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## Environmental Insecurity: Another Case for Concept Change

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## Environmental Insecurity: Another Case for Concept Change

### Abstract

For decades, scholars and policy-makers have disputed whether environmental degradation caused by human-induced climate change needs to be addressed and reversed in order to *prevent* conflict, or whether the instabilities generated by such degradation (resource scarcity, reduction of arable land, mass migration of so-called environmental refugees, etc.) provides a compelling new rationale for preparing militarily to *fight* the "climate change conflicts" of the future. Exploring the tension between these perspectives, the paper argues that any effective *practical* response implies and requires a change in the *conceptual climate* of the debate sufficient to discredit a literally devastating circular argument: that environmental problems, caused in part by the multiple impacts of industrial militarism, can be adequately addressed by new military strategies and spending, a "war reflex" only serving to exacerbate political tensions, widen and deepen already chronic inequalities, and inflict further ecological harm. The paper contrasts the state-centric status quo with the human-centric agenda of *sustainable peace*, a concept with the potential – *if* defined with sufficiently radical, transnational rigor – to disrupt and transform the sovereignty paradigm. The paper concludes 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."

**Keywords:** *Climate Change, Insecurity, Conflict, Militarism*

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## **Environmental Insecurity: Another Case for Concept Change**

**Lee-Anne Broadhead**

“What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.” Hannah Arendt (1958, p. 5)

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’” (WCED, 1987, p. 19). 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 (see Dalby, 1992; Dalby, 2002; Trombetta, 2008). 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-conceptualization 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 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 concentrate on a 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, this region offers a useful case study precisely because the Indigenous peoples who inhabit the land have both a better understanding of the concept of global environmental security and have articulated a view of the fluidity of the concept of *sovereignty*, which recognizes the ongoing existence of states while at the same time pointing in a direction that recognizes the overlapping nature of both human identities and security concerns. In so doing, this renewed conceptualization of sovereignty can assist us with envisioning the ways in which state leaders, international organizations, global non-governmental organizations and, indeed, citizens, can all participate in the global effort to confront environmental insecurity.

A consideration of earlier attempts—such as that undertaken at the 1972 Dai Dong Conference—to persuade policy makers of the logical necessity to consider environmental problems beyond the orthodoxy of sovereign state rights, and through a new prism of cooperation, helps highlight the high costs of the long failure to affect such a paradigm shift. A consideration of earlier attempts—such as that undertaken at the 1972 Dai Dong Conference—to persuade policy makers of the logical necessity to consider environmental problems beyond the orthodoxy of sovereign state rights, and through a new prism of cooperation, helps highlight the high costs of the long failure to affect such a paradigm shift. This paper can be seen, then, as an exercise in reviving awareness of largely forgotten but still relevant attempts to think “outside the box” of state sovereignty, a concept that has always been less stable than assumed by many scholars of international relations (Biersteker & Weber, 1996). An effort will be made to move the discussion forward in an innovative way by highlighting an example of a conceptualization of *sovereignty* that demonstrates the possibility of maintaining state identities while *at the same time* recognizing our overlapping identities as concerned citizens on a fragile planet, with a shared interest in confronting existential ecological threats. Nayak and Selbin (2010) are

certainly correct to note that we “tend to treat sovereignty as a given, or theorize it in the context of the nation-state system, rather than explore how people might negotiate what sovereignty means” (p. 41).

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, and not simply utilized to offer a set of platitudes to mask the continuation of business as usual—to disrupt and transform the traditional sovereignty paradigm, and thereby 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.” There exists a fresh approach that can help us in our quest to move beyond the rigidity of a Realist understanding of sovereignty with its commitment to domination and control and all the negative consequences such an approach entails for the natural world.

### **Climate Change and State Sovereignty**

Remarkably, after almost three decades of convincing research undertaken by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the contention that climate change poses a real, growing, “manmade,” existential threat to the planet remains, in some powerful quarters, controversial. Joseph Stiglitz (2017) recently argued that the Trump Administration’s withdrawal from the Paris accords should lead the world to view the U.S. as a “rogue state,” a concept that has been defined in more academic terms as any state that “actively blocks, stalls, or otherwise subverts an international process designed in the interests of all” (Broadhead, 2001, p. 462). 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 pursuing. From the lead-up to the Kyoto Protocol negotiations—when the U.S. was backed by its “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 have argued for countless “flexible” ways to reach them without making deep cuts in domestic emissions.

The U.S. Congress, with its commitment to the U.S. economy over other considerations, refused to ratify even the half-measures offered at 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. In what he refers to as “institutionalized patterns of disrespect at the level of international negotiations,” Brincat (2015) points to the U.S. use of “spying, threats, and promises of aid” (p. 301). As Bolivia’s U.N. Ambassador, Pablo Solon, remarked,

WikiLeaks confirms the pressures and blackmail exerted by the U.S. administration in the talks. They accuse us [in the cables] of being “political and ideological.” But all we want to do is to hold temperature rise to 1.5C. Is that political or ideological? (as cited in Carrington, 2010)

While the Paris Conference briefly restored the sense of common purpose and determination lost at Copenhagen, it did not represent the breakthrough required. Instead of serious targets and promised action, the Conference instead settled for agreement on the vague aim to keep the rise in global temperatures to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius with an “endeavour to limit” the rise even more. 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” (BBC News Online, 2017). 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. (Milman, 2015)

Hansen, in effect, is calling for a reconceptualization of economic growth in an age of global warming and 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 70<sup>th</sup> 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. (Bronson, 2017, p. 2)

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, as the Statement urges, “take the steps needed to begin the path toward a net zero-carbon-emissions world” (Bronson, pp. 3-4).

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 militarized sovereignty have long been identified, charted, and analyzed. Likewise, my call for “concept change”—demilitarizing 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 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, 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 environmental 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 and science 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 worldwide expenditure on militarism—\$1,676 billion dollars in 2015 (Perlo-Freeman, 2016)—with 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 (Lawrence, Stemberger, Zolderdo, Struthers, & Cooke, 2015; Rando, 2014; Hynes, 2015).

Of course, as mentioned above, it is the final stage of the military industrial process, war itself, that 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. Examples from the two wars in Iraq serve to make the point clear. First, an estimated 1,200 tons of Depleted Uranium (DU), a by-product of uranium enrichment with both chemical and radiological toxicity, was used by American forces in the Gulf War, spreading contamination “widely in the air, soil and water, particularly as dust in windstorms.” (Fathi, Matti, Al-Saligh, & Godbold, 2013; Al-Azzawi, 2006, p. 23). 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 (White, 2008). And in that same brutal conflict, Saddam Hussein responded by also using environmental destruction as a weapon of war, first by setting fire to over 500 oil wells, causing massive air pollution and possible climate change effects, and then by releasing large volumes of oil into the Persian Gulf, destroying fragile marshlands and devastating animal, bird, marine life, and more (Ross, 1992). Subsequently, 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 (2008) 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. (p. 4)

Perhaps the most infamous environmental war crime remains the American weaponization of seventy-two million liters of herbicides and defoliants in Vietnam, ravaging forests, food supplies, water, soil, and even the offshore fishery (Majeed, 2004). 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 (Palmer, 2007).

Militarism also consumes vast amounts of natural, as well as financial, resources. A 2007 report from the Brookings Institute (Lengyel, 2007) found that the Department of Defense (DoD) accounted for 93 percent of the U.S. government's oil consumption, a percentage dropping to a still stratospheric 78 percent by 2015 (USEIA, 2015). Indeed, if we take 2015 figures, the DoD oil consumption is roughly equivalent to that of Sweden. 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 destructive cycle continues.

Despite many valiant attempts, academic and political, to recast the notion of security in terms commensurate to the human and natural crises generated by inter-state conflict and competition, both academic security studies as well as mainstream discourse remains rooted in the paradigm causing the problem. 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. At a time 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, but such orthodox analysis is blind to the needs and vulnerabilities of the global ecosystem and fails entirely to address the causes (including militarism itself) 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.” (Center for Climate and Security, 2017)

Such language and focus typify status quo thinking on potential climate change impacts on “us.” 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 the 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 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. (Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, 2015, p. 29)

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—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”: Challenging the Orthodoxy?**

In 2003, with the environmental impact of the wars in the Balkans under review and fresh devastation evident in Afghanistan, Klaus Toepfer, then-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” (as cited in Kirby, 2003). While it is true that the Geneva Conventions prohibit “widespread, long-term and severe” damage to the environment, UNEP (2009) argues that this “triple cumulative standard is nearly impossible to achieve, particularly given the imprecise definitions for the terms “widespread,” “long-term” and “severe.” As a result, Toepfer referred to both the environmental causes and consequences of war when he wrote: “Using the environment as a weapon must be universally condemned, and denounced as an international crime against humankind, against Nature” (as cited in Kirby, 2003). The acknowledgement that struggles over natural resources frequently result in conflict leads logically to the suggestion that protecting the natural world, while ensuring a fair allocation of natural resources for peaceful development, 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 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” (Thomson, 2017).

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 co 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, “fueled 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” (UNSC, 2017).

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 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 defense 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 the most inconvenient truth of all: that “putting poverty to the sword is,” as Toepfer (as cited in Kirby, 2003) argued, “the peace policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

On April 27, 2016, the General Assembly and the Security Council jointly adopted the “Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its ninth session” (UNGA/UNSC, 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.” (UNSC 2016). Despite this, there is little evidence that the necessary shift in “great power” thinking is taking place. President Trump’s decision to massively increase defense spending while abandoning even the non-binding Paris accord exemplifies the failure, and 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 (Zenko, 2016). This is not to suggest that the worldview of the two 2016 U.S. presidential candidates is identical; it is not. Both, though, view the world through the prism of U.S. superiority, sharing a belief in the power of American power—political, economic, and of course military—far transcending party platform and allegiance. And in Canada, the Trudeau

government has recently pledged a 70 percent increase (\$62 billion) in military spending, much of it on major offensive weapon systems (warships, fighter planes, armed drones) over the next twenty years (LeBlanc & Chase, 2017) and contradicted its own sterling rhetoric on climate change by maintaining the woefully inadequate emissions reduction targets of the previous, Kyoto Accord-hating government of former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Struzik, 2017).

Sustainable peace can only be understood as fundamentally disruptive of the state-centric status quo if it is seriously pursued. If “concept change” is not part of its agenda, it will be co-opted and compromised, and 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, will be its success or failure in bringing an end to the prevalence of militarized responses to environmental crises.

It is perhaps worth adding an important caveat to the Secretary General’s enthusiastic support for the increased acceptance of environmental protection as a key component of the sustainable/sustaining peace concept. The embrace of the concept of *sustainable peace* is both based, and builds, on 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 this original concept and in the initial arguments put forward by the Brundtland Commission. With its commitment to economic growth, foreign investment, and an expanded role for international financial institutions, *sustainable development* is a concept of which to be, at least, wary. (Visvanathan, 1991; Luke, 1995; Clow, 1996). 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*. This deeper, more holistic vision is worth further exploration.

### **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 (Broadhead, 2015). In 2004, then-chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), Sheila Watt Cloutier, stated in testimony before the U.S. 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. (Watt-Cloutier, 2004)

As Watt Cloutier would surely agree, the response to this call from the “Canadian” Arctic (itself a profoundly misleading imperial construct), under both Liberal and Conservative leadership, has been nationalistic, militaristic, and opportunistic. Mounting evidence of unmanageable warming has been met not with a plausible action plan for radical emission reductions, but rather plans to exploit and extract the natural resources of the region in a manner compounding the problem.

In the context of this 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, seeing it as 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, for example: lower winter heating costs, longer growing seasons. 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. As with the current critique of U.S. actions noted earlier, Canada’s can also be seen as the action of a “rogue state” (Broadhead, 2001). The Harper government subsequently 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 disease (Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, 2004) the chance to both further militarize the region, announcing armed ice breakers, a national sensor system, offshore patrol ships, additional rangers, and more (Harper press releases, as cited in Lackenbauer & Dean, 2016). To secure “Canadian” sovereignty and further develop it, Harper sought to significantly boost “shipping, tourism and economic development in the Arctic Ocean region” (Harper, 2008).

Canada, of course, is not alone in looking at a fragile, threatened, transnational region and seeing dollar signs and borders. With a U.S. Geological Survey (2009) confirming major oil and gas reserves, all states with an Arctic boundary began preparing in earnest to claim their “fair share” (USGS, 2008; Gautier et al., 2009), ushering in, as Scott Borgerson (2008) said, “a new scramble for territory and resources among the five Arctic powers” (p.63), all key beneficiaries of the era of industrial imperialism leading to the global climate change crisis they seek now not to solve but to cash in. 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. The UN Conference has been 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 toward a framework and ethos that moved beyond the rigid notion of state sovereignty—defined as the absolute right of a state to decide, in Waltz’s words, “for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems” (Waltz, 1979 p. 96)—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” (UNCHE, 1972).

The tension between these two assertions—of sovereign rights and shared responsibilities—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” (Artin, 1973, p. 11), 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 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 cooperative approach to the global problem of environmental degradation. Each stands in conflict with the common cause and common concern essential to the ecological imperative. (Knelman, 1972-73, pp. 39-40)

Alternative conferences such as that held in Stockholm were subsequently held alongside each of the major international environmental conferences as citizens tried to encourage their governments to work together in defense of global environmental security. Eventually some state leaders joined the chorus calling for a new way of thinking and acting. Indeed, following the 2009 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, with its movement away from the Kyoto process of binding (albeit insufficient) targets toward a new approach designed around vague, aspirational and non-binding targets, Evo Morales, the Indigenous President of Bolivia, stepped up to offer an alternative approach to the growing crisis. Morales sought to recast the climate change issue by hosting his own alternative conference, the *World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*, in April 2010. The alternative proposal, known as the “People’s Agreement” emerging from that conference, reflected the demands of more than 30,000 delegates—many representing Indigenous communities long marginalized or silenced by official diplomacy. Morales took the Agreement to the next global meeting of diplomats organized to deal with climate change in Cancun the following December: “We came to Cancun to save nature, forests,

planet Earth. We are not here to convert nature into a commodity. We have not come here to revitalize capitalism with carbon markets” (Morales, as cited in Vidal, 2010). While it is both predictable and lamentable that his appeal was rebuffed by his fellow leaders, it is perhaps still too early to gauge the long-term impact of the Agreement, and the appeal of its earth-centric ethos, in the wider political world. As it stands, however, we find ourselves today on a path warned against by Lothar Brock (1992) decades ago, with the militarization of environmental issues rather than the demilitarization of security issues. Although these 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 at least one region of immense ecological significance, 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,” and citing a build-up of Canadian forces, he argued that the “militarization of this part of the world is assuming threatening dimensions.” He beseeched, “Let the North of the globe become a zone of peace” (Gorbachev, as cited from Barentsinfo.org., 1987).

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 program” 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” (Gorbachev, as cited from Barentsinfo.org., 1987).

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, we need look no further than the Arctic itself.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)—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 Eegeesiak 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, Eegeesiak 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” (ICC, 2017). 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. (ICC, 2009)

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 suppose—a point states are often willing to accept when they deal with economic issues but, to date, less open to contemplating in the realm of environmental protection. For its part, 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...” (ICC, 2009).

### **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, Hannah Arendt challenged the seemingly incontrovertible statement of C. Wright Mills that “all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate power is violence” (Mills, as cited in Arendt, 1970, p. 35). Power in this view is understood as *essentially* “power over.” For Arendt (1970), in contrast, power “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (p. 44). 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. (Arendt, 1965, p. 174)

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. It is worth noting that UN conference in Stockholm in 1972 used *Human Environment* in its title, which is somewhat curious for, as Artin (1973) argues, this is “at the very least a questionable proposition” precisely because “environment...as its etymology indicates, [is] that which *encircles*, or surrounds” (p. 17). 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.” This is much closer to the Inuit view.

In his “indigenous manifesto,” *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) pointed to the usefulness of Michel Foucault’s work:

A critique of state power that sees oppression as an inevitable function of the state, even when it is constrained by a constitutionally defined social-political contract should have 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. (Alfred, 1999, p. 48)

Indigenous social theory (and practice), as Alfred pointed out, opposes the concept not only of power as “power over” other human beings, but human “power over” the natural world. He further stressed:

The traditional indigenous view of power 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 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. (Alfred, 1999, p. 49)

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” (Alfred, 1999, p. 49).

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 of “sovereign” violence 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. Building wide-spread support at a popular level for this vision is of crucial importance if we are to survive.

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