



[Make Peace Possible With a United Nations Emergency Peace Service](#)

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[PETER LANGILLE](#), April 14, 2022

Soon, the United Nations will be called to do what it can't in the Ukraine war. Unfortunately, the UN's tool-box remains largely empty and insufficiently equipped to prevent armed conflict and protect people. Any expecting UN peacekeepers to separate belligerents, monitor a ceasefire and ensure safe havens and humanitarian corridors are likely to be disappointed again.

Our world is inappropriately prepared for more emergencies and violent conflict ahead. So, it's urgent to consider what might still help there and elsewhere.

It's not far-fetched now to imagine far more insecurity for people on an endangered planet. Last year's ['Code Red for Humanity'](#) was promptly followed by another warning of [potential world conflict and chaos](#). Our global emergencies will soon be more intense and more frequent, thus more powerfully affecting all.

Even before the Ukraine war, 84 million people had been [forcibly displaced](#) and, this year, over 274 million people will need [humanitarian assistance](#) and protection. The number of conflicts globally increased by 88 per cent over the past 10 years. [Reports](#) now warn the climate crisis could displace 1.2 billion people by 2050. New extremes of weather and vast inequality will prompt more desperate conditions and a higher incidence of violent conflict.

These tragedies for the individuals and countries affected also signal our growing interdependence on interconnected global systems. People now share mutual vulnerability in a global neighborhood. What goes around will likely come around quicker than ever. Expect emergencies. Expect institutional intransigence and delays. Expect calls for more military spending irrespective of ever-higher costs and risks. Expect shocks and shifts.

The flip side in every crisis is opportunity. Many now appreciate the need for new approaches, even new systems. Perhaps, we also need to imagine a virtuous circle whereby providing care and help to people abroad, helps to free up enormous resources to address our shared needs. By helping others, we enhance our own security.

What might encourage such a shift away from another long war, with mutually assured destruction (MAD) in a 'balance of terror' toward a UN-centered global peace system? The answer will not be found in more 'national security' systems largely designed to cause destruction and death. More militarism is already a shared global problem, not the solution.

A more effective UN, with a capacity for mutually assured prevention and protection merits serious consideration. After all, the UN was founded to prevent war and aggression, just never provided the funding or a dedicated UN capacity to fulfill assigned tasks.

Shortly after the world heard President Dwight Eisenhower's 1961 farewell warning of a [military-industrial complex](#)—with unwarranted influence over every sector and the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power—people also heard of a viable option.

In '[Freedom From War](#)', President J.F. Kennedy and officials in the State Department pointed to the process and a crucial requirement. American officials determined that preventing war and encouraging wider disarmament "can only be achieved" by a more effective UN with a UN Peace Force to safeguard legitimate interests.

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The Solution:

A proposal for a United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) is a more sophisticated option than a UN standing force.

With this one development—effectively a 'UN 911 first-responder' for complex emergencies—the UN would finally have a capacity to address four of its tougher assigned tasks: to help prevent armed conflict and genocide, to protect civilians at extreme risk, to ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations, and to provide human needs where others either cannot or will not.

What's distinctly different in this idea?

The UNEPS proposal is for a permanent standing, integrated UN formation; highly trained and well-equipped; ready for immediate deployment upon authorization of the UN Security Council.

This service is to be multidimensional (civilians, police and military) and multifunctional (capable of diverse assignments with specialized skills for security, humanitarian, health and environmental crises).

As an integrated first-responder, a UNEPS is not limited to simply stopping direct violence, but also extends to initiating quick-impact and long-term projects. Aside from addressing human needs, this should help to counter structural violence (exploitation and exclusion), and stem cultural violence. By including specialists in conflict resolution and mediation, human rights

monitors and educators, peacebuilding advisory units, and medical teams, there is a far better prospect of stemming or solving a crisis.

A UNEPS need not be large, but composed of 13,500 dedicated personnel (recruited professionals, selected, trained and employed by the UN); developed to ensure regional and gender equitable representation.

Ideally, it would be located at a designated UN base under an operational headquarters and two mobile mission headquarters; at sufficient strength to operate in high-threat environments. Yet unlike previous proposals, a UNEPS is to complement existing UN arrangements.

Three further advantages stand out.

First, UN peace operations would improve with a standing first-responder. Instead of taking 6 months-to- a year or more to deploy national contingents, the UN would have its own rapid and reliable service to address a wider array of emergencies. Rather than the current the focus on 'post-conflict stabilization', which now starts after the fighting stops—like a police force that can only intervene once the killing and rape has largely concluded—a UNEPS is to provide an immediate response within days.

Then, prevention and protection are far more manageable tasks when arriving promptly before conflicts escalate and spread into worse violence. In turn, there should be less need for later, larger, longer and far more costly operations. An ounce of prevention might be worth a ton of cure.

Any preventive system works best when it seldom has to intervene to stem crises. As with a police or defense effort, it's best to be known to have credible means to deter aggression and, when required, the means to intervene to stop crimes. In practice, this usually works by having a legitimate capacity that is recognized and ready to respond as needed.

A standing UNEPS would convey a legitimate presence ready 24/7 to discourage violence. Its deployable elements should be sufficient to deter most, if not all belligerents, to operate in high-risk environments and to intervene if needed to stop aggressive parties.

As a UNEPS will be limited in size and composition, its optimum application is in preventive deployment; in acting before a wider, unmanageable situation arises. In this respect, it may be seen as roughly analogous to the sort of fire extinguisher one keeps in the kitchen; it is useless once the entire house is ablaze, but usually very effective when the first flames begin to spread; and, it may be very helpful in protecting people, even in providing a safe area until help arrives.

Second, as a new model, a UNEPS is to encourage a wider shift toward providing prompt care and help, with an array of useful services. In what's now a global neighborhood, there will be a greater need for legitimate, universal emergency services designed to convey support. With a gender-equitable composition, there are also better prospects for peacemaking and peacebuilding. Standards would also improve system-wide.

The need for more far-reaching system shifts is already evident. Understandably, many governments will not stop preparing for more war until they see a universal commitment to ensure security backed up by a UN capacity that's rapid and reliable.

Increasingly, it's understood that progress in wider disarmament and even the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons depends on a coherent alternative to nuclear and conventional deterrence. The alternative need not be similar to what exists, large or powerfully destructive. It needs to be credible, respected and widely valued.

The third advantage of the UNEPS option is in its potential as a UN 'emergency security provider'; a [crucial step toward 'freedom from war'](#).

As an emergency security provider, the likely roles of a UNEPS would be similar to that of a 'first-responder', a trip-wire, a vanguard and a standing presence to dissuade, deter and, respond rapidly, if necessary. The minimal deterrent and modest military capacity within are appropriate and likely to be adequate.

In this capacity, a UNEPS does not require heavy military elements nor a capacity for mid-to-high-intensity war-fighting. In representing the

international community, it's unlikely to encounter violent resistance from any national armed force. If needed for back-up and support, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (France, China, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom) will continue to have ample capacity in the near term. But they may not need so much in the long-term.

Contrary to [official claims](#) of a UN standing capacity's "immense expense", a UNEPS would also be a cost-saver. Its development will entail approximately \$3.5 billion in start-up costs, with annual recurring costs of \$1.5 billion, shared proportionally among 193 Member States.

This service should help to prevent the escalation of volatile conflicts; deter groups from violence; and cut the size, length, cost and frequency of UN operations. Success in just one of these areas would provide a real return on the investment.

Clearly, the bigger bonus in developing a UNEPS is that it starts an overdue cooperative process; a step toward a global peace system; one to encourage military build-down and disarmament; one urgently needed to free up vast resources to help with a climate emergency, pandemic recovery and a looming social crisis; one that might save \$ trillions.

Here, it may help to recognize there is truth to the slogan, 'Planet or War, You Choose'. A more heavily-militarized world is unsustainable and now a serious threat to human survival.

Our future, if there is to be one, urgently depends on far deeper cooperation, not confrontation.

Last September, a '[Global Census Poll](#)' found, "widespread skepticism that the United Nations is well-prepared for the challenges of the next decade." Skepticism spreads when there is too little to inspire a constituency and further support.

It's unlikely a coincidence that UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, recently announced another [Agenda for Peace](#) will be forthcoming in 2022. Or, that the near-term choice is framed as either a 'breakdown' to worse or a

'breakthrough' to better. Sticking with the current approach, of renting national contingents that take six months to a year to deploy, irrespective of the crisis, is a route to 'breakdown'.

To breakthrough to better, supportive parties need to imagine a UN prepared to fulfill assigned tasks rapidly and reliably; one to provide security, with prompt care and help; and, one that inspires and appeals universally.

A forthcoming UN [Agenda for Peace](#) presents a unique opportunity to boost the UNEPS idea. In elaborating on his priorities, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres accorded a similar emphasis to prevention and protection, reducing violence and placing women at the center of security policies. And, the [People's Declaration of June 2020](#) explicitly called for more standing capacities available on short-notice for UN peace operations.

With two encouraging precedents calling for a UNEPS in the U.S. House of Representatives ([H-Res 180](#) and [H-Res 213](#)) as a viable policy option for 'saving millions of lives and billions of dollars', efforts are underway for a third.

Thankfully, millions are now active in the struggle to save the planet and succeeding generations. Many have also mobilized in resistance to more war and higher military spending. But it seems unlikely that peace will prevail or that war and armed conflict will be prevented simply from resistance or calls for cuts.

A useful point from Buckminster Fuller was that, "you never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

The proposed UNEPS is a new model to solve multiple problems. And, this is when viable policy options are needed most.

It's only in the aftermath of tragic wars and/or genocides when governments consider their options under public pressure to shift approaches, even systems. Then, when the need is urgent and evident to most, the prior preparation of coherent plans usually isn't. And, very seldom have widely-appealing plans been supported by a global constituency. So, once the

pressure subsidies, governments tend to fall back on dubious familiar approaches that serve powerful interests. A UNEPS is also an attempt to get ahead of this pattern.

A UN Emergency Peace Service is no panacea or cure all, but a new approach to help. And, it might be a game-changer if 'we the people' step up, pull together and give the idea a boost.

With our shared global emergencies, it's time to give peace another chance.

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