. Feaver is Associate Professor of Political Science, Duke University.

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