
Brandt, Palme and Thorsson: A Strategy That Does Not Work?

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In the 1950s we worried about the Cold War and the danger of nuclear accidents. For the 1960s the main agenda item was development in the Third World. The economic crises of the 1970s made these problems and concerns come together, and the 1980s present us with the twin problems of militarisation and development. Exacerbated by the economic, social and political problems experienced by the North, development and peace have become foci of attention for scholars, politicians and administrators, and for the general public.

From the mid-1970s a series of international reports has addressed various aspects of this linkage. The first of these, *North-South*, under the Chairmanship of the former West German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, outlined a global strategy for survival. In Brandt's introduction it was stressed that resources used for military purposes could be used instead to solve the development problems of the Third World: for example, 0.5 per cent of one year's world military expenditure could pay for all the farm equipment needed to increase food production and approach self-sufficiency in food deficit low-income countries by 1990 [Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues 1980: 13-15]. This proposal, though not part of the report proper, is illustrative of its underlying conception. Transfer of resources from the rich countries (the industrialised West) and the surplus producing countries (OPEC) to the poor countries in the Third World is the answer.

Survival is the main theme and economic survival problems are at the centre of the report's recommendations. Survival is also the reduction of conflict. By accommodating the concerns of the Third World as expressed in their demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) further conflict between North and South is reduced. If Third World countries get better prices for their raw materials, better access to the markets of the industrialised countries, and a better position in international decision-making, the

chances of common survival are improved. Furthermore, some of the problems that beleaguer all countries today can only be solved through concerted action. The protection of the environment, the reduction of the dangers and costs inherent in the arms race are problems that can only be dealt with by the entire international community.

These problems were described and analysed in detail in the report, but the proposals that were agreed upon as a consequence of the description of the problem were in reality very limited in scope, detail, and effect. For example, industrial restructuring in the industrialised countries is presented as one of the things that needs to be done, but the specific proposals only say that adjustment programmes should be pursued.

The report's recommendations concerning disarmament and development [*ibid.*: 117-25, 284] are equally vague. They talk about the need to educate the public; the development of a more comprehensive understanding of security, including its non-military aspects; international agreements to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons; the need to build upon the process of *détente* by undertaking negotiations to get the arms race under control; an enlarged role for the United Nations; and a globally respected peace-keeping mechanism. More specifically, the report proposes an international tax on the arms trade to be used for development; disclosure by governments of their arms exports and transfers of military technology; and negotiated limits on the arms trade, especially in areas of conflict and tension.

The follow-up report, *Common Crisis*, restated many of the previous proposals, underlining that very little of what the original report advocated had been achieved: 'The North-South dialogue remains much where it was when the Commission reported. Some modest steps forward have been taken. And some backwards. Meanwhile the world economy continues its dangerous downward slide, and the desperate

situation of many developing countries finds no new hope or relief" [Brandt Commission 1983:12]. It went on to note the complete failure of the 1982 UN Special Session on Disarmament, as well as the upsurge in world military spending [*ibid*:37-8]. In his introduction Willy Brandt was even more explicit, arguing that only an end to the arms race would provide a change to 'end the grim political and economic confusion engulfing our societies everywhere'. In his view the failure to respond to the crisis was 'not primarily the lack of technical solutions . . . but the lack of a clearly and broadly reflected awareness of the current realities and dangers, and an absence of the political will necessary to meet the real problems' [*ibid*:8].

However, another reason the reports failed to produce results was the nature of their own diagnoses and recommendations. Their basic philosophy is 'something for everybody', and they urge common action and negotiation as the way to solve problems. Common interests should motivate this type of action, and the main goal of the reports was to help create a political consensus around the need for a common international effort to solve global problems.

The second Brandt report, however, gave less attention to the relationship between disarmament and development. Instead this fell within the terms of reference of a new Commission on Common Security, headed by the Swedish Social Democratic leader (now Prime Minister) Olof Palme, whose membership overlapped (in the persons of Palme himself, Shridath Ramphal and Haruki Mori) with the Brandt Commission. Whereas the latter 'concentrated its work on economic matters, the new Commission' . . . 'will seek to complement that broad overview of global issues by concentrating on security and disarmament measures that can contribute to peace in the 1980s and beyond' (Report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues 1982).

The Commission's central theme is that 'states can no longer seek security at each other's expense . . . A doctrine of common security must replace the present expedient of deterrence through armaments' [*ibid*: 139]. Much of the report is given over to discussion of nuclear disarmament, East-West relations and qualitative arms control. However, it then goes on to discuss the role that the United Nations could play in creating a collective security system which would be based on 'political agreement and partnership between the permanent members of the Security Council and the Third World countries' [*ibid*:164] and would be primarily concerned with the resolution of Third World conflicts. Through this system it might be possible to prevent the escalation into major wars of local conflicts, border wars and ethnically based

clashes. Enhancing collective security means reactivating the security system originally built into the UN Charter, the creation of a UN army, the establishment of Helsinki-type regional security accords in the Third World, etc.

The Palme report is based on a state-centric view of the world, and its basis for analysis is the traditional security dilemma. All states seek national security through the acquisition of weapons. Weapons are equated with security. Security cannot, however, be achieved at the expense of others, and cooperation is necessary. All states live in an insecure world and share a common vulnerability. No nation can escape the threat of nuclear destruction, and both developed and developing countries live under this threat. Socially and economically, states have become vulnerable too, and security must be viewed and understood in this context, according to the report.

Only through the removal of mutual suspicion and fear can security be achieved. Security is common, and to create the foundation for true national security, the international system needs to be changed, so that cooperation instead of confrontation is the basis of the system. In the words of the report: 'Neither physical nor psychological security can be achieved without the development of an international system which would outlaw war . . .' [*ibid*:12].

With this as the premise, the report goes on to analyse the threat of war. A major part of this analysis naturally concentrates on the nature of the East-West conflict and the specific problems and dangers in Europe. However these East-West confrontations are now being transferred to the Third World, and increased conflict is the result. The report does add that indigenous factors are a fundamental cause of Third World conflicts. Yet the North often acts in ways that make the resolution of such conflicts more difficult, and supplies the increasingly advanced weapons that make the escalation of conflict more likely [*ibid*:27-31].

The relationship between the East-West conflict and the conflicts in the Third World are outlined in various ways in the report. The accelerating nuclear weapons competition creates tension that in itself heightens the danger of war and therefore also puts security in the Third World at peril. Tension is also transferred to the various regions of the Third World through an intensified arms race and the policies of the superpowers. The superpowers acquire bases and military facilities on the soil of Third World countries, and they pressure these countries to play a more active supporting role in the Cold War. Increased regional tension in the Third World in turns fuels the competition between the superpowers and has adverse

effects on the prospects of building mutual trust and reducing war.

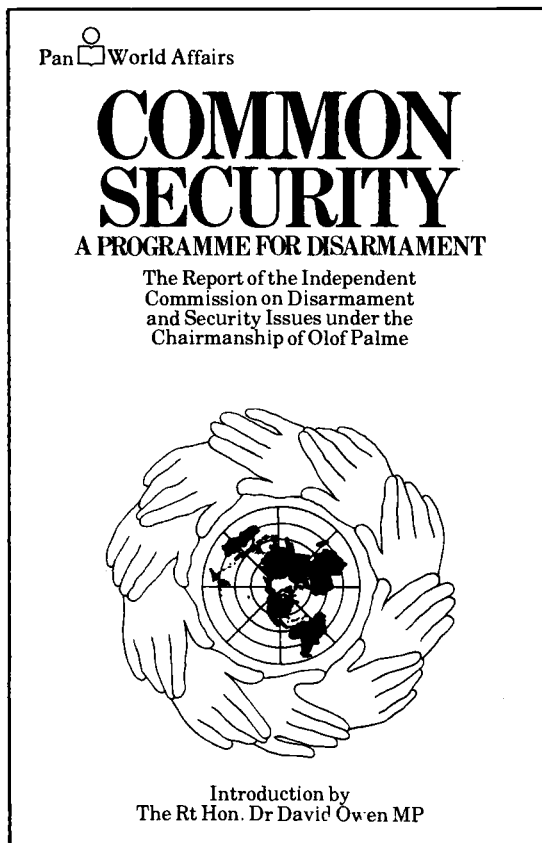
After this survey of causes of war and its consequences for the Third World, the report focuses on the effects of military expenditure upon both the developed and the developing countries [*ibid*:Ch4]. Its analysis of this is thorough, being partly based on commissioned studies by outside researchers. To states in the Third World, the rising costs of armaments are of particular importance. The report says that the military use of scarce resources and skills in the developing countries increases 'human deprivation' and 'can jeopardise economic growth and development and thus the foundation for lasting security' [*ibid*:87-8]. Since the developing countries have to import a large part of their arms, the economic burden is even greater than in the developed countries. Socially, military expansion presents the developing world with 'alien lifestyles and military cultures' that in themselves have negative effects on the development process [*ibid*:86ff].

But the security problem in the Third World is not seen merely as a reflection of the East-West confrontation or of induced militarism. The weakness and dependency of the developing countries in itself generates military conflicts and tempts other states to achieve political goals through military intervention. It is in this connection that the report proposes a system of collective security, UN peace keeping and regional conflict-resolution. The responsibility for achieving security between states is placed with the international community and the UN. The collective security system is mainly seen in relation to the Third World. Whereas security in the East-West context has to be negotiated, security in the Third World is to be enforced through a reconstituted UN system.

Central to the analysis of the report is a perception of development as primarily an economic process and of armaments and militarisation as wasteful spending. There are relatively few attempts in the report to establish in a rigorous way the causal connections between militarisation and development. The stress is on conflict avoidance through regulation of conflicts. A new international regime is needed, and here the burdens and the benefits must be evenly distributed. 'The burden of making the world safe for all (must) be shared by all' [*ibid*:3].

Thus the Palme Report, just like the Brandt Report, is premised on common interests. However there is little or nothing in the report to translate the obvious common interest in avoiding nuclear destruction into a political programme that can remove the perception of mutual threats between states. States can only achieve security through cooperation, and this is a readily recognised fact. But states have other goals,

and these goals often take precedence. The central problem is how political conflicts are solved, and here disarmament as such has little to offer.



The perspective of the Palme Report is illustrated very clearly in the illustration on the book cover. The world is seen from above in a projection that makes the South look much larger than it is. It is also the way that the world is presented in the official UN symbol, except that the world is turned 45 degrees. The drawing of the world is surrounded by ten hands that form a ring of cooperation between people. Cooperation is seen as the way to shield the world from war and insecurity.

Holding hands, however, does not solve conflicts of interest. Common security can only be achieved through the resolution of existing fundamental conflicts. How that is done is not addressed in the Palme report. The more than 30 proposals contained in the report have received scant attention since they were published in 1982. The only proposal that has been met with some public interest is the proposal for a battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free zone in Europe. This

had been widely discussed internationally; but the prospects for its implementation seem very dim.

Of the many recommendations of the report only a minority deal with the Third World. These include broader adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and greater international control over sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel-cycle. The report also proposes negotiations among supplier states to restrict the flow of arms to the Third World, particularly to regions where there are severe political tensions; and negotiations among recipients to regulate their acquisition of arms and prevent local arms races. There is little in the report, however, that directly addresses the connection between security and development, except perhaps the idea of promoting periodic Regional Conferences on Security and Cooperation *à la mode* Helsinki (CSCE) in the various Third World regions. These could provide a framework for cooperation, not only on security but also on economic, social and cultural issues. They could also establish the infrastructure for regional zones of peace and nuclear-weapons-free zones, both of which are endorsed by the report.

The report stresses that economic cooperation between the participating states in these regional security talks is a necessary foundation for the development of common perceptions of security interests and concerns. Economic development and cooperation is seen as a prerequisite for the attainment of security in the Third World: 'Without economic recovery there is no hope for common security — for the common prosperity which is the basis of security itself' [*ibid*:96]. However, the development perspective of the report is based on very conventional thinking. The development problem in the Third World is seen as mainly a question of financial resources. Consequently, the task at hand is to divert resources from wasteful use on armaments and into productive use for development. Thus the Palme Report proposes that specific national plans are devised in the developed countries and in the rich OPEC countries to release resources from their defence budgets which can be reallocated to development assistance; and that these be complemented by reductions in the military spending of the developing countries themselves [*ibid*:172-4].

As critics of the Palme Report have pointed out, these proposals have little bearing on national policy processes. They do not address the problem of military doctrine, or of the bureaucratic and industrial interests in weapons production. There is an overall focus on multilateral measures that makes it very difficult to translate the proposals into *national* policies for action and change [Galtung 1984:138-45]. This underlying confidence in international negotia-

tions and multilateral solutions channelled through the UN seems misplaced at a time when the national solutions and problems are at the forefront of leaders' attention everywhere. Because it fails to address specific interests, the impact of the Palme commission has been limited. The concentration of the report on the international and multilateral levels has in a sense made it easier to ignore its proposals at the national level of decision making. There is no need for individual governments to worry about a programme that can only be enacted when all the others have agreed to it.

The Palme Report details the economic and social consequences of military spending. But it does not adequately address how development and disarmament would be linked as political processes. The proposals do not posit a realistic way forward. One reason is that the report provides insufficient intellectual or political foundation for understanding the link between the security and development problems of individual Third World countries and the driving forces behind the East-West confrontation.

In a study prepared for the United Nations (called the Thorsson Report after Inga Thorsson, the chairperson of the expert group [United Nations 1981]) the analysis of these connections and their consequences is more centrally placed. And like the Palme Report it is based on the findings of a number of commissioned studies by outside researchers. This report stresses that previous studies had tended to refrain from coupling disarmament and development, because this might lead to a situation where neither was achieved. The report argues that this is no longer a relevant consideration. There is tremendous pressure on the scarce resources that governments control, which means that increases in expenditure in one area usually necessitate cuts in another. Increases in development assistance therefore can no longer be achieved in isolation. Furthermore, international negotiations on development issues and negotiations between super-powers on arms control are interrelated. The present Cold War situation makes it very difficult to get negotiations going on the NIEO. Consequently the two sets of problems now have to be studied together. The arms race, according to the report, directly reduces the security of the participating states, and disarmament will tend to increase their security. Development has to be seen both as a need for continuing economic growth and as an opportunity and responsibility for everybody to participate fully in the economic and social processes and their ensuing results [*ibid*:163].

The coupling between security and development is primarily seen in terms of their mutual economic interdependence: meaning that a continuing arms race

will create a vicious circle of confrontation, distrust, economic nationalism and protectionism and in the end reduce the policy options available to all parties. Besides highlighting the general negative effects which high armament expenditure has on the global economy, the report concentrates on showing the special burden that these expenditures entail for Third World countries. It cites a number of the detailed empirical studies carried out on behalf of the expert group, showing among other things that countries with high military expenditures have lower levels of investment and a greater tax burden than other countries; that military spending has limited positive spin-offs; that arms imports divert scarce foreign exchange and entail political as well as economic costs for the recipients, etc. [*ibid*:92-4].

On the basis of an input-output model of the world economy submitted to the expert group, the report suggests that simultaneous cuts in military spending by both the developed and the developing countries could produce substantial economic benefits [*ibid*:97-100]. Gradual cuts in the share of military outlays relative to GNP, reducing military spending to around 65 per cent of what it would have been if the arms race continued at the present level, would result in a world GNP 3.7 per cent higher than would otherwise have been projected. More important, on the assumption that the relatively wealthy countries transferred a fraction of the savings generated by their military cuts to development assistance, this could substantially increase the capital stock, industrial employment and per capita GNP of the poorer developing countries compared with the base (continuing arms race) level: the per capita GNP increases would range between 17 per cent (for resource-poor Latin America) and 146 per cent (for the arid regions of Africa). However, as the report itself admits, the model is 'highly aggregative, somewhat static and its detailed results are dependent upon a number of explicit and implicit assumptions. Some of these can be easily questioned' [*ibid*:99]. Another empirical analysis of the same problem [Duchin 1982] concludes, much less optimistically, that transfers of this type would only marginally increase the standard of living of the poor countries.

The report further argues that cuts in military spending need not produce unemployment in the industrialised countries. The direct job losses would not affect a large proportion of the labour force and would be more than offset by the gains generated by increased growth — especially if the military reductions were combined with a reduction in protectionism and consequent gains in North-South trade [UN 1981].

After a discussion of the problem of conversion from military production by the major military producers (discussed in other contributions to this *Bulletin*) and of possible institutional mechanisms for the transfer of resources from military spending to development assistance [*ibid*: Ch 5 and 6], the report concludes with a number of proposals for action. These are primarily directed to states and governments asking them to carry out detailed assessments of the costs of their military activities, the possible benefits of a reallocation of military resources to other purposes and of the practicability of conversion. The report also proposes an intensified campaign for educating the public on peace and development, to be orchestrated by the UN. And it proposes that the UN should investigate the French government's proposal to create an international disarmament fund for development, financed either by a levy on armament or by a disarmament dividend financed by the budgeting savings resulting from the implementation of disarmament measures. Versions of this proposal are still under negotiation internationally (e.g. in Stockholm at the Conference on Confidence and Security-building Measures and Disarmament in Europe).

The Thorsson Report suffers from the same defects as the other reports, despite its sharper focus on the relationship between disarmament and development. It is based on a conception of security that is valid in principle, but not adhered to by most individual nation states. The report argues that security is much broader than military security, with economic and social aspects placed at the forefront. In the security policy of states the perception of threats and of the intentions of adversary states is, however, the determining factor. Defining security in the way that the Thorsson Report does may therefore be counterproductive, if the objective is to ensure an impact on state policy. The intermediate steps between common goals and short term interests need to be spelled out much more clearly.

The concept of development in the report is equally broad and hard to apply. Development is defined as sustained economic growth with the opportunity and responsibility for full participation. The result should be profound economic and social changes in society and a universal share in the benefits of economic growth. However, unless this conception of development is translated into policy it will have little relevance or impact.

In sum, the main suggestions in all three of the reports under circulation are for more studies, reports and funds to be created. Besides an appeal to everybody's long term interests there is little to motivate spending time and money on this. There is nothing in the reports

on how to translate the studies into a practical strategy for change. Educating the public, governments and the international community is an impossible task unless you address interests that people and states have — here and now.

One cannot deny, however, that the three reports are of major international significance and address themselves to the long term interests of all of us. They point to many mistaken beliefs that float around in political discussion, and present a platform for discussing the interrelations between North-South and East-West problems. But they are not, nor can they be, an adequate foundation for action to change these systems. As a result of their terms of reference, they address long term global interests; which in the real world tend to be overshadowed by the short term national interests of particular states, groups and classes.

The fundamental problem of coupling such interests to common global interests is still unresolved. It is to be hoped that is where the next international report will start.

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