

Necessary and surplus militarisation: Rethinking civil-military interactions and their consequences

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Abstract

Recent scholarship on militarisation suggests that Western democracies are threatened by military influence spreading into civilian domains. I contend that this research has identified problematic forms of militarisation, but that more careful attention should be given to different manifestations of this phenomenon. I borrow Herbert Marcuse's distinction between necessary and surplus repression to show that militarisation can be excusable or excessive, depending on the context and its extent. Militarisation is potentially harmful and should be opposed when it is coercive or promotes militarism. By contrast, militarisation may be necessary if it is beneficial or ineliminable. A degree of militarisation may be desirable insofar as contact between civilians and soldiers promotes the spread of information, ensures that civilians have some influence on the military, and prevents members of the military from feeling detached and resentful. Some militarisation may also be indispensable for guarding against plausible threats or promoting social stability. Thus, militarisation should be treated as a process that has mixed costs and benefits depending on how it is enacted.

Keywords

Militarisation; Militarism; Security; Popular Culture; Civilians

Introduction

From sporting events and school to videogames and films, the military affects virtually every domain of civilian life. Over the past two decades a large and rapidly growing body of research has tracked this as evidence of militarisation: a process by which the military, products associated with war, or military culture colonise civilian life. This results in the divide between military and civilian spheres blurring or eroding. Research in critical security studies,¹ feminist international relations,² and popular geopolitics³ has identified myriad adverse side effects of militarisation, such as the decline of

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¹ James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Mark B. Salter, 'The geographical imaginations of video games: *Diplomacy, Civilization, America's Army* and *Grand Theft Auto IV*', *Geopolitics*, 16:2 (2011), pp. 359–88.

² Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Cynthia Enloe, 'The risks of scholarly militarization: a feminist analysis', *Perspectives on Politics*, 8:4 (2010), pp. 1107–11; Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via, *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (Wesport, CT: Praeger, 2010); Christine Sylvester, *War as Experience: Contributions from International Relations and Feminist Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

³ Matt Davies and Simon Philpott, 'Militarization and popular culture', in Kostas Gouliamos and Christos Kasseris (eds), *The Marketing of War in the Age of Neo-Militarism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 42–59;

democratic governance, the formation of a quiescent citizenry that is unable to critically evaluate war, predatory recruiting practices, increases in violence, and shifts in civilians' values.⁴ Militarisation has become an especially important target in work showing that it can undermine domestic security through the rise of police violence⁵ and gender violence,⁶ and alter foreign policy by encouraging the public to support aggressive military operations.⁷

The literature on militarisation provides ample evidence that this process is at work and establishes compelling grounds for thinking that it is dangerous. However, I contend that militarisation has been undertheorised insofar as critiques of it generally fail to consider whether it may be necessary to some degree. I argue that militarisation should be judged as a contextually-grounded process that has mixed implications depending on where it takes place and how it is enacted. Borrowing from Herbert Marcuse's theory of necessary and surplus repression in *Eros and Civilization*, I distinguish between necessary and surplus militarisation. Marcuse shows that repression is neither good nor bad in itself. At times repression can be essential for preserving social order, maintaining security, and protecting minority rights. The problem is that repression usually goes far beyond what is necessary to produce surplus constraints that are motivated by entrenching class privileges and legitimising irrational authority. Marcuse argues that the goal when analysing repression should be distinguishing what is necessary, and therefore excusable, from the unjustified surplus repression that should be critiqued.

Under many circumstances, militarisation is an objectionable and potentially dangerous process, just as repression is. We can see its dark side from the violence perpetrated by heavily armed police forces,⁸ popular culture that helps to justify torture,⁹ and recruiters disrupting classrooms.¹⁰ Nevertheless, some degree of militarisation may be necessary for two reasons. First, limited contact

Nicholas Robinson and Marcus Schulzke, 'Visualising war? Towards a visual analysis of videogames and social media', *Perspectives on Politics*, 14:4 (2016), pp. 995–1010.

⁴ Jackie Orr, 'The militarization of inner space', *Critical Sociology*, 30:2 (2004), pp. 451–81; Henry A. Giroux, *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military Industrial, Academic Complex* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007); Marcus Power, 'Digitized virtuosity: Video war games and post-9/11 cyber-deterrence', *Security Dialogue*, 38:2 (2007), pp. 271–88; Nick Turse, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008); Roger Stahl, 'Why we "support the troops": Rhetorical evolutions', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 12:4 (2009), pp. 533–70; J. Beier (ed.), *The Militarization of Childhood: Thinking Beyond the Global South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁵ Peter B. Kraska and Victor E. Kappeler, 'Militarizing American police: the rise and normalization of paramilitary units', *Social Problems*, 44:1 (1997), pp. 1–18; Peter B. Kraska, 'Militarization and policing – its relevance to twenty-first century police', *Policing* 1:4 (2007), pp. 501–13; Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013).

⁶ Madelaine Adelman, 'The military, militarism, and the militarization of domestic violence', *Violence Against Women*, 9:9 (2003), pp. 1118–152.

⁷ David Barker, Jon Hurwitz, and Traci L. Nelson, 'Of crusades and culture wars: "Messianic" militarism and political conflict in the United States', *The Journal of Politics*, 70 (2008), pp. 307–22.

⁸ Kraska and Kappeler, 'Militarizing American police'; Kraska, 'Militarization and policing'; Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*.

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, 'The depraved heroes of 24 are the Himmlers of Hollywood', *The Guardian* (10 January 2006), available at: {<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/jan/10/usnews.comment>}; Elspeth Van Veeren, 'Interrogating 24: Making sense of US counter-terrorism in the Global War on Terrorism', *New Political Science*, 31:3 (2009), pp. 361–84.

¹⁰ John Armitage, 'Beyond Hypermodern militarized knowledge factories', *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 27:3 (2005), pp. 219–391; Turse, *The Complex*; Seth Kershner and Scott Harding, 'Addressing the militarization of youth', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 26:2 (2014), pp. 250–7;

between civilian and military spheres may be beneficial. It is essential for members of the public to have some knowledge of the military and its operations to critically evaluate policy decisions related to military spending and deployments. Maintaining civil-military dialogue can also help to prevent members of the military from feeling detached from civilians or even resenting them, thereby protecting civilian political supremacy and ensuring that civilian values continue to have some place in military life. Second, certain aspects of militarisation are unavoidable. It may, for example, be essential to have a national security infrastructure or a military that can facilitate integration. These are not persistent conditions, yet they do exist in some places and indicate that the degree of justified militarisation must be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

My analysis focuses on the United States for several reasons. First, it is a hard case that has been singled out by critics of militarisation more than any other country. Demonstrating the strength of this analytical distinction in the US context shows that it could be generalisable to other countries where militarisation tends to be less aggressive or less clearly connected to real military operations. Second, the US has global influence as a producer of military entertainment and equipment, and as a user of military force. This makes it as a source of militarisation that critics often charge with spreading this process internationally. Finally, the US military is an innovator in civil engagement strategies that critics fear could provide a model for other armed forces. For example, Seth Kershner and Scott Harding argue that ‘America is a global leader in militarizing its schools’¹¹ and that other countries creating all-volunteer militaries may emulate its strategies. Showing the benefits of the necessary vs surplus militarisation frame when it comes to the US case therefore speaks to its broader relevance elsewhere. That said, it is also important to be aware that the US case does not exhaust the manifestations of militarisation, that civilian and military cultures vary cross-nationally, and that processes of militarisation take a distinctive character based on where they occur. The right balance of military vs civilian interaction must therefore be decided on a case-by-case basis, with attention to these context-specific considerations.

Most critiques of militarisation identify genuine problems that *can* and *should* be corrected, yet there is a gap in this literature insofar as it does not clearly answer the question of whether militarisation could in some contexts be unavoidable or even beneficial. This topic is especially important now because of work evaluating how far the critique of militarisation should extend and what its policy implications are. For example, Daniel Bos et al. point out the importance of ‘envisioning and promoting possibilities for change within the institutions and practices which constitute its focus’¹² as a future research challenge. Distinguishing between necessary and surplus militarisation not only sets clearer boundaries on the scope of critique but also offers added critical leverage when pointing out why certain forms of militarisation are objectionable. Acknowledging the mixed normative implications of militarisation is especially important for security studies because this lays the foundation for incorporating the diverse critiques of militarisation that are situated within different disciplinary contexts into a general assessment of domestic and international security that is attentive to militarisation’s costs and benefits. The distinction likewise makes it easier to see how critiques of militarisation should inform policy decisions by highlighting those manifestations of it that are most clearly superfluous and harmful.

Matthew C. Friesen, ‘Framing symbols and space: Counterrecruitment and resistance to the U.S. Military in public education’, *Sociological Forum*, 1 (2014), pp. 75–97.

¹¹ Kershner and Harding, ‘Addressing the militarization of youth’.

¹² Daniel Bos, K. Neil Jenkins, Alison Williams, and Rachel Woodward, ‘Geography, military geography, and critical military studies’, *Critical Military Studies*, 1:1 (2014), pp. 47–60.

Militarisation and its consequences

Militarism and militarisation are distinct, though closely related, concepts. I use the term militarism to refer to a belief system characterised by uncritical enthusiasm for the military, which is linked to nationalism and a desire to use military force to secure foreign policy objectives. Militarisation is a *process*. It is characterised by the spread of military influence or values into domains that are thought to constitute a separate civil sphere. Cynthia Enloe says that ‘Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas.’¹³ She identifies the spread of direct military control or of militaristic ideologies as constituting militarisation. This grounds the concept in material and ideational processes. The former involve the intrusion of military technologies into civilian domains, such as with the deployment of military weapons and vehicles in policing. The latter involve the spread of military culture or military values, as is the case when the language of war becomes commonplace in ordinary life. Enloe goes on to explain that both forms can alter civilian values in troubling ways. ‘The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal.’¹⁴

Others offer similar definitions of militarisation, connecting it to a broad range of material and cultural harms. Catherine Lutz says that ‘Militarization is intimately connected not only to the obvious increase in the size of armies and resurgence of militant nationalisms and militant fundamentalisms but also the less visible deformation of human potentials into the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality.’¹⁵ The term therefore ‘draws attention to the simultaneously material and discursive nature of military dominance’.¹⁶ These expressions of militarisation often go together. For example, the spread of weapons may encourage the adoption of military language and practices. Conversely, militaristic cultural products like films and videogames about war may encourage more people to enter military service. Nevertheless, distinguishing between material and ideational aspects of militarisation is analytically useful because these may have different causal roots. Material processes are usually linked to direct military involvement in civilian domains or to the enactment of violence. Ideational processes tend to be more subtle and are often instigated by civilian media producers that are attracted to militarism as a form of entertainment.

Research on militarisation spans disciplinary boundaries, but it is particularly important for security studies because it has direct bearing on the behaviour of security institutions and the forces shaping civilians’ views of security policies. Much of the literature focuses on the direct involvement of the military in areas of life that are thought to be inherently civilian. Recruiters attend sporting events, music festivals, holiday celebrations, markets, and schools – often bringing free food, weapons, vehicles, and interactive displays to build rapport. Analysis typically focuses on the United States or on militarisation as a general process that takes place everywhere because of the global spread of militaristic culture, though some studies have noted the spread of militarisation into other countries.

Critics of military recruitment in public schools in the US contend that it has led to recruiters manipulating and intimidating students, as well as interfering with the learning environment.¹⁷

¹³ Enloe, *Maneuvers*, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Catherine Lutz, ‘Making war at home in the United States: Militarization and the current crisis’, *American Anthropologist*, 104:3 (2002), pp. 723–35 (p. 723).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 725.

¹⁷ Giroux, *The University in Chains*; Christopher G. Robbins, *Expelling Hope: The Assault on Youth and the Militarization of Schooling* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

Commenting on recruiters' intrusion into primary schools, Brian Lagotte says that 'the major problem is a lack of any evaluation or accountability system as to what is considered equal access to school or what practices are acceptable once the recruiter has access'.¹⁸ In a study of higher education institutions, Henry Giroux argues that recruiters 'now use the academy to recruit middle- and upper-middle-class youth to research, design, and produce the highly advanced technological weapons that constitute the face of the new war machine'.¹⁹ American public schools are susceptible to this influence because they are legally required to grant recruiters access, but Kershner and Harding find that '[t]here has been a significant increase in the level of military involvement in European schools.'²⁰ The non-profit Forces Watch has even taken on the project of contesting recruiters' influence on schools in the United Kingdom.²¹

Sporting events are not only used as a forum for recruitment but also display patriotic tributes to the military that promote its values and missions. American Football games, at both the professional and college levels, are routinely hosted with military assistance, and include halftime shows celebrating soldiers' heroic sacrifices.²² Organisers attempt to induce soldiers to become audience members by offering them discounted tickets. Michael L. Butterworth and Stormi D. Moskal argue that 'Through this military-media-sport spectacle, sport effectively is war. It literally brings the military to the sporting public, immersing fans in the machinery of war and enlisting them to rally around the troops.'²³ The method of this engagement is especially troubling, with war being presented as a spectacle that audiences are expected to passively consume. Again, the United States is generally identified as the epicenter of militarisation when it comes to sports, though with other countries following similar practices.²⁴

Popular culture reveals militarisation through direct military involvement in creating texts for civilian consumption and indirectly through the values it perpetuates. In 2002, the United States military created its own recruitment videogame, *America's Army*, which is freely available to players who can learn about the army's values, weapons, soldiers, and culture. Many other games have either been appropriated by the military for training purposes, such as *Doom* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*, or have received production assistance.²⁵ The military also collaborates with civilian media

¹⁸ Brian Lagotte, 'Turf wars: School administrators and military recruiting', *Educational Policy* (2012), p. 15.

¹⁹ Giroux, *The University in Chains*, p. 58.

²⁰ Kershner and Harding, 'Addressing the militarization of youth', p. 250.

²¹ Available at: {<http://www.forceswatch.net/>}.

²² Samantha King, 'Offensive lines: Sport-state synergy in an era of perpetual war', *Cultural Studies <—> Critical Methodologies*, 8:4 (2008), pp. 527–39; Michael L. Butterworth and Stormi D. Moskal, 'American football, flags, and "fun": the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl and the rhetorical production of militarism', *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 2:4 (2009), pp. 411–33 (p. 429); Michael L. Butterworth, 'Militarism and memorializing at the Pro Football Hall of Fame', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 9:3 (2012), pp. 241–58; Mia Fischer, 'Commemorating 911 NFL style, insights into America's culture of militarism', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 38:3 (2014).

²³ Butterworth and Moskal, 'American football, flags, and "fun"', p. 429.

²⁴ See, for example, Roger Saul, 'War games: School sports and the making of militarized masculinities', in Nancy Taber (ed.), *Gendered Militarism in Canada: Learning Conformity and Resistance* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015), pp. 209–28; Fabian Virchow, 'Sporting aces and the military', in Rikke Schubart, Fabian Virchow, Debra White-Stanley, and Tanja Thomas (eds), *War Isn't Hell, It's Entertainment: Essays on Visual Media and the Presentation of Conflict* (London: McFarland, 2009), pp. 31–43.

²⁵ Ed Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006); Nick Dyer-Witherford and Greig De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

companies to produce films and television programmes.²⁶ *Black Hawk Down*, *Act of Valour*, *The Sum of All Fears*, and *Pearl Harbor* are just a few of the many films made with US military support. Usually the military exchanges equipment and technical assistance for some editorial control or influence.²⁷ And this goes beyond films that are explicitly about war. The *Transformers* and *Iron Man* franchises, among many others, likewise received US military assistance.

Nick Turse offers dozens of examples of products with ‘virtually unknown ties to the U.S. military’,²⁸ including Starbucks coffee, Apple iPods and MacBooks, and Oakley sunglasses. It is likewise evident in clothing. Turse argues that the trend of wearing military boots links the civilian and military spheres, while Matt Davies and Simon Philpott²⁹ and Jane Tynan call attention to the fashion of wearing military uniforms and camouflage.³⁰ The union of civilian and military influences is particularly clear from how military clothing is not simply adopted wholesale but rather integrated into a civil-military stylistic *mélange*.

Promotional activities provide additional opportunities for collaboration. Roberto J. Gonzales tells the story of one contest that was hosted with the US military’s help to promote the opening of *G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra*.³¹ The contest winner, a young boy whose father was a soldier, was taken to see the movie in a Humvee along with members of the National Guard. In the following weeks, hundreds of military personnel received free tickets to the movie. Gonzales uses this anecdote to illustrate ‘how today’s military-industrial complex is powerful and sophisticated enough to infiltrate and mediate intimate social relationships – between parent and child, between family and community, between civilian and soldier – while exploiting those who can help it further its own ends.’³² The story also suggests an effort to cultivate a young audience for militaristic entertainment. As Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter argue, ‘Militaristic culture and policy, once it gets on a roll, can create an audience that wants more militaristic culture and policy.’³³ Militarisation may therefore be a self-perpetuating process that is difficult to escape.

Even when the military is not directly involved in producing entertainment, militaristic themes are pervasive. Dozens of films, television shows, videogames, and books help to glorify armed conflict, military service, and specific armed forces. Marcus Power contends that ‘Digital war games put a friendly, hospitable face on the military, manufacturing consent and complicity among consumers for military programmes, missions and weapons.’³⁴ Matthew Thomson says that they support the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq when they ‘encourage an unrealistic and misleading belief in the

²⁶ Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006); Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, ‘The imperial warrior in Hollywood: Rambo and beyond’, *New Political Science*, 30:4 (2008), pp. 565–78; Simon Philpott, ‘Is anyone watching? War, cinema and bearing witness’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 23:2 (2010), pp. 325–48.

²⁷ Jason Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), pp. 91–110.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁹ Davies and Philpott, ‘Militarization and popular culture’.

³⁰ Jane Tynan, ‘Military chic: Fashioning civilian bodies for war’, in Kevin McSorley (ed.), *War and the Body: Militarisation, Practice and Experience* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 78–90.

³¹ Roberto J. Gonzales, *Militarizing Culture: Essays on the Warfare State Paperback* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³³ Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter, *Pop Culture Goes to War: Enlisting and Resisting Militarism in the War on Terror* (Plymouth: Lexington, 2010), p. 12.

³⁴ Power, ‘Digitised virtuosity’, p. 278.

potential of military transformation to achieve fast and decisive solutions to complex contingencies such as nation building, insurgency, and civil war'.³⁵ Popular media also identify and demonise enemies, normalising hostilities that underlie real armed conflicts. This is particularly clear from how popular culture depictions of Muslim terrorists prepared Americans for 9/11 and the violent responses to it.³⁶

These diverse examples show that concern over militarisation is widespread and well-supported by empirical research. Commentators cite dozens of expressions of this phenomenon and find evidence of it arising in different domains, yet as I show in the next section, this diverse literature is unified in their overriding sense that militarisation is a fundamentally destructive process.

Normative implications of militarisation

Studies of militarisation typically characterise it as undermining the distinction between military and civilian domains – with the former entering the latter and spreading its influence with little or no countervailing effects. Marek Thee characterises militarisation ‘as being an extension of military influence to civilian spheres, including economy and socio-political life’³⁷ that creates a ‘sick society’. He finds support in the way civilian rule continues even as military interests define public policy. This simultaneously threatens democracy while also setting the conditions for arms races and wars. Similarly, Madelaine Adelman argues that ‘living in a militarized society obfuscates any presumed distinction between being at war and not at war. In a militarized society, one is always oriented toward war’.³⁸ She is particularly concerned by two blurred boundaries – one separating military and civilian life and another separating the activities of war and peace. The reasoning here is that routinised contact with the military and its values increases civilians’ comfort with them, and possibly their willingness to use military force. To substantiate this she shows that militarisation is linked to heightened gender-based violence when aggressive military values spread into civil society.

Perhaps the most worrying consequence attributed to militarisation is that it may undermine democracy by transforming citizens into uncritical consumers. Mia Fischer contends that US military spectacles in sporting events have a ‘detrimental impact on democratic public discourse by acquiescing citizens’.³⁹ Offering distraction from the realities of war with heroic spectacles ‘generates a nation of complicit citizens, most of whom are unaware that their own actions may contribute to an increasingly militarized culture’.⁴⁰ This reduces the civilian public to ‘an audience of happy spectators rather than engaged citizens’.⁴¹ Some forms of militarisation may even go one step further by creating ‘virtual citizen-soldiers’⁴² who *participate* in interactive militaristic spectacles. Thus, ‘those not won over to actual military service are called upon ... to serve in other ways, through their

³⁵ Matthew Thomson, ‘From underdog to overmatch, computer games and military transformation’, *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, 7:2 (2009), pp. 92–106 (p. 99).

³⁶ James Castonguay, ‘Conglomeration, new media, and the cultural production of the “War on Terror”’, *Cinema Journal*, 43:4 (2004), pp. 102–8.

³⁷ Marek Thee, ‘Militarism and militarization in contemporary international relations’, *Security Dialogue*, 8:4 (1977), pp. 296–309 (p. 296).

³⁸ Madelaine Adelman, ‘The military, militarism, and the militarization of domestic violence’, *Violence Against Women*, 9:9 (2003), pp. 1118–52 (p. 1123).

³⁹ Fischer, ‘Commemorating 911 NFL style’, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴¹ Butterworth and Moskal, ‘American football, flags, and “fun”’, p. 419.

⁴² Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.*

tax dollars, most obviously, but also by working for corporations that fuel the military and are fueled by it'.⁴³ Showing solidarity with the military in these ways makes the civilian public integral to the projection of military power abroad and reduces its potential to restrain uses of force.

Despite their important contributions, studies of militarisation tend to be vague when identifying the proper balance between military and civilian worlds. In some cases there is such a strong presumption against the military that it seems difficult to imagine that there is any room for it in democratic political life. It is unclear whether military influence should be moderated or eliminated entirely. Further complicating this is that many studies of militarisation are directed at the militarisation of particular spheres of civilian life, such as education, sports, or films, and not with militarisation as a general phenomenon extending across a broad range of domains. This provides insight into how militarisation operates in particular instances, but leaves uncertainty about whether the authors engaged in focused research only see militarisation as problematic within the domain being studied or whether they object to militarisation in every instance. This is not to say that these critiques are flawed; they are useful even if they do not include clear boundary criteria or suggest a specific alternative. However, the disproportionate attention to critique leaves a gap when it comes to identifying what more defensible civil-military relations might look like. Resolving this ambiguity can benefit research on militarisation by making it easier to say just how far the critique of militarisation should be taken and what policy implications it has.

Re-evaluating militarisation and its effects

My contention is that the best target for critique is not militarisation as such. Rather, it is pervasive and excessive militarisation that goes far beyond what is necessary for security. We can gain some normative clarity by looking at how similar social processes have been theorised. Marcuse's work on repression provides an especially strong guide, as it combines analytical nuance with a strong critical perspective. Repression is generally considered to be an evil that we must avoid at all costs – as an impediment to freedom and a cause of needless suffering. However, Marcuse's analysis of Freud leads him to a more complex view.

Freud recognises that repression has mixed costs and benefits. Intuitively, repression is bad because it is a deprivation of liberty, and Freud provides additional grounds for thinking that it is harmful by exploring the hidden psychological costs that it incurs. He describes repression as being one of the root causes of neurosis, dividing the mind against itself by forcing the superego into an endless struggle of preventing desires from manifesting themselves in antisocial behaviour.⁴⁴ The costs of repression are primarily borne by individuals who must limit their desires and endure the resulting psychological trauma. Nevertheless, repression may be advantageous when judged from a civilisational perspective. Freud contends that we are only able to live in communities because repression drives us to overcome base instincts that would otherwise be manifest destructively. 'Civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct',⁴⁵ with increases in repression and psychological domination of individuals corresponding to higher degrees of progress. This is what he describes as the reality principle overcoming the pleasure principle. Freud's history is meant to not only describe how civilisation has taken shape by continually controlling dangerous impulses but also how individuals develop as members of civilisation by restraining the pleasure principle.

⁴³ Turse, *The Complex*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

As Marcuse points out, this suggests that the advance of civilisation has the ironic effect of increasing repression even as technological progress introduces the material basis for unprecedented individual freedom.⁴⁶

Marcuse argues that Freud is wrong in thinking that all forms of repression are equally beneficial or equally harmful for individuals or for society as a whole. He substantiates this by distinguishing between necessary and surplus repression – an echo of Marx’s distinction between necessary and surplus labour.⁴⁷ The former must exist for the preservation of order, while the latter sets superfluous constraints on liberty. As Marcuse sees it, surplus repression is often excused by being erroneously linked to necessary repression. Yet surplus repression serves no greater purpose than preserving power. ‘While any form of the reality principle demands a considerable degree and scope of repressive control over the instincts, the specific historical institutions of the reality principle and the specific interests of domination introduce additional controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association.’⁴⁸ Surplus repression is guided by the logic of domination and the entrenchment of privilege, while necessary repression is transparent and justifiable because it is essential for preserving order and even protecting marginalised groups.

This necessary/surplus distinction embodies the logic of ‘domination’ vs ‘rational exercise of authority’.⁴⁹ Domination refers to unjustified control that is directed at preserving the status quo through deception or coercion; authority is conditional power conferred to those who are best able to protect social order. Domination is imposed and cannot be easily rejected; authority is conditional control that is freely chosen because it benefits those who are subject to it. This distinction is what makes it possible for Marcuse to decry the inequities of capitalism, while still recognising that there must be some degree of social control in the interest of security. He even acknowledges that certain forms of administration arising from the capitalist system may be needed to preserve social cohesion in a post-capitalist system. For example, he recognises that workers have grounds for accepting managerial control that is essential for production, so long as they do this freely and because it is collectively advantageous.

It is, Marcuse admits, often difficult to distinguish between the two forms of repression in practice because those in power obscure the line between necessary and surplus repression for their own ends. Although Marcuse did not live to see 9/11 and its aftermath, he might agree with the studies that have shown that the attack was used to rationalise infringements on civil liberties that went far beyond what was necessary to protect the United States from terrorism.⁵⁰ The extent of necessary and surplus repression also ‘varies with the maturity of the civilization, with the extent of the achieved rational mastery of nature and of society’.⁵¹ Restrictions that are essential for security in one context may be excessive in another. Using the US military to enforce school desegregation in Little Rock Arkansas in 1957 is a prime example of this, as military force that would ordinarily be a threat to

⁴⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1966).

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

⁴⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵⁰ David Chandler, ‘War without end(s): Grounding the discourse of “global war”’, *Security Dialogue*, 40:3 (2009), pp. 243–62; Joanne Esch, ‘Legitimizing the “War on Terror”: Political myth in official-level rhetoric’, *Political Psychology*, 31:3 (2010), pp. 357–91; William John Thomas Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁵¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 88.

freedom was used to defend a progressive policy.⁵² Coercion with military force is clearly repressive, yet it may arguably be necessary in some circumstances when it helps to protect minority rights.

Marcuse's distinction between necessary and surplus repression leads him to a much different understanding of historical progress than Freud. Whereas Freud sees history as a linear progression of increasing civilisation and decreasing freedom, Marcuse thinks that civilisational advancement decreases the extent of necessary repression and makes greater emancipation possible. He draws less on Freud and his concept of Eros in later work and drifts away from the concepts of necessary and surplus repression, yet he remains committed to the underlying idea that complex social processes can have contrary implications depending on the context and how they are used. Throughout *One Dimensional Man* he is preoccupied with a similar duality in technology.⁵³ Technological rationality is oppressive, yet machines (especially when automated) hold the promise of reducing necessary labour and increasing worker freedom. As with repression, Marcuse attempts to chart a delicate path forward that depends on selectively mobilising technology to support progressive ends without allowing it to become a new source of domination.⁵⁴

Freud and Marcuse are primarily interested in repression as a social and psychological constraint on expressions of Eros. They explore the subversion of the pleasure principle to promote social stability, with Marcuse attempting to show that technological progress can provide the foundations for emancipation. Marcuse only addresses militarisation in passing, usually by talking about how the marks of military culture (medals, guns, etc.) are more fairly classified as 'obscene' than the expressions of sexuality that usually attract that label.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Marcuse's work on repression can help to theorise militarisation.

First, repression and militarisation are similar to the extent that they are coercive practices involving the use of force, threat of force, or organisation of society to use force. As Thee points out, 'Historically, militarism developed as a corollary to rule and privilege. The military habitually served the interests of the ruling classes, and in the process tended to acquire autonomous strength and a privileged socio-political position in society.'⁵⁶ Second, the two concepts overlap to some degree. Militarisation may incorporate or excuse repression, while repression is often enacted with the help of military force. Following 9/11, constraints on civil liberties, securitisation of everyday life, and stigmatisation of minorities associated with terrorism were forms of repression that were brought about via increased involvement of the military in civil society, the militarisation of police, and the promotion of militaristic counterterrorism policies. Third, borrowing from Marcuse's work on repression is analytically useful because he shows the extent to which even the most clearly undesirable aspects of social life may be unavoidable and possibly even useful. Finally, surplus repression and militarisation are alike in their pervasiveness. Surplus repression 'is present in factories and offices, bedrooms and living rooms, and the public and private spheres'⁵⁷ just as militarisation is.

⁵² Paul J. Scheips, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1945–1992* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2012).

⁵³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*.

⁵⁴ It is important to note that Marcuse has more to say about the psychoanalytic roots of the necessary/surplus repression distinction as well as how it fits into Marxist theory, but that I am deliberately omitting these details here to focus on how Marcuse's work can best inform research on militarisation.

⁵⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 7–9.

⁵⁶ Marek Thee, 'Militarism and militarization in contemporary international relations', p. 297.

⁵⁷ Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 170.

Arguing that some instances of militarisation are unnecessary and serve to reinforce existing patterns of authority without a compelling rationale for doing so should be fairly uncontroversial. Critics of militarisation have done very well in exploring the objectionable manifestations of this process. For example, recruitment practices that disrupt schools should be treated as an instance of surplus militarisation. Aggressively marketing military service to children disrupts education, is not essential for recruitment (less invasive alternatives are available), and often violates informed consent by incorporating deception. Similarly, it is easy to imagine the US military sustaining a capacity for waging wars without also promoting war at football games, especially considering the costs this may have when it comes to trivialising violence and circumventing critical attitudes. Nevertheless, to say that these specific practices are objectionable and non-essential does not indicate that processes of civil-military interaction are inherently bad or that they can always be eliminated.

The claim that some forms of militarisation may be necessary is apt to be more controversial and will therefore be my focus over the next two sections. There are two senses in which militarisation may be necessary. First, certain aspects of it can be desirable as a means of achieving socially beneficial goals, such as generating awareness about the costs of war, providing security, or promoting a countervailing civilian influence on the military. Second, some forms of militarisation may be necessary in the sense of being unalterable given the present conditions. In this sense, militarisation can be a kind of compromise that helps to avert more serious security problems.

The importance of civilian competence

Civilian oversight depends on civilian involvement in authorising uses of force, determining how the military should be structured, and monitoring the procurement of new weapons. An informed citizenry that is familiar with the military is in a much better position to make these kinds of decisions than one that is largely ignorant of military affairs. Risa A. Brooks argues that in the US, ‘Citizens often lack the information and expertise necessary to evaluate military activity’⁵⁸ and that ‘this seems to undermine a key premise of American civil-military relations’ by rendering civilians unable to evaluate military decisions or the performance of politicians whose electoral prospects should rest partly on how well they manage the military. Christopher Gibson says that democratic accountability depends so heavily on information that military personnel should provide it directly when elected officials and members of the media fail to do so.⁵⁹

Familiarity with the military and competence in judging its activities does not equate to support for war, as much of the work on militarisation suggests. Adam J. Berinsky finds that ignorance, rather than excessive contact, has been a major factor in leading the US to war. As he says, ‘there is little evidence that citizens have the information needed to make cost benefit calculations when deciding whether to support or oppose military action’.⁶⁰ Critics of a proposed military venture can make a stronger case against fighting if they are armed with the knowledge that the operation exceeds military capacities or if they can anticipate the potential costs. This was evident during the war in

⁵⁸ Risa A. Brooks, ‘Militaries and political activity in democracies’, in Don M. Snider and Suzanne C. Nielsen (eds), *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 213–38 (p. 225).

⁵⁹ Christopher Gibson, ‘Enhancing national security and civilian control of the military: a Madisonian approach’, in Snider and Nielsen (eds), *American Civil-Military Relations*, pp. 239–63.

⁶⁰ Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 62.

Iraq, when the US military's own calls for larger troop commitments and for more armoured vehicles were mobilised as an indictment of the Bush administration's unpreparedness and disregard for soldiers' safety. Multiple senior officers opposed the invasion plan, with Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki losing his position for criticising it.⁶¹ Some officers even consider it a professional obligation to make recommendations against launching unwinnable or disproportionately destructive operations, making them a potential barrier to fighting.⁶²

Victoria Basham correctly points out that the US military is not as homogenous or monolithic as some critiques of militarisation indicate.⁶³ There is considerable disagreement within the ranks, even when it comes to when a war is justified, and greater exposure to the military can bring these to light. Opinions from individual soldiers rarely attract broad attention because of the limited opportunities soldiers have for making their opinions known, yet ethnographic research shows that there is heterogeneity within the military that should not be overshadowed by opposition to civil-military interaction in all forms. Thus, the US military is not inherently pro-war and the information coming from the military into the civilian sphere is not inherently deceptive. Like any political institution, it has complex interests that change over time and that cannot be characterised in terms of a single straightforward causal influence.

Civilian disengagement from military affairs is dangerous – possibly even as dangerous as militarisation itself – in the United States and beyond. As Colin McInnes points out, when civilians lose a sense of the reality of war and only see images of it from a distance, citizens 'are spectators but not participants'.⁶⁴ 'Despite the exposure to suffering offered by the globalized media, those of us who watch, hear about or read about such events are inevitably removed from it. We may sympathize but we do not suffer. Nor is there any real threat of us suffering directly.'⁶⁵ McInnes warns that war has become far too easy because it 'is no longer conducted by society as a whole but by its representatives'.⁶⁶ He is particularly concerned by the lack of attention to casualties. Media representations of violence are often sanitised according to what James Der Derian calls the logic of 'virtuous war'.⁶⁷ Civilians rarely see the costs of fighting, especially the physical harm. Disengagement in the United States and other countries in which few citizens directly participate in conflicts make it easier for media spectacles to mask reality.

Studies of militarisation call attention to how spectacles of militarism mediate between audiences and the reality of war to manufacture comfortable spectator experiences, yet they too readily assume that civil-military interactions are inherently problematic. I contend that the real problem with these spectacles is not with the contact itself but with their deceptiveness. An honest look at the horrors

⁶¹ David Margolick, 'The night of the generals', *Vanity Fair* (16 September 2013), available at: {<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2007/04/donald-rumsfeld-iraq-war>}.

⁶² Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Chris Case, Bob Underwood, and Sean T. Hannah, 'Owning our army ethic', *Military Review The Army Ethic* (2010), pp. 3–10.

⁶³ Victoria Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State: Everyday Experiences of the Geopolitical in the Armed Forces* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁶⁴ Colin McInnes, 'Spectator sport warfare', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 20:3 (1999), pp. 142–65 (p. 143).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁷ James Der Derian, 'Virtuous war/virtual theory', *International Affairs*, 76:4 (2000), pp. 771–88; James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

of war might, as McInnes's theory of spectator sport warfare suggests, generate pressure against fighting. Recognising the horrors of war presupposes some exposure to them, but it is hindered by excessive mediation of civil-military relations. Empirical research on public opinion relating to American conflicts supports this by showing that high casualties and lack of success in achieving central objectives generally erode enthusiasm for war.⁶⁸ Open dialogue with the military that involves the presentation of these facts therefore constitutes a form of civil-military interaction that could plausibly strengthen opposition. Exchange between civilian and military spheres may therefore be a necessary form of militarisation if it offers insight into how soldiers and civilians in contested areas experience war.

Critiques of militarisation would be better served by focusing on the content of militaristic messages and practices of exception without treating civil-military interaction and information sharing as being inherently disruptive. Civil-military interactions that promote a kind of mindless militarism that is divorced from the realities of war can be fairly classified as unnecessary, while still recognising that the military has a rational basis for communicating its interests with civilian audiences and that such communication is needed for preserving civilian oversight.

Protecting legitimacy

Some degree of civil-military interaction is essential for the armed forces of democratic states (that is, those that are accountable to civilian authorities) to have a degree of legitimacy and public support that can maintain mutual trust between civilians and soldiers.⁶⁹ This is particularly important for ensuring that members of the military remain obedient to civilian leaders. Chris Case, Bob Underwood, and Sean T. Hannah (all officers in the US military), argue that the 'military respects the rights of citizens and the authority of the Constitution' and that 'being subordinate to civilian authority has moral force for the army'.⁷⁰ This moral imperative for soldiers to willingly subordinate themselves to civilians is essential to protecting the primacy of elected leaders. A military that is completely detached from the civilian population risks losing legitimacy and no longer representing the people that it is supposed to operate on behalf of. This can in turn foster mistrust and even antagonisms between civilians and members of the military – antagonisms that can be dangerous for those on both sides if they alter the culture of obedience to civilian authority.⁷¹

One misguided approach to restoring legitimacy is to fully embrace the superiority of 'the military ideal'.⁷² Writing at the height of the Cold War in his classic work on civil-military relations, Samuel P. Huntington describes American soldiers and civilians embodying different worlds with distinctive value systems. He advocates conservatism and militarisation as the antidote for discordant liberal values, saying that, 'if the civilians permit the soldiers to adhere to the military standard, the nations

⁶⁸ Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Berinsky, *In Time of War*.

⁶⁹ James Burk, 'The military's presence in American society, 1950–2000', in Peter Feaver and Richard H. Kohn (eds), *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 247–74 (p. 262).

⁷⁰ Case, Underwood, and Hannah, 'Owning our army ethic', p. 6.

⁷¹ Richard H. Kohn, 'Out of control: the crisis in civil-military relations', *The National Interest*, 35 (1994), pp. 3–17, 153; Joseph S. Nye, 'Epilogue: the liberal tradition', in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds), *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 151–6.

⁷² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 465.

themselves may eventually find redemption and security in making that standard their own'.⁷³ Huntington's case for the superiority of military values at the expense of liberalism and individualism embodies the worst aspects of militarisation in its effort to overwhelm and transform civilian life. Critics of militarisation are understandably concerned by such arguments, and yet the subsequent history of civil-military relations in the United States shows the potential costs of reifying the divide between the two domains rather than attempting to reach a compromise that would preserve civilian autonomy while still recognising the necessities of security.

Harsh treatment of American veterans of the Vietnam War encouraged the military to turn inward, cutting itself off from the civilian world and casting civilians as a disruptive influence undermining its missions.⁷⁴ Strategists also continue to see weak American civilian support as a potential threat to national security.⁷⁵ Hints of similar rifts are evident now, with sharply divided civilian and military opinions about the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan giving rise to much different conceptions of what the country's priorities should be in the future.⁷⁶ Most worrying of all is the sense of superiority or resentment some members of the military feel towards civilians. James Fallows quotes a retired Air Force general as saying, 'I think there is a strong sense in the military that it is indeed a better society than the one it serves.'⁷⁷ As Fallows points out, this is largely driven by a feeling that the civilian public is detached from and does not care about the military, except when it comes to superficial displays of support. Richard H. Kohn says that there is a 'wide-spread attitude among officers that civilian society has become corrupt, even degenerate, while the military has remained a repository for virtue, perhaps its one remaining bastion, in an increasingly unraveling social fabric, of the traditional values that make the country strong'.⁷⁸ This is a dangerous sentiment that is only reinforced if we accept that there is a natural antipathy between members of the military and the civilian public, such that any interactions between them must be avoided.

Soldiers' simultaneous engagement with and alienation from civil society has not gone unnoticed. Several recent studies have rightly challenged the strict separation between civilian and military domains as well as pointing out soldiers' disenchantment with civil-military barriers. Zoe H. Wool notes the importance of family relationships and gender roles in constituting soldiers' identities, and shows that this is not unique to the military but rather a general condition of social life.⁷⁹ She likewise argues that families, who are generally civilians, provide a vital support network for soldiers, which helps to manage psychological trauma that is not adequately dealt with by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Kenneth T. MacLeish shows that soldiers' lives cross the civil-military divide and cannot be neatly organised on one side of it or the other. Moreover, he discusses interviews with soldiers that confirm their feelings of disenchantment with civilians who

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

⁷⁴ Richard Lock-Pullan, *US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation: From Vietnam to Iraq* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁷⁵ Edward N. Luttwak, 'Toward post-heroic warfare', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June (1995), available at: {<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/chechnya/1995-05-01/toward-post-heroic-warfare>}.

⁷⁶ Tom Bowman, 'Gap grows between military, civilians on war', *National Public Radio* (5 October 2011), available at: {<http://www.npr.org/2011/10/05/141084358/gap-grows-between-military-civilians-on-war>}.

⁷⁷ James Fallows, 'The tragedy of the American military', *The Atlantic* (January 2015), {<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/383516/>}.

⁷⁸ Richard H. Kohn, 'The erosion of civilian control of the military in the United States today', *Naval War College Review*, 55:3 (2002), pp. 8–59 (p. 29).

⁷⁹ Zoe H. Wool, 'Critical military studies, queer theory, and the possibilities of critique: the case of suicide and family caregiving in the US military', *Critical Military Studies*, 1:1 (2015), pp. 23–37.

have little sense of their sacrifices.⁸⁰ MacLeish's method is itself instructive. He obtains powerful critical insights through conversations with soldiers that strategically breach the civil-military boundary to offer glimpses into the experience of military service.⁸¹

It is vital to build on this work by thinking more carefully about its normative implications, and the first step is recognising that some level of militarisation is necessary to ensure that civilians have a sense of the human costs of war and to preserve legitimacy. Here what matters is not just exposure to senior officers and the military as an institution but also greater awareness of the quotidian experiences of military personnel. It is essential to recognise that the military cannot be neatly cordoned off from the civilian world and that deeper insight into soldiers' struggles can have critical import.

Preserving trust

Some exchange of values between civilians and members of the military may be advantageous if it helps military personnel retain a sense of civilian identity as a moderating force. 'Before the present generation, American military officers (since before the Civil War) had abstained as a group from party politics'⁸² as this contravened the ideal of a non-partisan military that is neutral in domestic political matters. However, the Vietnam War marked a turning point by building mutual suspicion between members of the military and the civilian public, which has pushed the military to become increasingly partisan and strongly aligned with the Republican Party. Maintaining a strict separation between military and civilian spheres reinforces the sense that the two have distinct political interests and that the military must pursue its own goals through a more direct engagement with policy decisions.

Even more worrisome, soldiers' deracination from civilian culture may promote aggression. British Army General Aylwin-Foster criticised Americans' misconduct during the war in Iraq by saying that 'U.S. Army soldiers are not citizen soldiers: they are unquestionably American in origin, but equally unquestionably divorced from their roots.'⁸³ If preserving a sharp civil-military distinction domestically reduces soldiers' empathy for foreign civilians, then we should seek ways of developing more healthy civil-military interactions. This demands reconsidering the conviction, so often articulated in studies of militarisation, that contact between civilians and soldiers is inherently problematic. A more nuanced distinction between the dangerous forms of surplus militarisation and the potentially beneficial forms of contact that can sustain the influence of civilian culture is vital to making more defensible normative judgments about civil-military relations.

The benefits of militarisation are not universal and may pertain to differing extents in different contexts. My examples come primarily from the United States and are characteristic of democracies that maintain all-volunteer forces. It might, for example, not be necessary for a military to have any legitimacy in a country that faces no armed threats and that can secure itself without maintaining a military at all. Another country might face higher risks of militarisation running out of control and producing harmful social consequences, such that even moderate militarisation could introduce more dangers than the benefits of militarisation would warrant. I contend that levels of militarisation

⁸⁰ Kenneth T. MacLeish, *Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁸¹ Kenneth T. MacLeish, 'The ethnography of good machines', *Critical Military Studies*, 1:1 (2015), pp. 11–22.

⁸² Kohn, 'The erosion of civilian control of the military in the United States Today', p. 27.

⁸³ Nigel Aylwin-Foster, 'Changing the army for counterinsurgency operations', *Military Review*, November–December (2005), p. 10.

should be judged in specific contexts and with attention to these variations. The degree to which militarisation is necessary or superfluous may change considerably cross-nationally and across time. This variance makes it essential to explicitly distinguish between these two forms of militarisation and to ground normative points in a clear sense of what is possible in a particular context.

Unavoidable militarisation

Certain aspects of militarisation may be difficult to correct under the prevailing circumstances even if they appear to be undesirable. It is useful to analyse civil-military interactions with attention to what can be reasonably changed, as this makes it possible to identify where efforts at reform can be most usefully directed. Some degree of militarisation may be necessary for preserving security. This is a contingent condition that will depend on the extent to which a given country faces threats that can be countered by military force or by a militarised citizenry. Even by the acknowledgment of some of its most devoted supporters, the US military and the military-industrial complex are disproportionately powerful and guilty of wasteful spending on a massive scale.⁸⁴ Many of its interventions into domestic life are also non-essential from the perspective of promoting security, making these instances of surplus militarisation. Nevertheless, without some outreach programmes, the military would be unable to perform basic security roles.

Low recruitment can create new risks by reducing the number of soldiers available to guard facilities and maintain dangerous weapons systems. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan personnel shortfalls in the US military led to lower standards, even allowing those with criminal records to join. As Matt Kennard points out, 'the situation had become so bad by 2007 that nearly one in five recruits entered the army courtesy of a waiver for a felony or misdemeanor, representing a 42 percent increase in the use of waivers since 2000'.⁸⁵ The legitimacy of those wars is debatable, yet the moral questions they raise are only exacerbated when the fighting is done by soldiers who may be unfit for service.

Recruitment practices are one of the central targets in work on militarisation, with studies challenging videogames,⁸⁶ films,⁸⁷ classroom involvement,⁸⁸ and public spectacles⁸⁹ that are

⁸⁴ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸⁵ Matt Kennard, *Irregular Army: How the US Military Recruited Neo-Nazis, Gang Members, and Criminals to Fight the War on Terror* (New York: Verso, 2012), p. 82.

⁸⁶ Power, 'Digitized virtuosity'; Aaron Delwiche, 'From the Green Berets to America's Army: Video games as a vehicle for political propaganda', in Patrick J. Williams and Jonas Heide Smith (eds), *The Players' Realm: Studies on the Culture of Video Games and Gaming* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007); Robertson Allen, 'The unreal enemy of America's Army', *Games and Culture*, 6:1 (2011), pp. 38–60; Salter, 'The geographical imaginations of video games', pp. 359–88.

⁸⁷ Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Simon Dalby, 'Warrior geopolitics: Gladiator, Black Hawk Down and The Kingdom Of Heaven', *Political Geography*, 27:4 (2008), pp. 439–55; Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

⁸⁸ John Armitage, 'Beyond hypermodern militarized knowledge factories', *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 27:3 (2005), pp. 219–39; Scott Harding and Seth Kershner, "'Just say no": Organizing against militarism in public schools', *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 38:2 (2011), pp. 79–109; Matthew C. Friesen, 'Framing symbols and space: Counterrecruitment and resistance to the U.S. military in public education', *Sociological Forum*, 29:1 (2014), pp. 75–97.

⁸⁹ King, 'Offensive lines'; Butterworth and Moskal, 'American football, flags, and "fun"'; Butterworth, 'Militarism and memorializing at the Pro Football Hall of Fame'; Fischer, 'Commemorating 911 NFL style'.

designed with this goal in mind. There is good reason for this, as many of these practices are deceptive or target vulnerable people. However, it is essential to draw the distinction between necessary and surplus militarisation when looking at how soldiers are recruited. If recruitment, as an instance of civil-military interaction, is treated as being uniformly objectionable, then armed forces are left with no means of perpetuating their existence and would be unable to perform even their most basic functions. Moreover, such sweeping critiques would have trouble finding a receptive audience among policymakers or members of the military who must be swayed to alter recruitment practices. It would be profitable to shift the normative language to distinguish those recruitment practices that can and should be changed from those that pose fewer risks and that are essential to maintaining some level of military effectiveness.

The militarisation of domestic security roles may also be essential to some extent, though again the exact level depends on context. The militarisation of American police forces is clear from the heavy weapons and armoured vehicles they use, and I contend that much of this militarisation is superfluous. Tanks and heavy weapons are excessively destructive for law enforcement and training officers to use military tactics could prime them for aggression.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, when analysing police militarisation it would be too hasty to simply dismiss it as entirely unnecessary. This process has, after all, been driven by some legitimate fears of police not being able to provide security in a society that is already awash with military grade weaponry. This point was made powerfully by the 1997 North Hollywood shootout, when poorly armed police were initially unable to stop two heavily armed criminals wearing body armor.⁹¹ So long as ordinary Americans can easily obtain guns, it seems impossible for police to operate without some degree of militarisation, although comparable levels of militarisation will be excessive in other countries where fewer citizens have access to weapons.

The shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson Missouri in 2014 was one of the many unjustified that are symptomatic of police militarisation. Following the attack protestors took to the streets and were confronted with further evidence of surplus police militarisation when heavily armed riot units attacked them with tear gas, armoured vehicles, bean bag rounds, and rubber bullets.⁹² The initial shooting and the police response were excessive, yet a blanket critique of police militarisation has the dual effects of suggesting that all aspects of it are equally problematic and pushing police to take up a defensive posture that leads them to become unreceptive to criticism. A more profitable approach could be informed by the necessary vs surplus distinction. Drawing on Marcuse's comments on domination and rational authority, it is possible to conclude that some police involvement in the protests served the public's interest in maintaining security, but that the presence became antagonistic because of its size and confrontational stance. Certain material aspects of militarisation were even justified for the protection of the officers, such as wearing Kevlar vests and other military protective equipment. However, police militarisation crossed the line from rational authority to domination when the police deployed armed officers and used force against unarmed protestors.

As a more general rule, it would be reasonable for police who operate in clearly dangerous circumstances to benefit from militarised protection equipment and excessive for them to employ

⁹⁰ Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 228–32.

⁹² Shirley Li, 'The evolution of police militarization in Ferguson and beyond', *The Atlantic* (15 August 2014), available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/08/the-evolution-of-police-militarization-in-ferguson-and-beyond/376107/>.

offensive weaponry and tactics. *How* militarisation operates is far more important than the mere presence of civil-military interaction. Critiques of militarisation can therefore be made more convincing by drawing clearer normative distinctions between its specific manifestations. The examples from US policing also reveal that the line between necessary and surplus militarisation shifts depending on the context. The domestic challenges that make it necessary for American police to wear body armour do not exist in many other settings. Elsewhere, the division between necessary and surplus militarisation can, and should, be drawn more restrictively.

Finally, military service may sometimes be a mechanism for overcoming domestic antagonisms that threaten to tear civil society apart. By some accounts, race relations and civil rights in the United States benefited from military service.⁹³ Philip Klinker and Rogers M. Smith argue that ‘for many black soldiers, military service proved to be a radicalizing experience, transforming them into a vanguard in the fight for racial equality’⁹⁴ and that ‘as its units integrated, the military became an important symbol of radical progress to audiences at home and abroad’.⁹⁵ Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler say of the US Army that ‘It is an organization unmatched in its level of racial integration. It is an institution unmatched in its broad record of black achievement’, and that ‘As a rule of thumb, the more military the environment, the more complete the integration.’⁹⁶ The authors recognise that racial problems persist within the US military, but say that these fall far short of those affecting civil society. Other studies have reached similar conclusions about the integrative effects of military service,⁹⁷ such as by showing higher rates of inter-group marriage in the military,⁹⁸ and greater pay equity.⁹⁹

Discrimination continues to be a serious problem within militaries and should not be downplayed. There is likewise debate over how much integration carries back into civilian domains.¹⁰⁰ Ongoing debate over these points demonstrates that the benefits of military service should not be overstated, but that they also need to be recognised as plausible effects of militarisation that should be accounted for when making normative judgments about this phenomenon.

Conclusion

Militarisation is often a threatening process that should be resisted. It is vital to limit military influence when there are concerns relating to predatory recruiting practices, spectacles that promote civic disengagement, and the romanticisation of war. Nevertheless, just as it is possible to distinguish

⁹³ Philip Klinker and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 233; Christine Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men: Black Soldiers and Civil Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

⁹⁴ Klinker and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, p. 64.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁹⁶ Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 2.

⁹⁷ Sam C. Sarkesian and Robert E. Connor Jr, *The US Military Profession Into the 21st Century: War, Peace and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Jennifer Hickey Lundquist, ‘Ethnic and gender satisfaction in the military: the effect of a meritocratic institution’, *American Sociological Review*, 73:3 (2008), pp. 477–96.

⁹⁸ Cardell K. Jacobson and Tim B. Heaton, ‘Inter-group marriage and United States military service’, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 31:1 (2003), pp. 1–22.

⁹⁹ Juanita Firestone, ‘Occupational segregation: Comparing the civilian and military work force’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 19 (1992), pp. 363–81.

¹⁰⁰ Victoria Bashman, ‘Effecting discrimination: Operational effectiveness and harassment in the British Armed Forces’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 35:4 (2008), pp. 728–44; Von Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

necessary and superfluous instances of repression and to even identify instances in which limited forms of repression promote emancipation, it is essential to carefully distinguish between necessary and superfluous militarisation. Some civil-military contact can be advantageous. It has the potential to promote civilian oversight of the military, prevent members of the military from resenting the civilian public, and facilitate a positive civilian influence on the military. Militarisation may also be unavoidable if it is essential for security or a tool for promoting social integration.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that militarisation is always needed, only that we cannot assume that militarisation is an unmitigated evil or that it can be completely stopped. Analyses of this phenomenon should be attentive to whether certain manifestations of it may be necessary and to how far militarisation can reasonably be overcome in a specific context. Criticism of this process should not focus on civil-military contact as such. Rather, it should be directed more narrowly at those manifestations of militarisation that are excessive. This is especially vital for those who advocate some kind of activism, for whom it is important to formulate fairly clear plans that can inform efforts to resist militarisation. We must have some sense of what manifestations of militarism are most pernicious, what effects they have, what contestation may achieve, and whether militarisation should be eliminated or only moderated.

Marcuse's theory of surplus repression has been criticised for being too vague to permit measurement.¹⁰¹ Robert Paul Wolff says of the decision to distinguish between two forms of repression that it 'is one of those brilliant insights which are too often rejected by hard-headed social scientists because they prove difficult to quantify or operationalize'.¹⁰² The same objection could be applied to a distinction between necessary and surplus militarisation. This challenge is made all the more serious because militarisation itself is an ambiguous process that is manifest in countless different ways. My goal has been to show that Marcuse's conceptual distinction can profitably inform studies of militarisation in the future. Even without clear metrics for measuring the extent of militarisation or demarcating necessary and superfluous forms, these concepts add greater nuance to the research. Going forward, the challenge should be applying these concepts to the many specific domains in which militarisation is evident with the goal of determining what forms of this process are most objectionable and identifying those that are potentially beneficial or unavoidable.

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¹⁰¹ Raymond Guess, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 35; Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p. 429.

¹⁰² Robert Paul Wolff, 'Marcuse's theory of toleration', *Polity*, 6:4 (1974), pp. 469–79 (pp. 474–5).