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# *Development and . . . What? A New Perspective for the Disarmament and Development Debate*

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## **Introduction**

The disarmament and development debate is a curious phenomenon. It began formally within the United Nations machinery in 1960. A resolution of the General Assembly asked the Secretary General to examine the economic and social consequences of disarmament. It requested an examination of the effects at a national level, within different economic systems and in countries at differing levels of development, including the likely effects upon demand, world trade and the possible structural imbalances which would be caused within and between nations following disarmament. In other words, it represented a form of planning for disarmament; it was a policy-related document. The purpose was to facilitate 'the utilisation of resources released by disarmament for the purpose of economic and social development, in particular of the under-developed countries.'<sup>1</sup> This was based upon a common sense equation; the enormous amount of the world's resources which are spent upon armaments are a waste and would be better spent on development efforts.

This, in essence, has remained the motive for establishing an institutional link between disarmament and development efforts within the UN. It has been to ensure that the 'disarmament dividend' — the resources released by the disarmament process — is directed towards social and economic development, particularly in the Third World. This same intention can be seen in almost all other reports on the subject. The most recent UN report, chaired by Inga Thorsson, echoes the same sentiments [UN 1982].<sup>2</sup> It has developed a far more sophisticated analysis of the ways in which disarmament might be achieved and considers a range of ways in which resources might be transferred, but it presents essentially the same thesis.

It is important to establish the background to this concept, because it helps us to understand why the debate has remained marginal to both development thinking and to the conduct of disarmament and arms control negotiations. It would be wrong to imply that those involved in the debate are under any illusions about this matter. Thorsson states, in a revealing passage, that: 'at a time when progress on disarmament and development issues is minimal and seemingly beset by major differences in viewpoint, conflicting interests and lack of political impetus, proposals for a new disarmament fund for development, which would link the two issues, seems audacious . . .' [UN 1982: 135]. Previous studies have gone further and argued that there is some danger in establishing an institutional link between the two subjects lest slow progress in one area should delay progress in the other.<sup>3</sup>

It is also noticeable that none of the reports on disarmament and development has considered in detail the *structural* links between the two issues. The implication has always been that it is the scale of military expenditure which is at issue. Furthermore, the level of expenditure by the superpowers and their direct allies has always been such a large proportion of the world total, that it has almost been taken for granted that the dividend from disarmament would come from the transfer of resources from North to South. Thus the debate has not come to grips with the crucial links between patterns of defence expenditure and levels of underdevelopment. Nor has it explored how military expenditure and militarisation in the South might reinforce technological and economic dependence. Because of this, the debate has failed to capture the central attention of development theorists that it deserves.

Within the UN the link served an important purpose by adding a strong moral imperative to the disarmament process. But the generalised nature of

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<sup>1</sup> See Resolution 1516 (XV), adopted by the UN General Assembly 15th December, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> See pages 4-6 for a review of previous UN considerations of the subject.

<sup>3</sup> This point was made explicitly in United Nations 1972.

the debate has meant that it has achieved few, if any, concrete gains in two and a half decades. Much of the explanation for this must lie with the underlying limitations of the UN system. Recognising this, we want to suggest that there are nevertheless important ways in which the debate can be pushed along more productive lines. In this article, we put forward some of the issues which have remained implicit in the debate in order to encourage a more direct approach to the underlying problems.

### **What Lay Behind Establishing the Link?**

Before attempting this it is worth dwelling, for a moment, on the purpose behind establishing the disarmament-development link. Within the UN, the broad nature of the debate would seem to have performed a specific function — almost a hidden agenda. This relates to the move by the world's most powerful states away from a declared policy of disarmament to one of arms control and limitation during the 1960s. The concept of a disarmament dividend was closely associated with attempts within the UN to keep alive the ultimate goal of General and Complete Disarmament (GCD). To many in the field of international relations, GCD is at best a diversion [see Gray 1978]. Within the UN machinery, however, it remains a powerful symbol. This relates to the UN's intended function as the broker of a common security system. During the days of the League of Nations the aim of General and Complete Disarmament was a fundamental tenet. The UN has placed rather less emphasis upon it, focussing instead upon the need to establish a measure of common security which does not fundamentally alter the system through which that security is guaranteed. Nevertheless it implies that, at some future date, it will be possible to maintain the security of nations without resort to either the need for arms or war. Only then can the vast resources presently assigned to armaments be assigned to economic and social development.

In the event, neither GCD nor common security has played a central role in the power relations between nations. This became most evident in the 1960s when the United States and the Soviet Union chose to undertake their most basic and promising negotiations on a bilateral or trilateral<sup>4</sup> basis. Furthermore, the underlying assumptions about what these negotiations were intended to achieve also shifted. Arms control was conceived by the Americans as part of the new doctrine of flexible response. It became part of the battery of ways in which it was thought security — and in particular the security interests of the superpowers — might best be advanced. Arms control was intended to address the more destabilising effects of armament

developments and thereby ensure strategic stability and the status quo. Thus the SALT I Treaty was a bilateral treaty, signed without reference to other nations or to the UN. It dealt strictly with restrictions upon anti-ballistic missile systems and with ceilings on the numbers of launchers in the central strategic arsenals of the superpowers.

Over time, arms control became an institution of the arms race and disarmament became a marginal consideration. One response, therefore, was for critics of this process to attempt to keep the issue of disarmament alive within the UN, with GCD as an eventual goal. An important way of achieving this was to improve the UN's disarmament-related machinery. The most clear example of this was the slow but sure progress towards the establishment of the Disarmament Affairs Division, a shift which came out of the first UN Special Session on disarmament (UNSSOD I) in 1978. Previously the head of the UN Centre for Disarmament was responsible in the first instance to the Under-Secretary of the Political and Security Affairs Division — a Soviet post. Now the head of the Disarmament Affairs Division, a Swede, has Under-Secretary status and reports directly to the Secretary General.<sup>5</sup>

Actively linking disarmament with development was a part of this 'hidden agenda'. It provided a symbol of exactly what was at stake in the demand for disarmament. It became all the more significant when the growing contingent of non-aligned Third World states forged links with the neutral countries of Europe within the UN. These links have been particularly noticeable at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, where they act in concert as the Group of 21 Neutral and Non-aligned Countries. It is this coalition which lies behind the attempt to shift the focus of world politics away from an exclusive reference to East-West relations to one that concentrates upon redressing the imbalance between North and South. Seen in this light, Disarmament for Development is a powerful metaphor in the struggle to alter perceptions which have, over time, institutionalised the 'realpolitic' approach to global problems.

### **Why a Change of Emphasis Now?**

It has been two and a half decades since the initial intervention of the 'disarmament for development' lobby. Halfway through the Second Disarmament Decade and the Third Development Decade, it is evident that a more constructive approach is needed, and one which recognises the close links between armament and current levels of underdevelopment

<sup>4</sup> As in the case of the Partial Test Ban Treaty negotiations, where Britain acted as an intermediary.

<sup>5</sup> For details of the UN's disarmament related machinery see ADIU 1984a.

and maldevelopment. The basis of this approach would be a recognition that current defence policies and practices are failing to provide political and economic security.

Three trends in particular demonstrate the vulnerability of states in the South and the underlying dilemmas of both armament and disarmament. First, there is an increasing preparation, on the part of both East and West, for intervention in the Third World. This directly challenges both the security and the sovereignty of countries in the South. For the United States, direct intervention has become a plausible political option once more. The establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) has been described as a state of mind; it demonstrates a renewed willingness to intervene, particularly in the affairs of Southwest Asia and the Middle East. It is now subsumed under the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) founded in 1983. This was the first new geographic unified command to be formed for 35 years. It has forward based headquarters afloat in the Persian Gulf, and emphasises the ability to rapidly project all its forces to an area of conflict in the region, drawing upon forces normally assigned to the US Readiness Command [US Department of Defense 1985: 231ff]. However, the United States is also acquiring new tools and revitalising old ones to make intervention in any part of the world a reality.

The formation of USCENTCOM is just one aspect of the renewed readiness on the part of the United States to project its military power around the world. It is also an element in a major nuclear and conventional rearmament programme. One particularly striking example of this trend is the deployment of Tomahawk cruise missiles. By 1995, the United States Navy plans to deploy 3,994 Tomahawks at sea. There will be a range of surface and submarine platforms — from revitalised World War II battleships such as the *New Jersey*, which will form the core of Surface Action Groups, to hunter-killer submarines of the 637 and 688 classes. Each will have a mixed arsenal of anti-ship (conventional), land attack nuclear and land attack conventional cruise missiles. The greatest attention so far has been focused upon the nuclear deployments and their potential use against countries in the South, but by far the greatest number of Tomahawks, some 2,643, will have a conventional land attack capability. Of these 1,486 will be single warhead while the rest will have a dispenser warhead for anti-airfield operations [US Government Printing Office 1984: 361-2].

The implications of this are clear: the Tomahawk deployments on US ships are intended for intervention in the affairs of other nations by their use or threatened use in political disputes as they arise around the world. A Surface Action Group has

already seen action in the Lebanon. It is not far fetched to imagine the use of Tomahawks in place of shelling if the target or the political gesture warranted it. With Tomahawk anti-airfield missiles the capability would exist to destroy a country's entire airforce on the ground at a crucial moment in any dispute. This is only one aspect of a trend towards the use of military intervention instead of diplomacy.

Furthermore, there is a dangerous trend towards blurring the distinction between nuclear and conventional forces — witness the dual-capability of much of the RDF, ranging from systems such as the M-198 towed 155mm artillery to a wing of B-52H bombers known as the Strategic Projection Force. The blurring of the distinction is intentional and is part of the 'single entity' concept of deterrence in which forces ranging from the central strategic forces to the contingency forces of the RDF are seen as a continuum. It is unlikely that the United States would consider using nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear nation directly, but security is seen to rest in part on an ambivalent message; deterrence value is seen to be enhanced by that ambiguity. The implication of this is that *all* disputes around the world where American interests are seen to be at stake can be interpreted and deterred using the East-West axis as a yardstick. It is just this sort of threat which the late Indira Gandhi used to justify India's enormous military expansion in the early 1980s. Furthermore, it constitutes what might be referred to as the widening of the nuclear threshold by the existing nuclear states. It is this trend, rather than the likelihood of more states acquiring a nuclear weapon option, which is causing the greatest instability to the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Meanwhile, relations between the superpowers have reached their lowest point since the early 1960s. The desire of the United States and the Soviet Union to avoid direct confrontation in their increasingly overlapping spheres of influence, coupled with improved crisis management, should not belie the fact that the present military build-up on both sides is making existing conflicts more destructive and increasing the risk of a major escalation between the superpowers.

A second trend relates to the nature of military technology. This has an important bearing on efforts by states in both North and South to 'buy' security, but its impact is greatest in the South. Available evidence from studies of American weaponry suggest that weapons systems are increasingly over complex, unreliable and difficult to maintain during combat [Spinney 1980; Rasor 1983]. It would seem that European and Soviet weapons acquisition practices are following suit. Through the arms trade, technology transfer, and a fixed perception of what

constitutes effective technology for defence, the South is rapidly absorbing the costs, problems and dubious improvements in defensive capability inherent in modern defence postures.

Nor has this transfer been of particular benefit to the process of industrialisation in Third World countries, with little in the way of spin-off or even the establishment of a viable indigenous defence industrial base. Military technology has perhaps the fastest rate of obsolescence and represents the widest technology gap between developed and developing nations. The arms trade has increased the level of technological dependence of the South upon the North. The supply of spare parts has proved to be both a major element in the value of arms contracts and a means of establishing a long-term link between supplier and consumer. This has the added effect that withdrawal of supply represents an important political lever, witness the impact of past arms embargoes in the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent.

The cost of armament has also been a major element in the level of indebtedness. It has been estimated that arms imports represent approximately 25 per cent of the accumulated debt in the Third World [Brzoska 1983: 275; Kitchenman 1983]. This indirectly limits the economic choices of developing countries and enhances the role of international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF in defining the economic strategies of the indebted nations.

The third trend has already been alluded to, but deserves some further comment. It is the failure of efforts to achieve arms control and the virtual non-existence of disarmament. Having blocked progress in nuclear arms control at the multilateral forum of the Conference on Disarmament (CD),<sup>6</sup> the bilateral nuclear arms control process between the United States and the Soviet Union has itself reached a nadir. Both the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) and Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) negotiations broke down in 1983. The resumption of negotiations in the form of the so-called 'Umbrella Talks' in Geneva seem unlikely to make progress. The Soviet Union is insisting that the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) must be halted before progress can be made on offensive weaponry, while the United States is insisting that the SDI is not negotiable and will form a new basis for security.

This stalemate is more fundamental than many would like to admit. The breakdown of INF and START

<sup>6</sup> The only conceivable area where a disarmament agreement might be reached at the Conference on Disarmament, is in its efforts to conclude a chemical arms control agreement. Even this is overshadowed by major chemical rearmament programmes by both the United States and the Soviet Union and the use of chemical agents in the Iran-Iraq war.

marked the lowest ebb in superpower relations for two decades. Much of the rhetoric from the Reagan Administration must be put down to the need to justify its massive rearmament programme, but nevertheless it marked a distinct break in the tradition of arms control which had been built up over 25 years. The resumption of talks owes much to the desire on both sides to improve relations, but to be seen to be talking is the extent of this effort so far. At the same time, the policy of bargaining from a position of strength has effectively converted the arms control process into a means of legitimating new weapons programmes. (It was Henry Kissinger who once said 'What in the name of God is strategic superiority . . . What do you do with it?' He answered his own question by proceeding to bargain with it!) Furthermore the SDI has effectively put nuclear arms control back to where it was before the start of the SALT I process in the late 1960s. The understanding which was embodied in the SALT I agreement about the relative value of offensive versus defensive systems is lost and with it the basis of mutually assured destruction. It seems unlikely that the next decade or so will see the re-establishment of such a common understanding.

Nor would progress in existing arms control negotiations necessarily represent a particular benefit for countries in the South. Agreement to limit the deployment of ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe, for example, would do nothing to halt the deployment of sea-launched cruise missiles, either nuclear or conventional. It is also likely that the Soviet Union would retain a number of SS-20s targeted upon China.

On the other hand the arms control and disarmament process is no longer an entirely reserved area. On one level, this is reflected in the rapid growth of a transnational peace and disarmament movement. While this has seemingly failed to prevent any deployments of new weapons, it has had the effect of bringing defence policy and decision-making far more into the public arena. To an unprecedented extent this has allowed the emergence of a critique of current defence thinking, including small but increasingly vocal pockets of criticism from within the defence community itself.

On another level, far more countries are now involved in the machinery of disarmament, witness the increase in membership of the CD and its precursors from 10 countries, with a strictly East-West divide, in 1960, to 40 countries, with a strong neutral and non-aligned contingent. It is noticeable, however, that the United States and the Soviet Union shied away from the CD as the main forum for their negotiations on nuclear weapons once non-aligned nations joined the forum

[ADIU 1984b]. The UN General Assembly itself has become a far more vocal critic of the lack of progress in halting the build-up of armaments. However, it remains the case that the two Special Sessions Devoted to Disarmament, held in 1978 and 1982, achieved little beyond a form of words condemning the arms race, with little prospect of reversing, let alone halting, current trends.

### **What Next for the Disarmament and Development Debate?**

It is to mechanisms by which current trends can possibly be halted, if not reversed, that we now wish to address ourselves. The three trends outlined above are closely interrelated. It is clear that there is little prospect of achieving major disarmament measures in the present climate and with our current level of understanding of the dynamics of the armament process. Political will alone cannot halt the arms race if the institutions which sustain it are not addressed and changed at the same time.

Nevertheless, it seems as if some of the contradictions now developing in the armament process may open up significant opportunities for change. These are opportunities which can be taken advantage of by individual countries willing to re-examine their own defence and military procurement policies and how these relate to security and development. In non-military areas of science and industrial policy an increasing stress is being placed upon 'appropriate technology'. Yet, to date, there have been few corresponding critiques of defence, despite its central and crucial role in both science and technology. Military expenditure is not only a burden on the economy, but also inefficient in achieving its stated objectives. But politically, it is a reserved area. To some extent this is because of the central role of the military in the machinery of the state, and not only in those Third World countries where it plays a direct political role. Because there has been so little debate about possible alternatives, security still tends to be defined in terms of the accumulation of armaments. Therefore any reduction of levels of armament, which disarmament inevitably implies, is seen as detrimental to security.

Nevertheless, once states can begin to move beyond what might be called the 'military balance mind-set' it becomes possible to consider alternatives. Central to such a reassessment must be a re-evaluation of the concept of security itself. To a large extent, this has become uncoupled from the concept of political and indeed economic security (a crime Clausewitz would not forgive). Thus, to an extent that many governments in the Third World, and indeed Europe, would be loath to admit, independent political action

has been curtailed by technological and financial dependence. Moreover, national security contains the same contradiction as national development: it has failed the majority for whom it should be intended. More fundamental changes, however, will only come when states perceive themselves to be more secure within their regional setting.

This argument should not obscure the many complications and pitfalls. Nor should it be taken as a case against the use of high technology for defence as such. Rather, what is needed is a recognition that modern weapons systems should be regarded as having reached, as it were, the end of their product cycle. Further investment will continue to yield fewer and fewer useful gains in terms of increased security; indeed it may even reduce security. Given these endemic problems, the issue of how much spending upon arms is enough will have to be confronted sooner rather than later.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to generalise about what constitutes effective security. 'Threat perceptions' and 'defence postures', in the language of strategic analysis, are specific to individual states and regions. Different countries have varying abilities to assimilate, let alone purchase or produce, any given level of military technology. Furthermore, there are many states in the Third World, for example in Southern Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, which have to cope with genuine threats to their survival. Hence, unless alternative structures and processes can be developed to meet perceived security needs, the concept of disarmament will remain a side issue for countries in the South. Certainly, in this regard, the UN has not so far proved capable of guaranteeing the common security which its charter promises.

There are a number of regional and bilateral initiatives which could provide a starting point for a departure from the existing impasse. Non-aggression pacts, treaties of cooperation and friendship, and nuclear-free zones, although often cosmetic, can play a role in confidence-building at a regional level. Certainly regional cooperation would reduce the extent to which the superpowers can intervene and escalate localised disagreements into extensions of the East-West divide.

In the final analysis, however, security — both in the narrower sense of the ability to pay for defence and the broader sense of reduced conflict — will be the product of more successful development. This of course brings us full circle, but it is an important point to make, nonetheless. This is why change demands a much better understanding of the relationship between armament and underdevelopment; a clear recognition that it is not simply a question of resources being better spent upon development than upon the

military sector. Much as 'peoples' development' has come to represent an attempt to meet the basic needs of the bulk of a nation's population, the similar concept of 'peoples' security' may help to return the concept closer to the root of the word.

## Conclusion

This article has tried to map out ways in which some of the aims which motivated the disarmament and development lobby might be achieved. Here we are clearly still working at a conceptual level, and there are no illusions about the difficulties that will be encountered in moving to the operational. Part of the problem is that, at present, those who talk of disarmament and those who speak of security are talking different languages. It is all too easy for governments to dismiss the idea of disarmament as irrelevant; to argue that defence is a necessary evil. Defence, it is said, is an essential prerequisite behind which — basking in the security it provides — development can proceed. It is possible to demonstrate that the reverse is true. Current defence policies — and behind them arms production and arms transfers — have actually diminished sovereignty because they underpin both technological and economic dependence.

We have called for a change of direction: for a recognition that there is real scope for choice and change in how security is defined and achieved, both in the industrial North and the developing South. In doing so we hope to help reverse the present polarisation in the debate between the advocates of disarmament and the proponents of security.

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