

PEACE MANIFESTO

PAX
CHRISTI

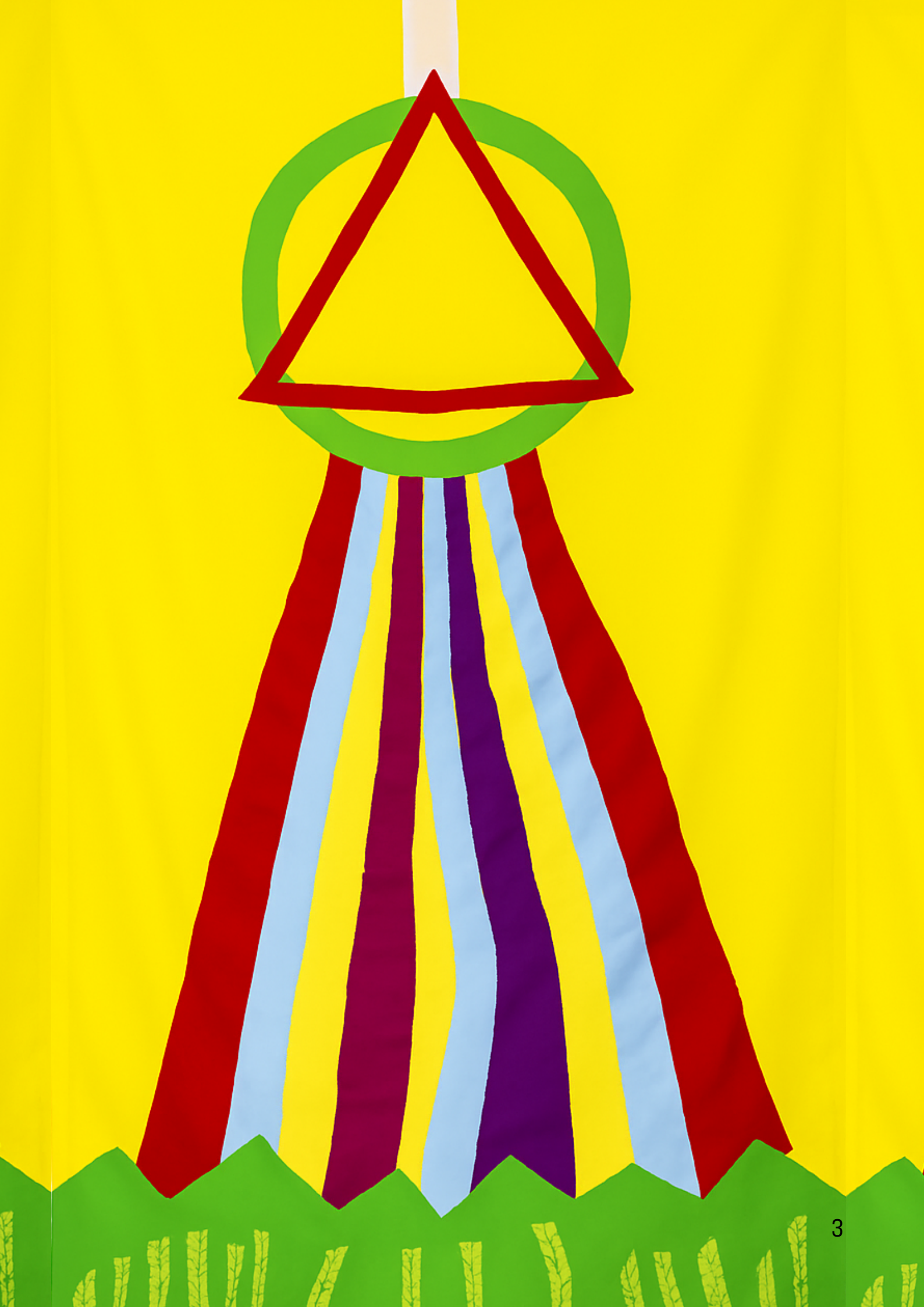
Building collective
security and sustainable
peace through
Diplomacy, Development,
Democracy, and Defence.



PAX CHRISTI FLANDERS' PEACE MANIFESTO

BUILDING COLLECTIVE SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE THROUGH DIPLOMACY, DEVELOPMENT, DEMOCRACY, AND DEFENCE.

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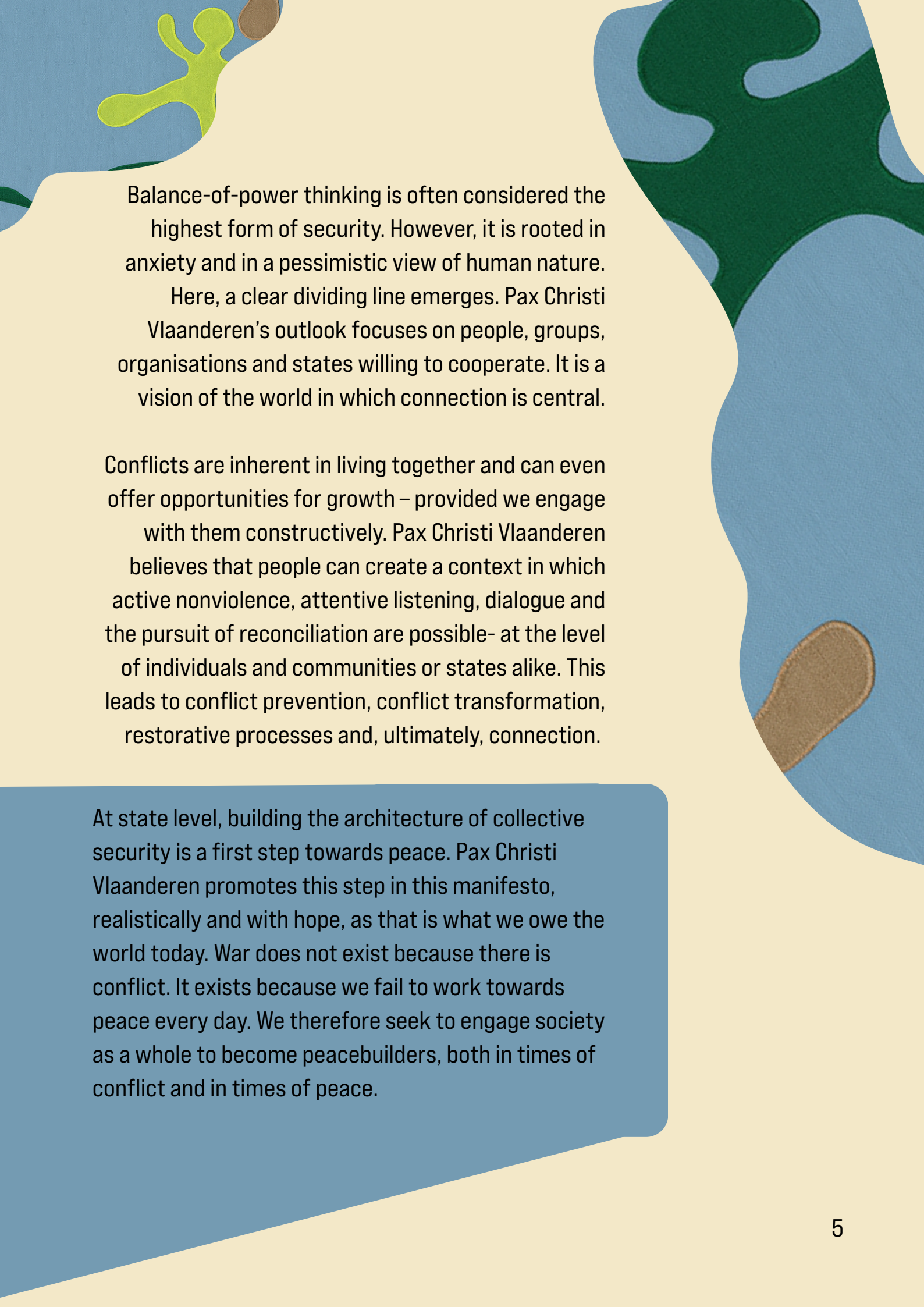


1. INTRODUCTION

With this manifesto, which updates and builds upon our earlier Manifesto for Peace, Pax Christi Vlaanderen offers a perspective for sustainable peace. We choose collective security as an alternative to the power politics that repeatedly escalate into armed conflict, claiming countless unnecessary casualties and innocent lives. Within our peaceful approach to security, we highlight how the “four Ds” contribute to this vision: Diplomacy, Development (development cooperation), Democracy and Defence.

This manifesto is more than an analysis. It provides a concrete framework for moving from vision to action. Through our 4D approach, we show how peace can take shape: through dialogue, through fair and just development, through democratic legitimacy and through defence that prioritises protection and cooperation. These four pillars are the building blocks of collective security and turn this manifesto into a guide for policymakers and society alike.

We recognise that this vision does not exist in a vacuum. Today we live in a world at war. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the war in Gaza have brought that reality closer to home. Yet war is present in many parts of the world: in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Sudan, in Yemen and elsewhere. Its horrors compel us to make choices and to seek solutions.



Balance-of-power thinking is often considered the highest form of security. However, it is rooted in anxiety and in a pessimistic view of human nature.

Here, a clear dividing line emerges. Pax Christi Vlaanderen's outlook focuses on people, groups, organisations and states willing to cooperate. It is a vision of the world in which connection is central.

Conflicts are inherent in living together and can even offer opportunities for growth – provided we engage with them constructively. Pax Christi Vlaanderen believes that people can create a context in which active nonviolence, attentive listening, dialogue and the pursuit of reconciliation are possible- at the level of individuals and communities or states alike. This leads to conflict prevention, conflict transformation, restorative processes and, ultimately, connection.

At state level, building the architecture of collective security is a first step towards peace. Pax Christi Vlaanderen promotes this step in this manifesto, realistically and with hope, as that is what we owe the world today. War does not exist because there is conflict. It exists because we fail to work towards peace every day. We therefore seek to engage society as a whole to become peacebuilders, both in times of conflict and in times of peace.

2. FROM CLASSICAL SECURITY THINKING TO COMPREHENSIVE, GLOBAL, AND COOPERATIVE SECURITY

CLASSICAL SECURITY THINKING

In traditional security thinking, states must remain constantly on guard against attack. Supporters of this approach saw their assumptions reinforced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In the absence of a world government or overarching authority above states, each state is considered responsible for ensuring its own security. To sustain military power, states require economic strength. The principal actors in this system are major economic and military powers. Today, these include the United States, China, Russia, India, Japan and the European Union.

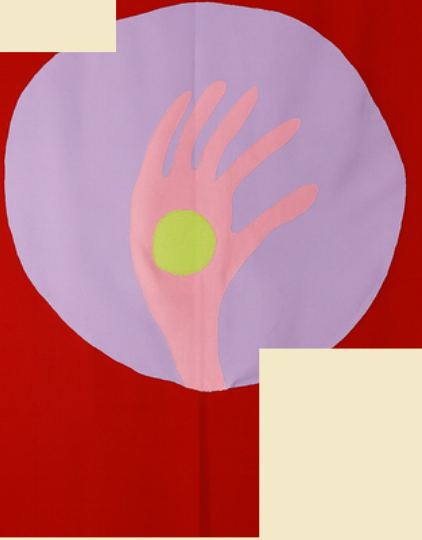
This defensive mindset nevertheless demands offensive thinking, and sometimes it does offensive action -if only to respond militarily to a perceived threat. As the Latin adage has it, Si vis pacem, para bellum: if you want peace, prepare for war. Within this framework, states claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Citizens may not use violence against one another because the state is expected to guarantee their security. The state therefore deploys resources to provide this protection, not only internally through law enforcement but also externally, through the armed forces.

Traditional security thinking assigns three functions to the armed forces: protection of national territory, foreign military intervention and support to civil authorities, e.g. in response to terrorism, natural disasters or pandemics.

Depending on the external security environment, the emphasis may shift between territorial defence and expeditionary operations. Within NATO, the post-Cold War period placed greater emphasis on military interventions – in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya – until Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014 prompted a renewed focus on territorial defence. The war in Ukraine and a perceived threat from China are likely to reinforce this trend.

A worldview shaped by fear and anxiety inevitably goes hand in hand with power politics. What one wins, the other loses.

COMPREHENSIVE, GLOBAL AND COOPERATIVE SECURITY



Pax Christi Vlaanderen by contrast regards human beings – and all of humanity rather than states – as primary actors. Peace policy should therefore serve the well-being of people, not the abstract notion of states. What is the value of wealthy and ostensibly secure states if their citizens live in anxiety and dissatisfaction, while climate change and a renewed nuclear arms race place the future of our planet at risk? For this reason, Pax Christi Vlaanderen advocates comprehensive, global, and cooperative security.

1) COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY

Comprehensive security encompasses not only military but also human, economic, social, ecological and cultural security. In human security, the safety of the person is central – not only physical safety but also the active pursuit of human dignity for all. In his 1941 Four Freedoms speech, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that freedom from fear and freedom from want are fundamental. The United Nations used these freedoms as pillars of its Millennium Declaration. Security cannot be separated from other rights.

2) GLOBAL SECURITY

Global security asserts that national security is inseparable from the security of our planet. Beyond pandemics, two threats are making peace impossible and could mean the end of life on Earth: **nuclear weapons** and **climate change**.

3) COOPERATIVE SECURITY

Cooperative security regards security as a shared responsibility – something which requires collaboration. We do not speak of security against others but with others. Unlike traditional security thinking, cooperative security is based on a win-win approach for all parties. Little of this can currently be seen between the United States and Russia or between the United States and China. Yet during the Cold War, the US and USSR/Russia managed to maintain shared security through bilateral agreements (such as START I and START II), alongside multilateral arms control treaties such as the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. The same approach can be applied today.

Pax Christi Vlaanderen also unequivocally advocates a strong focus on conflict prevention. Mutual respect, active listening, dialogue, and reconciliation can prevent many violent conflicts. This can be done, for example, by investing in diplomacy as institutionalised dialogue, in development cooperation and in non-violent mediation. Preventing war is considerably less costly than waging one. Financial resources are better directed toward healthcare, education and reducing socio-economic inequality. In doing so, the underlying causes of violent conflict are also addressed.

The European Union offers a compelling example. Following the Second World War, its creation helped to bring an end to centuries of war between Germany and France. In recognition of this achievement, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nuclear Weapons

In theory, the nuclear threat is the easiest to solve: simply eliminate all nuclear weapons. This had already been set out in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968, signed by all countries except Israel, India and Pakistan (North Korea withdrew in 2002). Nuclear-armed states promised to disarm, and the rest of the world promised never to acquire nuclear weapons. The 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons supplements the NPT with an unequivocal ban.

Yet nuclear-armed states and their allies remain committed to nuclear deterrence. Despite all assurances, roughly 12,119 nuclear weapons still exist worldwide. The nuclear-armed states – the US, Russia, China, the UK, France, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea – continue to invest over 100 billion dollars each year in modernising their arsenals. As long as no substantial disarmament steps are taken, there is a high likelihood that more nuclear-armed states will emerge and that these weapons will, intentionally or unintentionally, be used again. The consequences would be catastrophic.

Belgium is formally a non-nuclear-weapon state, but it is a member of NATO, a nuclear alliance. Since the Cold War, our country has hosted US tactical nuclear weapons. A November 2020 opinion poll showed that 77 per cent of Belgians support the Ban Treaty, yet our government refuses to sign it and remains silent, making it difficult to foster a societal and political debate.



Climate

The climate issue is more tangible than nuclear weapons. It is also more difficult to solve, partly because it challenges our growth-based economic system. Pax Christi Vlaanderen advocates a holistic approach as reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Sustainable Security Index of the Oxford Research Group.

Climate change, biodiversity loss and resource scarcity carry the risk of triggering conflicts. To prevent this, we must move towards ecologically responsible and just prosperity, underpinned by a sufficiently strong state – government, police and judiciary – and a vibrant society, including NGOs, civil society and grassroots organisations.

As noted earlier, human security remains central to Pax Christi Vlaanderen: people must be protected not only against traditional military threats but also against socio-economic threats such as poverty and inequality.



PROBLEMS WITH THE CLASSIC SECURITY THINKING

Classic security policy focuses on preventing wars between states, primarily through military and economic power and only secondarily through diplomatic efforts. Some states seek ever greater power in order to become the hegemon, the dominant state above all others.

Most traditional security thinkers argue, however, that states should have sufficient, rather than maximum, military and economic power in order to maintain a balance of power, which is thought to support international stability. Yet shifting power differences between states are inherent to the system, making it inherently unstable and dangerous. The most powerful state may attack a less powerful one to prevent it from growing stronger [which may have been Russia's fear regarding an advancing West]. Conversely, a rising power may become overconfident and attack a declining one. Consider the rise of Germany and the decline of the UK at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, one of the root causes of WWI.



NATO AS A COLLECTIVE DEFENCE ORGANIZATION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was founded in 1949 to counter the threat of the USSR and communism to the West. After the USSR and the Warsaw Pact - NATO's counterpart - dissolved in 1991, it would have been logical to dissolve NATO as well. This did not happen. Instead, NATO expanded into Eastern Europe and towards Russia, despite verbal assurances to the contrary. The US and Europe did not engage with proposals to integrate Russia as an equal partner into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

As a result, there was no safety net in the event of conflicts between Russia and the West. Relations between the two power blocs deteriorated following the Kosovo War (1999), the unilateral US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty on missile defence systems (2001), the Iraq War (2003) and NATO's successive expansion rounds - including the 2008 promise to admit Georgia and Ukraine. It was widely understood that this promise constituted a red line for Russia, yet these concerns were repeatedly ignored.

Since 2007 Russia has responded aggressively. NATO's former adversary came once again to be perceived as the enemy. None of this justifies the war against Ukraine. It does help explain the Kremlin's strategic mindset, though.

When its old adversary disappeared in the early 1990s, NATO shifted from defending its own territory to launching foreign missions: Yugoslavia (1995), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (from 2003) and Libya (2011). The outcomes of these interventions can hardly be described as successful.



Finally, NATO remains one of the major obstacles to nuclear disarmament. Two-thirds of all global nuclear-weapon expenditure comes from the US, the UK and France. Until recently, the US was the only country stationing nuclear weapons on foreign soil, including in Belgium. In the meantime, Belarus has also deployed Russian tactical nuclear weapons.

NATO still refuses to declare that it will never use nuclear weapons first, despite maintaining a combined defence budget of 1.5 trillion dollars per year, making it the most powerful military alliance in history. By comparison, China spends 300 billion dollars and Russia 140 billion dollars. Pax Christi Flanders therefore believes that, since the end of the Cold War, NATO has undermined rather than strengthened our security.

THE USE OF MILITARY POWER

States possess a range of military instruments that allow them to maintain power and protect themselves: defence, armament, alliances, and spheres of influence. Economic resources – expressed in Gross National Product [GNP] – are required to sustain these instruments.

The primary instrument of military power is a well-equipped army, including personnel, weapons, and sound command structures. One indicator of an army's strength is its defence budget. Globally, around 2.7 trillion dollars is spent annually on defence – a quarter more than just before the end of the Cold War. By comparison, with 200 billion dollars per year, extreme poverty and famine could be eradicated worldwide. Even the COVID-19 pandemic had no significant impact on global military budgets.

Some states, sometimes described as night-watchman or garrison states, such as the US (3.4 per cent of GNP), Russia (7.1 per cent), and Greece (3.1 per cent), spend a large share of their national income on defence (figures for 2024). Other countries, including Belgium (1.3 per cent, with a target of 2 per cent in 2025), Germany (1.4 per cent before the war in Ukraine; now 2 per cent), Japan (1 per cent before the war; now 1.4 per cent) and Canada (1.3 per cent) spend relatively less. At the June 2025 NATO summit, it was decided that all NATO members would aim for 3.5 + 1.5 per cent of GNP – effectively turning them all into night-watchman states. Yet countries such as Japan (55 billion USD) and Germany (88 billion USD) already had large defence budgets due to their high GNP, ranking ninth and seventh globally in military spending.

In many countries of the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, more money is spent on defence than on healthcare. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, the global economic cost of violent conflict in 2020 was nearly 15 trillion dollars, i.e. 11.6 per cent of global income.



According to Pax Christi Flanders, armament can create the so-called security dilemma: a situation in which states feel less secure because neighbours and adversaries arm themselves in response. Even if armament is intended to be defensive, it is often perceived as offensive. Fully defensive weapons do not exist. Missile defence systems may appear defensive, but adversaries view them differently, as they can neutralise offensive weapons, potentially leaving the side without missile defence at a disadvantage. This fuels the offensive-defensive arms race further.

Another instrument of military power, particularly for smaller states, is forming alliances, also known as collective defence organisations. In such alliances, states promise to assist one another if any member is attacked. Alliances are particularly valuable in times of great danger, especially when war is imminent, as is again the case today in Europe.

Traditional security thinkers argue that long-term cooperation between states is impossible due to mutual distrust. Alliances are therefore often dissolved after wars – as happened after both World Wars and the Cold War (at least for the Warsaw Pact). NATO's continued existence is an exception.

Alliances in peacetime, however, are perverse, as they must identify an external enemy to justify their existence - as NATO did after 1990.

Finally, there are spheres of influence. Large states that feel insecure seek to establish spheres of influence, often through buffer states. Ukraine is a clear example: Russia perceives it as a buffer against the West.

AN ALTERNATIVE, PEACEFUL APPROACH

Thinking in terms of balance of power aims primarily to prevent war. Sometimes it succeeds, but often it does not. In any case, it falls short of the peace ideal that Pax Christi Vlaanderen advocates. To reach that ideal, we must move towards cooperation between states in the form of a collective security architecture.

THE CORE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

Collective security means that states recognise one another's right to security and cooperate on this basis within a regulatory framework designed to prevent war. These rules are codified in international law and treaties. A collective security organisation is essential for this purpose. Such organisations already exist: the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Clear rules also ensure clear communication. Miscalculations and misunderstandings between states can be assessed and corrected more quickly. Conflicts between states are inevitable, but within a collective security framework, rules ensure that such disputes are resolved before they escalate into violence.

Under traditional balance-of-power logic, it is “every state for itself”, and alliances are at best fragile. In collective security, states guarantee one another a peaceful method of conflict resolution. This removes the incentive for military buildup and creates space for development-oriented investments that address the root causes of many conflicts. 16

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

History offers several examples of peace based on collective security. Consider the Concert of Europe, established after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which secured decades of stability and peace partly because France, the defeated power, was included. The League of Nations, founded after World War I, was another such organisation - though less successful, as Germany was initially excluded and not all major powers, such as the US, joined. Small and large states had equal power in the League - a feature that was later altered in the UN.

THE LONG ROAD TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE

For Pax Christi Vlaanderen, durable, positive peace remains the ultimate benchmark. To achieve this, individuals, groups, and societal structures must jointly embrace the challenge of sustainable development.

The collective security we advocate is a meaningful intermediate step. Further along the path to sustainable peace lies the concept of a security community: a group of states that no longer fear one another. Traditional balance-of-power thinking deems this impossible. Yet examples show that security communities are achievable: the Scandinavian countries or the European Union. Within collective security, security communities have room to flourish.

THE UN AS A GLOBAL COLLECTIVE SECURITY ORGANIZATION

The UN comes closest to a world government, though it is certainly not one – at least, not yet. This international organisation, of which almost every state is a member, comprises dozens of agencies addressing a wide range of issues. One of the most important is the UN Security Council.

The Security Council is the world's foremost body for peace and security and can impose binding measures on all member states. It has fifteen members, including five permanent members (the P-5: the US, Russia, China, the UK and France) and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms. The Council's composition is outdated: major countries such as India and Brazil do not hold permanent seats. Reform requires the approval of the existing P-5, making meaningful change virtually impossible and undermining the Council's legitimacy.

This could be offset by a more active UN General Assembly (GA) - effectively a UN Parliament - where every state already has one vote. In recent years, the GA has adopted both the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the recognition of Palestine.

Pax Christi Vlaanderen believes the UN should also engage with non-state actors – i.e. NGOs, academic institutions and international associations of cities or regions – by establishing a procedure for mandatory consultation.

Binding Security Council decisions, which carry far-reaching consequences, include imposing economic sanctions on member states, potentially followed by military action. On paper, sanctions appear a middle way between a “soft” diplomatic condemnation and a “hard” military intervention. In practice, however, many sanctions fail to achieve their objectives.

Ordinary citizens suffer far more than political elites. Traditional trade sanctions are often circumvented through smuggling or black-market activity. In some cases, the sanctioned state retreats into a fortress economy, as Russia has since 2022. Sanctions can also provoke countermeasures, meaning that all parties lose – as is evident from the war in Ukraine. Finally, sanctions are easy to impose but difficult to lift, so their effects linger.

Better alternatives include smart or targeted sanctions, designed to mitigate these problems by, for example, denying visas to political leaders or freezing the assets of individuals or companies.

During the Cold War, the Security Council was largely paralysed by the veto power of the five permanent members. Even today, the veto can block crucial decisions. The US, for instance, shields Israel from condemnation, making action on the world’s deadliest conflicts extraordinarily difficult: of the twenty-five deadliest conflicts since the Cold War, no decision was taken in ten cases.

The veto, however, was introduced to ensure that the most powerful states of 1945 would join the UN and remain engaged – unlike the League of Nations, which failed partly for this reason.

Ideally, the veto would be abolished. In the meantime, Pax Christi Vlaanderen advocates refining it: when a veto is exercised, the state must present a constructive, detailed alternative within a set deadline, after which the veto expires. Another option is to allow the GA, by a two-thirds majority, to override a veto.

Pax Christi Vlaanderen also calls for strengthening the International Criminal Court, which prosecutes war criminals. It should be given greater resources and authority to hold perpetrators, commanders, and the industries behind them accountable for crimes against humanity, genocide, and ecocide. This can support reconciliation and provide a deterrent effect.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the UN's financial resources are limited, as they are dependent on member-state contributions. Pax Christi Vlaanderen believes that reducing global military expenditure could benefit UN funding, or conversely, UN contributions could form part of an alternative defence budget.

OSCE AS A REGIONAL COLLECTIVE SECURITY ORGANISATION

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was established in 1994, spanning from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The US, Russia, and European states all participate. It evolved from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), launched in the early 1970s in Helsinki. Under the CSCE, arms-control negotiations made major progress following the Cold War.

Perhaps more significantly- the West pushed human rights as one of the CSCE's three pillars, compelling the USSR to confront these issues. This gave momentum to trade unions such as Solidarity in Poland and human-rights organisations like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia – crucial actors behind the major protests and revolutions at the end of the 1980s. The CSCE thus played a pivotal role in ending the Cold War.

Yet the OSCE has never fully demonstrated its potential, partly because NATO continued to exist and partly because tensions between Russia and the West have grown since the 1990s. Before the 2022 war, the OSCE was the only international organisation with observers on the ground in Eastern Ukraine.

Pax Christi Vlaanderen calls for strengthening the OSCE's powers and budget so that it might eventually assume NATO's role as the primary regional security organisation. This would allow the US, EU, and Russia to engage in permanent diplomatic dialogue within the OSCE framework on regional conflicts such as those in Ukraine.

THE EU AS PART OF A COLLECTIVE SECURITY ORGANISATION

Although the EU's predecessor was explicitly created as a peace project between France and Germany, its powers have expanded over decades, including into foreign and security policy. If the current European Monetary Union is complemented by a future European Political Union - a federal Europe - defence would likely also become a European competence. At that point, our primary political community would no longer be the nation-state but the supranational EU. The French seat on the Security Council could then be replaced by an EU seat.

Pax Christi Vlaanderen argues that a European Defence Union should focus on territorial protection and civil support – not on military intervention. This is entirely feasible if embedded within a functioning regional and global collective security system. External military interventions should be used sparingly and always require UN Security Council approval.

Cooperation within the EU could generate defence savings through specialisation and pooling and sharing. A strong European Defence Union, grounded in the principles of comprehensive, global, and cooperative security, would render NATO unnecessary, according to Pax Christi Vlaanderen. It would also limit the excessive influence of non-EU powers, such as the US, over European security matters.

At present, decision-making is quietly advancing towards greater European defence integration – through PESCO, the European Defence Agency, and the European Defence Fund – often without democratic input from the European Parliament or civil society.

3. THE 4D-APPROACH TO SECURITY

How Do We Guarantee Our Security? And how do we design policies that genuinely protect people? This is the challenge facing policymakers today. From the standpoint of classical security thinking, the focus lies almost exclusively on Defence. Pax Christi Vlaanderen, however, advocates a peace-centred approach in which the four Ds – Defence, Diplomacy, Development, and Democracy – together form the foundation of security policy.

DIPLOMACY

Conflicts between individuals, within organisations, and between states are, unfortunately, unavoidable. There are three primary responses: fighting, avoidance, or capitulation. None are ideal. Fighting escalates the conflict; as an old Pax Christi campaign once declared, “Violence gets you nowhere.” Avoiding the conflict, or immediately giving in, merely blinds us to the underlying causes, which are likely to resurface.

A far superior approach is problem-solving: listening and engaging constructively with the other party to address the conflict and its causes, usually through dialogue and occasionally negotiation, without resorting to threats of violence. Each side gives and takes.

In international politics, this is the role of diplomacy – an institution with deep historical roots and a proven track record. Ambassadors represent their countries worldwide, enabling rapid and direct communication to resolve bilateral issues.

Wars are ended through peace agreements achieved via diplomacy. The four-year conflict in the Balkans during the 1990s concluded with the Dayton Agreement. The IRA in Northern Ireland ceased its terrorist activities thanks to the Good Friday Agreement. Even when peace agreements fail, diplomacy is essential for achieving ceasefires, as after the Korean War in 1953.

Collective security also depends on diplomacy. The successful “Concert of Europe” after 1815 relied on multiple congresses and diplomatic meetings, most famously the Congress of Vienna. The engine of international organisations such as the UN, OSCE, and EU is multilateral diplomacy. Within the EU, member states and institutions engage in constant consultation to make decisions without violence, without immediate concessions and without avoidance. If diplomacy did not exist, we would need to invent it at once.

Diplomacy is not always straightforward: it demands patience, perseverance, creativity, empathy and more. Sometimes, reaching a peace agreement takes years. What is incomprehensible, however, is when states or international organisations refuse to talk. A negative example is the EU and NATO’s current policy towards Russia since its invasion of Ukraine in 2022: diplomatic engagement from Brussels is minimal, while EU and NATO states continue to invest heavily in Defence. If diplomacy were effectively employed and a negotiated solution with Russia were found, much of this defence expenditure could be avoided.

The Harmel Doctrine, named after Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel, emphasises that the ideal approach combines defence with diplomacy, as NATO applied in the early 1970s. Where is the Harmel Doctrine in 2025 regarding the war in Ukraine?

DEVELOPMENT

Diplomatic negotiation involves more than formal agreements. Bringing warring parties together requires material support and confidence-building measures -both of which have costs.

Immediate humanitarian interventions alleviate urgent suffering: medical care for injured civilians during ongoing conflicts, for example. This work is often carried out by specialised UN agencies or civil-society organisations such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent and Doctors Without Borders.

Support for refugees – providing emergency shelter, food, water, sanitation, and protection – is also essential. A stark example is the violent conflict in Sudan since April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Two years on, nearly 13 million people, i.e. one in three Sudanese, are displaced: approximately 8.6 million internally and 3.8 million as refugees in neighbouring countries.

In such cases, needs outstrip financial capacity: halting the refugee flow must become a priority in negotiations. Nonetheless, protective measures can be funded temporarily as part of peace processes. Targeted medical support for returning Syrian families in the northwest, post-Assad regime, is one example. Another is the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan for 2022–2025, supported by the UN and international partners, opening sparsely populated agricultural areas along the border to regional refugees. The programme benefits both refugees and local communities, providing schools, healthcare, and essential services for all.

Longer-term peace agreements may include reconstruction or compensation for damages incurred. In wars such as the conflict in Ukraine, these matters will form the basis of separate post-conflict initiatives.

Strategic interventions may also take the form of emergency aid: repairing bridges crucial for humanitarian corridors, restoring medical infrastructure, or repairing energy facilities. Development must strengthen the rule of law, democratic governance and the creation of social, economic and cultural structures in collaboration with civil society organisations. In cases using reconciliation or truth commissions for conflict management (such as in South Africa), channels for testimony and reconciliation initiatives may likewise be funded.

Pax Christi Vlaanderen distinguishes between development within the 3D approach and development cooperation aimed at sustainable development in Least Developed Countries (LDCs, UN definition). LDC development relies on the self-development of target groups, supported by individuals, organisations, states, and international institutions in solidarity.

There is a striking connection: most conflicts and wars are directly linked to inequalities in wealth and power structures, and poverty is a constant source of conflict.

DEMOCRACY

Although democracy is not always explicitly cited as the fourth “D”, it plays an essential role in underpinning the other three pillars of security policy. Before examining this further, the key features of democracy or democratic rule of law must be outlined.

A democratic state governed by the rule of law features a robust legal framework and independent democratic institutions across all branches of power. The population elects a parliament in free and fair elections, which makes laws. The government implements them. The judiciary ensures their fair application. Elected officials are accountable after their term, and mechanisms for accountability exist between elections.

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Free and independent media act as a critical watchdog, scrutinising those in power, reporting critically on government policy and providing a platform for diverse voices. Transparency and access to information enable citizens to make informed decisions and actively participate in democracy.

Social media increasingly supplement traditional media. Policymakers use these channels to communicate directly with the public, especially young people. Media literacy and critical awareness are indispensable to navigate this information landscape.

Democracy is more than periodic voting. It requires active citizenship and civic participation. Civil society institutions — socio-cultural organisations, trade unions, NGOs — strengthen democratic oversight and amplify the voices of those otherwise unheard. Policies that respect diversity, minorities, and social inclusion constitute an inclusive political culture.

A democratic rule of law also upholds fundamental rights and freedoms, including expression, assembly, and religion. A robust democratic state can adapt to societal changes and crises while maintaining these fundamental principles.

HOW DO THESE CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRACY CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SECURITY APPROACH?

In a democracy, citizens generally perceive their government as legitimate. This legitimacy promotes social cohesion, reduces internal conflict and enhances resilience to external threats. Society becomes safer.

Democracy fosters transparency and openness in international relations. Democracies are seen as more reliable and more inclined to pursue peaceful, cooperative diplomacy. Decisions on defence spending and development cooperation are publicly debated and politically accountable.



In Belgium, the King formally declares war but the constitution mandates that Parliament, representatives of the people, be informed. Parliament approves the military budget and exercises oversight, including over military actions.

Democratic states are generally less inclined to wage war against one another – which is the essence of the Democratic Peace Theory: shared democratic values, respect for human rights, and preference for dialogue lead leaders to favour diplomacy over war. Public opinion in democracies is also often critical of war and able to make its voice heard and thus acts as a check on aggressive policies.



A state that respects the rights of its own citizens is perceived internationally as trustworthy and peaceful. Conversely, a state that represses its own people is unlikely to respect other states' sovereignty or rights.

In short, strong democratic foundations enhance national safety and stability and strengthen the other three Ds. Democracy is central to Pax Christi Flanders' security approach.

DEFENCE

Pax Christi Vlaanderen advocates for a minimalist EU army, operating within the UN as a global collective security organisation, and, where feasible, within a regional collective security framework – whether a strengthened OSCE or a fundamentally reformed NATO, including Russia. Furthermore, we call for a Minister for Peace and Disarmament, replacing Defence, similar to New Zealand's model (Secretary of Disarmament and Arms Control).

A NEW ROLE FOR DEFENCE

In the coming years, we will increasingly confront new threats arising from climate change, such as floods, forest fires, or heath fires. The most obvious role for Defence - beyond territorial protection - is to provide assistance to the nation, and, where appropriate, to less developed states facing similar challenges. This is particularly relevant for a country like Belgium, where Civil Protection and B-FAST (intended for rescue operations abroad) have been scaled back. During the Verviers–Pepinster floods in the summer of 2021, civilians were left stranded on rooftops for up to fourteen hours, despite the army having helicopters available.

For NATO, as a collective defence organisation, there is no role in peacetime.

Finally, it must be noted that the UN's financial resources are limited and dependent on contributions from member states. In this context, Pax Christi Flanders advocates a system of non-compulsory, yet government-organised and compensated, volunteer service for students or recent graduates, similar to the arrangement in Germany. Young adults who choose to participate could help combat fires, floods and other disasters with Civil Protection, engage in nature conservation and biodiversity work, or support the health, social and cultural sectors or civil society organisations. Such a programme would foster societal engagement, encourage interaction between groups of young people who might otherwise never meet, and contribute to countering polarisation.

BANNING DANGEROUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

Weapons that cannot distinguish between civilians and combatants must be banned, in accordance with international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. Only by adhering to this principle can unnecessary suffering be prevented. Biological weapons (1972), anti-personnel mines (1997), chemical weapons (1993) and cluster munitions (2008) have already been prohibited. This principle now extends to nuclear weapons, thanks to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017). Pax Christi Flanders urges Belgium to sign and ratify this treaty without delay. A first step was Belgium's attendance as an observer at the first and second meetings of the treaty parties, though regrettably, it did not attend the third.

Emerging weapon systems, such as autonomous weapons capable of selecting and engaging targets without human oversight, should likewise be declared illegal.

Furthermore, manufacturers and traders of weapon systems must be held criminally accountable when their products are used unlawfully. Through the conventional arms trade, many weapons still find their way into conflict zones or into the hands of states that violate human rights. Introducing a tax on arms trading could enhance transparency and build mutual trust between states. Revenue from such a tax could be invested in healthcare, education, or even an international peace fund to assist countries and individuals recovering from the consequences of war.

FOREIGN MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

Since military force generally results in greater violence and civilian casualties rather than solutions, Pax Christi Flanders is, in principle, opposed to foreign military interventions. Wars create not only losers; the winners are often not states at all. They are arms dealers, the weapons industry, and its investors.

Moreover, the question arises: which country has the authority to intervene in another state? If Western powers intervene in the Middle East today, could China or another state do the same within Europe?

Successful military interventions are exceedingly rare. Past examples, such as Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, demonstrate that publicly stated reasons often mask underlying interests, including access to oil, gas or other natural resources.

Military interventions exact a heavy toll in both human lives and financial resources - resources which would be far better devoted to preventing conflict.

Consequently, Pax Christi Flanders sees very few scenarios in which the Belgian army could contribute meaningfully to a legitimate foreign military intervention, except in the context of self-defence. This raises serious questions regarding the so-called “purchase of the century”: the 34 F-35 fighter jets, costing €4 billion in procurement alone, with total lifecycle costs potentially rising to €15 billion. The rationale for purchasing these aircraft is further weakened by the fact that they are designed to carry the nuclear weapons currently stationed on Belgian soil. Decisions by the Arizona government may even push the number of F-35s ordered higher.

In addition to protecting the national territory and assisting the nation, Belgian Defence should focus on tasks within its core expertise - such as demining, providing logistical support to refugees or disaster victims, engineering tasks like repairing bridges and infrastructure and cybersecurity- rather than attempting to cover every conceivable domain.

CATEGORIZATION OF MILITARY MISSIONS ACCORDING TO PAX CHRISTI FLANDERS

Pax Christi Flanders proposes using the following categorization for military missions:

Military missions that are always illegitimate and often also illegal

- Territorial expansion
- Preventive attacks to curb proliferation, for example Israel against Iran in July 2025.

Military missions that are usually illegitimate because the true reason is not disclosed

- Humanitarian interventions
- Democratization of states
- Peace-enforcement missions

Military missions that are not illegitimate but stem from traditional security thinking

- Protection of allies who are being attacked

Possible legitimate interventions (in addition to self-defence)

- Collective security (after approval by the UN Security Council)
- Evacuation of nationals
- Peacekeeping missions (after approval by the UN Security Council)
- Protection of shipping lanes

AN ALTERNATIVE DEFENCE BUDGET

Traditional security policy does not merely strive for the highest possible defence budget to mitigate 'the many threats.' In countries without major threats (such as Belgium), Defence is often treated as a job-creation programme. Economically, however, investments in other sectors are more profitable.

According to Pax Christi Flanders, the Belgian army could be further downsized to **20,000 military personnel** through natural attrition and potential retraining options.

Within NATO, it was agreed in 2014 (after Russia's annexation of Crimea) that member states should spend **2% of GDP on Defence**. As mentioned earlier, the Arizona government wants Belgium to reach 2% starting in 2025. At the NATO Summit in The Hague in June 2025, it was agreed to spend **3.5 + 1.5 (= 5)% by 2035**.

Pax Christi Flanders believes that the majority of the defence budget would be better spent on other priorities for example on **peacebuilding [without military means] in unstable states, or on combating climate change**. The international fund intended to help developing countries cope with the effects of climate change still has not reached the promised 100 billion dollars.

Huge investments are also needed to meet the coming social challenges. By focusing on peacebuilding, the number of conflicts will decline, resulting in fewer refugees and less need for military interventions.

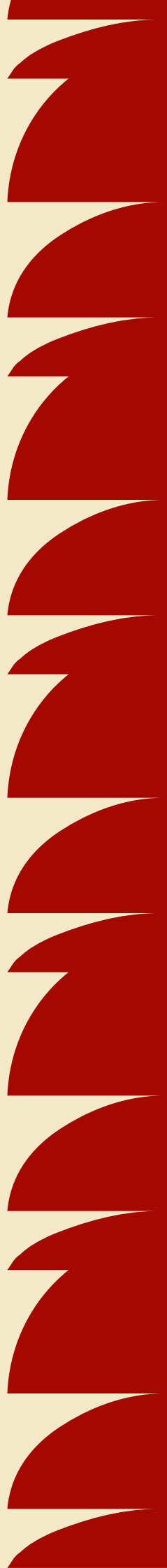
Another possibility is to include, within NATO's 5% norm, the expenditures for domestic security (such as police and cybersecurity), the UN, and development cooperation.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: PEACEBUILDERS

The climate crisis and nuclear weapons remain the gravest threats to the planet and to human security. Only cooperation between communities and states can avert this existential danger. The current security architecture - rooted in military balance of power - primarily creates new risks. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the possibility of destruction remains. As long as ever-growing defence budgets are justified, essential investments in the environment, education, and social justice are deprived of the resources they urgently require.

That is why Pax Christi Flanders delineates a different path with this manifesto: **collective security as an alternative to the balance of power**. Collective security rests on the belief that security is shared and that cooperation yields more than competition. It shifts attention from armament to human dignity, from fear to interconnection.

In our approach, the four Ds are central. **Diplomacy** creates space for dialogue and prevents escalation. **Development** offers perspective and addresses the inequalities that often form the breeding ground for conflict. Democracy guarantees legitimacy, transparency and participation, which make peace sustainable. And **Defence** also has a role but a new one: not as a driver of arms races or foreign intervention but as a force that protects civilians, provides disaster relief and contributes to international peace under clearly defined conditions.



This vision is more than a written manifesto – it is **not confined to paper**. Through our **Peacebuilders** campaign, we translate this Manifesto for Peace into a concrete social project. In Peace Labs across Flanders and Brussels, people of all ages and backgrounds create new symbols and stories of peace. These come together in the **Temple of Peace**, a visible and tangible sign that peace is not an abstract ideal but something we can create and experience collectively.

This manifesto becomes **more than a policy document**: it is the substantive backbone of a broad movement that makes peace a daily commitment.

The choice is in front of us: do we continue investing in a fragile balance of power, or do we build together an architecture of collective security and sustainable peace? Pax Christi Flanders chooses the latter unequivocally, and seeks to activate citizens, policymakers, companies, and civil society organisations as peacebuilders who work for peace every day.

COLOFON

Peace Manifesto – Pax Christi Flanders

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For the original Flemish “Manifest voor Vrede”, see <https://www.vredesbouwers.be/manifest-van-de-vrede>

