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The Disturbing Expansion of the Military-Industrial Complex

By Mairead Maguire

October 15, 2014

How can we explain that in the 21st century we are still training millions of men and women in our armed forces and sending them to war?

There are more choices than war or peace, there are multi-optional choices and a civilian-based non-military diplomatic-political policy has more chance of succeeding in solving a violent conflict.

In war, the cost in civilian lives is incalculable, not to mention the many military personnel whose lives are destroyed. Then there is the cost to the environment and the cost to human potential as our scientists waste their lives planning and researching even more horrific weapons which increasingly, in modern war, kill more civilians than combatants.

For example, the United States and the United Kingdom committed genocide against the Iraqi people when, between 1990 and 2012, they killed 3.3 million people – including 750,000 children – through sanctions and wars.

We all also watched our television screens in horror in July and August this year as the Israeli military bombarded civilians in Gaza for 50 days.

But, why are we surprised at this cruelty of military when they are doing what they are trained to do – kill, at the behest of their politicians and some people?

It is shocking to listen to politicians and military boast of their military prowess when in lay persons' terms what it means is killing of human beings.

Every day through our television and local culture, we are subjected to the glorification of militarism and bombarded with war propaganda by governments telling us we need nuclear weapons, arms manufacturers, and war to kill the killers who might kill us.

However, too many people do not have peace or the basics to help them achieve peace.

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They live their lives struggling with the roots of violence, some of which are poverty, war, militarism, occupation, racism and fascism. They have seen that they release uncontrollable forces of tribalism and nationalism. These are dangerous and murderous forms of identity which we need to transcend.

To do this, we need to acknowledge that our common humanity and human dignity are more important than our different traditions; to recognise that our lives and the lives of others are sacred and we can solve our problems without killing each other; to accept and celebrate diversity and otherness; to work to heal the ‘old’ divisions and misunderstandings; to give and accept forgiveness, and to choose listening, dialogue and diplomacy; to disarm and demilitarise as the pathway to peace.

In my own country, in Northern Ireland, when faced with a violent and prolonged ethnic/political conflict, the civil community organised to take a stand, rejected all violence and committed itself to working for peace, justice and reconciliation.

Through unconditional, all-inclusive dialogue, we reached peace and continue to work to build up trust and friendship and change in the post-conflict era. The civil community took a leading role in this journey from violence to peace.

I hope this will give an example to other countries such as Ukraine, where it is necessary for an end to the war, and a solution of the problem on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Accords.

We are also challenged to continue to build structures through which we can cooperate and which reflect our relations of interconnection and interdependence. The vision of the founders of the European Union to link countries together economically in order to lessen the likelihood of war among nations is a worthy endeavour.

Unfortunately instead of putting more energy into providing help for E.U. citizens and others, we are witnessing the growing militarisation of Europe, its role as a driving force for armament and its dangerous path, under the leadership of the United States/NATO, towards a new ‘cold’ war and military aggression.

The European Union and many of its countries, which used to take initiatives in the United Nations for peaceful settlements of conflict, are now one of the most important war assets of the U.S./NATO front. Many countries have also been drawn into complicity in breaking international law through U.S./U.K./NATO wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and so on.

It is for this reason that I believe NATO should be abolished and that steps be taken towards disarmament through non-violent action and civil resistance.

The means of resistance are very important. Our message that armed groups, militarism and war do not solve our problems but aggravate them challenges us to use new ways and that is why we need to teach the science of peace at every level of society.

The whole of civilisation is now facing a challenge with the growth of what President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) warned the U.S. people against – the military/industrial complex – saying that it would destroy U.S. democracy.

We know now that a small group made up of the military/industrial/media/corporate/academic elite, whose agenda is profit, arms, war and valuable resources, now holds power worldwide and has a stronghold on elected governments. We see this in the gun and Israeli lobbies, among others, which wield great power over U.S. politics.

We have witnessed this in ongoing wars, invasions, occupations and proxy wars, all allegedly in the name of “humanitarian intervention and democracy”. However, in reality, they are causing great suffering, especially to the poor, through their policies of arms, war, domination and control of other countries and their resources.

Unmaking this agenda of war and demanding the implementation of justice, human rights and international law is the work of the peace movement.

We can turn our current path of destruction around by spelling out a clear vision of what kind of a world we want to live in, demanding an end to the military-industrial complex, and insisting that our governments adopt policies of peace, just economics and cooperation with each other in this multi-polar world.