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**ETHICS,
SECURITY, & THE
WAR-MACHINE**

THE TRUE COST OF THE MILITARY

NED DOBOS

Ethics, Security, and The War-Machine

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Introduction

Jus Ante Bellum: Justifying the War-Machine

Ethicists dealing with war and armed conflict have invested most of their energies in two questions. First, under what circumstances is it morally permissible for a state to resort to military force? This is the question of *jus ad bellum*—the justice of war. Second, once hostilities are underway, how should combatants conduct themselves? This is the question of *jus in bello*—justice in war. In recent years the inquiry has been extended to cover justice after war (*jus post bellum*). Here the emphasis is on post-war relations, reconstruction, reparations, and so on.¹

This is certainly a positive development, but we ought to be extending the inquiry in the opposite direction as well, to address questions of *jus ante bellum*, or justice before war. In particular this one: Under what circumstances is it justifiable for a polity to *prepare* for war by militarizing? When (if ever) and why (if at all) is it morally permissible to create and maintain the potential to wage war? This is not about whether war-making is justified, but about whether war-building is justified.² It is not about how we should use the military resources we amass; it is about whether we should be amassing those resources in the first place. Just as the *ad bellum* question asks of particular wars whether they are (or were)

¹ See for instance Brian Orend, 'Justice After War', *Ethics and International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1, March 2002, pp. 43–56. The decision to bring an ongoing war to an end—the *transition* from war to post-war—has also received some philosophical attention of late. David Rodin discusses it under the heading *jus terminatio*. Darrel Moellendorf prefers *jus ex bello*. David Rodin, 'The War Trap: Dilemmas of Jus Terminatio', *Ethics*, vol. 125, no. 3, 2015, pp. 674–95; Darrel Moellendorf, 'Jus Ex Bello', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 123–36.

² I owe this distinction to Cheyney Ryan. See his essay 'Pacifism', in Seth Lazar and Helen Frowe (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, and his article 'Pacifism, Just War, and Self-Defense', *Philosophia*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2013, pp. 977–1005.

justified, the *ante bellum* question is best understood as asking of particular war-making *institutions* whether they are justified in existing.

If it is never morally permissible for a state to wage war, as pacifists think, then it probably goes without saying that states ought not to build and maintain military institutions.³ After all, if war-making is always wrong, then creating an institution whose *raison d'être* is war-making does nothing but enable us—and perhaps even tempt us—to do things we should never do. What this suggests is that war must be justifiable sometimes in order for militaries to stand any chance of being justified. The former is necessary for the latter. But it would be a mistake to assume that the justifiability of war is also *sufficient* to justify the existence of any given military establishment.

If pressed, I suspect that most of my compatriots would admit that there are conceivable circumstances under which torture is justified—in ticking time bomb-type scenarios, for example. But almost nobody would say that we should therefore create a Department of Torture, taxpayer-funded torture facilities, and academies where people are trained in torture techniques.⁴ If pressed, most of my compatriots would also accept that armed rebellion against our government would be justified if it ever became sufficiently oppressive. But again almost nobody would say that it is therefore permissible for us right now to form a militia and acquire the high-powered weaponry that would be necessary for successful rebellion should the need ever arise.⁵ Clearly, the fact

³ By 'pacifism' I mean the view that waging war is always morally impermissible. This is not the only way that the term has been used, admittedly. For a comprehensive overview see Andrew Fiala, 'Pacifism', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2018, available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/pacifism/>, and Andrew Fiala, *Transformative Pacifism: Critical Theory and Practice*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

⁴ As Seumas Miller rightly points out, 'it is perfectly consistent to concede that torture might be morally justifiable in certain one-off emergency situations, and yet oppose any legalization or institutionalization of torture'. Seumas Miller, 'Torture', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2017 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available at: plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/torture/.

⁵ In the 1700s Immanuel Kant argued that 'there is no right of sedition, and still less of rebellion, belonging to the people... It is the duty of the people to bear *any abuse of the supreme power*' (emphasis added). Immanuel Kant, *The Science of Right*, 1790, Second Part, 'Public Right'. Full text available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/morals/ch04.htm>. Nobody believes this anymore. Today it is widely accepted that, if a government becomes tyrannical and begins violating the basic rights of its citizens, those citizens have a right to fight back and even to overthrow their oppressors if they can. See Ned Dobos, *Insurrection and Intervention: The Two Faces of Sovereignty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, chapter 1. Even so, few of us think it is acceptable for individuals to possess automatic rifles and explosives and missile launchers simply because there are conceivable circumstances under which it would be acceptable for citizens to use such weapons against

that a particular action is sometimes permissible does not entail that an institution devoted to it ought to be created and maintained.⁶

This is because social institutions, even if they do some good, can also introduce serious costs and dangers into our lives, and there are going to be cases where these costs are simply not worth bearing. Even if some criminals deserve to die, and executing them does help to deter others, the courts will invariably reach a faulty verdict from time to time, leading to the execution of an innocent person. We might reasonably think this too high a price to pay for the sake of having an institution that administers ‘just executions’.⁷ Hence many people are of the view that capital punishment (the institution) should be abolished even if capital punishment (the act) is not always wrongful. There is nothing contradictory or wrongheaded about this.

By the same token, there may be cases where the costs and risks generated by a military establishment are too great for its existence to be justified, and this is *even if* we think that some wars are necessary and consistent with the demands of morality. It is a mistake to suppose that pacifism and anti-militarism stand or fall together, as if rejecting the former must also take the latter off the table philosophically. On the contrary, one can be an anti-militarist, or a military abolitionist, without being a pacifist—this is a perfectly coherent intellectual position. A few historical examples should help to illustrate this point.

Non-Pacifistic Anti-Militarism

In 1948, after a short but bloody civil war in Costa Rica, a revolutionary junta was established under the headship José Figueres Ferrer,

the state. Ted Cruz is a notable exception. He wrote in an email to supporters that the Second Amendment right to bear arms was ‘the ultimate check against government tyranny’. Greg Sargent, ‘Ted Cruz, Slayer of Tyrants’, *The Washington Post*, 15 October 2015.

⁶ The same might be said for the use of terrorism. ‘As morally reprehensible as terrorism is, there might be, on very rare occasions, circumstances in which it is permissible or even obligatory to commit an act of terrorism. But this does not mean that we should have a Department of Terrorism, or government-funded and trained terrorists standing by to commit acts of terrorism’. Saba Bazargan-Forward, ‘Varieties of Contingent Pacifism in War’, in Helen Frowe and Gerald Lang (eds.), *How We Fight*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 2–3.

⁷ Igor Primoratz interrogates this argument in chapter 8 of his book *Justifying Legal Punishment*, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1989.

affectionately known as Don Pepe. Figueres disbanded the vanquished forces, as one would expect, but he then did something unheard of. He disbanded his own armed forces, the very same that had brought his regime to power. In a public event, Don Pepe took a sledgehammer to the outer wall of the country's Cuartel Bellavista army base, to 'symbolize the elimination of the remnants of the Military Spirit of Costa Rica'.⁸ To this day, on 1 December each year, the Costa Ricans celebrate Día de la Abolición del Ejército: their 'military abolition day'.⁹ Article 12 of the country's constitution declares that 'the Army as a permanent institution is proscribed'. The Cuartel Bellavista was turned into a museum and the defence budget was repurposed for education, healthcare, and environmental protection.

By most accounts Costa Rica has fared rather well since demilitarization. Its territory has not been annexed by a foreign power, despite being surrounded by some hostile regimes. It leads Latin America and the Caribbean in primary education, has one of the region's lowest infant mortality rates, one of its highest literacy rates, the best healthcare system in Central America, and its citizens are ranked the happiest in the world, according to the Happy Planet Index.¹⁰ Needless to say, each of these achievements must be due to a combination of factors, but the decision to demilitarize is—rightly or wrongly—thought to have made it all possible. In 1987, president Oscar Arias boasted before US Congress: 'I belong to a small country that was not afraid to abolish its army in order to increase its strength.' He went on to explicitly connect the low rates of poverty and unemployment in Costa Rica to the absence of warships and artillery pieces.¹¹

When asked by reporters to explain his decision to abolish the military, Don Pepe allegedly replied: 'Why not? Most nations need an army

⁸ Jose Gerardo Suarez Monge, 'Costa Rican Army Abolished', *Howler Magazine*, 31 July 2018, available at: <https://howlermag.com/Costa-rican-army-abolishd-history-in-photos>, last accessed November 2018.

⁹ Gilbert Barrera, 'The Hammer Blow that Changed Costa Rica', *The Costa Rica News*, 1 December 2017.

¹⁰ Amanda Trejos, 'Why Getting Rid of Costa Rica's Army 70 Years Ago Has Been Such A Success', *USA Today*, 5 January 2018, available at: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/01/05/costa-rica-celebrate-70-years-no-army/977107001/>, last accessed November 2018.

¹¹ David P. Barash, 'Costa Rica's Peace Dividend: How Abolishing the Military Paid Off', *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 2013.

like they need a hole in the head.’¹² It’s not that Figueres was oblivious to the utility of armed forces—he did not deny that they could be, and sometimes were, used for good. It’s just that Figueres was acutely aware of the trade-offs that having such forces at the ready involved. There were the obvious budgetary pressures; Figueres and those around him were sensitive to the economic opportunity costs of military expenditures. But Figueres was also cognizant that militaries in the region had developed a bad habit of turning against the states they were supposed to protect; several neighbouring Latin American countries had experienced coup events during this period.¹³ Costa Rica’s ‘traditional position of having more teachers than soldiers’ also featured in Figueres’ reasoning.¹⁴ He and his advisors felt that a permanent military establishment was inconsistent with—and indeed corrosive of—their country’s culture and character. Whatever the benefit of having a professional army, the Costa Rican leadership evidently judged that the cons outweighed the pros.

Japan is another country whose constitution outlaws a permanent military establishment, or at least it appears to. Article 9 reads: ‘The Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.’ It goes on to promise that ‘to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained’. The way that the constitution has been interpreted by the courts, however, has effectively allowed Japan to gradually re-militarize since the armed forces were dismantled at the end of the Second World War, to the point that the country now has one of the largest defence budgets in the world.¹⁵ This has caused considerable disquiet among segments of the general population. Like the architects

¹² Quoted in the award-winning documentary *A Bold Peace* (2016), directed by Matthew Eddy and Michael Dreiling.

¹³ See Tord Høivik and Solveig Aas, ‘Demilitarization in Costa Rica: A Farewell to Arms?’, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. XVIII, no. 4, 1981, pp. 341–3.

¹⁴ Mario Kamenetzky, *The Invisible Player: Consciousness as the Soul of Economic, Social, and Political Life*, Rochester: Park Stress Press, 1999, p. 262.

¹⁵ Mark A. Chinen, ‘Article Nine of Japan’s Constitution: From Renunciation of Armed Forces “Forever” to the Third Largest Defense Budget in the World’, *Michigan Journal of International Law*, vol. 27, 2005, p. 60.

of Costa Rica's de-militarization, the opponents of Japan's re-militarization have not denied the possibility that armed force might one day be needed to fend off a foreign threat. They simply think the premiums on this insurance coverage are too expensive, so to speak. The risks and costs of having a military are thought to be greater than the risks and costs of going without one.

There are several concerns in play here. One is that if Japan is allowed to re-militarize, the country might again become embroiled in unnecessary and immoral wars, as has happened in the past.¹⁶ This fear is based partly on the historically accumulated mistrust that many Japanese still feel towards soldiers. After all, these people were seen as the main propagators of the poisonous nationalism that had led the country astray in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Hence after the end of the Second World War many Japanese blamed the military, and saw themselves as its victims, rather than its authors or enablers.¹⁸ The resulting suspicion of the armed forces endures to the present day, so much so that even routine military planning activities by the JSDF (Japan Self-Defense Force) can arouse public controversy.¹⁹ Besides this, there is also a fear of 'entrapment'. Japan and the United States remain the closest of allies. Some Japanese worry that the commitments generated by this alliance will rope their country into one or more of the military misadventures that the US is perceived as having a penchant for. The thought is that if the US calls for military support from its allies, Japan will be among the foremost expected to respond to the call, given the relationship between the two. Hence Japan might find itself politically compelled to participate in unjust wars. The only way to avoid this, according to some of Japan's

¹⁶ Yasuhiro Izumikawa, 'Explaining Japanese Antimilitarism: Normative and Realist Constraints on Japan's Security Policy', *International Security*, vol. 35, no. 2, Fall 2010, pp. 123–60. For discussion of the idea that militarization weakens democratic norms, which is another concern among Japanese anti-militarists, see Andrew Alexandra, 'Pacifism: Designing a Moral Defence Force', in Jeroen van den Hoven, Seumas Miller, and Thomas Pogge (eds.), *Designing In Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

¹⁷ See Thomas U. Berger, 'From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Antimilitarism', *International Security*, vol. 17, no. 4, Spring 1993, p. 134.

¹⁸ According to Berger, the chief lesson that the Japanese took away from the war is that 'the military is a dangerous institution'. Berger, 'From Sword to Chrysanthemum', p. 120.

¹⁹ Berger, 'From Sword to Chrysanthemum', p. 136. During the Gulf crisis JSDF personnel were even prohibited from reporting directly to Japanese cabinet, for fear that the influence of military thinking would distort government decision-making. Berger, 'From Sword to Chrysanthemum', p. 146.

anti-militarists, is to ensure that the country remains permanently devoid of all war-making capabilities.²⁰

To be sure, there are anti-militarists in Japan who express a deeper, principled objection to the use of violence as a means of foreign policy; they are pacifists as well as being anti-militarists. But others are of the view that even though some conceivable wars may be necessary and just, the existence of a war-machine in their country is nevertheless not justified, on account of the potential for its misuse.

The United States constitution does not proscribe a permanent military establishment, but some people desperately wanted it to. Under the pseudonym 'Publius', three of the founding fathers—Hamilton, Madison, and John Jay—published a collection of essays supporting the ratification of the constitution of 1787. These came to be known as the Federalist Papers. Lesser known are the so-called Anti-Federalist papers, written by various authors who were critical of the draft constitution for one reason or another. The most influential of these were published in the *New York Journal* between October 1787 and April 1788, under the pseudonym 'Brutus' (generally believed to be Robert Yates, a New York judge). Several of the essays vehemently opposed the proposal for a standing army.²¹

Brutus was worried that a permanent military would be mishandled by the government: 'the rulers may employ them [soldiers] for the purpose of promoting their own ambitious views'.²² He implored his compatriots to 'let the monarchs, in Europe, share among them the glory of depopulating countries, and butchering thousands of their innocent citizens, to revenge private quarrels, or to punish an insult offered to a wife, a

²⁰ Izumikawa, 'Explaining Japanese Antimilitarism', pp. 131–4.

²¹ See Laurence M. Vance, 'Brutus on the Evils of Standing Armies', 7 February 2004, LewRockwell.com, available at: <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2004/02/laurence-m-vance/the-evil-of-standing-armies-2/>, last accessed November 2018.

²² Brutus #10, 24 January 1788, available at: <http://www.constitution.org/afp/brutus10.htm>, last accessed December 2018. This is the chief concern of modern-day 'diversionists'. They worry that national leaders are prone to start wars for the pettiest reasons, like improving their political standing at home or distracting their constituents from domestic issues. See Jack S. Levy, 'The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique', in Manus I. Midlarsky (ed.), *Handbook of War Studies*, Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 259–88. Some commentators memorably offered a diversionist explanation for the Clinton administration's bombing of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan in the late 90s, claiming that its ulterior purpose was to divert attention away from the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The affair drew comparisons with the comedy *Wag the Dog*, in which a Hollywood film producer is hired to construct a phony war with Albania in order to shift the public's attention away from a sex scandal involving the US president.

mistress, or a favourite'.²³ More than this, though, Brutus was concerned about the risk of a military coup against the state. In one essay he approvingly reproduced the following passage from a speech delivered in the British parliament:

If an army be so numerous as to have it in their power to overawe the parliament, they will be submissive as long as the parliament does nothing to disoblige their favourite general; but when that case happens, I am afraid, that in place of the parliament's dismissing the army, the army will dismiss the parliament.²⁴

For Brutus, this made a standing army 'in the highest degree dangerous to the liberty and happiness of the community'.²⁵ It is worth noting that, though they may not have agreed with all of his conclusions, Hamilton, Madison, and some of the other founding fathers thought Brutus had a point. Madison admitted that in many places 'armies kept up under the pretext of defending, have enslaved the people'. Thomas Jefferson recognized that standing armies often become an 'engine of oppression'. Hamilton was concerned enough to propose that Congress should vote every two years 'upon the propriety of keeping a military force on foot'.²⁶

For his part, Brutus's proposal was to allow the government to raise a citizen's militia in times of war, rather than building war-potential during peacetime. Importantly, then, Brutus did believe that the use of armed force for national defence might one day be necessary and justified. And he even seemed to appreciate the argument that a standing army would be better prepared to prosecute such wars, and therefore more likely to win them. Nevertheless, he insisted that this was not reason enough to justify the existence of such a dangerous organization. Brutus was what we might call a *non-pacifistic anti-militarist*. Despite his openness to the prospect of legitimate political violence, he was opposed

²³ Vance, 'Brutus on the Evils of Standing Armies'.

²⁴ Vance, 'Brutus on the Evils of Standing Armies'.

²⁵ Vance, 'Brutus on the Evils of Standing Armies'.

²⁶ Phil Klay, 'The Citizen-Soldier: Moral Risk and the Modern Military', *The Brookings Institution*, 24 May 2016, available at: <http://csweb.brookings.edu/content/research/essays/2016/the-citizen-soldier.html>, last accessed July 2018.

to the idea of having an establishment dedicated to it. The same label could be affixed to the military abolitionists of Costa Rica and Japan.

The upshot is simply this: If we want to answer the *ante bellum* question of whether it is permissible to build and maintain a permanent military establishment, we do need to ask the *ad bellum* question of whether war can ever be justified. But that is not the *only* thing we need to ask. We also need to consider the various costs and risks associated with having some such establishment, and to assess whether they are worth bearing, all things considered. Our answer to the *ad bellum* question is relevant to, but it does not settle, the *ante bellum* one.

Unfortunately, while a great deal continues to be written about the costs of war-making, little philosophical attention is paid to the costs of war-building. As Cheyney Ryan puts it, 'the great shortcoming of received thinking is to focus on the first to the exclusion of the second'.²⁷ To its credit, the UN has tried to remedy this neglect. A key recommendation arising out of its First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 was that all governments should 'prepare assessments of the nature and magnitude of the short- and long-term economic and social costs attributable to their military preparations, so that the general public can be informed of them'.²⁸ No serious attempts at this have been made, at least not in relation to the social costs. That is where this book comes in.

The True Cost of the Military: Outline of the Book

In 2017, global military spending topped 1.73 trillion dollars annually. The growth has been driven largely by increases in the defence budgets of Asian and Middle Eastern countries, especially China and India, rather than by expenditures in the Euro–Atlantic region.²⁹ This trend might be short-lived, however. At the 2018 NATO Summit, US President Donald Trump admonished European leaders for failing to devote 2 per cent of their GDP to military spending, as per NATO guidelines. He then urged

²⁷ Ryan, 'Pacifism', p. 278.

²⁸ Quoted in Alex C. Michalos, 'Militarism and the Quality of Life', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 577, no. 1, December 1989, p. 216.

²⁹ Daniel Brown, 'The 15 Countries with the Highest Military Budgets in 2017', *Business Insider*, 3 May 2018.

member states to double their commitment, to 4 per cent of GDP. Were this to happen, military spending within the NATO organization alone would climb to 1.5 trillion dollars annually.³⁰

In a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, former US President and army general Dwight Eisenhower memorably called attention to the significant opportunity costs of such expenditures—the goods that a society forgoes by directing its scarce resources into war preparation. ‘Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired’, Eisenhower said,

signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. . . The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some fifty miles of concrete pavement. We pay for a single fighter plane with a half million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people.³¹

Clearly there are large amounts of money at stake, but this is only part of the story. The full cost of a military cannot be adequately captured in economic terms alone. The purpose of this book is to begin cataloguing some of the less appreciated cultural and moral costs, and the security sacrifices associated with creating and maintaining a permanent military establishment. Rather than trying to provide an exhaustive list, I will focus instead on the costs and dangers that I take to be the most generalizable; the ones that are borne to some degree by most militarized polities, not just those with particular histories, internal political dynamics, or international entanglements.

Wherever there is a military establishment, men and women must be recruited into it and conditioned to be effective war-fighters. Whether or

³⁰ Lindsay Koshgarian, ‘Trump’s NATO Military Spending Request Would add \$600 billion to World Military Spending’, *National Priorities Project*, 13 July 2018, available at: <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/blog/2018/07/13/trumps-nato-military-spending-request-would-add-600-billion-world-military-spending/>, last accessed January 2019.

³¹ Dwight Eisenhower, *Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 16 April 1953, Slater Hotel, Washington, DC, transcript available at: http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/ike_chance_for_peace.html, last accessed September 2018.