Tackling the big beast
Global Day of Action on Military Spending:
an overview

The big monster of militarism can be challenged in many different ways. Substantial campaigning communities have grown up over the years around specific weapons systems: for example, nuclear, landmines/clusters, small arms, and more recently drones. Others are working on issues like conscription, military bases, war taxes or the arms trade. The Global Day of Action on Military Spending, or GDAMS, was brought into being to focus attention on the economic aspects of the problem, notably public spending. For the International Peace Bureau (coordinating organisation) it is a part of our wider programme on Disarmament for Sustainable Development.

How much are we spending? (from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Or rather, how much are governments spending in our name and with our taxes? Military spending was already beginning to rise again (after the post-Cold War dip) when 9-11 offered the Pentagon a new enemy. Another Long War was launched, and the public purse was once again opened wide to pay for it. We are now spending more globally than even at the height of the Cold War. Thus, while the work on weapons and related themes needs to be strengthened, military spending (and the consequent lack of spending on development, social justice and peacemaking) is too important to be left to the politicians. The GDAMS campaign is an attempt to bring these issues before the public and to insert a peace-and-development perspective into national budget debates.

In 2011, world military spending reached an all-time record of $1.738 billion. The US still leads the list of top spenders with $711 billion. It is followed by China ($143bn), Russia ($71.9bn), the UK ($62.7bn), France ($62.5bn), Japan ($59.3bn), India ($48.9bn), Saudi Arabia ($48.5bn), Germany ($46.7bn) and Brazil ($35.4bn). The ten big spenders are responsible for 74.3% of global military spending, with the US alone accounting for 41%. In contrast, the total overseas aid of the rich countries comes to just $130bn.

Global military expenditure increased every year from 1998-2011, and between 2001 and 2009 by about 5% per annum. 2011 is the first year without any significant increase, many countries having reduced their military budgets because of budgetary crises. However, it is too early to say if this trend will be maintained.
Between 2002 and 2010, the arms sales of the top 100 companies increased by 60%, reaching around $411.1 billion in 2011. Bear in mind that these arms sales are mostly paid for from the budgets cited above, though arms dealers tend to sell both to their own governments and to those of other countries, not to mention private actors of all types – often in unstable or conflict-ridden regions.

**2011**

The first-ever GDAMS was held on 12 April 2011, as a result of a collaboration between International Peace Bureau (IPB) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), USA. GDAMS events generated considerable media coverage, and we achieved our goal of creating a global network. We also forged an important partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute that has continued ever since. Activists produced videos, constructed powerful public displays and performances, held press conferences and seminars, and mobilized public opinion in favour of reducing military spending.

At the international level, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs issued a supporting statement that concluded that GDAMS “should serve as a catalyst for shifting global and national priorities from massive military spending to creating human security and safety for all.” At the national level, in South Korea, Australia, UK, Greece, India, Uganda, Thailand, Malaysia and several other countries activists targeted their governments and the media to influence the debate. At the local level, activists highlighted the impact of misplaced budget priorities with rallies, peace walks, petitions, and street events. In all, around 100 events took place in 35 countries.

**2012**

The second annual GDAMS took place on 17 April 2012 with around 140 events in more than 40 countries. Once again, the day was endorsed by the UN. Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias issued a special video
message to encourage participation. Two key themes were (1) the Rio + 20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, due to take place just a few weeks later; and at which IPB and others rolled out a ‘bread tank’ in the streets of Rio de Janeiro to illustrate the importance of reallocating military budgets for human needs; and (2) the Occupy movement which had recently raised many similar issues regarding poverty and the misuse of public money.

GDAMS 2.0 coincided once again with the release of global military expenditure data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. It also took place on Tax Day in the USA where dozens of actions brought together peace and economic justice activists around a common message: cut the military budget and tackle human needs.

The preparatory work included convening an International Steering Committee; distributing background materials and facilitating access to SIPRI’s advance documentation; maintaining the website; compiling a special video and a set of posters for campaigners to use in their localities; distributing newsletters; and keeping contact with new and previous partners in all continents.

2013
The GDAMS committee is now making plans for the 2013 edition. Discussion is also under way on how to ensure that the GDAMS campaign becomes an all-year affair. The economic crisis is forcing greater scrutiny of public spending; some military reductions are already visible; and there is scope to draw in other civil society sectors who would benefit from different budget priorities.

One special focus this year is the attempt to get military spending included in the UN’s Post-2015 Development Agenda. IPB has published a 50pp paper which explores this issue. Write to us if you wish to receive copies. We have also just launched the ‘The World is Overarmed and Peace is Underfunded’ video and is available on the IPB and GDAMS websites.

What impact have we had?
Hard to answer! While military spending is dropping in a number of countries, we could not claim this is due to our own actions. In IPB’s view this is long-term work, just like ridding the world of nuclear weapons. But organising events in the framework of GDAMS helps to build a global community and gives extra media visibility. Moreover, the GDAMS framework allows each group to link the spending question to related topics, such as arms deals, war on terror, development debates, nuclear disarmament, space weapons, corruption etc. In this way we are able to work on one piece of a bigger whole, linked together by the economic thread.

Ways forward
Open any serious newspaper these days and you will read alarming calls for action on climate, biodiversity and habitat loss, global pandemics, mass poverty. Our beautiful blue planet is seriously ill, and there is no time to lose. Taking action through GDAMS – to get the message to politicians that they need to rethink their priorities – is one way to get a handle on this complex challenge. So let’s reach out, draw in new allies, and develop some really creative political projects.

Colin Archer
IPB Secretariat
Useful tools for your GDAMS actions

IPB fashionistas making a statement with do-it-yourself GDAMS masks and headbands!!!

http://demilitarize.org.uk

Our friends from the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAATW) had created the GDAMS-UK website. This is not just a mirror site, it is an informative source, on its own, of all UK-related actions and events on the Global Day.

Show 'The World is Overarmed and Peace is Underfunded' video

These and more are available for download at: http://www.demilitarize.org/tools
New Trends in the U.S. Militarization of Latin America

Susana Pimiento
Fellowship of Reconciliation USA

In recent years, there have been some changes in U.S. military strategy, globally and, of course, in Latin America.

With the end of the Cold War, the threats that justify militarization may have changed, but the protection of economic interests and investments considered strategic for the U.S., which are explicitly written in its threats and strategies documents remains the same.

The militarization of the U.S. in Latin America, increasingly, goes beyond the failed war on drugs (although this remains to be the principal interest). The militarization of the drug war is certainly one of the main reasons for requiring its dismantling and replacement with public health policy and control of organized crime. However, military strategy, now includes fields that traditionally belong to the civilian domain. Among these civilian areas are:

**Humanitarian assistance during natural disasters.** The new military bases of the Southern Command in Chile and Argentina -Concon and Chaco, respectively, were built for this specific purpose. As an example, the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, was immediately followed by a military occupation. The largest US warship was dispatched barely two hours after the earthquake and **10,000 U.S. troops** landed on the island. Time magazine labeled it ‘*A Compassionate Invasion*,’ purportedly because the U.S. military power, which is intended for war, was placed at the service of Haiti. That invasion was counter to the guidelines of International Law (**Oslo Guidelines**) which clearly limit the role of the military in humanitarian operations, by the very nature of humanitarian assistance.

The involvement of the military in the disaster relief operations violates one of the three fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance: **neutrality.** Indeed, in the light of international law, humanitarian assistance must be provided without interference by hostilities or taking sides in controversies of political, religious or ideological nature. This requirement is difficult to imagine in the Colombian context, where the sale and administration of medicines to treat tropical diseases like **leishmaniasis is controlled by the military.** Likewise, civilians who get involved in humanitarian assistance are coerced to become army informants and are used in ways which are banned by the Constitutional Court. There are many studies that show why the militarization of humanitarian assistance is a faulty idea: from the economic point of view, it has been shown that humanitarian assistance by the military **costs 8 times more** than the same assistance provided by civilians.

The U.S. Military is expanding its reach to the civilian sphere, notably, through **anti-riot operations.** By nature this is a police matter. But the armies get involved in the activity by providing weapons and tactics from the military. Perhaps this point may seem irrelevant in a country like Colombia, where police and army are interchangeable in
the minds of much of the population that has experienced the militarization of the police. It is particularly worrying that this trend goes hand in hand with a wave of criminalization of social protests. From USA to Chile, laws that would criminalize forms of protests are being enacted. For example, a law that would make the occupation of public roads an offence. This is a serious matter because communities often mobilize and protest in the streets against economic projects such as the construction of a dam or a mining project.

**Migration.** The United States recently built two new bases to "control the immigration traffic", one in **Panama** and the other in **Saona**, Dominican Republic.

**Counter-insurgency.** This is a purely military matter. In the new U.S. security strategy, published by the **White House in 2012**, it included the transfer of the U.S. military counter-insurgency capacity of Afghanistan and Iraq to Africa and Latin America. The two Latin America countries are: Colombia and Honduras. Honduras is specially problematic. The counterinsurgency tactics being employed in a country without guerrillas to launch the war on drugs is worrying: the civilians are accused of being insurgents simply by their presence in places where drug trafficking is prevalent.

In May (2012), the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agents, along with Guatemala and Honduras soldiers **fired from a helicopter** at a boat and killed four civilians, including two pregnant women.

In Colombia, in late 2011, new **Special Forces** were created in places like Tibú (Catatumbo), Arauca, Tumaco and Miranda (Cauca). Since last March, the U.S. has been sending senior military personnel there from Iraq and Afghanistan. To counter the criticism, the U.S. had asserted that the U.S. military will not participate in offensive operations and were only present to provide advice. This justification, however, is not enough to reassure people who are concerned about human rights: not only the participation of a foreign army makes the desired negotiated solution (legitimizes the insurgency) more difficult, but the high cost of civilian lives from the war operations in Iraq and Afghanistan should be taken into account.

What are the alternatives? It is vital for civil society organizations to reclaim their democratic spaces. Militarization should be stopped immediately. Moreover, the key is to reclaim the concept of security. It may be very challenging, but it is very important. As members of civil society, we say that, of course, we want security, but we must redefine that concept to incorporate the protection of social and economic rights, including food security and education. We have the capacity.

*This paper was presented by the author at the Forum: Military Intervention in Latin America and Colombia on 24 July 24 2012, Universidad Libre, Bogota.*
MILITARY SPENDING REDUCTIONS: how should we react?

Colin Archer
IPB Secretary-General

There are now decreases in military spending in many countries – for the most part on account of the economic crisis. Does this undermine the rationale for GDAMS? To take the view that ‘the worse it is the better..’ is surely a perverse position. We should welcome cuts but at the same time examine where the axe falls, for how long the cuts are maintained, and where the excess fat ends up. There are several important arguments to be put forward in these circumstances:

1. The cuts are on a relatively small scale – especially if viewed in percentage terms rather than absolute numbers. Agreed, this represents substantial job losses in the military sector. But think how many more jobs that money could have created if it had been invested differently!

2. They are reversible. Given that they are very much a product of the economic downturn, it seems evident that as soon as conditions improve, governments will wish to restore the level of military ‘readiness’ to pre-crisis levels; unless there is a strong movement to demand that social and development needs should have priority.

3. The money saved is not channelled to social development. In most cases it is being swallowed up in debt-reduction efforts. But our economies need expanding and at the same time reorienting in a radically ‘green’ direction. This will require a new kind of Keynesian approach. Income also matters. Public investment in health and education, for example, can be maintained if governments accept the need to tax more heavily the super-rich and close the many loopholes and tax dodges that keep revenues low.

4. The cuts are not made in the right places. One can support the removal of subsidies for marching bands ($1 billion in US!) but it is clear that the most dangerous elements of the military machine are the nuclear weapons. That is the absolute priority for the axe, though in some states it is the most heavily-protected budget, seen as ‘the crown jewels’ – even though they are unusable in every conceivable conflict situation.

5. Some countries are in fact increasing their military spending:
Sweden – Poland – Japan….Or at least maintaining the level more or less steady: Finland – Denmark….In these places our arguments for reductions continue to have validity.

6. The underlying attitudes to security have not changed. Governments think they can solve problems like Islamist terrorism by military means, while the deeper causes are not tackled. Thus, our campaign can also be thought of in broader terms as ‘Global Action against Militarisation’ (or militarism) – which could encompass protests against the proliferation of military bases, nuclear weapons, corrupt arms trade deals, compulsory military service, militarisation of aid, etc – regardless of the public spending aspects. However, since other organisations are engaged in these issues IPB argues that GDAMS should remain primarily economic in its focus for the time being.

This is a highly complex issue and the situation is different in each country. We plan to explore this in more depth in the next Newsletter. We would welcome comments on how the GDAMS community should respond.
Write to: gdams@ipb.org
MORE TOOLS...

Cut Military Spending - Fund Human Needs!
www.gdams.org

GDAMS Online

Website: gdams.org and demilitarize.org now lead to the same website. Come visit us there!

Social Media:
- Like us on Facebook: facebook.com/globaldayofactionnonmilitaryspending
- Follow us on Twitter: twitter.com/DemilitarizeDay

www.gdams.org

International Peace Bureau
41, Rue de Zurich
1201 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41-22-731-6429
gdams@ipb.org • www.ipb.org

Peace Action (US Focal Point)
8630 Fenton Street, Suite 524
Silver Spring, MD 20910, USA
Tel: +1-301-565-4050
info@peace-action.org • www.peace-action.org