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The UN, Defence Conversion, and Disarmament

by Jayantha Dhanapala

Experts and laymen alike have known for years that a country's power and welfare depend on a lot more than the guns in its armory. Yet how many civilizations have been decimated throughout history due to the belief that armaments alone could achieve such goals? It was this cycle of insecurity, armament, war, reconstruction, insecurity, and war again that led the postwar victors after World War I to create the League of Nations and—after the cycle ran another course—the United Nations.

In the aftermath of this carnage, governments would periodically address defence conversion, a challenge that has vexed mankind ever since beating “swords into plowshares” was first identified in the Book of Isaiah. The UN has also pursued this goal for many years and may have even more contributions to make with the assistance of civil society.

Indeed, the UN has been in the “defence conversion” business throughout its existence. Many of its most solemn goals—including the peaceful settlement of disputes, disarmament and the limitation of armaments, and economic and social development—are directly related to this activity. Proposals to ban biological weapons were negotiated in the UN's Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) and debated in the General Assembly—in 1972, these efforts culminated in the Biological Weapons Convention. A similar history in the UN's Conference on Disarmament led in 1993 to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Today 141 and 122 countries respectively have joined these treaties.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was also deliberated for years in the ENDC and the General Assembly. It was opened for signature in 1968 and now has an impressive 187 members. Though it does not ban nuclear weapons outright, it commits 182 non-nuclear-weapon States parties not to acquire such weapons and obligates all

parties (including the five nuclear-weapon States) to enter into negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The International Court of Justice has interpreted this obligation as meaning that negotiations must lead to a conclusion.

The potential savings to society from eliminating these weapons will be extraordinary, even considering that disarmament will itself be costly. The Brookings Institution has estimated that the United States alone has spent well over US \$5 trillion on its various nuclear weapons programs since the end of World War II. Nobody knows exactly how much the other nuclear-weapon States have spent but the aggregate figure for global expenditures on such weapons is surely astronomical however measured.

The UN is continuing to promote nuclear disarmament, despite all the familiar obstacles of fear, nationalism, bureaucratic inertia, and great power politics. Building global norms is never an easy business, especially not when the subject concerns the world's

most terrifying weapons. Yet nuclear disarmament is regularly debated in the General Assembly and its First Committee, yielding resolutions registering broad

international support for this goal. The newly re-established UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) gathers data in this field, organizes briefings for national delegations, hosts conferences, assists in international negotiations, and misses no opportunities to advocate this cause. The UN Institute for Disarmament Research produces some of the finest analytical products in the disarmament field. And the Conference on Disarmament is continuing its efforts—despite resistance by some of its members—to take up the nuclear disarmament issue.

The UN is also quite active in the field of conventional arms. We maintain the UN's Register on Conventional Arms, a major improvement in the transparency of global arms transfers. We assist countries in defence conversion activities, which include a project DDA implements jointly with the UN Development Programme involving the collection of

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excess arms in Albania. We are involved in helping to integrate former combatants into societies that have been devastated by chronic conflict. We assist in efforts to eliminate anti-personnel landmines. And we have also strengthened our three regional Disarmament Centres in Peru, Togo, and Nepal, which are also pursuing disarmament and peace-building activities.

All such initiatives rest on perceptions of national security and self-interest. There is no substitute for political will inside key governments when it comes to pursuing such goals—particularly with respect to weapons of mass destruction—and the responsibility for shaping that will ultimately lie in civil society. At a time when nuclear disarmament efforts have stalled, when the spectre of recent nuclear tests still hovers over the Indian subcontinent, when countries continue to test long-range missiles in three regions, and when conventional arms continue to be produced, perfected, and transferred everywhere, the need for a mobilized civil society is more evident now than ever. With the dedicated activities of groups like the Bonn International Center for Conversion, prospects for positive change in this field can only improve in the years ahead.

Jayantha Dhanapala, a Sri Lanka national, has been the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs at the United Nations since 1 February 1998. He is also the Head of the Special Group visiting the Presidential Sites in Iraq and a Commissioner in UNSCOM. Prior to his current UN appointment, Dhanapala was Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN in Geneva and Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the United States. He has also been President of the Conference on Disarmament, President of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, and Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

Staff Spotlight:



Jörn Brömmelhörster

Jörn Brömmelhörster (Germany) joined BICC in mid-1994. Prior to this, he worked as a researcher at the Seminar for Economic Policy and Public Finance at the Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. Jörn studied at the universities of Heidelberg, Shanghai and Bochum. He holds an MA in Sinology and Economics and a Ph.D. in Economics (with his thesis on defense conversion).

His first project at BICC was to advise the European Union on criteria to be used for the implementation of the KONVER program (1994–1999). This later resulted in the publication of *BICC Report 9*. Afterwards he edited a book on China's defense conversion together with John Frankenstein of the University of Copenhagen. The widely recognized book shows that conversion in China is not only geared to cope with the consequences of reduced military production but also constitutes a policy for the modernization of the Chinese defense industrial base.

His recent projects have focused on military expenditures and, more recently, on military business. An upcoming book will present eight country case studies which analyze to what extent peace dividends have been realized or lost. The project on military expenditures led to the formation of the MILEX Monitor (<http://bicc.uni-bonn.de/milex>), an online newsletter, which tracks news stories on global military expenditures, offers an expert list in this field, and literature bibliographies. Jörn is presently analyzing military businesses in four countries (Nigeria, Indonesia, China and Pakistan) and their effects upon military expenditures. This and the peace dividend project are funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

To stave off the effects of Jörn's love of good food and wine, he regularly runs marathons with the "BICC Run-a-ways", a team he and some of his BICC colleagues have formed.

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Restructuring of the German Defense Industry

After the end of the Cold War, the defense industry was confronted with a large decrease in public defense procurement. The defense companies in the United States reacted with an impressive wave of mergers and acquisitions resulting in improved competitiveness and market power of the remaining giants. In Europe, however, the market has been fragmented both on the demand and the supply side into many small national markets that are too marginal to allow similar economies of scale and scope. Cross-border cooperation is limited to special programs to employ the existing national capacities and locations.

BICC is conducting a two-year research project examining the measures and strategies German defense companies are already applying and plan to pursue in the future in order to survive in smaller markets.

The study focuses on large and medium-size enterprises of the main defense branches, namely aerospace, tanks and naval ships, to generalize the findings. Electronics is excluded, since it is related to the service sector for—and inter-linked with—all other defense sectors. A first component is an analysis of these three defense sectors on the basis of literature and company reports. In the second phase, leading managers and members of the works council (Betriebsrat) will be interviewed to find out more about the new tendencies and strategies. The project is funded by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung. The interviews will be conducted during the summer of 1999. The project will be completed by the end of May 2000.

For further information please contact

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International Disarmament and Conversion Conference

On 30–31 August 1999, BICC will host an International Conference and Expert-Group Meeting at the Wissenschaftszentrum, Bonn: *The Contribution of Disarmament and Conversion to Conflict Prevention and its Relevance for Development Cooperation*.

The conference is a cooperative effort by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the State Government of North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) and the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) in response to current challenges: To what extent and under which circumstances can disarmament and conversion contribute to conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation? How do these concepts relate to international development cooperation?

The conference will place emphasis on practical results and operational experiences. While still considering familiar topics and problems of security, conflict, disarmament, crisis prevention and peace-building, the conference will stimulate synergies from the linkages between these different areas and will look at the issues from a fresh angle.

The conference is being held under the auspices of the Prime Minister of the Federal State of North-Rhine Westphalia, Wolfgang Clement, who, together with the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, is one of the keynote speakers. The conference includes a public event in the afternoon of 30 August and seven expert panels on 31 August.

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Conversion Survey 1999—Global Disarmament, Demilitarization and Demobilization

In June, BICC's fourth annual survey was published and launched in Bonn and Geneva. It contains an update of events and data in 1997/98 as well as a topical essay on base closure and redevelopment in developing and transitional countries.

BICC's assessment of the disarmament and conversion scene in the late 1990s is less optimistic than earlier analysis. Military research and development, for instance, has started to grow again, and military expenditures seem to have reached a plateau. However, while a reversal of the disarmament and conversion process in some countries or regions has been noted, many positive, often silent achievements are documented in all of BICC's issue areas.

More information on the 1999 BICC *Conversion Survey*, including list of contents, press release and a German language summary can be found on BICC's internet website at <http://bicc.uni-bonn.de>. BICC does not sell the book. For order information please consult the enclosed flyer.

For further information please contact

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Upcoming Events

The Aftermath: Women in Post-War Reconstruction Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 20–22 July 1999. Contact: <http://www.wits.ac.za/aftermath>

49th Annual Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs: Confronting the Challenges of the 21st Century, Karos Safari Hotel, Rustenburg, South Africa, 7–13 September 1999. Contact: <http://www.pugwash.org>

Defence Restructuring and the Question of Identity
A COST A10 Workshop hosted by the Department of Sociology, Copenhagen University, 10–11 September 1999. Contact: Mark Elam at marel@tema.liu.se

Preventing the Proliferation of Chemical and Biological Weapons organized by Wilton Park Conferences, Wiston House, West Sussex, 1–3 October 1999. Contact: <http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/conferences/programmes/wp576.html>

COST A10 Seminar on **Regional Conversion** organized by the Arms Conversion Project, Glasgow, 18–19 November 1999. Contact: Ian Goudie at ian.goudie@ccd.glasgow.gov.uk

BICC Notes

From 11–14 May, BICC researchers Natalie Pauwels and Sami Faltas, along with some 4,000 other people, attended the conference and fair of the Hague Appeal for Peace. At this event, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA see <http://www.iansa.org>) was launched, a global association of non-governmental groups concerned about the proliferation and accumulation of small arms. Sami Faltas made a **workshop presentation on removing the tools of violence from conflict societies**.

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A delegation from the Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (COSTIND), the administrative body overseeing **conversion in the Chinese arms industry**, visited BICC on 4 May to share experiences in industrial conversion. The 8-person delegation included representatives from a number of Chinese companies involved in conversion. Their visit to Germany was organized by the German Aerospace Center for the Federal Ministry for Education and Research.

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The **BICC project to support former defense companies in Moldova** in finding new civilian markets has been extended until the end of August 1999 by the European Union. BICC long-term expert Thilo Rötger will continue to advise the project on a part-time basis supported by BICC's representative in Moscow, Ksenia Gonchar. BICC director Herbert Wulf, who visited the project in early May, reported good progress in the creation of joint ventures with western European automotive firms.

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Former BICC guest researcher Ann Markusen of Rutgers University is directing a **study group on changes in the defense industry at the Council for Foreign Relations** in New York. Herbert Wulf and Michael Brzoska of BICC have contributed to a forthcoming book (Ann Markusen and Sean Costigan, *Arming the 21st Century*, Council for Foreign Relations Press, 1999). On 20 April, Hartmut Küchle of BICC attended a meeting of the study group in Paris, while Michael Brzoska used the opportunity of a visit to the United States to participate in a study group meeting in New York on 29 April.

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From 7–12 May, BICC researcher Sami Faltas was in Nigeria. He familiarized himself with the work of the Peace Corps in Ile-Ife, which is trying to reconcile and disarm two hostile communities. Afterwards, he attended the conference on Subregional Security Protocols and Demilitarization in Africa, organized by the Africa Leadership Forum in Ota, where he made a **presentation on microdisarmament**.

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Thirty researchers from the **Southern African region** met in Windhoek, Namibia, 21–23 May to discuss initial findings of a research project on **demilitarization and peace-building** in the region. Central in the discussion were the complex developments in internal and external security. Herbert Wulf and Kees Kingma of BICC participated in the meeting, which is part of a joint research project for BICC and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town (BICC *Bulletin 9*).

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