

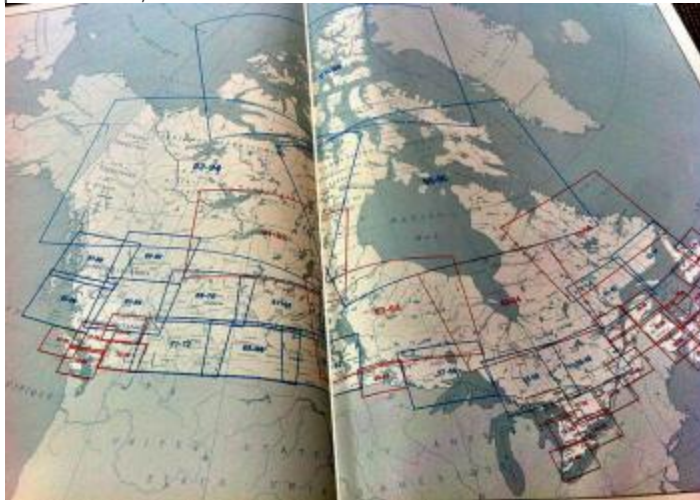
ANALYSIS

Austerity and war no more! How do we shift course in Canada?

BY

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| DECEMBER 3, 2014



With overlapping crises and new extremes, it's time to shift course.

About ten years back a series of reports and studies indicated a very encouraging decline in war and armed conflict world-wide, with lower fatalities, as well as lower military spending. Now, few are confident that these promising trends will hold.

The Global Peace Index reported that the past year was the fifth consecutive slide backwards in peacefulness, with the costs of war reaching \$9.8 trillion just last year. To paraphrase from a good book by Steven Pinker -- 2014 has not reflected the better angels of our nature. War and armed conflicts are now coupled to extremes, as well as to pressures from climate change and global divisions.

Over the past month, thoughtful analysts raised the specter of a serious decline in world order with more anarchy ahead. Mikhail Gorbachev just warned the world is on the brink of another Cold War. It would appear that we're into an era characterized by overlapping crises and extremes.

Earlier, the Oxford Research Group put the challenge clearly:

Without radical change we are likely to see the impact of these interactions become progressively more dangerous, leaving us with the core question -- will there be the political will to act in time?

Three points may help to understand an unfolding process:

First, deep divisions continue to arise since the Global War on Terrorism and the financial crash of 2008. Wars, especially long inconclusive wars generate further opposition and animosity, even more recruits for more violent causes.

Coinciding with this, our economic system shifted billions up and sent the costs down, spreading the hurt and desperation. Inequality and austerity are diminishing hope and opportunity. The new mantra is 'do more with less' almost everywhere, except for those at the top who often benefit from war and austerity.

A global precariat is new. Billions of people are now living on the edge, with marginal employment and little prospect of hope or help. We share a precarious socio-economic condition driven by globalization and the fractured terms of work. Fear and insecurity affect more.

Many also experience the structural violence of exploitation and exclusion, even worse. Understandably, desperation and anger follow. There are fewer life lines, especially for youth. The precariat isn't simply vulnerable and growing; it's volatile.

The direct violence in the Middle East and throughout Central and North Africa is a related manifestation. Less violent extremes are also evident here, in the E.U. and across the U.S. (see Tea Party and Ford Nation). The right succeeded in re-directing anger toward government and unfair taxation. But with diminished services and the greed agenda sidelining hope in the West, many will soon envy the social security of the Nordics and the substantive developments of the BRICS.

For now, religious nationalism and militarism are the easy choice. British economist Guy Standing's book, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* suggests it will be manipulated by venal politicians in the short-term yet may also be central to a progressive transformation once they appreciate their position. Our global precariat will be a very unstable driver. It may improve, but it will need hope and help.

The third driver is our dysfunctional state system, which can't adapt to address global challenges so has chosen what, global security expert, Paul Rogers refers to as 'liddism' -- applying old coercive approaches to keep the top on a pressure cooker, that is heating up.

Rather than acknowledge a complex emergency that a few helped to foster, Western states prefer to box it up into another tidy war on terrorism, with stand-off weapons and air strikes. A long war is a useful distraction, particularly when there is an easy caricature of 'good' against 'brutal'. With pressure growing, weak states already find it convenient to label their opposition and dissent as terrorism. Repression will fuel an explosive condition.

The route out of such a complex mess won't be easy or quick. It will definitely require a more comprehensive approach. But we can start with a preliminary outline of helpful steps.

A better understanding seems like a useful first step.

In a previous period, the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security (CIIPS) helped to guide higher decisions with wider civil society participation. Pierre Trudeau's initial objective was to develop a better perspective on the Cold War and global challenges, to offset the Department of National Defence's reliance on information from the Pentagon and, the Department of Foreign Affairs reliance on information from NATO.

CIIPS provided balanced insight to pressing problems. Yet its demise led to a dearth of informed analysis and wider engagement, which is urgently needed, but can't be generated without core expertise and funding for programs.

Reviving the idea might take the form of a new Department of Peace and Sustainable Common Security or a similar federally supported institute with a broad mandate to address our new global challenges. The cost wouldn't likely be more than acquiring one F-35 fighter jet. Inequality now has to be addressed by more than taxes on financial transactions.

A second more radical yet inevitable step will be to provide a wage sufficient to meet basic needs as a human right and, an obligation of good governance. If Brazil can provide wages to 50 million citizens, there is little excuse for a rich country like Canada with a comparable GDP yet smaller population to refuse it. Spread out, this cost might reach upwards of forty F-35 fighter jets.

Reviving an ethos of social solidarity and cosmopolitan democracy seems essential to counter further divisions.

A third useful step would be to revitalize and re-launch the United Nations program for a culture of peace and non-violence. We were supposed to have a decade of focused efforts; a decent way to mobilize people and unify governments to work for a better world.

Clearly, youth everywhere would benefit from programs in peace education and cosmopolitan conflict resolution. Sadly, that promising initiative didn't attract adequate support, although it could still go viral worldwide for about the cost of another F-35 jet.

Capitalism and accelerating climate damage will change everything, as Naomi Klein documents. Whether we can adapt in time will depend on getting beyond old modes of thought and practice. Joint projects with China, Iran and Russia now make more sense than staged photo opportunities to appear tough.

Sustainable common security may be a useful organizing principle to help address the deeper divisions, but it's hardly sufficient. Bigger shifts are ahead. Global governance is simply overdue and, despite its flaws the United Nations will have to lead.

Restoring legitimacy and appropriate services to help with complex emergencies will also be critical for people and the UN. While the Organization has vast experience in complex emergencies, it lacks its

own capacity to fulfill assigned tasks so must now wait to borrow or rent what's available or not, from its Member States. Protecting the most vulnerable should remain central to global norms and institutional priorities.

Similarly, prevention has proven far more helpful and more cost-effective than the later, larger, longer and costlier operations required once violent conflict has escalated and spread. The UN urgently needs help with both.

A dedicated UN emergency peace service may merit inclusion as another step. It was proposed as a more legitimate, first responder for complex emergencies. This option was specifically designed to help prevent armed conflict and genocide, to protect civilians at extreme risk, to ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations, and to address human needs where others can't.

A UNEPS would be a multidimensional UN service -- with civilians, police and military having multifunctional roles -- capable of diverse assignments with specialized skills for security, humanitarian, health and environmental crises. It's to be composed of approximately 16,000 dedicated personnel, (recruited professionals, selected, trained and employed by the UN) developed to ensure regional and gender equitable representation, rather than national affiliation. It's a service to complement existing UN and regional arrangements by filling the critical gap of managing the critical initial six months of complex emergencies.

Of course, it's no panacea or cure-all, and there will be conflicts it shouldn't attempt. It's a peace service to help, but not a war-fighting mechanism that can manage opposed intervention.

Yet the wider potential of a UNEPS or similar entity has been understood for over 50 years. As officials in the U.S. State Department **formerly acknowledged**,

There is an inseparable relationship between the scaling down of national armaments on the one hand and the building up of international peacekeeping machinery and institutions on the other. Nations are unlikely to shed their means of self-protection in the absence of alternative ways to safeguard their legitimate interests. This can only be achieved through the progressive strengthening of international institutions under the United Nations and by creating a United Nations Peace Force to enforce the peace as the disarmament process proceeds.

Clearly, a UNEPS would be a supportive step in advancing disarmament and sustainable development. Notably, the start-up or development costs of a UNEPS (\$3 billion), as well as the annual recurring costs (of \$1 billion) would be spread among 193 UN member states. For its share, Canada might have to forego another F-35 jet.

Overall, plans for 65 new jets could be scaled back to 20 or better still, just cancelled. As an alternative, the Swedish Saab Gripen NG is a better multi-purpose plane at roughly a third of the cost. But why bother?

In starting a process for a cosmopolitan future, there should be far less need for developing any system for fighting World War III. Preparing for more war is simply old school, a means to divide, as well as an absurd expense. National defence efforts must be scaled back and transformed to support UN peace operations and environmental priorities.

In short, rather than contribute to a contrived sense of security for a few, this country might help to reduce global divisions and extremes to focus on the more legitimate needs of all. Of course, other better options should also be encouraged.

If anyone knows of a progressive politician inclined to raise the most pressing issues, that's another requirement. Yet even this short-list of choices won't be considered too radical for too long. Without the political will to shift course, the lid on this cooker won't hold.

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*Photo: flickr/**Aviva West***

CLIMATE CHANGE WAR INEQUALITY AUSTERITY GLOBAL DIVISIONS