

PROFESSIONAL READING LIST

The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List is intended to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the civilian, military, contractor, and industrial workforce who participate in the entire defense acquisition enterprise. These book recommendations are designed to complement the education and training vital to developing essential competencies and skills of the acquisition workforce. Each issue of the *Defense Acquisition Research Journal* will include one or more reviews of suggested books, with more available on our Web site <http://dau.dodlive.mil/defense-acquisition-professional-reading-program>.

We encourage our readers to submit book reviews they believe should be required reading for the defense acquisition professional. The books themselves should be in print or generally available to a wide audience; address subjects and themes that have broad applicability to defense acquisition professionals; and provide context for the reader, not prescriptive practices. Book reviews should be 450 words or fewer, describe the book and its major ideas, and explain its relevancy to defense acquisition. Please send your reviews to the managing editor, *Defense Acquisition Review Journal* at DefenseARJ@dau.mil.

Featured Book

The American Warfare State: The Domestic Politics of Military Spending

Author: Rebecca U. Thorpe

Publisher: University of Chicago Press

Copyright Date: 2014

Hard/Softcover/Digital: Available in all three media, 245 pages

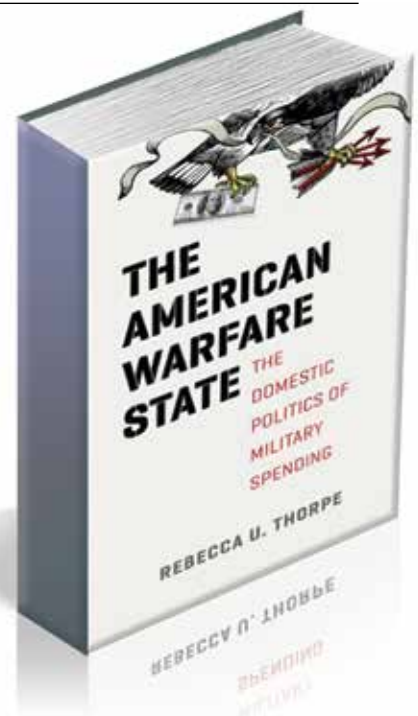
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Reviewed by: Professor Trevor Taylor, Cranfield University, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom



Review:

Most observers would recognize that the size and shape of the U.S. defense budget is determined by more factors than the perceived threats to U.S. security and the endorsed strategy to manage them. This important book focuses largely on one consideration: the concern of members of Congress with defense-related employment in their constituencies.

The broad propositions of the work are that during World War II, defense production became more central to the U.S. economy and moved into new regions. Not least among these were rural areas with few economic opportunities. After 1945, there was a failure to cut defense spending on a significant scale, and more areas became structurally dependent on defense-related jobs. With defense contractors increasingly aware that congressional representatives support programs that bring jobs to their districts, sub-contracting on major programs has been spread farther across the country. The resultant wider constitutional consequences are that Congress has largely given up its constitutional role as a second center of decision making regarding the size of the defense budget and whether the United States should commit to the use of military force.

The author has researched diligently in search of statistical correlations to support her arguments, particularly regarding voting patterns and the geographical dispersion of subcontracts. She has assembled a significant evidence base showing that “the shared threat of economic hardship affects legislative voting on targeted and generalized weapons spending” (p. 106).

Although the following points are not made by the author, U.S. defense contracting appears to have some parallels with the “*juste retour*” principle, whereby the proportion of contracts under a particular program awarded to firms from a given country is in proportion to the funding that country has contributed to the program. This principle tends to operate on collaborative weapons programs in Europe and even with offset demands made by many arms purchasing states. Legislators in many states prefer to see the pain of defense procurement spending reduced by ensuring such expenditures generate as much local economic benefit as possible.

The work is not without flaws: in particular, the ongoing sequestration experience is not analyzed and the author does not venture into big questions that the book’s core arguments will suggest to some readers. Is the division of powers advocated by Founding Father James Madison appropriate in the modern age when speed of decision or credibility of commitment may be of greater importance? How serious was the Soviet/Communist threat

after 1945 that gave public justification for the continued defense effort? Is it an inevitable feature of the capitalist system in the United States that some rural areas will remain underdeveloped compared with other areas of the country? Linked to all this is that the book is short on prescriptions for improving the situation, and there is no discussion of the defense industrial “conversion” efforts that occurred in Europe and elsewhere after 1990. Instead, the book is focused on building, in a terse style, a few significant arguments and effectively reinforces the broad point that defense acquisition is as much about politics as it is about management techniques.