CHAPTER 6

The Military and the Use of Force

Corporate Interests and War

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The differentiation between political and military functions was institutionalized at the end of the 18th century, and since that time the way the military relates to the application of force and war has been lengthily debated. Discussions were initiated by scholars such as Tocqueville and ideologues such as Jaurès or Liebknecht and continued into the early 20th century with historians such as Delbrück and Vagts and political scientists such as Mosca and Lasswell. They became more systematic with the development of “military sociology” by Andreski, Janowitz, and Huntington and “security studies,” notably by Allison and Betts and many others recently in light of civil–military relations in the post-Cold War period.

All try to answer the question by taking into account either the nature of military personality or that of the institution proper. For some, the military, when it does not exhibit belligerent traits, is seen as naturally prone to alarmism and the defence of various postures that could lead to war. For others, on the contrary, the military is considered more circumspect than civilians in the area of international security, aware first of its hazardous nature and second of the consequences of any unconditional use of force for their own personal and professional interests as well as for society.

The purpose of the present chapter is modest. It does not seek to bring forth new evidence, only to perhaps put the existing information in perspective (in view of a more detailed study). Rather than trying to evaluate the weight of corporate interests, it points out that the link of such interests with the advocacy of force is complex and is affected by various extraneous conditions while the relation seems more immediate with offensive-oriented doctrines and alarmist assessments, two war-connected factors.

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1 This voluntarily vague term encompasses all of those who, by their functions or ranks, are able to influence, directly or obliquely, the decision-making process regarding military affairs; essentially, senior officers.
It ought be said, in terms of relevance, that though its primacy in inter-state relations seems challenged by more constabulary techniques, the use of force remains the ultimate function of the military, whose concern with the upper end of the destructive continuum is still central. Moreover, in numerous countries (Pakistan, Russia, China, and the Middle East), the military establishment constitutes a powerful sociopolitical and economic operator, and in Latin America or Africa, it is always in position to assert its point of view.

MILITARY INTERESTS AND WAR

The Weberian ideal of modern bureaucracy as a neutral agency whose actors would be devoted entirely to the realization of purely objective ends formulated by the parent political institution is a pedagogical tool intended to present an ideal while at the same time deemphasizing a more complex reality. And as any other organization, the military, often considered the epitome of bureaucratic development, functions according to modalities in which the superior interests that are supposed to justify its raison d'être—national security and defence—are rivaled and penetrated, if not invaded, by some of its members, collectively or individually, preoccupied equally by prestige, resources, and power (Schumpeter, 1953).

For or Against the Use of Force

In terms of corporate interests, war seems to offer plentiful opportunities for the military. Even the simple prospect of a conflict is likely to afford the armed forces with renewed means and resources, and for its members it is a factor that enhances their social as well as political status. When the confrontation is engaged, the political powers that be, if they do not want to be accused of jeopardizing the nation's survival, feels obliged to pay greater attention to the military's demands, voiced in material and financial terms as well as in terms of political autonomy. Further, critics of the armed forces would then be prevented from organizing themselves, since they would be considered agents at the service of the enemy. In some cases, such as in Wilhelmian Germany or in France at the beginning of World War I (Craig, 1955; King, 1957), war favored even the autonomy of the military and sometimes a prolonged war could allow the military to take over. A victorious war demonstrates the "centrality" of the military as guardians of the nation and thus reinforces its prestige and social position, such as it was the case of the Prussian military after its victories against Denmark, Austria, and France at the beginning of the second half of the 19th century.

The nature of the political regime does not always change this situation, as authoritarian and democratic systems, even if they dominate their military establishment, are both tributary to its expertise and hence often in position to make its viewpoint prevail; during the Cold War, the American military had generally exaggerated the Soviet threat to justify their budgetary demands, feeding in turn the arms race (Allison, 1974). Preoccupations with corporate interests could also lead to war; for some, the U.S. engagement in Vietnam was partially linked to the military interest in increasing their appropriations (Galbraith, 1969).

However, the argument also works the other way around and the defence of corporate interests could be equally seen as leading the military to resist, and even oppose, the application of force. Officers in particular form the group which has the most to lose in a conflict in case of defeat, not so much from a human point of view, since it is their vocation, but from an organizational standpoint (Cohen, 1998). The notorious reluctance of the U.S. military to use force in the post-Cold War period resulted from organizational disintegration induced