

Pentagonism: lessons in the political economy of the American Military Budget Part 2

In his essay *Pentagonism*¹, Juan Bosch approaches the empirical problem of the American Military Budget and the Military-Industrial Complex from the perspective of a former president of the Dominican Republic. Writing in the late 1960s after being forcibly removed from office at the hand of intervening American forces^{2,3}, Bosch bases the theory of ‘pentagonism’ on a then-emerging economic condition he refers to as ‘overdeveloped capitalism’. Overdeveloped capitalism (Bosh’s version of monopoly capital) is characterized by the expropriation of technological advancements in service of profits. Between the First World War and the Atomic Era, American corporations with the financial and proprietary means to augment and streamline production leveraged scientific progress to do so at an unprecedented rate. For Bosch, it was at this juncture that the largest firms became capable of producing the very raw materials required for production, and through precise, scalable, and low-risk means no less. According to the theory of pentagonism, the capacity to mass produce the inputs to production (i.e., the metals, compounds, formulas, foods, and other things that go into the making of goods) changed the nature of U.S. imperialism. Formerly understood as the conquest or colonization of foreign territories in order to extract and gain control over their natural resources, raw materials, and markets, Bosch reconceptualizes imperialism in terms of internal conquest. Overdeveloped capital no longer needed to engage in the costly endeavor of subjugating foreign peoples in order to expropriate raw materials from their lands, it could now produce most of what it needed domestically for cheap, thanks to the fact that private power had harnessed technology. As a result, the major corporations turned their attention to the American masses, with the goal of mobilizing their bodies, minds, and wallets for unbounded financial gain.

Through political lobbying, the mass media, and the science of public relations, the Pentagon and its corporate contractors have come to occupy our collective consciousness and in consequence exploit us as a source of service personnel, labor, and tax revenue. Pentagonism (i.e., the Military-Industrial Complex) dynamically invents and perpetuates national security threats in order to justify, and amplify, the American Military Budget, which converts into hundreds of billions of dollars in bankable weapons contracts. The ‘pentagonists’ not only exploit our labor (many of us work for the ‘defense’ industry and military), but they appropriate the majority of our discretionary budget, half a trillion dollars in public funds, and undemocratically use it to contract weapons manufacturers, who in turn profit handsomely and instantly. As Bosch points out, these earnings translate into the “accumulation of capital and therefore into new investments with which they raise their profits all over again”.⁴

This system of accumulation has advantages over imperialism: ostensibly, the success of pentagonism does not hinge on the outcome of wars, the suppression of foreigners, or the extraction of raw materials, but on the occupation of the war-waging country. No longer reliant on the success of prolonged and costly wars to unlock new assets, defense-based corporations now secure comparable, if not greater, risk-free profits the second a contract is signed. Bosch argues that,

from a certain point of view, it would not matter to those who accumulate profits through the production of these goods whether they were thrown into the sea or used up in war maneuvers. But in the former case the endless chain of production — high profits, high salaries, greater sales, ultra-rapid accumulation of capital and increase in production once more, and so back to the beginning of the cycle — would be broken, since the production of such expensive and such short-lived equipment could not be justified if it was not meant for war...⁵

The military forces of a pentagonist country are not sent out to conquer colonial territories. War has another purpose; war is waged to conquer positions of power in the pentagonist country, not in some far-off land. What is being sought is not a place to invest surplus capital for profit; what is being sought is access to the generous economic resources being mobilized for industrial war production; what is being sought are profits where arms are manufactured, not where they are employed.⁶

However one-dimensional Bosch's theory may be, it is conceptually useful. Even if we, as American citizens, cannot grasp the fallout of our military budget — the realities of wealth, death, and destruction — as its source we must grapple with it. Although it provides an incomplete picture, pentagonism can clarify our understanding of the American Military Budget and the Military-Industrial Complex. For, if we are to quell these forces of violence, we must understand them.

- 1 <https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=03367A716A332C66309C1EA59659612D>
- 2 <https://web.archive.org/web/20231204161800/https://liberatedtexts.com/reviews/defense-contracts-as-limitless-loot-juan-boschs-pentagonism/>
- 3 https://web.archive.org/web/20231224051852/https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8944&context=etd_theses
- 4 *Pentagonism* p. 29
- 5 *Pentagonism* p. 27
- 6 *Pentagonism* p. 22