

SESSION 8

Purpose: In this session participants will explore the impact of the arms race on four dimensions of American society: political institutions, the economy, race, and psychological and spiritual health.

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Materials Needed: copies of the *Foundation Document*, Bibles, newsprint and marker, and copies of *The Book of Hymns*.

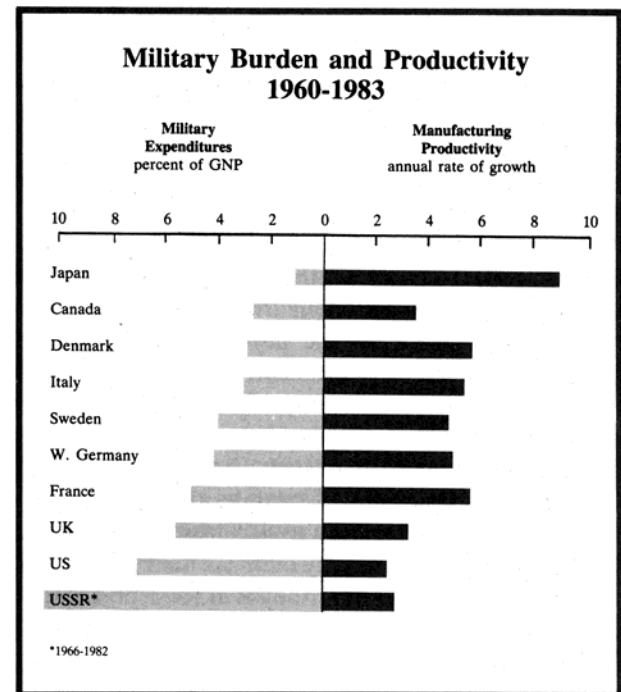
1 Begin with a brief Bible study of Jeremiah 27–28. The year was 594, three years after the cream of the Palestinian nobility had been deported to Babylonia. Yet the prevailing mood in Jerusalem was that God would overthrow Babylon and bring the exiles home. That was what people within the Jerusalem web of influence wanted to believe. But Jeremiah had something different to say. And he said that God had something different to say. Invite the group members to read the Bible passage silently. What was God's message to Jerusalem? Do you suppose it was a popular message? It wasn't what Jeremiah *wanted* to say. He loved his country deeply. But he could not ignore God's command. One cannot always trust the web of influence in any society to speak the truth. God's truth sometimes flies in the face of conventional wisdom. Of course, that does not mean that if something is unpopular, it is necessarily God's word. The point is simply that vested human interests can sometimes skew the perception of truth.

The bishops are saying that something similar has happened in our time. A web of influence has evolved (in which all basic institutions are implicated) that systematically distorts the perception of truth about the prospects of peace (see pages 55-56 in the *Foundation Document*). Truth itself has become a casualty of vested interests. The bishops, after prayerful and penitent study, have tried to discern God's true word for this time and place. The bishops have not claimed a copyright on the final or complete truth. But if Jeremiah is any clue—and as Scripture we believe it is—the issue of truth cannot be resolved by a popularity poll or a barometer of leading economic indicators. The kingdom of God is neither a democracy nor a corporate boardroom.

What do the group members think about the claim that a complex web of influence distorts our perception of dangers and possibilities? What might those vested interests be? How do group members

think God's true word for today's complex policy issues can be discerned? Do they agree or disagree that the Scriptures and church tradition give some direction to a prudent reading of the signs of the times? Why?

2 The point is made in the *Foundation Document* that high levels of military spending are not *necessary* for economic prosperity. Do the group members agree? As a way of prompting discussion, it may be helpful to copy the following chart on newsprint. You may also want to read aloud the interpretive comments that follow it.



“Military expenditures not only divert funds from current needs but also have a long-term effect on productivity in civilian industry, pushing up price levels, and slowing economic growth. Military programs preempt resources that might otherwise have been invested in the technology, research, and human capital on which the quality as well as the rate of economic development depend.

“Available data for developed countries show a strong correlation between high rates of military spending and slow gains in productivity. The two superpowers, carrying the largest military burden and the lion's share of all public investment in military

research, stand at the end of the line in productivity. CIA, which calculates the USSR showing in productivity at about the US rate, has described it as the Soviets' biggest headache. Japan, at the opposite end of the scale, has a very low ratio of military expenditures to GNP, a strong investment record, and an extraordinary 9 percent average annual gain in productivity. No other developed country comes close to matching this record.

"The reasons for this evident link between an intensive military effort and relatively poor productivity and growth are not hard to find. Military spending does not add to the economy's productive capital stock. It competes directly with civilian investment in fields such as research, electronics, and machinery. A strong bargaining position, supported by generous pricing practices and political priorities, enables it to outbid civilian industry for scarce talent and materials. But the skills and technology that it fosters are not central to the development process. They neither improve the nation's competitive position in international markets nor promote the better transportation, health, and living conditions essential to the home market in both rich and poor economies."¹

3 Explain that one of the *current* effects of the nuclear arms race, cited in the *Foundation Document*, is its impact on the psychological health of persons. An attitude of fatalism, of despair about the chances of a viable future, of helplessness to do anything about it, is one response that psychologists have noted. Long-term projects—marriages, careers, families—are undermined even as they are desperately needed. Perhaps the most disturbing information is the report that many adolescents and children are deeply suspicious that they will have no future.² Following are some excerpts of interviews with children that you may want to read aloud to your group.

"Boy aged 9: 'I just kept thinking about having to get killed by nuclear bombs, and sometimes I didn't want to go to sleep 'cause I was afraid I was going to have a really bad dream about a nuclear war and get killed or something. Maybe my parents and my friends and all my family would get killed and I'd just be alive and I wouldn't know what to do or anything. And I'd just be stuck.'

"Girl aged 9: 'I sometimes think that I'd rather be dead because then I could go up to heaven and I wouldn't have to worry about all this stuff about nuclear war.'

"Boy aged 9: 'I think I'd rather live in B.C. where

there were no people. Well, there were people, but there were no war kinds. And I think that, I always keep on thinking that when I grow up I'm going to be an astronaut but I think I'm never going to be one. War's going to keep going on and nuclear missiles are going to keep on bombing countries and stuff. I think I will be dead and I'll never survive.'

"Girl aged 9: 'I tell my mom that I'm never going to have a child because if I do then I'll die and also my child will. And I'm not that scared about myself because I'm myself, I'm one person. But, like, you know, if everybody in the world got killed then there'd be nobody left.'"³

You may want to allow a few minutes for parents and teachers in your group to share their own experiences with children.

4 Thinking seriously about the nuclear arms crisis can be awfully sobering. One resource that Christians can bring to the struggle for *shalom* is a distinctive understanding of *hope*. Read aloud the following and then allow a few minutes for comments: "Christian hope is not the same thing as simple optimism. The Christian hope is confidence that God can be trusted. Even when much of the observable evidence seems to declare that all is lost, God is struggling to provide a future worth living. That is the message of comfort. But Christian hope carries a challenge, too. It grants no license for complacency. It comforts us in order to give us the strength and determination to seek out the new future God is offering. Christian hope assures us that in our struggles as peacemakers, we are conforming to God's will for *shalom*."

5 Read aloud Psalms 44 and 46. Close by singing or reciting one of the great hymns of Christian hope grounded in God: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," No. 20; "How Firm a Foundation," No. 48; or "Be Still, My Soul," No. 209 (*The Book of Hymns*).

¹Chart and comments are quoted with permission from Ruth Leger Sivard's *World Military and Social Expenditures 1985*, © World Priorities, Washington, D.C.; pages 22-23. Sivard is a former chief of the economics division of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

²See "Psychosocial Trauma," by John E. Mack, in *The Final Epidemic: Physicians and Scientists on Nuclear War*, edited by Ruth Adams and Susan Cullen (Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science, 1981); pages 21-34. See also "The Psychosocial Impact of Nuclear Developments," by William R. Beardslee and John E. Mack, in American Psychiatric Association Task Force Report No. 20.

³Eric Chivian, M.D. and Roberta Snow, Harvard Medical School and the Harvard School of Education, Interviews with Children in Massachusetts Schools, 1982. Used by permission.