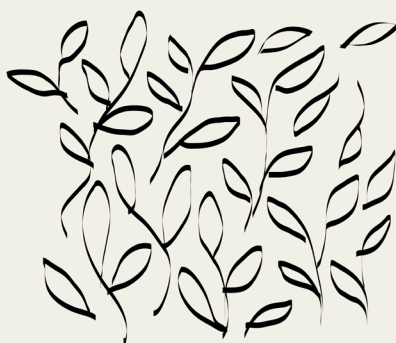


# Exploring the nexus of Climate, Peace, and Security:

A post-workshop briefing



MARCH 2024

Exploring the Nexus of Climate, Peace, and Security  
Hybrid Workshop  
Thursday 23 November 2023  
9:30 - 15:00 EST  
Balsillie School of International Affairs  
Waterloo

#### **Acknowledgment**

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A significant portion of Ploughshares' funding comes from everyday Canadians, reflecting their deep and genuine commitment to a more safe, just and secure world. This support ensures independence and integrity of our work.

All photos taken by Helen Vreugdenhil for Project Ploughshares.



## Overview

A [wicked problem](#) defies easy solutions because of its complex and interconnected relationships with a host of factors. Climate change is often viewed as a wicked problem; when climate impacts on peace and security are brought into the discussion, the challenge to find solutions may seem insurmountable. Arriving at this conclusion should not produce despair but rather lead to “a dynamic approach” that promotes novel thought and encourages the crafting of new tools and mechanisms.

In this spirit, on November 23, 2023, in a seminar room at the Balsillie School of International Affairs in Waterloo, Ontario, the staff of Project Ploughshares met with invited experts from academia, the military, and civil society to explore, in an open and safe forum, the many points at which climate, peace, and security (CPS) intersect and how to respond to the effects of this nexus.

The workshop was intended to provide advice and guidance for Project Ploughshares as it crafts the parameters of a new research program that brings its peace-focused work to the current climate crisis. Like nuclear weapons, war in outer space, and autonomous weapons, the climate crisis poses an existential threat to the achievement of sustainable world peace. Also up for exploration: How can Project Ploughshares, a Canadian organization with extensive international linkages, best contribute to the conversation and the creation of solutions.

With viewpoints ranging from local to national to global, participants presented a variety of options about the role that Project Ploughshares could most effectively and usefully play. While the path ahead is not certain, clearly the climate crisis must inform Ploughshares research and analysis going forward.

The discussion served as a jumping-off point for devising a research program and a planned workshop with an expanded range of participants in Ottawa in June 2024.

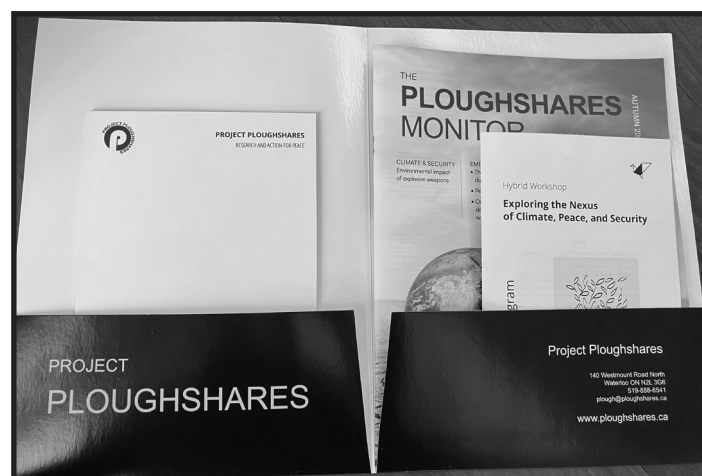
## Session 1: What role is there for multilateral institutions in addressing the climate, peace, and security nexus?

Participants saw the need for multilateral institutions to help coordinate global responses to the climate crisis. No single organization currently meets this need; discussion highlighted the difficulty of a platform with numerous issues, bodies, and institutions capturing such a broad mandate. And, while participants did point out some multilateral institutions that they believed could address the climate crisis, the feeling in the room was that most large international institutions have failed to bring about any serious positive change, often because of a lack of commitment and financial support by member states and national governments.

Many participants agreed that, despite its flaws, the United Nations (UN) and its agencies are best suited to address the complex problems related to the interactions of climate, peace, and security, even if UN efforts are often underfunded and therefore unsuccessful. The UN's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was raised as an example of a UN agency that is doing relevant work. Non-UN institutions that received favourable mention included the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research and the World Bank for its work on immigration and climate change.

The developing discussion it seemed to suggest that existing institutions face a hostile environment when responding to crises relating to climate or security. Some participants saw a global environment opposed to international cooperation and dominated by economic turmoil, authoritarian governmental regimes, and nationalistic ideologies. Tackling the effects of climate change on world peace and security in such an environment could easily seem hopeless.

However, participants remained reasonably optimistic that opportunities to respond to problems still existed. They believed it was still possible to find ways to encourage the world's citizens to favour global governance and international cooperation. At the same time, as several participants emphasized, private industry and business interests must be seen as part of the solution, not only part of the problem. Many of the ideas that could re-



solve the crisis will come from the private sector. And, finally, much of the responsibility will continue to lie with national governments, which must lead in assuming responsibility.

Conclusion: There ARE roles for many different types of organization to address the CPS nexus. There are certainly roles that Project Ploughshares can assume, as both a national organization and as a member of international networks. But it must remain fully aware of existing barriers in an increasingly fragmented global political environment.

## **Session 2: Understanding the Canadian context: Who leads on climate, peace, and security?**

This session surveyed the domestic context to see where Project Ploughshares could make a worthwhile contribution.

Currently the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the Department of National Defence (DND) play major roles not only in security crises but in national environment/climate crises, such as wildfires. But when participants were asked to choose the institution best suited to address the climate crisis, most selected a civilian defence body. DND/CAF were second, with local institutions last.

Some participants felt that if climate emergencies were added to DND/CAF responsibilities, the climate file would always be the “poor brother,” last served in funding, staff, and institutional support. Other participants opposed to assigning climate emergencies to DND/CAF argued that DND/CAF have made it very clear that responding to domestic natural disasters is not their priority. Someone speaking from a local perspective added the point that communities do not want combat-trained “men with guns” dealing with humanitarian crises. Another feared that all DND/CAF responses to crisis would be reactive and securitized; such a response would not suit crises that made a significant humanitarian impact and produced a need for long-term commitments.

On the flipside, some participants were concerned about limiting DND/CAF commitments and contributions to warfighting. They saw assuming a role in climate emergencies as an opportunity to make the DND/CAF a different, better institution with a more service-oriented culture. And DND/CAF already have much of the equipment and logistical support needed for emergency response. Moreover, a concern was raised that a civil defence body, while preferable in theory, could also become securitized and act like a de facto paramilitary body. Why reinvent the wheel? Any localized solution to the climate crisis was seen as inadequate in a country as large as Canada.

But incorporating the CPS nexus involves more than responding to crises. Monitoring climate change in the Arctic is also important, as is cooperating with other Arctic nations to preserve the existing environment. Such work requires a whole-of-government response, according to some participants. DND and Global Affairs Canada are already assessing the risks of climate change by employing climate security analysts.

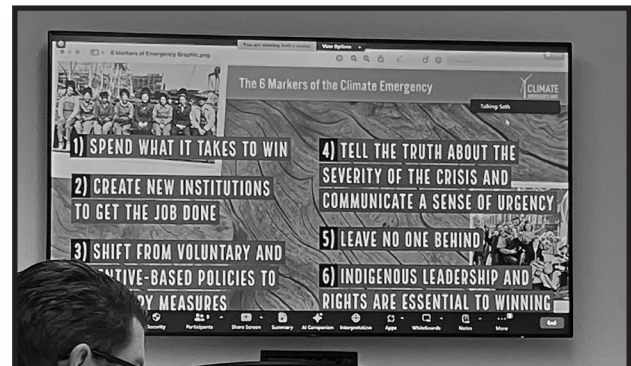
Conclusion: A number of suggestions were made: Project Ploughshares could monitor efforts to link climate, peace, and security in Canada; preliminary work on government partnerships with academia and other organizations could suggest a niche for Ploughshares; Ploughshares might be able to fill a gap in an international civil-society network; and

Ploughshares could provide beneficial peace-oriented, research-backed policy advice to the Department of National Defence on the intersection of climate, peace, and security and on Arctic security.

## Keynote with Seth Klein

Seth Klein, the author of *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency* and Team Lead and Director of Strategy at the Climate Emergency Unit, a project of the David Suzuki Institute, outlined the six markers that he and his team had identified to indicate when a government or large institution has shifted into “emergency mode”:

1. Spend what it takes to win;
2. Create new institutions to get the job done;
3. Shift voluntary and incentive-based initiatives to mandatory ones;
4. Tell the truth;
5. Leave no one behind; and
6. Centre Indigenous leadership, rights, and titles.



Participants were eager to relate these markers to climate emergencies and the CPS nexus.

A key takeaway for Ploughshares from Klein’s remarks was the need to develop a comprehensive plan for tackling overlapping crises that are further impacted by changes in climate.

## Session 3: Desecuritizing the nexus: Promoting peace through climate action

The CPS nexus is most frequently studied through a lens that determines the potential for conflict. In the opening discussion, participants had acknowledged that security is often an appealing lens because it raises issues to the level of existential threat, thus raising appropriate levels of awareness and urgency – and often raising more financial support. But, as we have learned, a war mindset can backfire, as in the cases of the war on drugs and the war on terror. How should the climate crisis be framed?

When participants were asked if climate change should be approached as a national security threat, some responded that, while they did not endorse a securitized approach to the climate crisis, they were pragmatic enough to acknowledge that the approach would get a lot of engaged stakeholders on board. Others argued that such a large and multifaceted issue required a variety of approaches, including a securitized one. Some rejected a securitized approach; they felt that relying on male-dominated security institutions was inappropriate.

And some argued that a national security approach was incorrect because it did not take



into account international cooperation and global governance, which are required to respond effectively to the climate crisis. Indeed, a focus on national security is wrong because the problem is global and constitutes an existential threat.

There was also discussion on the distinction between national defence and national security. One participant argued that national security includes human security and mutual security. Another noted that declaring war on something often means building and making new things, but to tackle the climate crisis, we need to make fewer things. Several participants asked, “Whose security?” The question suggested that we need to consider who is defining security in the context of the climate crisis.

As a collective, participants came up with working definitions. “Peace,” often referred to as “negative peace,” means the absence of physical conflict; “climate peace” refers to doing the work to prevent climate change from happening. “Climate security” is reactive work that protects people from climate change already underway. One participant saw climate security as militarized, while climate peace included a just transition, climate finance, and cutting military spending. Several participants noted the number of non-human factors (such as flora and fauna) that will also affect human security and be impacted by climate change.

It was noted that much of the discussion in the workshop was focused on the threats posed by climate change. To garner support for change, this attitude must also change, so that opportunities, peace, and the ability to adapt are stressed. It was thought that proactive, not reactive, government policies were needed.

Conclusion: Ultimately, the focus of Ploughshares’s work must be not only on “human security” but on “global security,” which strives to preserve all creation, and on opportunities for peaceful and non-violent adaptations.

## **Defining research priorities**

To close the workshop, participants suggested some Project Ploughshares CPS research and advocacy priorities, including:

1. Monitor NATO’s green efforts;
2. Ensure that the transition to a green economy is not violent;
3. Campaign against geoengineering;
4. Revisit Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in the context of climate change;
5. Give a higher profile to the environmental impact of military activity and preparation for war;
6. Create a new coalition; and
7. Find ways to incorporate Indigenous practices.

By the end of the workshop, it was apparent that there was lots of work for Project Ploughshares to tackle. Some methods and ideas central to the Ploughshares way of doing things, including a focus on human security, R2P, and working collaboratively with other organizations, seem well suited to a subject as complex as the CPS nexus.



Project Ploughshares is a Canadian peace research institute with a focus on disarmament efforts and international security, specifically related to the arms trade, emerging military and security technologies, nuclear weapons, and outer space.

For more information please visit: [www.ploughshares.ca](http://www.ploughshares.ca).