

Review - Militarism and International Relations

Written by Anne de Jong

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ANNE DE JONG, AUG 28 2013

Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security, Theory
Edited by: Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby
London: Routledge, 2013

Any book with the ambitious title *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security, Theory* seems bound to be critical, thought provoking, rich in content, but impossible to read due to it incorporating many perspectives. While the first three points certainly ring true, much credit goes to the editors Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby for eloquently stringing the variety of chapters together for ensuring the latter does not. The introductory chapter clearly sets out and justifies the two overarching aims of the book:

“to make the case for a renewed research agenda for IR centred on the concept of militarism; and to provide a series of empirically focused and theoretically informed case studies of contemporary militarism in practice” (p. 4).

The authors reflect on:

“why the concept of militarism has been so marginal within post-Cold War debates in IR, emphasizing in particular

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the political and intellectual ascendancy of liberalism, and the dominant disciplinary concerns with 'new wars', 'state failure', 'human security' and 'securitization'" (p. 5).

Stavrianakis and Selby not only successfully make the case for a return of the concept of militarism but manage to do so by using the empirical case studies of the book which clarifies its structure. The chapter ends with an editor's note on some of the difficulties they faced in pulling the book together. These transparent reflections do much to intercept possible critiques as well as reinforce the underlying assumption that much further research on militarism and militarization could and should be done.

Building on the introductory chapter, the rest of the book is loosely structured into three parts: part 1) Theorizing Militarism; part 2) Militarism & Security; and part 3) The Political Economy of Militarism. Martin Shaw locates

"the problem of militarism in the context of transformations of the mode of warfare, related to the larger socio-economic, political and cultural changes of the twenty-first century" (p. 31).

This historical, broad, yet, detailed text will prove a valuable resource to scholars new to the subject and paves the way for the following two chapters which approach militarism from a critical geopolitical and a Gramscian perspective.

Through an intellectually entertaining reading of Peter Jackson's reworking of J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy, Simon Delby suggests that "the geographies of endangered virtue are very much more complicated than the simplistic taken-for-granted geographic entities frequently invoked in national discourses" (p. 35) and that "challenging these geographical specifications of danger is now key to unraveling the logics of contemporary militarization" (p. 44). Nicola Short's 'Militarism, 'new wars' and the political economy of development' concurrently critiques the new war thesis by looking at contemporary militarism of the Global South. Through a carefully constructed and multifaceted argument, Short argues that the

"linking of development and security is not merely a symptom of neo-liberal, post-Cold War governmentality, but an on-going problem of liberal capitalist modernization and uneven development" (p. 46).

Part 1 concludes with a transcribed interview conducted by the editors with Research Professor James Der Deridan from the Watson Institute, Brown University. At first, this chapter appears to be the odd one out because Der Deridan does not subscribe to "'isms', period." (p. 72). However, the critical interaction between the interviewers and the interviewee draws out promising gaps in theorization on militarism. Der Deridan's observation that contemporary militarism and military are highly diffused across industry, the media and entertainment – what he labels the 'Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network (MIME-NET) – could, for example, be critically examined in relation to militarism of the Global South. Similarly, Der Deridan's new film, Human Terrain, holds the potential to widen the debate regarding the role of academia in a militarized world, or as the chapter's title reads: 'Wars becomes academic'.

Part 2 connects militarism and security through four empirical case studies. Much in line with Dalby's analysis, Yoav Peled uses the animation film *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) to exemplify the two profound transformations in Israeli society that lead to two distinct discourses of citizenship: "the liberal discourse in the economy, and the ethno-nationalist discourse in politics" (p. 89). This detailed case study not only maps the development of the 'enlightened public' from Oslo to Gaza but also sharply critiques this public for the "almost universal acceptance of the [Israeli] government's version" leading to the conclusion that "domestic public opinion is one front [Israel] will not have to worry about" (p. 90).

Dirk Kruijt and Kees Kooning's chapter focuses on the transformations of militarism in Latin America. The authors do not contest that democratic transitions have diminished the influence of political armies, instead arguing that "a much more prominent trend has been the militarization of law enforcement in a context of what can be called the 'new violence' of Latin America"(p. 92). In 'From political armies to 'war against crime'', Kruijt and Kooning critically analyze these transformations. The chapter concludes that the newly emerged strategies

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“contribute to the violation of human rights by the state in a new guise and to the reproduction of social exclusion, transforming ‘the poor’ into second-class citizens and depicting them as a new threat to the integrity and stability of the nation” (p. 103).

David Kinsella and Andrew Bacevich adopt a similar critical analytic approach in their respective chapters on global arms trade and the diffusion of militarism (Kinsella) and the contemporary Wilsonian civil-military relationship in the US (Bacevich). Whereas all previous chapters implicitly touch upon the political economy of militarism, the third and final part of the book is specifically dedicated to this significant aspect. Firstly, Iraklis Oikonomou provides the reader with a critical insight into “the EU set of military instruments, institutions and capabilities developed under the aegis of the Common Security and Defence Policy” (p. 133). Focusing on the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES), Oikonomou illustrates how the process of EU militarization is a result of “the twin impact of the quest for capitalist profitability and power projection abroad” (p. 144) and that

“it is also a major response to the politico-economic necessities posed to the European space industry by economic internationalization and transatlantic competition” (p. 145).

In ‘Producing men, the nation and commodities’ Ramy Aly argues that “contemporary Egypt should not be the subject of ‘civil-military’ relations analysis, but of one based on ‘militarism’” (p. 147). This detailed chapter exposes the pernicious character of militarism in the Egyptian state and, in light of current developments in the country, proves to be extremely relevant. The final chapter of this book analyses the role of the PLA in the political economy of China from a military-industrial framework. The detailed description of the historical development of the Chinese military industrial complex is carefully connected to its’ contemporary complexity and the concluding “look into the future” (p. 175) places it in a broader, global perspective.

Overall, *Militarism and International Relations* is an informative, well written, carefully selected collection of essays. Perhaps the only critique is that each essay reads as the opening of an entire book raising more questions and begging further research. These open ends may leave the reader unsatisfied but also affirm the editors’ claim that a return of the concept of militarism in to the IR debate is indeed needed.

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