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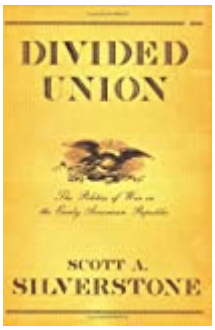

Scott A. Silverstone. *Divided Union: The Politics of War in the Early American Republic.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004. vii + 278 pp. $42.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4230-8.

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West Point political science professor Scott Silverstone explores why the United States in the years of the Early Republic went to war in certain circumstances, yet in other instances when war was an option, armed conflict was avoided. He finds that the United States did go to war twice in the fifty years before the Civil War, but "in a much larger number of cases we find a clear pattern of constraints on the use of military force to resolve international crises" (p. 3). The author asks what it is "that prevents conflicts of interest in specific cases from escalating into violent clashes" (p. 4), and how "democracy might have reduced the frequency with which the early United States engaged in armed conflict" (p. 9).

Silverstone does not espouse the position of "contemporary realists" who argue that states base their decisions whether to use military force "on the power of their potential adversaries relative to their own" by using a cost-benefit analysis "as the means to secure their interests" (p. 7). In other words, if the probable cost of using military force is perceived as being too high, a state will forgo its use. Proponents of this theory would argue that in the five decades leading up to the U.S. Civil War, political leaders in America judged the United States "at a power disadvantage relative to their British, Spanish, and Mexican adversaries" in several instances, and therefore did not undertake violent means to achieve policy goals (p. 8).

Rather, Silverstone argues in favor of using the "federal democratic peace" model to evaluate why the United States did not resort to military action on a number of occasions between 1807 and 1860. Within this framework, the author looks at conflicts and potential conflicts in terms of how the decision for or against war was significantly shaped by the country's democratic politics, which "creates self-imposed limits on how military force is used and against whom" (p. 5). Silverstone concludes that there is a greater chance of opposition to war from within than from outside an open democratic system set up as a federal union. This federal system, peculiar to the United States, inspires domestic competition regarding the use of force or its restraint. Congress's significant role in deciding upon the use of force is heavily influenced by the territorial nature of that elected body, while electoral accountability of the members of that body to their constituents also constitutes a potential brake on the use of force in a federal manner. Moreover, Silverstone argues that the President and his executive decision-making is similarly influenced by electoral issues and concerns for party success at the polls, which act as a restraint on the use of force built into the federal system. "The Federal structure of the legislative and presidential electoral system," he contends, "acted as a

consistent impediment to party unity, and thus inhibited the centralization of policymaking that might otherwise have been produced by party solidarity" (p. 28). This federal structure served to rein in tendencies to use force to achieve political objectives in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps Silverstone's most interesting argument focuses on the territorial nature of the federal democratic process and its influence on decisions for war or peace. He argues that "federalism provides state-level constituencies with a direct institutional outlet for shaping nation-level policy questions," which may conflict with the interests of other states as to the employment of force or its restraint (p. 44). Similarly, the regional interests may act as a check on presidential power, since the chief executive must be mindful of the electoral impact and "potential political penalties or rewards" for himself and his party (p. 48). Furthermore, while Silverstone notes that political parties "can have a decisive centralizing effect on decision-making that may override the formal institutional divisions of a particular democratic system" (p. 55), he finds that regional/local influences can "override party loyalty" as a "potential source of consensus on using military force" (p. 58).

After laying out his framework for looking at the decision-making process for the use of force during the Early Republic, and the institutional influences thereon, Silverstone spends the greater part of his book discussing fourteen crises between 1807 and 1860 in order to examine how the federal system acted–or failed to act–as a constraint on interstate armed conflict. His crises include the 1807 *Chesapeake* affair; the Anglo-U.S. war crises of 1809 and 1812; the 1812-1815 U.S. invasion of Canada; the occupation by the United States of Florida, 1811-1813; the Oregon Crisis between the United States and Great Britain, 1845-1846; the 1845 deployment of U.S. troops to the Rio Grande and the Mexican War of 1846; the 1848 crisis surrounding the annexation of "All Mexico" in 1848; the Mesilla Valley crisis of 1853; the Cuba crisis of 1853-1855; the 1859 Mexican Protectorate issue of 1859 and the intervention into the Mexican Civil War question of the same year; and the Mexican Protectorate Treaty of 1860. Silverstone finds that "the United States demonstrated restraint in eleven out of the fourteen cases, incidents in which the federal democratic process led the United States not to intervene militarily in a civil conflict with a neighboring state" or limited "territorial expansion made possible by the use of force" (pp. 64-65).

One instance will suffice to illustrate how Silverstone explores each of the above-mentioned crises to demonstrate the effect of federalism on early-nineteenth-century decisions to use force. The Crisis of 1807 between Great Britain and the fledgling United States over issues of impressments and neutral shipping in the shadow of the Napoleonic Wars produced "war fever, but no war" (p. 74). Despite flagrant British navy violations of America's sovereign rights and maritime practices in 1807 (and 1809 as well) which produced a significant "rally around the flag effect" (p. 76), and the considerable political strength of President Thomas Jefferson and his Republican Party at the time, war did not result. Silverstone asserts that "the logic of regional diversity and federal institutions play a crucial role" in explaining why war did not follow this crisis in 1807 (p. 78). As Jefferson soon recognized, regional divisions over how the United States should respond to various insults and aggression delayed Congressional response, while factionalism had "fractured the Republican Party" (p. 78). Southern and Western states backed Jefferson in his attempt to respond effectively to British affronts. Mid-Atlantic and northeastern states, however, were divided on a course of action, even within the Republican Party. Thus, the chief executive found that he was unable to use party coherence to facilitate the passage of his goals, while regional pressures regarding potential responses first delayed any decision and ultimately led to cooler heads prevailing and the imposition of an embargo, not war.

Through several more examples Silverstone lays out his case in workman-like prose generally clear of jargon. His detailed knowledge of the various crises is impressive, and the overall effect on the reader will be a clear understanding of the causes and particulars of the "flare-ups" leading up to 1860, most of which could have led to armed responses but did not. He offers a capable account of the growing influence of slavery and territorial expansion as a catalyst for crises in the 1840s and 1850s, although surprisingly he seems to have ignored Leonard Richards' *Slave Power* (2000). Perhaps readers' main concern with *Divided Union*, if they have one, is that it may be too thesis-driven. By the last few examples of crises Silverstone uses to support his contentions, one might be inclined to wonder what other factors were at play within, or outside, the governmental structure of the United States to account for decisions to go to war. Nevertheless, *Divided Union* is certainly a worthwhile addition to the historiography of the Early Republic.

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