CHAPTER 2

The US Military-Industrial Complex and the Ruling Class

Notabene in regard to the points to be mentioned here and not to be forgotten ... War developed earlier than peace; the way in which certain economic relations such as wage labour, machinery etc. develop earlier, owing to war and in the armies etc., than in the interior of bourgeois society. The relation of productive force and relations of exchange [are] also especially vivid in the army.¹

Concrete ruling classes cannot ... be equated with the functionaries of capital, because they carry on a historical consciousness and posture derived from their confrontations and clashes with subordinate classes and many more 'others' but also from the conditions under which they won power from previous ruling classes, domestic and foreign. Violence and war are essential constitutive aspects of rule ... and also of capital, so that every particular enterprise and its owners are ultimately bound up with the unique history of the country and only in the mirror of monetary validation are momentarily abstracted from it as a particle of collective capital.²

The British ruling class and the middle classes perhaps were numerically weak in the face of a vast proletariat (compared to countries such as France ...). But their internal nervous system was far better developed. By 1872, there were about four million Freemasons in the British Empire compared to half a million trade unionists and 400,000 members of the co-operative movement ... Already in that period one of the strongholds of masonry was the police ... the privacy and secrecy of masonry have all

² Pijl 1998, p. 34.
along provided a cover for intelligence operations as well. Since the same applies to the subsequent private planning groups, this may remind us of the fact that class power is always backed up by coercion – and not only at the formal state level.3

Introduction

The US military-industrial complex (MIC) was famously given that moniker in US President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s farewell address, at the end of his presidency, when the US Cold War military machine he himself helped build had taken on enormous proportions.4 Subsequent scholarly research has identified the evolution of this complex in an earlier era, particularly at the time of World War I, while also noting its variegated further development – in the form of, e.g., a military-industrial-university-entertainment complex – in recent decades.5 More generally, historical research on the development of capitalism has brought out the important but too-often-ignored point that nowhere have capitalist class relations developed absent the phenomena – indeed the spur – of war. If, as Randolph Bourne once put it, ‘war is the health of the state’, one could likewise say that war is the health of capital – a proposition that can be born out whether we look, e.g., at the roles of the Royal Navy and the US military in the development of van der Pijl’s ‘Lockean heartland’, the roles of Japanese and German militaries, van der Pijl’s ‘Hobbesian contender states’, in efforts at late(r) capitalist industrialisation, or even the efforts of various actors in the Global South to enter the ranks of the industrial capitalist powers, as later chapters will argue.6

4 Turse 2008, p. 15.
6 Bourne, cited in Zinn 2003, p. 359. On the ‘Lockean heartland’, see Hobsbawm 1999, pp. 28–48; Kolko 2006, pp. 92–102; Cumings 2010. On the ‘Hobbesian contender states’, see Hobsbawm 1975, pp. 56–7; Stavrianos 1981, pp. 349–66; Pijl 1984. While analyses of military spending and East Asian development are limited, there is a tremendous amount of literature on specifics of the US military-industrial complex and its various effects on the US economy and society, much of this centred on debates about whether it has effectively spurred, hindered, shaped, or distorted economic growth in the United States. For examples, see Mills 1956; Solo 1962; Com-