**Realist and Constructivist Theory about the Military Industrial Complex**

According to the realist theory of international relations and political science, the military industrial complex can be said to be a reflection of its most fundamental principle, namely, that international politics consists of “competing interests defined in terms of power.” (Donnelly, 8) From this perspective, therefore, the military industrial complex is merely a continuation of states’ struggle for the maintenance and acquisition of power. In so far as military might is coextensive to political power in realism, the military industrial complex is a certain embodiment of this claim. Furthermore, to the extent that the military industrial complex remains central to the policy decisions of countries such as the United States in the realms of economics, general society, and foreign relations, then this decisive position can be said to confirm the realist hypothesis. At the same time, however, the military industrial complex as posited from a realist perspective must be a homogeneous entity, at least to the extent that it is tied to mechanisms of state power, or in other words, “the military-industrial complex is presumably steered by state demands.” (Laferriere & Stoett, 103) If these demands can be understood in realist terms, the military industrial complex is thus the response to the demands for preservation of power against forms of “international anarchy” and tensions between other states and non-state entities. However, even if the military industrial complex is considered to be its own entity, essentially autonomous to the state apparatus, such that it is the military industrial complex that influences state policy decisions instead of vice versa (i.e., the decision to go to war since this is good for the business of the military industrial complex), the realist framework can also explain this motive, as realism is not bound to state actors as the fundamental actors of international relations and politics, but also can include non-governmental actors such as NGOs.

Whereas the existence of the military-industrial complex essentially follows from the inherent logic of realism, constructivism, in contrast, would view the military-industrial complex as a socially constructed phenomenon. Constructivists, therefore, oppose realism on the grounds that it makes phenomena such as the tension between states and struggle for hegemony objective features of political reality. This is a form of determination, therefore, whereby politics can be nothing else other than conflict. Constructivists, in contrast, argue that such phenomena are not “dictated by the ‘realities’” (Kinsella, Russett & Star, 27) of political life; instead the position maintains that political “identities may change.” (Zehfuss, 4) The existence of the military industrial complex is therefore not the necessary consequence of political life, but instead a particular approach to political and social life. The military industrial complex is thus the reflection of various social norms and mores that conceive as politics as a tension space between nations, one constantly imbued with conflict and the struggle for survival. The military industrial complex is, for the constructivist, a real phenomenon: but it is a contingent feature of political life, rather than necessary. The constructivist does not make any radical and sweeping generalizations about what politics is or can be, other than the proposition that approaches such as realism conflate contingent interpretations of what politics is with some essential and objective fact about what politics is. For both a realist and a constructivist, therefore, the military industrial complex does exist, it is a fact of our everyday lives: for the realist, however, it is a necessary fact following from the presumed meaning of political life itself. The constructivist, however, can critique the military industrial complex to the extent that it is only a socially constructed symptom of a particular way of looking at politics, that is, a claim that politics is conflict and tension and struggle.

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