Paradoxes of the Warfare State

Is the warfare state better than the welfare state?

Today the preparation for war is the central activity of the modern nation. The world "spends" over $100 billion a year on war, half coming from the United States, a fourth from the Soviet Union, with the remainder shared by other major powers. In the United States the annual expenditures for defense procurement alone are, according to a U. S. Congressional committee, "twice as large as the total net farm income of the nation . . . almost twice as large as the total U. S. expenditure for public education." The 1964 defense budget of $56 billion will consume 65 percent of the tax dollar, provide employment for over 10 percent of the labor force and generate some $110 billion in economic activity.

When then are the social consequences of this massive "war" effort? In the early 1950's Harold Lasswell could foresee a "thickening atmosphere of suspicion" as the superstates each became monolithic and as the democratic process died "by slow strangulation." Yet insofar as the war-operation has involved a real conflict, not merely an imposture, it has brought certain beneficial changes in "world society." The Soviet need to prosecute the "cold war" is dissolving its own "iron curtain" just as the American response to the Soviet challenge has broken down our tradition and practice of isolationism. Contrary to George Orwell's anticipation, the two systems have not remained "inviolate within their own boundaries." And conflict, as Lewis Coser has pointed out "establishes relations where none may have existed before."

When neither side can annihilate the other and still continue to function as a unit, then conflict is often transmuted into accommodation, and in time accommodation becomes cooperation. Faint hints of the subsiding of world tension are even now apparent and could bring about a wilting of the superstates; indeed, signs of the break-up of war-created alliances of both East and West are already discernible.

The warfare state calls into being its own antithesis, perhaps leading eventually to a new synthesis which none of us can now foresee. The growth of the military-industrial complex has generated counter-currents which seem to contradict the very premises of the garrison state. These unintended consequences of war preparation can be viewed as a series of inter-related paradoxes.

Paradox I: The Military-Industrial Complex Does Not Engender Militarism

"Militarism is not so much the propensity to wage war," writes Hans Speier, "as the organization of the civilian sector after the model of the military establishment. A society is militaristic if its civilian members behave like soldiers, value discipline above freedom, pay more respect to valor than to work."

Distinctions between military and civilian life are being obliterated: The U. S. military establishment is modeled after the business corporation, not conversely; generals behave like board-chairmen, soldiers like clerks. As Morris Janowitz notes, within the military there has been a "shift of organizational authority from discipline based on domination, to organization control involving manipulation." The danger of war today grows out of the finely honed rationality of gamesmanship; it does not stem from what Bertrand Russell calls "the ferocious . . . prejudices . . . of the military-industrial fanatics."

Professional soldiers are seldom militant. The first requirement of military life is not belligerence.
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but obedience. For an army to become a useful instrument of policy it must be stripped of fanaticism. As Hoffman Nickerson writes: "Professional soldiers are craftsmen . . . you do not have to excite them by telling them their enemies are fiends." In the Thurmond hearings on troop indoctrination, General Shoup of the Marine Corps said that he did not want his men to "hate the enemy" because hate engendered (and depended upon) fear, which breeds defeatism and reduces fighting efficiency.

It is primarily in unstable societies that officer corps are insurrectionary; normally the military is content to follow and obey. In the U. S., military presidents from Grant to Eisenhower have been mild and passive; they are usually less bellicose than our idealists. The General Walkers are atypical. Military men in foreign-policy positions have proved no more aggressive than civilians; in fact, says Walter Millis, they have often had to "hold back the sporadic and truculent impulses of political people and diplomats . . ." The training of the professional soldier and the codes of military life create a rather cautious outlook.

But what of the industrialist? An erratic ferocity was perhaps the dominant trait of early capitalism, of the Robber Barons. However, corporate capitalism today calls forth a different style of leadership—contrast McNamara with Henry Ford I. The managerial elite is now rarely fanatical and the psychopathic types are usually eliminated in the long climb up the organization pyramid. "The corporate manager today," writes A. A. Berle, "is essentially a civil servant . . . There is common interest among corporation administrators in maintaining conditions permitting them to act with a minimum of control, and their enterprises to go on working; and there is a common desire for an orderly system in which they play a prominent part."

Monopoly has curtailed risk in capitalist enterprise and the rationalization of economic life has curbed "adventurism," in both business and politics. Like the medieval church, the primary aim of the modern corporation is continuity. Corporate capitalism engenders a confused conservatism, which if fatuous is not ferocious.

While big business may speak the muted rhetoric of the cold war, it still seems more interested in salesmanship than anticommunism. (The Chamber of Commerce and the head of the New York Stock Exchange backed the recent wheat deal with the Soviet Union and the president of the Chamber has called for trade with Red China.) Most large corporations have not supported the radical right. Fred Cook points out that leading defense contractors (Boeing, Lockheed, General Electric) have used rightist propaganda (Communism on the Map, writings by Fred Schwartz) for public relations purposes, and that an ex-General Motors president made a $300,000 contribution to the anti-communism school of Harding College in Arkansas. But when the big money has to go to Arkansas to find an ideologist, the danger cannot be quite as grave as Cook suggests. Fifty years ago it could buy spokesmen at Harvard and Yale.

All established corporate structures are conservative, and regard the overly-zealous—the fanatic—as more disruptive than the dissenter. In the Middle Ages the church isolated its religious zealots in monasteries; today the Russian leadership has curtailed its reactionary Stalinists just as the American establishment has sought to control its Birchites. Big business "leans" to the right; big Communism "leans" to the left; but probably both would accept a harmonious center position.

Both the Soviet and the American elite have advocated competitive or peaceful co-existence. Erich Fromm contends that while the Soviet elite uses the language of revolution it is, at bottom, concerned with the preservation of the Communist establishment. A. A. Berle, the most articulate spokesman of corporate capitalism writes:

"Assuming continued peace, in any long view the American and Soviet systems would seem to be converging rather than diverging so far as their organizational and many of their economic aspects are concerned . . . (There is) no essential reason (why they cannot cooperate) provided cooperation is real and not an attempt to weaken the other, awaiting the moment of ultimate conflict."

Paradox II: The Pressure for War Comes From the Public
Mass democracy generates a unique pressure for war: it fosters a climate of irresponsibility while it frustrates the urge for heroic action. The demagogue who cries for war usually finds a following, not because people are bloodthirsty, but because the call for valor and sacrifice elevates them above the dreary routines of peace. People have rather enthusiastically supported every war since the Napoleonic period and there are many