

## INTRODUCTION

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Some time ago, the idea occurred to produce a special issue of this journal devoted to a historical perspective on and of our discipline, defence and peace economics. By far, the majority of the contributions made to the discipline deal with recent, contemporary events such as arms races, arms production, procurement, and trade, the impact of military spending on an economy, employment effects, possibilities and problems with military–civilian conversion, and the like. But the methods of pure economics apply to any time-period in history, not just to the recent past. Moreover, since war and peace or, less sharply, conflict and conflict resolution, are as old as humanity – indeed, as old as life itself – it seemed that a look back in history might prove useful in three ways. First, what might modern-day economists and their students learn from earlier thinkers? Might we discover that we are merely “reinventing the wheel”? Might we overconfidently design schemes to limit war and promote peace that our forebears already thought about, tried, and discarded? Or might we find ideas and insights that, today, we can polish more fully in the light of our new-found instruments of mathematics and econometrics? Second, to what extent might it be possible to apply economic tools of reasoning and estimation to earlier time-periods? How useful and powerful is economics as a discipline of thought to explain the shape that history took? By moving away from a narrow focus on contemporary concerns and affairs to a longer span of time – taking the perspective of hundreds of years rather than a handful of decades – do we see fundamental principles of economics consistently at work? Can we learn from history? And third, might we discern a “trajectory” of useful research questions when we study a time-period that goes much further back than the post-world war II, cold war era?

Reaching back a thousand years, Hubert van Tuyl and Jurgen Brauer (both at Augusta State University in the US) apply a set of principles of economics to military history. If it were correct, they reason, that economics as a discipline of scientific inquiry is ahistoric (*i.e.*, that its modes of thought apply independent of the time-period considered), then it should be possible to offer a wholesale rewriting of military history. It should be possible to “colonize” military history, just as economics has colonized other disciplines such as law, sociology, political science, biology, and, indeed, conflict and peace studies. Working on a monograph-length study, van Tuyl, the military historian, selected six time periods

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and certain military episodes within each and Brauer, the economist, independently selected a handful of economic principles to be applied. The time-periods, military episodes, and economic principles they examine are: (a) the European Middle Ages (1000–1300; siege warfare; principle of opportunity cost); (b) the Renaissance (1300–1600; the *condottieri*; principal-agent problems); (c) the Enlightenment and the Age of Battle (1618 to 1789; the decision to offer battle; expected marginal costs/benefits); (d) the Age of Revolution (1789–1914; the US civil war; information asymmetries); (e) the World Wars (1914–1945; strategic bombing of Germany; principle of diminishing returns); and (f) the cold war (1945–1989; France's nuclear *force de frappe*; principle of substitution). Aspects of cases (a), (c), and (f) are reported in their contribution to this special issue. It appears that historians at least are intrigued by the idea, and economists have gained another useful avenue for interdisciplinary work.

In the second paper, two German authors, Ralph Rotte (at Aachen) and Christoph Schmidt (at Heidelberg), undertake a fascinating empirical study on the determinants of battlefield success. Their data set contains detailed information on 625 battles fought between 1600 and 1973. The data points, which include material and non-material factors (e.g., force size as opposed to leadership skills), are passed into a military production function to determine the production of victory. They find that “contrary to the emphasis on technology which can be found in the recent literature, our estimation results indicate that numerical superiority has retained its crucial role for battlefield performance throughout history... [and that]... human elements of warfare, like leadership, morale and surprise, have continued to be important determinants of battle outcome despite technological progress in weapons.” It is a thought-provoking paper that one would dearly love to see extended to and tested on battles since 1973 as soon as the data set can be expanded. If Rotte and Schmidt are correct that military technology *per se* did not historically play a decisive role in the production of victory, might arms racing truly be “history”, at least on the global scale, now that the US appears to own a monopoly on technological superiority?

If the first two papers dealt with the economics of war and armament, the third switches to disarmament. Fanny Coulomb and Jacques Fontanel, both at the University of Grenoble, have a long-standing and well-known interest in the economics of disarmament and its historical antecedents. It was natural to ask them to tell the story of disarmament economics. Picking up in the mid-eighteenth century, the story of disarmament is difficult to tell unless one also tells the story of armament. In the researching, writing, and editing of their paper, Coulomb and Fontanel strove to relate the “grand sweep” of how disarmament became a category of economic analysis. We all are aware that today a dichotomy exists between those who argue that the development of free, private, competitive markets is a fundamental force for the peaceful economic development of people and their nations and those who argue that, quite to the contrary, unfettered capitalism is precisely what gives rise to deprivation, discontent, and violent conflict, especially but not only in the so-called developing countries. Coulomb and Fontanel's contribution is to trace this dichotomy – “markets-as-peace” versus “capitalism-as-war” – back to the earliest precursors. In the process we discover how conflict economics (e.g., Boulding, Hirshleifer) and peace science (e.g., Isard) became intellectual possibilities.

I knew that Charles Anderton, who co-edits this journal and teaches at the College of the Holy Cross in the US, had discovered a fondness for reading classical economists, and for this special issue's fourth paper, I asked him to reread a sample of their writing and report what and how they thought about conflict, war, and peace *as economists*. Most of us know that John Maynard Keynes was thinking deeply about the wars with Germany. But how many of us know that, for instance, A. C. Pigou, Lionel Robbins, and F. Y. Edgeworth wrote book-length treatments on the economics of war and peace? Likewise, we know, in a general way,

that Adam Smith addressed the question of the defense of the realm, but how many of us know of Malthus' and Mill's contributions? Rereading the classics, one is astonished and embarrassed. Astonished because almost all of the great economists spent at least some time thinking seriously about war and peace *as economists*, and embarrassed – outstanding exceptions notwithstanding – because not nearly all great economists today do likewise. As readers of this journal know, Anderton's special *forte* is conflict economics (*i.e.*, the application of economic tools to understand and explain conflict, of which war is but one form). One aspect of his contribution to this special issue therefore looks specifically at classical precursors to conflict economics, what they already knew, what they did not yet know, and what themes for the modern researcher are hidden in their work. The other aspect of Anderton's paper regards the political economy of war and peace in a global trading system, and again he points out parallels between current work and past work as well as possible research avenues present and future students might wish to take.

The special issue concludes with Dietrich Fischer and Jurgen Brauer's "Twenty Questions for Peace Economics: A Research Agenda". Fischer, teaching at Pace University in the US, is an economist and computer scientist. Taking their cue from David Hilbert's famous speech on unsolved mathematical problems presented at a mathematics congress in Paris in 1900, Fischer and Brauer likewise pose a set of questions to which economists do not possess final answers. Like Hilbert, their hope is that the questions will stimulate research by economists, and especially by our students, to try out our skills on difficult problems. One caution: some of Hilbert's questions have been answered only recently.

This special issue could have been expanded by inviting additional authors to write, for instance, on the development and contribution of mathematical and statistical tools to the theory and empirics of defence and peace economics or on the problem of data collection and data verification that bedevils our field. But the success of this special issue might best be measured by the future contributions it will have generated, not by the page count of the current issue. The authors and I very much hope, even urge, readers to pass it around among colleagues but especially among our doctoral students. Finally, a special "thank you" to the contributors for their forbearance, as well as to the peer-reviewers for offering so many useful comments and suggestions.

