

## **Militarism**

### **Issue Introduction:**

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the term militarism as a concept that consists of the following three attributes:

1. Glorification of the ideals of a professional military class.
2. Predominance of the armed forces in the administration or policy of the state.
3. A policy in which military preparedness is of primary importance to a state.

These three attributes are considered interrelated when a society makes the transition towards militarism. The first attribute describes the cultural adjustment that a society makes that is needed in order to have the political will for the other two more practical attributes. The second attribute then develops a generally accepted political framework which after time hopes to become a political norm for a militaristic society. The third attribute would then set a specific policy related to foreign relations, as the second attribute develops into a political norm a policy expectation would be the acceptance of the third attribute.

It is relatively easy to look back on history and study the moments certain society makes the leap towards militarism. Many have written on the development of the militaristic societies in Japan and Germany during the Second World War. Others have studied the militaristic development of the classical civilization such as Rome or Sparta. In these historical lessons it sometimes is also easier to judge the moral value of these transitions especially as the researcher has a broad view regarding not only the development but the consequences of such a transition.

What is infinitely more difficult and challenging is to identify the development of militarism within one's own contemporary society and then to attempt to place moral judgments on such a transition.

People in contemporary society tend to judge socio-political development from a very short term and self interested vantage point. This is very likely true in past societies where what was important was tomorrow versus next year. When we examine our own social norms and public policies we are not so much influenced by the judgments of history as we are with the immediate issues of security, profit and stability. However many should and some do recognize that the broader perspective of history can be very insightful with respect to the future repercussions of our own immediate policies.

The emerging American Militarism is one such development that many historians who do social analysis have come to critically review. A flurry of research on this topic has surfaced recently. In 2004 Chalmers Johnson, author of *Blowback* and an academic critique of U.S. imperialism, wrote the book *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*. In 2005 conservative academic Andrew Bacevich wrote the *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*. In 2006 film

director Eugene Jarecki created the film *Why We Fight*, an acclaimed documentary on the development of American Militarism and the state of the Military Industrial Complex. Phil Donahue and Ellen Spiro have presented the documentary *Body of War*, which touches on the social and political developments that lead to the war in Iraq and its repercussions.

What is clear from this research is that we as a society can no longer treat issues such as Iraq, Iran, military budget, recruitment, torture/rendition, private security forces and other related topics as isolated political issue. As a society and a state we must come to terms with our Militarism. What is the history of American Militarism. Is militarism a positive value for us, our ideals, and global security? Is it a necessary evil that we may want to restrain but which we dare not eliminate? Or is militarism and aberration to the American experiment that is inconsistent with our values.

In this position guide we will treat the moral question of American militarism. Our debaters, Paul Jefferson and James Hamilton, will again analyze the details of this issue from their perspective of a progressive American Catholic (Paul) and a conservative American Catholic (James). As with our other position guides we will again presuppose that both perspective share a legitimate concern and opinion that honestly flows from their American and Catholic tradition. We hope that in the tradition of the American founders a dialogue can help us understand and appreciate the challenges and complexity of the issue in hopes that each reader of this position guide can establish a sure foundation for whatever opinion is adopted on the issue explored here.

### **Paul: The Failure of Militarism**

There are two main reasons why Militarism is going to fail as a way to freedom and democracy. First, it will milk the sponsoring nation dry of its financial resources. Look at the U.S.A. now. We are in debt like never before. The gap between rich and poor widens inside our nation and there is less money available for the middle class. This trend downward will continue as long as we are in Iraq. Look at what happened to Russia and its pursuit of Militarism, same with Cuba. North Koreans are starving to support that nation's military and nuclear projects.

Question: What do you to tell someone, such as a welder, working on submarines, who lobbies for legislative financial support by arguing: "If you stop me from welding the submarine I am working on now, my wife, our three children and I will be homeless in six months. Then what do I do?" You can try convincing the welder that the bottom line will be public dollars invested in health care, education, mass transit, or construction for home weatherization and infrastructure, which will create many more jobs than an equivalent amount of money invested in the military. You point out to him that if he had been welding on I-35E in Minneapolis, Minnesota, five years ago in a national freeway repair and renewal blitz, that bridge would not have fallen, and you could take your three children around to the bridges that you had been working on and show them how you are helping to renew the safety of our highways in this country. With your secret military job now, you can't show your children anything of the work you are doing. TWICE as many jobs are created by equivalent spending on education and mass transit as on the military.

Militarism is a drain on another national resource as well. Militarism always demands a hierarchical and centralized form of government to command it. Democratic systems and the protection of civil and political rights are impediments to a militaristic society. The Roman Empire started out as a republic whose defense system focused on protecting the rights and freedoms of its citizens. This gave grounds to democratic institutions like the Senate and Roman law. As soon as Rome took on the obligations of World Empire it demanded a militaristic institution whose focus was global domination and imperial rule. The once noble institutions were left to decay and ultimately the Roman culture crumbled upon the weight of its own militarism.

The second reason for failure is the alleged mission for our nation's militarism, to be of benefit to a nation seeking democracy. There is a general rule, received from common wisdom, that "democracy does not grow out of the barrel of a gun." There is historical backing for this saying. If one looks carefully at Japan, one recalls that these highly educated people accepted emperor-rule and vertical-style society so conducive to demands coming from on high, including military prowess.

If you look closer to home all you need is to study the Latin American situation. For almost 200 years that area has been struggling with the organized development of democracy in their region. The issue is not that people reject democracy, rather that the historical situation of this region prior to 1820 (when many of the Latin American nations sought independence) had no democratic system or institution such as a representative form of government, a free press, and a functioning rule of law. That is why this part of the world continues to rely on militarism to fill the lacuna with its discipline and organizational procedures. On the other hand the 13 American colonies had this experience from which the United States could launch into a more democratic society. Democracy is not something you impose; rather it is something you nurture.

To try to make Iraq a democracy is like trying to teach a four-year-old how to fly a Boeing 747. Just as the four-year-old has no capacity to fly a 747, and is totally unfamiliar with it, so also Iraq's people lack a political and social history that includes democratic foundations, such as those that the United States inherited from Great Britain. It is not so much a question of whether or not they desire democracy, recent surveys seem to suggest that they do. It's just that the democratic foundation must develop through their own cultural and social institutions so that it can make sense to them. To superimpose a democratic foundation that is completely insensitive to the culture and social norms of that community is pure folly. Iraq's culture is 2000 or more years old. Outsiders cannot change its way of living. In large part this explains why elements of Iraq society are resorting to militaristic measures to preserve a semblance of unity and cohesiveness amid impending fragmentation.

### **James: An ode to military preparedness**

The term "Militarism" has generated negative attention these past few years. It has raised the image of totalitarianism familiar to those living during the World War II era, with its forms of cruel dictatorships, and suggest to some contemporary observers that the United

States of America, by virtue of its robust military apparatus, is in danger of entering into the unfortunate ranks of nations so afflicted. But this is a major misconception. What is being dubbed as “American Militarism” is in fact the very important and urgent development calling for military preparedness for aggression against this country.

Such readiness is highly reasonable. In fact, it is commendable, an act of service and indeed ministry on behalf of the American people. It is based on realism, not utopian dreams. Just as capitalism represents, possibly a less attractive, but certainly a more realistic and effective manner of organizing capital and labor to benefit large numbers of people, than Socialism does, so military preparedness honors a similarly realistic appraisal of and responsiveness to forces inimical to the best interests of this country, much more so than any anti-militaristic stance can provide. It regards as irresponsible any position that would leave this nation vulnerable to attacks from other nations.

It firmly believes in the principle: peace through strength. This has served the country well over the recent past. There has been a relative state of peace which this country and the world-at-large, thanks to American leadership, have enjoyed during what has otherwise been a threatening situation globally. Despite growing unrest throughout the world and the central role that has been thrust on this country, given its leadership prominence, in the wake of the general incompetence of the United Nations, it is remarkable that this nation has managed to act as the world’s peace-keeper without having to institute a standing army. Thanks to the generosity of its young men and women, it has succeeded in this role by way of a purely volunteer armed forces.

The U.S. has anticipated what Pope Benedict XVI recently called for, in his address to the U.N. on the occasion of his visit to the U.S.: coordinating military interventions in nations whose leadership has acted against the best interest of its own population, causing untold suffering and misery. This, of course, requires military preparedness and capability on the part of this country. Pope John Paul II recognized occasions when the use of such force is legitimate: legitimate self-defense and measures taken by the Security Council within the area of its responsibilities for maintaining peace. This kind of readiness implies a militaristic state of mind.

So-called militarism is really military preparedness to withstand the forces of evil that threaten a nation. It calls for the training of personnel in the art of war. This in turn requires the kind of equipment that enables these military personnel to accomplish their purposes effectively. It would be irrational to provide them inferior weapons when better tools are available. This in turn calls for their training in the competent use of such weaponry—training that is simultaneously technical, physical and mental. There is an undeniable military mind-set that is required in those serving in the armed forces. It includes a certain spirit of dedication and sacrifice on the part of those who could otherwise be pursuing their life goals in other safer and more beneficial and financially lucrative settings. This sacrifice extends even to their willingness to lay down their lives for others, which represents an ideal straight out of the New Testament scriptures.

Military training provides the kind of discipline that immensely benefits significant numbers of young people, not only during their time of service, but later in life as they return to peacetime pursuits and raising families. If this is what is meant by militarism, then it is to be regarded as an asset, not a liability. It instills a sense of duty and of service, providing protection for one's fellow-citizens. It instills the virtue of patriotism in young people, an invaluable asset throughout their lives. Correspondingly, it deepens in them a repugnance for the evils of cowardice, fear and betrayal, in others' regard, including that of their country. Some of the outstanding characters of American history have come out of the military to assume positions of importance that steered this nation to the greatness it enjoys today.

Militarism enables young people to honor one of the fundamental purposes underlying the origins of this nation, as the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution reads: "...provide for the common defense..." This articulates a lofty purpose that can engage them with an exalted mission.

**Paul: Exactly what are we securing?**

James, my dear friend and colleague, would have us believe that the military agenda for our nations is the altruistic motive of security and national defense. Furthermore he suggests that there are great national benefits to those who engage in the military institutions of our nation. Finally James considers militarism to simply mean the participation and training of our military institutions. I will now address these three issues.

To begin with the term militarism refers to much more than the preparedness for national defense by our military institutions. Militarism involves a state of national focus that dictates the policies of the nation. It becomes a national state of mind. Although I submit to a pacifist Catholic tradition I also acknowledge the very real need for nations to engage in military training and to develop structures for national defense. In this position guide no one is arguing the issue that a nation ought to have a well functioning military system that can provide for the legitimate defense of the state.

A democratic nation decides national priorities through a system of citizen participation. There will be times when issues of military preparedness will become a priority but not at the expense of a democratic institution. Keep in mind the wisdom that Benjamin Franklin imparted to those who founded our nation, *they who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.* Militarism not only promotes the priorities of national security and the programs of our military institution, it also erodes the democratic base of government in order to promote a political, economic and social system dominated by the military machine. One of our most famous World War II heroes, and an American President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, warned us of this scenario in his farewell address to the nation on 1961:

*This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize*

*the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.*

*In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.*

*We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.*

America would do well to heed this warning.

As for the benefits of our military training and discipline that James refers, I will ask just one question. Why is it that our recruitment strategy is to call on a select group of Americans to make this ultimate dedication and sacrifice? I have a friend who was an army recruiter in Palatine, IL. It is a well known strategy with recruiters that they are to focus their relationships on high school students that do not have much post graduate school prospect for higher education. Recruiters tend to focus on our low income and marginalized population to make the ultimate sacrifice for the nation. This taints the altruism involved, and it is certainly unfair.

As with regards to the comment that militarism promotes national security, I would suggest that this is a contradiction! Military power, in conjunction with closed borders and walls, are signs of national insecurity. The preeminence of military policies in our nation is fueled by fear and insecurity. Our own media, TV, and video gaming culture are feeding us a diet of fear, insecurity and apathy. On the other side of the world, our military engagements and economic policies they have produced, are leaving Iraq and the Middle East in an even more desperate situation then they already were. When people are faced with economic despair connected with ongoing military aggression, they will push back. Aggression and despair produces anger, violence and terrorism.

Real security comes from enough food for everyone to eat, from building schools and healthcare centers, from digging wells for clean water and from functioning purification plants, from everyone having jobs that meet their skills and needs, from providing life's essential elements of life for every single person on the globe. Finally, security comes through diplomacy – that includes the enemy. Honest dialogue about the sources of conflict is going to guarantee real security.

**James: Economic and social development can only happen in a secure environment.**

I do not disregard the legitimate warning of our wise predecessors such as Benjamin Franklin or President Eisenhower. History indeed show that national militaristic fervor can unleash an ugly political reality such as the dictatorships of the mid-twentieth

century. However this historical reality should not cripple our ability to promote the legitimate defense of our nation or to provide for global security.

If Paul fears that the democratic institutions of our nation are being compromised, then I would need to inquire where this erosion is occurring. Our Constitution has not been altered in any way. Our basic system of government continues to remain the same. The executive branch has not challenged the constitutional authority of Congress or the Judiciary. If the issues such as the patriot act or wiretapping unnerve my colleague I would remind him that these laws obtained passage legitimately within our democratic system of government. While the Constitution has not been altered but it has been interpreted in a way that prioritizes the national security, reflecting the prevailing mood of the American citizens since the attack on September 11, 2001.

We are living in a global world. While I do agree with Paul that in this global environment we must be sensitive to the economic and social needs of the worldwide population with whom we are in relationship, we can realistically pursue international development only if the host population is secure. This is our role in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Catholic just war tradition validates our engagement in Afghanistan because of 9-11. The jury is out on whether or not our nation's engagement in Iraq is justified based on the just war principle. Nevertheless we are currently involved in these two regions and, given the reality of fundamentalist terrorism in these regions, we must do all we can to secure these areas. This of course includes the promotion of military, economic, and social factors. But without the military component, there can be no economic and social accomplishments.

A nation such as the U.S. which, for better or for worse, enjoys leadership stature in the contemporary world needs a military force commensurate with the responsibilities that have fallen upon it. It cannot forget the flawed diplomacy of Arthur Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, who, in 1938, sheepishly acquiesced in Adolph Hitler's demands for Nazi aggression in Europe, precipitating the horrors of World War II. British military preparedness might have prevented this.

The bible does not eschew the topic of "militarism", if one insists on this term. In the Hebrew Scriptures the Books of Joshua and Judges record the role that military engagements played in shaping and developing Jewish history. Not even God's Chosen People could escape the role of violent conflicts in forming their character. Jesus Himself remarked: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force". (Mt. 11.12) And, at the end of His life, He engaged in this conversation with His disciples: "But now one who has a money bag should take it, and likewise a sack, and one who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one." (Lk. 22.36), and shortly thereafter the conversation continued: "Then, they said, 'Lord, look, there are two swords here.' But He replied, 'It is enough!'" (38)

Militarism can be abused, and it can be flawed, but it plays a vital role in this sordid world of ours. It keeps the evil in check so that the good may prevail.

### **Wisdom of the Cross**

As the above arguments suggest, the term “militarism” conveys negative overtones. It implies the potential for undue influence in a nation, if it gets out of hand, and indeed, it can move into the position of taking over the conduct of a nation under certain conditions.

World history provides examples of this very thing. There are, and have been, military coups in which the armed forces took over the conduct of national affairs. The current situation in Myanmar (Burma) is an instance of this. It repeats situations in Pakistan, Central America, Argentina, Chile, and other South American countries.

Need we fear that such a situation would occur in the U.S., a democracy ruled according to law? After all, the first president of this country, George Washington, was a military officer, highly esteemed, who could easily have extended his presidency of the nation beyond the two terms by which he chose to abide. And his example has been followed by other military officers turned President (Andrew Jackson, Ulysses Grant, Dwight Eisenhower, among them), while someone such as Douglas MacArthur, enjoying great popularity among Americans, could easily have challenged the demotion imposed on him by then President Harry Truman. But he didn't. He strengthened the tradition of this country subordinating the military establishment to the duly constituted civilian authority. But is there danger of this being subverted?

Perhaps not in a constitutional way, since the first title this document confers on the President is Commander in Chief of the armed forces. (Art. II, Sect. 2, 1) It is a comforting precaution that a civilian holds this position, in view of the Preamble to the Constitution with its clear statement warranting provisions for the common defense, and the Bill of Rights allowing for the establishment of a militia. Further precautions acknowledged the power of Congress “To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces.” (Art. I, Sect. 8, 14) And, most important, “to declare war” (ibid, 11).

But the role of the U.S. in the world has changed dramatically since our birth over two hundred years ago. While we can take comfort in our own democratic institutions and the wisdom of our Constitution we also cannot take for granted the corruptive influence of world power. As the Latin phrase states: **Corruptio optimi pessima!**

Until the beginning of the last century, the occasion for militarism to emerge was mitigated by the geographical placement of the U.S. between two oceans, with no land boundaries linking it to unfriendly nations that might threaten us. We could pursue our national agenda without devoting too much time and attention to military matters. We had little temptation to pursue a standing army, thereby facilitating the continued observance of our Constitution on the General Powers of Congress: “To raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years.” (Art. I, Sect. 8, 12)

However, with the growing proximity of nations through expedited means of travel, and the development of ICBMs and space satellites, our national security became less assured, and national security began to emerge as a major concern. "Peace through strength" took on new meaning, and the military capacity of the nation began to assume a peacetime importance that it never had before. And the last century saw the U.S. begin to adjust its sense of national welfare that took into account nations abroad, especially Europe, where warfare seemed to be an ongoing activity. We were drawn into these conflicts out of a changing sense of our own security, and a more militaristic mindset took hold in our nation, where something like militarism could develop, given the right conditions.

Many of the values that Americans cherished found expression in military categories, since that is where much of our security and well-being began to anchor itself. In addition, our economic standing became increasingly linked to our military pre-eminence, which depended on our technology and industrial leadership. The concern of Eisenhower about a military-industrial complex seems to have come to pass. Other areas of American culture began to display the military influence: many of our favorite melodies, some of the most fascinating films, the content of our media, the aura surrounding military academies (West Point, Annapolis, Colorado Springs), the dedication of our major expressways to various military units - all combined to recommend an ever growing awareness of the importance of the military in our way of life. Military personnel, in their spiffy uniforms, became paragons of uprightness, honesty, discipline, dedication, and, above all, patriotism, that appeal to Americans. It attracted more approving glances than the garb of religious personnel, medical staff or sitting judges on the bench.

All of this proves conducive to the growth of militarism, representing, however, less a concern, and more a desirable development in our ranks. And, at the same time, there was a notable diminishment in military powers abroad, resulting in a power vacuum that only the U.S. was equipped to fill. It felt forced into assuming more responsibility abroad than it had done in the past, given its now recognized hegemony. Protection of its allies became increasingly important, by way of numerous treaty alliances with other nations, obliging the U.S. to come to their defense in case of attack.

The American psyche is now marked by a strong military influence. Love of country looms larger than ever. For many the flag prevails over the cross, the star of David, the half crescent. The art of diplomacy is dismissed as cowardice. Militarism prevails in the land, making the U.S. "muscle-bound", and quick to flex its power which is so readily and easily at hand. We countenance this development as necessary, even as we wonder about the rise of violence on our streets. Might there be a connection between a militaristic mindset and a proneness to strike out at our fellow citizens, upon the slightest provocation? Our military chaplains have a wonderful opportunity, and a heavy responsibility, to influence the young people entrusted to their charge, supported by the biblical admonitions: "But I will not save them by war, by sword or bow, by horses or horsemen" (Hos. 1.7), and Jesus' words: "Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Mt. 25.52)