

Inga Thorsson¹: Disarmament and the question of Conversion

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In addressing this Executive Committee Meeting of the IADPPNW at its opening session this morning, I have to apologize for applying not so much a factual but rather a conceptual and philosophical approach to my subject of the arms race versus disarmament. Although, or perhaps just because the present facts are related to the arms race - disarmament situation are quite depressing - I disregard for the moment the INF Treaty and its implications as well as the strange present relationship between the two super powers - I find it necessary to take a more philosophical and long-term view on the disarmament possibilities facing this world of ours and this generation of mankind today.



Inga Thorsson

Survival threats

First of all, a self-evident statement: We belong to the first generation of mankind to have to face serious threats to our own survival. Two of them are, or should be, well known. These most destructive threats to human survival are the nuclear arms race and the ongoing process of environmental destruction. But before I elaborate that statement further, let me share with you some more general and rather plain ideas. Two truths are beginning to penetrate our minds concerning the characteristics of the crucial problems threatening our survival:

- the globality of issues;
- the commonality of issues.

This fact requires a recognition of the need for a change to a new global thinking, which will be difficult but at the same time urgently necessary. However, comprehension of this need is tragically missing, particularly among the political leadership in nations around the world. Examples are easily found. Let me just summarize them, in a rather simplistic way: If the understanding, and the sorely needed political will had been there, this generation of mankind would not have been faced with problems such as:

- the world economic crisis, with its manifold components, such as inflation, unemployment, debt burdens, lack of balance in world trade and international monetary systems;
- the threatening lack of resources, particularly the non-renewable ones and energy;
- the short-term and long-term destruction of the human environment;
- the continued population increase;
- the morally unacceptable and politically hazardous gap between the rich and the poor - within and among countries;
- the arms race and its negative economic and social effects.

¹ Inga Thorsson was born in 1915. Throughout her life she has held a number of political appointments, both in Sweden and abroad. During 1964-66 she was Sweden's Ambassador in Tel Aviv and during 1974-82 Under-Secretary and Chairman of the Disarmament Delegation and of the Swedish Delegation to the International Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. Dr Thorsson was appointed Chairman of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in January 1988. In March the same year, the five political parties represented in the Swedish Parliament unanimously nominated Inga Thorsson to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The reason put forward by the cross-parliamentary group for its nomination is Inga Thorsson's life-long commitment and tireless work for peace, and her ability to convincingly champion this great challenge. The group also emphasized the role that she played for the parliamentary decision in 1968 to not develop Swedish nuclear weapons, and her work as an envoy.

The relationships between these global problems imply that if, or as long as they remain unsolved, they will mutually reinforce their negative effects on our future. But they can never be solved through confrontation and conflicts, only through compromise and co-operation.

Greater insecurity

The wellknown and often cited problem, constituting both the reason for the survival threats that I have just quoted and an obstacle to the urgently needed change in the conduct of political behaviour, is the lag in human thinking compared with the leap forward in technological development. We all know Albert Einstein's famous statement: *The splitting of the atom has changed everything save our mode of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe*. Some years later, at an international air travel conference in Copenhagen, the brilliant Danish Gruk-poet Piet Hein said:

We are global citizens with tribal souls.

Yes, indeed, since these words were spoken, almost 20 years ago, we have acquired much technical knowledge and our ways of life have been revolutionalized - at least in the industrialized world. But thinking has remained the same: there is no new thinking, no re-definition of old and outdated concepts concerning for instance security. This is proof of considerable decrepitude among political leaders and human beings in general. Our existence has been internationalized, but not our political actions.

And the results? Let me quote the final paragraph of the Declaration on Disarmament and Development, issued in April 1986 at a Panel of so called Eminent Personalities, which I chaired, and as part of the preparatory process for the United Nations International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development in August-September 1987:

- Our small planet is getting endangered: by the arsenals of weapons which could blow it up; by the burdens of military expenditures which could sink it under; and by the unmet basic needs of two-thirds of its population which subsists on less than one-third of its resources. We belong to a near universal constituency which believes that we are borrowing this Earth from our children as much as we have inherited it from our forefathers. The carrying capacity of Earth is not infinite, nor are its resources. The needs of security are legitimate and must be met. But must we stand by, as helpless witnesses of a drift towards greater insecurity at higher costs?

The quote from the Declaration on Disarmament and Development points directly to the impact of the arms race, in quantitative and qualitative terms, on our possibilities for survival and for development. What are then the facts of the arms race? Its size and its role in the context of possibilities for economic, social and human development? I think we all know the figures. Let me, just for reference purposes, repeat them briefly. The level of global military spending totals close to 1 000 billion US \$. This implies a real increase in worldwide military expenditures of between four and five times since the end of World War II. Current military expenditures represent well over 5 per cent, rather 6 - 8 per cent of total world output and are over 25 times as large as all official development assistance to developing countries. And during the 80's global military expenditures have grown, at an average, at a faster rate than during the second half of the 70's.

Still, it has been increasingly recognized, not least through the efforts by the United Nations, that the traditional concept of security, which lies behind so much, if not all, of the tremendous use of world resources for military purposes, has been hollowed by the development of interdependence among nations, to such an extent, that the most urgent security need of our time is a complete redefinition of the concept of security. Within the totality of military expenditures, there are some trends on which I want to make some particular observations because of their importance, of their implications both for the arms race and for their effects on development. These implications are ill-boding; both to the survival aspect and to the resource use and its develop-mental aspect.

Military R&D

First and foremost among them are the resources devoted to military Research & Development, R&D. I have to give some importance and some space to this particular aspect of the growth of military expenditure, because of its conspicuous and ominous impact on economic and social development. This has been documented in many scholarly papers, in the annual reports by Ruth Leger Sivard on

World Military and Social Expenditures and, most recently in a paper by Marek Thee, Senior research Fellow at PRIO, at an international convention last spring. Ruth Leger Sivard states that the rapid and unconstrained march of weapons technology has led to what she calls the art of warfare being revolutionized. I'll use this statement as an introduction to what I am going to say about one of the most influential and crucial - nay, I say, the most influential and crucial ingredient of the arms race, also the one where the dominance of the developed countries is so much apparent.

As far as R&D in general is concerned, let me quote just two figures from Marek Thee's paper which represents the most recent summing up of facts in the military R&D field. While the developed countries have 2 875 scientists and engineers per million population, the figure for the developing countries is 121. In percentage terms this means that 94% of world's scientists and engineers live and work in the developed countries, leaving the developing world with a poor 6%.

And in what way are these intellectual resources, in which the developed world has such a dominance, used? Another researcher, from the Washington-based Worldwatch Institute, formulates it thus: the feeding of the world's military machine is thus the predominant occupation of the global R&D. Various estimates have been made concerning the size of world expenditures and manpower engaged in military R&D. I might sum up these estimates by quoting professor Skolnikoff of the MIT as saying - in 1987 - that out of the funds devoted to R&D worldwide, "*a reasonable estimate, probably conservative, is that one-third to one-half is motivated, directly or indirectly, by military security concerns*".

As far as the national-geographic division is concerned, various appraisals seem to agree that the six biggest spenders on military R&D - USA, USSR, FRG, France, UK and China - account for some 90-95% of world expenditures, with 6 the USA and the USSR alone in the mid 1980's responsible for 80-84%. And in 1986 the share of government R&D funds in the USA diverted to military R&D reached 72.7%.

Some figures to show the increase over the last decade could be quoted: Real expenditures on military R&D are estimated to have increased by under 1% a year from 1974 to 1980, from 5 to 8% between 1980 and 1983, and by more than 10% from 1983 to 1984. As this last figure is higher than the rise in military expenditures as a whole, military R&D as a proportion of military expenditures has risen.

And it should be recalled that personnel requirements - 25% of the total number of scientists, in the US an estimated percentage of 35% - show that technological change in the military sector has a much higher degree of personnel intensity than the corresponding need in the civil sector; it requires much more - an estimate is 20 times more - than R&D in the civil sector, which thus is deprived of talents for modernization and innovation.

The trends that are apparent reflect the shift in what Marek Thee calls the centre of gravity of armaments; from a competition in quantities to a rivalry in science-based military technology. Qualitative superiority has become a central objective in the arms race. Here a memento is in place, because of the euphoria stemming from the US-USSR INF Treaty and the four summit meetings held between these two countries' leaders:

- By reducing quantities of weapon systems one creates the impression of a discontinuing arms race;
- By improving qualities one in fact escalates the arms race.

Fact is that, quite independently of the INF Treaty, and as stated by the magazine US News and World Report, "over the next three years nearly 50 major weapon systems are scheduled to move from prototype to production". I have emphasized this crucial aspect of the arms race, i.e. military R&D, because I share the widespread view of its negative implications for economic and social development - as, indeed, for survival, collective survival.

The arms race prevents economic development

Studies on economic conversion have shown, as, among many others Marek Thee points out, that, for a variety of reasons, the required high-tech performance of military production does not fit civilian industry. This is a serious drawback to the economies of both developed and developing countries. To quote Professor Lloyd J. Dumas of the University of Texas: "*The use of productive resources for non-productive purposes constitutes a drain on the vitality and prosperity of any economy*". Among developed countries' economies the difference between the US on one hand and Japan and the FRG on the other is striking: in the 1982 - 1984 period the US spent on military R&D 0.80% of its GDP, compared

with, for Japan 0.01% and for the FRG 0.22%. On the other hand, while the US shows a high preponderance of military R&D over government-funded civil R&D, Japan and the FRG have shown an overwhelming preponderance of civil government-funded R&D over military R&D. This has contributed to the great reduction in US competitiveness in international markets, profiting Japan and the FRG. No wonder that 1987 economic account published in the magazine US News and World Report is entitled: "Will the US stay number one?"

The current economic predicament of the US has many roots. But as so many others, Marek Thee points to the militarization of the economy and the technology as one of its prime causes. It is, however, particularly important to emphasize the problems imposed on the developing countries by the use and misuse of science and technology. It does contribute to sustain the polarization of North-South economic development. Marek Thee speaks about the numerous structural features related to the functioning of military and civilian R&D on a global scale, underlying underdevelopment in the Third World, and creating a developmental threshold, probably not possible to transcend in the foreseeable future, unless a radical transformation of the world economic and military order can be undertaken.

First and foremost among them is the maldistribution of human and material resources devoted to R&D between North and South. And as total global R&D is dominated by high-tech military R&D, and is geared to military and industrial requirements of the developed countries, it evinces little interest in the Third World's development problems. And to make a final quote from Marek Thee's illuminating paper: *"The synergistic impact of the skewed global distribution of R&D, reinforced by the inroads of military R&D in some Third World countries, has to be seen in the context of gross North-South inequalities, in capital, and in scientific-technological skills. These uphold and deepen the polarization in development and wellbeing between developed and developing countries"*.

Let me now recall the fact that many developing countries have - for a variety of reasons, which I do not intend to go into here - incurred high and, up to recently, increasing military burdens which have negatively affected their urgent need for economic and social development. But it is important to note that the burden on the developing countries has two different roots: one is the military expenditures of these countries themselves; the other is the negative effects on the world economy of the ongoing militarization - and it is ongoing, in spite of summit meetings, the INF Treaty etc. - of the world as such, constituting an important factor in the World economic crisis, which affects developing countries and their peoples much more than peoples in the North.

This was stated explicitly already in the 1981 report of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on the Disarmament-Development relationship, approved by the UN General Assembly in 1982. And a number of research reports submitted to the group showed that increased military spending, i.e. a militarization process, tends to be related to lower investment, greater tax burdens, cuts in consumption and social welfare spending, and inflation.

Absurd priorities

Cuts in spending on social welfare - and education for that matter - cause considerable negative effects in social and human terms. In a report to the UN Group the American economists Bruce Russett and David Sylvan estimated, through an econometric model, various social opportunity costs of arms purchases. They found that, for an average developing country, with a population of 8.5 million and a GNP per capita of around \$ 350 (in 1970 dollars), the first \$ 200 million of arms imports would add approximately 20 additional infant deaths per 1 000 live births, decrease life expectancy by 3 to 4 years, and result in 13 to 14 fewer literate adults out of every 100 of the adult population.



It is of course of importance to note here the effects of the militarization process on the debt burden of developing countries. In a study that I undertook for the Swedish government a few years ago, it was found that arms imports are responsible for around 25% of the debt burden of countries in the South. Another estimate, reported in the UN 1985 Report on the World Social Situation, indicates that in at least four of the twenty countries with the largest foreign debts in 1983, the value of arms imports amounted to 40% or more of the rise in debt between 1976 and 1980. We are all aware that the gap between rich and poor is widening, inter alia through the net transfer of financial resources from the developing to the industrialized countries, as a result of the debt crisis. The latest data that I have seen,

from June 1987, show - according to a report by the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission of Africa - that the African continent received, in 1986, about \$ 15 billion in assistance, while losing \$ 19 billion in reduced commodity prices and \$ 16 billion in debt services.

Thus, no one should be surprised at the tragic fact that - to quote again from the UN Declaration on Disarmament and Development - dozens of developing countries have lost a decade or more of development and that some of the economic and social achievements over the previous 20 years are in danger of being lost. The countries most severely affected are no longer able to adequately provide for the basic needs of their population, such as food, safe water, health care or education, let alone find additional resources for development.

In the Declaration the situation is summed up in the following two sentences:

- Harsh economic conditions, hunger, poverty, and political instability are natural allies. Not to grasp the wider implications of these issues may well amount to a central misperception of our times.

And let me quote the following paragraph of the declaration:

- To the extent that a reallocation of a part of the resources released through measures of disarmament can provide additional means for development, disarmament could make an important contribution towards development. As development helps to overcome non-military threats to national wellbeing and security, thus also favouring a more stable and sustainable international system, it may contribute towards a more secure world. The relationship between disarmament and development, in this sense, may be seen as a two-way street. The international framework for the relationship between disarmament and development needs to be sought within the network of global interdependence. In the present times, there is not only a growing interdependence among nations, but also a growing interdependence of issues.

Many of you may be aware of the series of excellent reports on World Military and Social expenditures, published by the American economist Ruth Leger Sivard, whom I have quoted already. Everyone of them starts with what she calls Priorities. Let me quote some of them:

- There is one soldier per 43 people in the world; one physician per 1 030 people;
- It costs \$ 590 000 a day to operate one aircraft carrier; and every day, in Africa alone, 14 000 children die of hunger or hunger-related causes;
- The world's annual military budget equals the income of 2.6 billion people in the 44 poorest countries.

And in her latest report, for 1987/88, she gives the following examples of alternative uses of resources now used for military purposes:

- Research on Star Wars in fiscal year 1988, \$ 3.9 billion, would correspond to an elementary school education for 1 400 000 children in Latin America;
- One Trident submarine, \$ 1.5 billion, would correspond to a 5-year programme for universal child immunization against 6 deadly diseases, preventing 1 million deaths a year;
- 2 Fighter aircrafts type JA 37, \$ 45 million, would correspond to the installation in Third World countries of 300 000 hand-pumps, to give villages access to safe water.

These figures represent an absurd way - to put it mildly - of priority-setting. And we should not think that the negative economic and social effects of the militarization process are limited to the peoples of the developing world. They are felt by the peoples in the major military powers as well. According to Ruth Leger Sivard, the United States, while being the world military power no. 1, ranks no. 5 in literacy rates, no. 8 in life expectancy, no. 18 in infant mortality rate, no. 18 again in population per physician and no. 20 in school-age population per teacher. The militarization process has its price, for rich and poor countries alike, and it is the people that have to pay it.

Increase pressure on political leaders

I have painted a rather dark picture of developments in the military-political field. But unfortunately I do believe that in all essentials it is true. Powerful forces are still at work in a destructive direction. I

shall not go into the intricacies of the ongoing game of disarmament, as played by the two superpowers and the two superpower leaders, assisted by their alliance or pact members, as this would lead me into another lengthy discourse.

Let me only say two things:

- Whatever happens at the surface, glorified by mass media, in terms of INF and possible other treaties, summit meetings and the like, the militarization process goes on and the capacity to overkill is there.



The meeting of IADPPNW (later ARC-PEACE) took place at the School of Architecture in Stockholm.

- Therefore, what is urgently required is a continuous and increasing political pressure by concerned citizens all over the world on short-sighted and unimaginative political leaders everywhere, to make them develop the urgently needed qualities of vision, combined with the recognition of the realities of this interdependent world of ours.

This would lead to a realizable change of the use of world resources, from unproductive and destructive purposes, to productive and constructive use for developmental purposes. But for this to happen, what is required is a radical reversal of traditional thinking about development priorities, policies and strategies. I repeat the obvious: the armaments build-up constitutes two threats to mankind to-day:

- the threat to our collective survival;
- the threat to a decent human life in security to people everywhere.

A sub-committee of a Nordic conference on the global interdependence issues about a year ago formulated it thus: "Until all people of the world feel secure in their everyday lives, there will be security for none. The urge for security thus becomes a global issue". And I would add: This is because as long as we live in an over-armed and undernourished world, people will not feel secure in their everyday lives. This is the main reason for an urgently needed re-definition of the concept of security, for, in fact, a new global thinking.

For the global problems of our time represent, again, an urgent need for recognition of the fact that no country is sustainable on its own, that there is a global commonality of issues.

- We find ourselves in a common crisis; and
- We have, all of us, common interests, to speak with the Brandt Commission;
- We are all united in the need for common security, to speak with the Palme Commission;
- We are looking forward to a common future, to speak with the Brundtland Commission.

But today, to quote again the final paragraph of the Declaration on Disarmament and Development:

- Our small planet is endangered: by the arsenals of weapons which could blow it up; but the burden of military expenditures which could sink it under; and by the unmet basic needs of two-thirds of its population which subsists on less than one-third of its resources.

Disarmament needed

But, again, counteracting forces exist, brighter elements are to be found in the picture. It is my conviction that, in the 90s we shall have disarmament, for two reasons:

- Because countries, be they - at least in their own eyes - rich and mighty, or be they poor and weak, will have to disarm for economic reasons. Economic conditions point unequivocally to the impossibility of having the present destructive process continue much further. Our world cannot afford much longer, its poor countries and its poorest people cannot afford any longer, even its riches countries cannot afford much longer to continue to use our resources for an arms race that very few people consider either possible or necessary.
- But to allow these positive forces, counteracting a negative utilization of world resources, to become a factor of political power, what is required is a mobilization of the peoples.

The peoples shall not any longer trust the world's political princes and their summit meetings. And there are signs, after all, that these princes are beginning to become alive to the demands of the people. Someone has said that the popular mobilization for peace, development and justice is spreading like a prairie-fire around the world. We see today the popular movements for peace spreading and broadening their support base, among the churches, among the trade unions, among the environmental groups and, not least among the many professional groups against nuclear weapons and for peace, in one of which I am pleased to find myself this morning.

As a matter of fact, I can see no realistic way out of this common dilemma of ours but the genuine involvement of the peoples. It is their lives that are at stake, because of the double threat to their survival. We must first of all aim at collective survival, by removing the Damocles sword of the militarization process. Without that there will be no development, no human life worth living. I should therefore like to see the peoples develop an immense amount of confidence in their own possibilities of power; one might call it the power of the powerless. That could be mobilized and the results that it could bring should never be underestimated by the mighty and powerful.

And we must always remember the opening words of the UN Charter:

- *We, the peoples of the United Nations,*
- *determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and to live in peace with one another as good neighbours...*

It is the peoples that have declared themselves determined to do that, not the governments. Therefore, the governments are accountable to the peoples on how they live up to the UN Charter, and how they fulfil their commitments, in accordance with the Charter, to the activities of the United Nations. Of the lack of observance of these commitments we have had, very recently, the most ample and tragic evidence, provided by the still most mighty UN Member State. Because of this, governments of UN Member States must always be reminded of their accountability, through the peoples increasingly exerting political pressure on them to fulfil their duties. That means, in fact, that the challenge is before each and everyone of us.