Rethinking Security
for a just and peaceful world

Submission to the Labour Party International Policy Commission

30 June 2020

Shared Security

In 'national security' policy-making, there is tension between what the UK government presumes to be its national and transnational interests and the interests of individual humans and humanity at large. Adopting 'shared security' as an underpinning value for future security, defence and foreign policy would help to relieve this. We are, after all, globally interdependent when it comes to security. Pressing examples include climate change, pandemic disease, conflict-induced forced migration, violent conflict and transnational crime. Rarely is human insecurity contained by national boundaries.

Peace is therefore only sustainable when we see the well-being of others as being as important as our own. This is both a moral and a logical point: from the mountains of Afghanistan to the oilfields of Arabia we see disregard for other humans' well-being having real consequences for our own long-term security. To build sustainable peace the well-being of people in their social and ecological context should be the proper goal of security policy.

The Rethinking Security network has suggested four principles for a sustained, shared approach to security:

1. **Security as a freedom**. A shared freedom from fear and want, and the freedom to live in dignity. It implies social and ecological health rather than simply the absence of risk.

2. **Security as a common right**. Security should not, and usually cannot, be gained for one group of people at others' expense. Accordingly, it rests on solidarity rather than dominance – in standing with others, not over them.

3. **Security as a patient practice**. Security grows or withers according to how inclusive and just society is, and how socially and ecologically responsible we are. It cannot be coerced into being.

4. **Security as a shared responsibility**. Security is a common responsibility; its challenges belong to all of us and are too important to be entrusted to a self-selected group of powerful states.

A shared security approach means the consequences of UK policies for the rest of the world – whether trade, military or diplomatic – should be explicitly considered and measured as if the security of people beyond our borders mattered as much as the security of those within them. Such an approach would limit the impetus to engage in unsustainable security practices such as unilateral foreign military interventions, burning coal, or closing borders against asylum seekers.

A shared security approach would also have implications for the development, timing, resourcing and coordination of national security policy.

First, for a security strategy to serve people rather than elites or an abstract state it must be open to consultation and critique by the people in whose name it is generated. So, transparency and accountability are vital, and sorely lacking in current arrangements.

Second, its timescale must be long-term, potentially open-ended, since peace and well-being must constantly be nurtured from deep roots to transform conflicts and prevent violence. The Welsh experience of a Future Generations Commissioner provides a useful example of how long-term planning and harm-reduction might be built in to ongoing policy-making.

Third, a shift to an approach that actively seeks to prevent violent conflict rather than suppress it would require an intentional shift in priorities, resources and strategies towards building human and ecological security and away from controlling and containing threats by military and security means.

Finally, shared security would provide a lens to improve coherence and coordination of policies pursued by different arms of government. It could, for example, address the dysfunctionality of one branch of government fighting a war while another patches up the resulting humanitarian crisis in the same country, or the tension between UK counter-terrorism laws impeding the work of UK-funded humanitarian and peacebuilding work.