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# U.S. National Security as a Policy Regime

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This work continues and builds on efforts to center the study of national security policy as a field in American and comparative politics and public policy. Given its vast size and manifold consequences, U.S. national security policy gets very little attention in the study of American politics and public policy. The traditional division of labor that kept national security policy predominantly the province and concern of specialists in international relations (IR) eroded after the end of the Cold War but remains a barrier to scholarship and new insights.<sup>1</sup> Few Americanists and comparativists study military policy and IR scholars rarely build their studies of national security around theories of public policy, let alone American or comparative politics (Sapolsky, Gholz and Talmadge, 2014, p. 1).

In turn, national security or military policy is rarely a subject in the policy process literature (Gerston 2004; Miller and Barnes 2004; Moran et al 2006; Guess and Farnham 2000; Kraft and Furlong 2004; Lester and Stewart 2000).<sup>2</sup> This is not a criticism of the field as much as it is another piece of evidence that the study of public policy is dominated by domestic policy, and that the study of security policy continues to be all but relegated to IR-centered journals. When national security or military policy is treated as a category of public policy, it is not typically integrated into general theories of policy-making (e.g. Kolodziej 1983; Hermann 1983). Theories in public policy are rarely built or tested with national security policy in mind. And yet security or military policy can and should be compared to other policy arenas using the same analytic frameworks applied to domestic policies in a way that reveals both similarities and differences.<sup>3</sup>

This paper draws from a wide range of contributions to the study of the politics of public policy to develop a set of variables that shape the formation of policy in any area – variables that define and characterize a policy regime -- and then uses these variables to explicate the characteristics of the national security or military policy regime. How have we theorized and conceptualized the forces at work in the policy-making process? What makes national security policy different from or similar to other areas of public policy? I will show that security/military policy is both more similar to the politics of domestic policies than some theories from IR imagine and yet also critically different from some domestic policy arenas or regimes in the ways that can inform and refine comparative and Americanist theories of public policy. This combination of similarities and differences, I argue, produces both a bias toward hawkish policies and excessive spending and a higher potential for volatility relative to other realms of public policy.

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<sup>1</sup> In some ways the aftermath of 9/11 reinforced the old separations with the dramatic resurgence of IR-centric perspectives on national security policy. Other aspects of the Bush presidency and national security policies, however, prompted considerable attention to the politics of national security at several levels,

<sup>2</sup> From 2001 through 2014 *Policy Studies Journal* published 12 articles that touched in any way on military or security policy, and four of those were about homeland security after 9/11, and only one was directly about DoD policy, but in this case DoD energy policy. In the *Journal of Public Policy* only seven articles from 1981-2009, twenty-nine years covering the Reagan buildup, the end of the Cold War, and the wars and Bush buildup after 9/11, had anything to do with military or non-economic foreign policy either in the U.S. or elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> Durant and Diehl (1989) provide somewhat of a parallel to this paper with their analysis of foreign policy, which builds on John Kingdon's distinction between agenda setting and alternative specification in the policy process.

Thus, I make three interrelated theoretical claims and contributions. First, I build on the regime perspective on public policy formation by advancing a set of comparative characteristics or variables that define a policy regime. Second, this more nuanced set of variables allows us to see the parts acting as a whole, as a configuration that produces a kind of politics, in contrast to attempts that attempt to weigh the relative influence of independent variables in a theory or model. In so doing I make a contribution to understanding military/national security policy formation more generally by situating its study substantively and theoretically in American politics and policy rather than in IR or yet another attempt to compare and contrast IR and domestic explanations.

National security is a broad term that can encompass far more than the potential for or use of military force, including much of foreign policy, energy policy, immigration and even other areas. It is also, as a result, a politically contested term. What I might define as national security could be less or more expansive than someone else's definition. For the purposes of this paper and the analytic claims it will make about this particular policy regime, I will focus on the military aspects of national security policy, by which I mean the choices of strategy, resource commitment, and material components for the potential or actual employment of martial force beyond the nation's borders.<sup>4</sup> Hereinafter I will use the terms national security policy and military policy interchangeably.

The ongoing dominance of studies of military policy by specialists in international relations continues to frustrate the integration of national security issues into the study of both comparative and American politics, including American political.<sup>5</sup> Too often studies of national security, insofar as they incorporate domestic politics, still do so as part of a longstanding debate over the relative influence of international versus domestic causes in the formation military or foreign policy (for recent examples: Narizny 2007, Trubowitz 2011, Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2012). That is an important debate but it is not the puzzle for this paper, in part because I think it is undeniable that domestic politics are required often to explain what international variables underdetermine. Instead of starting from yet another version of a dichotomy between international and domestic variables, this paper consciously escapes that binary by specifying the characteristics of military policy as a policy regime and then showing how the often combined effects of the attributes tend to push military policy in a particular direction.

Instead of seeing how much domestic politics can be brought into the IR-dominated study of military policy, I start by conceptualizing military policy as a form of public policy. This means we start with the central perspectives on and contributions to the study of the policy process generally to categorize military policy as a policy arena – how is it similar to

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<sup>4</sup> I use "martial" to connote warlike as a way to encompass some categories of covert operations and new forms of military action, such as cyber warfare, in addition to more traditional forms of military force.

<sup>5</sup> For exceptions see *inter alia*, Katznelson and Shefter 2002 and Friedberg 2000. More generally, there is a relatively small but notable school of scholarship on the politics of national security policy, stretching from Huntington 1961 to some recent works, some of which I cite in this paper. Benjamin Fordham (1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008a, 2008b) has been one of most prolific in this field. For a discussion of the methodological debates at the intersection of domestic and international politics, see Wirls 2006.

and different from other arenas? With this in mind, I begin by reviewing theories of public policy formation and the ways military policy has or has not been integrated into those theoretical perspectives.

### **Theories of the Policy Process and Policy Regimes**

Theories of public policy, and here I am limiting the discussion to theories and analysis that focus on policy formation rather than implementation or evaluation, generally attempt to characterize or capture the policy process across arenas. How is the policy process (or some important part of it) best characterized, theorized, modeled? How is policy produced? Rational actor theory, variations on multiple streams or garbage can models, path-dependency and punctuated equilibrium, policy-diffusion, advocacy coalition frameworks, constructivist approaches, and models based on ideas of arenas of power: versions of these and others compete or complement in this realm (e.g. Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Sabatier 1999; Birkland 2001; Fischer 2003). Several have roots in pluralism and the politics of interest group liberalism. These are not, in the main, theories of power or bias; that is, they do not make explicit claims about expected outcomes and who or what is favored by the process. In fact, most are best characterized as analytic frameworks or models rather than theories insofar as they provide a description of the policy process in terms of generalized variables but without hypothesizing a predictive set of relationships among the variables (Sabatier 1999, 5-6).

The analysis of “policy regimes” is another such approach. Wilson (2000, pp. 257-58) sees policy regimes as consisting of the power and array of interests, the dominant policy paradigm or ideas about policy in that arena, the arrangement of decision-making institutions, and finally the nature of the policy or policies at work in the regime. Similarly, according to May and Jochim, the policy regime perspective highlights “the roles of four key attributes—issues, ideas, interests, and institutions—in regime formation and change” (2010: 309). As a result, “[t]he policy regime lens entails different thinking about the unit of analysis for studying policies. Rather than starting with a policy, one starts with a particular set of problems—crime, environmental harms, illegal immigration, terrorism, and so on—and seeks to depict the ideas, institutional arrangements, and interests that constitute the governing arrangements for dealing with the problem” (May and Jochim, 2013, p. 429).<sup>6</sup>

My own thinking about the “domestic realism” of military policy -- that military or national security policy is a product of national politics in which international variables play a politically and socially constructed role -- drew me toward the policy regime perspective. The analysis of policy regimes has the merit of getting past pitting one independent variable against another, which is a typical problem with the IR-domestic politics debate. Instead, does a particular regime, which is defined by the collective relationship among the variables, produce a bias or set of tendencies in decision-making in that issue arena?

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<sup>6</sup> May and Jochim are concerned more with regime “strength” as in quality rather than power but their formulation does not preclude its use as a lens on power.

As May and Jochim also note the “label policy regimes...remains underconceptualized” (2013, p. 428). For the regime concept to have analytic utility it must reveal some comparative effect of the regime. May and Jochim use the regime perspective to evaluate the “strength” or quality of the policy process if not the policy itself. For example, U.S. homeland security policy, they argue, has developed into an “anemic” regime due to the arrangement of ideas, interests, and institutions (2013, pp. 438-40; May, Jochim, and Sapotichne, 2011). So the strength or weakness of a regime is a comparative dimension, even if more could be done to clarify the metrics for assessing relative strength. By contrast, I will argue for using a policy regime approach to understanding the politics of an issue arena. Can we use the regime concept to better theorize and assess the political bias or tendency of a policy arena. As Schattschneider famously put it, any form of “organization is a mobilization of bias in preparation for action” (1975, p. 30). Can we delineate the constellation of ideas, interests, institutions, and policies in a systematic way such that we can make comparisons across regimes as arenas of power? To that end, this paper focuses on the delineation of a more clearly defined set of variables that define any policy regime.

Policy regimes as the combination of ideas, interests, institutions, and issues/policies can be more precisely specified, I think, as the following five variables, which draw as well from the variety of theories of the policy process:

1. Discursive Context: Ideological Construction and Issue Framing
2. Policy Set and Trajectory: The Character and History of Policy or Policies
3. Social Agency: The Organization and Relative Power of “Domestic” Social Forces
4. External or Sovereign Agency: The Presence and Power of “External” Actors
5. Governmental Agency: The Structure and Distribution of Authority and Power

Each variable represents or draws on one or more of the policy-relevant approaches just outlined and is a more specific way of conceptualizing the ideas, interests, institutions, and issues of a regime. As we will see in greater detail, discursive context gets at both the degree to which a policy arena is affected by durable ideological constructions and subject to significant framing effects shaped by the dominant ideology. Policy trajectory, the depth and breadth of policy structures in an arena, is derived primarily from historical institutionalism. Is a regime deeply rooted in a set of embedded policies or is it of recent origins or with fragmented policies? Social agency and interests is broad, but I will put an emphasis on the theories of the distribution, location, and psychology of policy costs and benefits, derived primarily but not exclusively from rationalist approaches. External or sovereign agency is of course directly related to IR’s central concern with the interaction among more or less autonomous actors in a system governed by weak or non-existent rules of engagement, but redefined to fit a more general policy framework – that is all policy arenas can be affected by the presence or absence of external agents and sovereign agency. Governmental agency combines a traditional concern with formal powers and their distribution (both within the central government, across levels of government, and

bureaucratic power) with the insights of rational and historical institutionalism. How does the distribution of decision-making authority and influence affect the policy process in a regime?

By applying these variables we will see that military policy features several characteristics that can be compared to other arenas but which in combination differentiate it from nearly any other issue or policy arena and produce what I will later describe as the bias in military policy making.

### **What is Being Explained: Stages of Decision-Making and Levels of Policy**

Before turning to the (independent) variables and their relationships, I should discuss the kinds of things being explained or at least elucidated by such a policy regime perspective. The power of a particular theory or explanation is linked to what is sometimes called the dependent variable problem. One difficulty of the research enterprise can be the vast number of approaches to what turn out to be slightly different problems; that is, a variety of independent variables explaining somewhat different dependent variables (e.g. Howlett and Cashore 2009). One might be trying to explain outcomes at different stages of the policy process, as in Kingdon's four levels of agenda-setting, alternative specification, an authoritative choice among alternatives, and implementation (Kingdon, 1995, pp. 2-3). One might be examining a specific and discreet decision (the Star Wars speech; Truman and Korea) or a more complicated process (such as privatization, in which there are a host of decisions that comprise the phenomenon).

Some of the debate about explanations in military policy-making, and nearly any policy arena, stems from this classic apples and oranges problem. Truman's decision about how to respond to the invasion of South Korea is undeniably a different type of policy-making from Congress's decisions to close or preserve military installations. Bush's decision to add "preemption" to national strategic doctrine is not the same as Congress's fight to preserve funding for the Crusader program. To help clarify this, military policy can and should be broken down into levels or layers, each related to the other but not as subsets or governed by a causal hierarchy. Even Durant and Diehl (1989) do not explicitly cite the problem of different types of levels of decisions. Their examples cut across levels but are mostly from the elite/presidential level to make their point that foreign policy can be different because of constitutional roles (due deference, secrecy, discretion, crisis). But they do not comment directly on the levels issue or differentiate policy cases on that basis. One of the few who does, Samuel Huntington distinguishes between strategy and structure in military policy (1961, pp. 3-4). I would divide structure into two to create three categories:

*1. Strategic Policy.* This level includes overall strategic posture (such as Flexible Response, Preemption, an overall structuring scenario such as the two-war commitment), and the specific doctrines or programmatic orientations that implement the overall posture (counterinsurgency, an emphasis on transformation, etc.). Decision-making during major crises is part of this category as well. Strategic policy is typically the most executive-centered area of military policy-making.

2. *Resource Commitment.* Whatever the grand strategy and overall strategic posture, there is the size and overall shape of the budgetary commitment to the military. As Huntington notes, the two should be related but they are not always in harmony; strategic vision and doctrine might be one thing and the budget to implement them quite another.<sup>7</sup> For example, the resource commitment for the military is here most clearly in competition with other priorities in Huntington's great equation (1961, pp. 197-98). The Pentagon's requirements are in competition with fiscal policy in general and domestic programs in particular.

3. *Program Components.* Strategic policy and the resource commitment often determine but do not always dictate the myriad specific decisions regarding personnel, operations and maintenance, R&D, and procurement. Does "transformation" require the Crusader mobile cannon? Does the Joint Strike Fighter require a second source of engines? Can O&M be trimmed to make room for a pay increase? It is here that congressional politics, logrolling, porkbarrel, interest groups, lobbying are often in full swing even if not always decisive.

This clarifies why it is hard to generalize from one theory of policy-making. It is easy enough to find high politics (elite, idea-driven, executive-centric) at the level of grand strategy and even easier to find low politics (bureaucratic, legislative, bargaining, logrolling, interests) at the level of decisions about particular weapons systems, for example. In fact, Spanier and Uslaner (1978) argue that rational actor models often best explain crisis decision-making but that bureaucratic models often best explain more general policy-making.

Whatever the merits of that claim and related claims, this paper argues that the characteristics of the military policy regime cut across various levels of decisions within military policy and that these combined and interrelated characteristics can and often do affect the politics of decision-making whether it is centered in the White House, Congress, or the Pentagon.

### **Discursive Context: Ideological Construction and Issue Framing**

Several perspectives on the policy process emphasize the importance of ideas, even if ideas, per se, remain difficult to pin down as either independent or dependent variables. In particular, social construction has been used as a policy framework (Schneider and Ingram, 1993, 1997; Ingram, Schneider, and deLeon, 2007; Pierce et al, 2014). And as noted, the regime perspective includes ideas as one of fundamental elements that define a regime. In international regime theory issue regimes "contain shared principles, norms, and beliefs" (Wilson, 2000, p. 256). And more generally, "[i]deas can be thought of as a set of political commitments that provide the substance to a given regime's governing activities" shaping institutions and interests (Jochim and May, 2010, p. 312; e.g. Lieberman 2002).

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<sup>7</sup> Examples abound, including the material force behind the Monroe Doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary, the status of NSC-68 before the Korean War, the Base Force and Bottom-Up Review after the Cold War.

These general definitions all imply that regimes are in part defined by some level of shared beliefs about an issue area. But what is the nature of those beliefs and how much do they matter? Those might be difficult questions to answer but they are crucial to understanding the regime in question. That is, ideas are not just a generic factor but a variable. The coherence and direction of beliefs might vary considerably across regimes. Some might be characterized by little coherence and no strong direction; others by consistently held beliefs and a consistent direction. What about U.S. national security?

The U.S. national security regime is characterized by a nearly 70-year ideological commitment to a wide array of policies that have maintained the world's most potent war-making apparatus, a consensus that regardless of details the U.S. must be the world's preeminent military power. The structure and politics of the military regime were dramatically different for the first 150 years or so of the nation's history when there was not a substantial or overarching goal of superiority and no substantial material commitment. The decades-old and unquestioned assumption that the U.S. retains its comparative preeminence in military power shapes American military policy in ways that are as profound as they are unacknowledged.

For our purposes it is important to emphasize the unique character of this national goal and mission compared to other U.S. policy arenas and in comparison to other nations' security regimes. No comparable zeal or mission is as evident in other nations, and no other arena of U.S. policy is so affected by a relatively consistent national mission. The advanced liberal democracies, in fact, happily cede primacy to the U.S. and their politics are that much less freighted and constricted as a result. In domestic policy a president might launch a war on poverty on drugs, or for energy independence, or invoke a New Deal or Great Society, or a return to normalcy and less government -- the domestic goal is in regular flux and typically highly contested; military commitments vary somewhat over time but remain structured by a mission that might be more dormant or active but never denied. Moreover, there is nothing analogous in other arenas to having military superiority; the U.S. certainly does not try to be first in health care and lags significantly in any meaningful measure of educational success. So powerful is this commitment that it is taken for granted. No other policy regime has such a simple and overarching imperative. U.S. military policy is characterized by a singular purpose that has been in place for about one third of the nation's history.

Well before the rise of various theories of culture and constructivism, studies in history and comparative politics showed that national security and military affairs often invoke powerful effects of nationalism that not only fuel war abroad but also displace or modify domestic conflicts. In the American case the identity has a particular character. The nature of American nationalism is often mentioned in discussions of U.S. foreign and military policy, but not as a point of comparison to other forms of public policy. This nationalist identity has been organized historically around powerful and enduring conceptions of America's exceptional character and universalist mission in the world (Hartz 1955; MacDougal 1997; Mead 2002; Lieven 2004; McCartney 2005; Bacevich 2005, 9-33; Smith 2007). Based on a mix of historical fact and cultural mythology, American nationalism is periodically aroused in the form of a crusading spirit to remake the world. Related to but



also transcending the nationalist impulse, is the tendency for national security issues and policy to evoke jingoistic rhetoric, simplistic binaries (strength versus weakness), and empty tropes (the national interest, for example). Not that such things always work, especially over the long run, but they constitute, along with some of the other factors discussed, a contrast to the political possibilities and propensities in other policy arenas.

Even if difficult to pin down conceptually let alone operationalize and measure, political culture and national identity shape – in John Kingdon’s terms -- problem identification, agenda setting, and alternative specification across policy arenas (Kingdon, 1995). That is, what we see as a problem, how problems are defined and prioritized, and the range of possible solutions can be deeply affected by the ideological context. This affects a policy arena in two ways. A dominant ideology in a policy arena is an embedded and self-reproducing social construction, an ongoing bias, that shapes political discourse and action. It forms most of the background assumptions for policy consideration. Related to this are shorter term “frames” in specific policy debates. We can think of ideological constructions as the dominant beliefs that shape the arena, while a frame is a short term social construction produced by agents around a particular event or proposal. Both are at work and almost always a tight relationship. That is, to be effective at this level on a major issue, a frame must harmonize with a dominant ideological construction. In the realm of U.S. security policy both the dominant social constructions and the frames typically based on the premises and assumptions of those constructions are biased toward reproducing a commitment to U.S. primacy and hawkish policies that are perceived as protecting that primacy.

Some social constructions, such as a long-standing nationalist ideology, are so deeply rooted that even elites seem captured by it. Their agency is limited largely to actions and words that largely reproduce and reinforce the construction. From the critical constructivist perspective, “Constructions of reality reflect, enact, and reify relations of power. In turn, certain agents or groups of agents play a privileged role in the production and reproduction of these realities” (Weldes et al, 1999, 13). And in the realm of national security discourses are particularly “sites of social power” because of the institutional authority of the national security apparatus and the perception of security as an issue especially under state control (Weldes et al, 1999, 17-18). Following this line of critical constructivism, my argument is that agents compete within a bounded range of imaginaries or constructions. If culture means anything, it’s that even powerful agents cannot pick and choose among identities, imaginaries, etc. Major crises and other disruptions might provide elites or movements with the opportunity to reshape and reconstruct a dominant cultural construct, but again the agency is circumscribed by events beyond direct control.

The United States had a battle royal over the bailout of the auto industry and the TARP program in the recession of 2008, when at the same time the \$1 trillion in extra spending for the wars, and the endless profiteering that went with it, had gone all but unquestioned. Why? Most readers answered that question by the time they finished the preceding sentence. Americans have never abandoned the idea of limited government as far as the economy, no matter what the exceptions. In fact, neoliberalism represents a significant resurgence of that ideology in the face of the welfare and regulatory states. Neoliberalism

does not apply, however, to national security, except insofar as aspects of a privatized military can be used for private gain (which if anything pushes for more military spending). It is not that the policies and spending associated with national security are never questioned, but it is almost never on the basis of its being to whatever extent “un-American.” As Alan Grayson pointed out in 2012, “we have 27 Attorneys General challenging the constitutionality of 35 million Americans getting health coverage, but no one challenges the constitutionality of an undeclared war... that has now entered its second decade.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Policy Set and Trajectory: Types and Character of the Policy or Policies**

By definition a policy regime is organized around an issue or set of related issues and the responses to those issues. A policy regime can be categorized by whether it is an ongoing policy arena or new one and by the nature of the policy commitment in the arena. As James Q. Wilson argued the politics of an issue area are affected by whether what is under consideration is a new or ongoing policy (Wilson 1989). The politics are also affected by the types of policies (distributive, regulatory, redistributive, etc) that have been used or are being proposed as the solution to the problem.

Some areas or arenas are broader and more complex, such as national security, even when narrowed to a focus on what I have defined as military policy. Military policy is composed of rather different layers or types of policy, everything from authorization of war, whether and how many F35s to build, to what combat positions are available to women (to say nothing of such things as military pay and benefits). Social Security, a very costly and vast program, by contrast is comparatively simple in the layers and dimensions of policy types – the Social Security administration is redistributive and cuts checks. I will discuss policy complexity in greater detail later in the paper. For now the point is that despite the complexity of the military policy regime, it is characterized by an unusual type of policy commitment and trajectory.

In the case of U.S. security the discursive context is inextricably related to the types and character of the policies in this arena. The ideological commitment to being the world’s number one military power is manifested in vast and complex material reality of the American warfare state. The policy set and trajectory emphasizes the nature of the policies and material commitment in scope, variety, and duration. Military policy features a strong and unambiguous link between an overriding objective and a mammoth material commitment to achieve that objective. The emphasis is on the material components of the policy arena and the extent to which they create a path-dependent policy anchor that limits the potential for policy change.

Policy trajectory is a cause as well as an effect. Chris Preble (2009) demonstrates this with what he labels the “power problem” of U.S. military policy. It is the inflated military power itself that leads to distorted uses of that power, such as the war in Iraq. Yet the system is biased toward maintaining that power. The distortional impact of the ex ante comparative position of preeminence in military capability leads to imprudent decisions and then

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<sup>8</sup> Grayson for Congress (email), 9 May 2012.

supports the continuation of bad policies (to retain the perception of preeminence). And around we go. In this way, the policy trajectory is a form of path dependency in which the embedded material commitment and policies bolster a supporting ideology, which in turn bolsters the material position and policies. There is no analogy in domestic policy or even a metric for how this would affect non-military foreign policy or the State Department's status.

To return to the example of Social Security, it is mammoth and has a discernible purpose, but in recent decades its purpose or overriding goal has at times seemed to be less about providing a secure retirement for many Americans (already a very compromised and flexible goal) than about the sustainability of the program. Other areas are more multiplex without a clear core or (e.g. energy, education, environment). Health care offers another example. Here a highly entrenched combination of private and public health care insurance or coverage forms a powerful material commitment, but one with only a rather loosely defined goal. Instead the material commitment, the policy trajectory shapes and sometimes destroys attempts to reform it.

As we will see, the policy trajectory is related to the organization and power of interests. If policy structures interests, then a long-term policy builds interests and relationships and embeds them powerfully. But they are not the same. The organization and power of interests is the cross-sectional view of the forces at work in a policy arena as affected by such things as the distribution of costs and benefits at that time. The policy trajectory is the longitudinal commitment behind the snapshot.

Military power measured by financial commitment is one example of this at work. Any decrease in spending is interpretable as a threat to security and preeminence. We do not measure energy security by what the government spends because the government is there just to help the market not replace it. In other areas federalism obscures this relationship – states might have debates about their relative rank in education spending, but this does not happen at the national level. The military is the one area of public policy that allows national politicians to embrace both high spending and tax cuts without getting into even philosophical trouble. This is different from many other policy arenas and different from other countries. As no other country is in this position, they define national security less in terms of financial commitment.

U.S. nationalism is in part defined and sustained by military superiority (and perhaps increasingly so as other measures of U.S. power deteriorate). The material position helps to shape the social response. In the abstract, superiority might be a sensible conclusion. But its reality and duration has had distortional effects as politicians and policy makers resort to tropes, clichés, and tradition instead of analysis, and rarely feel compelled to justify what is taken for granted.

### **The Organization and Relative Power of Social Forces: The Distribution, Location, and Psychology of Policy Costs and Benefits**

Another attribute of policy regimes is the array and power of interests. Almost implicit in the concept of a policy regime is the claim that the attributes of the policy or policies in the

issue area affect its politics. A line of analysis originating with E.E. Schattschneider and Theodore Lowi, the notion that “policy produces politics” was given further traction with James Q. Wilson’s classification based on the distribution of the costs and benefits of policy types (Lowi 1964 and 1972; Wilson 1992, 433-437; Arnold 1990; Schneider and Ingram 1997, pp. 70-72). For purposes of comparing the military policy regime to other policy arenas I will utilize and build on Wilson’s framework.

The distribution of the costs and benefits of military and national security policy is typically thought of as quite general or universal, producing in Wilson’s terms majoritarian politics. The costs are distributed across all taxpayers. The benefits are often portrayed as similarly general – we are all made equally secure or insecure by national military policy and the benefits of that are indivisible. Looking at the costs and benefits of national defense as general is often politically relevant and powerful – we are all in this together and politics stops at the water’s edge -- but not entirely true in most cases. Military policy produces rather concentrated and particularized group and geographic benefits. While other policy arenas (agriculture, energy, transportation) involve this kind of client politics (again, Wilson’s terminology), the sums and industry impact are trivial by comparison.<sup>9</sup> What other source of federal funding provides such direct geographically/group concentrated benefits but under a universal justification?

This distribution of costs and benefits powerfully affects the array of social forces and organized interests at work in military policy. The multitude of forces at work pushing for, or receptive to, militarism, whether in a mild or more pernicious form, is ubiquitous and powerful, and often organized (Snyder 1991). This might not be an iron triangle--that is, an unbreakable set of interests linking military contractors, Pentagon bureaucrats, and members of Congress--but it is constituted by powerful interconnected social and political actors and institutions. The *potential* interests that could be arrayed against militarism are relatively weak and unorganized; most do not even see militarism (at least publicly) as the enemy or competition. The logrolls that connect the forces in favor of militarism are relatively easy to get going and self-perpetuating. There is, by contrast, nothing like an iron triangle for peace.<sup>10</sup> The interests that receive concentrated group or geographic benefits are already organized or motivated to organize in defense of their programs while the ordinary taxpayer has no such incentive short of a policy failure of historic proportions. In some ways a parallel can be made to the often conflict-free arena of agriculture policy. Consumers are a latent force that can be aroused and one that members of Congress are

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<sup>9</sup> By some measures, the Pentagon accounts for over 20% of all research and development funding in the United States and military spending is a significant factor in many industries’ well being. Bases are another source of geographically concentrated benefits. It is these group and geographic beneficiaries who form the hawkish logroll lobby to be discussed below. In no other area of public policy is the government so heavily involved in sponsoring research (Pentagon R&D is about 75% of all federal R&D) and buying goods and services across the nation.

<sup>10</sup> While few would disagree that the forces in support of greater military spending are more numerous, mobilized and organized, and that the potential opposition is usually just that, potential, some have made arguments that, at another level of generalization, the American system and political culture have retarded the potential scope and size of the military establishment in the United States (Friedberg 2000).

mindful of, but it takes a market meltdown to arouse consumer awareness and stir members of Congress into action (Arnold 1990, 123-128).

### ***Location, Location, Location***

Related to the distribution of costs and benefits are the location of the problem being addressed and the location of the policy effects, and here things are radically different from most other policy arenas. The location of the problem--the threat, the enemy--is displaced; it is elsewhere (Wiris, 2010, p. 12; Thorpe, 2014). This has at least two notable effects that make it important to distinguish the spatial or geographic aspects from the more straightforward distribution of domestic costs and benefits discussed above.

First, the physical violence of military policy and many of the related externalities are exported and visited on other nations and their citizens. Many of the negative effects of military policy are halfway around the globe, and that matters even in the media age. A particular U.S. citizen might be an unlikely victim of violent crime but nevertheless behave in ways that imply otherwise because of news coverage, fictional TV crime series, or cop reality shows. Few if any American citizens worry about air strikes and IEDs as a potential threat in their daily lives, however aware of and concerned about U.S. policy they might be. This is related to Douglas Arnold's concept of proximity and its potential impact on the politics of policy (1990, 29). Moreover, within the United States many of the most dangerous elements and externalities of military policy (pollution, radiation, weapons testing) are, sensibly enough, located far from population centers, which further decreases direct experience and knowledge and lowers potential opposition to these aspects.

Second, the location of policy effects is an important factor in the relative lack of public knowledge of these issues. As an American citizen, at least, one is much more likely to have experienced health care, crime, taxes, environmental regulations than anything about naval deployments, imperialism, depleted uranium, foreign bases and troops in one's neighborhood, drones, collateral damage, and so forth. Military policy, at least as far as its external effects, is typically characterized by ignorance and relative indifference. The high level of ignorance found in public opinion surveys about Americans' knowledge of the world is complemented by the lack of influence world issues (foreign policy, national security, etc) seem to have on voting behavior in most U.S. elections.

### ***The Social Construction and Psychology of Costs and Benefits: Rational Calculations and Prospect Theory***

One problem with the Lowi-Wilson approach is that it is difficult to fix policies in one box or the other, as I've already implied, because policy types are partly political. The costs and benefits at stake are not immutable facts but socially and politically constructed interpretations (Steinberger, 1980). Politicians and interested parties can and do fight over the perception of costs and benefits all the time – it is, of course, one of the central tactics of politics. But military policy, however much a subject of this type of political combat, is not infrequently cast in Manichean terms that no other major area of public policy (even much

of foreign policy) can match.<sup>11</sup> The perceptions of the costs and benefits in the realm of national security are often quite dramatic. What is at stake? Whether an illusion or not, blood and treasure, the homeland, the free world. In what other area of public policy (except aspects of foreign policy), however exaggerated at times, are the potential costs and benefits so profound, again at least in how they are often portrayed and perceived? Outside the United States some nation's economic policies might take on that character insofar as they become fundamental matters of national sovereignty or survival. In the United States no other area of policy has that standing. Even if one argues that as part of a broader conception of national security this status should be shared with such things as the environment or health care, it isn't.

This emphasis on the political interpretation or social construction of costs and benefits in policy regimes entails some other important additions to the cost/benefit framework. Policy benefits and costs measured in terms of success or failure have a particular character in military policy. As far as national security the potential costs of even *perceived* failure are often extraordinarily high, whether the perception is international, domestic, or both. In a version of the two-level game, decision-makers weigh the perceptions of policy success or failure in the eyes of both international and domestic audiences, and either or both can be crucial (Putnam, 1988).

For example, in what other policy arena is the possibility of failure, even if the homeland is in no way in jeopardy as a result, an argument for continuation of the same policy? Or perhaps a better way to say this: In what other policy arena is the preservation of national credibility a powerful argument for continuing a policy as much or more than the original purpose or goal, or more than the actual or potential consequences of failure?

The party or president in power assesses the international implications as much or more in terms of the potential costs at home in domestic prestige and credibility. In both cases, international and domestic perception, there is a fear of loss of prestige or credibility. Will my presidency or our party suffer if we are held to be responsible for this failure abroad, regardless of its actual international impact? This results in a high tolerance for sunk costs and, according to prospect theory, a disposition by policymakers to undertake (and domestic audiences to support or abide) risks to recover (or at least create the perception of having recovered) sunk costs through a mitigating outcome (McDermott, 1998; Masters and Alexander, 2008). As a result, there is a "must act, must persist" syndrome in national security that is not nearly as strong in most other policy arenas. There are strong incentives in the realm of national security to take action in the face of a threat and once action is taken, there are strong political incentives (due to both domestic and international perceptions) to persist.

This "must act, must persist" syndrome is reinforced by the psychology of threat reduction. As John Mueller notes, "Disproved doomsayers can always claim that caution induced by their warnings prevented the predicted calamity from occurring. (Call it the Y2K effect.)"

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<sup>11</sup> In the United States one can argue that abortion is another example. In recent years we have witnessed, of course, increasingly apocalyptic rhetoric about such things as health care.

Disproved pollyannas have no such convenient refuge..." (2005, pp. 227). Moreover, the incorrect doomsayers might not have to bother with any retrospective rationalization whatsoever: in many cases nonevents are not subject to retroactive analysis. If something goes wrong, then it is possible not enough was done to prepare or prevent. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult for skeptics to criticize hawkish statements or material preparations insofar as one's publicized doubts become part of the calculus of deterrence and credibility -- one's utterance might undermine the policy. Even without a crisis it is often easier to persuade citizens to support preparations against plausible threats from foreign actors than against probable natural disasters. This is in part because unlike with natural threats, the preparations for military threats are frequently tied to a theory of deterrence and national credibility. Such preparations, even if hollow or misdirected, might work, and in most cases are protected by nonfalsifiability -- if they work (no attack or war), QED.

As a result, most politicians are motivated to become threat entrepreneurs, threat acceptors, or passive bystanders who fail to actively contradict the threat. The potential costs of being at least passively on the side of hawkish caution are relatively low. Far fewer find it in their interest to contradict and oppose the perception of a threat or the hawkish means proposed to deal with it (e.g. Cavanaugh 2007-2008; Fettweis, 2007-2008; Davidson 2008).

Finally, this is unlike most other issues in the United States where the creation or identification of enemies and problems and the formulation of policies typically means setting one sector of America or Americans against another. The invocation of communism, the Soviet Union, rogue states, or international terrorism does not pit--typically--region against region, race against race, city against country, business against labor.<sup>12</sup> National security, in this way, is not the Super Bowl, but the World Cup.

A comparison of the costs and benefits of foreign (concentrating on what the State Department oversees and implements) versus military policy reinforces these points about costs and benefits. Although there is often considerable overlap between foreign and military policy, the two have different characteristics or effects. The U.S. is notable for the vast disparity between the material aspects of its foreign versus its military policy. Miniscule by comparison to military spending, foreign aid has external impacts that are often small when compared to the externalities of military policy, whether positive or negative. The positive effects of most foreign aid are felt abroad and remote to the American public. Foreign aid has a limited and usually indirect domestic impact (and this is one reason it has rather tenuous political support, and is so small). Military policy, by contrast, has an enormous domestic material impact. Whereas military policy maximizes positive domestic material effects and minimizes negative domestic externalities, foreign policy's positive externalities are international and weak while its domestic material impact is weak to nonexistent. Likewise, it is not hard to argue that ordinary foreign policies (Israel, Central America, immigration, Armenia-Turkey) sometimes mobilize

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<sup>12</sup> For a contrasting perspective based on the history and importance of economic sectionalism in U.S. history, see Trubowitz 1998.

domestic cleavages that destabilize political expectations and coalitions; military policy, short of war, rarely does this.

The organization of interests and the distribution and location of the mostly material costs and benefits of military policy bias the process toward hawkish policy and greater spending. This does not mean and is not meant to imply, however, that the organized interests in this arena constitute a military-industrial complex with overweening influence on outcomes in this policy arena. The material interests that comprise what might be called a military industrial complex are often depicted as a causal force: they make things happen that otherwise would not. In some cases, that no doubt is true. Overall, however, I see a different pattern of cause and effect at work. The “unwarranted influence” to which President Eisenhower alerted us is more contingent. The military-industrial complex, such as it is, does not produce the propensity or predisposition for war or even hawkish policies short of conflict, as much as war or hawkish policies (driven primarily by political decisions) produce an opening for the military-industrial coalition to take advantage of the biases built into the system that favor, over the long run, hawkish policies. The complex could not stop the end of the Cold War or the drawdown that followed. Nor could the complex ignite an equivalent of a new cold war so soon after the end of the old one; that required the coincidence of 9/11 and an ideologically driven administration (Wirles, 2010). The powerful interests benefitting from high levels of military spending draw upon and bolster their support from natural allies in government, particularly Congress. This is not so different, perhaps, from other arenas of policy with powerful vested interests, but as noted earlier, the economic impact of the military budget is without equal.

### **Sovereign Agency: The Presence and Power of “External” Actors and Actions**

Discussions of “interests” in politics and policy theory and analysis concentrate almost exclusively on, for lack of a better term, “domestic” interests; that is, citizens, groups, corporations, and so forth whose political influence takes place within the structures of a nation’s laws. Related to but separate from the interests which operate totally or primarily under the authority or by recognition of a sovereign, are those agents who are themselves more or less sovereign, that is, able to act independently of a particular nation’s laws and impinge on its autonomy. This conception of sovereign agency parallels Durant and Diehl’s (1989) idea of “international partisanship” as a factor in the politics of foreign policy. That is, other nations and external actors are constraints on and shapers of U.S. policy. Sovereign agency is a more general way of categorizing the variety of global and international forces that IR tends to lump under the conceptually biased and constricted rubric of international anarchy and the demands it puts on state behavior.

Conceptually, sovereign agents and agency can be seen as another form of “interests” affecting the policy process. They are significantly different, however, for two reasons. First, sovereign agency is different from internal agency. North Korea can invade South Korea; Iran can produce nuclear weapons; Al-Qaeda can attack the United States (or any other country); pirates can take hostages for ransom. Domestic agents, by contrast, must work almost exclusively through the legal avenues of the participation structured by the sovereign, in this case, the United States government. There are, of course, domestic agents – criminals -- that act outside the law but are subject to it nonetheless. Neither Lockheed



Martin nor AIPAC can start a war on its own even if wanted to. Second, sovereign agents' actions and interests are less often structured directly by the costs and benefits of another sovereign's security policies. For example, France's (more typical among nations than the U.S.) military policies do not impact the interests and actions of many sovereign entities. Even U.S. most military policies, those short of the use of force, are indirect in their impact. A decision to pivot to Asia or hold joint military exercises with South Korea may or may not affect China or Thailand, for example, and does not necessarily alter North Korea's intentions.

Sovereign agency implicates the role of "exogenous events" central to theories of the policy process and political change more generally. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 can be thought of as a classic external event, that is, a crisis that then fundamentally alters the politics of a policy arena. This example is of course the direct action of a sovereign agent, and most such "events" in the realm of national security are. Other policy arenas might be affected by more or less agent-less events, such floods, droughts, and plagues. Such "events" – whether agentic or not -- matter greatly, as the history of public policy in many times, places, and arenas, has shown us (e. g. Mayhew 2007). But I don't think random agentless events compose a distinct comparative variable, whereas the sovereign agency does. As Durant and Diehl argue the combination of sovereign agency (what they call international partisanship) and the more executive-centered decision-making (to be discussed below) in this regime, "render its alternative specification (and agenda setting) processes relatively more volatile than in domestic policy" (1989, p. 190). Compared to more stable domestic policy regimes, there is greater potential for actions or events produced by sovereign agents to result in relatively rapid policy shifts led by executive action.

Sovereign agency is conceptually distinct and important for another reason. Not only can sovereign agents affect the policy process in ways distinct from domestic interests, they are, of course, the targets or objects of national security or military policy, unlike most policy arenas that target domestic agents. Foreign policy shares this characteristic. But some things that are in or overlap with foreign policy, such as trade or immigration, are simultaneously inward and outward in their orientation, often targeting some domestic actors and with domestic ends in mind. The vast majority of other policy arenas are domestic as far as both the targets of the policy and the goal they are intended to achieve. Military policy is directed exclusively at affecting the capabilities and behavior of sovereign agents, whether in the form of nation states, terrorist groups, other NGOs, or even individuals. Trade and security policy are clearly affected by sovereign agency whereas the impact of sovereign agents on even a policy arena as mammoth as health care is negligible. While the era of globalization has exposed more areas of policy to the same exogenous source of constraints and opportunities (trade, taxation, regulation in general, immigration), these areas are pursued still primarily for their domestic impact. Only foreign and military policy start from and aim at external problems and agents.

The categorization of sovereign agency as a variable across policy arenas is not meant to imply, as is often done from the IR perspective, that the actions of sovereign agents are unambiguous and objective. The meaning of the global environment, even in the throes of a

crisis, is open to interpretation by political leaders and entrepreneurs. Politicians attempt to forge and deploy social constructions of world events and forces rather than the global environment dictating particular policies. And sometimes their social constructions are aimed more at a domestic than international goal – the global situation is a means to a domestic end. In this way, the exogenous constraints and opportunities of international affairs and events are themselves deeply political factors in military policy-making.

### **The Structure and Distribution of Decision-Making Authority and Power**

In the context of the United States, three characteristics define the structure and distribution of institutional power and authority of any policy regime: the relationship among three decision-making branches of the national government; the bureaucracy or bureaucracies involved in the regime; and role of federalism in the policy regime.

### ***The Separated Institutions Sharing Powers and Power: President, Congress, and Court***

All policy regimes operate amid the overarching set of institutional commonalities that characterize any given era. In recent decades these have included such things as general presidential power and initiative (if not success), divided government, hyper-partisanship, judicial power, and the 60-vote Senate. These general and shared features, however, do not have a uniform impact on various policy regimes. In some arenas the powers are more shared than in others.

Compared to many areas of domestic public policy in which it plays an important and sometimes decisive role, the judiciary plays a very small and mostly deferential role in national security. Despite a handful of famous cases, several of which are notable for the court's lack of intervention or its endorsement of presidential power in war and as commander in chief, the Supreme Court in the course of American political development has not increased the importance of its policy making role, unlike in most other policy arenas. Likewise, despite presidential power and Congress's collective action problems, many areas of domestic policy feature a high level of effective congressional policy initiative and involvement, including education, agriculture, welfare, and energy, and a low level of deference to the president.

As Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson recognized in 1952, the constitutional “zone of twilight” into which many areas of national security and foreign policy fall is one in which “congressional inertia, indifference or quiescence may sometimes, at least, as a practical matter, enable, if not invite, measures on independent presidential responsibility” (*Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, 343 U.S. 579, 1952). It also allows Congress to do what it does best--deal with and benefit from the particulars, rather than try to direct the show. The somewhat uncertain constitutional status of foreign and national security powers, and the tilt to the president, has often been characterized as “an invitation to struggle” (Crabb and Holt, 1980). Congress, however, rarely RSVPs and if it accepts the invitation it is usually after the party is over and inebriation has been replaced by a hangover. So the invitation to struggle is rather more a presidential temptation toward unilateralism and a congressional tendency toward risk-avoiding parochialism: let out the leash on the dogs of war, concentrate on maximizing particular benefits, and await the

results of the conflict you have facilitated. Presidential-congressional relations after the September 11, 2001 are only the most recent example of this pattern.

As familiar as this story might be, the point here is that its reality has been used much more frequently to separate the analysis of military policy from other arenas, rather than as a basis for comparing the politics of different arenas. Crisis decision-making and the valorization of prompt decision and action in this realm, for example, should be a point of comparison, as Durant and Diehl imply, for understanding the politics of policy rather than a distinction indicating incomparable phenomena. Certainly the power and reach of the domestic administrative presidency has grown along with those of the commander in chief. But the speed, impact, and irreversibility of presidential decisions in national security still set it apart.

The explicit constitutional powers given to the president and the related prerogative powers interact with congressional politics in ways that reinforce the hawkish tilt in national security policy. When united in party and spirit, the president and Congress can act in a parliamentary fashion, but the temptations for the president to go it alone are powerful, especially in the realm of foreign and national security policy. And Congress at least initially will often cheer the president on in such unilateral endeavors (Korea, Tonkin Gulf, Gulf War, Afghanistan, Iraq). Whether united or divided, Congress often follows the president's lead. This is not simply because of constitutional powers, including those of the Commander in Chief, or precedent.

The presidential bias has at least two components: (1) the distribution of powers by the Constitution, law or precedent aspect (powers) and (2) the action aspect; that is, the action the president can take here confers advantages and power even if it also entails risk (Howell and Pevehouse, 2007, pp. 7-9; Durant and Diehl, 1989). Presidential action is often not just unilateral, but quick, consequential and even irreversible. Howell and Pevehouse list several distinct advantages the president has over Congress when it comes to the use of force. Aside from whatever constitutional powers are conferred by the commander in chief clause and by statutory delegation and treaties, unilateral action by the president, however justified, does not just short circuit the usual political process, it often stymies effective congressional action. First, it forces Congress and perhaps the court to confront and revise a new political landscape. Second, the use of force typically puts "troops" in harm's way and Congress is reluctant to be seen as possibly interfering and not supporting the troops. Third, the president has an information advantage (9), sometimes based on classified information, and Congress has to defer or play catch up, usually when divided. Fourth, "Multiple veto points, high transaction costs, and collective action problems regularly conspire against the president when he tries to guide his legislative agenda through Congress. Each, though, works to his advantage when he issues a unilateral directive, as each cripples Congress's capacity to muster an effective response" (8-9).

The larger point is that this policy arena features potential presidential action that is, by comparison to other arenas, very rapid, immediately consequential, and often irreversible, or only partly reversible. The gap between decision and action is abrupt, the policy making is completely "segmented", that is, limited to a few actors with access to the president and

the president himself. What other area of policy has these characteristics? In other areas, the president might take unilateral action, or use power without persuasion, such as an executive order, but the policy is then typically subject to the usual delays of the Administrative Procedures Act, and bureaucrats have to then enforce the order. Some of the only domestic analogies are essentially military, such as President Eisenhower sending the troops to Little Rock.

### ***Bureaucratic Formation and Status***

Although contemporary bureaucracies share many significant characteristics, the status and formation of the national security bureaucracy has some unique attributes that give it unmatched influence in the policy process and reinforce congressional deference (and to that extent presidential power). In what other area of public policy is there such a distinct class of separately and highly trained bureaucrats who implement policy not only in the usual sense (of sending out and overseeing directives) but also as the direct agents? These are the doers, not simply the overseers of policy. No Department of Education or Agriculture bureaucrat even at the state level actually performs education or farming, and much the same can be said for most areas of domestic policy, except for the FBI (which, after 9/11, has become an integral part of the national security regime).<sup>13</sup>

The military constitutes a historically embedded professional bureaucratic class unlike that in any other area of policy. Aspects of this characteristic are discussed in rather different ways in three literatures: the analysis of civil-military relations, bureaucratic politics, and arguments about subgovernments or “iron triangles.” The analysis of civil-military relations has often concerned itself with the potential and actual problems associated with the military as a powerful and separate force in government and society (Huntington 1957; Finer 1988; Desch 1999; Feaver 2003). After all, a central focus is on the potential for the military to take over all policy-making powers. To that extent this literature addresses this characteristic, but its primary theoretical and empirical concerns tend to be somewhat different, often with a focus on the quality and nature of the relationship between civilian and military authorities, less so as a component in a larger policy-making process. Bureaucratic politics emphasizes the largely interest-based power of bureaucracies in maintaining and expanding their mission and influence (Kanter, 1979; Hilsman, 1993; Allison and Zelikow, 1999; Halperin and Clapp, 2006). In the iron-triangle literature, the uniformed military class is certainly part of the subgovernment system in this policy area, but the special status and nature of the bureaucratic vortex of this particular triangle is not, I think, duly noted. Here the worry is that various subdivisions of the military are actively cooperating with corporate and congressional interests to get what they want in a manner that subverts democratic or majoritarian control. But the size, professionalization, ongoing major role – and if nothing else the possession of nuclear weapons – made the military bureaucracy into something substantially different from those of the other agencies. It’s not just that the generals and admirals could use their power to take over the state, unlike even the FBI, let alone the Education Department, it’s that the Education Department does not

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<sup>13</sup> Bureaucrats typically issue and enforce regulations for activities that mostly private actors perform. As the FBI suggests, the analogy to the U.S. military bureaucracy at the state and local level is the police and firefighters.

even control education in any direct sense, but the military controls the means of violence, directly.

Policy-makers must listen to the warfighters on weapons, the needs of troops, intelligence, and even foreign policy more generally, partly because of their stature and expertise but also because they actually do the policy. But the military does not always get deference let alone always get its way. And politicians do not always listen in a disinterested manner. Both president and Congress have to play this angle carefully, but they are willing to use the warfighters and the respect generally given to them and their opinions as leverage against their opposition on policies, such as Congress citing the generals against a president's policy. Respect and deference can be and are employed politically. The unique status of the military bureaucracy makes it more of a multi-dimensional and powerful presence in this arena relative to other bureaucracies in their arenas. Some bureaucracies in quiet relatively uncontroversial areas, like agriculture, might be powerful in their own way, but have very limited policy discretion and no special respect as policy agents. What other bureaucracy is even named? Or more to the point, in public opinion polls regarding trust in or approval of various American institutions what other bureaucracy is asked about and compared to (and ranked higher than) the president, Congress, the Supreme Court, and religious institutions?

Also, when members of the armed services are in harm's way, as Americans have performed and witnessed since 9/11, another feature of the unique warfighting bureaucracy comes to the fore. Presidents benefit from the "rally round the flag" effect in crises, and the use of force is given political protection by the related "support the troops" effect. In what other policy arena do the government workers involved, the policy implementers, become the reason for unquestioned backing or agreement for material support even for policies that many consider to be failing?

Other countries have some level of separate military bureaucratic class, but not to same degree (especially size and social status) and some other countries (such as France and Japan) have had a government elite structured around the top schools that produce the governing (domestic) bureaucratic class. In the U.S., the governing class is fragmented, pluralistic. Even the foreign policy establishment in the State Department, as relatively small as it is, cannot claim this kind of distinction. The status of the military bureaucracy matters when it comes to conflict or potential conflict, but it is clearly part of ordinary and ongoing politics of defense.

### ***Federalism***

Finally, military policy is affected by its constitutional status in relation to federalism. It is one of the few areas of national policy without any degree of significantly shared or overlapping responsibility for policy-making.<sup>14</sup>As a result there is almost no dilution of

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<sup>14</sup> The only exception is funding, management, and employment of the National Guard, a once nearly irrelevant division of labor that took on new importance with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as the consequences of the Total Force policy became manifest in ways the Gulf War only hinted at.

responsibility, or any federalization of policy politics, unlike nearly any other policy arena or regime. This also reinforces the presidential and bureaucratic power in this arena.

### **The Politics (and Bias) of the National Security Policy Regime**

To what extent have the characteristics just discussed been ongoing and consistent features of the arena of national security policy at least in the United States? Most of the characteristics discussed above have been in full effect since the end of World War Two and the onset of the Cold War. Entire domains of domestic policy did not exist prior to the New Deal or even the 1960s (healthcare, environment, civil rights, much of welfare). Moreover, many theories of public policy are grounded in political and institutional features of the modern, bureaucratic state embedded in some form of interest-group liberalism.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, this paper's argument is no more time-bound than most theories of public policy. If anything, as I argued earlier in regard to the discursive context and trajectory, the consistency of the regime's characteristics across nearly one-third of the nation's history is part of what distinguishes it from many other arenas.

Military policy can be framed in comparative terms and variables so that it can be compared to other policy arenas. The list produced in this paper brings together institutional, material, and ideological factors without attempting to assess their relative importance; instead, what makes it a policy regime is the combined and interrelated effects of the variables. The list of variables is not just a list; it is a package of often interrelated and mutually reinforcing characteristics, shaping the perceptions and participation of mass and elite, citizen and politician, news media and popular culture. The various facets of the organization and psychology of interests, policy trajectory, discourse, sovereign agency, bureaucratic and executive agency have a frequently synergistic relationship. And to some extent the relationships have a self-sustaining quality.

On the one hand, because military policy is deeply political it is more like other arenas of public policy than some theories and conceptions, especially from international relations, would have us believe. On the other, certain characteristics of its particular politics also distinguish it in important ways from other types of policy-making, as we have seen. My argument is a bit more specific than that however. It is not simply that politics prevails even where national security is at stake, or that some attributes of the variables differentiate it from domestic policy regimes. This combination of characteristics, whether shared with or different from other policy arenas, produces a powerful mobilization of bias. There is a political tilt in the world of military policy that tends to favor certain kinds of arguments and interests, which in turn tend to be more successful especially over the long run. The combination of characteristics biases the system in favor of more hawkish or militaristic policies, whether in the confines of the White House and a decision to use force in a crisis or in the bargaining of a congressional subcommittee over the number of F-35s to fund in FY 2016.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Douglas Arnold (1990, p. 15) notes that his theory of congressional policy-making makes sense of a legislature with particular electoral and organizational elements that characterize Congress from the 1970s onward, but less so before that.

That claim about the bias, in and of itself, is not terribly surprising, and yet the regime perspective is different from most arguments made about security policy. In both the IR security literature and the less voluminous work from the perspective of domestic politics, the analytic tendency is to isolate and compare the trees rather than see them as a forest or policy ecosystem, if you will. I have no quarrel with that kind of work, as such, but I would argue that the attempts to weigh the relative influence of putatively international versus domestic variables, or to distinguish between ideology and interest in, for example, congressional decision-making on national security, often obscure as much or more than they reveal. As I have noted, this preliminary discussion of the regime perspective is an initial attempt to characterize in a new and comparative fashion the forces at work in the process. I have not made (nor have I yet satisfied myself as to) the case for its explanatory power. For now I will simply suggest the possibility that whatever this model of the military policy regime lacks in parsimony it might make up for in reality.

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