Presidential Machismo: Executive Authority, Military Intervention, and Foreign Relations. (Book Reviews)

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Alexander DeConde, emeritus professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has written numerous studies of American foreign policy. Here he asks the most important question in American constitutional law: Why does "a democracy allow presidents to exercise this immense power in foreign relations virtually as personal prerogative"? (p. 3). Unfortunately, his question is better than his answer.

DeConde advances the thesis that presidents "have a penchant for using military force unilaterally," because they are imbued with "presidential machismo" (p. 3). He defines machismo as involving "an exaggerated masculine pride, an admiration of physical aggressiveness, and an entitlement to dominate, associated often with military violence" (p. 4). It may be the case that some presidents are macho men, but there have been so many different personalities in the Oval...

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