

**Making Endless War:
Neoliberal War-Making and the Social Transformation of the US Military-Industrial Complex**

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This dissertation aims to make sense of the seemingly ‘endless’ character of US wars in the twenty-first century by investigating the changing social relations of war-making. Using newly compiled data on labor unrest and materials from state, firm, and newspaper archives, it shows how a shift from a *regime of mass mobilization war-making* to a *regime of neoliberal war-making* facilitated the endless expansion of war. In the wake of multiple crises in the 1970s, military and industrial elites embraced the transformation of war at three key moments of its making: On the battlefield, a conscript army was replaced by capital-intensive weapons systems and small, flexible forces. At the point of production, geographical and organizational fixes eroded the power of armaments manufacturing workers. And in global military supply chains, just-in-time techniques made migrant non-citizen service workers from across the global South increasingly important to the logistics of war. This new organization of war requires little participation from US citizens and workers—removing social and political constraints on war’s endless expansion.

This dissertation argues that these transformations in war-making were intertwined with the dramatic transformation of the world-economy, as capitalists sought out new sources of profit by buying government debt, providing credit to military firms, and investing in the armaments industry. This study thus demonstrates how financialization facilitated the restructuring of US war-making. In the process, it shaped the direction of transformation towards avenues that were the most profitable. The result has been a deep articulation of finance and war that has broadened the elite base of militarism in the United States, incentivizing war without end.

This financialized war-making yields extraordinary profits, but its social consequences are even more unequally distributed than in the twentieth century era of “military Keynesianism.” This is a key contradiction of the social organization of endless war: as its elite base grows, its social base erodes. The result is that disenchanted US industrial workers and precarious migrant laborers are operating at strategic chokepoints of war, leaving the US military-industrial complex vulnerable to disruption in the twenty-first century. Examining the contradictions of neoliberal war-making, this study concludes, may offer clues for how to end ‘endless’ war.