Making the Shift: Canadian momentum for "Sustainable Common Security"

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The centrality of the United Nations for conflict resolution and sustainable development are obvious touchstones for global governance advocates. The idea of "sustainable common security" is one way we might widen the tent, to bring more governments and other stakeholders into the fold.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (adopted in 2015) embraced a kind of synchronicity when it focused on how to create "peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development," it declared, "without peace and no peace without sustainable development." The same year, the Security Council and General Assembly adopted "sustaining peace" as a new framework guiding peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts.

Not everyone, and certainly not every powerful state, sees the UN the same way, but the organization remains our preeminent source of international law, through its Charter and resolutions, for peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

As far back as the 1970s, when alternatives to threatening Cold War security postures and nuclear deterrence were pursued, the ***common security*** rubric — ideas of mutual vulnerability, centrality of the peace process, de-escalation, disarmament, arms control, the minimum use of force — appeared from the margins and gained prominence in peace research circles and some governments.

In Canada, there's been an update making the rounds over the last few years, with growing recognition of Sustainable Common Security (SCS). It is a hybrid of several complementary ideas, offering a durable, shared-security alternative to mainstream national and competitive security that is based on threats, overwhelming power and eternal arms races.

Peter Langille, who has fleshed out an outline of the SCS framework, sees it as an umbrella concept synonymous with positive peace, "more holistic than the narrower notions of national and international security or the conception of negative peace (the absence of direct, overt violence)." It is considerate of interdependence across

systems, beliefs and borders, and "makes the connection between direct violence, structural violence (exploitation and exclusion) and cultural violence…"

Some core elements include: (1) elevating protection of the most vulnerable, particularly succeeding generations, as a shared security imperative; and (2) prioritizing prevention of armed conflict. But just as importantly, addressing fundamental root causes of security challenges – whether from climate change, nuclear weapons, systemic violent conflict or weak and undemocratic global governance – cannot be ignored nor delayed without incurring higher common costs and risks.

In Canada several civil society networks have adopted these ideas.

For example, the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons considered "sustainable common security" as an umbrella concept at its annual deliberations in November 2015.

In 2016 a 13-page statement, "A Shift to Sustainable Peace and Common Security," was produced as a contribution to the Canadian Defence Policy review process and was supported by a number of mainstream and influential peace organizations. It stated:

> Canada can be a beacon of hope in an unsettled world by pursuing and promoting, wherever possible, conflict prevention, the peaceful resolution of disputes and sustainable peace-building. We can press for multilateral over unilateral responses. We can be a constructive, innovative problem solver, striving to bring conflicting parties closer together to resolve their differences. We can thereby stave off or hasten the repair of breaches of the peace, limit human suffering and environment degradation and minimize costly military interventions.

The NGO statement was supported in a 2017 resolution by the prestigious Canadian Pugwash Group. And subsequently the Group of 78 forum in 2017, "Getting to Nuclear Zero", looked at options to replace nuclear deterrence and concluded: "Nuclear disarmament ultimately requires a shift from the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD) to a commitment – in mind, policy and practice – to mutual security, through a sustainable common security regime rooted in global interdependence, the rule of law and a recognition of the limited utility of military force in responding to political conflict."

In June of 2018, a forum held in Toronto, "How to Save the World in a Hurry", organized by veteran Peace Magazine editor Metta Spencer, framed 25 proposals that were agreed by consensus, including that "Social movements and states shall prioritize Sustainable Common Security to address shared global challenges."

There is also evidence of a fresh perspective surfacing at the UN, particularly in the new "sustaining peace" framework that is the conceptual basis for a comprehensive

cross-departmental set of "peace and security architecture" reforms that Secretary-General Guterres is implementing at the UN Secretariat.

In a time when nationalism and exceptionalism are all too often at odds with the international legal order, governments like Canada should embrace the shift to a Sustainable Common Security policy framework.