

AN ARMY OF HUMANITY TO FIGHT CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

During the UN's 75th anniversary year, this global governance invention just might help save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

Tad Daley

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Tad Daley, Director of Policy Analysis at Citizens for Global Solutions, is author of the book APOCALYPSE NEVER: Forging the Path to a Nuclear Weapon-Free World from Rutgers University Press. He's now at work on a new book about the history and future of the idea of a world republic.

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In 1945, as WWII ground its way toward a conclusion at Hiroshima and Nagasaki that portended only darker days ahead, a young man named Duncan Cameron was charged by the United Kingdom with treason. His offense? Refusing to take up arms for his country. When questioned under oath in the dock, however, the precocious 18-year-old insisted he was no coward, and no pacifist. Duncan Cameron announced that he was quite willing to fight to defend not the nation where he happened to have been born, but all of humankind. And he declared that he would gladly put his life on the line to enforce a universal rule of law, by serving as an officer in a "World Police Force."

Perhaps we might call him, in retrospect, a planetary patriot.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of not only the end of that terrible war, but the birth of the United Nations. The UN Charter was signed by 50 countries in San Francisco on June 26th, 1945, and came into force four months later on October 24th. World leaders plan to gather this September in New York, coronavirus permitting, both to celebrate the occasion and to chart a course for the years ahead.

Two major civil society initiatives, known as UN2020 and Together First, have emerged to focus on that latter ambition. Mostly alas outside the United States, they are laboring now to craft and push global governance innovations which might be enacted as soon as that September 2020 summit. And they are also exploring larger, longer-term ideas – perhaps aiming for the UN’s centennial in 2045 -- regarding the ideal global structures by which nine or ten billion humans might optimally organize themselves as a unified global civilization.

One of the most important proposals now circulating in this debate is to invent at last the force that was not available for young Cameron to join. The United Nations needs soldiers of its own – to put a stop to genocide, crimes against humanity, and abominations that rival Dante’s inferno when national governments are unwilling to dispatch their own forces to do so.

There has never been any shortage of violent conflicts inside one state which directly engage the interests of outside states – leading to military intervention. This rarely leads to optimal outcomes for the citizens inside those states! Syria might be the best contemporary example. It is perhaps not hyperbole to assert that “the main reason” for the humanitarian catastrophe inside that country since 2011 is the sharply divergent interests of outside actors like the United States, Russia, Turkey and Iran – all of which have deployed their own boots on the ground in Syria.

But there is equally no shortage of internal violent conflicts where the opposite strategic calculus prevails. UN member states, over and over again, have proven unwilling to put their own forces at risk – no matter how macabre the atrocities – when the fight in question does not directly engage their own national interests. The catalogue of such cases just since the Cold War’s end wearies the soul. Bosnia, four years of international abandonment (most agonizingly in Sarajevo and Srebrenica) before the 1995 Dayton Accords. Darfur. Congo. The abuses of the Rohingya by the government of Myanmar. The violations of Boko Haram in West Africa. The barbarities of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

“Never again” we say. Again and again we see.

Rwanda remains the prototypical, still unbearable case study. Hutu extremists began massacring members of the Tutsi minority after a plane crash killed President Juvenal Habyarimana in 1994. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali pleaded with 19 developed UN member states to dispatch just a handful of troops – who could have quickly established safe corridors and safe havens, and provided refuge for hundreds of thousands of innocents. All 19 turned him down.

Most Americans were sickened by the violence in Rwanda, reported nightly on their television newscasts. But no one could credibly argue that America had any vital national interests in Rwanda! President Clinton, under pressure to intervene, could not have made that more clear. “We cannot dispatch our troops to solve every human misery. ... We are prepared to defend ourselves and our fundamental interests when they are threatened.” The same was true for virtually every other country in the world. So for ten long weeks, perhaps three quarters of a

million souls were tortured, and raped, and hacked to pieces alive in Rwanda. “I swear to you,” said Boutros-Ghali later, “that we could have stopped the genocide in Rwanda with 400 paratroopers.”

Enter stage left the proposal to create a permanent and directly-recruited "UN Volunteer Force" (UNVF). Its *raison d'être* would be to defend not the national interests of any particular state, but our common human interest in creating a world free of such outrages. It would be filled with crack soldiers from all around the planet, well-equipped, extensively trained, superbly led by experienced military officers. They would explicitly volunteer to put their lives on the line not to defend their own country but to protect humanity – even when their own country has no dog in the fight.

Perhaps we might call these courageous women and men of the future “world citizen soldiers.” To bring an end to crimes against humanity, the world needs an army of humanity.

This idea was first formally put forth in 1948, when the first UN Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, called for establishing a “UN Legion.” It was elaborately developed in William Frye’s seminal 1957 book, *A United Nations Peace Force*. Former President Ronald Reagan endorsed it in a speech at Oxford in 1992 – calling it “an army of conscience.” Governor Bill Clinton advocated it during his 1992 presidential campaign, and in 1993 his new Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, placed it on the UN Security Council agenda. It was considerably elaborated by Sir Brian Urquhart in a landmark 1993 *New York Review* article, “For a UN Volunteer Military Force.” Pulitzer-Prize winning author Kai Bird followed up in *The Nation* magazine in 1994 with “The Case for a UN Army.” One of the central recommendations of the 1995 Commission on Global Governance was the creation of “a highly trained UN Volunteer Force ... willing to take combat risks.” In 2001 Congressman James McGovern of Virginia introduced a “U.N. Rapid Deployment Act,” co-sponsored by more than 50 members. And American foreign policy establishment heavyweights Morton Abramowitz and Thomas Pickering revived the proposal again in a 2008 essay in *Foreign Affairs*.

Many mistakenly believe the UN already possesses such a force – the “UN Blue Helmets.” But while the UN may own the helmets the nations still own the troops! The Secretary-General must implore member states to contribute to new UN peacekeeping missions every time, from scratch. That’s why Secretary-General Kofi Annan often observed, with unconcealed exasperation, that the UN is the only fire department in the world which can’t even hire firefighters until after the blaze breaks out.

Perhaps most importantly from the American perspective, a UNVF could free American presidents from facing the excruciating dilemma that confronted President Clinton in Rwanda. He faced two options, and both of them were miserable. One was dispatching U.S. forces, and incurring however small the number some inevitable American casualties, to stop atrocities that, however dreadful, had little impact upon us. The other, which by all accounts he chose with

much agony, was doing nothing -- while the nightmare continued to unfold before all of our very eyes.

Who would authorize the deployment of a UNVF? What criteria would they apply? Could preventive deployments sometimes forestall violence? Might its very existence serve as a deterrent? Can we prevent it from becoming yet another vehicle for the strong doing what they can and the weak enduring what they must? These kinds of questions have been thoroughly explored in the literature over the years. None of them are inherently unanswerable.

Perhaps the most important question is whether a UNVF might inspire people to think anew about their primary identities and allegiances. Which brings us back to Duncan Cameron. Might his world police force move more than a few – including many who have no intention of signing up – to openly proclaim themselves to be citizens of the world?

That term has come in for a lot of abuse recently – not least from the current occupant of the White House. Perhaps the brutal coronavirus plague, driving home the Big Truth that we all live in one interconnected global civilization, will cause more than a few to reconsider the lure of hypernationalism, and to reject sentiments like “America First” in favor of “Humanity First.”

A UNVF would give individual citizens all around the world the ability to volunteer to do more than just “serve their countries.” It would give them the opportunity to serve humanity. And then thousands of brave young soldiers might hear the ubiquitous greeting -- “thank you for your service” -- not just from their fellow nationals. They would hear it from their fellow Earthlings.

And then perhaps, someday, we will see a gaggle of reporters and a couple of TV cameras set up on the front lawn of a Minneapolis home. And a middle aged couple will walk out, slowly and heavily, toward the microphones. And one of them will tearfully say, “Our only child Megan was killed yesterday, serving in the UNVF mission in Freedonia. Here is the medal she won in the Twin Cities Triathlon just nine months ago. Here is a photograph of her playing Mrs. Soames in *Our Town* when she was a sophomore in high school. We will never get over losing her.”

But then the other one will say: “However ... know this. Because of Megan’s sacrifice, 100 other parents in a faraway land did not lose their own daughters and sons today. Our country has no dog in that fight. But all those children are members of the human race. Just like our own daughter, they are for us all beloved children of the family of humankind. So have no doubt. Our precious little soldier girl did not die in vain.”