

9. Conclusion: the elements of fruitful demilitarization

The Persian Gulf could be classified on a number of dimensions as the most militarized region in the world.¹ Heavy military expenditures, in turn, have fueled costly conflicts and conflicts have taken a heavy human and economic toll on the region and its inhabitants. All the while, most if not all world leaders profess peaceful coexistence and economic and social progress for the Persian Gulf as a critical region for global stability and economic prosperity. How can this espoused “wish” be translated into reality? If their words were true, the task would be made all the easier. But in reality, it will take a Herculean effort on a number of fronts. If the global powers will not “walk the talk,” then it will be up to the citizenry of the region to demand change from their leaders to achieve peace and prosperity. In this quest, a dramatic reduction in military expenditures and arms imports, though necessary, will be insufficient to achieve regional peace and prosperity. To be successful a number of simultaneous steps, along with a dramatic reduction in military expenditures and arms imports, will be required.

President Ronald Reagan perhaps best summed up the reason for military expenditures, aggression, and war when he said: “History teaches that war begins when governments believe the price of aggression is cheap.” The goal must be to initiate a framework to reduce the means of aggression and to make the price of aggression expensive for all. If the price of aggression is increased, demand for military expenditures will decline accordingly.

No single country in the Persian Gulf on its own accord will reduce, far less eliminate, its wasteful military expenditures. No single country will unilaterally disavow aggression. The status quo can only be reversed with concerted and sustained international effort. Military expenditures, aggression, and conflict will be a part of the Middle Eastern landscape as long as countries are pressured into acquiring weapons, feel threatened, or feel that they can vanquish a weak neighbor with impunity. The Middle East needs a long, assured dose of peace. To help the region achieve long-lasting peace that enables a true blossoming of economic and social progress requires a number of simultaneous bold steps.

We should first take a few essential steps to enhance the environment for peace and then adopt elements of a system to deter aggression and reduce the demand for military expenditures and arms imports.

The United Nations (the Security Council), each Permanent Member of the Security Council and every country in the Middle East, individually and collectively, should guarantee the territorial integrity of every country in the region. This security umbrella must also be extended to Israel, and this leads to the next essential element. The “two-state” solution for resolving the Palestinian–Israeli dispute must be adopted immediately; this is the solution wherein: Israel keeps nothing of the West Bank unless it trades Israeli territory for it on a basis acceptable to the Palestinians; an international fund is set up to compensate Palestinians for their lost homes and land; and in the aftermath of such confidence-building measures, the status of Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees can then over time be resolved through peaceful means. Other existing territorial disputes in the region (Iran–Iraq, Saudi Arabia–Qatar to name but two) must be resolved under United Nations (UN) auspices. At the same time, the permanent members of the Security Council should state that they will not interfere in the internal affairs of any country in the region.

As an integral component of trying to bring peace to the Middle East, there must be a total arms embargo to the region, with the exception of riot and civil control equipment. It must be recognized that: whenever arms are acquired, they will eventually be used no matter what; arms always reduce available economic resources for development and growth; and arms kill people and destroy infrastructure and other valuable economic assets. The West must stop using the region as its greatest market for the sale of weapons and to reduce their own unit cost of weapons; the West must replace the sale of military goods with investment goods. Such a shift in exports should be viewed as akin to a shift in comparative advantage and the West can easily adjust to it with little long-term cost. In the case of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), all countries (no matter whether they are or are not signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treats NPT) must give up their arsenal if they want to be beneficiaries of the guarantees offered above and if they want to avoid UN sanctions, sanctions that should automatically be applied if they do not comply.

In the world that we live in, there are no effective and internationally sanctioned deterrents and mechanisms to resolve disputes before they become conflicts, to stop conflicts from leading to armed conflicts, and to deter all-out wars. This is especially evident when the powerful are a party to a dispute or conflict, as there is no international entity that has historically stood up to them. Any deterrent is ill-defined and is the prerogative

of the powerful to define and to enforce. The powerful have a free hand to do as they wish. All the while, the presumed guardian of global peace, the United Nations (effectively the United Nations Security Council), is controlled by the five major powers with veto powers, and if they do not get UN support for their actions they do as they wish anyway and with impunity. It would be naive to think that this setting for conflicts will ever change if we as citizens and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) idly stand by. There is no incentive for change. The world will continue as it has, but with an increasing likelihood of an unimaginable catastrophe and enhanced threat to all life on this earth.

Superpowers use their military and economic might to pursue their own interests; use the threat of force to cower nations into submission; continue their efforts to develop and acquire increasingly sophisticated weaponry; and selfishly guard their Security Council veto. No realistic leader would give up any advantage that his or her country enjoys. Similarly, weaker countries have little choice but to align themselves with a superpower for protection against other would-be aggressors. These weaker countries have no desire for change if they feel secure under the umbrella of their big brother, and that is especially so for absolute and corrupt rulers whose government are kept in power by their powerful backers. All the while the average citizen, especially in the less fortunate countries, suffers. This vicious circle is almost impregnable. The only imaginable way to break the circle would be if, by magic, every leader in the world simultaneously realized the insanity of military conflict and renounced all aggression. Even the naive realize that this will never occur.

In sum, there is no recognized penalty for an aggressor to a conflict. There is no formal system of enforcing penalties even if penalties were assessed. Most importantly, there is nothing that forces parties to a conflict, or at least affords them great incentive, to sit down and resolve their differences before they take up arms and embark on a path of senseless destruction and death. At best it is all ad hoc. Anything goes when it comes to conflicts and wars. And the powerful rule the waves.

While conflicts and wars take a heavy human, social, economic, and environmental toll, their legacy is invariably hatred and future conflicts and wars; and intra-religious, ethnic, and tribal conflicts within countries and across borders may result in even more passionate hatred for generations to come. Such a legacy magnifies the costs of conflicts and wars and makes reconciliation ever more difficult in the aftermath of a conflict, as compared to before armed conflict and war. While this is the undisputed legacy of conflicts and wars, the world stands by and does little to deter them. We accept this as the natural price of national borders, and religious, ethnic, and tribal differences, and hope that the United Nations

will tackle disputes, conflicts, and wars. How can this dismal reality be changed for the better?

We need a number of institutions. We need an institution that publicizes the cost of military expenditures and arms imports and their economic toll, and lobbies against military grants and arms exhibitions around the world. We need an institution that brings parties to a dispute to the negotiating table before the outbreak of hostilities; and for parties that refuse to negotiate, the institution must develop a system of enforceable penalties, including naming the party that refuses to negotiate as the aggressor in any subsequent conflict. We need an institution that assesses reparations for conflicts based on an agreed-upon methodology; and we need an agreement to enforce such assessments automatically. We need all these to be done by an entity, or entities, that is immune to political interest and manipulation as far as possible. While the world waits for leaders, and especially those from the countries that are superpowers, to set up this institution (or institutions) that has the power to deter conflicts and wars, we propose that NGOs set up institutions that would do the same work, and publicize their results and assessments to shame countries into reduced military expenditures and armed conflict. The more people, NGOs, and governments that adopt these suggestions to deter military expenditures, aggression, conflicts, and wars, the likelier we are to succeed on a global level. We require a global movement to save humanity from itself.

We, in the context of this institutional structure, must try to encourage formal mediation efforts before disputes lead to armed conflict. We must publicize the heavy toll of military expenditures and wars. Similarly we should publicize and document the aggressors to a conflict, and those who will not negotiate. We should recommend reparations to be paid and sanctions to be placed on aggressors. In these endeavors, our efforts will be reinforced by publicizing these facts. Aggressors and those who support them must be shamed. We hope that public pressure will in time motivate the weaker countries to embrace this approach. We hope that they will do this by giving their official endorsement. If a sufficient number of countries do so, then we can imagine that the powerful will one day listen to reason too. In time, the union of informed citizens around the globe, concerned NGOs, and weaker countries could force the powerful to see the benefits of peace in a holistic framework: that is, when they consider all the ramifications of their actions on their own long-term economic conditions, global poverty, human misery, environmental degradation, and more. The world may be slowly uniting to tackle global warming, but attention to arresting global conflicts and wars is no less urgent.

Can such a proposal succeed? We can only try and hope. The costs of military expenditures, conflicts, and wars are killing more of mankind

than ever before; the poor need medical care; the disadvantaged need education; the poor need food and shelter; and our environment is slowly, but surely, being destroyed by a multitude of human abuses, including conflicts, wars and the ensuing destruction and degradation. We hope that the success of NGOs and citizens in such an endeavor around the world will be a positive force for change.

The West must not support and condone rulers who use oil and gas revenues to enrich themselves, their families, and a chosen few. If the West continues to support rulers who are robbing their own citizenry, we can look forward to a continuous cycle of violence and instability in the region.

Time is running out for the governments in power in the region, and for the Western powers if they want to see a prosperous and peaceful Persian Gulf and better relations with the Muslim world. Higher oil prices may provide a short-term respite to the major oil exporters of the region, but oil alone cannot solve their deep-rooted economic, social and political problems. Oil and oil revenues, which theoretically should have supported economic prosperity, have in practice and in part fueled regional conflicts and enabled policies that have been, and continue to be, detrimental to economic, social, and political progress. In the case of the Persian Gulf, the region that is critical for global energy supplies and for the global economy, success cannot be measured by improvements in the sparsely populated countries of Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE. The key is what happens in the larger Persian Gulf countries: Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. If the world does not come to terms with the global importance of Middle Eastern peace and prosperity, the world economy will suffer as increased energy supplies are not brought on line and conflicts over restricted energy supplies develop between the major powers.

If military expenditures are dramatically reduced or eliminated, then border security will be guaranteed and regional stability will be enhanced. Most future oil and gas exports will have to emanate from the Persian Gulf. The region could expand its oil and gas production by the equivalent of about 15–20 million barrels per day over 2020–2025 if peace and stability are restored, foreign investment is encouraged (requiring an investment of US\$400 billion to US\$500 billion), and outside meddling is eliminated. If this is done, the world could enjoy stable energy supplies at reasonable prices while alternative energy sources are developed. There is no Iraq solution. There is only a Persian Gulf solution and with a Persian Gulf solution, comes the benefit of less conflict and a medium-term global energy solution.

The United States will play the key role in affecting the region's military expenditures and level of conflict. Mikhail Gorbachev aptly summarized the decision the US faces in an opinion piece in July of 2008:

the next president, will have to decide and state clearly whether America wants to be an empire or a democracy, whether it seeks global dominance or international cooperation. They will have to choose, because this is an either-or proposition: The two things don't mix, like oil and water.²

NOTES

1. Parts of this chapter are adapted from Askari, Hossein, *The Middle East Oil Exporters: What Happened to Economic Development?*
2. Gorbachev, Mikhail, "From Russia With Alarm: Questions for the Candidates," *International Herald Tribune* (Source: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/07/04/opinion/edgorbachev.php?page=2>).