

A United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS): one step toward a global peace system

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The objective of the proposed United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) is to develop a standing UN capacity that can respond rapidly and reliably to address four or more of the UN's long-standing challenges. A UNEPS is designed to:

- help prevent armed conflict and genocide/atrocity crimes;
- to protect civilians at risk;
- to ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations; and
- to address human needs in areas where others either cannot or will not.

In addition to the four primary roles identified, a UNEPS has emancipatory potential to help in the following areas: facilitating disarmament; freeing up enormous resources; saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war; and as a step toward a more legitimate, effective, universal peace system.

A UNEPS will be a new UN formation.

Ten Core Principles of the proposed UNEPS:

1. a permanent standing, integrated UN formation;
2. highly trained and well-equipped personnel;
3. ready for immediate deployment upon authorization of the UN Security Council;
4. multidimensional (civilians, police and military);
5. multifunctional (capable of diverse assignments with specialized skills for security, humanitarian, health and environmental crises);
6. composed of 13,500 dedicated personnel (recruited professionals who volunteer for service and are then screened, selected, trained and employed by the UN);
7. developed to ensure regional and gender equitable representation;
8. co-located at a designated UN base under an operational headquarters and two mobile mission headquarters;
9. at sufficient strength to operate in high-threat environments; and,
10. a service to complement existing UN and regional arrangements, with a “first responder” role to cover the initial six months until Member States can deploy.¹

What's Different?

A UNEPS would be a standing UN formation, ready to serve in diverse UN operations, immediately available upon authorization of the UN Security Council. With dedicated UN personnel, advanced doctrine, training and equipment, UN operations could get off to a good start quickly at the outset of a crisis.

As a multidimensional service, a UNEPS will include sufficient police to restore law and order, a military formation to deter aggression and maintain security, as well civilian teams to provide essential services for conflict resolution, human rights, health, disaster assistance and peacebuilding quick impact projects.

A multifunctional service ensures a cost-effective capacity to help with a wider array of tasks. With its modular formation, responses can be tailored for specific operational requirements.

A UNEPS is to be a first-in, first-out service, limited to deployments of six months. With a prompt, coherent start-up, its role is to de-escalate and calm the crisis, ideally averting the need for further deployments or, if required, to lay a solid foundation for follow-on efforts.

As a 'UN 911' first responder for complex emergencies, a UNEPS is not intended for war-fighting, but primarily to provide prompt, reliable crisis support. Yet it may also serve as a strategic reserve, a robust protector and a security guarantor, with the capacity to both deter and respond.

Another distinct feature of a UNEPS is that it would be composed of devoted individuals recruited worldwide within a UN rather than national service. After screening and selection on the basis of merit, skill and commitment, its personnel would be co-located on a UNEPS base where they would be extensively trained, equipped and employed by the UN.

Thus, a UNEPS is a new model.

Unlike previous proposals, a UNEPS is to complement existing UN arrangements, with a service that's gender-equitable, which should help to develop higher standards system-wide. Aside from being a more rapid and reliable life-saver, this option is also a cost-saver.

The case for a UNEPS

From Rwanda and Srebrenica to Myanmar and Syria, the pattern of ‘too little, too late’ – incurring vast suffering, higher costs and wider consequences – has simply gone on for far too long. Instead of UN rapid deployment to prevent worse, routine delays allow worse.

People world-wide share a problem. According to research from the Institute for Economics and Peace, "the world is less peaceful today than at any time in the past decade".² “After declining for much of the 1990s, the number of major civil wars has almost tripled in the past decade”.³ Global armed conflicts are also killing more.⁴ "The chances of nuclear war are higher than they’ve been in generations" -- a warning the UN disarmament chief recently conveyed to the UN Security Council.⁵ With the *Global Peace Index 2018* reporting the annual economic cost of violence (war and armed conflict) at a staggering \$14.7 Trillion (USD), people know this isn’t a safe or sustainable system.⁶

Countries world-wide lack the capacity to prevent armed conflict and to protect civilians at risk. What they do have is frequently either unavailable to the UN or inappropriate for UN peace operations. Coalition attempts to protect tend to be too destructive and even counter-productive.

UN peace operations definitely help, but they’re now relegated to post-conflict stabilization — putting a lid on a crisis once the fighting slows to allow the start of a peace process. For every operation, the UN faces an arduous process of renting the highly-valued resources of its member states, negotiating around their terms and accepting their conditions. Now it usually takes six-to-twelve months or more to deploy.

As a result, conflicts tend to escalate and spread, setting back the prospects for development and disarmament for decades. Then they require larger, longer UN operations at far higher costs.

Does it seem odd that countries could put a man on the moon fifty years back, but have yet to equip the UN to meet its primary objective – “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”? No, it’s not that governments don’t know how to start or what would work.⁷ **Yet they won’t develop such a service until they see a viable plan and feel the pressure of a broad-based, informed constituency.**

The UNEPS proposal is one step toward meeting these serious, recurring challenges. Without a dedicated UN Service, national military establishments will remain reluctant to support UN peace operations, military transformation or any shift away from further preparation for more war.

The projected expense and cost-effectiveness

Developing a UNEPS will entail approximately \$3 billion in start-up costs, with annual recurring costs of \$1.5 billion, shared proportionally among 193 Member States. Clearly, there will be additional expenses in deploying a UNEPS, which would require strategic and tactical air-lift for early-in formations, as well as sea-lift for follow-on, heavier assets.⁸

With such additional costs, the advantages must be substantive. A UNEPS should help to prevent the escalation of volatile conflicts; deter groups from violence; and cut the size, length, and frequency of UN operations. Even with success in *just one* of those areas, it would provide a substantive return on the investment. As noted, there are other positive benefits in this development, which merit further support and investment.

Next Steps

With pivotal elections ahead, progressive policy options, including UNEPS must be on the agenda. What more is needed?

First, if there is to be a UNEPS, civil society must press political leaders to think big, bold and outward, encouraging multilateral cooperation, innovation and unprecedented shifts.

Second, educational outreach must include political outreach, particularly among progressive parties world-wide. And indeed, some leaders are now encouraging a renewal of progressive internationalism.⁹

Third, links should be created between UNEPS support and the NGO communities that address climate change, social justice, and sustainable development. Clearly, there is a need to build bridges and partnerships. The umbrella of sustainable common security encourages such support and solidarity, as well as other substantive shifts urgently needed to address global challenges.¹⁰

A UNEPS is no panacea, but just one step toward a global peace system. With modest support, this option could make a world of difference. As William R. Frye noted, “that which is radical one year can become conservative and accepted the next.”¹¹

End Notes

¹ World Federalist Movement – Canada, *UNEPS Backgrounder*, revised January 2017.

Available: <https://www.wfmcanda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/0217-re-print-0516-unepps-backgrounder8-fnl.pdf>

² Cited in Dominic Dudley, "Where And Why The World Is Getting More Dangerous", *Forbes*, June 6, 2018

Available: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2018/06/06/why-the-world-is-getting-more-dangerous/#212535a6dc67>

³ Sebastian von Einsiedel, with Louise Bosetti, James Cockayne, Cale Salih and Wilfred Wan, "Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict", United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, Occasional Paper, United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, 10 March 2017.

Available: https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6156/Civil_war_trends_UPDATED.pdf

These authors also confirm that, "from 2011 to today, there has been a six-fold increase in battle deaths, with 2014 and 2015 being the deadliest years on the battlefield since the end of the Cold War."

⁴ Richard Norton-Taylor, "Global armed conflicts becoming more deadly, major study finds", *The Guardian*, May 20, 2015

Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/20/armed-conflict-deaths-increase-syria-iraq-afghanistan-yemen>

⁵ Cited in Linda McQuaig, "Prospect of nuclear war highest in decades, yet media ignores", *Toronto Star*, April 10, 2019.

Available: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2019/04/10/prospect-of-nuclear-war-highest-in-decades-yet-media-ignores.html>

⁶ Global Peace Index 2018, Institute for Economics and Peace.

Available: <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/06/Global-Peace-Index-2018-2.pdf>

As reported, "The economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2017 was \$14.76 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. This figure is equivalent to 12.4 per cent of the world's economic activity (gross world product) or \$1,988 for every person."

⁷ As early as 1961, officials in the US State Department identified a UN Peace Force as a prerequisite to wider disarmament. In their words,

“There is an inseparable relationship between the scaling down of national armaments on the one hand and the building up of international peacekeeping machinery and institutions on the other. Nations are unlikely to shed their means of self-protection in the absence of alternative ways to safeguard their legitimate interests. This can only be achieved through the progressive strengthening of international institutions under the United Nations and by creating a United Nations Peace Force to enforce the peace as the disarmament process proceeds.”

See, *Freedom from war: The United States program for general and complete disarmament in a peaceful world*, (United States. Dept. of State. Publication, 1961)

Available: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.a0014375794;view=1up;seq=3>

⁸ The UN Department of Field Support recently conducted a five-year study into a Global Field Support Strategy that demonstrates how logistics, supply and sustainment in operations might be improved to facilitate rapid development of a new UN formation.

⁹ For example see, Peter Beinart, "It's Foreign Policy That Distinguishes Bernie This Time", *The Atlantic*, February 21, 2019. Available: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/foreign-policy-distinguishes-bernie-sanders-2020/583279/>

Also see, "The Sanders Institute's Gathering Was About Saving the World, But It Was Not About Bernie Sanders", *Common Dreams*, December 10, 2018. Available: <https://www.commondreams.org/.../sanders-institutes-gathering-was-about-saving-wor...>

¹⁰ See, Langille, "Sustainable Common Security", *Mondial*, World Federalist Movement - Canada, December 2016. Available: <https://www.wfmcanda.org/2016/12/sustainable-common-security/>

Also see, Langille, "Pulling Together for Sustainable Common Security", The Rideau Institute, June 11, 2018. Available: <https://www.rideauinstitute.ca/2018/06/11/pulling-together-for-sustainable-common-security/>

¹¹ William R. Frye, *A United Nations Peace Force*, (New York: Oceana Publications, 1957).