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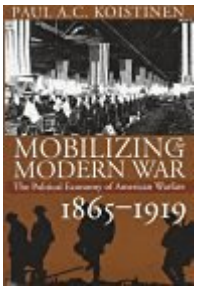
Paul A.C. Koistinen. *Mobilizing for Modern War The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997. xiii + 391 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-0860-7.



Reviewed by Kendrick A. Clements

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Mobilizing for Modern War is the second volume of Paul Koistinen's projected "five-volume study of the political economy of warfare in America" (p. ix). The first volume, *Beating Plowshares into Swords*, covered the period from 1606 to 1865. The other three books in the series will carry the story from 1919 to the present. The overall objective of the series, writes Koistinen, is to explain "how the nation mobilized its economic might in order to conduct war," not to describe the "conduct of war itself" (p. xi). This is not a military history of the United States but a history of how the civilian economy was used to support American forces during wars.

It would be convenient to describe Koistinen's work, as the book's dust-jacket does, as a history of the rise of the military-industrial complex in America. For the period covered by *Mobilizing for Modern War*, however, such a description is an oversimplification. Between 1865 and 1919, relations among the military, industry, and the government were complex, unstable, and mutually suspicious. The development of modern weapons and the nature of twentieth-century war forced the three groups together, laying the basis for a future "military-industrial complex," but no such sustained, intimate relationship among the three developed in this period.

In his previous volume Koistinen argued that the North's strategy during the Civil War anticipated modern warfare in which nations mobilize their entire economies to support their armed forces, but for a number of reasons Union mobilization did not move beyond a "transitional" stage. Following the war, the economy matured further. Market forces remained strong, but great corporations administered by specialists increasingly controlled the economy's direction. To regulate and control these industrial giants, the federal government took on new powers and grew rapidly in size. Lines between business and government bureaucracies blurred as their interests touched at many points. During the Progressive Era, Koistinen believes, "a government-business regulatory alliance began to emerge" (p. 3).

While the economy was changing rapidly, the Army and Navy, facing little in the way of external threats in the late nineteenth century, lagged behind. The Navy was the first to emerge from these doldrums. Beginning in the 1880s the Navy set out

to build a fleet of armored, steam-propelled ships fitted with advanced ordnance, and to train professional officers to command them. This new navy required dependable supplies of high-grade steel for armor and weapons, as well as many other specialized products. In order to supply its needs, long-term relationships among naval officers, civilian officials, and industrial suppliers had to be formed. By the time of the Spanish-American War, the foundations of such relationships had been laid, and the Navy was therefore in a reasonably good position to call upon the full resources of industrial America when World War I began.

The Army, which had less forward-looking civilian leadership than the Navy, and which was less dependent upon technologically sophisticated weapons, relied as it always had upon bureaus which made or purchased through a competitive bid system the supplies needed for Indian fighting and strike-suppression, its two principal activities in the late nineteenth century. Lacking either modern command or supply structures, the Army performed poorly during the Spanish-American War. Following the conflict, Secretary of War Elihu Root was able to implement a new chief of staff-general staff system, but his successors did not follow up on his initiatives. Even less was done in reforming the supply services, which blindly assumed that if a war started, they would be able to buy what was needed. Few officers or civilian leaders comprehended the demands that a major modern war would place on the economy, and no plans were made to meet such an emergency. During World War I, the Army's procurement agencies warred with civilian mobilization organizations and complicated the mobilization process for everyone involved.

When the United States entered World War I, the Army was poorly prepared, the Navy somewhat better so, but there had been almost no planning for civilian mobilization. In part this resulted from a hope that the nation could avoid war, but Koistinen makes a strong case for the view that it also resulted from a deep reluctance on the part of Wilson and his advisors to accept the close collaboration between government and business that modern mobilization requires. Although the Progressives had moved toward business-government regulatory collaboration, Wilson and especially what Koistinen calls the "neo-Jeffersonian" wing of the Democratic Party in Congress, were still deeply committed to individualism and free competition and feared big government almost as much as big business. By necessity, the administration turned to cooperation with business in order to mobilize for war, but they were unwilling to give the agencies entrusted with the task specific powers, they emphasized voluntarism, and they insisted that the whole wispy structure must be dismantled as soon as the war was over.

It was these ephemeral qualities of World War I mobilization that led Robert Cuff, in his seminal book on ***The War Industries Board***, to argue that the experience was ***sui generis***. Koistinen contends, however, that there were important continuities, both with prewar Progressive regulatory methods and with postwar government-military collaboration. In this sense it is reasonable to argue that World War I contributed to the growth of a business-government partnership that would eventually evolve into the "military-industrial complex," but Koistinen certainly does not claim that any such partnership developed during the period covered by ***Mobilizing for Modern War***.

As anyone who has examined the history of mobilization during World War I knows, it was a stunningly complex business. Koistinen imposes a firm narrative control on the chaos. Nowhere else are the innumerable agencies, committees, and other organizations that dealt with mobilization so clearly explained and their relationships so sharply delineated. Moreover, this volume, better than any preceding work, demonstrates how closely President Wilson watched and controlled

every phase of the mobilization process. Certainly this should become the standard source for the subject.

Yet it is the business of reviewers to quibble. It seems to me that by focusing so heavily on the War Industries Board, Koistinen creates a somewhat misleading impression of a relatively coherent, unified approach to mobilization within the Wilson administration. The WIB, Koistinen points out, had very little statutory authority and depended upon voluntarism and cooperation to achieve its goals. The implication seems to be that the same model also applied to all other agencies. But the third volume of George Nash's biography of Herbert Hoover, ***The Life of Herbert Hoover Master of Emergencies*** (1996), makes it clear that in Hoover's Food Administration, persuasion and voluntarism were the velvet glove that covered the mailed fist of regulation and coercion. And in the "other agencies" (such as the U.S. Fuel Administration, the U.S. Railroad Administration, the U.S. Shipping Administration, and the War Finance Corporation) which Koistinen sketches only cursorily in Chapter Eleven, a little study shows that very different methods and principles sometimes prevailed. Since, as Koistinen says, the War Industries Board was the chief mobilization agency, he is correct to see it as indicative of the administration's general direction, but the concurrent existence of other approaches suggests that there was no clear commitment to any single ideal. For all the strengths of ***Mobilizing for Modern War***, there are still aspects of the mobilization story that need further examination.

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