

Common Security - Progressive Alternatives to the New Arms Race

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Is a new arms race inevitable? Compared to the cautious optimism at the end of the Cold War, when the prospects for disarmament and a substantial peace dividend were universally welcomed, the rhetoric now is one of confrontation and existential threat.

Some extracts from the opening pages - subtitles added:

Under the Bush/Blair axis, with its determination to use military force to secure access to oil and other resources, the West embarked on a disastrous and illegal policy of invasion and occupation. Hundreds of thousands of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan were either killed or suffered serious injury as a direct consequence of military intervention and social breakdown, while millions more faced a bleak future as exiles and refugees.

If that legacy demonstrates anything it is that, however much the rhetoric remains one of defence to protect ourselves against dangerous enemies and to encourage democratic governance, the reality is an aggressive militarism that has been an abject failure. Yet, decisions are being taken by the UK government that will reinforce our subordination to the United States because the very expense of the next generation of nuclear and conventional weapons makes us ever more dependent on US technology.

Common security offers the possibility for a much-needed and fundamental re-appraisal of the UK's role in the world. Two essential criteria are disarmament and the release of resources from military spending for international economic and environmental programmes that address fundamental security issues around poverty and climate change.

This agenda can be traced back to the very founding of the United Nations and its inspirational charter. Quite simply, the objective was to end the scourge of war after the most destructive conflict in world history. UN disarmament initiatives were based on the recognition that any new arms race must be vigorously opposed since the build-up of forces, in itself, was a major cause of instability, feeding the demand for further military preparations in an ever-increasing cycle of confrontation. Resources squandered on armaments could then be used for social priorities that addressed the growing gap in wealth and power between rich and poor and the underlying economic and social causes of conflict.

Since its founding, the UN has also been a leading body highlighting environmental concerns and the growing security threat from climate change

Such is the scale of the crisis that there are growing calls for the rapid transition to a post-carbon economy, leaving coal, oil and gas supplies in the ground and satisfying future requirements through renewable energy matched by energy-efficiency technologies to reduce overall demand. The scale of investment is one that has only previously been mobilised for arms production and war. The challenge is to mobilise on the same scale for common security and peace.

We are living through a neo-liberal political and economic experiment that is increasing, rather than reducing income inequalities and is punishing the poor for the profligacy of the banks

There should be no illusions about the barriers to any progressive alternative. Economic growth and prosperity are seen in terms of unfettered corporate power and further exploitation of non-renewable resources, underpinned by Western military force, even where this might lead to confrontation and war.

The idea of a internationally coordinated disarmament and development programme around climate change and common security would be anathema to the range of elite groups in the military-industrial-complex that have direct access to political power and decision-making.

A climate of fear is being inculcated. Russia is now being re-established as a major threat on the scale of the former Soviet Union, while Islamic State is represented as a new form of terrorism that could use its territorial base in Syria and Iraq to build a network dedicated to the destruction of Western societies. The threat of war, therefore, far from receding is now multi-faceted and the world is becoming ever more dangerous.

Yet the United States and its allies refuse to take any responsibility for the deterioration in relations between the West and Russia. The policy of military encirclement and its support for corrupt and anti-democratic regimes in the Ukraine gave the Putin leadership a simple cause through which to mobilise domestic support for its own military build up, leading to the annexation of Crimea. Nor will the United States take any responsibility for the chaos of post-invasion politics and economics in the Middle East and, more recently North Africa, in which extremist groups can gain support.

To argue for a de-escalation of military confrontation, therefore, is not an act of weakness but an act of strength if it is linked to common security policies that help transform the international system offering both environmental and economic security.

Read the full paper, Common Security – Progressive Alternatives to the New Arms Race:

<http://www.lessnet.co.uk/docs/arms-race-alternatives.pdf>

Dr Steven Schofield wrote this paper following [the Defence and Security Review](#) in order to highlight the common security framework as an alternative to the new arms race.

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