
Common Security and Nuclear Deterrence: How to replace the current reliance on nuclear weapons with sustainable security for all.

Joint Statement to the 2023 Prep Com for the 11th NPT Review Conference

Endorsers: *All Souls Nuclear Disarmament Task Force (USA), Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace (NZ), Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (Bangladesh), Basel Peace Office (Switzerland), Blue Banner (Mongolia), Citizens for Global Solutions (USA), Democracy Without Borders (Germany), Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability, G100 Defence and Security Wing, Global Rights (Nigeria), Global Security Institute (USA), Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights (USA), Human Survival Project (Australia), Initiatives pour le désarmement Nucléaire (France), International Community for Georgia Development and the Progress (Georgia), Mali Peace and Security Network (Mali), Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (USA), My World Mexico (Mexico), National Forum for Human Rights (Yemen), Pax Christi USA (USA), Peace Depot (Japan), People for Nuclear Disarmament (Australia), Scientists for Global Responsibility (UK), UNFOLD ZERO, Uniting for Peace (UK), World Academy of Art and Science, World Federalist Movement Canada (Canada), World Federalist Movement – Institute for Global Policy, World Future Council, WPC Media Private Limited (Sri Lanka) and Youth Fusion.¹*

Introduction

The very first resolution of the UN established the objective to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). This objective was affirmed as an obligation in the Non-Proliferation Treaty adopted in 1970. Commitments to implement this objective have been made by States Parties to the NPT in successive Review Conferences.

However, this objective remains unfulfilled.

Campaigns to highlight the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the illegality of their threat and use have helped to develop restraint on actual use - nuclear weapons have not been detonated in armed conflict since 1945. But these campaigns have had little if any impact on the production, possession and deployment of nuclear weapons – which continues today fueled by a \$100 Billion per year global budget.

Indeed, there are currently nine nuclear armed countries and another 37 countries that rely on nuclear deterrence. Although a numerical minority amongst UN member states, these countries together comprise most of the northern hemisphere and nearly 2/3rds of the world's population.

The primary reason for the reliance on nuclear weapons by such a significant number of countries is because nuclear deterrence is perceived by them as providing security, especially from acts of aggression. Nuclear weapons will therefore continue to be a part of security doctrines until the nuclear armed and allied states can be confident that the security provided by nuclear weapons is no longer necessary, or that nuclear deterrence can be replaced by alternatives which are credible. Common Security could provide such credible alternatives, and therefore make a vital contribution to building the framework for the peace and security of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

¹ *List in formation. Organizations are international except as noted.*

Common security

[Common security](#) is an approach to achieving national security by taking into account one's own security needs and also the security of other nations, including one's adversaries. It is based on the assumption that sustainable national security cannot be obtained by undermining or threatening the security of others, but rather on resolving conflicts with one's adversaries and ensuring that the security of all is upheld. It relies on diplomacy, negotiation, mediation, arbitration and on the application of international law to ensure fairness and security for all.

Common security does not rule out national defence and some reliance on military power for security. However, a common security framework places a much greater emphasis on conflict resolution and international law, reserving military approaches to the last resort in response to aggression if all other methods fail and in strict adherence to the UN Charter.

The United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are examples of two international organizations established on common security principles. The UN Charter, for example, prohibits the threat or use of force by UN member states and requires international conflicts to be resolved peacefully through "*negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their own choice.*" The [Helsinki Act](#) (1975) upon which the OSCE was established, includes similar obligations. The [Lisbon Declaration on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the twenty-first century](#), adopted by the OSCE in 1996, elaborates further on the Common Security framework of the OSCE.

Common security, aggression and nuclear deterrence

The common security approaches and mechanisms outlined in the UN Charter, Helsinki Final Act and Lisbon Declaration can be used to resolve international conflicts before they escalate to the level of armed conflict. They can also be used instead of nuclear deterrence to address aggression, the threat of aggression and other threats to the peace and serious violations of international law. Better utilization of common security approaches could therefore assist the transition from nuclear deterrence to non-nuclear security.

However, there are many challenges, unanswered questions and issues of confidence in making such a transition.

In order to facilitate the replacement of nuclear deterrence with common security, we recommend the NPT establish a subsidiary body to outline the full range of theoretical and actual security threats which nuclear deterrence is designed to address, explore common security and conventional military alternatives to nuclear deterrence to address these threats, and make recommendations on the transition from nuclear deterrence to non-nuclear security.

Non-nuclear states already rely for their security on common security (and conventional military forces). Their experience could be useful to nuclear-armed and allied states in making the transition to non-nuclear security. Of particular value could be the experience of States which relied on nuclear weapons and have already made the transition to non-nuclear security (such as Kazakhstan, New Zealand and South Africa).

Building confidence in Common Security – the UN General Assembly and the International Court of Justice

Unfortunately, the credibility of Common Security is challenged by the veto power of the Five Permanent members in the UN Security Council (P5) which provides each of them with a tool to block action in response to acts of aggression or threats to peace arising from them. However, the P5 do not generally have veto power to block action of other UN bodies, in particular the UN General Assembly and the International Court of Justice.

The adoption in April 2022 of the UNGA resolution “*Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council*”, has strengthened the process for the UNGA to act in the face of aggression or threats to the peace. This authority of the UNGA to act when the Security Council is blocked was first used in the Uniting for Peace Resolution during the Korea War and has more recently been exercised in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The UNGA has taken a number of actions including declaring the invasion to be an act of aggression in violation of the UN Charter and declaring that the annexation by Russia of Ukrainian territories is invalid and illegal.

The International Court of Justice has demonstrated in numerous contentious cases and advisory opinions that it can address aggression (including the threat or use of nuclear weapons), territorial conflicts and other threats to the peace. Increased use of the court in such cases – and increased acceptance of the jurisdiction of the ICJ – would build confidence in the capacity of common security to replace nuclear deterrence.

We encourage all States that have not done so to declare their acceptance of ICJ jurisdiction. We welcome the [Declaration on promoting the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice](#) which **33 countries have endorsed, and we welcome also the civil society initiative entitled *Legal Alternatives to War, Towards universal jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice*.**

Common security, nuclear deterrence and the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The Russia/Ukraine conflict has demonstrated that nuclear deterrence, while potentially rational on paper, can fail or be rendered useless in real life situations. President Putin tried to use nuclear deterrence as a coercive tool to prevent Western military support for Ukraine. This failed. Military aid has poured into Ukraine, undeterred by the nuclear threats, and has been a major reason for the failure of Russia to subjugate Ukraine. From the other side, the United States government realized that making counter nuclear threats against Russia would be escalatory and dangerous. This stimulated the United States to explore and implement non-nuclear responses to the Russian nuclear threats.

These realizations also led to the remarkable statement in the G20 Leaders Bali Declaration that ‘*The threat or use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible*’.² **This statement should be affirmed and implemented by the 11th NPT Review Conference.**

These developments provide fertile ground for the NPT to take up our recommendation to establish a subsidiary body to undertake a situation-specific evaluation of the roles of nuclear weapons in conflicts and the common security/conventional alternatives to nuclear weapons in each of these situations. Indeed, in an increasingly inter-connected and globalized world, nuclear deterrence already has much less utility - combined with very high risks - whereas **Common Security** has much greater potential and relevance to meet current and emerging security issues, reduce tensions, resolve international conflicts and ensure sustainable peace.

² See *G20 Bali Leaders’ Declaration*, paragraph 4

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/16/g20-bali-leaders-declaration/>