

The International Options for Response

The preceding analyses sketch a variety of means by which quantitative indicators could be used in a regional context to help identify those states that might be devoting excessive resources to their military sectors, or which might be suffering the adverse social, economic and political consequences of such spending. Obviously, both the indicators and the analysis could be refined, and without detailed case studies of particular states or regions, one cannot be certain about any of the tentative conclusions that have been drawn about which states might be carrying an excessive military burden. But the overall point remains: in spite of fairly major analytic and statistical obstacles, some sensible use can be made of currently available data to draw policy-relevant conclusions that could stimulate or catalyze multilateral or regional discussions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the cases selected also confirmed the scholarly consensus that it is impossible to uncover any general relationships between levels of military spending and a variety of social, economic or political indicators. In these regional case studies, military expenditures do not appear to be systematically traded off against health and education spending, do not exert any necessarily systematic negative effect on economic growth, and do not (as measured by the number of soldiers per thousand population) appear to be correlated tightly with levels of political and civil freedom. Of course, it might be the case that different groupings of states (by level of economic development, for example) might uncover such general relationships, but those were not undertaken in this report.

On the other hand, two other types of comparisons do appear to be useful. First, regional comparisons of changes in overall levels of military spending, the percentage of GNP devoted to the military, military spending per capita, and the relative size of armed forces, can serve to identify those states that seem to lie outside regional norms. Such "outliers" would perhaps not emerge from a global comparison that did not distinguish among radically different regional contexts. Second, the ratio of military to social welfare spending (as measured by public health and education spending), appears to have some across-the-board utility in making comparisons within (and perhaps even between) regions. It too, however, broke down when comparing states at widely divergent stages of social and economic development (as in Southeast Asia, for example). Nevertheless, the index of a 1:2.0 ratio of military to social spending was helpful in identifying possibly negative government policy choices, and (with appropriate sensitivity to qualitative factors) in highlighting outlier states. Some examples of this from the case studies will be offered below.

But one question remains: what should the policy community do to reduce excessive military spending? This report is not intended to make policy recommendations for appropriate instruments and precise mechanisms, but it can analyze in a preliminary fashion the instruments that have been the main focus of multilateral attention: international development assistance (IDA) and the level of external debt. Linking