

MILITARISM AND DEVELOPMENT*

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Looking back at development trends in the second half of the twentieth century, two contrasting tendencies stand out. The first is a steady improvement in living standards in many countries, evident for instance in rising per-capita incomes, declining mortality rates, better nutrition, higher education levels and expanding civil liberties. The second tendency consists of periodic wrecking of these achievements in specific countries as a consequence of armed conflict. Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Vietnam and former Yugoslavia are some examples – among many – of countries where armed conflicts have played havoc with social progress and left behind them a long trail of destruction and misery.

Development economics, however, has focused almost exclusively on the first tendency. The standard textbooks have virtually nothing to say on the relation between armed conflicts and development. Even in the broader field of ‘development studies’, armed conflicts have received little attention until quite recently. Tawney’s (1933) view of war as ‘the most neglected factor in social development’ (p.15) remains largely applicable today.

Defining militarism is not an easy task. Seen as a characteristic of states, it is commonly understood in at least four different senses: military rule, high levels of military spending, a propensity for aggression, and a preponderant influence of military institutions or culture in civilian affairs. These features are related, but only loosely so. For instance, military rule need not imply any of the other characteristics (Berg and Berg, 1991). A further difficulty is that states need not be seen as having the monopoly of militarism.

Militarism will be broadly understood here as a propensity to use military power, or the threat of it, for political settlements. Including the *threatened* use of military power in the definition is important, especially in view of the role of nuclear threats in contemporary military strategy. Note also that this does not require military or even authoritarian rule. The United States government, for instance, clearly satisfies the proposed criterion of militarism.

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The reference to ‘military power’ encompasses guerrilla armies and private militias, but not pub brawls or individual murders. The proposed definition has its limitations, but it will do for our purposes. Militarism in this sense may be contrasted with various alternatives – collective security arrangements, the rule of international law, peaceful negotiations, total disarmament, among others.

There are at least three important classes of social costs associated with militarism. These relate to security, development, and democracy, respectively.

To start with, militarism is a major source of insecurity and violence in people’s lives. This may sound paradoxical, since the ostensible purpose of building military power is often to ensure ‘national security’. The problem is that unilateral investment in military power for defence purposes tends to be collectively self-defeating: each state attempts to enhance its own security through military strength, but as other states do the same, collective security often decreases instead of increasing. This is a typical example of the ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’ well-known to game theorists, or more generally of a ‘social trap’ (Rapoport, 1992). Arms races can be seen as the culmination of this self-defeating process: as each side tries to enhance its own security by outdoing the other side, a dangerous process of escalation sets in. Indeed arms races have often ended in devastating wars.

Secondly, militarism often interferes with development. In development economics, this issue has been examined primarily in terms of the impact of high military expenditure on economic growth (see *Military Expenditure and Economic Growth*, this volume). There is a large literature on this, with mixed findings, though the balance of evidence suggests that military expenditure tends to slow down economic growth (Sandler and Hartley, 1995). However, this is only one particular link between militarism and development. For instance, aside from slowing down economic growth, high military expenditure is often associated with relatively poor social indicators, possibly because of the trade-off between military expenditure and social expenditure, or because of a similar trade-off in the domain of policy priorities (Dixon and Moon, 1986). Similarly, to the extent that militarism enhances the probability of armed conflict, it is also a major threat to development, given the devastating economic and social consequences of war (Stewart and Fitzgerald, 2000). Once we acknowledge that development is not just about economic growth, but also about social

progress in a larger sense, we also get a fuller view of the adverse consequences of militarism on development.

The third and least studied casualty of militarism is democracy. In situations of armed conflict (or preparation for it), there is a tendency to suppress human rights, political opposition and democratic freedoms. This can be seen even in countries with a relatively strong democratic tradition. During the First World War, for instance, the governments of Britain and the United States pioneered the art of modern propaganda, later applied to marketing. Even outside situations of active conflict, the military establishment tends to have a strong anti-democratic influence.

The anti-democratic influences of the military establishment have many aspects, including hostility to human rights, extensive propaganda activities, promotion of a culture of secrecy, intensive lobbying for military projects, and the spread of corruption. At an obvious level, military activities involve a high concentration of power, and in this respect they are fundamentally at odds with democratic ideals. Another anti-democratic influence of the military establishment is the spread of a culture of secrecy. A certain amount of secrecy is perhaps inevitable in military matters, but the culture of secrecy has a tendency to spread well beyond the bounds of necessity. Closely related to secrecy is the role of the military establishment in spreading corruption. Defence contracts are particularly attractive channels for illegal inducements: the deals are sheltered from the public gaze, the number of 'partners' tends to be small, and the amounts are huge. It is no wonder that in many countries some of the biggest scams that have been exposed relate to military expenditure.

This brief account of the relation between militarism and development may appear to be 'one-sided'. Indeed, there are also positive connections between militarism and each of the social objectives examined here – security, development and democracy. For instance, it has been argued that war tends to be a period of rapid social change, including positive social change (Marwick, 1988). The swift change in gender relations in Britain during the First World War is an interesting if controversial example, as is the role of the World Wars in the origin of the 'welfare state'. Similarly, military expenditure can have some positive 'externalities', such as civilian uses of military infrastructure (e.g. roads and satellites), commercial applications of defence research, and the involvement of the army in disaster

relief. However, the positive links between militarism and development tend to be much more speculative than the adverse connections reviewed in this article.

To illustrate the point, consider the consequences of militarism in India and Pakistan during the last fifty years or so. This is a situation where there has been a persistent tendency to settle disputes through military means ('militarism' in the sense used here), at the expense of other means such as peaceful negotiation and regional détente. The adverse consequences are fairly clear: five wars have been fought; the region came perilously close to nuclear war on several occasions; human rights and civil liberties have been comprehensively suppressed, especially in conflict zones such as Kashmir; crippling defence budgets have displaced social expenditure; defence-related scams have flourished; and so on. The consequences of militarism have been particularly stark in Pakistan, but even India has paid a heavy price for it (Drèze and Sen, 2002). This is not to deny that military power may have had its positive uses from time to time. In India, for instance, the army has often played a positive role in disaster relief, and sometimes also in bringing communal violence under control. But it would be hard to argue that these 'positive externalities', as they are called in economics, outweigh the devastating toll of militarism in the subcontinent. The same applies to most of the armed conflicts mentioned at the beginning of this essay.

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