

# The Scourge of Modern Militarism

Michael T. Klare

**M**ilitarism. The word has a faintly anachronistic ring. It conjures up images of Prussia in Bismarck's day, or perhaps Hitler's Third Reich. It suggests a static, rigid society in which a traditional officer caste dominates an authoritarian and hierarchical state system. But while this image is still valid for many societies today, it fails to convey the particular virulence and dynamism of modern militarism—a scourge that threatens to obliterate all the gains made in the areas of human rights, democratic government, and economic progress throughout the world since the end of World War II. If not checked soon, this scourge will almost certainly trigger a global conflagration that could destroy the human species.

Consider: World military spending in 1977 reached the record level of \$400 billion—more than the combined gross national product of the world's hundred poorest nations. Most of these funds, of course, were expended by the two superpowers, which now have sufficient nuclear weapons to destroy each other several times over. A significant portion, however, was spent by the less-developed countries of the Third World, which increasingly seek to duplicate the conventional arsenals of the industrial powers. Iran alone will spend \$20 billion on modern armaments over the next two years, and comparable amounts are being allocated by several other of the more ambitious Third World countries. Such profligate spending on military forces will exceed by a large margin all the funds provided by the advanced nations for Third World economic development. At the same time, it will help sustain the trend toward military government that is sweeping through the Third World with such devastating consequences.

Although the impact of militarism is perhaps most immediately felt in the junta-dominated societies of the Third World, its effects are no less prevalent in the advanced countries. Indeed, modern militarism is a complex disease that attacks the world body politic from several directions at once. Each branch of this invasion produces its own symptoms and injuries, but each sustains and reinforces the others. To appreciate the extent of the dangers facing us, therefore, it is essential to examine each of these destructive systems:

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MICHAEL T. KLARE is Director of the Militarism & Disarmament Project of the Institute for Policy Studies and author of *War Without End: American Planning for the Next Vietnams* (1972). This article is based on an address he gave at the World Council of Churches Consultation on Militarism held in Montreux, Switzerland.

## The Superpower Arms Race

Of all the trends associated with militarism today none is more costly in the short run and as potentially catastrophic in the long run than the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. The desperate efforts of the U.S. leadership to retain a nuclear lead over the USSR, and of the Soviet leadership to narrow that lead, are contributing to the development and deployment of ever more potent and provocative weapons. Furthermore, with the development of precision-guided *counterforce* weapons (weapons designed to destroy an enemy's strategic military forces rather than its cities) it is becoming increasingly possible to conceive of "first-strike" scenarios—thus placing both sides under enormous pressure during a crisis to launch a preemptive strike of their own, thereby precluding the threat of a similar attack by their adversary.

To "deter" such strikes, both sides are now introducing new types of delivery systems (mobile ICBM launchers, "cruise" missiles, precision-guided warheads) that will further burden already heavily militarized economies in the USA and USSR, while increasing the risk of thermonuclear holocaust. Moreover, these trends have not been appreciably slowed by the SALT negotiations between the superpowers. Given the fact that (1) the rivalry between the superpowers tends to poison relations between other countries and lead to big-power involvement in local rivalries (with sometimes devastating consequences), (2) war preparation in these two countries consumes enormous resources that could be otherwise used for global development, and, most serious, (3) *any* nuclear exchange between the U.S. and USSR will almost assuredly cause enormous destruction elsewhere, it is obvious that *all* peoples in the world have a vital stake in first controlling and ultimately abolishing the superpower arms race.

## Authoritarianism in the Third World

On the grounds that "national security" requires a high degree of economic "modernization," and that high rates of growth are possible only in tightly disciplined societies, more and more Third World military leaders are assuming control of the governing institutions of their countries. In some cases this process leads to the violent overthrow of civilian governments (as in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Thailand), while in others it is characterized by the progressive emasculation of civilian institutions to the benefit of military agencies (a process not unknown in many of the advanced countries as well). In carrying out their "de-

velopmental" programs, the military tend to impose centralized, hierarchic forms of decisionmaking on all government institutions, and to place all other national institutions—the press, schools and colleges, the church, trade unions, peasant organizations, etc.—under central state control. Institutions, social groupings, organizations, or individuals that resist such control tend to be considered a threat to "national security" and forcefully dissolved, restricted, purged, or neutralized by the agencies of the state. Nonconforming ideas, values, religious or political beliefs, artistic styles, or ethnic identities are considered "subversive" and adherents thereof punished accordingly. Furthermore, to obtain the external financing, technology, and investment considered essential to promote the Western-sponsored "developmental models" that most Third World juntas have adopted, more and more governments are imposing punishing "austerity" measures that inflict disproportionate hardship and suffering on the poorest and least powerful sectors of the society.

#### Arms Sales and Local Conflict

In order to enhance their own self-image as powerful, modern institutions, and/or to intimidate or suppress competing civilian institutions, and/or to counter real or imagined external threats, the military forces of most countries are diverting more and more resources to acquire advanced weaponry. This phenomenon is most marked in the Third World, where spending on imported weapons now totals some \$15-20 billion per year. At the same time, in order to assure a high degree of popular support for the national development program and/or increased military spending, military regimes tend to exaggerate external threats and to encourage nationalistic and xenophobic feelings. Both these trends tend to generate local arms rivalries, since any military buildup in one country will naturally cause insecurity and thus matching military spending in neighboring or rival countries. This process is most visible in the Middle East, where every new arms purchase by Israel is almost automatically followed by acquisitions by the front-line Arab states (and vice versa), but can also be detected in South and Southeast Asia, North and East Africa, and South America. The principal victims of this phenomenon are the poorest sectors of all these countries. In the long run, however, we all stand to lose, since such local rivalries, fed by the aggressive posturing of the reigning military and the arms marketing of the great powers, can easily explode into armed conflict and conceivably trigger a global war.

#### Internal Violence and Terror

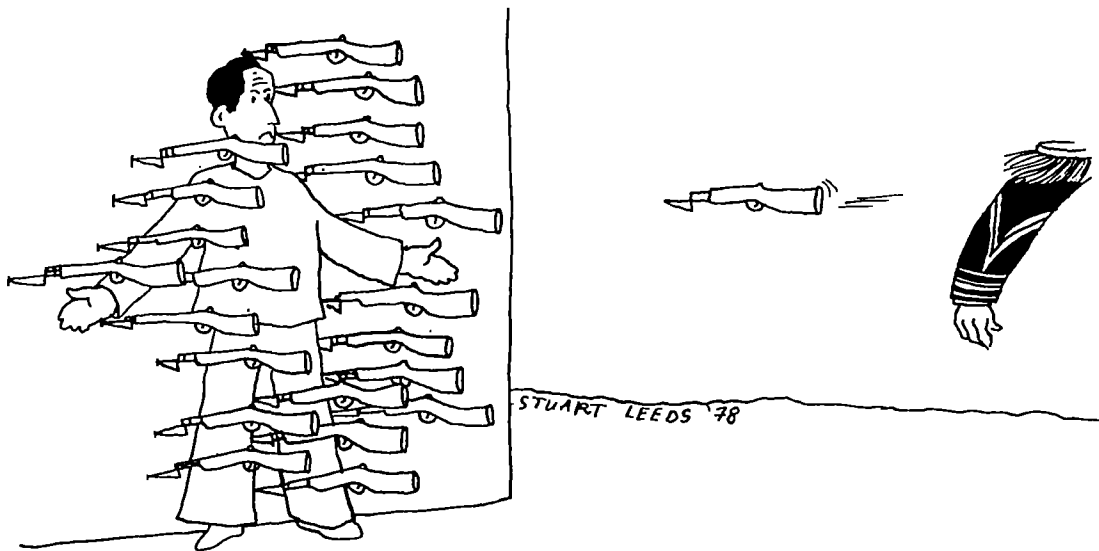
Since all these developments are occurring at a time of generally rising expectations on the part of the world's people—both for improved material conditions and increased personal freedom—and since the military's goals (whether in the advanced or underdeveloped areas) tend to be achieved at the expense of the most disadvantaged sectors of the population, the interests of the military authorities and those of the masses of poor people grow further apart. Since in many countries the

poor have obtained a degree of power, or at least self-expression, through the formation of unions, peasant and farmers' organizations, neighborhood and *barrio* committees, and, in some cases, political parties, the ruling authorities often feel compelled to employ indiscriminate terror and brutality to deter popular resistance. This process is perhaps most advanced in Chile and Indonesia, where the military leadership has attempted to eradicate—through mass executions—an entire generation of political activists, but it can be seen in many other societies where martial law has become a permanent way of life.

The desire for increased freedom and self-development has emerged with particular force among the minority peoples, whose sense of "nationhood" is denied by existing political boundaries (which were established, in most cases, by the colonial powers). This led to intense and often bloody conflicts with the prevailing authorities (hence the Biafran war, the Kurdish uprising, the conflict in Northern Ireland, the Palestinian struggle, the Moslem insurgency in the Philippines, and dozens of similar conflicts). Although militarism (in its modern guise) is not always the cause of these conflicts, it is obvious that the military mission—whether "national security" or economic "development"—tends to preclude a search for a just and peaceful solution. All this is even more true, of course, in Southern Africa, where minority white regimes rely on superior force to dominate majority black populations. (In this case the issues of militarism, human rights, and racism are all inextricably linked.)

#### Misuse of Resources and Technology

It is becoming increasingly obvious that many of the earth's critical natural resources will soon be depleted if present-day rates of consumption prevail. At the same time, it is clear that changes in the global "ecosphere"—many of them produced by human activity—threaten to limit the supply of foodstuffs at a time of rising birth-rates throughout most of the Third World. These developments suggest an urgent need for international action to conserve critical resources, protect the environment, and develop new sources of food and other vital products. However, not only is the epidemic of militarism making such cooperation increasingly unlikely; it is also hastening the advent of global catastrophe by consuming enormous quantities of scarce and nonreplenishable natural resources. It has been estimated by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that the Defense Department accounts for 14 per cent of U.S. consumption of bauxite and copper, 11 per cent of zinc and lead, 10 per cent of nickel, and 7.5 per cent of iron. This pattern of waste is not confined to material resources alone, but extends to human resources as well: According to SIPRI, over 400,000 scientists and engineers were committed to weapons research and development (R&D) work in 1970, representing a large fraction of the world's total R&D workforce. If these scientific resources were freed from military work, we would have a much better chance of solving the world's food, shelter, and health problems.



**H**aving examined the principal manifestations of militarism, it is possible to attempt a definition of the monster itself. Although no single rendition will be completely satisfactory, we can describe modern militarism as the tendency of a nation's military apparatus (including paramilitary and intelligence agencies, whether or not part of the formal military establishment) to assume *ever-increasing control* over the lives and behavior of its citizens, while at the same time its institutional *goals* (preparation for war, acquisition of weaponry, creation and expansion of military industries) and *values* (centralization of authority, discipline and conformity, combativeness, and xenophobia) increasingly dominate the nation's culture, education, politics, and economy. Ultimately, of course, militarism connotes a preference for the use of force in solving intra- or international problems, but what is unique about modern militarism is its tendency to dominate all aspects of communal life and to mold our very consciousness of the world around us.

Fundamental to our understanding of modern militarism is the notion of expansion, of the growing encroachment of the military sphere over the civilian, with a concomitant decline in individual freedom and democratic decisionmaking. Militarism, like cancer, is a progressive disease, whose destructive effects accumulate and multiply over time. It follows, then, that if we are to be effective in combating this disease, we must first identify those forces and conditions that generate and promote militarism in any given society. For to stop the spread of militarism we must attack those phenomena and structures that are the driving forces behind its expansion.

To begin this process of analysis it is useful to divide these generative forces into internal factors (i.e., those indigenous to the society in question) and external factors (those practices that promote and sustain militarism across international boundaries).

Among the internal factors that generate and nurture militarism are:

#### Unjust Class and Racial Structures

In any society in which a small segment of the popula-

tion owns (or reaps the benefits from) a large share of the nation's wealth, that privileged minority is likely to rely on the use of military force to deter or overcome any threats to the prevailing order. This tendency results in what has been termed a system of "economic apartheid," wherein the privileged few live in "sanctuaries of wealth" surrounded by and protected from the impoverished masses. Similarly, in any society wherein the people of one race are subordinated and exploited by people of another race, the dominant racial grouping tends to rely on military force to discourage and overcome rebellion on the part of the oppressed.

#### Institutionalized Military Industries

As demonstrated by the U.S. experience since World War II, the creation of large-scale military enterprises is likely to result in the formation of a self-perpetuating industrial combine that will take independent measures (propaganda and "scare" campaigns designed to create a perpetual crisis-type atmosphere; lobbying efforts, bribery, and intrigue, etc.) to insure a continuing demand for its products. Although we can surmise the existence of such institutional pressures in the major socialist states, this phenomenon is more entrenched in the advanced capitalist countries, where institutional ambitions are reinforced by the profit motive.

#### The Military's Self-Aggrandizement

Once a society has created a powerful military apparatus in response to some real or imagined threat, this institution will often seek to expand and enhance its prerogatives at the expense of civilian institutions. In the advanced countries this drive is often linked to and fed by the self-perpetuating mechanisms of the military industries; in the poorer countries it is sometimes produced by the desire of the officer class (which is often composed of middle- and even lower-class persons) to enhance their status vis-à-vis the traditional ruling élite.

#### The "National Security" Syndrome

All four previous items take an ideological cast through the "national security" syndrome, i.e., the

tendency to expand the definition of "national security" to require ever greater military control over national life. In the Third World this is most often expressed in "developmental" terms, whereby the military affirms that it is the only institution capable of managing rapid economic growth in the midst of poverty, while in the advanced countries it is often predicated on the existence of a "cold war," i.e., the existence of an intense global struggle encompassing all forms of human activity, including culture, religion, science and technology, diplomacy, etc.

### Cultural Prejudices and Stereotypes

Despite all that has been said about global interdependence and ecumenicism, cultural prejudices and stereotypes remain deeply engrained. This is particularly true in the less-developed countries, where ethnic, religious, and tribal animosities are often highly pronounced, but is hardly absent from the most advanced societies. In the United States, for instance, groups like the Committee on the Present Danger and the American Security Council have organized multi-million-dollar "scare" campaigns to persuade the general public that the Russians—unlike the Americans—are emotionally capable of planning a thermonuclear war that would result in the death of at least forty million people. Such attitudes are easily manipulated by the military authorities for their own purposes and hamper the efforts of peace-minded people to work against militarism.

### Perceived Insecurity in the Face of External Threats

Countries that are surrounded by hostile neighbors will often develop a "siege" mentality, which views any unusual external move (troop movements, military exercises, major arms purchases) as a signal of impending hostilities requiring appropriate counteractions. In such countries—Israel, South Korea, and Taiwan are perhaps the outstanding examples—preparation for war often becomes a permanent way of life, and any demands for relaxation of military authority and martial law are viewed as tantamount to treason. In some cases, as a result of the impulses described above, this condition persists long after the initial threat has disappeared.

Among the external factors that promote and sustain militarism we can identify:

### Imperial Intervention

Throughout history, imperial powers have sought to expand or guard their empires by displacing hostile leaders and replacing them with local warlords who agree (or can be compelled) to serve the imperial cause. This practice underlies, for instance, the formation of the prevailing political order in the Persian Gulf, which was fixed by British colonial agents in the nineteenth century. Although most formal arrangements of this sort have now disappeared, the practice persists in the efforts of the major powers to promote the rise of friendly military élites in client states. U.S. support for friendly military forces typically includes cash subsidies, arms deliveries, military sales at subsidized interest rates, free military training and technical assistance, political recognition,

and other benefits. Similar resources are provided to selected regimes by the other major powers, with the result that Third World armies are increasingly coming to resemble the forces of their benefactors. And even when big power involvement does not extend to direct intervention, it is obvious that the transfer of such resources (particularly of arms and equipment for internal repression) will contribute to the ascendancy of the military sphere at the expense of competing civilian institutions.

### International Arms Marketing

Many of the advanced nations have concluded that they must export arms in order to retain a domestic munitions industry at a time of rising military costs and/or help reduce balance-of-trade deficits brought about by the rising cost of raw material imports. Since, moreover, many nations now possess the capacity to produce weapons, there has been a growing competition between the arms exporters, which, in turn, has led them to use a variety of conventional and unconventional techniques to induce increased military spending by the arms-importing countries—now running at the rate of \$15-20 billion per year. And, as competition between the major exporters has increased, they have offered increasingly more lethal and sophisticated weaponry to prospective buyers, leading to a steady increase in the war-making capabilities of the poorer countries.

Linked to the trade in conventional weaponry are several other factors that also contribute to the spread of militarism: (1) the growing trade in police weapons and other repressive technologies (surveillance devices, torture equipment and techniques, computers used to identify and track victims for torture, assassination, or imprisonment, etc.), whose use tends to parallel the encroachment of the military over the civilian sphere; (2) the sale of arms-making technologies by the advanced countries to the less-developed countries, thereby permitting an increasing number of countries to become self-sufficient in war-making commodities and to enter the arms trade on their own; (3) the sale of nuclear power technologies which, as demonstrated by the case of India, can lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons; and (4) linked to all of the above, the sale of military technical services, which has resulted in the formation of a new corps of "white-collar mercenaries" who sell their technical skills to Third World governments that have imported large quantities of advanced weaponry they cannot adequately maintain, support, and operate using indigenous labor. All these factors obviously enhance the power of the state—and particularly of the military sector—vis-à-vis the population at large and tend to promote the use of force to solve internal and international disputes.

### Big-Power Involvement in Local Conflicts

Because the major powers tend to view local power shifts in critical areas, whatever their cause, as enhancing or damaging their global strategic interests, they often attempt to influence the outcome of a struggle or rivalry by providing their clients with arms, training,

advisory support, etc. As soon as such support is provided, other parties to the dispute almost automatically seek similar assistance from a competing great power. And since the major powers tend to equate their security and prestige with the fortunes of their clients, they are usually quick to match or outstrip any arms deliveries made by another great power to their clients' rivals—a pattern we have witnessed with such regularity in the Middle East. Obviously, this process tends to intensify the local arms race and increase the risk of great power involvement in any war that does erupt.

#### Cross-National Ideological/Religious Struggle

As recent history demonstrates, national leaders sometimes feel compelled by ideological or religious ties to provide military assistance to like-minded governments (or, in some cases, minority or separatist groups) under attack elsewhere. The division of the world into pro- and anti-Communist alliance systems is, of course, the most obvious example of this phenomenon, but recently we have seen the socialist world itself rent by ideological struggle between supporters of Moscow and Peking. In the Third World we see that Saudi Arabia is subsidizing the "front-line" Arab states battling Israel, that South Africa is arming the white minority government of Rhodesia, and that Brazil is aiding the military regimes of Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia. Such linkages insure that even the poorest nations have access to modern military equipment, and this obviously complicates the job of negotiating a peaceful solution to local conflicts.

#### Alliance Politics

Military alliances are presumably forged in response to clearly perceived dangers, but often these linkages develop a life of their own long after the original danger is past. In such cases, various governments and/or powerful interest groups perceive a vested interest in the survival of the alliance as a *system*, and thus intervene in the political process of member states to assure their continued adherence to the pact. Thus the Soviet Union intervenes regularly in Eastern European politics to assure the stability of the Warsaw Pact system, while the NATO powers have provided financial support to centrist parties in Portugal and Italy to prevent the Communist party from winning control of the government. Furthermore, since the survival of many of these alliances appears to depend on the perceived "steadfastness" of their most powerful member(s), they sometimes trigger military actions whose major purpose is to demonstrate a nation's "commitment" to the alliance. This, indeed, was the principal reason cited by U.S. authorities for continued involvement in Vietnam after it had become apparent that an American victory was unattainable.

**A**lthough it is helpful to separate internal and external factors for the purposes of discussion, we must always remember that these factors normally work together and reinforce each other. Indeed, analysis suggests that it is the very mixing of these factors, each of which tends to nurture and

support the others, that underlies the current world epidemic of militarism. Thus we see that the strategic and economic interests of the great powers, as represented in arms deliveries or arms sales to clients, often promote the rise of military institutions within recipient countries. By the same token, the desire of military élites in Third World countries to strengthen their position vis-à-vis competing civilian institutions often leads them to seek alliances with the military of the great powers in order to obtain the arms, equipment, and funds to carry out their political designs. All this suggests that there is an interdependence of militarism between the industrial and nonindustrial nations, and that this interdependency intersects and distorts all other relationships between the nations. This interdependence has been characterized by some analysts as constituting a *world military order*, whereby military developments in any one nation or bloc of nations tend to produce parallel or related developments in all other nations. One hardly need add that the expansion of the world military order will surely frustrate any efforts, no matter how widely supported, to institute a New International Economic Order.

Modern militarism, as we noted earlier, is a progressive disease, whose crippling effects accumulate and multiply with time. If left untreated, this process will surely end, as it did in 1914 and 1939, with the outbreak of world war—perhaps leading, this time, to an unimaginable destruction of life. While the analysis developed here suggests that the epidemic has already progressed to an advanced state, there are some hopeful signs to suggest that it is not too late to begin remedial treatment. These include:

- Indications that the United States and the Soviet Union will sign a new SALT treaty limiting the introduction of new strategic weapons, while opening the way to further agreements that would actually mandate the destruction of existing nuclear stockpiles.
- The nonaligned nations are becoming increasingly aware that the world arms race poses a threat to their very survival while diminishing their chances to escape the bondage of underdevelopment, and they have taken the leadership in convening the recent U.N. Special Session on Disarmament.
- More and more private citizens and nongovernmental organizations are becoming conscious of the menace of militarism and are taking steps to combat that threat, for example, the many NGOs committed to making the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament a starting point for real disarmament action.

These signs should convince us that the task is not hopeless, and that many world leaders perceive the urgency of developing strategies to combat militarism. We must not assume, however, that existing institutions will be able to overcome this scourge on their own. Widespread public action—in the educational, legislative, religious, and political spheres—is needed if governments and other bodies are to be successful in meeting the common threat. And given the progressive nature of the menace we face, it is obvious that every delay permitted now will surely make our task infinitely more difficult and less certain of success later on.