



Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime

By Eliot A. Cohen

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The relationship between military leaders and political leaders has always been a complicated one, especially in times of war. When the chips are down, who should run the show -- the politicians or the generals? In *Supreme Command*, Eliot Cohen examines four great democratic war statesmen -- Abraham Lincoln, Georges Clemenceau, Winston Churchill, and David Ben-Gurion -- to reveal the surprising answer: the politicians. Great statesmen do not turn their wars over to their generals, and then stay out of their way. Great statesmen make better generals of their generals. They question and drive their military men, and at key times they overrule their advice. The generals may think they know how to win, but the statesmen are the ones who see the big picture.

Lincoln, Clemenceau, Churchill, and Ben-Gurion led four very different kinds of democracy, under the most difficult circumstances imaginable. They came from four very different backgrounds -- backwoods lawyer, dueling French doctor, rogue aristocrat, and impoverished Jewish socialist. Yet they faced similar challenges, not least the possibility that their conduct of the war could bring about their fall from power. Each exhibited mastery of detail and fascination with technology. All four were great learners, who studied war as if it were their own profession, and in many ways mastered it as well as did their generals. All found themselves locked in conflict with military men. All four triumphed.

Military men often dismiss politicians as meddlers, doves, or naifs. Yet military men make mistakes. The art of a great leader is to push his subordinates to achieve great things. The lessons of the book apply not just to President Bush and other world leaders in the war on terrorism, but to anyone who faces extreme adversity at the head of a free organization -- including leaders and managers throughout the corporate world.

The lessons of *Supreme Command* will be immediately apparent to all managers and leaders, as well as students of history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Abraham Lincoln, Georges Clemenceau, Winston Churchill and David Ben Gurion what made them great wartime heads of state, according to Eliot A. Cohen (*Military Misfortunes*), a professor of strategic studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, is that they were able to finesse a relationship with their military leaders that kept the balance of power squarely in (their own) civilian hands. In his lucid study, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime*, Cohen looks closely at the strategies of the four premiers and addresses broader questions about the tension between politicians and generals in a wartime democracy.

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From Library Journal

The constant tension between political and military leaders is exacerbated by wartime conditions. The director of strategic studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins and author of *Military Misfortunes*, Cohen examines how four civilian statesmen Lincoln, Clemenceau, Churchill, and Ben-Gurion successfully exercised control over their military services during wars that threatened the very existence of their countries. The challenges and complexities that they faced were immense, and how each leader overcame them is the important issue in this study. Cohen stresses key individual traits (e.g., making tough decisions, not worrying about a general's feelings, being willing to stick it out to the end) rather than the totality of these men's experiences, showing that they took a direct hand in the operations of their country's armed forces. Cohen thus concludes that some selective skillful intervention is needed to keep the military on track. This well-documented book will be accessible to lay readers as well as scholars. For academic and public libraries and for anyone else interested in the civilian-military relationship. Daniel K. Blewett, Coll. of DuPage Lib., Glen Ellyn, IL

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From [Booklist](#)

Prevailing wisdom holds that in war as conducted by democracies, the civilian leadership establishes policies and goals, then lets the military leadership implement them unfettered by politics. Exponents of this viewpoint think the Gulf War of 1990-91 vindicates the thesis, but Cohen thoroughly criticizes it. His attacking argument is intrinsically significant to the study of strategy and important on a practical level as well, for he teaches serving officers at the Naval War College. In brief, Cohen says that civilian leaders who neglect military detail in the name of allowing the professionals to get on with the job expose their countries to strategic failure. He sees the Vietnam and the Gulf Wars as examples of such failures, and contrasts them with four strategic successes of civilian leaders who intervened in technical military matters: Abraham Lincoln, Georges Clemenceau, Winston Churchill, and David Ben-Gurion. Readers knowledgeable about these figures will recognize commonalities to their war leadership that, considering the likelihood of a renewed war with Iraq, are topical to the age-old question of what constitutes sound strategy. *Gilbert Taylor*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Deborah Ellefson:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have a lot more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open as well as read a book called Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have some other opinion?

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Richard Williams:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got scholars? We believe that that problem was given by teacher to the students. Many kinds of hobby, Everyone has different hobby. Therefore you know that little person like reading or as studying become their hobby. You need to understand that reading is very important along with book as to be the thing. Book is important thing to add you knowledge, except your current teacher or lecturer. You find good news or update in relation to something by book. Numerous books that can you decide to try be your object. One of them is niagra Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime.

Joe Williams:

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