

Contours of a Sustainable Security Policy

By Steen Folke

**Spokesperson, 'No to Armaments – Yes to Sustainable Security Policy'
Nordic Peace Conference, Helsingør July 14, 2023**

Dear friends,

Since most of you don't know me, I shall use a couple of minutes to introduce my background for delivering this speech. Professionally I have been development researcher as associate professor at the University of Copenhagen and senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies, now retired. As such I have for many decades carried out research on development issues, poverty, conflicts over water, international trade and development cooperation in Asia and Africa.

In the 1960s I was active in the marches against nuclear weapons and demonstrations against the American war in Vietnam. I was also founder and first chairman of Militærnægterforeningen, the association of conscientious objectors in Denmark. In the 1970s and 80s I was member of the Left Socialist Party and represented the party in the Danish parliament for 9 years as spokesperson on foreign policy and security policy. One of my main tasks as MP was to take part in the campaign against the deployment of American nuclear weapons in Europe – Cruise missiles and Pershing. I and my party were very active in the parliamentary majority that again and again forced the government to make reservations about this NATO policy in so-called footnotes.

Last year I was one of the founders of the Danish organization 'No to Armaments – Yes to Sustainable Security Policy'. With a group of friends, I took the initiative to establish this organization on April 6th last year, six weeks after Russia's disastrous invasion of Ukraine. From the outset we condemned unequivocally President Putin's illegal war, but we recognized that in the chain of events that led to the war, NATO under US leadership had encouraged Russia's neighbouring countries to become members of the NATO alliance, so that in the end Russia was quite encircled by NATO, now also with Finland and Sweden as members and invitations to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

In the light of what has now happened in Ukraine, it is understandable that Russia's neighbours felt more secure as members of NATO, and we believe that every country has a right to decide on its own which security policy it wants to pursue. But the US and NATO could have done a great deal more to give Russia security guarantees to address its legitimate security concerns. On the contrary US scrapped several peace building treaties with Russia, including the treaty on the intermediary nuclear weapons that mobilized the peace movement in Europe in the 1980s. Under Putin, Russia also dropped several treaties, so that today only the toothless non-proliferation treaty and the

New START treaty remain. The latter is likely not to be renewed when it soon runs out. Both the US and Russia have modernized their nuclear weapons, both the strategic inter-continental weapons and the smaller, so-called tactical ones that are more likely to be used. Together with Putin's veiled threats to do this in Ukraine, the whole world finds itself in the most dangerous situation since the iron curtain's fall and the end of the cold war.

It is important that we try to put pressure on our Nordic governments to engage with the United Nations' Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted in 2017 by a large majority and entered into force in 2021. However, none of the countries with nuclear weapons and no NATO country voted in favour of the treaty. It is encouraging that Norway as well as Finland and Sweden took part as observers in the follow-up UN conference in Vienna in 2022. Unlike its Nordic neighbours, Denmark was conspicuously absent in Vienna. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, has said: "Unless nuclear weapons are abolished, there can never be peace".

Our organization has the objective to contribute to revitalizing and renewing the peace movement. In doing so, we have also felt it necessary to take a stand on the NATO countries' supply of weapons and intelligence as well as training of Ukrainian soldiers, that will be seen as controversial in parts of the peace movement. But Ukraine fights for its existence, and without this military support, we believe that Russia could have succeeded in conquering Ukraine and toppling its government. However, as we have seen, such a military support can easily lead to gradual escalation through delivery of more and more heavy weapons, first helmets and security vests, then armoured cars, then Abrams and Leopard tanks and now F-16 fighter jets. We warn against this latest escalation, and we certainly do not think that there will be a military solution to the war. The countries that deliver weapons to Ukraine should at the same time pursue negotiations which can lead to armistice and an end to the war, ideally under the United Nations' auspices.

Most likely it will end as it started as a frozen conflict, where neither Ukraine nor Russia will be victorious, and where the status of certain parts of Ukraine will remain disputed. In the light of this we support all initiatives that will lead to negotiations. It is interesting that countries of the global South, including Brazil, India, Indonesia and a number of African countries, are active in this field. They do not want to take sides for a variety of reasons, including their view that NATO countries have themselves been involved in illegal military adventures, notably that in Iraq.

Along with this stand, we have argued strongly against the massive armaments race that is now underway in Denmark and many other NATO countries. Our organization has collected signatures on a petition against the Danish government's decision to increase

its military spending from around 1.4% to 2% of GDP. That money could be more constructively spent on improving welfare, speeding up the necessary green transition and on development cooperation. Our petition has so far got more than 1,200 signatures - perhaps not an impressive result. But in the context of the war and the prevailing enthusiasm for massive armaments it is an uphill struggle to go against the government and the overwhelming majority.

Based on figures from SIPRI, it is clear that the NATO countries' spending on armaments is 16 times greater than that of Russia – 16 times! The NATO countries in Europe alone spend 5 times as much as Russia. NATO's military is hugely superior to that of Russia in all conventional areas. The only area where Russia can somehow match the US is in its nuclear weapons.

After Finland and - a few days ago - Sweden have now been admitted to join NATO, we need to discuss how the Nordic countries can influence NATO in a direction that moves the alliance away from a prolonged armaments race in competition with Russia and China. I suppose that many in the Finnish and Swedish peace movements were against their government's decision to apply for NATO membership, but we also know that the stand on NATO can split the peace movement in the Nordic countries. Our organization has no clear stand on NATO. Most of us, no doubt, have been extremely critical of NATO and its actions in the past. But we recognize why the Baltic countries – and now also Finland and Sweden – feel more secure as members of NATO.

My own view is that NATO should have been dissolved after the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact, and I think we must remain very critical of NATO. Under US leadership NATO or 'coalitions of the willing' have carried out military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya with terrible consequences, and there is no guarantee that something similar will not happen in the future. In particular, one can fear that NATO will be used by the US in its attempts to encircle and isolate China as part of a competition for global hegemony.

Nevertheless, the Nordic peace movements should find ways to influence NATO in a more constructive and peaceful direction. But this must also entail saying a loud No! to US American bases and nuclear weapons in the Nordic countries. In Norway, it can be argued, it is too late. Denmark is currently involved in secret negotiations with the US government about something similar. A more constructive and peaceful way forward – both in NATO and the European Union – is also to put pressure on our governments to avoid having a new iron curtain splitting Europe in the next 10-20 years. While sanctions against Russia are justified - as long as Putin is conducting a terrible war in Ukraine – we must do all we can as civil society to keep in touch with Russian people who are not our enemies. And as soon as the war ends, we need to reestablish normal relations with Russia in terms of trade, traffic, diplomacy and all other interactions.

In terms of Nordic cooperation, it is obvious that all five Nordic countries have a special interest in the Arctic region. Through the work in the Arctic Council there has for years been a somewhat fruitful cooperation to ensure that the Arctic remains a low-tension region. The Ilulissat declaration from 2008 between USA, Canada, Norway Greenland/Denmark has contributed to this. But after Russia's attack on Ukraine, Russia has been suspended from the Arctic Council, and its work has come to a standstill. At the same time both Russia and the USA have increased their military build-up in the Arctic. There is a grave risk that the Arctic will now become a high-tension region. It is an important task for the peace movements in all the Nordic countries to try to prevent this.

Our organization has been greatly inspired by Olof Palme's ideas of 'common security'. As you may know these ideas were conceived in 1982 – in the midst of the cold war – when Palme was Chair of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues. The concept of common security entails that cooperation between adversaries can provide the security that people and nations need, where military confrontation and nuclear deterrence have failed. In simple words: Nations and populations can only feel safe when their counterparts feel safe.

A few days before we held the foundational meeting in our organization last year, the Olof Palme International Centre together with the International Peace Bureau and the International Trade Union Confederation published its report "For our Shared Future", which builds on Olof Palme's basic concept. The content of this report is in many ways similar to the kind of security policy that we have tried to develop.

The report outlines 6 principles for common security, which I present here in a slightly abbreviated version:

1. All people have the right to human security
2. Building trust between nations and peoples is fundamental
3. There can be no common security without nuclear disarmament and reduced military expenditure
4. Global and regional cooperation are crucial to tackling the world's challenges
5. Disputes must be resolved through dialogue, conflict prevention and confidence-building measures
6. Better regulation and governance need to be extended to cover new military technologies, for instance in cyberspace and outer space

Such principles are easier to formulate than to implement, but they identify an important direction for an alternative security policy in a world that is characterized by conflicts, contradictory interests and different roles in the economic-political world order. The

report also contains a large number of more concrete recommendations which are useful for the peace movement.

In our organization we have coined the term ‘sustainable security policy’, which is not used in that report, but our concept includes Palme’s idea of common security.

In the 40 years that have lapsed since the Palme commission, there has at global level been two important developments which must be taken into account in a contemporary security policy. The first is the globally growing inequality – both economically, socially and politically. Even if a substantial reduction of absolute poverty has taken place in many countries – and especially in China – the gap between rich and poor is increasing both globally and internally in most countries, including in the Nordic welfare states. The inequalities do not only create unjust societies and a growing chasm between the rich in the global North and the poor in the global South. They also foster innumerable conflicts out of which some develop into uprisings and war. Thus, the growing inequalities must be addressed in an alternative security policy.

The second important development is the accelerating climate- and biodiversity-crisis. While it is overwhelmingly the rich countries in the North that have created the problems with our way of life and ruthless exploitation of natural resources, it is the poor countries in the South that bear the worst consequences of man-induced climate change in the form of prolonged droughts, extreme flooding, massive soil erosion and devastating cyclones. All these calamities create conflicts between people over land, water and security, and they generate millions of refugees. The continued emission of greenhouse gasses threatens the planet’s existence and is thus the greatest threat to the security of all people.

The concept of common security must be extended to cover these developments, and it is with this background that we have preferred to talk about sustainable security policy, a concept which includes the idea that such a policy must be common in order to be sustainable. It is an added advantage that the concept links to the United Nations’ global sustainable development goals. Although some of these are insufficient and contradictory, they point in a direction that is also relevant for a sustainable security policy.

The ideas I have presented here are unfolded and deepened in a 45-page pamphlet – “Bæredygtig Sikkerhedspolitik – en nødvendig omtanke” (Sustainable Security Policy – a Necessary Reflection) - we have written and published in March of this year. “We” are in this context a think-tank (“Omtænk tank”), which forms part of ‘No to Armaments – Yes to Sustainable Security Policy’. The 10 authors of this pamphlet have different backgrounds, but the majority are now retired researchers that span a range of

disciplines such as biology, geography, sociology, economics, political science and peace research.

At the backdrop of the war in Ukraine we analyze conflicts around the world, discuss the role of NATO and EU and argue the need for arms control, diplomacy and peace- and conflict research. A whole section is devoted to the consequences of global inequality and the climate- and biodiversity crisis. There is also a section on psychological, social and cultural factors behind conflicts and wars as well as ideas about what an active civil society – including the peace movements – can do. Lastly the pamphlet has a concluding section which outlines a number of concrete recommendations related to the war in Ukraine and an alternative Danish development- and security-policy.

Here I will just quote a couple of recommendations concerning the war in Ukraine and the role of United Nations. We recommend that:

- Denmark continues to support Ukraine's defence, but works for an armistice under international control – and that Denmark supports diplomacy aimed at negotiations between Ukraine/USA and Russia.
- A sustainable security policy is solidly anchored in the United Nations – and that Denmark works for a reform of the United Nations, so that the veto in the Security Council is abandoned and the Security Council mirrors the actual global situation with better representation of South and East.

Based on this pamphlet we held a conference in the Danish parliament in March this year with the former Swedish prime minister, Stefan Löfven, as key-note speaker. He is now president of the European Socialists and Social Democrats and also Chairman of the board of SIPRI. He delivered an interesting speech, which – a little bit to our surprise – was well-aligned with our ideas of a sustainable security policy.

You can find his speech on our website <https://nejtiloprustning.dk> where we also present numerous articles we have written in the Danish mainstream press over the last 15 months.

I have brought with me more than a hundred copies of our pamphlet, which I believe all – except some of our Finnish friends – can read. Please take a number of copies with you and distribute to friends in the peace movement who may be interested. It is our hope that you can find some inspiration in this pamphlet and maybe write similar pamphlets in your own country.

The pamphlet can also be downloaded from our website:

<https://nejtiloprustning.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/pamflet-Baeredygtig-Sikkerhedspolitik-NtO-020323.pdf>

We need to renew and strengthen the peace movements everywhere. It is my firm belief that Nordic cooperation can contribute to this.