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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-siecle 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-a-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 Glasmeier (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
The approach used by the authors is not without merit, however. The second section of the book is rich with details of the history of the development of the military industrial complex, and this level of detail is one of the strengths of this book. Notable inventors, corporations, and the all-important economic and political contexts in which military industrial firms developed are detailed. The change in concentration of military production from the Midwest to the contemporary pattern of production on the coasts and southern regions of the country (which is described as looking like a gunbelt), is the central focus.

The authors propose that there is no simple explanation for the spatial pattern of military industrial firms in the early years or their subsequent "gunbelt" locations. What is suggested is that a number of factors, "the shifting national military mission, changing service roles, rapidly evolving technology, the adaptive capacities of local entrepreneurs in industry, science, and civic boosterism" (6), in different combinations and different local settings may explain the presence of military resources. While these factors can explain the spatial distribution of the military generally, this approach is theoretically unsatisfying.

The case studies of areas which have a large military presence map nicely onto the scenarios of how a defense complex might arise. The book offers rich details of the major actors and contexts in which the military complex arose, and this is another of its strengths. However, the case studies match too neatly with the proposed scenarios. This narrative structure is short on comparisons and stresses particular factors in some situations while conspicuously ignoring others factors. A more convincing approach might be to follow each of the factors proposed by the authors in each setting, whether they are purported to have impacted that setting, or not.

The final chapter summarizes earlier comments and speculates on the role that the military plays in the spatial distribution of the American economy. The contention that military policy has played a large role in the regional restructuring in American industry is supported. While this may be the case, a problem with the concept of the "gunbelt" is the difficulty of separating the effects of the military policy, or the "gunbelt," from other factors affecting regional industrial restructuring. In effect, the authors may be conflating the effects of the "gunbelt" with the "sunbelt" or other phenomena.

_The Pentagon and the Cities_ is quite similar to _The Rise of the Gunbelt_ and in fact contains a twenty-page condensation of Markusen's et al. book. The emphasis of _The Pentagon and the Cities_ is again on the economic and social impact of the military with a particular focus on the urban setting. It is composed of essays regarding four geographical regions, and also contains three other essays dealing with the topics of development theory, the peace dividend, and the ideology of defense spending.

Although this collection of essays is a bit uneven, most essays are solid and contribute to the overall theme of the book. One of the more interesting is the contribution by Nancy Ettlinger, who discusses the role of the military industrial firm in development theory and the uniqueness of the economic environment within which these firms operate. In one of the more theoretical pieces of the book, she attempts to anticipate the way in which military restructuring will affect military industrial firms.

The complexity of the relationship between the presence of the military and economic growth in New England is discussed by Richard Barff. He stresses the importance of an examination of the sectoral composition of military production in a region with both high and low technology utilized in military production. This level of complexity adds to the difficulty in anticipating the economic effects of the military, although in the case of New England, the diversity of military production will provide some protection from military cuts.

In the only essay that deals directly with the role of the military in the growth of cities, Robert Parker and Joe Feagin examine Houston and Las Vegas. The authors state that both cities have quite different relationships with the military. Las Vegas has actively pursued a relationship with the military and has benefitted from the numerous installations surrounding it. Houston has benefitted from indirect military expenditures in the form of government subsidies to the synthetic rubber industry and petrochemical industry, the privatization of government pipelines, and the Johnson Space Center. In both cases, the authors argue that the military has had an important economic and spatial influence on city development.

The essay by Gerald Jacob investigates the environmental problems resulting from military production and speculates that the cost of cleaning up military sites will negate any possible peace dividend. The environmental problems in many of these military installations will become apparent to the public as the proper procedures, environmental impact statements included,
are carried out. The irony of this situation is not lost on Jacob who states: "How ironic that more deaths should result from government negligence and mismanagement of the nuclear weapons complex than in confrontation with the evil empire those weapons were intended to deter" (169).

The link to the urban setting is somewhat tenuous in Peter Armitage’s essay on the Innu’s attempt to limit the Canadian military flights over its territory. Although not without merit, this essay is out of place and adds to the book’s unevenness.

The obstacles to conversion to a non-military economy are discussed by Marvin Waterstone and Andrew Kirby. The consequences of a military-based economy characterized by the diversion of material and human resources away from the private sector to military production, inefficient and non-competitive military industries unable to compete in non-military production, and the lack of commercially viable products or commercial spinoffs from military production all are seen as major stumbling blocks. Waterstone and Kirby emphasize the need to overcome the cult of secrecy surrounding the military. Information on the social and economic costs of military production as well as economic alternatives to military production must be made public in order to make conversion of the military economy an option of the democratic process.

The final essay by Marvin Waterstone emphasizes the role that ideology plays in support of the militaristic economy and the political and economic actors that support it. In this chapter he incorporates a feminist perspective which links militarism and masculinity. He argues that masculinity must be redefined and separated from violence. Although this perspective seems out of step with the rest of the book, it certainly warrants further discussion.

The strength of The Pentagon and the Cities, particularly in the last two chapters, is the ability to create linkages between economic, political, and ideological issues. If the democratic process is to be effective in the conversion to a non-militaristic economy, these issues will have to be confronted on an individual and local level.