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# Militarism and the Pursuit of Peace

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## Military Spending and Subsistence Rights

The former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, asserted that 'development cannot proceed easily in societies where military concerns are at or near the centre of life. Societies whose economic effort is given in substantial part to military production inevitably diminish the prospects of their people for development. Preparation for war absorbs inordinate resources and impedes the development of social institutions.'<sup>1</sup> Jack Matlock, a former United States ambassador to Moscow, makes a similar point in relation to the required weapons spending for new members joining NATO: 'It's extraordinarily unwise for these countries to shoulder these costs when they must pay the costs of meeting their social needs.'<sup>2</sup>

*Webster's Dictionary* defines militarism as a 'policy of maintaining a strong military organization in aggressive preparedness for war.'<sup>3</sup> Militarism thus includes the disposition to maintain national power by means of strong military forces projecting menacing arms potency capable of deterring or compelling enemy nations. The Secretary-General and the ambassador argue that militarism repre-

sents a structural choice that accords military priorities and arms spending a higher priority than meeting basic human needs. Are these distinguished diplomats right? Are there dire economic consequences to high levels of military spending? And if so, what are the human rights implications of militarization?

The negative effects of militarism on society overall are often dramatically shown through analysis of the policies of repressive governments in the less developed world from Myanmar (Burma) to Iraq to Syria. These dictatorial regimes clearly choose militarism over human rights. In this article, however, I will undertake a tougher task. My hypothesis is that there is a global tradeoff between militarism and economic growth which impacts on the protection of rights. High levels of military spending in less developed and developed countries prevent all of these from fulfilling the basic economic and social rights articulated in the International Bill of Human Rights.

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Academic studies from the 1980s to the mid-1990s confirm the negative relationships between militarism and economic growth. Steve Chan, for example,

concludes that the evidence is clear for advanced Western economies: military spending does not encourage or facilitate sustained economic growth. In the long run, 'these expenditures are more apt to have a negative than a positive impact on investment, inflation, employment, balance of payments, industrial productivity, and economic growth. The evidence on the United States...indicates especially significant costs in these regards.' Heavy defense spending 'seems to have a particularly important impact in dampening capital formation and investment, which in turn reduces economic growth in the long run.' Chan also notes the 'customary preference of officials to finance defense and war by running budget deficits rather than by cutting other programs or raising taxes, [with] much of the cost of this spending shifted to future generations.'<sup>4</sup> These conclusions were confirmed in a 1995 study by Alex Mintz and Randolph Stevenson that was grounded solidly in neoclassical economic theory. Using longitudinal data from 103 countries, they demonstrated that increases in nonmilitary spending contribute to growth significantly more than increases in military expenditures. Military expenditures had either a negative effect or no effect on growth in about 90 per cent of the cases. Mintz and Stevenson demonstrated that a shift away from military spending significantly contributes to economic growth in the long run....<sup>5</sup>

In summary, there are at least three different ways in which military spending restricts economic growth in the United States. First, it leads to a decrease in investment and thus retards the expansion of civilian industry; second, it leads to lower employment and an inefficient use of labour resources; and third, it takes resources away from civilian research and development, impeding nonmilitary innovation and growth and siphoning off highly qualified engineers and labour from the civilian sector. The result is a diversion of resources away from the collective human rights of education, health care and subsistence. The implementation of basic economic and social rights depends upon a shift in scarce resources away from militarism and

towards these areas of human need.

Militarization, of course, is a global phenomenon. Expensive and sophisticated weapons are sought and purchased everywhere in the name of security and self-determination. Worldwide military spending of \$815 billion in 1992 equalled the income of nearly half the world's people. Military expenditures in developing countries rose three times as fast as those of the industrialized countries between 1960 and 1987; from \$24 billion to \$145 billion, an increase of 7.5 per cent a year, compared with 2.8 per cent for the industrialized countries. In 1990-91 the ratio of military to social spending (calculated as military expenditures as a percentage of the combined education and health expenditures) was an astounding 373 per cent in Syria, 222 per cent in Myanmar and 190 per cent in Ethiopia. Some of the poorest countries are among those which spend more on their military than on education and health: Angola, Mozambique, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, as well as Ethiopia and Myanmar.<sup>6</sup> Did these expenditures provide security? Unfortunately not. In developing countries, the chances of dying from social neglect (from malnutrition and preventable diseases) are 33 times greater than the chances of dying in a war from external aggression.<sup>7</sup> Yet U.S. arms and military aid continue to flow to countries that face no significant external enemy. As a consequence, the function of the military in these countries often becomes internal repression (as was heinously demonstrated in Guatemala throughout the 1980s). The human cost of military spending in developing nations is enormous. The statistics are numbing. Twelve per cent of military spending in developing countries could provide funds for primary health care for all, including immunization of all children, elimination of severe malnutrition and reduction of moderate malnutrition by half, and provision of safe drinking water for all. Four per cent could reduce adult illiteracy by half, provide universal primary education and educate women to the same level as men. Eight per cent could provide basic family planning to all and stabilize world population by 2015.<sup>8</sup>

## The Enduring Tension between Militarism and Human Rights

Militarism describes one type of society and world vision; international human rights describe a very different world. The two visions are incompatible. To implement a human rights agenda means sacrificing the fixation with military growth and military spending.

Human rights claims evolve over time. There is a strong link between the growth of new human rights and social development. As modern global society has matured, accompanied by deep ecological interdependence, new threats to the individual and the group have surfaced. To combat these threats, governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have raised issues of environmental balance, economic growth, social equality, refugee relocation, drug interdiction and disease eradication. Global cooperation between state and nonstate actors is seen as critical to addressing this perplexing new agenda of world politics. Accordingly, the list of human rights claims keeps growing. Complex social relations give rise to these demands as new claims are made to alleviate suffering. What appears fundamental in one historical era may not be in another. Human rights claims today have no relation to a primitive state of nature where people's lives were dominated by a few essential needs. As Norberto Bobbio points out, there are no current charters of rights which do not recognize the right to education, which broadens as society develops to include secondary and university as well as primary education. Yet none of the better-known descriptions of the state of nature mentions such a right....<sup>9</sup>

It is now commonly accepted that it is not possible to achieve significant progress on human rights without subsistence needs (food, sanitation, education, etc.) being met. It is also impossible to achieve human rights progress and development in societies controlled by repressive and corrupt regimes. The government can be the main obstacle to achieving either economic or political rights. Most

United Nations scholars and human rights activists promote an interdependence between the two sets of rights (civil/political and economic/social/cultural), and criticize those who make too sharp a distinction between them. Economic and social rights are complementary to libertarian principles found within civil and political rights. They are both symbiotic and mutually dependent. Civil and political rights can be enacted only if everyone has a minimum of economic security.

This human rights agenda can also only be implemented within a framework of peace. Militarism has neither created a world of peace and stability, nor protected the human right to physical security. Overemphasis on military superiority undermines the ability to build regimes of trust and harmony. The arsenals of the war system are symptoms of deep conflict. Arms control and disarmament and the demobilization of armed forces are prerequisites to providing the institutional framework within which nations may pursue implementation of the corpus of international human rights law.

International security and stability are dependent on domestic security and stability. The roots of conflict within domestic societies are often the result of economic, social and environmental pressures which cause poverty and unemployment and pit one community, class, sex or ethnic group against another. Human rights as the core of domestic and foreign public policy can provide a route for the achievement of peace and stability. Preoccupations with 'balance of power' and military prowess can only continue to produce a world of insecurity and war. Policies based on outmoded notions of *realpolitik* exacerbate insecurities. The irony is that human rights policies provide the clearest road to achieve the 'realist' objectives of security and stability. Long-term interests in international stability should compel governments to explore human security and positive peace.

It is commonly accepted that totalitarianism and human rights are incompatible. The negative impact of militarism on basic human rights must also be understood. A militarized society exists in

contradiction to basic human rights and negates the opportunities for human freedom.

### Inhibiting Militarism

The collective human right to self-determination and the individual human right to personal security are fundamental needs of every human community. For this reason, proposals for immediate and unilateral disarmament consistently fail. As long as societies and individuals feel threatened, the need will be felt to possess armaments to keep aggressors at bay. But could security be achieved without militarism?

Three clear areas in which a beginning could be made in inhibiting militarism while protecting personal security rights are curbing arms sales; initiating steps towards common security and basic deterrence; and launching institutions of war prevention and preventive diplomacy.

### Limiting Arms Sales

Global military spending since the Second World War totals at least \$30–\$35 trillion. Enormous resources are needed every year just to maintain superfluous military equipment. Converting military industries is the first step to the release of resources needed to implement international human rights....

From Thucydides to present-day political scientists, it has been noted that the influx of new weapons into a region sets off arms races and rekindles traditional rivalries. Nations either acquire arms or form alliances with distant states to balance out the perceived military power of their neighbours. The Clinton administration, however, in an Orwellian twist, asserts the opposite: its spokesperson claims that lifting the ban will stabilize the region and promote democracy. Selling F-16s and other high-powered weaponry to Latin America will have, in fact, the opposite effect.

For the United States, a programme of positive peace would be based on converting a military

based economic system to a civilian based system. The conversion process can begin with a restriction on arms exports. No longer can such weapons sales be justified as a means of preserving jobs and stemming economic decline. According to the annual arms survey of the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. share of the international weapons trade grew by nearly 23 per cent in 1996, to \$11.3 billion in orders, representing 35.5 per cent of the global market.<sup>10</sup> Conversion must begin by transforming these military industries to civilian enterprises. Clearly, cooperative security, positive peace and Third World development are not enhanced by the sale of high-tech weapons systems. The defence technologies developed during the Cold War can be redirected towards productive civilian ends.<sup>11</sup> A compulsory registration of arms sales and transfers should be established under U.N. auspices. World conflicts and the fires of war are fanned by these sales. The NGO community can play a key role in publicizing illegal and surreptitious sales of arms.

### Institutions for Peace

To implement this ambitious agenda, it will be necessary to develop new institutions specifically committed to demilitarization and human rights. Since the end of the Cold War, a plethora of proposals for the restructuring of the U.N. has been produced.<sup>12</sup> The following ideas could be useful first steps in the construction of global institutions dedicated to overcoming militarism and establishing a framework of common security.

1. The creation of a new International Verification Agency. This could help create confidence that disarmament enhances rather than undermines security. Reagan's quip to Gorbachev, 'trust but verify', holds true internationally. Effective inspections and monitoring arrangements are essential to verify compliance with disarmament agreements. This new agency could be charged with inspection responsibilities for nuclear, chemical and conventional disarmament. The Chemical Weapons Convention established the

- Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to verify global adherence to the treaty. The new International Verification Agency could draw on this experience and expand the verification function to cover other armaments.<sup>13</sup>
2. The creation of a Global Demilitarization Fund as proposed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias. Arias calls on the nations of the world, both rich and poor, to 'commit themselves to at least a 3 percent a year reduction in their military spending levels over the next five years'. The rich would be asked to earmark only one fifth of these savings towards the demilitarization fund, and the developing countries would contribute perhaps one tenth. The money raised could address other human security needs, such as those arising from famines, natural disasters and resource depletion.<sup>14</sup>
  3. The establishment of a 'crisis management centre' at the U.N. to enable proactive mediation and dispute resolution measures to be taken effectively. The centre would undertake an international monitoring function to ensure compliance with demilitarization and human rights norms. The U.N. will need an independent capacity to verify information and gather data on its own. Such monitoring could help end illegal shipments of arms and technology across borders and deter illegal tests of missiles or warheads.<sup>15</sup>
2. *New York Times*, 29 June 1997.
  3. David B. Guralnik, ed., *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1972), p. 901.
  4. Steve Chan, 'The impact of defense spending on economic performance: a survey of evidence and problems', *Orbis*, Summer 1985, pp. 413-14.
  5. Alex Mintz and Randolph T. Stevenson, 'Defense expenditures, economic growth, and the peace dividend: a longitudinal analysis of 103 countries', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39: 2, 1995, pp. 283-305.
  6. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human development report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 34, 47-51.
  7. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
  8. *Ibid.*
  9. Norberto Bobbio, *The age of rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 53.
  10. *New York Times*, 16 Aug. 1997.
  11. See Domenick Bertelli, 'Military contractor conversion in the United States', in Lloyd J. Dumas, ed., *The socioeconomic of conversion from war to peace* (Armonk NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995).
  12. See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An agenda for peace 1995*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Nations, 1995); Richard Falk, *On humane governance: toward a new global politics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 207-40; Saul H. Mendlovitz and Burns H. Weston, eds., 'Symposium: preferred futures for the United Nations', *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* 4: 2, Fall 1994.
  13. Michael Renner, 'Budgeting for disarmament: the costs of war and peace', *Worldwatch Paper* 122, November 1994, p. 44.
  14. UNDP, *Human development report 1994*, p. 59.
  15. Robert C. Johansen, 'Reforming the United Nations to eliminate war', *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* 4: 2, Fall 1994, pp. 471-2.

### Notes

1. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An agenda for development* (New York: United Nations, 1995), p. 20.

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