

Duncan, Stephen M. **Only the most able: moving beyond politics in the selection of national security leaders.** Rowman & Littlefield, 2013. 287p index afp; ISBN 9781442220225, \$50.00; ISBN 9781442220232 e-book, \$49.99. Reviewed in 2013jun CHOICE.

The thesis of this book is that the current process of selecting national security leaders is inadequate. The military is capable of selecting and disciplining its leaders, but the presidents and senators who appoint political leaders to various national security agencies have not developed a successful system. Hence, key national security officials are haphazardly selected, often ineffective, and seldom disciplined when they fail. This book is distinctive because Duncan (formerly, assistant secretary of defense) has not only the courage but also the knowledge to cite examples of political appointees who should never have been appointed and whose mistakes jeopardized the safety of the American people. Too often, neither presidents nor senators understand what qualities an individual must have to be effective. Hence, they use misguided political criteria rather than substantial qualifications to make selections. The problem has become more acute in recent decades because of the decline in the number of presidents or senators who have security-related experience. The solution: those who do the selecting must understand that appointing a leader to a national security agency for political reasons is just as bad as selecting a military leader for political reasons. **Summing Up:** Recommended. All readership levels. -- *J. A. Stever, emeritus, University of Cincinnati*