Artwork: Communique

Deborah Dixon

DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/DISCLOSURE.03.16
The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America
Ann Markusen, Peter Hall, Scott Campbell, and Sabina Dietrick
Oxford University Press, 1991

The Pentagon and the Cities
Andrew Kirby (Ed.)
Sage Publications, 1992

Reviewed by John Grimes

These volumes deal with an important and timely issue, namely, the relationship between the military and American society. The demise of the Soviet Union, the military build-up under the Reagan Administration, and the more recent military reductions and base closings have prompted a re-evaluation of the role the military plays in our wider society. While this issue has been on the minds of both politicians and the public, it is now receiving deserved attention in academic circles.

Pertinent to disclosure's theme of fin-de-siècle democracy, the wealth of resources devoted to the military and the secrecy that surrounds the development of weapon systems and military activities in general are often at odds with the ideals and practice of democracy. Both texts emphasize the influences of defense policy on economic development and utilize city level case studies to do this, but in neither text is the position of the military vis-à-vis the political system addressed directly. Political choices about the future size and distribution of military resources and conversion to a non-military economy are important contexts which these books can inform.

Given the large high technology component in the military and military production, The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America is a natural progression for Markusen, Hall, Campbell, and Dietrick to follow up on the earlier High Tech America by Markusen, Hall, and Glasmieier (1986). The changing spatial distribution of the defense industry is the focus of this effort, and it is divided into three parts: a geographic history of the defense industry in the United States since World War II, an attempt to interpret these patterns and explain the processes behind them, and several case studies of places with high levels of military presence.

A problem of the approach utilized by Markusen et al. is the inconsistent scales of analyses. While the measurement of military presence is at the state scale (often without accounting for the size of the state economy), and the description of the gunbelt is at the state level, most of the case studies are at the