

MILITARISM AS A SOCIOLOGICAL
PROBLEM:
THE POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF U.S. MILITARY
SPENDING, 1951-1983

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ABSTRACT

Classical social theory includes only scattered references to militarism, perhaps because many theorists assumed that it was more characteristic of the feudal or despotic societies of the past than of the emerging industrial societies of the future. More recently, radical political sociologists have seen the military as one element of a power elite which was becoming increasingly dominant in American society. Empirical studies of militarism in advanced capitalist societies have generally focused on military spending and have stressed its role as part of a Keynesian strategy of managing the business cycle. The evidence shows, however, that fluctuations designed to influence the business cycle have only a minor effect on military spending patterns.

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An examination of trends in military spending in the United States since 1951 shows that it has declined sharply as a percentage of the gross national product. Increases in military spending occurred in three distinct episodes, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Reagan era. After the first two of these episodes, expenditures returned to previous constant dollar levels. This study argues that military spending has declined as a proportion of GNP because the social and political forces favoring military spending are weaker than those supporting tax limitation and civilian spending, particularly for transfer payments to the elderly. After a period of stagnation in real military spending, conservative political groups mobilize public support for spending increases by exciting fears of threats to American security from Communist forces. These campaigns have been successful, particularly when they gain the support of a major party Presidential candidate. After a period of increased spending for several years, however, concern about the Communist threat abates and pressures for spending in other areas become more pressing. The periodic waves of militarism which occur in the United States partially are political and sociological in origin and need to be studied with the techniques of social movement analysis, public opinion surveys, and elite decision-making studies.

MILITARISM

In 1842, Auguste Comte proudly proclaimed that, "at last the time has come when serious and lasting war must disappear completely among the human elite" (Comte, 1908:239; Aron, [1958] 1968). Theorists such as Comte and Herbert Spencer (1896) saw history as a positive, evolutionary development from militant to industrial society. Militant society was not a happy place. The demands of warfare required that the individual and his property be subordinated to a centralized, hierarchical, and frequently despotic state. Those who were not in the armed forces were compelled to dedicate their efforts to serving the needs of their leaders and protectors. Economic, social, and political freedoms were luxuries which only served to weaken the society against its enemies.

The emerging industrial society promised to free humanity from despotism and misery by creating conditions where peaceful economic competition would be more rewarding than armed plunder or imperialist exploitation as a source of wealth. Science would replace theology and metaphysics as the dominant mode of thought, and benevolence would replace personal attachments and veneration for leaders as the prevailing sentiments. The functional division of labor in the factory would liberate society from the rigid, authoritarian ethos of militant social organization. Petty family and tribal loyalties would be outgrown as people came to recognize their kinship with the entire human race.

Today, it is easy to criticize this positivistic view of the future as a utopian vision which fared poorly in the twentieth century. It is easy to appreciate the prescience of nihilists such as Oswald Spengler ([1918] 1945) and Friedrich Nietzsche [1866] 1964) who predicted that the growth of mass society would lead to new levels of bellicosity. Yet it is clear that capitalist industrial societies can experience periods of peaceful productivity. Sweden, West Germany, and Japan are excellent examples of societies which have prospered greatly by turning to peaceful pursuits after their militant aspirations were frustrated by greater powers. Comte's vision, as Raymond Aron ([1958] 1968) suggests, may have value as a statement of a possible future, even though it failed as a prophecy.

Marxist and other radical critics of capitalism would give short shrift to Comte's vision. Yet, the radical critics have not done any better than positivists in predicting the development of militarism in capitalist societies. Marx was concerned with warfare primarily as it affected the likelihood of workers' movements coming to power and largely delegated the responsibility for writing on the topic to Engels (Semmel, 1981). Engels' ([1878] 1934) major work on the topic was a critique of the thesis that political and military force were the key dynamics of historical development. Engels stressed the economic basis of military strength and explained strategies and tactics as derived from economic considerations. Indeed, he shared with Comte the thought that war might become obsolete because it would become overly expensive, while new technology might make massive weapons systems obsolete.

Some contemporary Marxist writers have seconded Comte's argument that high levels of military spending retard economic growth rates in advanced capitalist societies (Szymanski, 1973; Smith, 1977). The data tend to show that those countries which maintain low levels of military spending as a proportion of their gross national products are able to sustain higher average rates of economic growth, although it is impossible to control for all the other factors which influence economic growth in these comparative studies. Other Marxist writers (Baran and Swezy, 1966; Kidron, 1970) have argued that military spending is essential in monopoly capitalist societies, since it is the only politically practical way to absorb the surplus product accumulated by the monopoly corporations.

However, these authors underestimate the extent to which other types of expenditure can also serve to absorb the economic surplus. The common tendency of social analysts to overgeneralize from recent trends without anticipating changes is exemplified by Ernest Mandel's (1962:564) statement:

The ever greater—and stable!—share of armament expenditure in the national income of all the capitalist nations is the chief factor determining the growth of "public ex-

penditure' in the national budget: the development of the social services plays only a secondary role in this connection.

In fact, social expenditures grew much more rapidly than military expenditure in the United States in the decade following the publication of his book.

As Kennedy (1975) has pointed out, arms expenditure is less than ten percent of the gross national product of the advanced capitalist nations. It is unlikely that this limited amount of expenditure could play a crucial role in maintaining the stability of the economy of advanced capitalist societies, especially when we consider that those countries with low levels of expenditure tend to do better than those with higher levels.

If the Marxists cannot agree in their analysis of the role of military spending in capitalist societies, neither can the positive economists. Kennedy's (1975) attempt to derive a supply curve based on the cumulation of individual desires for defense only serves to demonstrate the inability of the classical economic model to explain social expenditures that are not determined by the interplay of market forces (as he, of course, recognizes). The classical economists (Smith, [1776] 1966; Ricardo, [1817] 1969) viewed defense spending as an economic burden which should be minimized, consistent with the needs of national security. Jean-Baptiste Say ([1803] 1975:32) was quite eloquent on the subject:

Smith calls the soldier an unproductive worker. Would to heaven that he were nothing worse! But he is rather a destructive worker: for not only does he not enrich society with any product, not only does he consume the products necessary for his maintenance, but only too often he is called upon to destroy, without any personal advantage to himself, the fruits of others' hard labor.

The straightforward certainties of the classical economists were, however, shattered by the development of Keynesian economics. Keynes ([1936] 1964:381-82) thought that his theories could help to make war unnecessary by enabling capitalist nations to maintain full employment through domestic policies instead of competing for foreign markets. However, his theories of demand management left open the possibility that military spending could be a stimulus rather than a burden to a troubled capitalist economy. Massive military spending during World War II clearly stimulated the depressed Western capitalist economies, although it also burdened them with heavy debts and a tendency to rely on continued deficit spending to sustain economic growth. Keynesian theory makes it easier to justify increases in all categories of spending, since these can be viewed as beneficial rather than burdensome. However, it provides no persuasive guidelines for explaining how much is spent on military as opposed to civilian matters. That question remains essentially a problem in

political sociology, although it has received little attention from that perspective.

Of course, military spending is only one measure of militarism in the broader sociological sense in which it is used by theorists such as Comte and Spencer. Many Latin American societies, which are periodically ruled by military governments, and which seem culturally infused with militarism, spend a low percentage of their GNP on the military. Other countries that are strategically insecure, such as Israel, spend a great deal, despite a culture which is in some ways closer to Comte and Spencer's vision of industrial society. Much empirical research has focused on military spending, however, since it is readily measurable and provides an objective index of trends over time. While comparative studies of military spending are plagued with difficulties caused by differences in strategic situations, currencies, and budgetary practices, studies of trends over time in a single country can provide a useful empirical test of theoretical issues.

In this study, I propose to explain trends in U.S. military spending after World War II by placing them in a context of an analysis of trends in federal spending in general. First, I review the limitations of studies which explain fluctuations in military spending as a function of fiscal policies designed to regulate the business cycle. Second, I develop models which relate the trends in major categories of nondefense spending to social forces. Finally, I present an analysis of trends in military spending as a function of the periodically successful efforts of militarist social movements to overcome the generally negative effects of economic and fiscal constraints on military spending.

MILITARY SPENDING IN THE POST-WAR UNITED STATES

Several authors have examined the trends in military spending in the United States since World War II. Perhaps the best is Gert Krell's (1981) review of trends in military spending as related to the business cycle. Krell's graphs clearly show that military spending in constant dollar terms has been responsive primarily to political rather than economic factors. Military spending declined rapidly in the late 1940s, then accelerated rapidly in the early 1950s as the United States entered the Korean war. After 1954, expenditures were stable until the Vietnam era. From 1970 to 1978, they declined slowly in constant dollar terms. There is little evidence of a correlation between trends in the business cycle and military spending. Nincic and Cusack (1979) do show a weak relationship between the rate of change in military spending and the business cycle, but this only explains short-term fluctuations in spending, not long-term trends.

Griffin, Devine and Wallace (1982, 1983) develop numerous single equation econometric models which explain a good deal of the variance in U.S. military spending as a proportion of GNP during the period from 1949 to 1976. An examination of their equations shows that by far the strongest variables predicting military spending are revenue as a percentage of GNP and civilian spending as a percentage of GNP. As one might expect, military expenditures go up when revenues increase, and go down when civilian spending increases. While these findings explain most of the variance in their equations, their analysis focuses on other variables which are important to their theoretical orientation: monopoly corporation profits and unemployment rates in heavily unionized industries. The findings with these variables, however, are barely statistically significant and depend on questionable definitions of both the monopoly sector and unionized unemployment. They also completely ignore the fact that military spending as a proportion of GNP declined from over 13 percent at the height of the Korean war to under 5 percent in the late 1970s, a fact which seems much more important than the short-term fluctuations which are the focus of their analysis. In general, Krell's (1981:237) conclusions seem warranted:

While economic influences in U.S. military spending can be found, the evidence is in both directions (increases and cuts), and it is rather weak. The shifting back and forth of a few very low percentage points of the defense budget in line with the general direction of fiscal policy certainly cannot be considered equivalent to "economic factors driving U.S. military expenditures." Mostly, intended changes in military expenditures can and can only be explained by international developments and by foreign policy and strategic orientations or moods.

Krell, however, offers no explanation of either international or domestic political trends. The fact that military spending increased during the Korean and Vietnamese wars could be considered a response to international developments, but there were also domestic political considerations which led the United States to become involved in those conflicts. Most interesting, however, is the upturn in military spending which began in the last years of the Carter administration and has been stepped up by the Reagan administration. This increase was not caused by involvement in any foreign war (although the political forces behind it certainly carry the risk of generating one). The rapid increase in military spending in the late 1970s and early 1980s has been accompanied by cuts in nonmilitary spending which are unprecedented in the post-war era. While it might be argued that the increase in military spending has been motivated by an attempt to counteract the economic downturn in the late 1970s, the spending cuts in other areas would have an opposite effect. Military expenditures cannot be analyzed separately from trends in other categories of expenditure, nor can

they be explained by purely economic considerations. A political sociological approach which considers the full range of social and political factors that impact on federal spending patterns is needed.

A Model of U.S. Federal Spending: 1951-1983

U.S. federal spending (Break, 1982) can be analyzed in terms of four broad categories: defense, transfer payments, debt servicing, and "other" expenditures. Defense expenditures here are defined as all purchases of goods and services for defense purposes, including personnel costs, operational expenses, and procurement of weapons.¹ Transfer payments are moneys given to individuals within the United States as an entitlement, rather than as payments for services rendered. These include social security, medicare, unemployment, and veterans' benefits. These expenditures are difficult to control on an annual basis since they represent long-term commitments to which people feel legally and ethically entitled. Debt servicing includes all interest payments made by the federal government. Other expenditures include a wide range of programs such as purchases of goods and services for nondefense purposes and grants in aid to state and local governments. These expenditures are more readily controlled by changes in annual budgets and appropriations. The trends in these four categories, measured in 1972 dollars, can be seen in Chart 1. The same trends, measured in terms of percentages of gross national product, are in Chart 2. The graphs cover the period from 1951 to 1983, in order to capture stable post-war trends.²

The most striking phenomenon in Charts 1 and 2 is the rapid increase in transfer payments. These went from 15 billion 1972 dollars in 1951 to 157 billion in 1982. Debt service and "other" federal spending have also increased significantly, although "other" spending has been cut in the Reagan years. Military spending has declined sharply as a percentage of GNP, and has barely held its own in constant dollar terms. Increases in military spending occur in three distinct historical episodes: the Korean War, the Vietnam war, and the Reagan era. After both the Korean and Vietnamese involvements, spending returned to previous constant-dollar levels.

The failure of military spending even to keep up with the increases in GNP or with spending increases in other areas is surprising, especially from the point of view of radical political sociology. Radicals have generally accepted C. Wright Mills' (1956) argument that the military are one of the major power holders in American society, and one of the consequences of power should be the ability to maintain if not increase one's share of national resources. Even those of Mills' critics (Domhoff and Ballard, 1968) who argued that he exaggerated the power of the military

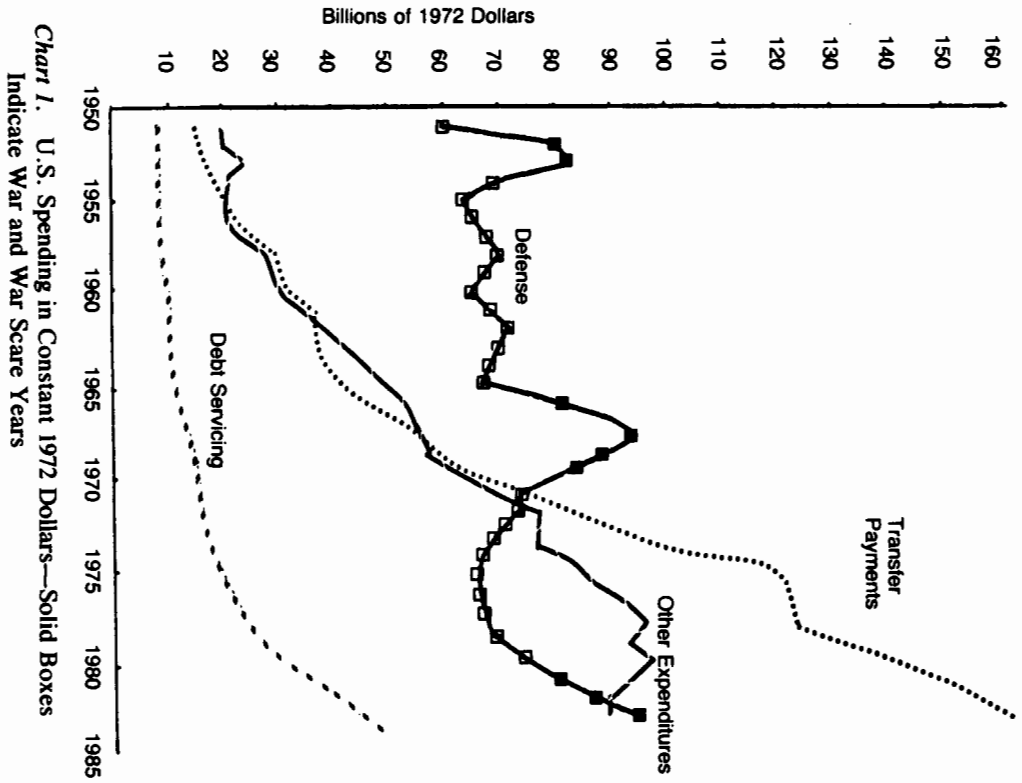


Chart 1. U.S. Spending in Constant 1972 Dollars—Solid Boxes Indicate War and War Scare Years

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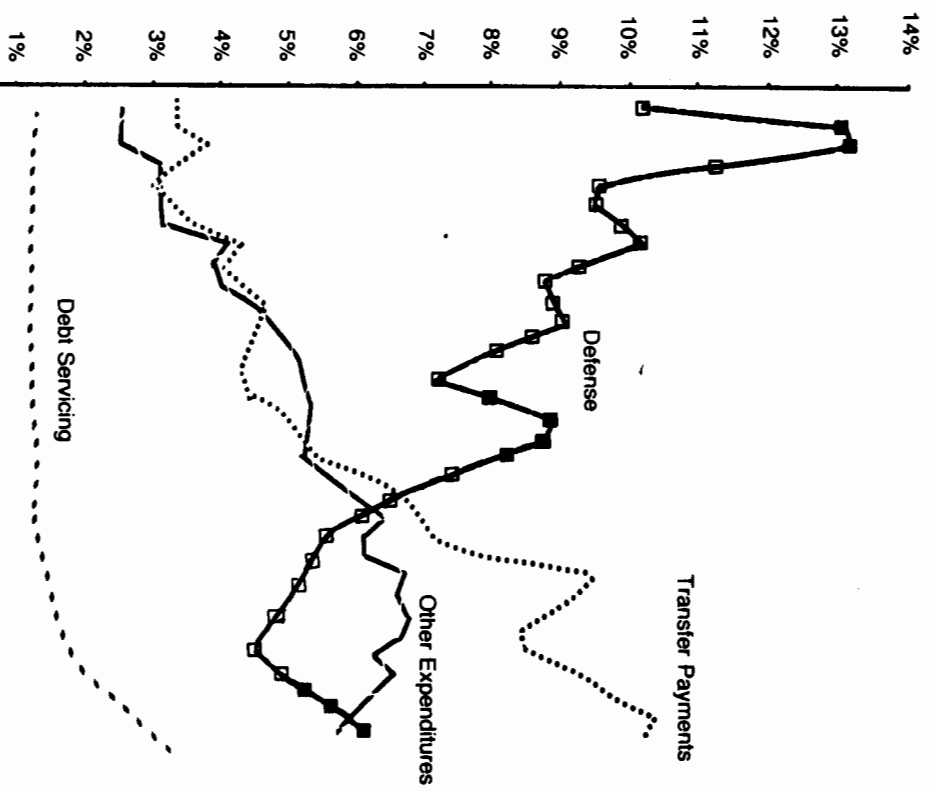


Chart 2. U.S. Spending as Percent of Gross National Product—Solid Boxes Indicate War and War Scare Years

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relative to that of the capitalist class generally expected the capitalists to maintain high rates of growth of military spending for reasons of their own, either as a stimulus to the domestic economy or in order to protect investments in the Third World. The fact that actual trends in military spending have not conformed to these expectations has been noted by thoughtful journalists (Fallows, 1981) and right-wing ideologues (Viguerie, 1980) but discretely ignored by the radicals who were so concerned about the military-industrial complex and power elite of the 1960s.

Of course, the reason military spending has declined as a proportion of GNP is not hostility to the military on the part of Congress, the capitalist class, or the political elite. Indeed, almost all political leaders express sympathy with the need to maintain a strong national defense. Military spending seems quite simply to have lost out to social and political forces which are stronger in the competition for limited federal dollars.

World Wars I and II led to significant increases in the proportion of the national product going to the federal government. Peacock and Wiseman (1961) argue that public expenditure in capitalist democracies tends to increase in response to major wars and then remain at the higher levels after the wars since the public has learned to tolerate higher levels of taxation. Neither the Korean war nor the Vietnam war was a sufficiently credible threat to American security to justify increases in taxation. Indeed, while state and local tax revenues have increased as a proportion of GNP during the post-war era, federal revenues have not. As the first equation shows, federal revenue during the period 1951-1983 has been almost entirely determined by fluctuations in GNP:

$$\text{Rev}_t = -21.18 + .214 \text{GNP}_t \quad (1)$$

$$R^2 = .99 \quad (49.66)$$

This equation shows that the proportion of the GNP which has gone to federal taxes during the period has been quite stable. The slow rate of GNP growth during the 1970s, however, has meant declining federal revenues and pressures to limit expenditures.

The largest category of federal expenditures is transfer payments to individuals. The large majority of this money goes to the elderly, although public attention is often focused on the smaller proportions going to the poor. As the second equation suggests, the amount of money going for transfer payments has been almost entirely a function of the proportion of the population aged 65 or older:

$$\text{Trans}_t = -380.73 + .836 \text{Unemp}_t + 45.10 \text{Over65}_t \quad (2)$$

$$R^2 = .97 \quad (19.52)$$

$$R^2 = .97 \quad (.648)$$

The proportion unemployed has relatively little to do with the amount of transfer payments, since the large majority of this money goes to the elderly. The fact that the proportion of the population over 65 years of age has steadily increased accounts for the dramatic increases in spending on transfer payments shown in Charts 1 and 2.

The amount of federal spending on debt servicing is quite simply a function of the interest rates and the amount of federal debt, as shown in the third equation. The fact that this equation, which is almost true by definition, does not correlate more strongly is simply because the measure of interest rates (the current rate for three-month treasury bills) does not apply to the cost of servicing the entire debt, although it was the only measure available for the entire thirty-two year period.

$$\text{Dbstrv}_t = -43.11 + .111 \text{Debt}_t + 1.67 \text{Interest}_t \quad (3)$$

$$R^2 = .96 \quad (11.91)$$

$$R^2 = .96 \quad (11.73)$$

The growth in "other" spending cannot be explained quite so readily as the growth in transfer payments or debt servicing, due to the heterogeneity of this category. However, Peacock (1979) has argued that there is a general tendency for government spending to increase in post-industrial society as part of a general increase in service spending due to the increasing complexity of society. In fact, the level of federal government spending on areas other than defense, debt servicing, and transfer payments has varied closely with the growth of post-industrial society as measured by the proportion of the nonagricultural labor force employed in sectors other than manufacturing, mining, and construction. This variable actually works better than the number of federal civilian employees as a predictor of levels of "other" spending.

$$\text{Othersp}_t = -317.53 + 5.70 \text{Nonmanemp}_t \quad (4)$$

$$R^2 = .95 \quad (23.3)$$

We have been successful in modeling federal revenues and nonmilitary expenditures with a set of simple equations which explains a high proportion of the variance. These equations reflect strong social pressures which have been successful in maintaining increasing levels of expenditure and in keeping taxes down. The evidence shows that the social forces favoring military spending have been less successful than those favoring spending for the elderly or for the myriad of interests reflected in the "other" spending category. A major reason for this may be the lack of a clear and convincing rationale for maintaining high levels of military expenditure. Estimates of Soviet expenditures are routinely used to argue

for increases in American spending, but there is no accurate and generally accepted way of equating American and Soviet expenditure levels (Brzoska, 1981). Nor is it easy to justify the fact that our NATO allies choose to spend much less of their resources on defense, despite the fact that they are much more directly vulnerable to Warsaw Pact attack.

There is a clear mathematical explanation for the fact that the dominant member of an alliance tends to contribute a larger proportion of its resources to the cause than do the smaller members (Olson and Zeckhauser, 1970). An increment in spending by a smaller partner has less influence on the total strength of the alliance than a proportional increase by the larger partner. Still, the burdens of being a dominant power (Goldstein, 1981) are debilitating in the long run. From 1958 to 1978, U.S. military expenditures fell from 46 percent to 25 percent of world defense spending (Goldstein, 1981:241), and it is clearly impossible for the United States to retain the degree of world military hegemony which it had after World War II. World history suggests that dominant powers tend to rise and fall in arguably predictable cycles (Modelski, 1978; Thompson and Zuk, 1982). The United States does seem to be declining as a hegemonic power, both economically and militarily. While this is partly due to the recovery of other nations which were devastated by World War II, it seems also to be due to forces within American society which demand a greater emphasis on domestic concerns.

The Political Sociological Modeling of Military Expenditures

It is much more difficult to model military expenditures than the other categories of U.S. federal expenditures, since military spending fluctuates sharply. The model developed in this study assumes that military expenditures have been forced down in the long run because of fiscal pressures: the limited revenue base caused by the reluctance to raise taxes, combined with pressures to increase other types of spending. After a period of decline (as a proportion of GNP and in comparison with other spending categories), a political movement is generated to persuade the public and decision-makers that national security is threatened. These movements have been successful in maintaining increased levels of expenditure for a few years, after which the public tires of militarism and spending returns to previous levels.³

These political movements have been described in Alan Wolfe's (1979) book on *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Threat*, although he wrote during the Carter presidency and failed to anticipate the extent to which the Carter buildup would be exaggerated by a succeeding Republican administration. Organizations such as the Committee on the Present Danger,⁴ which was founded for the first time in 1950, have worked quite deliberately and

openly to pressure for increased levels of military spending. They have been successful at periods when military spending has been stagnant for a number of years, and influential political groups can be persuaded that military preparedness is a useful political issue. The first of these movements began just after World War II, with the publication of George Kennan's (1947) influential article on Soviet intentions, and succeeded in persuading President Truman and the American public that a massive military buildup was needed to contain an alleged expansionary threat from the Soviet Union and "international communism" (Lafeber, 1967). The cold war hysteria generated by this movement was cooled by the Eisenhower administration which cut military expenditures in the interests of fiscal conservatism.

The second period of political mobilization around the anti-Soviet issue began with the preparation of the Gaither Report (Gaither, [1957] 1976) by a Pentagon review committee in 1957 and related works for public consumption from well-connected policy analysts (Kissinger, 1957; Taylor, 1960). This movement was picked up by John Kennedy as a useful campaign issue, leading to a second period of military buildup and involvement in the Vietnam war. In both of these cases, the period of increased military expenditures came after a recession, not during it.

The third period of increased military expenditures is, of course, the current era. The increase began under the Carter administration and has accelerated under Reagan, despite the previous pattern for Republican administrations to moderate military spending. The current increases follow a period of declining military expenditures relative to GNP and have been financed by increased deficits rather than tax increases. Because of the depressed state of economic growth since 1973, this period of increase has been more burdensome economically than earlier periods which came during eras of economic growth. For the first time, serious efforts are being made to curb civilian expenditures in order to keep some limits on the deficits.

These periods of sharply increased military expenditure are captured by a dummy variable in our political-econometric model. The dummy variable is set at one (1) for the years 1952, 1953, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1981, 1982, and 1983, and at zero (0) for other years. If we use military spending in *constant dollars* as our dependent variable, this dummy variable accounts for most of the variance:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Defex}_t &= 67.3 + .0060 \text{ GAP}_{t-1} + 17.30 \text{ Waryr}_t & (5) \\ & (.142) & (10.21) \\ R^2 &= .78 \end{aligned}$$

Where GAP_{t-1} refers to the difference between federal government revenue and the amount spent on transfer payments, debt service, and "other"

spending in the previous year. The GAP variable is lagged one year in order to avoid simultaneity, and since military expenditures are budgeted a year in advance. The fact that the GAP variable is a poor predictor can be understood when one examines Chart 1. There is little variance in military expenditures, when measured in constant dollars, when one excludes the war or war scare years (which are indicated by solid boxes on the Chart). When, however, we use military spending as a percentage of GNP as our dependent variable, the GAP variable is much more significant, while the war year variable fades into insignificance:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Defex/}GNP_t &= .031 + .675 \text{ GAP}_{t-1} + .0081 \text{ War}_t & (6) \\ &(12.3) & (2.18) \\ R^2 &= .84 \end{aligned}$$

This equation corresponds to the data in Chart 2, which shows the persistent secular decline in military expenditures as a percentage of GNP. The wars and war scares have had only a modest restraining effect on this long-term tendency for military expenditures to consume less of the nation's resources, although they look much more significant when we view them in terms of constant dollars. This illustrates the importance of examining the data in graphic form before drawing conclusions about causality from econometric equations which can give sharply differing results depending on the way in which the data are measured.

DISCUSSION

Military expenditures in the United States have been quite stable in constant dollar terms since the 1950s, while the gross national product, federal revenues, and other categories of federal expenditures have increased. Increases in real military expenditure have come as the consequence of periodic wars and war scares which have been supported by militarist political groups, military men, and others who have been concerned by the failure of military spending to keep pace with other categories of spending or to meet national security needs as they perceive them. These periods of increased spending have ended when public enthusiasm waned and other priorities became more important.

It is risky to venture a prediction on the basis of such a short period of historical experience, which is one of the inherent limitations of this kind of time-series analysis. Economists have not been able to succeed in developing equations which would predict turning points in defense expenditures, because these are dependent on political and foreign policy considerations which cannot be reliably incorporated in a quantitative

model. The fact that the Vietnamese war dragged on much longer than the Korean one, for example, could not be predicted with any of the variables included in this analysis. World War II was followed by a severe demobilization which lasted for about five years. The Korean and Vietnamese wars were followed by modest cutbacks in spending which lasted for about ten years each.

If the pattern of the past 33 years holds for the next few years, we would expect the current buildup to slow down within two or three years, with military expenditures in real dollars settling back close to the previous level. Of course, if the United States becomes involved in a war in the Middle East or Central America, a higher level of expenditure could be sustained for a much longer period. Doing this, however, would require a political consensus sufficient to make it possible to raise taxes significantly. President Reagan's military buildup has been based on economic theories which deny the necessity to raise taxes to cover increased expenditures. His conservative supporters confidently promised to:

Build up our military forces regardless of the cost so that we are once again the Number One military power in the world . . . reduce federal spending . . . significantly reduce personal and business taxes . . . and balance the budget (Viguerie, 1980:226-29).

It is already obvious that these promises cannot be fulfilled. By 1984, President Reagan's own budget director (Stockman, 1984:56) was convinced that:

The problem is that this democracy is somewhat ambivalent about what it wants. It wants low taxes and substantial public spending . . . people want to have mass-transit subsidies and middle-class subsidies for education. And the agricultural sector wants all those benefits. I can't foresee that anytime in this decade we will have the kind of people in Congress who will abolish those things.

The Reagan administration has made unprecedented cuts in federal domestic spending other than transfer payments, and steps have been made to limit the growth of payments to the elderly. Even with these cuts, the military buildup has been financed primarily with increasing deficits which threaten the hopes for sustained economic recovery. The public mood seems to be becoming more skeptical about claims of military inadequacy, and there is clear pressure for progress in arms control with the Soviet Union. The economic pressures for a cutback in military expenditures are strong and persistent, while the political movements which struggle to overcome them are usually able to sustain enthusiasm for only a few years at a time. For these reasons, it seems likely that the sharp increase in military expenditures which we have experienced in the last few years will level off and probably decline in real terms.

CONCLUSIONS

Writers such as Comte (1908) and Schumpeter ([1919] 1955) thought that capitalism was fundamentally anti-militarist because it depended on an ethos of rationality which would recognize that more money could be made with much greater security through economic competition than through armed plunder or imperialist protectionism. Even if we give full acknowledgement to capitalism's tendency toward economic crises caused by monopolization, underconsumption, and other factors, we must recognize that military spending is only one solution to this dilemma, and in many ways not the best one.

Writing in the heyday of British imperialism, J. A. Hobson ([1902] 1969:98-99) argued that advanced capitalist nations had two ways of resolving the economic difficulties caused by the concentration of resources in large corporations which could not find adequate outlets for productive investment at home:

A nation may either, following the example of Denmark or Switzerland, put brains into agriculture . . . public education . . . and . . . apply the ripest science to its special manufacturing industries, and so support in progressive comfort and character a considerable population upon a strictly limited area; or it may, like Great Britain, neglect its agriculture . . . fall behind other nations in . . . education and in the capacity of adapting to its uses the latest scientific knowledge, in order that it may squander its pecuniary and military resources in forcing bad markets and finding speculative fields of investment in distant corners of the earth. . . .

V. I. Lenin (1917) relied very heavily on Hobson in his essay on imperialism, yet he denied the possibility of a capitalist nation following Hobson's alternative on the grounds that such a society would no longer be capitalist. Today we have many examples of nations which have successfully followed Hobson's advice while retaining substantial private ownership of the means of production. Their success demonstrates that the barriers to this policy alternative are strategic, political and sociological, not economic. These nations have often chosen to organize their societies around peaceful pursuits after a military failure made it clear that they would not be able to play a hegemonic role in their region or in the world system as a whole. It seems to be much more difficult for a nation which is a dominant partner in an alliance to reduce its concentration on military pursuits.

Prior to World War II, the United States relied on its fortunate geographic situation, and the British fleet, to provide military security and maintained only enough forces to dominate its weaker neighbors. Today, nuclear weapons provide a relatively inexpensive way of providing invulnerability from deliberate foreign attack, and many Americans feel that

extensive foreign commitments place our nation at greater rather than lesser risk. In this context, it is difficult for the military and its supporters to overcome the desire of citizens and economic leaders to limit military spending in order to keep taxes low and maintain domestic spending programs.

The fact that U. S. military spending has declined substantially as a proportion of the U. S. gross national product shows that the military has been a relatively weak contender in the competition for federal tax dollars. Why this is the case certainly deserves further study. It hardly seems likely that the new left and other peace groups are strong enough to have driven down military spending against the will of the capitalist class or power elite. Support for increased military spending does not seem to come so strongly from these groups as from the ideologues of the radical right. Their success depends largely on their ability to manipulate public opinion in such a way as to make demands for increased military spending a useful issue for presidential candidates. The dynamic of public opinion seems to be that issues lose their urgency after a few years when the alleged crisis never comes to a head and other problems seem more compelling. Pressures for spending on behalf of economic interest groups—be they agriculture, the elderly, the cities—or for tax incentives and subsidies for business, are more persistent and tend to win out in the long run.

By contrast to the United States, Soviet military spending tends to grow steadily year after year, with fluctuations dependent on the scheduling of major weapons acquisitions programs, and there is no convincing evidence of an interaction between fluctuations in Soviet and U. S. expenditures (Cusack and Ward, 1981; Krell, 1981). The public perception of the intensity of the Soviet threat varies significantly, however, depending more on trends in domestic politics than on international events, since these events are always susceptible of diverse interpretations. The threat of a Communist government in Vietnam was portrayed as a major threat to American interests, while the triumph of Marxist-Leninists in Mozambique was hardly noticed, since these events took place at different times in the American socio-political cycle.

Sociology seems well equipped to analyze these trends in social attitudes and political mobilization, yet they have received only sporadic attention. References to militarism are scattered throughout the sociological literature, without being the focus of a sustained body of work. Despite the fact that many sociologists are concerned about the risks of war, and even spend considerable time in anti-war activities, the study of militarism is not often considered a productive focus for professional work. The functionalists seem content to leave questions of international relations to the political scientists, while the Marxists have never seen the issue as central

to their paradigm. Of course, the study of the military as an organization retains a small but persistent following, but there is all too little study of militarism as a societal phenomenon.

Political sociology offers an excellent conceptual framework and empirical basis for the study of militarism. There is a large amount of survey data on trends in public opinion and political attitudes, a considerable literature on social movements, and a lot of discussion, with some empirical basis, on policy-making and fiscal sociology. Political sociologists also have a good record in combining qualitative with quantitative information and avoiding the preoccupation with mathematical modeling which has so severely limited the efforts of many researchers in the peace research movement. The emergence of the "gender gap" as an issue (Goertzel, 1983), also, has helped to revive interest in militarism and anti-militarism as socio-political phenomena, since a significant difference between men and women has emerged on these issues.

Military spending is a convenient index of the amount of resources a society devotes to war-related activities, but it hardly captures the complexity of militarism as a sociological phenomenon. Only a perspective which deals with the interaction of social, economic, and political forces can hope to deal with the complexity of these issues.

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NOTES

1. This is a more accurate measure of actual spending than the use of budgeted or appropriated levels of expenditure.
2. All economic data for this study are taken from the *Report of the Council of Economic Advisers* which is published together with *The Economic Report of the President*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, various years. Data in current dollars were converted to 1972 dollars with the GNP deflator. Data on the percent of the population 65 years of age and older are from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, various years, and *Historical Statistics of the United States*. Estimates for 1982 and 1983 were obtained by projecting data from the preceding ten years. The numbers in parentheses in the equations are 1 statistics.
3. This pattern of defense spending is also discussed in Huntington (1983).
4. The first Committee on the Present Danger was founded in 1950 to urge increases in military spending in response to the fact that the Soviet Union had broken America's nuclear monopoly. A second committee of the same name was founded in 1976 to rally public opinion around the idea that declining defense spending had made the U.S. vulnerable to the Soviet

Union. Another organization active in this effort is the National Strategy Information Center, Inc. The boards of these organizations include militarist businessmen, politicians, and labor leaders. A detailed study of the Committee on the Present Danger is by Sanders (1983).

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