

The Case for Concept Change in Response to Environmental Insecurity
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Paper Prepared for Canadian Pugwash Conference 2017:
“Canada’s Contribution to Global Security”

Draft
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“What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.” – Hannah Arendt¹

Introduction: Sovereign Rights and Natural Realities

The debate around the extent to which environmental problems constitute security threats is a long-standing one. Thirty years ago, the World Commission on Environment and Development – more commonly known as the Brundtland Commission – argued the “whole notion of security as traditionally understood in terms of political and military threats to national sovereignty – must be expanded to include the growing impacts of environmental stress – locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.” Not surprisingly, they concluded: “there are no military solutions to ‘environmental insecurity’”.² Thus began three decades of dispute amongst scholars and policy-makers about where the appropriate focus lay: on ways to deal with environmental problems in order to *prevent* conflict, and/or ways to prepare militarily *for* conflict inevitably arising from a deteriorating global environment – resource scarcity, reduction of arable land, mass migration of so-called environmental refugees, and so on.³ For some, such crises can be contemplated and contained within the familiar conceptual terrain of state-centric language; they seek to ‘securitize’ environmental issues and shore up traditional notions of sovereignty and the centrality of the state in the global order. Others fear the limiting effects of viewing such qualitatively unprecedented, transnational challenges through the lens of state security; in order to place the security of the planet and interests of humanity above that of states, they seek a radical reconceptualization of sovereignty. Though the academic debate has been intense, in most corridors of power there has been little movement away from the traditional, state-centric framing of global environmental deterioration in terms of *state security*. It is my contention, however, that a re-conceptualisation of the security/environment nexus has never been more crucial.

Following a brief discussion about the substance and shaping of the climate change crisis, I will argue that an effective *practical* response implies and requires a change in the *conceptual climate* of the debate sufficient to break the vicious cycle dragging the planet, at accelerating rates, to disaster. The circular argument that environmental problems, caused in part by the multiple impacts of industrial militarism and conflict, can be addressed by new military strategies, spending and responses will not succeed and will instead serve to exacerbate political tensions and inflict further ecological harm. Following this general critique, I will then concentrate on a

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 5.

²World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

³ For an early discussion of the discourse, see Simon Dalby, “Ecopolitical discourse: ‘environmental security’ and political geography.” *Progress in Human Geography*, 16(4, 1992): 503-22. See also Dalby, *Environmental Security* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. For a consideration of the potential for the discourse around environmental problems as security issues to transform security practices see, Maria Julia Trombetta, “Environmental security and climate change: analysing the discourse,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21(4, December 2008): 585-602.

region already brutally harmed (with grave global implications) by this vicious cycle: the Arctic, already reeling from the ecological and cultural ravages of colonialism and now experiencing a degree of climate change which is, alas, seen as creating openings for oil and gas ‘development’ and an increasingly militarized, exercise of sovereignty. In the course of the analysis, I will contrast the state-centric status quo with the human-centric agenda of *sustainable peace*, a concept with the potential – *if* defined with sufficiently radical, transnational rigour – to disrupt and transform the sovereignty paradigm, and thus tackle the root causes and worst effects of both the general and specific, global and Arctic, crises. I close by drawing on both Western and Indigenous political theory to ask what we think we mean by – or have come to accept as – ‘peace’ and ‘power’.

Climate Change and State Sovereignty

Remarkably, after almost three decades of convincing research undertaken by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)⁴ the contention that climate change poses a real, growing, ‘manmade,’ existential threat to the planet remains, in some all-too-powerful quarters, controversial. Following its recent withdrawal from the non-binding greenhouse gas emissions reduction framework agreed at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, the current U.S. Administration is the most famous, and powerful, of these ‘quarters,’ a far broader and deeper failure to *rethink* the nature and criteria of economic growth and international security is involved. Joseph Stiglitz recently argued that the withdrawal from the Paris accords should lead the world to view the U.S. as a “rogue state”.⁵ The truth, alas, is that the U.S. (the world’s premier polluter) has never played a leading (or even strong) role in global efforts to articulate systemic adjustments – economic, political, conceptual and cultural – required to alter the damaging course the world is on. From the lead-up to the Kyoto Protocol negotiations – when they were backed by their ‘enablers’ in the so-called JUSCANZ group of Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – through the two decades since, U.S. negotiators– have sought to reduce targets and argued for countless “flexible” ways to reach them without, magically, making deep cuts in domestic emissions.⁶

The U.S. Congress, of course, steeped in the creed of nationalist ‘exceptionalism’, refused to ratify even the half-measures and ungrasped nettles of Kyoto, setting the stage for President George W. Bush’s rejection of its allegedly ‘job-killing’ commitments. And while President Barack Obama played an important role at the Paris Conference, his Administration was the prime mover, particularly at the unimpressive Copenhagen Conference in 2009, behind the abandonment of binding reduction targets, long understood as a precondition of serious progress. Indeed, WikiLeaks cables confirm what many had previously suspected: at Copenhagen, the U.S. resorted to financial bribes and political threats to gain support for its non-binding approach. As Bolivia’s U.N. Ambassador, Pablo Solon, remarked: “WikiLeaks confirms the pressures and blackmail exerted by the US administration in the talks. They accuse us [in the cables] of being

⁴ The IPCC was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to assess scientific and technical information related to human-induced climate change. See Bert Bolin, *A history of the science and politics of climate change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁵ Joseph Stiglitz, “Trump’s renegeing on Paris Climate deal turns the US into a rogue state” *The Guardian*, 2 June 2017. Available at: www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jun/02/paris-climate-deal-to-trumps-rogue-america

⁶ For a consideration of this action as being akin to “rogue” statehood, see my, “Canada as a Rogue State: It’s Shameful Performance on Climate Change.” *International Journal*. 56 (3, Summer, 2001): 261-80.

‘political and ideological’. But all we want to do is to hold temperature rise to 1.5C. Is that political or ideological?’⁷

While the Paris Conference briefly restored the sense of common purpose and determination lost at Copenhagen, in its non-binding nature and resounding vagueness – aiming to keep the rise in global temperatures to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius, with an “endeavour to limit” the rise even more – it was very far from the breakthrough required. Amid the fanfare, reports noted, “scientists point out that the Paris accord must be stepped up if it is to have any chance of curbing dangerous climate change,” with the “pledges” made “thus far,” even if fully implemented, likely to “see global temperatures rise by as much as 2.7C”.⁸ In despair, former NASA scientist James Hansen, sometimes referred to as the ‘father of climate change awareness,’ called the agreement “a fraud really, a fake”: “It’s just bullshit for them to say ‘we’ll have a 2C warming target and then try to do a little better every five years.’ It’s just worthless words. There is no action, just promises. As long as fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest fuels out there, they will continue to be burned.”⁹ Hansen, in effect, is calling for a reconceptualization of economic growth in an age of global warming; such a reconceptualization, I believe, must necessarily entail a broader re-visioning of the central concepts of sovereignty and security.

Earlier this year Rachel Bronson, Executive Director and Publisher of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* introduced the 2017 Doomsday Clock Statement, published annually by the Bulletin’s Science and Security Board – the 70th anniversary of a powerful symbol of our collective fate – with eloquent reference to the “existential threats” posed by nuclear weapons and climate change:

In 1947 there was one technology with the potential to destroy the planet, and that was nuclear power. Today, rising temperatures, resulting from the industrial-scale burning of fossil fuels, will change life on Earth as we know it, potentially destroying or displacing it from significant portions of the world, unless action is taken today, and in the immediate future.¹⁰

The Statement warns that “inaction and brinkmanship” on climate change and nuclear sabre rattling are “endangering every person, everywhere on Earth.” And it offered no comfort about who might “lead humanity away from global disaster,” noting the recent election of Donald Trump had already “made a bad international security situation worse.” But, despite his absurd demonization of climate change science as a “hoax,” Trump can hardly be blamed for the profound, decades-long failure of the most powerful members of the international community to,

⁷ Pablo Solon quoted in Damian Carrington, “WikiLeaks Climate Change Cables: What do you think?” *Guardian* 7 December 2010. Available at: www.guardian.co.uk/environment/damian-carrington-blog/2010/dec/07/wikileaks-climate-change-reaction. See also: Damian Carrington, “WikiLeaks cables reveal how US manipulated climate accord,” *Guardian* 3 December 2010. Available at: www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/dec/03/wikileaks-us-manipulated-climate-accord;

⁸ ‘What is in the Paris climate agreement?’ BBC News Online, May 31, 2017: www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-35073297

⁹ ‘James Hansen, father of climate change awareness, calls Paris talks “a fraud”’, *The Guardian*, December 12, 2015: www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/12/james-hansen-climate-change-paris-talks-fraud

¹⁰ Rachel Bronson, “Statement from the Executive Director,” in: Science and Security Board, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* “It is two and a half minutes to midnight” 2017.

as the Statement urges, “take the steps needed to begin the path toward a net zero-carbon-emissions world.”¹¹

It is this political climate, an ecologically toxic atmosphere of state-centric self-congratulation, that fuels and locks in place the vicious cycle sketched above. The ecologically devastating impacts of militarised sovereignty have long been identified, charted and analysed. Likewise, my call for ‘concept change’ – demilitarising and de-nationalizing security – in response to climate change is nothing new. The question, though, is why nothing remotely serious enough has been done? The answer can be found by examining the cycle – downward spiral – more closely.

Militarism and the Environment: the Vicious Cycle and the War on Nature

For the world’s major powers and most of their allies, obsessive fidelity to state-centric security is inseparable from devotion to militarism as a ‘legitimate’ and ‘normal’ instrument of policy and aspect of power projection. Even in the absence of armed conflict, the human, socio-economic and environmental consequences of maintaining a large-scale military-industrial capability are frequently severe. The cycle is vicious indeed. Militarism exacerbates environment crises caused primarily by the narrow pursuit of national security and competitive advantage. And when the scale of the ecological crisis is presented, militarism is invoked and deployed to help ‘solve’ the problems it will then again make worse. Despite decades of scholarship, science and activism exposing the follies of militarized security, and despite the end of the Cold War and the broken promise of a ‘peace dividend’ capable of making real differences in people’s lives, we continue to witness obscene expenditure on militarism – \$1,676 billion dollars in 2015¹² – with totally predictable results: environmental deterioration and human insecurity.

At each stage of the military-industrial process – from the mining of resources for use in the making of weapons of war, through the development, testing, production, storage, disposal and, of course the lethal use of those weapons – ecological damage is inflicted. Even disarmament and decommissioning of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, presents formidable challenges, while the question of what to do with stockpiles of banned chemical and biological weapons continues to haunt the global community.¹³

Of course, war itself does the greatest harm. The contamination of land, water and air is an inevitable consequence of modern military conflict, and the associated effects on food sources, livestock, wildlife, and of course human health are often horrific. Two examples serve to make the point clear. First, US use of Depleted Uranium (DU): an estimated 1,200 tonnes of DU, a by-product of uranium enrichment with both chemical and radiological toxicity, was used by

¹¹ Science & Security Board, “It is two and a half minutes to midnight”, *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.

¹² Sam Perlo-Freeman, “The opportunity cost of world military spending” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 5 April 2016. www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2016/opportunity-cost-world-military-spending

¹³ For an excellent overview, see Michael J. Lawrence, Holly L.J. Stemmerger, Aaron J. Zolderdo, Daniel P. Struthers, and Steven J. Cooke, ‘The Effects of modern war and military activities on biodiversity and the environment,’ *Environmental Reviews* 23(2015):443-460 . For a summary of the environmental impact of weapons of mass destruction, see Frank G. Rando, ‘A Tainted Legacy: The Environmental Impacts of CBRN Agents,’ *CBRNePortal*, December 16, 2014, www.cbrneportal.com/a-tainted-legacy-the-environmental-impacts-of-cbrn-agents/; See also: H. Patricia Hynes, “The Military Assault on Global Climate” *Climate and Capitalism*, 2015, <http://climateandcapitalism.com/2015/02/08/pentagon-pollution-7-military-assault-global-climate/> (originally published on *Truthout* in 2011).

American forces in the Gulf War, spreading contamination “widely in the air, soil and water, particularly as dust in windstorms.”¹⁴ While debates swirl around the verifiable harm caused – there are ‘deniers’ here as in the climate change case – hard evidence abounds to justify and motivate international efforts to ban all military use of DU.¹⁵ And in that same brutal conflict, Saddam Hussein twice used environmental destruction as a weapon of war: setting fire to over 500 oil wells, causing massive air pollution and possible climate change effects; and releasing large volumes of oil into the Persian Gulf, destroying fragile marshlands and devastating animal, bird, marine life and more.¹⁶ Second, it is estimated that between 2003 and 2007 the war in Iraq generated at least 141 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, a figure that Oil Change International placed in stark context: “If the war was ranked as a country in terms of emissions, it would emit more CO₂ each year than 139 of the world’s nations do annually. Falling between New Zealand and Cuba, the war each year emits more than 60% of all countries”¹⁷

Perhaps the most infamous environmental war crime remains the American weaponization of 72 million liters of herbicides and defoliants in Vietnam, ravaging forests, food supplies, water, soil, even the offshore fishery.¹⁸ The effects, of course, did not stop with the War. A national health survey conducted in 1999, long after the initial waves of infant mortality, miscarriages and malformations, found one million people, and 50,000 children, suffering from Agent-Orange associated diseases.¹⁹

Militarism also consumes vast amounts of natural, as well as financial, resources. A 2007 report from the Brookings Institute found that the Department of Defense (DoD) accounted for 93% of the U.S. government’s oil consumption,²⁰ a percentage dropping to a still stratospheric 78% by 2015.²¹ Indeed, if we take 2015 figures, the DoD oil consumption is roughly equivalent to that of Sweden.²² Fossil-fuel dependency is, not surprisingly, at the root of decisions designed to protect supplies, compounding environmental problems that militarism is then expected to solve. The abusive cycle continues.

¹⁴ Riyadh Abdullah Fathi, Lilyan Yaqub Matti, Hana Said Al-Saligh & Douglas Godbold, “Environmental Pollution by depleted uranium in Iraq with special reference to Mosul and possible effects on cancer and birth defect rates.” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 29(1, 2013): 23. See also: Al-Azzawi, Souad N. "Depleted uranium radioactive contamination In Iraq: An overview." *Global research* 1 (2006): 4-8.

¹⁵ Rob White, “Depleted uranium, state crime and the politics of knowing,” *Theoretical Criminology* 12(1, 2008): 31-53.

¹⁶ Marc A. Ross, “Environmental Warfare and the Persian Gulf War: Possible Remedies to Combat Intentional Destruction of the Environment” *Penn State International Law Review* 10(3, 1992): Article 7.

¹⁷ Oil Change International, “A Climate of War: The War in Iraq and global warming,” March 2008, p. 4. [http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2008/03/A%20Climate%20of%20War%20FINAL%20\(March%2017%202008\).pdf](http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2008/03/A%20Climate%20of%20War%20FINAL%20(March%2017%202008).pdf)

¹⁸ Abeer Majeed, *The Impact of Militarism on the Environment: An Overview of Direct and Indirect Effects* Physicians for Global Survival, 2004, p.4-5.

¹⁹ Michael G. Palmer. “The Case of Agent Orange,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29(1, 2007): 172-195.

²⁰ Gregory J. Lengyel, “Department of Defence Energy Strategy: Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks,” The Brookings Institute, August 2007. www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/lengyel20070815.pdf

²¹ U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Defense Department energy use falls to lowest level since at least 1975” 5 February 2015. www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=19871

²² I calculated this by using the BP Statistical Review of World Energy and calculating the DOD use of 78% of the US government’s roughly 1.9% of total country consumption. www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review-2016/bp-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2016-full-report.pdf

Despite many valiant attempts, academic and political, to recast the notion of security in terms commensurate to the human and natural crises generated by state-centrism and exploitative and extractive economics, security studies and mainstream discourse remains rooted in precisely that – problem *causing* – sovereignty-fixated paradigm. Thus, when security “experts” and pundits (often retired military officials) expound on the security ramifications of climate change, the search is for ways in which the militarization of security can be maintained. That is to say, discussions about potential conflicts have climate change considerations added to them; and at a time, for example, when the potential for ‘water wars’ (and mass-migration) triggered by climate change is growing, the ‘need’ for a military response or solution can seem obvious and logical. Such orthodox analysis, however, is blind to the needs and vulnerabilities of the global ecosystem and fails entirely to address the causes (including militarism) of accelerating human and natural insecurity.

To examine this orthodoxy more closely, we can consider a June 2017 report identifying “12 major epicenters of climate risks to international security,” based on research conducted by the non-partisan Center for Climate and Security, a think-tank whose Advisory Board includes sixteen retired senior military officials and eight security and foreign policy experts. Unsurprisingly, the focus of the Center’s attention is on the threat *to* states *from* climate change – an “accelerant of instability” – rather than the impact of state-centrism on the planet. The report, and its associated video animation:

includes analyses of 12 significant climate and security epicenters....These epicenters were chosen due to their nature as risks to critical parts of the international nation-state system (food, water, trade, health, cities, sovereignty) that ripple out into serious global security cases, especially if happening in tandem. The epicenters span the globe, and many are fundamentally interconnected.”²³

Such language and focus typifies status quo thinking on potential climate change impacts on ‘us’.²⁴ NATO, for example, certainly takes the threat seriously, and is doubtless sincere in its concern. That concern, though, is directed solely at the “risk factors” complicating the traditional exercise of state and military power – its own legitimacy and utility, in other words – rather than risk to the environment and humanity of that ‘threatened’ status quo. In a 2015 ‘Strategic Foresight Analysis,’ for example, NATO notes –

Global environmental change and its impacts are becoming readily apparent and are projected to increase in the future.... All indicators suggest that the trend is still valid and increasing in regard to severity of extreme weather events and other impacts such as melting polar and glacial ice. However, it is

²³ Center for Climate & Security, “Experts Identify 12 Major Epicenters of Climate Risks to International Security,” 9 June 2017. <https://climateandsecurity.org/2017/06/09/release-experts-identify-12-major-epicenters-of-climate-risks-to-international-security/>

²⁴ See also: Center for Climate & Security, *Climate Security 101*. [nd] www.climatesecurity101.org and Caitlin E. Werrell and Francesco Femia “Epicenters of Climate and Security: The New Geostrategic Landscape of the Anthropocene” Center for Climate & Security, June 2017. https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/epicenters-of-climate-and-security_the-new-geostrategic-landscape-of-the-anthropocene_2017_06_091.pdf

still uncertain what the environmental effects will be by the end of the 21st century. This uncertainty is complicated further by the fact that climate change-related environmental effects may have second or third order effects on other domains (e.g. economic, resources, urbanization, and demographics) and may also be affected by future trends in these domains. The severity of this development will potentially increase the number of conflicts based on a mix of different trends and drivers in combination with environmental and climate change. These conflicts may threaten global stability and security and may therefore impact directly or indirectly on the members of the Alliance.²⁵

Such seemingly unobjectionable assertions can obscure their own, underlying assumption: the existence of a basically sound, stable and secure world order – in which NATO, a nuclear-armed, expanding military alliance is seen and appreciated as normal and natural – which may soon come under an unprecedented degree and kind of stress. In sum, powerful states and the organizations they have created to maintain their dominance refuse to relinquish their long-held view that the way to deal with threats – regardless of the cause – is through the state-centric exercise of military power. In such a worldview, a view of *the world* as central is the most threatening thing of all: an alien concept.

Sustainable Peace: The Beginning of Concept Change?

In 2003, with the environmental impact of the wars in the Balkans under review and fresh devastation evident in Afghanistan, Klaus Toepfer, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) proposed legal protections for the environment. “We have the Geneva Conventions,” Toepfer argued, “aimed at safeguarding the rights of prisoners and civilians. We need similar safeguards for the environment.”²⁶ Referring to both the environmental causes and consequences of war, Toepfer wrote: “Using the environment as a weapon must be universally condemned, and denounced as an international crime against humankind, against Nature.”²⁷ The acknowledgement that struggles over natural resources frequently result in conflict leads logically to the suggestion that protecting the natural world is an important method for ensuring peace.

Toepfer’s 2003 statement foreshadowed the recent – and better known – UN effort to articulate the concept of *sustainable peace*, an integrated organizational approach to the maintenance of global security. By focusing on the root causes of conflict, the sustainable peace approach holds

²⁵ Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, “Strategic Foresight Analysis 2015 Interim Update to the SFA 2013 Report” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2015.

²⁶ Alex Kirby, “World ‘Needs a Green Geneva Convention’” BBC News 10 February 2003
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/2744359.stm>

Although the Geneva Conventions prohibit “widespread, long-term and severe” damage to the environment, UNEP argues that this “triple cumulative standard is nearly impossible to achieve, particularly given the imprecise definitions for the terms “widespread,” “long-term” and “severe”. See: UNEP, *Protecting The Environment During Armed Conflict: An Inventory and Analysis of International Law*. UNEP, 2009.

www.un.org/zh/events/environmentconflictday/pdfs/int_law.pdf

²⁷ Kirby, Ibid.

that “it will not be possible to achieve lasting peace in the long term without sustainable development, equitable economic opportunity, and human rights protection for all.”²⁸

In January of this year, in his first address to the Security Council, Secretary General António Guterres enthusiastically endorsed this “new approach,” arguing that the “interconnected nature of today’s crises require the international community to connect global efforts for peace and security, sustainable development and human rights, not just in words, but in practice”: with so many of today’s conflicts, he argued, “fuelled by competition for power and resources,” and grievously “exacerbated by climate change, population growth and the globalization of crime and terror,” it is time to end the “boundless human suffering and the wanton waste of resources generated by conflict.”²⁹

This sweeping objective can be seen as both revolutionary and restorative of the fundamental intent of the UN Charter to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” through an agenda of ‘positive peace’. What *is* new, compared to 1945, is the scale of risk to the planet from climate change triggered by industrialism and militarism. Thus, for peace to be sustainable – for positive peace to emerge as the new “common sense” – the *ecological* indefensibility of war as an instrument of foreign policy must be acknowledged, most importantly in the most heavily-armed states and alliances. Instead of increasing defence budgets in an attempt to win wars stemming from resource shortages or the effects of climate change, the practitioners and proponents of militarized security need to confront, for them, the most inconvenient truth of all: that “putting poverty to the sword is,” as Toepfer argued, “the peace policy of the 21st Century.”³⁰

²⁸ H.E. Peter Thomson. “Building Sustainable Peace for All” General Assembly of the United Nations [President of the 71st Session], 20 January 2017. www.un.org/pga/71/2017/01/20/building-sustainable-peace-for-all/

I would like to add an important caveat to my enthusiastic support for the increased acceptance of environmental protection as a key component of the sustainable/sustaining peace concept: this concerns the concept of *sustainable development* – a framing device that has been with us since the Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future* released in 1987. We need to be mindful of the contradictions inherent in the concept and in the arguments put forward by the World Commission on Environment and Development (aka the Brundtland Commission) from whence it is derived. With its commitment to economic growth, foreign investment and an expanded role for international financial institutions it is a concept to be, at least, wary of. It is true, however, that in many ways this concept has become a kind of “common sense” notion. When most people use it, they believe they are referring to an environmentally conscious worldview that would be an essential foundational belief to the broader conceptualization of *sustainable peace*. They are not speaking about foreign investment but, in most cases, an environmentally focused economic model that would call into question the kind of celebration of resource exploitation that remained a central focus of the Brundtland Commission’s recommendations. For the best critique of the concept as originally defined, see: Shiv Visvanathan, “Mrs. Brundtland’s Disenchanted Cosmos.” *Alternatives* (16, 1991), 377-84. See also: Michael Clow, “Our Next Path of Development, or Wishful Thinking?” *British Journal of Canadian Studies*. 11 (1, 1996): 1-10; and Timothy Luke, “Sustainable Development as a Power/Knowledge System: The Problem of ‘Governmentality’.” In: *Greening Environmental Policy: The Politics of a Sustainable Future*, ed. by Frank Fischer and Michael Black. London: Paul Chapman, 1995.

²⁹ Security Council, Meetings Coverage: “Secretary-General, in First Address to the Security Council Since Taking Office, Sets Restoring Trust, Preventing Crises as United Nations Priorities” SC/12673, 10 January 2017. www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12673.doc.htm.

³⁰ Toepfer, in Kirby, op cit.

Despite the joint UN General Assembly and Security Council adoption of the concept of sustainable peace as a guiding principle in April 2016³¹, there is little evidence that the necessary shift in ‘great power’ thinking is taking place. President Trump’s decision to massively increase defence spending while abandoning even the patchwork and non-binding Paris accord exemplifies the failure; though there is little reason to suggest that on a range of foreign policy issues a Hillary Clinton presidency would have been anything but hawkish and wholeheartedly committed to shoring up the American-led status quo. And here in Canada, the Trudeau government has recently pledged a \$62 billion, a 70% increase in military spending, much of it on major offensive weapon systems (warships, fighter planes, armed drones) over the next twenty years and contradicted its own sterling rhetoric on climate change by maintaining the woefully inadequate emissions reduction targets of the previous, Kyoto hating Harper government.

Sustainable peace, if pursued with serious conceptual rigour, can only be understood as fundamentally disruptive of the state-centric status quo. If ‘concept change’ is not part of its agenda, its agenda will be co-opted and compromised, in the worst case serving as rhetorical cover for the unsustainable militarization of international relations, including militarized responses to climate change-related turmoil. The critical test of sustainable peace, then, alongside a set of ‘deliverable’ policies, will be its success or failure in breaking the vicious cycle – the conceptual pervasiveness of state-centrism – critiqued in this paper.

Conceptual Deep Freeze: the Assault on the Arctic

Nowhere can the circular thinking of national security responses to climate change be demonstrated more graphically than the Arctic, a region on the front lines of the currently losing battle for a sustainable future.³² In 2004, then-chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) Sheila Watt Cloutier stated in testimony before the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation:

If we can reverse the emission of climate change inducing greenhouse gases in time to save the Arctic from the most devastating impact of global warming, then we can spare untold suffering for hundreds of millions of people around the globe. Protect the Arctic and we Save the Planet.³³

As Watt Cloutier would surely agree, in the ‘Canadian’ Arctic – itself a profoundly misleading imperial construct – the response to this call, under both Liberal and Conservative leadership, has been woeful: nationalistic, militaristic, and opportunistic. Mounting evidence of unmanageable warming has been met not with a plausible action plan for radical emission reductions but rather

³¹ On April 27, 2016, the General Assembly and the Security Council both adopted the ‘Report on the Peacebuilding Commission on its ninth session’ (A/70/714-S/2016/115, February 4 2016) enshrining sustainable peace as integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Peace. Security Council Resolution 2282, adopted unanimously, notes that the concept “should be broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society” encompassing myriad “activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict.”

³² For a consideration on the toxic legacy of arctic militarism see my “Canadian Sovereignty versus Northern Security: The Case for Updating Our Mental Map of the Arctic,” in Leif Christian Jensen and Geir Homneland, *Handbook of Politics of the Arctic* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2015).

³³ Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Testimony before the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, Washington DC, 15 September 2004, available at: <http://commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=Hearings>.

plans to exploit and extract the natural resources of the region – in a manner, of course, compounding the problem (or ‘increasing the opportunity’) yet further.

In the context of our focus on concept change, it is important to stress that this approach did not begin, let alone end, with the internationally maligned government of Stephen Harper. Indeed, it was the Liberal Chretien government that first framed the Arctic crisis as a potential economic boon: an opening for Canadian business, rather than a calamity for indigenous inhabitants and all the life of the region (and beyond). While acknowledging the negative impacts of climate change (extreme weather, coastal erosion, flooding, etc.) the government’s 2000 report – *Canada’s National Implementation Strategy on Climate Change* – stressed also the corresponding benefits, e.g. lower winter heating costs, longer growing seasons.³⁴ This type of cool calculation, almost blandly ‘rational’ from the vantage of national competitiveness, continues the long betrayal of Inuit peoples and exemplifies the narrowness of the national, rather than human or ecological, focus.³⁵ The Harper government merely adopted and expanded this core agenda, seeing in the horror and danger of melting permafrost, unpredictable sea-ice conditions and myriad related symptoms of climate disease³⁶ the chance to both further militarize the region, announcing armed ice breakers, a national sensor system, offshore patrol ships, additional rangers, and more³⁷ to secure ‘Canadian’ sovereignty, and further ‘develop’ it, significantly boosting “shipping, tourism and economic development in the Arctic Ocean region”³⁸

Canada, of course, is not alone in looking at a fragile, threatened, transnational region and seeing dollar signs and borders. With a 2009 U.S. Geological Survey confirming major oil and gas reserves, all states with an Arctic boundary began preparing in earnest to claim their ‘fair share’ of the cake,³⁹ ushering, as Scott Borgerson says, “a new scramble for territory and resources

³⁴ National Climate Change Process, *Canada’s National Implementation Strategy on Climate Change*, October 2000

³⁵ Indeed, at that time I argued that Canada’s role is little more than that of a “rogue” state and while some saw this as inflammatory, it seems obvious that the fear of tanks rolling over the borders had long since been replaced by threats of pollution or environmentally irresponsible behaviour and nowhere is this more true than in the Arctic region. Any state that, for the purposes of gaining competitive advantage or of merely maintaining an unsustainable way of life and actively blocks, stalls, or otherwise subverts an international process designed to deal with shared problems becomes a threat to others by virtue of the destructive environmental consequences which result from such intransigence. Under such circumstances, it seems justified to use such a term. See Lee-Anne Broadhead, “Canada as a Rogue State: Its Shameful Performance on Climate Change,” *International Journal* 56 (2001): 261-80.

³⁶ Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, *Impacts of a Warming Arctic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004).

³⁷ See Stephen Harper’s press releases: “Harper Stands Up for Arctic Sovereignty,” Address by the Hon. Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P. Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, 22 December 2005, Ottawa, Ontario; Prime Minister Stephen Harper Announces New Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships, 9 July 2007, Esquimalt, British Columbia; Prime Minister Announces Expansion of Canadian Forces Facilities and Operations in the Arctic, 10 August 2007, Resolute Bay, Nunavut. All can be found in: P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Ryan Dean, *Canada’s Northern Strategy under the Harper Conservatives: Key Speeches and Documents on Sovereignty, Security, and Governance, 2006-15*. Arctic Institute of North America, University of Calgary, 2016.

³⁸ Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy: Exercising Sovereignty and Promoting Canada’s Northern Strategy Abroad, August 2008.

www.international.gc.ca/arctic-arctique/arctic_policy-canada-politique_arctique.aspx?lang=eng

³⁹ United States Geological Survey, ‘Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle’, *USGS Fact Sheet 2008-3049*, 2008, available at: <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/> These estimates were amended the following year after a more detailed geological investigation. See Donald Gautier et al., ‘Assessment of undiscovered oil and gas in the Arctic’, *Science* 324(5931), 29 May 2009, 1175–1179.

among the five Arctic powers,”⁴⁰ all key beneficiaries of the era of industrial imperialism leading to the global climate change crisis they seek now not to solve but (in a manner making matters yet worse) cash in on. And as ever, the concept spinning the wheel is ‘sovereignty.’

The tale is familiar: while there has long been widespread recognition that an adequate response to climate change necessitates a re-conceptualization of sovereignty (and with it, development), the centrality of sovereignty (and with it, militarized national security) has been upheld at every major environmental conference.

Consider the debate in 1972 between those attending the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (better known as the Stockholm Conference) and those attending the *Dai Dong Independent Conference*, an alternative conference organized by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and held (also in the Swedish capital) to highlight the limits of the orthodoxy guiding the official UN approach.⁴¹ The UN Conference was – and is – acclaimed as the official beginning of the international community’s attempt to deal collectively with global environmental problems. While it is true that it acknowledged that environmental deterioration was not containable within state borders, the decisive (and logical) step to a post-sovereignty framework and ethos was not taken. Indeed, the Stockholm Declaration guaranteed “the sovereign rights of states to exploit their own resources in line with their own environmental policies” while, at the same time encouraging states to recognize “their responsibility to ensure that activities in their control do not damage the environment of other states.”⁴²

The tension between these two assertions is, or should be, obvious and, indeed was to those attending the Dai Dong Independent Conference. At that gathering, the participants united in arguing that no dependable solutions would be found unless basic social, political and economic practices and structures were called into question. High on the Dai Dong agenda were the impacts (cultural as well as ecological) of industrial militarism, the ultimate threat posed (and damage already inflicted) by nuclear militarism, the long-term implications for conventional economic growth models (and resource use), and the intimate connection between instability and inequity, the pernicious effects of grotesque wealth and power maldistribution. In sum, the indivisibility of ecology and economics was linked to the limitations of an international system focused on sovereign state rights and political and economic national advantage. Dai Dong saw the world, correctly I believe, “as a single functioning system in which nothing is independent,”⁴³ while the UN conference was stuck in the sovereignty-based mindset so linked to the very problems being discussed:

The issues which disunited the nations at Stockholm were precisely those that violated the ecological imperative of indivisibility: nationalism, ideological

⁴⁰ Scott G. Borgerson, “Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming” *Foreign Affairs*, 87(2, March-April 2008): 63.

⁴¹ The whole phrase is “Dai Dong Thé Gioi” which, literally translated is: “world of the great togetherness” and “comes from a pre-Confucian vision of a world in which all people are united as one family.” See: Tom Artin, *Earth Talk: Independent Voices on the Environment*. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973. Dai Dong is pronounced *Dha t’ong*.

⁴² Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, June 1972. www.un-documents.net/unchedec.htm

⁴³ Tom Artin, *Earth Talk: Independent Voices on the Environment*. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973, p. 11.

differences, sovereignty, and maldistribution. Each is inherently anti-ecological in that it divides and separates nations by territory politics, ideology, and profound differences in economic development. Each erodes a united co-operative approach to the global problem of environmental degradation. Each stands in conflict with the common cause and common concern essential to the ecological imperative⁴⁴

And we find ourselves today on a path warned against by Lothar Brock decades ago, with the militarization of environmental issues rather than the demilitarization of security issues.⁴⁵ Although repeated attempts to adopt a more radical, holistic stance have generally failed, serious efforts to avoid the pitfall identified by Brock have been made with respect to the Arctic.

An End to Inhumane Security: Rethinking Arctic ‘Sovereignty’

In 1987, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev took his call for a new vision of international politics to the Arctic, arguing in a speech in Murmansk that “a new, democratic philosophy of international relations, of world politics is breaking through”: a “new mode of thinking with its humane, universal criteria and values is penetrating diverse strata. Its strength lies in the fact that it accords with people’s common sense.” And what made sense, above all, in the Arctic, were common, cooperative efforts, an “integrated comprehensive plan for protecting the natural environment”. “We must hurry,” Gorbachev warned, “to protect the nature of the tundra, forest tundra, and the northern forest areas.” Lamenting that the region was traditionally seen as a “problem of security,” he argued, citing a build-up of Canadian forces, that the “militarization of this part of the world is assuming threatening dimensions”. “Let the North of the globe,” he beseeched, “become a zone of peace.”⁴⁶

There remained a blind-spot, however, in Gorbachev’s vision of a post state centric, demilitarized Arctic. His clarion call for cooperation was driven in part by the potential for joint ventures in what he called “rational” resource development, an “integral energy programme” to share “boundless” oil and gas reserves for the common good. Because “extraction entails immense difficulties and the need to create unique technical installations capable of withstanding the Polar elements,” he elaborated, setting his environmentalism aside, it would be “reasonable to pool efforts in this endeavour.”⁴⁷

Though the Murmansk speech was farsighted, its fidelity to industrial, extractive economic development builds on, rather than breaks through, the tension inherent in the 1972 UNEP declaration. Happily, to find an impressive blueprint for such a breakthrough – an authentic remodelling of both economics and security – we need look no further than the Arctic itself.

⁴⁴ Fred Knelman, “What Happened at Stockholm?” *International Journal* 28(1, 1972-1973): 28-49.

⁴⁵ Lothar Brock, “Security through defending the environment: an illusion?” in: E. Boulding, ed, *New Agendas for Peace Research: Conflict and Security Reexamined* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992, p. 98.

⁴⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev, The Speech in Murmansk at the ceremonial meeting on the occasion of the presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal to the city of Murmansk, 1 October 1987. Novosti Press Agency, Moscow, 1987. www.barentsinfo.fi/docs/Gorbachev_speech.pdf

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)⁴⁸ – a group bringing together the Indigenous Inuit peoples of Greenland, Canada, the United States and Russia – was established in 1977. At a recent conference, ICC chair Okalik Egeesiak recalled that the Council “was initially envisioned by the respected Inupiat leader, Eben Hopson, to protect the rights of Inuit to sustainably harvest marine mammals critical to Inuit food security in the face of pending oil and gas development.” Hopson, Egeesiak said, “understood that the Inuit voice was stronger through circumpolar solidarity.” The ICC has accomplished a great deal in the four decades since, and now enjoys consultative status at the United Nations. Vice Chair Hjalmar Dahl is right to declare that the “ICC has achieved a global reputation by defending and advocating for Indigenous Rights, including rights related to culture, food security, Indigenous Knowledge and preservation of language,” and has “been instrumental in negotiations for international agreements to reduce contaminants reaching the Arctic, defended the Inuit right to be cold in a changing climate, and advocated for improved Inuit health, wellness and socio-economic status.”⁴⁹ For the purposes of the paper, however, the ICC’s most significant contribution is its radical political and philosophical approach to ‘sovereignty’ –

‘Sovereignty’ is a term that has often been used to refer to the absolute and independent authority of a community or nation both internally and externally. Sovereignty is a contested concept, however, and does not have a fixed meaning. Old ideas of sovereignty are breaking down as different governance models, such as the European Union, evolve. Sovereignities overlap and are frequently divided within federations in creative ways to recognize the right of peoples. For Inuit living within the state of Russia, Canada, the USA and Denmark/Greenland, issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights must be examined and assessed in the context of our long history of struggle to gain recognition and respect as an Arctic indigenous people having the right to exercise self-determination over our lives, territories, cultures and languages.⁵⁰

This is not, to be sure, a call to end the existence of states. It is, rather, an acknowledgement that sovereignty is more fluid than we often suppose⁵¹. The ICC offers a profound critique of the unnaturalness of state borders and demonstrates that truly sustainable peace and development requires a dramatic shift in the prevailing view of state-centric logic. “The conduct of international relations” they argue, “must give primary respect to the need for global environmental security, the need for peaceful resolution of disputes and the inextricable linkages between issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic...”⁵²

⁴⁸ Until 2005, the Inuit Circumpolar *Conference*.

⁴⁹ Inuit Circumpolar Council, “ICC Welcomes the World to Celebrate 40 years of Arctic Advocacy on Behalf of Inuit: For Inuit, by Inuit, with Inuit” Press Release:

June 15, 2017. www.inuitcircumpolar.com/uploads/3/0/5/4/30542564/press_release_-_icc_celebrates_40_years.pdf

⁵⁰ Inuit Circumpolar Council. *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic*. Adopted 2009.

Available at: www.itk.ca/publications/circumpolar-declaration-sovereignty-arctic/

⁵¹ It is worth noting the difference between what states have been willing to do in accepting legally binding measures in terms of international trade – including the acceptance of trade dispute mechanisms. A willingness to set aside sovereign control of certain aspects of economic relations has not been matched by a willingness to accept legally binding mechanisms to protect the environment.

⁵² Inuit Circumpolar Council. *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic*.

Conclusion: Security, Sovereignty...and Power (Always Power)

To question the nature (and ‘naturalness’) of the state is to question the nature of political power itself. In her profoundly important challenge to the long-held orthodoxy linking power to violence, Hanna Arendt challenged the seemingly incontrovertible statement of C. Wright Mills that “all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate power is violence.”⁵³ Power in this view is understood as *essentially* “power over”. For Arendt, in contrast, power “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert.”⁵⁴ Considering power in this horizontal, shared manner is foreign to most people, who tend, instead, to equate power with control, with domination, whereas for Arendt –

power comes into being only if and when men [and women] join themselves together for the purpose of action, and it will disappear when, for whatever reason, they disperse and desert one another. Hence, binding and promising, combining and covenanting are the means by which power is kept in existence; where and when men succeed in keeping intact power which sprang up between them during the course of any particular act or deed, they are already in the process of foundation, of constituting a stable worldly structure to house, as it were, their combined power of action.⁵⁵

Despite enormous suffering, the Inuit have never forgotten, as so many Eurocentric ‘modern’ people have, that *because* artificial borders must not be allowed to divide that which is indivisible – the ecological integrity of the natural environment – power can *only* be attained when humans act in concert with each other and *within* the natural environment that surrounds us.⁵⁶

In his ‘indigenous manifesto,’ *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) draws on the work of Michel Foucault to reach a similarly radical conclusion. Foucault, Alfred writes, provides a “critique of state power that see oppression as an inevitable function of the state, even when it is constrained by a constitutionally defined social-political contract,” a point of “special resonance for indigenous peoples, since their nations were never party to any contract and yet have been forced to operate within a framework that presupposes the legitimacy of state sovereignty over them. Arguing for rights within that framework only reinforces the state’s anti-historic claim to sovereignty by contract.”⁵⁷

Indigenous social theory (and practice), as Alfred points out, opposes the concept not only of power as ‘power over’ other human beings, but human ‘power over’ the natural world. “The traditional indigenous view of power,” he stresses, “has nothing to do with competition, or status vis-à-vis others: it focuses on whether or not power is used in a way that contributes to the

⁵³ C. Wright Mills, cited in H. Arendt, *On Violence* New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1970, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 44.

⁵⁵ H. Arendt, *On Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1965, p. 174.

⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that the UN conference in Stockholm in 1972 used *Human Environment* in its title. This is odd for, as Artin, *op cit.*, p. 17, points out, this is “at the very least a questionable proposition” precisely because “environment” “as its etymology indicates, [is] that which *encircles*, or surrounds.” The participants at the Dai Dong conference pointed out that it is not a “human environment” but an “environment of which humans are a part.

⁵⁷ Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 48.

creation and maintenance of balance and peaceful coexistence in a web of relationships. ... Where differences in the understanding of power come into play is in the various forms power can take, and the spiritual elements of the natural order that regulate and structure the expression of power in the temporal world.” And in a beautiful distillation of that subtle, sophisticated – and, to state-centric ears, unfamiliar and unworkable – idea, he defines power as “the force needed by all to achieve peace and harmony.”⁵⁸

As the eloquent but urgent promptings of the ICC show us, *this* is the kind of power, the way of thinking, we need to save ourselves and planet now endangered by the imperious application of the opposite, oppositional concept of power as ‘power over’ that finds its ultimate expression in the vicious-cycle ‘sovereign’ violences of military and economic war. The Declaration powerfully problematizes and undermines the dominant discourse of power and sovereignty, offering instead a vision of shared power, a new (and ancient) natural logic of mutual enablement exposing the folly and false claims of militaristic state-sovereignty. This is building “common sense” in the Gramscian, counter-hegemonic sense. And it is crucially important.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 49.