

## FROM 'LIBERAL WAR' TO 'LIBERAL MILITARISM': UNITED STATES SECURITY POLICY AS THE PROMOTION OF MILITARY MODERNITY<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract:**

The connection between liberalism and war has been a persistent recent focus in security studies. A large critical literature on liberal war has developed, ranging from viewing such wars as predicated on expanding spaces of capitalist accumulation to seeing them as techniques of a global liberal governmentality. However, this critical literature needs to be complemented by an institutional approach to militarism that links liberal war with broader societal dynamics of warfare. The article argues that the concept of 'liberal militarism' provides a means to better historicise and institutionalise liberal war beyond the sharp edge of military interventions, connecting liberal war to broader institutional manifestations of war preparations and war making, which are also fundamentally linked to liberal approaches to modernisation. The article uses the example of the United States during the Cold War and after to demonstrate that liberal approaches to modernisation were explicitly formulated as key to US foreign and security policy, a form of 'military modernity'. The article further analyses US foreign policy in terms of the military modernity of 'security assistance' in the Obama Administration. Seeing liberal militarism through the lens of US-led modernisation efforts draws on important insights from the critical literature on liberalism and war, but emphasises the historical institutionalisation of military power as central to understanding its durability.

### **Introduction**

The combination of liberalism and war has been a recurrent fascination for scholars and critics of US foreign policy. Post 9/11 US foreign policy, characterised not only by wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also by a militarised counterterrorism policy, has only increased interest in the connections between liberalism and war. Discussions of the paradoxes of liberal wars became commonplace in the post-Cold War era (Dunne, 2009; Freedman, 2005;

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c.f. Sørensen, 2006). While proponents of a Kantian ‘democratic peace’ believed that the spread of liberal democracies would lead to peace (at least amongst a community of democracies) (e.g. Brown et al., 1996), this was contrasted with an increasing bellicosity of relations with non-democracies (Desch, 2007/2008; Geis and Wagner, 2011; c.f. Jahn, 2005). These wars against illiberal spaces were seen by some as forms of humanitarian intervention premised on the universalism of liberal values, where war could be waged in the name of peace (e.g. Wheeler, 2000). However, critics have argued that war was being used as a means to impose particular sets of values and ‘peacefulness’ through state building (Chandler, 2002; c.f. Dodge, 2013). The practices of the US-led ‘Global War on Terror’ were based on such liberal premises, beginning a decade of war and intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, post-war ‘stability operations’ and counterinsurgency, continuing today through various interventionary practices associated with military advisors, special operations and drone strikes (Gregory, 2011; Niva, 2013; Shaw, 2013).

Much critical work in security studies has seen the liberal wars of the ‘War on Terror’ as an extension of US imperialism, a way of creating new spaces of neoliberal accumulation (Neocleous, 2014), or as part of a general extension of neoliberal governmentality and biopolitics (Dillon and Reid, 2009; Evans, 2010). While this work has brought many insights, it has lacked a longer historical perspective on the institutionalisation of liberal war, as well as an over-attention to the violent practices of war at the expense of its links to broader social structures.<sup>2</sup> The article argues that a strengthened and historicised concept of militarism can help provide a deeper understanding of the links between liberal wars and the institutionalisation of military power within liberal states.

Militarism has long been a focus for understanding the political character of states and their propensity to war (Berghahn, 1984; Vagts, 1959). Contemporary debates about US foreign policy have reinvigorated a critical analysis of the role of militarism in the international system (Bacevich, 2006; Goodman, 2013; Johnson, 2004). While it is clear that the concept itself is meant to refer to a proclivity to the use of force (and military power) in

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<sup>2</sup> This is not the case with the work on gender and war, which has explicitly focused on militarism, especially in terms of the reproduction of gender identities and structures of militarism, as well as an embedded ideology of militarism. For example, see: Enloe, 2000; Sylvester, 2012; and Whitworth, 2007.

foreign policy, these analyses have not always made the scope of US militarism clear. As Stavrianakis and Selby (2012) have noted, part of the issue is the real variety of ways in which militarism has been conceived of analytically, especially in terms of an overly narrow focus on particular dispositions and behaviours and a tendency towards over-generalisation about militarism itself. These issues in conceptualisation tended to gloss over the militarism of liberal states and differentiations between militarisms across states and societies. The present analysis draws on the final category discussed by Stavrianakis and Selby (2012), the sociological, which enables the conceptualisation of a militarism of liberal states that is different organizationally than others but has similar effects.

Liberalism and war can be fruitfully examined through the historical sociological literature on militarism, which more clearly situates militarism as a historical phenomenon and links its specific dynamics to the institutional characteristics of particular polities, societies and economies (Mann, 1987, 1988, 1996; Shaw, 1988, 2005, 2012; c.f. Berghahn, 1984; Gillis, 1989). As Mann notes, militarism needs to be seen as ‘a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity’ (1987: 35). In this fashion militarism is both a disposition that justifies particular security or military practices and a particular constellation of social forces surrounding the military and the institutionalisation of military power, that vary with time and place. The advantage of this approach is that it more concretely connects war as a social practice to the interplay of military institutions, political economy and social relations, seeing the contingent character of institutional development while not ignoring longer-term continuities. The article provides an account of ‘liberal’ militarism focused on longer-term historical processes embedded in a liberal political economy that can clarify issues of continuity and change (Edgerton, 1991, 2006; Joana and Mérand, 2014). Liberal militarism has historically focused on an expansive and crusading ideology, on technology and capital-intensive warfare, and based on socio-economic interventions linked to liberal political economy (Edgerton, 1991).<sup>3</sup> Crucially, all three dimensions are part of a modernising project

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<sup>3</sup> Mann (1996) also developed a category of ‘liberal militarism’, which mainly refers to various forms of ‘civil society’ militarisms: on the one hand a national-based mass mobilization, and on the other, a more autonomous bottom-up militarism that was encouraged by but often separate from the state. While these have

that aims to use war and military power to solve the ‘problem’ of illiberal (and ‘uncivilised’) states.

The article makes the case in three steps. First, it goes into more detail concerning the concept of liberal militarism and its relationship to other critical perspectives on liberalism and war. Drawing on the historical sociological literature, it delineates liberal militarism in terms of ideology, capital-intensity and societal interventions, but argues that we need two additional features in order to better examine the institutionalisation of liberal militarism and its relationship to change: a focus on civil-military relations and the political-economic foundations of warfare. The second step applies this framework to the United States, arguing that liberal militarism is a military extension of modernisation efforts of the Cold War and beyond, as part of a means to liberalise societies: military power can be exercised both in terms of actual war-fighting as a modernising practice, but also through the adoption of US (and Western) ‘best practices’ and arms systems. Finally, it looks at United States foreign policy in the present, in terms of the militarised dynamics of ‘security assistance’ and arms transfers, arguing that these policies are part of a promotion of a particular of neoliberal militarism to other states and societies. Overall a focus ‘military modernisation’ as a part of liberal *militarism* rather than liberal *war* goes beyond the focus on the violent proclivities of liberalism to see military power as embedded in a broader political economy of war that also encompasses war preparations.

### **War, Liberalism and Historical Change: From Liberal War to Liberal Militarism**

The paradoxes of liberal wars are well established. Michael Howard (1981) prominently argued that despite the importance that peace plays in liberal thought, liberal states are prone to the over-moralisation of war, which has been detrimental to peace in international relations. Core to liberal thought was not pacifism, but an interest in solving the problems of war through war itself. Two sets of critical literatures have picked up on this point with regard to

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resonances with the concept developed here, they are broader and more historically attuned to pre-1945 state-development.

Caverley’s (2014) analysis of ‘democratic’ militarism has a similar focus on political economy – making an important argument concerning democratic publics’ support of wars that have deferred costs – but is less interested in the broader ideological ends that war serves.

liberal warfare today. First is a broadly historical materialist critique of the use of military power as a means of imposing economic imperatives on other states and societies. Here war is seen as an extension of capitalist imperialism, particularly in its current neoliberal mode, and the focus is on opening up of new spaces of accumulation (Callinicos, 2003; Harvey, 2003) or ‘pacifying’ uncivilised spaces (Neocleous, 2014). The second critique centres on the ‘liberal way of war’ that draws on Foucault’s concepts of governmentality and biopolitics (e.g. Foucault, 2004, 2007, 2008). The ‘liberal way of war’ goes beyond mere violence or the institutions of the military, as liberal states not only engage in a crusade through militarised interventions abroad, but they also extend the power relations of liberal societies globally (Dillon and Reid, 2009; Evans, 2010; Jabri, 2006). The ‘liberal way of war’ is about using war as a technique of international biopower or governmentality, a means to pacifying and constituting the liberal subject (Dillon and Reid, 2009; Evans, 2010; Gregory, 2011; Kienscherf, 2011; Shaw, 2013). Both sets of arguments point to the contradiction at the heart of supposedly peaceful liberal logics of governance: that of using war as a means to make a ‘liberal’ peace.

Following from the historical sociological view given in the introduction, liberal war needs to be seen as a historically contingent set of practices – it cannot be generalised across time and place (c.f. Chandler, 2010). Furthermore, despite giving many insights, these two poles of the critical accounts neglect a crucial element for the understanding of liberal war: the broader institutions of warfare that reproduce and sustain it. While the Marxist accounts are right to focus on structures of domination and spaces of accumulation, they tend to see war as an extension of capitalism rather than a structural and institutional phenomenon of liberal societies in its own right (Balakrishnan, 2009); while the Foucaultian analysis of liberal war over-emphasises the biopolitics of liberal governmentality as expressed through warfare, and generalises and abstracts war as a technique of power (Chandler, 2009). Foucault in fact highlights the importance of the institutions of war, noting in his account of war as a historical discourse the beginnings of a political-economic analysis of society in early modern Europe:

it is war insofar as it is a way of waging war, a way of preparing for and organizing war. War in the sense of the distribution of weapons, the nature of weapons, fighting techniques, the recruitment and payment of soldiers, the taxes earmarked for the army; war as an internal institution, and not the raw event of a battle (2004: 159-160).

What Foucault adds is the way in which military-political-economic organization precedes conquest, in that it is not the winning of battles that determines what the conquest will look like: 'it is not because it takes the form of an invasion that war leaves its mark on the social body; it is because, through the intermediary of military institutions, it has general effects on the civil order as a whole' (2004:159).<sup>4</sup> If we add the organising feature of military institutions, broadly conceived, as a link between war and society, we can develop a broader analysis of war not just in terms of the practices of war itself (the battles, the immediate and potential looming violence), but also in the global structures that perpetuate and enable war. Thus we can draw from the critical accounts the 'civilising' and 'pacifying' elements of liberal warfare, but we must also note how these are embedded in the institutions of militarism within the state and projected globally.

An analysis of militarism focuses on how military power is institutionalised and reproduced within and outside of liberal states. As noted in the introduction, militarism in general relates to war both in terms of a disposition towards seeing military power as useful for social goals as well as providing a legitimation for broader social practices that enable war (see Mann, 1987). 'Liberal militarism' can be seen as one type of militarism that developed in liberal polities, a means of institutionalising military power in a fashion that went along with liberal sensibilities embedded in a liberal political economy of war. Edgerton (1991: 141; c.f. 2006) points to the development of four aspects of liberal militarism in the British context: an aversion to mass conscript armies; investment in technology and professionalism to make up for the lack of 'manpower'; that militaries are not just directed at enemies abroad, but also at civilian populations and economic capacity (both 'home' and 'abroad'); and 'advances under the banner of its own universalist ideology and conception of a world order'. The broad

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<sup>4</sup> See also his discussion of the 'deployment of a permanent military apparatus' in modern European states, which has further similarities in terms of the analysis here (Foucault, 2008: 305-306). Foucault was of course also critical of the analysis of institutions in their own right (despite some ambiguity on the subject), seeing the need for placing them in a broader context of order-making (see e.g. 2008: 116-120).

framework of liberal militarism – capital, intervention, ideology – gives us a sense of what is specific to liberal states’ approach to military power in the modern era.

However, it leaves out two contingent factors.<sup>5</sup> First is the contingency of institutionalisation: the ways in which military power is institutionalised within liberal states. Institutionalisation involves both the positioning of the military and the normative invocation legitimating (and reproducing) particular configurations of civil-military relations. Huntington (1957; c.f. Lasswell, 1941) argued that there are two core dimensions of civil-military relations: the functional need for security, and the social and political imperatives arising from broad contours within society. These two axes proved crucial to debates in liberal states in terms of legitimating the role of the military in politics and public life and the size of forces that could be congruent with liberal life.<sup>6</sup> The liberal attitude has tended towards advocating a strict separation of the military from civil affairs, especially from a political role. Essential to the liberal conception of civil-military relations is its relationship to professionalism, which is seen in Huntington’s (1957) model of objective civilian control: a professional core of officers deal with the majority of military policy, but directly follow the orders of their civilian masters. The important context to this argument was the future of liberalism in an age of greater global security threats, which liberal commentators framed in terms of a number of core problematics: liberal states could easily side-line the military in times of peace, but what would happen when security threats were more pressing and imminent? Would the switch see a decline of ‘objective control’ and a move towards a ‘garrison state’? (e.g. Lasswell, 1941).

The second contingency relates to the political economy of war: how practices and preparations for war distinctly emerge from political-economic relations. As Shaw (1988) argues, war and militarism are separate from the logic of capitalism, but feed off the productive capacities of states, and, as such, war has to be seen as part of the totality of society. As he describes it, ‘we are talking about the role of *socialised* warfare in a *militarised* economy and society’ (Shaw, 1988: 24; c.f. Mann, 1993). Shaw brings warfare into a broader

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<sup>5</sup> These link roughly to Shaw’s two determinants of militarism: the ‘social forces mobilised in military power’, how armed actors mobilise resources and constituencies; and ‘the social relations of military power’, the often conflictual relationship between armed actors and civilians (Shaw, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> For salient critiques of the divide between liberal civil society and military, see: Frazer and Hutchings, 2011; and Neocleous, 2014: chap. 3.

structural logic of modern societies: it is not just parasitic on the mode of production, or instrumental in the expansion of capital. We might better see it as a link between modes of production and modes of destruction: shifting forms of political economy, in terms of both the organisation of markets and the dominant mode of production, help embed particular modes of destruction. In liberal states, there is an emphasis on capital-intensive forms of warfare (Edgerton, 2006), but one that is further tempered in relation to dominant ‘modes of warfare’ (Kaldor, 1982b).

These two contingencies indicate that problems of militarism and militarisation are embedded in liberal states that are, contradictorily, ideologically critical of the institutions of war. While always defining itself against other, illiberal states, liberalism also has at its heart a modernising and civilising logic. If illiberal states were atavistic and war prone, liberal states would be beacons of civilization, and part of a process of modernisation (Berghahn, 1984; Joas, 2003). The overall paradox of liberal modernisation was that it brought with it its own form of militarism, even as it was opposed to other ‘militarised’ states. As Shaw (2012) has pointed out, here lies the real essence of the problem of militarism: it has mainly been used as a pejorative term to demonize the enemy. However, ‘while the differences between ideologies which glorify war and those which don’t are significant, glorifying and non-glorifying ideologies may equally justify war and military power, and in this sense have the same core social function’ (Shaw, 2012: 20). As such, liberal militarism is distinguished both in its particular arrangements for war preparations and how it legitimates the use of force, but is still a form of militarism. While we need to recognise potential differences within liberal states themselves in terms of the pursuit of militarism (Joana and Mérand, 2014), the US as a leading liberal state serves as an important example of the tendencies of liberal militarism and its links to modernisation.

### **The United States and Liberal Military Modernity**

The development of the three aspects of liberal militarism – capital, intervention, ideology – in the United States have been the result of long term historical processes, giving a long continuity to the US statebuilding project, but one that has also been driven forward by



contingency. The early-Cold War period provided an institutional stability to the historical tendencies of liberal militarism, where it became clearly solidified as part of the US state, and eventually folded into a modernising logic, that became part of US ‘military modernity’.

Political historian Richard Hofstadter once noted that ‘War has always been the Nemesis of the liberal tradition in America’ (Hofstadter, 1955: 272). This statement gets to the core of the problem of war and militarism in US history, and the important place it has had in US political life. While the view of the United States as a monolithic liberal society has been challenged for many years by analysts of American politics (Gerstle, 1994; Katznelson and Kalyvas, 2009; Smith, 1992; Wood, 2007), there is no doubt of liberalism’s importance in shaping the contours of politics, including military, security and foreign policy. The founders were critical of the idea of standing armies, peacetime conscription, and the concentration of military power that could be used as a form of tyranny (Friedberg, 2000; Krahnmann, 2010). This was reflected in the lack of a substantial early military force – army or navy – with the US instead relying on militias and privateers to augment the small military forces that did exist. The dedication to liberalism created a problem in regards to how the US would reconcile liberalism with the instrumental use of military power. As Huntington noted, war was seen in moral terms, so required an extreme commitment: ‘Since liberalism deprecates the moral validity of the interests of state security, war must be either condemned as incompatible with liberal goals or justified as an ideological movement in support of those goals’ (1957: 151).

The ideological focus of liberalism therefore fixated on the divide between the US actively pursuing its liberal beliefs internationally and passively setting an example. There has been much discussion of these two choices (e.g. Desch, 2007/2008; Green, 2012; McCartney, 2004; Monten, 2005), but the link to modernisation provides a fruitful reference point. While modernisation is not usually clearly connected to militarism or militarisation, it was core to the liberal project (e.g. Latham, 2011; Westad, 2005), and connects to militarism through the exporting of liberal styles of military preparedness to other states. There were two core issues that the modernising logic raised with regard to militarism: how the US could institutionally deal with threatening militarised states and how to modernise other states.

The first concerned the relationship between the US and other powerful states which were illiberal: the issue here was whether military policies could be developed that would defy the challenge of strong states without liberal states succumbing to militarism themselves. By World War II, militarism had mainly become associated with the totalitarian states of the interwar period, and liberalism became an ideology based on the opposition to totalitarianism (Bell, 2014). Liberal democracies were opposed to militarised values, especially the combination of ‘collectivism’ and the domination of the state and politics by the military (Vagts, 1959; c.f. Friedberg, 2000). However, there was great concern that the need to combat and secure the liberal state against totalitarianism could lead to liberal states becoming militarised themselves, transforming into ‘garrison states’ predominated by military planners (Lasswell, 1941; c.f. Gleason, 1995: chap. 3); or, conversely, that liberal states would not be able to make the ideological compromises necessary to defend themselves (Huntington, 1957). The focus on the scale and scope of the state and its potential for internal and external intervention became crucial for the institutionalisation of military power (i.e. in terms of civil-military relations): achieving the appropriate balance between war preparation, military power and liberalism was necessary for the maintenance of security at home and from threatening states abroad. The shifting focus of liberalism to become, in essence, the opposite of totalitarianism brought clarity to both what was seen as threatening to the US and what the response would need to be. While the causes of the Cold War national security state have been endlessly debated (e.g. Friedberg, 2000; Hogan, 1998; Sherry, 1995), what is important is that it institutionalised the new dynamics of liberal militarism in the state. The national security state not only prioritised peacetime military mobilization in a way that was impossible previously, it embedded this in a series of organizational changes that pushed national security to the forefront of US political life: military professionalism was maintained, with increases in defence spending focusing on research and design and capital development via the private sector, but also requiring a larger ideological commitment to anti-communism (Hogan, 1998; Hooks and McLauchlan, 1992; Sherry, 1995; Waddell, 2001).

The second issue concerned the potential to spread modernity more broadly, especially to less powerful states that were considered to be in need of ‘civilising’. In terms of external

modernisation and anti-militarism, it is clear that policymakers often folded modernisation into a broad sense of national security: that postcolonial states (and other allies) that followed the US path to development would both be better off, and also form a more peaceful part of the international system (Latham, 2011; Ekbladh, 2010; c.f. Duffield, 2005). Developing states would be modernised in order for them to avoid authoritarianism, and therefore become less militarised, and also ideological allies of the United States. However, *liberal* militarism was also integral to modernisation, as the US encouraged modernising states to develop military power in line with the US: focusing on capital-intensive militarisation with the US providing military aid through training and arms transfers (Kinsella, 2012: 110; Wendt and Barnett, 1993). Overall, a key part of US liberal militarism was not just a way of organising military power at home, but a ‘militarism of the globe’ (Mann, 1996) that attempted to embed military power across the international system in a fashion that reflected US liberal militarism, as well as through the deployment of US military presence throughout the world. As such, an early approach to the modernising process focused not just on the modernity inherent in industrialisation, but the values of liberal versions of civil-military relations (see Berghahn, 1984: chap. 4), especially in relation to the ‘Third World’. Furthermore, US liberal militarism was embedded globally through a broader political economy of militarism that used arms production and transfers, not only as political tools, but as ways of expanding and reproducing a particular global military order (Kaldor, 1982a; Stavrianakis, 2010).

The interventionary aspect of modernisation and militarism became a crucial part of the Cold War, both domestically and internationally, effectively blurring the lines between these divisions. While the interventionary actions were seen both in military interventions themselves (covert and otherwise) and broader international economic policy, they were also fashioned in terms of ‘modernisation’. As NSC 52/3 noted:

recognizing, however, that we do not have the resources unilaterally to defend, direct and support the entire non-Communist world, we are also assisting and encouraging those nations that are willing and able to contribute towards the same results we deem essential, to increase their political and economic stability and their military capabilities (National Security Council, 1949: 386-387).

This description also links with ‘Point Four’ of President Truman’s Address to Congress on January 20, 1949 (Ekbladh, 2010: chap. 3; Latham, 2011). Point Four generated attention to the problems of external state development as part of the overall national security: if developing states could be brought along the modernising path of the United States, they would be more likely to be peaceful members of the international community. That a US ideology of modernisation co-existed with an increasingly popular Soviet model of modernisation – focused on rapid industrialisation – was also crucial (Westad, 2005). While more attention has been paid to Point Four as being influential for US developmental policy in the Cold War, it also went hand in hand with the broader goals of US liberal militarism as a modernising project. While early phases were mainly seen in terms of providing funding and incentives (and expertise) for post-colonial states to develop along the lines of the US, the relative failure of these early attempts (at least in terms of US policymakers getting their own desired outcomes) led to a more coercive focus to modernisation, especially in the Vietnam War (Ekbladh, 2010; Latham, 2011).

The focus on modernisation in the Cold War was Keynesian in its outlook: it was part of creating a global ‘new deal’ that could foster sustained economic growth and the instantiation of strong market relations through a ‘top down’ approach focused on large-scale social engineering (Gilman, 2003; Latham, 2011). Where US policymakers failed was in the imposition of these features on states which were more committed to industrial independence: in India for example, there was much more of an interest in the Soviet model of modernisation that focused on rapid indigenous industrialisation as a way of ‘catching up’. In military terms, two versions dominated. The first was modernisation through military intervention, where intervention itself provided a means to modernise states and society. The second saw an intersection of strategic purpose and the spread of liberal ideas about military practice and organisation, through training and arms transfers. While modernisation theory in its top-down Keynesian version fell out of favour in the 1970s and 1980s as it was overtaken by the ‘Washington consensus’ of neoliberal development policy (Kiely, 2007), its broader ideological legacy remained, and carried on into the post-9/11 era of military intervention and state-building. The focus in statebuilding was much more predicated on the development of

‘good governance’ that would promote a flourishing economy (rather than large top-down programmes of the modernization in its heyday). Here we again see the promotion of military modernisation through direct military intervention (as in Iraq and Afghanistan) and through arms transfers and security assistance, but now focused on neoliberal ideas: now the state only minimally needs to set a context for bottom-up market-based programmes and allowing the private sector to flourish (Ekbladh, 2011). Neoliberal militarism therefore is still capital-intensive, but more reliant on the private sector to innovate and provide logistical support (e.g. Erbel and Kinsey, 2016; Joana and Mérand, 2014; MacLeavy and Peoples, 2009); neoliberal military modernisation is the internationalisation of these ideas.

### **Liberal Militarism and Modernisation Post-9/11**

While the United States struggled in the 1990s to find a coherent and broadly accepted rationale to support its national security state, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 reinvigorated the sense of purpose, refashioned against global terrorism (Jackson, 2011). President Bush captured the purpose in a Manichean worldview that mimicked the apocalyptic tones of the early Cold War (Bush, 2001; c.f. White House, 2002). However, what was core was a sense of the United States at the forefront of a moral, civilizational mission that necessitated a war on terror, as claimed by President Bush in his September 2001 speech to Congress (Bush, 2001): the invocation of Nazism and totalitarianism in the speech also gave echoes of the earlier debates about liberalism and freedom. While the Bush Administration eventually dropped the rhetoric of a ‘war’ on terror – as seen in the more measured tone of the 2006 National Security Strategy (White House, 2006) – the ideology of security remained, one calling for US leadership against transnational terrorism, expressing an increased sense of risk in the world, with a need for US military intervention to stop it. The Obama Administration in the main dispensed with the divisive rhetoric of the war on terror (e.g. Obama, 2009b) while also scaling down the US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, but retained much of the same counter-terrorism policy (Jackson, 2011; McCrisken, 2011). As such, this was not a move away from war, as demonstrated by President Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize speech (2009a) that emphasised the need for a ‘just war’ in certain circumstances,

seemingly backing up the counter-terrorism policies of his predecessor through a moralizing take on the use of military force. As such, the rhetoric of perpetual insecurity plays a crucial role in framing liberal war, especially in terms of the necessity of intervening in illiberal spaces as a means to fostering liberal identity and affirming US responsibility and exceptionalism.

The emphasising of a civilizational narrative in US foreign policy brought a renewed focus on liberal modernisation. However, while the broad contours of liberal militarism were still present, the major shifts in geopolitics and the global political economy made the organizational imperatives of the shift towards a neoliberal dynamic (Harvey, 2005). The critical literature on liberal war is situated in this context, focusing on either the ways in which war was used to pacify new spaces of accumulation or as a technique of biopolitics and governmentality. However, we can additionally critically analyse the role of military interventions as part of reconstructing society in terms of what militaries themselves do. As Gilbert (2015: 203) has argued, ‘militaries are productive of markets, in times of war and peace, and gain influence through their commissioning and contracting’. Gilbert traces this idea through several core programmes the US military utilised in both Iraq and Afghanistan, primarily the Commanders’ Emergency Response Programme (CERP) and the Task Force on Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO). The former enabled commanders to distribute money to small development-related projects with little oversight, and the latter forged links between US businesses and the private sector, as a means to rebuilding the economies of Iraq and Afghanistan through private enterprise.

What is of great interest in terms of thinking about neoliberal militarism as a form of modernisation is the ways in which these programmes were clearly in line with implementing bottom-up policies aimed at neoliberal marketization. While they do not go as far as some commentators would have liked, they clearly do form a part of what Schramm positively described as ‘expeditionary economics’. As Schramm notes, ‘The United States’ armed forces are uniquely positioned to contribute to world peace and prosperity by means other than actual force’ (Schramm, 2010: 99). While Gilbert is more interested in how money becomes an actual ‘weapon’ of the US military (and despite the changing policy focus of the Obama

Administration, away from stability operations, the new doctrines remain fairly firmly embedded in military thinking), we can connect this more broadly to the interface between military power and economic power: not just in terms of how military interventions foster modernisation, but how exporting liberal models of military preparedness provide the background conditions for and institutionalisation of liberal militarism. As noted at the outset, liberal militarism here refers to a specifically liberal way of legitimating war and its preparations as socially useful, but fashioned in liberal terms.

#### *'Security Assistance' and Arms Transfers*

As a sector in which the US has a distinct advantage (economically and technologically), it is not surprising that there is a distinct confluence of interests in what is referred to as 'Security Assistance', which runs the gamut of activities to do with military training and arms transfers. Barkawi (2011) has referred to the military-to-military contacts as a form of 'defence diplomacy', a set of often asymmetrical relations that encourage US partners and allies to take up the burden of US security interests in various regions. The provision of training and transfer of arms is usually put in the context of geopolitics: that the US supplies arms to its allies and to states that it wants to form better relationships with. This was a common trope of the Cold War and is still the dominant frame for reading arms export policies. However, while this aspect is of course important, there is a broader set of processes involved, in relation to how arms transfers and production arrangements are part of a modernisation strategy. First and foremost, arms transfers are a means of modernising the militaries of states and especially developing states: in the context of US arms exports, this can be seen as part of liberal militarism in the sense that it focuses on military capacity in terms of capital-intensity that is also explicitly linked to US technology. While never a relationship of equality – in many cases North-South transfers created a form of dependency (Wendt and Barnett, 1993) – the transfer of US produced weapons is part of a broader political strategy of the US, and also often lines up with a broader liberal logic of what it means to have a modern military: that capital-intensity is crucial (Wendt and Barnett, 1993) and that civil-military relations should be shaped by 'objective control'. This was clear in the Cold War, where weapons and training

were often part of an effort to ensure allied states were not only playing on a the same field as the ‘enemies’ of the US, but that their militaries had a status that could effectively combat Soviet Communism.

The post-Cold War era changed this picture somewhat. As direct geo-political threats to US interests receded, arms transfers were put in the context of business relationships rather than geopolitics. International arms sales increased during the Clinton Administration, at least partially for economic reasons: shoring up US defence industries that would be certain to see a decline in domestic sales (Wirles, 2013: 66-67). The new security challenge was maintaining a robust defence industrial base in an era of globalization (Wirles, 2013; c.f. MacLeavy and Peoples, 2009). While the increased concentration of defence firms in the US led to four main firms which had a narrow focus on defence-related products, there was a diversification of both supply chains and the use of off-the-shelf technologies from the civilian sector which could be used in defence manufacturing. The Cold War era ‘spin offs’ from the defence industry had been transformed into more integration, a process of ‘spinning in’ technologies from the civilian sector (Dunne and Surry, 2006). Post-9/11, while the security focus became more prominent, the commercial aspects of arms transfers were still pronounced, as can be seen in the volume of US arms transfers. In the Bush and Obama era, the US retained its leading role in the international arms industry, accounting for 30% of all sales in 2004-2008, and 29% in 2009-2013 (followed closest by Russia at 24% and 27% respectively) (Wezeman and Wezeman, 2014), with an 11% increase between the two periods. The US has retained an impressively diverse range of recipients, amounting to at least 90, and the top recipient, Australia, accounting for a 10% share (compared with Russia’s 52 recipients, with half going to China, India and Algeria) (Wezeman and Wezeman, 2014).

As can be seen in the various statements from the Obama Administration concerning security assistance, it is not just important for achieving specific national security goals of the United States, but also in fostering partners to maintain a military edge over collective rivals, to encourage interoperability of equipment, and for persuading partner countries to develop indigenous capacities to defend themselves (US Department of Defense, 2014; White House, 2013, 2014). But the core objective is for partner countries – whether in the North or South –



to be in line with US security goals. This can be seen clearly in US arms transfer policy: ‘United States conventional arms transfer policy supports transfers that meet legitimate security requirements of our allies and partners in support of our national security and foreign policy interests’ (White House, 2014).

While the focus on modernisation is not nearly as pronounced as it was in the Cold War, arms sales are still caught up in a modernising logic: while the core emphases in policy statements about arms transfers (and security assistance more generally) stress burden-sharing and common security goals, broader goals related to military modernisation are still apparent. For example, one of the goals stated as part of the Presidential Policy Directive 23, dealing with Security Sector Assistance, is to ‘promote universal values, such as good governance’ (White House, 2013), also expressed in a policy goal: ‘pursuit of security sector reform as part of a broader, long term effort to improve governance and promote sustainable economic development.’ Such commitments are also reflected in a later directive specifically dealing with arms transfer policy, where a core goal is ‘promoting the acquisition of U.S. systems to increase interoperability with allies and partners, lower the unit costs for all, and strengthen the industrial base’ (White House, 2014). These goals need to be seen in a broad fashion, in that security can be achieved by allies becoming more like the US, which can be actualised through the diffusion of neoliberal militarism.<sup>7</sup>

The desire to maintain a modernising presence can be seen in US policy towards Asia-Pacific. As part of its ‘pivot’ to Asia-Pacific, expressed in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (US Department of Defense, 2012), also occurring in a time of increasing austerity and increasing interdependence (with threats also transnationalised), the Obama Administration stressed the need to rely on regional allies, especially through training and modernisation programmes. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (US Department of Defense, 2014) emphasised this in its second ‘pillar’ of defence strategy, ‘building security globally’, which stressed the need to build up the capacity of partners, to ensure interoperability and the ability of partner states to work together to achieve common goals.

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<sup>7</sup> A good example of this in the North can be found in the politics of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (for an overview, see Vucetic and Nossal, 2012-13; for a detailed case on the US and Norway, see Vucetic and Rydberg, 2015).

While the usual alliances are emphasised in terms of Asia-Pacific (Australia, Japan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand – and some new partnerships to build upon with Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore), one of the most interesting is the new approach towards India. As announced in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance document, the US was to take up a new strategic partnership with India as part of its focus on Asia-Pacific (US Department of Defense, 2012: 2). A crucial part of this growing cooperative arrangement has been a focus on arms industry relationships: in 2015, President Obama and Prime Minister Modi jointly announced a commitment to a new mechanism of cooperation (as part of a broader ‘statement of friendship’): the Defense Technology Trade Initiative (DTTI) (White House, 2015). The purpose of the DTTI is not only to form a stronger geostrategic partnership, but to also strengthen India’s defence industrial base and promote increasing business ties between defence industries. These efforts go beyond just an interest in security or economic prosperity; as Undersecretary for Defense Frank Kendall put it,

our hope is that these efforts will begin a process of continued growth over time, until India and the U.S. achieve a strong and enduring partnership in military modernisation, technology, and manufacturing — because a strong Indian military serving as a security provider both regionally and throughout the globe is in the mutual interest of both our countries (Kendall, 2015).

What is of great interest in terms of DTTI is the shift in US-Indian relations, and the diversification of the source of Indian arms. Long pursuing a foreign policy of nonalignment (and hampered by US trade sanctions), India had acquired the vast majority of its arms (and its developmental model) from the Soviet Union and then Russia. Despite some scepticism about the new arrangement (especially in terms of whether the US can overtake Russia as a main supplier of arms to India) (Raghuvanshi, 2015), the Modi government’s switch to improving their own defence industrial base is a crucial aspect, that chimes more broadly with US modernisation efforts. India currently imports 70% of its defence technology (mainly from Russia), and is currently the largest international importer of major arms (Shah, 2015; Wezeman and Wezeman, 2015). Under Modi, India is developing its defence industrial base through an indigenous production programme called ‘Make in India’, and here US support is really essential, especially through co-production projects, which will also eventually involve

technology transfer (Carter, 2013; Kendall, 2015; c.f. Lubold, 2015; Shah, 2015). As defence commentator Ashley Tellis put it: ‘I think there is a clear strategic judgement in India that important though Russia still is for India, Moscow represents the past, Washington represents the future’ (cited in: Raghuvanshi, 2015). As the relationship is still in its early stages, it is best to see it as a potential case of US-centric military modernisation, rather than a complete success.<sup>8</sup>

Another key area of military modernisation through security assistance is to provide direct training and assistance to partner states. A number of programmes led by the Department of State (DoS) and Department of Defense (DoD) have been inaugurated to provide ‘capacity building’ as part of security assistance. While the DoS has traditionally taken the lead on such matters, an increasing amount of security assistance is being provided through the DoD, especially through the specialist Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) (Pincus, 2008). The DSCA is now in charge of running core programmes (though with the initial input of DoS) such as ‘Global Train and Equip’, ‘Foreign Military Sales’ (FMS), ‘Foreign Military Financing’ (FMF), and ‘International Military Education and Training’ (IMET). All of these programmes are designed in various ways to provide US equipment and training for ‘friendly states’ that build capacity and allow for interoperability. Training courses link to key goals such as ‘Military Professionalization’, ‘Interoperability with US & Coalition Forces’, ‘Strategic Bilateral and Regional Relations’, ‘Institutional and Security Sector Reform’ and ‘Border Security and Transnational Threats’ (US Departments of Defense and State, 2014).

The importance of these programmes goes beyond the obvious benefits for the US – to the security environment, for interoperability and for the US defence industrial base – as these are often seen in tandem with a broader goal of security assistance, that capacity building leads to ‘good governance’. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gregory M. Kausner (2013) put it, ‘in Foreign Military Sales we often talk of a “total package approach” – but the package needs to be greater than a weapons system; it needs to involve, according to the situation, everything from institutional reform to legal reform to professional education’. There is a synergy between broad US foreign policy goals and shaping partner states to have modernised military

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<sup>8</sup> On potential obstacles to US moves into the Indian defence market, see: Vucetic and Duarte (2015).

capabilities. The security cooperation fostered through such links goes beyond just alliances to broad modernisation strategies based on military capabilities: ‘capacity-building’ promotes capital-intensive warfare, liberal civil-military relations and the promotion of a marketised defence economy. As such, ‘security assistance’ concerns the spread of liberal militarism itself, promoting an ideology of neoliberalism around military preparation.

### **Conclusion**

The study of liberalism and war is important. While much has been done in recent years to better understand the dynamics of liberal states fighting wars, more emphasis needs to be placed on understanding the societal dynamics of military power. Such dynamics are especially important in terms of the long-term historical institutionalisation of liberalism as a guiding ideology, and its broader, contingent effects on the organisation and practices of military power. While the critical literature on liberalism and war has come to provide an important reference point for understanding war today, it tends to overly focus on the structural aspects of liberal war, underplaying both the long term historical trajectories of liberalism in liberal societies and the specific institutionalisation of military power in relation to both liberalism and political economy. The article has argued that ‘liberal militarism’ is an important way of understanding the relationship between liberalism and military power, by embedding liberalism in the social and political institutions of military power in liberal states, especially examining the linkages between war, security and political economy. The case of the United States demonstrates the effectiveness of such analysis, by establishing that the link between liberalism and military practices has continuities shaped not only by the centrality of liberalism to US political life, but also to the particularities of the institutionalisation of liberal militarism in the early-Cold War period. Liberal militarism is one manifestation of militarism that developed in the early Cold War, highlighting liberalism’s tendency to turn wars into moral crusades, but also embedding preparations for war in the dynamics of liberal political economy (especially that of modernisation), leading to the prevalence of both capital-intensive warfare and the predominance of the private sector in producing for war.

The United States, as both a leading liberal state and preeminent military power, was utilised as a core case of the usefulness of liberal militarism as a concept. Liberal militarism frames the institutionalisation of military power in the US, giving an overall direction to how militarism manifests in the US as a liberal state. However, as argued, the particularity of US liberal militarism is also related to its instantiation in a pattern of civil-military relations and in the dominant mode of warfare. The Cold War inaugurated a shift for the US, where permanent preparedness in an industrialised war economy was paramount, and the institutionalisation of militarism in the US state was modified to fit these new parameters. Civil-military relations were still shaped by professionalism, enhanced by an approach to capital-intensive warfare that was led by the state, but still in the hands of private industry. Overall, the ideology of US liberalism has been entwined with liberal modernisation, and this became a hallmark of US policy in the Cold War period, and became a part of liberal militarism in terms of promoting a military modernity to its allies and other post-colonial states as a means of both control and development. While this military modernisation did have a coercive edge (as seen in the Vietnam War) it also relied on other techniques, such as military training and arms transfers.

In the post-Cold War period, the modernisation associated with US development programmes at their height – in the 1960s – had already been abandoned in favour of neoliberal development, which eschewed large top-down planning in favour of promoting ‘good governance’ in the form of a reduced state role in the economy and increasing free trade and privatisation. While this was a direct rebuff to the liberal modernisers of the 1960s, it was still in the broadest sense an attempt at improvement through intervention – but a belief in the power of markets rather than in social engineering. This manifested itself in a change in military modernisation: while the US would intervene militarily to state-build these would be premised on promoting a new market society, rather than a strong state. The article argued that this could also be seen in the realm of security assistance, which included military training and arms transfer programmes. While partially about finding security through providing allies with adequate resources, security assistance also concerns setting up a ‘modernised’ global military order, where like-minded states not only share US security

concerns, but also share them because their goals are the same. Further research needs to be done to analyse variation within modes of militarism, as the US is in many ways a special case due to its hegemonic position in the international system (see Joana and Mérand, 2014). However, a focus on liberal militarism rather than liberal war broadens out the critical analysis of present day military practices, by focusing on their long-term institutionalisation, while also further demonstrating that war is not just about battles and violent intervention, but about the instantiation of a political economy of war in the everyday structures of states and societies.

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