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## After the Great Lockdown, far-sighted global cooperation will be heralded and lauded as wise

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## OPINION

# After the Great Lockdown, far-sighted global cooperation will be heralded and lauded as wise

By [ERIKA SIMPSON](#) MAY 25, 2020

**With our allies in the United States and Europe, Canada faces an economic crisis and worldwide depression; apparently long-term government budgets will need massive amounts of public money to boost recovery in critical sectors such as basic income, development, education, employment, energy, and health.**



In an appeal released last month, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the bigger battle against COVID-19: 'The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war,' he said. 'It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives.' *Photograph courtesy of the Kremlin*

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs has just released a report, [Rethinking Unconstrained Military Spending](#) as a follow-up to its 2019 report on [United Nations Efforts to Reduce Military Expenditures](#) which pushes governments to move the money and spend taxpayers' funds on caring and repairing, not preparing for combat and killing.

Yet defence experts in the U.S. and at NATO and the EU say that, although we are rightfully focused on fighting the COVID-19 crisis, the reality is that with significant geopolitical challenges currently facing the West and Europe, this is no time to cut or under-invest in expensive defence capabilities. They assume COVID-19 will likely make the world more unstable and insecure,

therefore military capabilities and spending must better protect defence investments and industry.

Drops in GDP in 2020 could foreseeably be two and three times higher than after the 2008 crisis, therefore during economic recovery, maintaining and increasing defence spending should not return to be a high priority for North American and European leaders. We must do all we can to halt world leaders from self-reinforcing cycles of insecurity; their mutual suspicions and fears spur arms races.

As the security dilemma foretells, efforts by one country or group of countries to increase their security by pursuing more offensive military forces creates more insecurity among rivals and neighbours, prompting similar increases in spending, and growing cycles of hostility.

Last year, the world spent \$1.9-trillion on the military, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) [latest report](#) released last month.

Once again, Canada ranks 14<sup>th</sup> highest at US\$22.2-billion, which is 1.2 percent of GDP; but over the next ten years, Canada still plans to devote billions to reach [NATO's target of two per cent of GDP](#). The 2017 defence policy report, [Strong Secure Engaged](#) promised greater increases to buy equipment including for combatting high-intensity warfare in Europe.

Rather than devote more resources to research and development of next-generation fighter aircraft, battle tanks, new frigates, lethal autonomous weapons systems in space, and killer drones to ensure our military and technological edge is credible, we need to focus on sustaining critical industrial and technological capabilities that undergird human security, not militarization.

Many valuable non-defence sector industrial capabilities—like the airline, service and tourism industries around the world—are experiencing incredible risks and may well disappear.

To mitigate devastating climate crisis effects and preserve humankind's long-term future, we need to learn the lessons of the pandemic and understand militaries are not the primary guarantor of security.

We should not repeat our past mistakes by allowing defence spending to absorb political attention and material resources that could otherwise be devoted to far more pressing human security challenges.

Canada's renewed \$14-billion export of light armoured vehicles to the Middle East contributes to an arms build-up in the most militarized and conflict-prone region on the planet. The UN's special envoy has welcomed the start of the cessation of hostilities on 10 April of a conflict described by the UN Secretary-General in 2018 as the [worst humanitarian crisis in the world](#).

The Yemen crisis was a human-made disaster, not a natural disaster like the COVID pandemic; now faced with a looming global food security crisis, we must do all we can to prevent already dire unemployment conditions witnessed around the world from deteriorating into a [global famine](#).

To ensure more efficient use of public spending, we need to redouble our diplomatic peacebuilding efforts, and leverage more spending on nurses, hospitals, medical equipment and Indigenous Peoples, not on combat-capable soldiers, cutting-edge weaponry, threatening war exercises and fomenting armed conflict in Europe and the Middle East.

As Canada and the world gradually emerge from the pandemic, there must be no 'new normal' based on traditional ideas about the percentage of GDP, and the amounts of dollars that should be spent on defence, not development.

In an [appeal](#) released last month, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the bigger battle against COVID-19: "The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war," he said. "It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives."

Appropriately, a mid-April extraordinary meeting by video conference of NATO defence ministers decided upon coordinated [military support of civilian missions](#) to combat the virus. But

the UN chief is calling for warring parties to entirely pull back from hostilities, put aside mistrust and animosity, and “silence the guns; stop the artillery; end the airstrikes.”

With our allies in the United States and Europe, Canada faces an economic crisis and worldwide depression; apparently long-term government budgets will need massive amounts of public money to boost recovery in critical sectors such as basic income, development, education, employment, energy and health.

After the Great Lockdown, far-sighted global cooperation—not short-sighted spending on militarization—will be heralded and lauded as wise.

*Erika Simpson is an associate professor of international politics at Western University, president of the Canadian Peace Research Association and author of NATO and the Bomb.*

*The Hill Times*