



Warmaking and American Democracy: The Struggle over Military Strategy, 1700 to the Present (Modern War Studies)

Michael D. Pearlman

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While war is most effectively waged as a united effort, the United States has consistently waged military conflict without firm central direction. Throughout our history, observes Michael Pearlman, the waging of war has been subject to continuous bargaining and compromise among competing governmental and military factions. What passes for strategy emerged from this process.

Warmaking and American Democracy is the first comprehensive study of American war strategy in its domestic context. It shows how internal divisions—between political parties, presidents and Congress, elected representatives and bureaucrats, soldiers and civilians, and branches of the armed services—make the creation of strategy extraordinarily complex and explains why wartime goals, ways, and means were often disconnected.

Pearlman reveals how divided America has always been over warmaking, from colonial times to Desert Storm. Drawing on a wide array of sources in political, military, and diplomatic history—as well as interviews with leading figures in the defense establishment—he illuminates the strengths and weaknesses of our convoluted decision-making process. His examples of wartime success and failure explain many of the perpetual dysfunctions when a pluralist democracy makes high-level strategy.

Exploring many previously neglected connections in American history, Pearlman compares the military thinking from different eras and points out the recurring difficulties of presidents and commanding generals to compose a common strategy. Disagreement between LBJ and the Joint Chiefs of Staff over how to conduct the war in Vietnam was similar to disputes between Wilson and Pershing, or Lincoln and Grant. Pearlman also provides a wealth of fresh insights into our major conflicts—notably the Civil War, World War II, and Vietnam—and shows how the experience of one war can influence strategy in the next.

Warmaking and American Democracy goes far beyond other accounts of U.S. military history by relating strategies and campaigns to policy goals and means. It invites serious reconsideration of how we wage war as it shows the complex nature of national security decision making in a democracy.

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