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Arms transfers control and proposals to link disarmament to development

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Summary : The questions of arms transfers control and of the negative effects of armament for economic development (and the possibility to create an international disarmament fund for development) is clearly important questions for the United Nations. It is important to study the adoption of some proposals affecting the level of arms imports and arms production technology in the Third World. At the same time, for the development of Third world development, economic aid to developing countries can be realized by the creation of the international fund disarmament for development.

Mots clés : International Fond of Disarmament for Development, arms transfers control, disarmament for development.

ARMS TRANSFER CONTROL AND PROPOSALS TO LINK

DISARMAMENT TO DEVELOPMENT

The idea of there being a link between disarmament and development is a very old one. Two centuries ago, economists already believed that military expenditure was unproductive and had a negative effect on the world economy. But proposals to establish an institutional link between disarmament and development are recent. They mostly appeared in the seventies and eighties. The problem of underdevelopment certainly is the oldest of the world, but its theory and economic policy are intimately related to the process of decolonization. The considerable inequality of development between States, the responsibility of colonial States for underdevelopment admitted now by most of the analysts and the growing power of the Third World in the international community have aroused international concern for developing countries. On the other hand, because of increasing military expenditure, the arms race between East and West and even in the Third World and the terrifying effects of modern weapons, the need for disarmament has become greater. Because it could be possible to have the same international security with less weapons, military expenditure really looks scandalous in comparison with underdevelopment.

A recent U.N. document established for the international Conference on disarmament for development, to be held in Paris in 1986 and finally postponed, gives a list of no less than 19 State proposals, among which 11 were made after 1973 and 6 since 1984 (1). Until now, France and Soviet Union have been the two leading States in the field of disarmament for development. As early as 1955, President Edgar Faure proposed the establishment of an international fund for development and mutual assistance. According to that plan, States would agree to reduce a growing percentage of their military expenditure from year to year and to transfer these resources to an international fund. This fund would decide a uniform definition of military expenditure and States would be obliged to communicate all documents useful for the knowledge of their defense budgets. A part of the resources assigned to the fund would be left at the disposal of the donor countries and another part would be available for international aid transfers. Edgar Faure's plan was well thought out but it did not receive any agreement from the international community (2). Some of Edgar Faure's ideas were again put forward in 1978 when France proposed, at the UNSSOD I, to establish an international fund (3). Its project was institutionally ambitious but modest in the field of the revenues which were to be transferred to developing countries. France once again improved its proposal in 1984 and asked for an international Conference (4).

Soviet proposals since 1956 focus on military budget reductions. In 1973, the U.S.S.R. asked for a reduction of 10 per cent of military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council (5). According to Soviet views, 10 per cent of these funds ought to be reallocated to the economic and social development of underdeveloped countries. In 1973, Mexico called for an expert study on technical problems linked to the definition and comparison of military expenditures. The U.N. General Assembly voted a resolution supporting both the Soviet and the Mexican proposals (6). With the exception of Mexico and earlier (7) of India (1950) and Brazil (1962), developing States don't really pay attention to the idea of disarmament for development. It has mainly been a project developed by the superpowers. Nevertheless that situation was recently modified. Senegal (1978 and 1984), Tunisia (1984), Mexico (1984) and Sri Lanka (1985) also submitted various proposals (8).

Even if there exist important differences between these proposals, they all conceive the idea of disarmament for development in the same way. Their purpose is to promote disarmament in States that are well developed and armed in favor of aid transfer to underdeveloped, poor and generally unarmed States. International initiatives to limit or reduce military expenditure or arms trade have failed. Many reasons can be put forward to explain this failure : economic crisis, , distrust and absence of political will on the part of States, secrecy surrounding military forces and expenditure or national selfishness.

We are going to try to analyse 1) whether and how the adoption of such proposals would affect the level of arms imports and arms production technology in the Third World and 2) whether linking limitations of arms from the Third World with development aid makes such limitations more attractive for the States involved, and thus could facilitate Third World arms transfer control.

Two kinds of proposal may be examined :

- 1) Proposals on arms transfers,
- 2) Proposals on disarmament for development

I - PROPOSALS ON ARMS TRANSFERS

These proposals are very difficult to negotiate.

1) Definition of weapons is not universal. The notion of military products is ambiguous, since it depends on the circumstances of conflicts and of peace. In wartime, every product can be considered as a weapon for the defense of a country. In peacetime, often it is difficult to know the real nature of some products, which can be used simultaneously in civil or military fields.

2) The geographical coverage of the negotiations on arms transfers is very difficult to negotiate. Does it concern underdeveloped countries which are not usually producers of arms and then which are not able to develop their own defense ?

2) An international agreement must be verified. But, in arms trade, secrecy is the usual practice.

These problems must arise in every negotiation on the reduction or freeze of military expenditure or arms transfers control. Beyond these general problems, special difficulties appear in connection with each variety of effort to promote arms transfers limitations.

Arms imports limitations

The proposition that Third World States should decide to reduce or stop their arms imports from developed countries is usually based on the negative economic effect resulting from regional arms races. However, arms imports reduction may have various effects on the national economy. If these reductions are not counterbalanced by national military purchases, the country will actually increase its total reserve of foreign currencies, or reduce its debts. But if an import substitution policy is applied, then direct and indirect effects will be more complex (9). They rely on the possibility for the country to export its weapons, if it does not want to produce a very expensive product without economy of scale effects. Arms production is characterised by very high costs for research and development, learning curves and economies of scales. They would produce tendencies toward monopoly in the market (10). The theory of the industrialization of the Third World by the arms industry is not adequate, because increased competition pushes world market prices down towards short-run marginal costs. Large producers can produce more cheaply and undercut competition. Third World States are not able to produce very sophisticated weapons. They can only produce small weapons in a very competitive market (11). So, an arms imports reduction in developing countries without a reduction of military expenditure is a political decision which is certainly very expensive. If a government wishes to establish an indigenous arms industry in order to ensure national independence, it will need various informal and formal barriers to protect its arms industry and this will involve it buying its products far above world market prices. In purely commercial terms it is a risky and unattractive market, because of a long product development cycle, international competitiveness, and the large amount of research-development included in the production of weapons. Strategic arguments in favor of an indigenous production are not convincing, because a rapid surge in production by Third World arms producers looks very unlikely. Furthermore, from the States' point of view, existing stockpiles of weapons are better than developing a new military industry. A reduction of the arms trade toward the Third World has no real sense in terms of disarmament and development without a reduction of military expenditure. The lack of such a reduction certainly would favor the rise of new arms producers. One may doubt that such a result would be in any way a positive change. The main reasons for establishing

arms industries are political in nature, based on security reasons and the will to be more independent by becoming self-efficient. But some government following inward-looking import substitution strategies for economic development use arms production for the industrialization of their countries. They think that there are technological spin-offs from defence industrialisation, that military industries have backward linkages and create effective demand for inputs produced by the civilian system, and that the costs of foreign arms are becoming prohibitive both for their balance of payments and for their foreign currencies reserve (12). But these relations did not receive any historic proof. The defense technology is often far too advanced for the civilian economy and the costs constraints on the civilian and military products are very different. The spin-offs of the military sector are not so important partly because of the military secrecy. For instance, it has been demonstrate for India that in none of the main industries the industrial spin-off from military expenditure has significantly positive effects (13). The country must compete on external markets for the scale effects useful for the the military industries, increasing its dependency on international arms transfers. Given the relatively poor integration between military and civil industrial sectors, the weakness of the spin-offs of military R & D on civilian sector, the need for considerable imports of components or sub-systems in weapons production and their negative effects on the national debt (14), the constant need to sell the national weapons on the international market, the general effects of arms industry for underdeveloped countries are not positive in the long run. If a reduction of the arms trade lead to the development of new arms industries in the Third World, then the remedy is worse than the disease. A reduction of military expenditure must be included in a negotiation on the reduction of the arms trade.

Arms exports control

Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States, proposed "Conventional arms transfer talks" (CAT). He suggested reducing the growth of arms trading and took the initiative to negotiate with the Soviet Union. He unilaterally decided that arms sales would be an exceptional instrument for foreign policy, when the national security of the United States was concerned. Such a proposal was not very realistic, because U.S. national interests in the area of defense are very difficult to define and can be interpreted in a large or a narrow manner.

For some years, the informal London Suppliers Club of major nuclear technology have been trying to limit the proliferation of military nuclear technology (16). It has partly been successful. But by the late 1980s, several developing countries, with the help of industrialized countries, will have obtained the technological potentiality to produce nuclear weapons. Exports cartels are able to restrict the proliferation of special arms systems in the short run. But it is very difficult to keep the homogeneity and the solidarity of the Club in the long run.

The efficiency of embargoes (17) is a matter of disputes for many economists and politicians. Usually, the economic weapons fail in the

long run, either because various economic interests of the partners are conflictual or compared opportunity cost for the opponents are very different. It does seem unlikely that it would be possible to obtain an embargo on arms exports to the Third World, because the economic interests involved are far too important for many industries in developed countries and because socialist and capitalist States compete in the world for ideological and strategic supremacy.

Even if an agreement on arms transfer control was accepted by the main superpowers, a lot of short run problems would rise, like pressures from lobbies of the military-industrial complex, the additional costs of some weapons for the exporting countries, the dependence of employment on arms exports, the temptation of developing countries to take the place of developed countries, the strategic disequilibrium of some regions or the development of an international black market. In the long run, the discrimination between developed countries and developing countries created by this transfers control could become intolerable to the Third World.

Tax on international arms transfers

This proposal from the report of the Brandt commission (18) has been supported by former French Prime Minister Laurent Fabius (19), and in a way, by Tunisia (20). The main idea is to establish a tax on arms transfers for the benefit of development aid. Two main criticisms must be made of this proposal : 1) Only 3 or 4 % of military expenditure is concerned by that tax (21) and 2) 65% of transactions on arms transfers affect developing countries. Therefore with the inclusion of the bureaucracy costs of this tax, this proposal is not of very much interest for developing States, with the exception of countries producing their own weapons or buying only small quantities of foreign arms. Even if it was paid only by developed countries, the tax would reduce the appeal of international arms trade, which is not, in the late 1980s, very attractive for any country, because the profits from arms exports benefits are concentrated on particular interests. Undoubtedly it is difficult to measure the effects of arms exports on a national economy, because often these transactions are very complex (22). The transfer takes place as part of a package involving equipment, spares, training, access to technology, etc... With arms transfers, other arrangements are negotiated in the civil sector. The real transaction price is then seldom well defined (23).

II - PROPOSALS ON DISARMAMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Three main proposals on disarmament for development have been made : aid to developing and low military expenditure countries, the reduction of military expenditure and the creation of an international disarmament for development Fund.

Aid to developing and low military expenditures countries'

The idea to aid developing and low military expenditures countries is popular ; it has been proposed in three ways :

Two members of the Brookings Institution (24) proposed a special Fund to transfer to developing countries an aid of the same financial amount as that of the reduction of their military expenditure. This proposal is not very unselfish for developed countries. First, a country which spend no money for military expenditure will receive nothing from this proposal. Second, no mention is made on war, conflicts or threats against underdeveloped countries, which are obliged to defend themselves against aggressors by increasing their military expenditures.

Third, the main problem in the current arms race is not developing countries, but developed countries ; but it is the last ones which give some aid to the underdeveloped and often weakly militarized countries if they decide to reduce their small military expenditures. This proposal has the taste of imperialism.

A study published by UNIDIR (25) proposed to help the initiatives among the poorest developing countries in favor of regional arms reduction which could be assisted by international development aid in order to reduce social and economic conflicts. This proposal did not receive support from the international community.

Because disarmament does not seem a realistic objective in the short run, it has been suggested by the french government (26) that it would be possible, in order to aid developing countries, to use for civilian purposes the enormous potentialities of developed countries for production of military goods or services. Because the armies are able to build bridges or to give first aid for a catastrophe, developed countries could lend some military specialists for this civilian purposes. Such a proposal is very ambiguous and is either dangerous or useless. If it results in substantial transfers, if foreign armies begin to work in developing countries, that exposes them to the risk of imperialism. If it only produces occasional transfers, it can be of little help for development.

Reduction of military expenditure

The reduction of military expenditure can be very useful for developing countries, if they are directly concerned . It would also have an indirect effect on arms imports by Third World countries, because international tension would be reduced and programs of armed forces could then be restricted. The notion of military expenditure is ambiguous. In wartime, the military sector dominates the whole of society. That generally is not the case in peacetime. United Nations experts adopted a stricto sensu concept of military expenditure, based on the direct nature of the expenditure incurred (27). The Soviet Union's proposals (1973) failed because the United States wanted to

measure, to compare and to verify the figures of military expenditures. The Soviet Union did not agree with this idea and asserted that U.S. demand was above all the expression of a lack of political will to reduce military expenditure (28). At the second special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the United States took the important initiative of calling for the convening of an international conference on military expenditures (29). In contrast, the Soviet Union expressed a negative view about the United Nations experts works on the reduction of military expenditure and particularly the report on disarmament for development. Technical studies are not relevant because the reduction of military expenditure requires mutual trust, accordingly, negotiations should be based on data published by States themselves. This exercise in non-communication between the USSR and the USA dominates the debate on the reduction of military expenditure. If a reduction of military expenditure was decided on by superpowers, developing countries might follow. If there was no international transfer for the benefit of developing countries, the poorer countries of the world would then have to fight in the short and long run, against developed countries' need to find new substitute markets to counterbalance the restriction of activity of their military sector.

International Disarmament Fund for Development

The idea of reducing military expenditure in benefit of developing countries received its best formulation in the proposal of an Disarmament Fund for Development. Everybody agrees that armaments constitute a waste of world resources. But, if military expenditure improves national security, it also improve the well-being of the Nation. This analysis is not true for the world system as a whole, where every dollar spent on the military sector is wasteful if the other side spends exactly the same amount for the same product. Empirical analysis on the effects of a reduction of military expenditure produces contradictory results for both developed and developing countries (30). While defence efforts sometimes compromise economic growth by reducing investment potential, limiting foreign currency reserves or promoting impoverishing exports, the effects of domination resulting from military strength or certain types of militarization of the economy often have, at least temporarily, positive effects on national economies. On the basis of import-substitution and industrialization theories, some analysts and politicians in the Third World consider that a strong national armament sector is very useful for the development policy of poor countries. The establishment of an international disarmament fund for development would be, in this context, highly symbolic. But any reduction of military expenditure should be done with a special care for the strategical disequilibrium that it can induce in the world or in a region. That is why comparisons and verifications of the military expenditure of the participating States must be rigorously established.

very difficult for it to obtain some additional resources, because its military expenditure will be very low. Moreover, the creation of a Fund is not inevitable with this method, if it does not introduce the obligation of international transfers for the benefit of Third World.

ii) The voluntary contributions method (32) is simple and it avoids the painful problem of verification. But, it leaves States free to transfer resources to the Fund and moreover, it does not establish a clear link between disarmament and development: Superpowers which decide to reduce their military expenditure could only be called by international community to contribute to the Fund. The link between disarmament and development is weak with voluntary contributions, which would face difficulties during a world economic crisis. Nevertheless, this method can be the simplest method at the initial stage of a disarmament process.

iii) Levying taxes on armaments (33) encourages disarmament or, for the same outlays, reduces the quantity of weapons produced. It is the most interesting proposal, because it taxes the overarmed superpowers for the benefit of developing countries. However, the amount contributed would be in proportion to military efforts and it is very difficult to know military expenditures of a lot of countries. This method implies international comparisons of military expenditure, and socialist countries do not want to publish clear data on that area. The tax might be useful in a climate of trust, because of the verification it implies for military expenditure and arms and because of resources it would provide for the poorest countries.

In fact, the three methods must be used. It depends on the opportunity to create and to maintain the International Disarmament Fund for Development. A lot of problems subsist concerning the working of the Fund such as the amount of available resources, the comparative importance of disarmament and development in the definition of the taxpayers, the structure of the Fund, the distribution of resources and the process of establishing the Fund. But first of all, developed countries must agree with this proposal. Then, even if political factors are not completely solved, the Fund would have a reality which is difficult to establish before concrete negotiations (34).

All States could participate and reduce their military expenditure or pay some kind of tax on arms transfers. Looking at the various recent proposals, one can see that this principle, as such, seldom appears. Soviet proposals identify as donor States the 5 permanent members of the Security Council and, further, other major States which are well developed and armed (35). The French proposal of the international fund more or less agrees with this solution. In principle, the Fund would be filled by resources coming from disarmament, but as long as there is no disarmament it will be firstly fed by contributions mainly from States possessing nuclear weapons (36). Thus, both France and the USSR propose not to try to get funds from Third World, not to use the idea of disarmament for development for limiting arms transfers and arms production to developing countries. Senegal and Tunisia have another point of view. Senegal proposed a tax of 5 per cent on the military budgets of all States (37). Tunisia is in favor of compulsory

contributions linked to arms transfers (38). However these proposals must be seen as exceptions, because such an attempt would confront the principle of the special responsibility of great powers, especially superpowers, in the arms race and disarmament, which is well established and has been ratified by UNSSOD I in its Final Document (39). It would also mean that the Third World would be seen as truly participating in the arms race. Such an idea is unacceptable for Third World States, and furthermore is not sustained by all the great powers (for instance, France at the UNSSOD I denounced it (40)). It looks impossible to change the present approach, because the Third World controls the UN General Assembly. Any effort to modify this principle would be of a very high political cost. That is all the more true as military expenditure in the Third World is presently decreasing.

One particular way to use disarmament for development against the arms race in the Third World could consist in acting on reallocation between States of resources coming from disarmament. In 1978, the French proposal indicated that resources from the international disarmament fund for development should be intended for the least developed and armed States. This implied that underdeveloped but overarmed States would not obtain aid from the Fund. It does not introduce a clear relation between reduction of military expenditure and the international aid and the concept of overarmed States is related to the particular threats of each country. In principle that would be a stimulus to reduce their military expenditure and devote more efforts to social and economic development. This second way is compatible with the principle that the arms race is due to the behaviour of the superpowers. Moreover it goes well with the fact that military expenditures in the Third World vary greatly. Only a few overarmed States would be excluded from the benefit of the Fund. Nevertheless several difficulties remain, like the definition of overarmed countries and the relation between security and development. Another obvious difficulty is the necessity to find clear criteria which will make it possible to decide whether or not a State, bearing in mind its present military capability, will receive some aid. One can easily conceive various criteria - the amount of military expenditure, the number of a certain kind of weapons,...- but how can one take into account the position of States involved in wars and conflicts? Furthermore, it is not necessary to appreciate the situation of each State as a whole, its military power and its social and economic position? Thus there exists no single, simple criterion for the defining overarmament, security and responsibility in conflicts... The lack of a single criterion implies one more obstacle: it gives a greater role to the body in charge of the reallocation. So other questions appear and particularly that of the composition of this body (41).

Conclusions

Beyond technical difficulties, proposals on arms transfers control and disarmament for development face serious economical and political obstacles. Even if they present various proposals, great powers really are reluctant to participate in such a process. Trying to have an effect

on arms exports to the Third World or on arms production in the Third World by means of arms transfers control or disarmament for development would increase these difficulties. These proposals are not panaceas, but they could be useful in a better political and strategical situation. Perhaps the link between disarmament and development is not so appealing, since it adds these two problems. We can raise the question whether disarmament is more useful for development than development must be for disarmament. Even if it is fundamental to continue to propose solutions to the problem of disarmament and development, nothing can be done without mutual confidence.

Jacques FONTANEL
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NOTES

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- (4) President Mitterrand's statement, UN General Assembly, 28 Sept. 1983. (Document d'actualité internationale, La Documentation Française, n° 23, 1983) and U.N. Disarmament Commission Document, A/CN 10/57/add 1 (1984).
- (5) U.N. General Assembly document A/9191. The Soviet Union had already proposed to reduce military budgets in 1956 (DC/SC 1/41) and 1958 (A/C1/L207)
- (6) U.N. General Assembly resolution 3093 (XXVIII) A (Soviet proposal) and B (Mexico's proposal), 1973.
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 for SIPRI : 38.5 Billions dollars/ 762.4 billions dollars = 5 %
 for USACDA : 26 billions dollars/765 billions dollars = 3,4 %
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