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## Social movements and states shall prioritize Sustainable Common Security to address shared global challenges.

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It's time to pull together for Sustainable Common Security

Sustainable common security is an umbrella concept to help with the deeper understanding and cooperative action now urgently required to address shared global challenges, human and environmental needs. There are wider objectives, including to:

1. revitalize idealism, a 'one-world' perspective and work for a better world;
2. clarify the links between insecurity, the climate crisis, capitalism, militarism and inequality;
3. build solidarity and cooperation toward a movement of movements;
4. challenge constant preparation for more war as the central approach to national security;
5. develop viable, sustainable policy options for peace and conflict, human rights and socio-economic justice, disarmament and development, military transformation and economic

conversion, with a priority accorded to a global peace system and, arguably most important;

6. encourage the substantive system shifts and transformations now needed.

Five global systems are now dysfunctional and failing. People need radical leaps from an unsustainable economic system to a Green New Deal; from a high-risk, high-cost war system to a global peace system; from a competitive, self-help sovereign state system to a caring and cooperative system of local and global governance.

The concept of sustainable common security is a synthesis drawing from both the imminent common security imperative of preventing worse and the sustainable security emphasis on the deeper causes. As an effort to address both immediate security needs while motivating and mobilizing for sustainable solutions, this is a modestly more comprehensive and broader umbrella for wider related effort. It's also one to complement rather than diminish work on either approach. The emphasis is on 'pulling together' for a more just and safer world. In short, sustainable common security is a useful organizing principle for progressive internationalism.

### **The urgent need**

In the words of the Dalai Lama, "your right to life, and the right to life of your children are no longer secure."<sup>(1)</sup> Recently, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres wrote that, "... we are in a race for our lives, and we are losing."<sup>(2)</sup> People and the planet are in jeopardy. Five deeply integrated global systems are failing to deliver security.

### **The Eco-System**

Climate change is accelerating.<sup>(3)</sup> Recently, the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change indicated a slim 12-year period is all that remains before devastating effects become irreversible.<sup>(4)</sup> Now, the commitments levels supported in the 2015 Paris Agreement<sup>(5)</sup> are clearly insufficient, but those are still not being met.<sup>(6)</sup>

Climate change is also described as the ultimate threat multiplier.<sup>(7)</sup> Already, it adversely affects not only the rising incidence of powerful hurricanes and cyclones, but entire regions and the survival of people. More refugees, fragile states and armed conflicts are early symptoms of worse ahead.<sup>(8)</sup> The economic system that drove most of the damage may deny responsibility, but that's likely to come at a high cost too.

The results are evident: the extinction of living species<sup>(9)</sup>; increasing temperatures for a decade<sup>(10)</sup>; the increasing extremism of weather; destruction of habitat; a surge of 68.6 million forcibly displaced people world-wide<sup>(11)</sup>; and a three-fold increase in civil wars.<sup>(12)</sup>

Joseph Stiglitz stresses the urgent need for a bold response writing: "the climate emergency is our third world war. Our lives and civilization as we know it are at stake, just as they were in the second world war."<sup>(13)</sup>

### **The War System**

Another Cold War and nuclear arms race are underway.<sup>(14)</sup> Once again, people everywhere are under a balance of terror within a system of mutually assured destruction (MAD). UN officials warn that the chances of nuclear war are higher than they've been in decades.<sup>(15)</sup> The probabilities increase over time with the development and proliferation of

advanced weapons and, fewer restraints in arms control. Any nuclear weapon use risks uncontrollable escalation to full nuclear war, with a nuclear winter risking life on earth.(16)

Wars over the past fifty years have been largely unwinnable, even for the most powerful, despite their massive efforts and expense. *Si vis pacem para bellum* – ‘if you want peace, prepare for war’ might have been a compelling dictum for the Roman Empire, but it no longer holds in an era of global interdependence and mutual vulnerability.

Yet preparation for more war remains the primary focus of national security efforts worldwide. Rather than an efficient peace system, a global military-industrial complex expanded to exert unwarranted influence over a war system, generating wider insecurity at higher risks and costs.

The Global Peace Index now report the annual cost of war and violence at a staggering \$14.7 trillion (USD) in purchasing power terms – a figure equivalent to 12.4 per cent of the world’s economic activity, or \$1,988 for every person.(17) Clearly, that’s unsustainable, but it’s also big business and key to personal profits and the national economies that depend on ever-higher military spending.

### **The Economic System**

Unprecedented wealth has been accumulated over the past thirty years of globalization.

Capitalism drives a global economy. Yet inequality continues to rise.(18) Neo-liberalism deregulated capitalism, making it an increasingly predatory economic system, exploiting people and the planet’s resources.(19) With an emphasis on austerity, there has been less funding of social programs and development.(20)

While wealth surges up for a small minority, precarious conditions pour down heavily onto people in more vulnerable conditions, particularly near the equator.(21) With extreme inequality and marginalization, desperation is generating further pressure on people, weak states and the environment.(22) This will prompt more armed conflict. Worse, the beneficiaries of this malaise now shift the blame onto the victims fleeing horrid conditions.(23)

Paul Rogers identifies the core drivers of insecurity as a failing neoliberal economic system, environmental limits, especially climate breakdown and, an entrenched security paradigm. As he writes,

“Neoliberalism puts us in danger by deepening socio-economic divisions, which marginalizes many people and so increases the risk of violent revolts from those margins. Climate change is of course a global danger and will be catastrophic if not prevented. And our military-industrial complex, with the use of force as its excuse for existing, has proved disastrous in the 18-year ‘war on terror’ and is incapable of responding to a divided and constrained world.”(24)

### **The Human Rights System**

Human rights provide a universal foundation for justice



and security.(25) Despite substantive progress on human rights over seventy years, this foundation is under siege. In the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, "The world is sliding back on human rights and its principles are under attack in all corners of the globe."(26)

An array of impediments defies efforts to improve human rights. For one, they rely on consensus within a universal framework of principles and norms – not binding laws.(27)

Enforcement lingers as a long-standing dilemma. Second, while human rights are widely recognized, there is now less respect for abiding by agreed rules to protect such rights. As with international treaties and conventions, the powerful can simply ignore human rights and the international consequences of violating rights. In turn, with selective adherence and controversy, the challenges to human rights increase.(28)

Equality and democracy – two bedrocks of human rights – are at risk.(29) Political extremes now mobilize around divisions, hate and race to challenge the rights of immigrants and refugees, even socio-economic security for citizens. Lately, the recurring appeal to national sovereignty and national security – with more money for the military and less for people and the planet – has trumped both the universality and, for many, the faith that human rights matter.

### **National Sovereignty & The Rules-Based System**

Since the system of independent sovereign states took root following the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, competition in pursuit of power, wealth and territory has hardly stopped. Cooperation to manage global interdependence is a relatively new priority of sovereign states; one all-too-often addressed by pragmatic, incremental reforms to existing arrangements ('the tippy-toe method') rather than a security and survival imperative that merits serious broader effort.

For over two decades, it's been commonly accepted that global challenges require global cooperation. Multilateral cooperation continues, albeit with far less official enthusiasm for far-reaching change. Sovereign states are in trouble.(30) Now, the wider interest in a rules-based system is under assault by resurgent nationalism, with a narrow preference for unilateralist self-help and restoring greatness.

Despite an evident need, official interest in global governance waned over the past twenty-five years to become a target of scorn. As President Trump informed the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, "we reject the ideology of globalism and accept the doctrine of patriotism."(31)

A deeper multilateral commitment to a rules-based system might reinvigorate the earlier processes for addressing each of the five problematic systems, although those were awkward, slow processes of developing international consensus. In the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres:

At this time of great anxiety and geopolitical disorder we need multilateralism more than ever... We are transitioning to a new world order, with destination yet unknown. That is why our world seems at present chaotic. But even if we end up with a multipolar world, it is not in itself a guarantee of mutual peace and security.(32)

Global governance may seem elusive, but it also appears to be key to securing 'our global neighborhood'.(33) Democratic world federalism has already provided several key blocks of the foundation required.(34) In short, these five dominant global systems are stressed, dysfunctional and failing.

Similarly, decline is apparent in world order, the neo-liberal order, Pax Americana, and the transatlantic post-war alliances.(35)

Notably, these systems are not direct threats that can be managed with forceful coercion or traditional military approaches. Each is a shared security challenge.

Like it or not, these systems and the people within are now interdependent and interconnected so, 'linked in'. Shared challenges cannot be solved by isolated efforts. Progress in one area may depend on progress in others. Clearly, integrated thinking and approaches are required.

As a transition to a new world order is underway, the near-term future is already characterized by a contest between the twin forces of narrow nationalism driving disintegration and progressive internationalism urging deeper cooperation, help and systemic change. In turn, it's inevitable that traditional interpretations of national security are now challenged by recent attempts to articulate a universal conception, with more sustainable options.

In making the case for sustainable security, Paul Rogers writes:

A hurricane of crises across the world – financial meltdown, economic recession, social inequality, military power, food insecurity, climate change – presents governments, citizens and thinkers with a defining challenge: to rethink what 'security' means in order to steer the world to a sustainable course. The gap between perilous reality and this urgent aspiration remains formidable.(36)

The Oxford Research Group (ORG) warns that, "current approaches to global security are characterized by the 'control paradigm': an approach based on the premise that insecurity can be controlled through military force or containment, thus maintaining the status quo."(37)

For the Oxford Research Group and proponents of sustainable security, the emphasis shifts toward the long-term impact and consequences of our policies, as well as the underlying causes of insecurity, desperation and conflict. The central premise is that the consequences of insecurity are beyond control and fighting the symptoms will not work sufficiently; the focus must shift to resolving the deeper causes.(38)

Common security was a blueprint for survival that helped to stem the last Cold War, stop provocative deployments, calm tensions and cut both conventional and nuclear weapons. It emphasized our interdependence and mutual vulnerability.(39) This insight still applies to Russia and America; India and Pakistan; Iran and Saudi Arabia; even to people everywhere. We may share security, but we can no longer fight to win it. The competitive pursuit of national security at the expense of others now incurs unacceptable costs and existential risks. Understandably, in a period of overlapping crises, people feel deep insecurity.

Increasingly, representatives of diverse sectors see a need for a new approach to security, one that may prompt hope, along with a guide to dealing with their various challenges. Yet previous attempts to redefine security have had limited results. In an earlier attempt to explain this dilemma, Langille wrote:

To date, concepts of cooperative security – whether collective, comprehensive, common or human security – have been helpful but insufficient. The emancipatory potential of each was evident early on, just not agreeable to the most powerful. As a result, our key systems and institutions did not shift as hoped. Within a few years it was back to national security, preparing for war and business as usual. Despite a rapidly globalizing world, transformational change continues to be resisted in all the state-centric institutions. This raises a fundamental question: how do we break from this pattern to do better?"

Security concepts usually have a fifteen- to twenty-year shelf-life. They linger until new challenges arise exposing their limits. In this, they are vaguely similar to paradigm shifts, but often without the wider transformation intended. By definition, paradigm shifts occur when prevailing systems are deemed inadequate or failing and, when another option is widely viewed as better.(40)

### **What's different in Sustainable Common Security?**

This idea is simply more comprehensive, with an approach that combines short-mid and long-term challenges and needs. Arguably, this approach helps to address both imminent crises and the underlying, deeper causes of insecurity.

Sustainable common security is largely synonymous with positive peace. As peace research pioneer, Johan Galtung stipulated, positive peace stems from fostering the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.(41) Both sustainable common security and positive peace are more holistic than the narrower notions of national and international security or the conception of negative peace (the absence of direct, overt violence).

Both work across systems, beliefs and borders. Both make the connection between direct violence, structural violence (exploitation and exclusion) and cultural violence, and help in efforts to curtail each.(42)

Cosmopolitan conflict resolution entails a similar approach.(43) A hybrid mix of local, regional and global conflicts have emerged that defy resolution by traditional means. With globalization, our shared obligations expand beyond borders and the Westphalian state system.

In an emerging 'world community', progressive governance is needed to enhance justice and the welfare of all. As Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall write, the term cosmopolitan conflict resolution indicates "...the need for an approach that is not situated within any particular state, society or established site of power, but rather promotes constructive means of handling conflict at local through to global levels in the interest of humanity."(44) As with sustainable common security, three key objectives are in justice, human welfare and emancipation via constructive rather than destructive means.

Upholding and enhancing human rights are another influence and priority. Notably, the understanding of human rights, as well as the body of related international law expanded substantively over the past seven decades.(45) It's no longer just about protecting the rights of individuals who are victims of discrimination and exploitation, although both are of pressing importance to millions of vulnerable people. Already, there is a human right to peace(46) and protection,(47) to freedom from fear and want, to sustainable development(48) and to hope for a better future. Now, social movements and progressive governments must elevate human rights to the front and centre of political and security agendas, both to restore shared rights and, to seek structural and systemic changes that liberate whole societies – of all human civilization – from the threat of nuclear annihilation and climate extinction.

A sustainable common security approach relies on deeper cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect for the golden rule: treat others as you would wish to be treated. With the critical issues ahead, cooperation isn't just a nicer approach; human survival may depend upon it.

Sustainable common security is a response to the earlier question, "how do we break from this pattern to do better?" People can make a break by acknowledging that their deeper interdependence stems from shared global challenges, by aiming higher and wider as global citizens and by mobilizing cooperative efforts.

As people inhabit and depend upon complex interdependent systems, integrated (i.e., comprehensive) analysis is essential to understand, improve and transform each. As this is

relatively new and global, people are now in the ‘same boat’. Rather than pull apart, it’s time to pull together.

Aiming higher for a more just and secure world is an eminently reasonable target that’s also a widely shared aspiration. Similarly, sustainable common security is what most expect of others, even in a global neighborhood. So, it’s time to build a more inclusive global community, with a one-world perspective.(49) In the words of the late Howard Zinn, “we need to assert our allegiance to the human race, and not to any one nation.”

Here, it’s understood that there is a lot to pull with not a lot of time. Yet social movements widen the conception of what is acceptable and apply pressure to prompt required change.(50) Further, social movements have already demonstrated their capacity to motivate, mobilize and fast-track progressive policies. A movement of movements has far more potential to convey influence and power. Sustainable common security is to complement and expand on both “sustainable security” and “common security.”

## **Origins**

‘Sustainable international security’ arose from an official Canadian response to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s 1992 ‘An Agenda for Peace’. As early as 1992, Department of External Affairs documents advised that, “the Security Council should not only be in a position to react to short term crises. It should also aim to look at the long-term evolution of our world and at ways of promoting the conditions for sustainable international security”.(51) For three years, officials attempted to promote this approach.(52)

There were already numerous key contributors, including the United Nations and several pivotal international commissions. In 1980, the Brandt report, North-South: A Programme for Survival, envisaged a new kind of global security.(53) Their case combined social, economic, and political challenges with traditional military threats. They also proposed ‘A Society of Nations’. World peace and disarmament, international justice, and addressing the human needs of the more vulnerable were at the forefront of priorities.

By 1982, the Palme report, Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival, emphasized our shared dependence – that security for one nation could only be enhanced by increasing the confidence and security of others.(54) Preventing war and violent conflict had to be common priorities. Survival required a comprehensive conception of security, moving beyond narrow notions of national security to include wider global challenges.

The “common security” approach emphasizes co-operative over competitive security planning; advocates national military restraint; promotes the common good rather than national interests; and co-ordinates multinational security through the United Nations.

For many, this concept continues to provide an enduring vision. It helped end the earlier Cold War in 1988/89, guided the post-Cold War era, and was included in the UN Secretary-General’s 1992, An Agenda for Peace. That agenda prompted official interest in sustainable international security until being eclipsed by a new ‘human security’ concept.

A focus on human security stemmed from the 1994 UNDP’s Human Development Report which suggested enhancing global security by ensuring “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear.”(55) A human security agenda and network was developed in several states, with Canada and Japan assuming lead roles, albeit with different interpretations and approaches.(56)

Human security expanded the traditional focus on state (national) security to include the security of individuals.(57) It arose largely in response to both globalization and the fragmentation of states that prompted violent, internal conflicts and widespread human suffering.

It elevated human rights and development, resource limits, as well as protection from poverty, disease, military and criminal threats. Thus, it was to broaden and update the security focus to complement rather than replace existing approaches. Enthusiasm for this agenda recently faded. It struggled to keep up with an era of overlapping global challenges and was not intended to encourage systemic shifts.

Another pivotal contribution to rethinking global security also arose in 1995: Our Global Neighborhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance.(58) Although partially eclipsed by the new focus on human security, this high-level report took the further step of stressing that, “global security must be broadened from its traditional focus on the security of states to include the security of people and the planet.”(59)

The following ‘Principles of Security for a New Era’ were proposed:

- All people, no less than all states, have a right to a secure existence, and all states have an obligation to protect those rights;
- The primary goals of global security policy should be to prevent conflict and war and to maintain the integrity of the planet’s life-support systems by eliminating the economic, social, environmental, political, and military conditions that generate threats to the security of people and the planet, and by anticipating and managing crises before they escalate into armed conflicts;
- Military force is not a legitimate political instrument, except in self- defence or under UN auspices;
- The development of military capabilities beyond that required for national defence and support of UN action is a potential threat to the security of people;
- Weapons of mass destruction are not legitimate instruments of national defence; and,
- The production and trade in arms should be controlled by the international community.(60)

In hindsight, this was a prescient Commission; one with an early sense of several looming challenges and the shifts required. As their report noted:

Embracing these norms would go a long way towards responding to the most pressing security challenge of the twenty-first century: preserving and extending the progress made in securing states against the threat of war while finding ways to safeguard people against domestic threats of brutalization and gross deprivation and ensuring the integrity and viability of the life-support systems on which all life depends.(61)

The further development of “sustainable security” was primarily by British academics, peacemakers, and NGOs. In 2006, Chris Abbott, Paul Rogers, and John Sloboda wrote “Global Responses to Global Threats” for the Oxford Research Group.(62) They framed the deeper causal factors of global crises not as threats, but as challenges requiring a new framework.(63)

Sustainable security also arose in a series of papers from the Center on American Progress. In 2008, Gayle E. Smith, a former member of the U.S. National Security Council, wrote, “In Search of Sustainable Security: Linking National Security, Human Security and Collective Security to Protect America and Our World”. She emphasized further contributions to international development as a means to enhance both global and national security in America, along with a better image abroad. Smith concluded that:

It is time for our next president to remind the rest of the world that we stand for the sustainable security of our shared world. To do otherwise would be to diminish our collective security and abandon our common humanity.(64)

In 2014, the Ammerdown Invitation – a British civil society peace network – encouraged alternatives to national security, prompting a wider focus on sustainable security.(65) A Canadian effort followed.(66) The objective was to merge “common” and “sustainable” security while addressing the core concerns of both. Peter Langille published a sequence of articles advocating sustainable common security as a guide to Canadian foreign and defence policy.(67) Subsequent development of the concept was in Mondial, the publication of the World Federalist Movement – Canada,(68) with modest elaboration of the core principles in the World Federalist Debate.(69)

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has since confirmed support for ‘sustainable peace’ as the framework to guide peace and security efforts.(70) Although the UN Security Council promptly endorsed this shift little, if anything, seemed ready to change. Each of the great powers has argued that their national security practices and nuclear weapons sustain peace. There was no obligation to change prevailing approaches or systems. Thus, while helpful as a guide to better, more enduring approaches, the emancipatory potential of “sustainable peace” seemed stalled.

## **Support**

By 2015, the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons adopted sustainable common security.(71) It was also included on the agenda of the Group of 78 and Rideau Institute and within their Shift document, ‘Defence and Foreign Policy Priorities’ supported by a coalition of civil society organizations.(72) The “Policy Recommendations From: Getting to Nuclear Zero, Building Common Security for a Post-MAD World” encouraged the Federal government to “...adopt the umbrella concept of sustainable common security to bridge disarmament, peace and justice, and global environment campaigns.”(73)

In 2016, the British ‘Ammerdown Group’ evolved into the NGO – academic network, ‘Rethinking Security’.(74) A substantive effort is ongoing, including detailed research, educational materials, courses, videos, policy papers and briefings. Considerable elaboration on a new, more inclusive approach was included in their “Discussion Paper”. As noted,

People across the world face growing insecurity. Violent conflict is spreading and intensifying, economic inequality is widening, and the natural ecology on which human life depends is in jeopardy. The world’s poorest people bear the brunt, while those in rich countries are also increasingly affected.(75)

In summary, they note the problem is a shared one: national security continues to dominate, despite an outmoded, dubious narrative. Aside from overriding common rights and legitimate needs, national security advances national interests, usually defined by political and corporate elites to extend control in the short-term over perceived physical threats with offensive military capacity and alliances. The real long-term drivers of insecurity are overlooked. The reluctance to adapt is explained by the control of a small elite group: the disproportionate influence of business, particularly arms industries; institutional inertia and a political pragmatism dismissive of alternatives.(76)

‘Security for the many’ requires a collective effort to build the necessary conditions over the long-term with a commitment to the common good. Yet with respect to ‘Practicable Alternatives’, the list provided by Rethinking Security was short on viable policy options.

An early contributor to the Ammerdown Group, Professor Paul Rogers, frequently writes on sustainable security in his column for Open Democracy and his global security briefing for the Oxford Research Group.(77)

In Canada, the concept of sustainable common security was adopted as one of the ‘enabling measures’ in the May 2018 consensus platform of the conference, ‘How to Save the World in a Hurry’.(78) This coalition-building initiative soon became ‘Project Save the World’.(79)

### **Impediments**

Governments have yet to support or even consider sustainable common security. Unfortunately, the drivers of insecurity are ramping up.

In the cycle of acceptance, many adults are still in denial and angry over the intrusion into their plans. That millions are overwhelmed, depressed and already in precarious struggles to cope is undeniable. A disturbing reality will inevitably lead some to apathy and despair, but it is already motivating and mobilizing others in response. In turn, among the questions already arising are: whose interests are being served; security for whom; and, what options are on offer?

Deep public trust and allegiance has been placed in governments and national security institutions to manage serious challenges. Good governments share valid concerns about the safety and security of their people, their country, even their neighbours nearby and partners worldwide. National security has been an overriding priority of sovereign states for over 370 years. While the early objectives appeared helpful and timely, the intentions and approaches shifted over time. Clearly, neither sovereignty nor national security did little to stop the competition for power whether in Empire, Imperial control, balances of power, civil wars and world wars, or simply as every state’s right to retain a monopoly over the use of force in its sovereign territory.

Now, this system and the approaches pursued within national security pose an array of serious impediments. Ten can be identified:

First, national priorities are often distorted by national security. All 193 sovereign states have a legitimate right to national security and the vast majority retain independent armed forces – armies, navies, air forces and intelligence services. These services usually compete to acquire as large a share of the national budget as possible. Many also compete to remain inter-operable with larger allies such that they are ‘capable of fighting alongside the best against the rest’. As military budgets increase,(80) often without a direct military threat to justify more, social spending is cut, along with cuts to curtail climate change and to support sustainable development.

Second, with few exceptions, national security trumps human rights and drives militarization at home and abroad. Countries still compete for limited resources and constantly prepare for more war. In many Western states, permanent war is effectively institutionalized with a ‘long war policy’. Another inconvenient truth is that national militaries are more frequently used to repress citizens and stifle dissent at home than against aggression from neighbours or abroad.

Third, attention and resources are now diverted to another nuclear and conventional arms race.(81) A balance of terror and a system of mutually-assured destruction (MAD), are rationalized as national security priorities. Combined, they drive another security dilemma, an action-reaction response that increases weapons and stress, thus reducing global security. In short, our prevailing approaches to security now generate vast insecurity.

Fourth, political realism and American security studies dominate Western academe – focusing primarily on pursuit of national interests – with military power and use of force central to advancing national security.(82) In the realist paradigm, cooperation tends to be dismissed at the international level, which is assumed to be a self-help system, characterized by anarchy and competition for power. Aside from encouraging competition and fostering conflict, this paradigm dismisses alternative approaches to security, irrespective of fundamental changes. Ken Booth was correct to write that, “the concept of security in world politics has long been imprisoned by conservative thinking.”(83)

Fifth, within national security analysis, there is a recurring tendency to ascribe blame to others, while their nation and its allies’ policies and deployments are presumed benign. Threats are externalized and exaggerated to rationalize further militarization and spending. By fostering tension there is little prospect for the deeper cooperation needed to address serious challenges.

Sixth, national security helps to ensure business as usual. Few governments can say “no” to higher military spending in preparation for war or, to arms sales abroad. Most lack the political autonomy to slow or stop either process.(84)

Seventh, the emphasis on national security consolidates the unwarranted influence of a global military-industrial complex. President General Dwight Eisenhower warned of this complex in his 1961 farewell address, cautioning that “the total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government... the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”(85) Governments were advised to guard against such influence, power and control. Instead, many encouraged it.

With globalization and the global war on terror (GWOT), the military-industrial complex expanded worldwide into finance, banking and insurance sectors, big oil and gas, homeland security and intelligence, logistics and telecommunications, media and academe, information and high-tech. The military-industrial complex sets the global agenda by harmonizing interests and ensuring their constituents get a share of the pie. Investing in protracted violent conflict yields high profits and few risks, especially when aligned to overwhelming political, economic and military power.(86)

Eighth, national militaries – a central institution of national security – are among the most conservative and, the most opposed to progressive change. Many within work on public relations and perception management to influence citizens.

On numerous global issues – from disarmament and peace operations to climate change and inequality – there is a strong official preference for pragmatic, incremental reform to existing arrangements. In turn, there is a deep aversion to transformational change in most governments, particularly within national defence establishments. Frequently, their agencies use a network of embedded think tanks, NGOs and academics to define problems, develop agreeable analysis and gatekeep consideration of acceptable options.

Ninth, national security, like neo-liberalism, helps to control a hierarchy of credibility, access and funding. As a result, NGOs and civil society may even opt for cooperative, siloed complacency to acquire funding and access. Or, if active or critical, they may lose funding and be isolated, limiting efforts at networking, bridge-building and educational outreach.

A related impediment arises from the prevailing approach to growing insecurity. As noted, one aspect is aptly described as the ‘control paradigm’ – utilizing dated, counter-productive methods to secure national interests with force. Paul Rogers labels this ‘liddism’ – applying old coercive approaches to keep the top on a pressure cooker of overheated issues, by tightening the lid.(87)

Tenth, the national security priorities of the most powerful have inordinate influence over the United Nations Security Council, which since 1945 has retained primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Frequently, the most powerful have conflicting interests.

Further, the UN does not have its own dedicated service to respond to any breach of peace and security, nor sufficient means to prevent armed conflict and protect civilians.(88) As the President of the UN General Assembly lamented in 2016: “it is clear that the UN today remains insufficiently equipped to meet its overriding 1945 objective: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”(89)

A more effective UN is critical. The Organization already leads cooperative multilateral efforts on sustainable development, climate control, disarmament, human rights, equality, peace and security. In the words of Hans-C von Sponeck, Richard Falk and Dennis Halliday:

More than ever before in human history the peoples of the world are being severely challenged by problems of global danger that can only be solved globally. The best hope of humanity to meet these challenges is to abandon unilateralism and isolationism and instead empower the United Nations to become at last an effective mechanism for the protection of “fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.(90)

Overall, the UN now has an annual budget of \$5.4 billion, shared proportionally among 193 Member States, with a separate budget for peace operations of \$ 6.7 billion – a small fraction of the over \$2 trillion devoted to national security spending. Sadly, as climate change and competition for resources have led to more armed conflict, it’s also increased the numbers of refugees and the more vulnerable, while the UN is increasingly denied the funding to help.(91)

In short, powerful vested interests dominate most decisions over national and international security, climate change and political economy, social justice and development.

Sustainable common security has only started to attract the interest of NGO networks and a few progressive political parties. This option may appear to be asking a lot from many who are not yet ready or willing. For millions, a bigger bank account is their first security priority and nothing is to intrude on that objective. Thoughtful engagement on global issues also faces an uphill struggle with complacency and just ‘living-the-dream’. Like idealism and activism, sustainable common security will initially be associated with naïve, wishful thinking.

Breaking from this pattern may be difficult. But soon, the problems from afar will inevitably arise as shared emergencies, stirring wider concerns. That millions more are already mobilizing in response to environmental crises and the new political extremes indicates a tipping point isn’t that far off.(92)

Few, if any, states are ready for the shifts ahead. Combined, the problems may appear overwhelming. Occasionally, the solutions may seem overly complex.

Sustainable common security is not easily formulated as a single resolution or agreeable policy option for current governments.(93) Without progressive leadership, the implications are seen as too far reaching and too radical. Yet over the past two decades, progressive parties have largely avoided discussions of foreign, defence and security policy. As their interest waned along with their expertise during the long, global war on terrorism, so too did their support for viable policy options. Obviously, progressive ideas need both progressive leaders and progressive movements.

Generating public awareness of the wider challenges and alternatives is essential, but also onerous. Corporate media help little, for most journalists must defer to expert opinion that’s often embedded, and academic research which has lost its critical edge.

Social movements have yet to unite or align efforts behind an agreed vision and agenda. Intersectoral cooperation is key to a broad-based campaign and unity of effort. Naomi Klein stresses that “no one movement can win on its own,” and urges a move beyond silos into cooperative alliances of solidarity.(94) This prospect has attracted enthusiasm yet too few tangible partnerships thus far.

That people need to ‘Leap’ for new systems, including a Green New Deal – to create jobs and work to save the planet – is evident.(95) However, the intersecting crises of our time include more than climate change, racism and inequality.(96)

In “How to Revive the Peace Movement in the Trump Era”, Daniel May calls for merging social justice with anti-war activism.(97) That’s an encouraging first step but why stop there? More recently, Medea Benjamin and Alice Slater make a compelling case for Green New

Deal advocates to also address militarism with a New Peace Deal. As they write, If climate change is not addressed rapidly by a Green New Deal, global militarism will ramp up in response to increases in climate refugees and civil destabilization, which will feed climate change and seal a vicious cycle fed by the twin evils militarism and climate disruption. That’s why a New Peace Deal and a Green New Deal should go hand in hand. We cannot afford to waste our time, resources and intellectual capital on weapons and war when climate change is barreling

down on all of humankind. If the nuclear weapons don’t destroy us then the pressing urgency of catastrophic climate will.(98)

Similarly, the Progressive Alliance’s call for ‘a social and ecological transformation’(99) merits wide support, but it’s equally important that both be accompanied by an economic and security transformation. Aside from the evident need, a broader agenda is likely to deserve and attract broader support.

Sustainable common security is also intended to build solidarity in a wider movement of movements. Clearly, social movements need partners in broader coalitions representing diverse yet shared global challenges. In an earlier period, coordinating such efforts was deemed akin to ‘herding cats’ – aside from diverse priorities, few have financial resources, making it very difficult to coordinate and campaign together. But most now communicate and organize online.

So, it’s possible to pull together with the combined weight that actually influences. Then, the required resources may follow.

A progressive movement of movements remains vitally important, especially where there are crucial elections approaching, and the prospect of a well-funded, counter-coalition of right-wing nationalists in what’s called ‘The Movement’.(100)

### **Next steps**

Sustainable common security is a work in progress. Serious plans are required for a new security agenda. These must include innovative ideas to fast-track efforts on the following:

- stimulate renewables, a Green New Deal and related Leaps;
- ensure human rights and humanitarian care, particularly for the more vulnerable;
- demand equality with empowerment of women society-wide;
- mobilize for sustainable development and a living wage;
- encourage disarmament and demilitarization;
- prompt military transformation and economic conversion;
- renew efforts for a global culture of peace and non-violence;
- develop a stronger, more effective United Nations;

- revitalize multilateral cooperation and global governance;
- initiate a global peace system;
- inspire confidence, inclusion and hope.

‘The defining challenge’ as Paul Rogers noted, is to “rethink what security means to steer the world to a sustainable course.” This can be encouraged at local and national levels, even within the UN. A global dialogue and discussion of diverse security needs would help, particularly in identifying areas of complementarity and concern.

Civil society organizations in each area above have experience in coordinating global campaigns. For example, NGO networks have mobilized promptly in lead roles on diverse issues such as a global ban on land mines, a climate convention and a UN Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW).

Educational outreach and dedicated research programs will also require independent centres, leadership, and funding. There is a pressing need for new programs in democracy, human rights, social justice, peace and conflict studies, sustainable development and environmental studies. As Nelson Mandela stressed: “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Youth and students have the most potential and the biggest stake in sustainable common security. The Dalai Lama writes that, “...thanks to the rapid development of information technology, this is the first generation of truly global citizens”.(101) There are no borders in digital culture and there is a lot of sharing world-wide.

It shouldn’t be any surprise that students are demanding bold change, even profound shifts. In the words of 15-year old climate activist, Greta Thunberg:

You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes. Until you start focusing on what needs to be done, rather than what is politically possible, there is no hope. We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis. We need to keep the fossil fuels in the ground, and we need to focus on equity. And if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, then maybe we should change the system itself.(102)

The demand for similar solutions isn’t about to fade. As another young British activist, Cameron Joshi, put it, “They fear us because they know if we get our shit together, we can change the world. We’re at an absolutely seminal point in history, years of consumerism, capitalism, and environmental murder, and we can change it all if we want it all, and we do.”(103) The Leap slogan, ‘Change Everything’ resonates powerfully. Youth are motivated and now mobilizing in both their own campaigns and in cooperation with progressive social movements.(104)

Unions should also play a prominent, wider role. Most within understand the importance of support, solidarity and struggles to improve socio-economic standards. Their members aren’t immune to global challenges. Aside from being key partners in social movements, they formerly contributed both research and educational outreach to help with human rights and justice, peace and security, disarmament and development.

Nonviolent mass movements for change provide inspiring examples and demonstrate what actually works. Recent research suggests that once 3.5% of a population becomes sustainably committed to nonviolent mass movements for political change, they are invariably successful.(105) Others note that tipping points(106) arise and spread fast and widely when 10% of citizens hold firmly to their understanding of an idea.(107)

System shifts are neither unreasonable nor impossible. They are essential to shared security and survival. As Jeremy Lent writes, they may now be underway:

Paradoxically, the very precariousness of our current system, teetering on the extremes of brutal inequality and ecological devastation, increases the potential for deep structural change. Research in complex systems reveals that, when a system is stable and secure, it's very resistant to change. But when the linkages within the system begin to unravel, it's far more likely to undergo the kind of deep restructuring our world requires....The current dire predicament we're in screams something loudly and clearly to anyone who's listening: if we're to retain any semblance of a healthy planet by the latter part of this century, we have to change the foundations of our civilization.(108)

Better ideas that offer hope and inspire widely definitely matter. As Rebecca Solnit writes, "Ideas are contagious, hope is contagious, courage is contagious. When we embody those qualities, we convey them to others."(109)

Of course, the diverse problems of national security and militarization will also continue to call for bold, innovative steps. Albert Einstein astutely wrote that, "past thinking and methods did not prevent world wars. Future thinking must." In the words of Pope Francis "...the ultimate and most deeply worthy goal of human beings and of the human community is the abolition of war."(110)

Yet war and preparation for more war may not fade from better arguments and protest alone. Here, there may be other ways too. As Buckminster Fuller noted, "you never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

The proposed United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) – a 'UN 911' first responder for complex emergencies – is a new model to help prevent armed conflict and genocide, to protect civilians at risk, to ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations and, to address human needs where others cannot or will not. It should also offer a rapid and reliable, legitimate UN security guarantor, thus facilitating wider disarmament.(111)

A UNEPS is no panacea.(112) It's simply one key step toward a global peace system; one that encourages a wider shift from war-fighting to providing prompt help and useful services.

Renewed efforts on military transformation and economic conversion are also essential in any transition to a peace system. Notably, in 2004, the UN made a bold call for defence transformation, encouraging member states with advanced militaries to transform Cold War capacity for war-fighting towards UN peace operations.(113) Few, if any, responded. Now, the need is more evident yet Governments will still need to be pressured to elevate UN peace operations as a priority.

Further, this transformation to provide prompt help in UN peace operations should be accompanied by a parallel shift to non-offensive and non-provocative defence postures, which diminish the emphasis on war-fighting abroad.(114) Simultaneously, this would reduce the demand for, the expense of, and threats represented by advanced war-fighting systems. Non-offensive defence offers more security and more prospects for global cooperation than the prevailing threat-based system of nuclear and conventional deterrence. If encouraged system-wide, international tension, insecurity and fears would subside.

Similarly, this process has to be combined with extensive efforts to convert military industries and defence-dependent communities to more useful and sustainable production.(115)

Green conversion to areas such as renewables, solar and battery-driven light-rail, aircraft and ships may need financial support to start, but each is already in demand. Now, there is a pressing need to accelerate research into local and national conversion options that sustain

employment, jobs and communities. Economic conversion diminishes the unwarranted influence of a global military-industrial complex.(116)

Clearly, other steps will be needed, including wider support of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, a stronger Arms Trade Treaty, new Departments of Peace and a revitalized push for a global culture of peace. No, work on these and other isolated peace initiatives simply hasn't delivered the required results. Again, it's vital that people cooperate to aim higher.

Increasingly, it's understood that our shared global challenges are not being adequately addressed. And, challenges such as climate change, inequality and sustainable development, cannot be met if two-thirds of 193 sovereign states continue to prepare for more war. Our dilemma is captured in the recent slogan, 'PLANET OR WAR – YOU CHOOSE'.

A global peace system is overdue. It will not be easy to shift from a wildly expensive, high-risk, dysfunctional war system to a legitimate, cost-effective global peace system. But the key steps to start this shift are already available.

To date, there has not been sufficient political will or a widely agreeable option to unify support for such a shift. That many countries world-wide are currently reluctant to help with this or other aspects of sustainable common security is understandable; many feel directly intimidated and fear attracting retaliation from the most powerful bully. Yet this is a temporal condition; one likely to change as the global context shifts.

Pivotal elections are just ahead. For progressive parties, success is likely to be determined by the extent to which they provide a compelling vision, with viable policy options for addressing shared global challenges. It's easy to be cynical in dismissing a bold, new agenda, but there are immediate practical steps to start.(117)

American leaders are already moving related ideas(118) and so too in Britain.(119) Among their priorities are a more just world, a stronger, more effective UN, a global order based on human solidarity and steps toward a global peace system. Here, it may also help to recall that what's radical one year may be conservative and accepted the next.(120)

In summary, sustainable common security is to help civil society, social movements and governments encourage wider understanding of shared global challenges, to build support and solidarity for vital new policies, and to inspire a movement of movements. As an umbrella concept, sustainable common security strives to be comprehensive and inclusive in addressing the increasingly interconnected issues driving insecurity, and the interdependence of people on a shared planet. As an organizing principle for progressive internationalism, it also offers a new vision, with new priorities to support crucial system shifts.

As noted, paradigm shifts occur when prevailing systems are deemed inadequate or failing and, when another option is widely viewed as better. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has already acknowledged that, "we are transitioning to a new world order, with destination yet unknown."

By pulling together, people can still influence 'the destination' and, improve our shared prospects for a better future. To quote Fuller again, "We are called to be architects of the future, not its victims."

*Endnotes for this article can be seen at the [Footnotes 4](#) page on this website (link will open in a new page).*

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