

# **Sustainable Common Security and a United Nations Emergency Peace Service Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons**

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Abstract:

At the forefront, this paper makes a case for the umbrella concept of sustainable common security. It may help to build a much-needed bridge within civil society and between progressive social movements and governments. It's timely, relevant here and elsewhere. A tentative conceptual definition is offered along with nine core principles. Second, the paper briefly elaborates on the proposed United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS); an option to improve rapid deployment to peace operations and to operationalize prevention of armed conflict and protection of civilians. While seldom viewed as a disarmament initiative, a UNEPS is a step toward a global peace system; a step that may also be a pre-requisite to wider disarmament.

Recent events and trends suggest the need for a new security concept and agenda, at least one more aligned to pressing global challenges. Sustainable common security is an umbrella concept that may help.

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, but not to the wider world. As a result, the key systems and institutions did not shift as hoped and within a few years they were back to security, business and war as usual. This raises a fundamental question: How do we break from this pattern to do better?

These concepts usually have a fifteen- to twenty-year shelf-life. They linger until new challenges arise exposing their limits. In this respect, conceptual changes are vaguely similar to paradigm shifts, but to date, 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.

People world-wide also recognize the need for a strategic re-think and a new approach to security, particularly one that is attuned to costs and consequences over the long-term. With the [Global Peace Index](#) reporting the cost of war and armed conflict has reached \$14.3 trillion over the past year alone, even children know that's unsustainable.

In “[A world in need: the case for sustainable security](#)”, Paul Rogers writes that,

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.

[The Oxford Research Group](#) identifies four interconnected trends that are most likely to lead to substantial global and regional instability, and large-scale loss of life of a magnitude unmatched by other potential threats:

- Climate change
- Competition over resources
- Marginalization of the majority world
- Global militarization

[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. 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.

[Common security](#) provided a blueprint for survival that helped to stem the last Cold War, stopped provocative deployments, calmed tensions and cut both conventional and nuclear weapons, largely by stressing our interdependence and mutual vulnerability. In this ongoing nuclear era, our security dilemma is similar to that of two people in a canoe; one can’t be destabilized without jeopardizing the other. That’s an understanding governments and citizens cannot afford to forget. A common security approach relies on deeper cooperation; there is less reliance on the competitive pursuit of national security at the expense of others.

A synthesis of sustainable security and common security may be timely and widely useful. Sustainable common security is considered synonymous with positive peace. Both 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 are increasingly interdependent across systems, beliefs and borders. Both make the connection between direct violence, structural violence (exploitation and exclusion) and cultural violence, and they help in efforts to curtail each.

A conceptual definition is attempted below, but it is recognized to be both preliminary and open to revision:

*Sustainable common security is an organizing principle that provides for the deeper understanding and cooperative action required to address both our longstanding and future human and planetary challenges and needs.*

Clearly, both a revitalized United Nations and a more preventative approach to security are needed, to ensure that whenever possible challenges are addressed before they manifest as threats. Sustainable common security is an umbrella concept and a progressive ideal.

Hopefully, sustainable common security will help to build a wider bridge that facilitates cooperation within civil society and government, expands our base and potential to help with what's ahead. It may also help to identify corresponding steps in [Canadian foreign security and defence policy](#) .

**Core Principles of Sustainable Common Security:**  
(a tentative short-list)

1. To be just and enduring, security has to be a common endeavor. Security only lasts if widely shared;
2. Security must address the legitimate needs of individuals, communities, nations, the world and our environment;
3. Protecting the most vulnerable, particularly succeeding generations, is a shared security priority; preventing armed conflict must also be elevated to the highest common priority. To date, both have attracted lofty rhetoric and studies, but too few tangible changes;
4. Fundamental security challenges – whether from climate change, nuclear weapons, violent conflict or democratic global governance – cannot be ignored nor delayed without incurring higher common costs and risks;
5. An enlightened long-term perspective of the causes and consequences in our approach to security is imperative. We need to re-think the implications of how we sustain security;
6. If it doesn't help, don't do it! If it will help, don't delay! An ounce of prevention is often worth a pound of cure. A key determinant of security is that it applies broadly and offers help worldwide. Rather than self-help, a commitment to sharing help is essential.
7. Sustainable common security now requires a more holistic (e.g., comprehensive) understanding, ongoing reflection and commitment;
8. Embracing a 'one world' cosmopolitan perspective is key to encouraging wider solidarity and support; and,
9. Be prepared – ambitious shifts are overdue and ahead. Together, we must aim higher.

Why might civil society, progressive social movements and governments share an interest in sustainable common security?

Twenty years back, it was widely assumed that civil society was an emerging super power that would wield soft power to fast-track an array of pressing issues. Now, understandably, there are doubts and few remain optimistic. The Global War on Terrorism and long war policy combined with political extremes to induce a heavy dose of fatalistic cynicism. When combined with austerity, many within civil society had little choice but to specialize and compartmentalise efforts in a manner that limits outreach and understanding. And, like others, committed NGOs are often inundated, overwhelmed with issues.

But what's actually new? What's new that matters, especially to the abolition of nuclear weapons and effective global governance? Increasingly, people are more connected, networked, linked and often informed of social media and global issues. More people see the links between disarmament, development and conflict prevention. These links, at least, are confirmed in the recent [sustainable development goals](#) if not in the empowerment of related institutions. By now, we should acknowledge that our issues are related to an array of other pressing problems. We could probably use help; others need our help too. Support and solidarity across the major challenges have been elusive, but they don't have to remain that way.

Here it may be useful to think more about cosmopolitan world views: loosely defined as "conditions arising in today's unique historical moment, an emerging phase of civilization, creates a latent potential for the emergence of identity as global citizens and possible formation of a global citizens movement." Is the umbrella concept of sustainable common security sufficient to reflect a shared vision, an ideal and a useful organizing principle? Possibly!

Governments may be inching in this direction, but most of our key institutions and officials continue to impede progress, demanding any change be pragmatic, only incremental reforms to existing systems and arrangements, nothing bold, visionary or even sufficient to adapt and modernize.

Sustainable common security isn't inevitable; it depends on building bridges between diverse sectors and governments to move critical issues. But, ultimately, it can't be avoided either or it entails bigger costs and risks ahead. Of course, it would help to develop research and educational programs within a new Canadian Institute of Peace and Sustainable Common

Security. Here, the precedent provided by the former Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security (CIIPS) merits another attempt.

### **The proposed United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS)**

In response to both the UN Secretary-General's *An Agenda for Peace* and the Rwandan genocide, our Prime Minister, Foreign and Defence Minister announced that Canada would lead on a detailed, in-depth [study](#) to explore the requirements of a standing UN force. This was followed by a [multinational initiative](#) to improve United Nations rapid reaction capacity, which ran from 1996-97. The ensuing consultative process revealed little support for a 'UN force', 'army' or 'legion', but wider receptivity to the notion of an integrated UN emergency service.

The proposal for a permanent [United Nations Emergency Peace Service](#) (UNEPS) stemmed largely from that process and subsequent refinement. At the outset, the twin objectives were to identify both a viable and a widely appealing idea that might attract a broad-based constituency of support.

With this one development—effectively a 'first responder' for complex emergencies—the UN would finally have a rapid, reliable capacity to help fulfill four of its tougher assigned tasks. The UNEPS 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 other actors either cannot or will not.

Ten core principles characterize the UNEPS proposal. It's to be:

- a permanent standing, integrated UN formation;
- highly trained and well-equipped;
- ready for immediate deployment upon authorization of the UN Security Council;
- multidimensional (civilians, police and military);
- multifunctional (capable of diverse assignments with specialized skills for security, humanitarian, health and environmental crises);
- composed of 13,500 dedicated personnel (recruited professionals, selected, trained and employed by the UN);
- developed to ensure regional and gender equitable representation;
- co-located at a designated UN base under an operational headquarters and two mobile mission headquarters;
- at sufficient strength to operate in high-threat environments; and,

- a service to complement existing UN and regional arrangements, with a first responder to cover the initial six months until Member States can deploy.

Aside from providing a military formation to deter aggression and maintain security, there would be sufficient police to restore law and order, as well as an array of civilian teams to provide essential services. A distinctive feature of a UN Emergency Peace Service is that it would be a dedicated standing UN formation, prepared and ready to serve in diverse UN operations. Thus, a UNEPS would clearly be a more reliable and rapid first responder; one that could also serve as a vanguard, strategic reserve and a modest security guarantor, both to deter violent crime and respond, when necessary, to prevent and protect.

Further, as a dedicated UN service in a coherent formation with advanced doctrine, training and equipment, a UNEPS would help to develop higher standards system-wide. National contributors would likely improve in response.

A UNEPS would inevitably entail major start-up and recurring costs. Given a full complement of 13,500 personnel, the start-up costs would be in the range of \$3 billion (U.S.), with annual recurring costs of approximately \$1.5 billion and, incremental costs for field operations of approximately \$1.2 billion. These costs would likely be shared proportionally among 193 Member States as part of each nation's assessed share of the UN regular budget.

For some, that may appear as an unwarranted cost, but a UNEPS merits further consideration as both a life saver and a cost saver. A UNEPS would not only help to prevent the escalation of volatile conflicts and deter groups from armed violence; it could also drastically cut the size, the length and the frequency of UN operations. Even with success in just one of these areas, it should provide a substantive return on the investment.

Clearly, a UNEPS is no panacea or cure all. It's neither intended nor capable of mid-to-high intensity war-fighting or large-scale enforcement operations. It's to provide prompt, legitimate help in complex emergencies, with an array of useful services. Unlike previous proposals, the objective is to complement the existing foundation for UN peace operations. As such, it would remain dependent on existing standby arrangements and partnerships for prompt replacement and rotation, as well as augmentation and extraction if necessary.

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. Few, if any, responded. While any such a transformation will be resisted in the short-term, it's now critical to persist in efforts to shift destructive capacity towards constructive capacity to help.

But there is another aspect of the UNEPS initiative that is frequently overlooked; it has considerable potential to encourage wider disarmament. In this respect, it's not as if governments don't know how or what's needed. As early as 1961, officials in the US State Department [identified](#) a UN Peace Force as a pre-requisite for wider disarmament. In their words,

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.

Strangely, the peace and disarmament community – that formerly stressed the need for conversion and transition options – may sometimes neglect the question of ‘how’ to address perceived security concerns and ‘what’ will fill the gap if governments disarm or eliminate weapons of mass destruction? In turn, a UN peace service is missing from many of the recent blueprints for disarmament, a global peace system and the campaign, [World Beyond War](#). Writing in response, Robin Collins made the case succinctly:

Without UNEPS, in the future peace blueprint, there is no practical, interim, realistic, deterrent measure and capability and no UN linchpin to make the peace project work. The going from where we are now to where we want to get to is not a magical, but a practical, question that needs creative thinking...there is no longer any excuse for leaving out the UNEPS proposal.

A UNEPS might start a promising process with a permanent modest, more legitimate UN deterrent. What's distinct about a UNEPS as a deterrent is that it's not to be destructive or for war-fighting; it's designed to provide prompt help with an array of useful services.

Notably, a UNEPS isn't simply related to disarmament, but also to a global culture of peace. In the words of Douglas Roche,

The barbarism the world has witnessed ... cannot be allowed to define our time. I believe a permanent, highly-trained UN Peacekeeping Force, capable of rapid deployment by the Security Council in emergency situations, has now become essential... A UN emergency peace service – what might be called an international “911” – would, if established, protect civilians and prevent regional conflicts from turning into wars. We must express our global citizenship by protecting the most vulnerable in the global community. This is a path to the culture of peace.

And, if serious about preventing armed conflict and protecting the most vulnerable – both priority’s of [The Responsibility to Protect](#) – we’ll need a shift from our very destructive means of responding, to helpful and more legitimate means, designed for complex emergencies. Arguably, a UNEPS may also be the most effective means to operationalize prevention of armed conflict and protection of civilians. Equally important, leaders of the R2P community recently started to shift in support of a UNEPS. That’s one critical bridge. Perhaps as we get our heads around the challenge of sustainable common security, we’ll expand our horizons to make progress in related areas.

Clearly, civil society, here and elsewhere are justifiably concerned with numerous challenges. Progress in disarmament seems more likely to come from mutually-supportive efforts than from a rigid insistence on a sole focus. To date that approach has alienated more than it has converted to the cause. If anything, we need to build a wider bridge and encourage wider help too.

What may be essential to get beyond the current paralysis of the UN Security Council? Big shifts, and big cooperative projects twinned to global priorities. Both appear overdue.

To conclude, sustainable common security and a UNEPS should help with diverse challenges, reducing risks and costs over the long-term. Hopefully, these and other ideas help to build a much-needed bridge. As the [Ammerdown Invitation](#) noted,

We need to look forward, acknowledging the past but consciously determining a different kind of future...A new strategy could look first for common interests with others. It could seek collective decisions with other governments and international organizations, accountable to citizens and in solidarity with those most in need. It could acknowledge its share in the current failures of our international institutions, and work diligently for their reform and revitalization. We believe that this change in direction is both desirable and feasible.