

17 ways to address Canadian security issues

At the forefront, it's time to re-organize Canada's foreign and defence policies around the umbrella concept of sustainable common security, says H. Peter Langille.

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The Munk election debate on foreign policy scheduled for Sept. 28 is likely to raise two questions.

At the outset, the party leaders will likely be asked 'what threatens our security?'

To hold his Conservative core, Stephen Harper will attempt to highlight his leadership, repeating his war record with the Taliban in Afghanistan, with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and with Russia under Putin in the Ukraine. Although our PM can't demonstrate success, victory or independent initiative, he's been in step with Western powers and conventional wisdom on the role of the state. His advisers may not 'do sociology,' but some are familiar with political strategy.

Borrowing from Machiavelli's advice to the Prince, war and the terrorist threat will be Harper's focus. "Fear," as Machiavelli noted, "is simply a means to an end, and that end is security for the prince." Now, it's a pretty safe bet to assume our PM's objective will be to manipulate fear to divide and win.

Yet the Harper government's narrow, national security agenda is distinctly at odds with a world that urgently needs global solutions to address overlapping global crises. Equally important, it's also at odds with public preferences.

Polls over the past three years indicate broad support for a bold vision and progressive agenda. Promoting global peace and security is widely popular, even a close rival to economic security (32 to 34 per cent). As the enthusiasm for war and the fear of terrorism fades, support for the UN and UN peace operations remains high. It remains the public's preferred priority for Canada's military. Despite or perhaps in response to their federal government, Canadians are becoming more progressive.

Understandably, many aren't persuaded by Harper's record on the environment and accelerating climate change, the economy and growing inequality, refugees and terrorism, a turbulent crisis in the Middle East and a new Cold War. Overall, it seems we already fear worse ahead.

So, Canadians will tune in to the Munk debate hoping to hear more compelling, progressive policy options. And, it's almost inevitable that the second question will be 'how should Canada respond?'

There are promising alternatives.

At the forefront, it's time to re-organize Canada's foreign and defence policies around the umbrella concept of sustainable common security. 'Sustainable security' shifts the emphasis toward the long-term impact and consequences of our policies, as well as the underlying causes of insecurity, desperation and conflict. As the Oxford Research Group notes, "the central premise of sustainable security is that we cannot successfully control all the consequences of insecurity, but must work to resolve the causes. In other words, 'fighting the symptoms' will not work, we must instead 'cure the disease.'"

'Common Security' helped to arrest the momentum of the last Cold War by demonstrating our interdependence and mutual vulnerability, which helped to stem provocative deployments and the search for military advantage. In this ongoing nuclear era, our security dilemma is similar to that of two people in a canoe: you can't destabilize one without jeopardizing the other. Like it or not, we're in this world together and despite our extremes, we're gradually inching toward a common perspective of 'one world.' Cooperation is imperative in a shared/common approach to break from the tradition of self-help and the competitive pursuit of national security at the expense of others. Both a revitalized United Nations and a more preventative approach are essential to ensure challenges are addressed before they manifest as threats.

A key determinant of security is that it applies broadly and offers help worldwide. Like 'positive peace,' sustainable common security offers a more comprehensive approach, acknowledging the relationship between direct violence (e.g., war, violent conflict and destructive approaches), structural violence (e.g., exploitation and exclusion), and cultural violence (as manifested in corporate media, academe, divisive politics, militarism, patriarchy and extremism).

While aspects of the human security agenda remain relevant—particularly prevention of armed conflict and protection of civilians—that concept has not facilitated the new thinking, better approaches or the wider system shifts now urgently required.

Equally important, sustainable common security addresses both human and environmental needs. In order to create a more cooperative cosmopolitan community it calls for more effective and equitable institutions at every level.

In short, our safety and security can be assured at lower cost, less risk and wider benefits. So, how might a new Canadian government help? Here are a few suggestions.

Key initiatives to advance sustainable common security:

Initiate a much-needed consultation on security, foreign and defence policy with an inclusive cross-Canada commission that ensures gender mainstreaming in security, foreign and defence policy discussions, planning and operations.

Prioritize multilateral diplomatic and global security engagement through the United Nations (a cornerstone of Canadian policy from 1945 to 1997).

Meet the UN's target of disbursing 0.7 per cent of GNI in overseas development assistance.

Do our fair share to meet the 17 goals and 169 targets identified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([Transforming Our World](#), Aug. 1, 2015). The issues central to the new agenda are peace, security, justice and freedom from war.

Revise Canadian immigration and refugee policy to help the most vulnerable, wherever possible. Canada has the space and resources to provide sanctuary and citizenship to five-fold the number of families currently being accepted. Fast-tracking this process is critical.

Restore the long-standing Canadian emphasis on prevention of war and armed conflict (a 50-year priority of successive Canadian governments until Harper).

Revitalize a commitment to arms control and disarmament. In 2010, our Parliament urged the Canadian government to commit to a leadership role in nuclear disarmament. The elimination of nuclear weapons is overdue. This should be accompanied by unequivocal support for the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the UN Arms Trade Treaty (rejected by the Harper government).

Promote peace education and conflict resolution, here and abroad. This would include pushing for another UN decade (from 2016-2026) devoted to advancing a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world (ignored by the Conservative government).

Develop a new federal department or institute for Peace and Sustainable Common Security (expanding on the former CIIPS, cancelled by Mulroney).

To counter violent extremism, Canada could actively support peacemaking (dialogue), peacekeeping (restoring stability and stopping violence), peacebuilding (addressing human needs) and sustained development assistance. There is an urgent need for a more comprehensive approach that reflects the 'strategic re-think' recently called for by senior American officials.

In response to IS and Syria, there is an urgent need for a UN General Assembly-authorized no-fly zone, with peacekeepers from non-Western states (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, India, Nigeria, Nepal and South Africa) to protect civilian safe havens, as well as UN-directed close air support and humanitarian air drops of supplies and basic needs. An arms embargo on the region should be accompanied by a UN blockade of oil sales to deny funds required by the IS and the Syrian army. Despite the difficulties, the objective must shift to stem war-fighting, protect civilians and restore both security and a functional society.

Encourage international dialogue on a UN Parliamentary assembly (a world Parliament) to democratize efforts at better global governance.

Shift the priorities and approach of Canadian security institutions such as DND, the Canadian Forces, CSIS, CIDA, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Treasury Board to support sustainable common security.

Renew Canada's commitment to a non-offensive defence posture advanced by previous governments to calm tensions and restore confidence, facilitate wider arms control and disarmament, and work in concert with other UN member states to promote a global peace system at the lowest level of threat. Canada's capacity for force projection should be limited to legitimate defence of territory and citizens, as well as UN-authorized peace operations.

Contribute Canadian personnel in response to the recent call from the High-level Commission on Security, Justice & Governance for additional standing police capacity and a new standing civilian capacity for UN peace operation.

Support the UN High-level Independent Panel on peace operations call for a more 'rapid and reliable first responder' by taking a lead-role in developing a permanent United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS). This option of a standing 'UN 911' was specifically designed to prevent armed conflict and mass atrocity crimes, to protect civilians at extreme risk, to ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations and to address human needs in areas where others either cannot or will not. This is a Canadian idea that Jack Layton supported in his initial leadership campaign. It has also been endorsed by senior UN officials, prominent international leaders, academics and organizations.

Re-purpose Canada's defence effort to specialize in demanding UN peace operations.

H. Peter Langille specializes in conflict resolution, independent defence analysis, peace initiatives and UN operations. He is on the advisory board of the World Federalist Movement-Canada and wrote the initial plans for a Canadian multinational peacekeeping training centre at CFB Cornwallis, served on the 1995 Government study on improving UN rapid deployment and developed the proposal for a United Nations Emergency Peace Service. He can be reached at hpl@globalcommonsecurity.org.

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