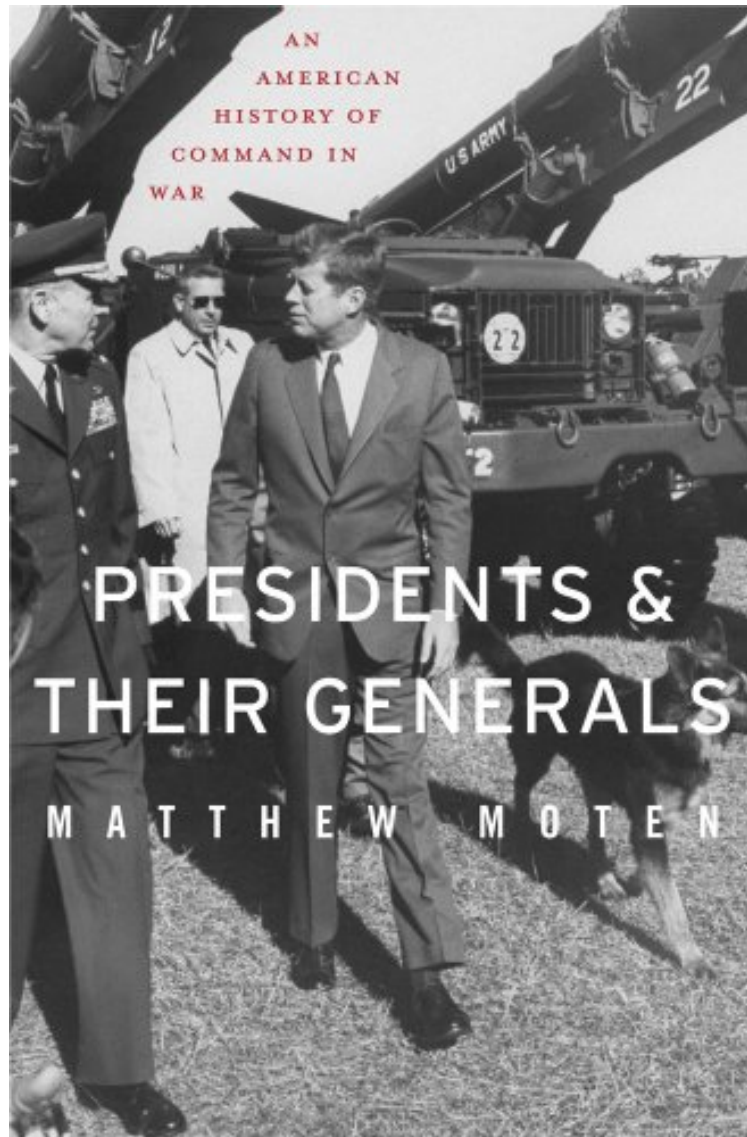


Presidents and Their Generals: An American History of Command in War

Matthew Moten

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Matthew Moten : Presidents and Their Generals: An American History of Command in War before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Presidents and Their Generals: An American History of Command in War:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Looking at History with a Fresh Pair of Eyes By T. Berner Mr. Moten's book is a valuable work for both the expert and the casual reader. Well written, it covers the history of the US

Presidential/military relationship by focusing on a series of episodes, primarily major American wars from the revolution through the most recent Iraq war. Even though some of the material will be familiar to veteran readers in the field, Mr. Moten manages to put new twists on old stories. He does not rely on conventional wisdom. Still, there are places where he could have been a bit more unconventional. He rightly, I think, decries the tendency of the JCS since the 1950s to be Administration yes men and he also indicates, in damning detail, just how long Harry Truman wrongly tolerated Douglas MacArthur's insubordination. But he presents Truman's ultimate firing as a triumph of civilian control of the military. It was not. Truman only mildly chided MacArthur's insubordinate statements to the press, but, always the partisan politician, he fired him for the one thing MacArthur did that he was supposed to do: express his views to a Congressman who requested them. Granted, Congressman Martin misused the information, but the military takes an oath to support the Constitution, not the Commander-in-Chief, and that includes being frank to Congress. By punishing a military man for responding to a question from Congress, Truman set the stage for the emasculated JCS we saw in the 1960s, where, as HR McMaster shows in painful detail, Robert McNamara would blatantly lie about JCS advice and they did nothing to fix the record. MacArthur's firing led inevitably to an emasculated military. Similarly, Mr. Moten is too harsh on LBJ's advisors. Once we supported the coup which destabilized the entire region, there was no viable alternative than to act as we did. Even before JFK was killed, Cambodia, citing US support of the coup, broke its alliance with the US and declared non-aligned status. If we hadn't moved to prop up our puppets, we would have been distrusted throughout the Third World. Finally, while Mr. Moten is very effective at damning the flaws of the planning of the Iraq War in 2003 and, unlike other critics, acknowledges that it is demonstrable fact that at one time, Saddam had Weapons of Mass Destruction (and, frankly, anyone who listened to Secretary Powell's evidence at the UN should have realized that we'd never find the WMDs), he should have acknowledged that Saddam funded, equipped and trained nearly all the terrorist groups in existence in 2003. Iraq was both a legitimate target in the "War on Terror" and its defeat was effective (a lot fewer school buses full of Israeli school children and US embassies have been destroyed since Saddam fell). A 1600 page report documenting that was published by the Pentagon in 2008, but most commentators have just ignored it. Mr. Moten is far too honest an historian to do so. But these are all minor blemishes compared to the virtues of the book and the way the book has of making the reader reexamine many of the assumptions he had about historical figures: Alexander Hamilton's attempted power grab during the Quasi War against France, Winfield Scott's efforts to fulfill the policies of an antagonistic President Polk, General Grant's instinctive grasp of the balance between the political sphere and the military sphere, Woodrow Wilson's complete abdication of leadership during World War I, Harry Hopkins crucial role in smoothing the differences between George Marshall and FDR, Maxwell Taylor's marginalization of the JCS (they were barely consulted during the Missile Crisis and the decisions that led us to Vietnam were largely Taylor's), Colin Powell's skillful efforts to bring the military viewpoint back into the policy debate and Donald Rumsfeld's efforts to shove them out again. Time and again, Mr. Moten makes the reader revisit the familiar and forces him to look at it with fresh eyes. That's a signal achievement.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This historical assessment of interactions between Commanders in Chief and ...
By David P. McLain Jr. This historical assessment of interactions between Commanders in Chief and the Generals assigned to complement civil authority by strategic insights and execution is detailed and insightful. I can't help but believe it is, or will be, on the required reading lists at the Army War College and the National Defense University. The range of personal and official relationships are captured in detail and their impact on key moments in National history is clear. Meaningful history indeed. Thanks for offering this book in the Kindle library.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent treatment of an important subject.
By Hoodlum Excellent treatment of an important subject. The author writes well and ably places the key figures in their contexts. My favorite sections had to do with Congress/Washington, Lincoln/McClellan, and Roosevelt/Marshall. Highly recommended.

Since World War II, the United States has been engaged in near-constant military conflict abroad, often with ill-defined objectives, ineffectual strategy, and uncertain benefits. In this era of limited congressional oversight and "wars of choice," the executive and the armed services have shared the primary responsibility for making war. The negotiations between presidents and their generals thus grow ever more significant, and understanding them becomes essential. Matthew Moten traces a sweeping history of the evolving roles of civilian and military leaders in conducting war, demonstrating how war strategy and national security policy shifted as political and military institutions developed, and how they were shaped by leaders' personalities. Early presidents established the principle of military subordination to civil government, and from the Civil War to World War II the president's role as commander-in-chief solidified, with an increasingly professionalized military offering its counsel. But General Douglas MacArthur's insubordination to President Harry Truman during the Korean War put political-military tensions on public view. Subsequent presidents selected generals who would ally themselves with administration priorities. Military commanders in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan did just that?and the results were poorly conceived policy and badly executed strategy. The most effective historical collaborations between presidents and their generals were built on mutual respect for military expertise and civilian authority, and a willingness to negotiate with candor and

competence. Upon these foundations, future soldiers and statesmen can ensure effective decision-making in the event of war and bring us closer to the possibility of peace.

In a country as disposed to war as the United States has been, the relationship between the commander in chief and his admirals and generals is as critical as that between the president and Congress. Just how critical that relationship may be is the theme of this book, the first full-length history of its subject. It should be required reading in the White House, the Pentagon, and Foggy Bottom—in this, and every succeeding administration. The history it relates is sobering. Matthew Moten is the kind of authority you'd want for a guide through the subject: As the former head of West Point's history department, an Iraq war veteran, and a former legislative aide to the Army chief of staff, he has the broad field and staff experience essential for understanding political–military relations in their many forms—and from inside. He's thorough, disenthralled, critical, and balanced in his judgments. No one can dismiss what he writes... Presidents and Their Generals makes a signal contribution to the historical knowledge of its subject over the long sweep of our nation's history. (James M. Banner, Jr. *Weekly Standard* 2014-11-17) A masterful analysis of the evolution of the American system of military command, in which exists a remarkable cloistering between the military men and the political apparatus that delivers them their orders, and the ways in which that system has so successfully maintained itself... This book is an incredible work of American history, blending as it does military and political histories while simultaneously addressing a will to power that is as American as it was Roman... This indispensable work contains within it a picture of America that expands beyond its subject matter. (Nicholas Mancusi *Daily Beast* 2014-11-03) In *Presidents and Their Generals*, Matthew Moten sets out to provide an episodic history of what he calls American 'political–military relations,' by which he means the relationship between military leaders and their civilian overseers. He succeeds admirably, jumping from the Revolution through the War of 1812 to the Civil War, the two World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, the 1991 Gulf War, and the Iraq war. This book is well done: Well considered, well structured, and well written. Moten, a former head of West Point's history department, is a clear and pleasant writer, with an assured style. He favors making bold statements and then backing them up with persuasive analyses... Moten is sophisticated in his political analysis in a way that academics sometimes are not... The most surprising thing about this book may be that no one seems to have written one like it until now. Moten has stepped up and filled the gap impressively. (Thomas E. Ricks *Journal of Military History* 2015-01-01) This highly readable book, impressive in scope, is a major contribution to understanding the important yet often-shifting dynamics of civil-military relations in the U.S.—past, present, and future. (W. A. Taylor *Choice* 2015-04-01) [Moten] traces the long struggle of presidents to assert their power over recalcitrant generals... Moten beautifully exposes the battles and the alliances between men controlling the country's future... The author explains the workings of war, the effects and dangers of standing armies, and the growth of the president's Cabinet-level military advisers... The author's opinions are precise and witty and based on comprehensive knowledge of his subject, as he clearly demonstrates how wars are lost by the arrogant and/or incompetent. A brilliant, fascinating picture of how wars badly begun and poorly run can affect an entire country—usually at the hands of just a few men. (Kirkus *s* (starred review) 2014-10-01) Filled with shrewd insights and wise judgments, this remarkable book by one of the country's leading soldier-scholars demonstrates that the lack of harmony and trust between civilian and military at the top of government has cost the nation dearly, both in the distant and recent past. Every president and senior military officer should ponder this history. So, too, should every citizen who cares about national security. (Richard H. Kohn, Professor Emeritus of History, University of North Carolina, and former Chief of Air Force History, U.S. Air Force) A new and welcome exploration of the often fraught interactions between political and military authority in the United States from the Revolution to the present. Moten makes clear that all was not orderly in the councils of national defense during the last two centuries, and that they are likely to grow even more contentious in the future. (Roger J. Spiller, author of *In the School of War*) About the Author Matthew Moten, former Head of the Department of History at the United States Military Academy at West Point, is a writer living in Austin, Texas.