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Civil-Military Relations-Congress

U.S. CONGRESS AND THE MILITARY

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

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NOTE: CONGRESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN MILITARY AFFAIRS

Allan R. Millett's American Political System and Civilian Control of the Military: A Historical Perspective (Columbus, OH: Mershon Center, 1979; JK558.M5) succinctly covers the subject on pp. 13-17. Each of the following sub-themes on Congressional influence receives attention: appropriations, officer promotions, social reform in the military, and special investigations. His Note 11, p. 63 states that no authoritative study exists on the role of Congress in making defense policy in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Useful quotations on this subject appear in Sec VIII, Art I, US Constitution. Other pertinent quotes:

"Though the President is commander-in-chief, Congress is his commander; and, God willing, he shall obey." (Thaddeus Stevens to the House of Rep, 3 Jan 1867).

"When a nation is at war, the presence of a deliberative body is injurious and often fatal." (Napoleon I, Political Aphorisms, 1848).

"I do not desire to place myself in the most perilous of all positions -- a fire upon my rear, from Washington, and the fire, in front, from the Mexicans." (Winfield Scott, Letter to Sec of War Marcy, 21 May 1846).

Perhaps it is appropriate to use Clausewitz, who stated:

That the political view should wholly cease to count on the outbreak of war is hardly conceivable unless pure hatred made all wars a struggle for life and death. In fact, as we have said, they are nothing but expressions of policy itself. Subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that creates war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political.

- p. 607, Michael Howard's edition of, On War (Princeton, 1976), U102.C65

It is clear...that war is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means.

See also brief descriptions of the Continental Congress' Board of War in the Revolutionary War and the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War in the Civil War in Mark Boatner's [Encyclopedia of the American Revolution and the Civil War Dictionary](#).