



From Arms Race to Human Race

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In order for peace to be established, there is a question that every individual, as well as every professional organization, must constantly ask of themselves: Do one's actions help contribute to the happiness of fellow humans or to their suffering? We must always examine whether our actions favor the cause of peace or promote instability. Sometimes the narrow pursuit of our own comforts or needs can mean pain, poverty, or death for other human beings. At all times, our knowledge can be employed to do good or to facilitate evil. Because of this, an enormous responsibility rests on our shoulders to follow a higher moral ground.

In addition to being accountable for our own actions, we must demand the same of our governments. We must ask our current world leaders whether their policies respect and tolerate differing views or whether they attempt to silence and annihilate them. Violence is always the ultimate form of intolerance.

This article is based upon a speech given by the former President of Costa Rica at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, on February 23, 1997. Dr. Arias, the president of Fundacion Arias Para La Paz, spoke at a conference entitled "From Arms Race to Human Race," before a group of 700 people.

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Unfortunately, the world of military and economic powers is full of cynicism and hypocrisy. The discrepancy between what is said and what is done becomes greater by the minute. As we speak of the need for conservation, we create more smoke, noise, and disease. As we speak of economic growth and social justice, hunger spreads throughout the world. Today I would like to share with you an issue that weighs heavily on my heart -- the continuing transfer of arms to the developing world, and in particular, to Latin America.

The Vanishing Peace Dividend

Since the wake of the Cold War, most governments have reduced their defense budgets considerably. Yet even though world military expenditures have plummeted in the years after the Cold War, peace dividends have not materialized to reduce the poverty rampant in both the developing and developed world. According to the World Bank, in the next ten years both Latin America and the Caribbean will need to invest approximately \$60 billion annually in their infrastructures. This exorbitant cost is beyond the reach of most governments. Latin America's only hope is to stimulate both domestic and foreign private investment. In order to attract investors, however, democratic stability must be guaranteed throughout the region. This

soundness is contingent upon the effective subordination of militaries to civilian authorities as well as upon the ability of governments to continually decrease poverty rates. Stability and economic growth in Latin America are threatened by an arms race such as the one being promoted by former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry in Latin America.

Perry recently pushed for the reversal of a policy ban on selling high technology weapons to Latin America. From Latin America's perspective, this initiative is both disillusioning and disconcerting as it creates the possibility for a new arms race in the region. If approved by President Clinton, this measure would reignite Latin America's historic conflict between civilian authority and military power over the allocation of budget expenditures. If buying conventional weapons already represents an excessive burden on national budgets, there is no doubt that high technology weapons could exact a much larger sacrifice at the expense of Latin America's people. The damage that will be inflicted on the democracies and peoples of Latin America if this initiative becomes a reality is unquantifiable.

With Perry's initiative we risk losing our modest, yet significant, foothold on the demilitarization and democratization of our countries. To date, two countries in our hemisphere, Panama and Haiti, have joined Costa Rica in eliminating their armed forces. Many other countries have begun to follow these examples by substantially downsizing their armies. How then can we not be frustrated when high ranking officials of the country most compelled to help maintain Latin America's peace, are about to instigate a new arms race in the region?

How disheartening that, while tremendous efforts are being made to reduce military expenditures in Latin America, the manufacturers of sophisticated and expensive arms are using the United States government as a weapons sales agent. Opening this market of death as a source of economic success for the richest countries of the world, will maintain the people of developing countries in absolute poverty and misery.

U.S. Jobs vs. Latin American Chaos: An Immoral Equation

Among the arguments made in favor of the sale of U.S. high technology weapons to Latin America, two merit strong ethical responses -- even though some may argue that politics should be pragmatic and keep a distance from moral reasoning.

It is said that increased high technology weapons sales will translate into more jobs for the United States. Furthermore, it is

argued that if the United States does not sell the weapons, other countries will sell them instead. It is an immoral and unbalanced equation to justify a few thousand jobs in the United States at the expense of placing more weapons in the hands of the developing world. An increase in armaments that are not needed in Latin America will only provoke more instability and chaos for its people and neighboring countries.

If we accept such reasoning, it would not be surprising if some Colombian or Bolivian were to argue that exporting mind-altering drugs to the United States is justified; because the production of cocaine and marijuana creates jobs in the agricultural, industrial, and commercial sectors of those countries. Moreover, it could be further asserted that if these drugs were not exported from Colombia or Bolivia, they simply would be supplied by other countries.

For many, this comparison may seem rather drastic. There is no doubt, however, that both types of sales export death and misery. The reality that selling arms is considered legal whereas selling drugs is not, does not automatically make the first transaction morally defensible. It should be noted that the buying and selling of arms is a large source of corruption, as evidenced by several scandals in both industrialized and developing countries. If we are frightened by the extent of drug trafficking originating from the South and directed toward the North, we must then also be scandalized by the scope and magnitude of indiscriminate arms sales from the North to the South.

Politics, Lobbying, and Arms Sales

The U.S. is responsible for the largest number of arms exports to the developing world. Furthermore, at \$265 billion, U.S. military expenditures exceed the combined military spending of Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Iraq, Iran, and all of Latin America, including Cuba. The United States' military excess is closely linked to what President Dwight D. Eisenhower called the "military-industrial complex." This superstructure's extensive political powers have been influenced by American weapon manufacturers to maintain military expenditures at a level that represents a burden to the citizens of the country. In Congress, recipients of industry money led successful fights to increase government subsidies for arms exports to \$7.6 billion. According to a recent report by the World Policy Institute, in the past decade 25 U.S. arms exporting companies have made political contributions of more than \$21 million in promoting their industry. Sadly, approximately the same

amount of money could have funded four years of primary education for 135 million of the world's less fortunate children.

Moreover, it is discouraging that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are responsible for more than 90% of arms sales to the developing world. The very countries that should be maintaining world peace and security are the ones most responsible for promoting war and insecurity by producing and selling weapons.

Even if the Clinton Administration abstains from selling these high technology arms to Latin America, there is much to be done to put an end to the sale of arms to the developing world.

Since 1960, the developing world has imported weapons valued at approximately \$775 billion, a total that represents 69% of the global arms trade during that period. Military forces in the developing world waste \$220 billion a year on weapons, four times as much as their governments receive in foreign aid from the developed world. Moreover, with only 8% of what is spent in the developing world on military expenditures, a voluntary family planning program could be enacted that, according to some estimates, would help stabilize the world population by the year 2015. (Every 24 hours about 400,000 children are born, 90% of whom come into being in the developing world. What kind of a future awaits these children?)

Making People More Important Than Arms

In developing countries, the urgent need for governments to dedicate their scarce resources to human development rather than military personnel and the instruments of war, makes itself heard in the forgotten voices of deprived populations. Recently, India purchased fighter planes worth \$1.8 billion for their air force. With this same amount of money, 8 million children could have received vaccinations against six deadly childhood diseases.

India is not alone. While the governments of developing countries buy more than \$25 billion a year in arms, their people remain subject to the chilling reality of poverty. These people cannot participate in the development of society because they do not know how to read or write. Their health worsens because they have never had any contact with a qualified doctor. They continue to tolerate squalid living conditions exacerbated by the lack of access to potable water. And their children -- our children -- suffer from malnutrition and die daily from contagious diseases that could have been prevented. The

time has come to make people more important than arms.

Since the time of Adam Smith, the conventional economic wisdom has been that military spending is not productive since virtually any other kind of spending will generate more economic growth in the long term. Only blindness can prevent us from seeing that a reduction in military spending would be beneficial to humanity. The time has come to make people more important than arms.

Developing countries must be responsible for reorienting their priorities from national security to human security: that is, security of education, security of health, security of food, security of employment, and security of the environment. Human security is a matter of human dignity: a child who does not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed.

When human security needs are not met, we foster a cycle of violence. When we allow militaries to grow in power in order to control increasingly desperate populations, we have failed to address the root causes of conflict. Too many poor countries spend their limited resources on militaries that serve only to oppress their own people. Too many industrialized countries continue to export death to the developing world. Unless we put an end to the arms trade, we will never put an end to violence.

An International Code of Conduct

This is why I have proposed to my fellow Nobel Peace laureates that they join me in promoting an International Code of Conduct on Arms Trade. Building on similar proposals before the U. S. Congress and the European Union, this Code of Conduct would stress that any decision to export arms would take into account several factors pertaining to the country of final destination. The recipient country must endorse democracy, in terms of free and fair elections, the rule of law, and civilian control over the military and security forces. Its government should not engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. The International Code of Conduct would not permit arms sales to any country responsible for armed aggression in violation of international law. Finally, the Code would require the purchasing country to participate fully in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

The great American President John F. Kennedy once stated:

"[We] must examine our attitude

toward peace itself: Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it is unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief: It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable -- that mankind is doomed -- that we are gripped by forces we cannot control.

"We need not accept that view. Our problems are man made. Therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No

problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable -- and we believe they can do it again."

The time has come for us to dispel our skepticism toward peace. The time has come for us to act upon our hopes and aspirations, and to leave to future generations a legacy they will be proud to call their own. 🐼