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The Military in Development

MARY KALDOR

*Institute for the Study of International
Organization, University of Sussex*

All the wars since 1945 have taken place in the poorer parts of the world. The military coup has become the rule rather than the exception in Third World countries. Budgetary outlays by Third World governments are, in general, dominated by military expenditure while roughly half the technology imported by Third World countries is military-related.

These facts alone, and many more could be cited, indicate the importance of the military contribution to the process of economic and social change in the Third World. And yet the subject has received remarkably little scholarly attention. Most of the work was undertaken by apologists for the US military aid programme in the early 'sixties; the analysis tended to be scant and the substantiation anecdotal. There were a couple of more solid statistical studies but these did not reach very definite conclusions. A lot of information about the size of military spending, the size of armed forces, and the size and nature of military equipment has been collected at a number of research centres¹ but by and large this is not directed towards any specific analysis so that its usefulness is limited. Similarly, there have been a considerable number of historical studies of the armed forces in Third World countries but these have largely analyzed the role of the military in politics and in war, ignoring the implications for economic and social development. Finally, much of the classical Marxist literature on militarism is relevant to the subject but it is only recently that radical critics of the military have attempted to apply these ideas to the current situation in Third World countries.

This survey summarizes what has been or could be said about the military in development from a reading of this disparate literature. Inevitably, it tends to attribute a coherent body of thought where none exists. Inevitably also, there are major gaps; for example very little has been written about the role of irregular or guerilla forces and about post-revolutionary armies – the Red Army in the Soviet Union

and the People's Liberation Army in China, both of which have contributed in fundamental ways to development processes.

The topic is examined in the light of two aspects of the military which are common to all societies. The first is the role of the military as organized force. The use of this force whether explicitly in war or implicitly through political intervention, can determine the balance of power, the complexion of government and the prevailing social and economic conditions. The second aspect of the military is its role in the allocation of resources, whether or not this is part of a conscious policy. The armed forces absorb resources – people, equipment, money – but they may also mobilize resources through the concentration of skills, infrastructures, etc. The interesting questions are about the various forms these aspects take in different societies and whether we can generalize about the forms taken in the Third World.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

In trying to answer these questions, it is useful to distinguish between different approaches to development and how they incorporate the role of institutions. In a sense, the very concept of development conceals a particular school of thought. It presupposes the possibility of transforming Third World countries from a state of rural poverty to one of urban wealth and it implies that this transformation can be engineered by the ruling institutions and/or external agents. There are, of course, other schools of thought. For Marxists, institutions are subordinate to class. Transformation and change, the product of class conflict, are endemic to all societies and in general, this is reflected in, rather than engineered by, the ruling institutions. Further, Third World countries are inextricably linked to the international system, dominated by a few rich nations. The possibility for development as

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