

## How Can Veterans Contribute to Peace and Security in Society? Presentation by Hans Blix to World Veterans Federation

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*Check against delivery*

I am pleased to address this meeting of the World Veterans Federation and I add my welcome to the many veterans who have come here. You will rightly discuss **what society needs to do** to help returning veterans. It is a practically important and legitimate issue. Your main subject, however, is **how you, as veterans can contribute to society** – to peace and security.

My short answer is that you have a vital role as **reporters from a grim reality**.

We are flooded by reports but it is often not easy to find the **reality** in the daily flood, where ambitious and serious journalism is mixed with and may be drowned by censored reports by ‘embedded’ journalists, sensationalism, and the information from vested interest groups – including governments.

**Madison Ave** in New York is the symbol of public relations management and it is said that when people on that avenue quote President **Lincoln’s** famous line: ‘You can fool some people all the time, and all people for some time, but you cannot fool all people all the time...’-- they **add** that this is much **too pessimistic a view...!**

**It is in a very mixed flood of information that we must seek the reality that we are to handle. Unless we** have a good diagnosis, how can we expect to devise meaningful therapies?

We need to **hear the eye witnesses**. Veterans have a broad and varying experience from the field. Governments and the public need to hear directly from them – what they did, what they think was achieved – and not achieved – at their places of action, what they think can be learnt, corrected and improved.

I am not a veteran with experience from the field of active conflict but I have been **engaged** in organizations – the IAEA and the UN

commission for inspections in Iraq – trying to provide the world **credible data** about the existence or absence of weapons of mass destruction and about activities possibly pointing to attempts to acquire such weapons.

**Such international inspection** is becoming **increasingly important** in arms control and disarmament and is akin to the **fact finding and observation role** of various UN missions for peace and security.

There are other mechanisms for **impartial international fact-finding**. One is **UNSCEAR** – the United Nations Scientific Commission on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. It provides the world **scientific data** about radiation and its effect, e.g. from the Fukushima nuclear accident. It once told us about the **radioactive fall out** from the nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, which contributed to the conclusion of the Partial Test Ban Treaty.

Another is more widely known: the **IPCC** – the International Panel on Climate Change. It is a scientific body whose reporting today is vital as background for discussion and meaningful action to protect the **climate**.

The world community will need more **impartial fact finding -- and it needs to pay attention to the findings that result**. This, regrettably, is not always the case. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a case of ignoring impartial, international fact finding from the field. The inadequate response to the reports and conclusions of the IPCC is another case.

When, as veterans, you report in your home society your experience from the field of action I think you need also to be **knowledgeable about the broader question** of how the world community **looks upon armed conflicts** and **how it seeks peace and security**. You need to place the specific role you have played on the ground in the broader world context. I have some knowledge and experience of the security system of United Nations I hope you will accept that I focus on how the UN addresses armed conflict and seeks peace and security.

The famous, very first lines of the **Preamble** of the United Nations' Charter read:

*“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...”*

I can see **no** mission in the world that is **more** important – and I feel **optimistic** that it **can be fulfilled** – even this century.

It is not out of any all encompassing optimism. I feel **less hopeful**, I confess, about success on another vitally important global mission that did not stare the authors of the UN Charter in the face in 1945: to **save succeeding generations from the deterioration and destruction of an environment in which the human species can live and thrive.**

Since 1972, when I participated in the Stockholm UN conference on the human environment, the world has **woken up** to the dramatic need for this mission, **but** in many ways the environment has deteriorated even further and the threats have become greater and clearer.

**You will not focus on this** issue here, but **we should all be aware** that **war damages the human environment** and that a **nuclear war** could be the destroyer of the human civilization. From experience many of you know how **war** destroys lives, traumatizes people, kills cattle, blows dwellings to pieces, craterizes and makes vast areas inaccessible by mines left in the ground.

**We should also be aware** that the **prevention of war** and the reduction of military expenses would **free up** enormous **resources** in terms of money and human talent to protect the environment. Annual global military expenses stand currently at over **1.700 billion dollars**. Even half of this amount could go a long way, for instance

- to attain a more effective generation and use of energy; and
- a greater use of clean sources of energy, like renewables and **nuclear power, and**
- to combat desertification and achieve reforestation.

#### **How can I feel optimism about disarmament and peace?**

- **Syria** is exploding, Congo is bleeding, Afghanistan and Iraq are failing to calm, the situation on the Korean peninsula is tense.
- **Iran** is hard hit by economic sanctions and may be hit by bombs.

- **Cyber warfare** is initiated and
- **drones** are dropped in many countries as the **laws of war** with a right to kill adversaries are claimed to be applicable over ever wider areas.

All this is true and dismaying. Nevertheless, **peace research** tells us that the number of **armed conflicts** in the world and the number of killed in armed conflicts has actually **gone down** in the last 100 years. Let us notice that

- between 1913 and 1945 we had **two** world wars and the joint peace mechanism of the time, the League of Nations, was largely a European club and lasted only 20 years;
- between 1945 and 2013 we have had **no** world war and the joint peace mechanism, the United Nations, comprises all states in the world and has lasted 68 years.

**The traditional causes of war were**

- conflicts about **borders**,
- **the wish to conquer** land, and
- **the wish to spread a religion or an ideology**.

Over time most – but not all -- **borders** have been **settled**. The colonies that were grabbed have been freed. Perhaps Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait in 1991 was the world's last **attempted conquest** of land.

And the **end of the Cold War** and the disintegration of the Soviet empire may have marked the **end of armed struggle between religions and ideologies**. There will not be a war of civilizations.

A **world war** involving the big powers now looks like a very **remote risk**. **Market economies** of various shades are the globally accepted economic pattern and **democracy** of various kinds is the almost universally claimed political pattern.

Over **history** we can see a **pacification of ever larger areas of the globe**

- In **Scandinavia** – as in other corners of the world – we used to be very accomplished in slaughtering each other. For about two hundred years there have been **no wars between Nordic states**.
- The **European Union** was created as a **peace project** and whatever Europeans may feel about it and about the euro, I think they are

convinced there will not be another war in Europe or – even – between Europe and **Russia**.

- Wars between the US and Mexico or in **South America are also horrors of the past**.
- In **Africa**, many **borders** are not firmly or clearly settled and there is terrible bloodshed and great need for peace keeping and peace enforcement, **but** conflicts there **no longer** risk leading to **larger conflagrations**, as they did around 1960..
- After the end of the Cold War, **even** eruptions in the **Middle East**, although brutal and bloody, hardly risk causing global conflict.
- While **Taiwan**, the **China-India border** and **Kashmir** are dangerous flashpoints, they are handled with some **restraint**.
- The many differences that exist about **islands and borders at sea** should be susceptible of **diplomatic or judicial settlement**. Years ago Norway and Denmark turned to the International Court of Justice to settle their controversy over Eastern Greenland. And it did.

No doubt **many factors** have contributed to **this gradual global pacification**. In my view, **nuclear weapons** should **not** be given any part of the credit. It is true that their existence may **counsel restraint**, but the **cost** of that counsel – the risk of use – was and is unacceptable. Several times during the Cold War – as in the Cuban missile crisis – it was more by luck than skill that the launching of nuclear weapons was avoided.

**Rather**, I believe the vastly increased international trade and communications and the vast expansion of international law and **international institutions** are **weaving the world together in** a fabric that is getting **ever harder to tear**.

**MAD** – the mutually assured destruction – is being replaced as **a factor for peace** by **MED** - mutual economic dependence. It leads states ever more often to **restraint** rather than to **sabre rattling**.

The **risk is not zero**, regrettably, that these modern factors generally leading to restraint could be **outweighed** in some situation, if governments of big powers allowed themselves to **throw away critical thinking**. It is, indeed, only **ten years ago** that some governments, in my view, miserably failed to exercise such thinking. In **March 2003**, the **alliance of ‘willing states’** **invaded Iraq** without any Security Council authorization. They advanced as

the **main reason** for their **erroneous assessment** that Iraq retained weapons of mass destruction in violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

The 2003 **Iraq war** is **now history** but it may have been a **turning point** in several respects and it has many lessons to offer,

A **first lesson** is that governments should make full use of available **international verification** to check the validity of national intelligence. As I mentioned, impartial and professional **fact finding** – including reports from UN inspections and teams for cease fire observation – is becoming ever more important to **avoid** fatal misunderstandings and false motivations.

A **second lesson** may be that while a **surgical military operation from the outside may remove an odious leadership**, liberation from oppression **into** chaos and anarchy may be a doubtful gain. Outside powers that for various – rarely altruistic – reasons take military action bear responsibility for the result: **‘If you break the pot you own it.’** The experience is that the emergence of decent governance must come **from the inside** – from an accommodation between the people of the region – perhaps with some non-partisan assistance from the UN.

Is the world then to remain **passive** in the face of armed slaughter in a country?

The responsibility to protect doctrine – **the R2P** – proclaimed by the United Nations – declares that governments have a duty to protect all people within their jurisdiction and that if they fail in this duty the UN must exert pressure on them. The UN declaration foresees even the possibility of **armed interventions to protect human rights**, but **only** with approval of the Security Council and **only** in extreme situations. Even such actions are likely to be difficult, but they will have the advantage of **international legitimacy** and **support** that action by **self appointed world police** is likely to lack.

A **third result** of the case of Iraq was a greater **awareness** and discussion of the international **legal restrictions that have emerged on** the use of armed force in interstate relations. It was only through the UN Charter in 1945 that significant restrictions were adopted. Armed force against other states was allowed, according to the Charter, essentially **only** in **self defense** and in actions **authorized by the Security Council**. While these rules and the security system of the UN were of limited relevance during the Cold War,

the Security Council's decision and the UN's action to stop Iraq's occupation of Kuwait **in 1991** were celebrated with enthusiasm. President Bush Senior even spoke of '**a new world order**'.

Regrettably that order did not last long. In a **speech in Chicago in 1999** Tony Blair asked a question suggesting that great powers should take it upon themselves to act as an armed world police – **even without green light from the UN** – to rid a country of a dictatorial regime, where this is doable and change will not come by evolution. This is what happened in Iraq in 2003.

**However**, the broader **reactions** to the Iraq war and to the assertiveness of the Bush Jr administration may have led to **renewed support for the restrictive UN rule**. A report to UN Secretary General Annan by a High Level Panel comprising prominent figures from all corners of the world took the view that

*“in a world full of perceived potential threats **the risk to global order is simply too great for the legality of unilateral preventive action**. Allowing it to one is allowing it to all.”*

Later, President Obama has showed appreciation for the legal restriction. In his Nobel lecture he said – I quote

*‘I believe that all nations – strong and weak alike – must adhere to standards that govern the use of force. I – like any head of state – reserve the right to act **unilaterally if necessary, to defend my nation**. Nevertheless, I am convinced that adhering to standards strengthen those who do and isolate – and weakens those who don't.’*

There is, of course, **no guarantee** that even when war **between** big powers has become unlikely, as is the case after the end of the Cold War, there could not be a resort to the use of armed force in disregard of the Charter rules in **other conflicts**.

A recent report about the reorganization of **Germany's armed forces** into a professional rather than conscript force suggests that 'classical' types of threats are no longer in focus, but that other types of threats may arise. Germany considers itself surrounded by friendly states and believes it to be more likely that its military may be employed in areas of **conflict and crisis around** the world than for the **territorial defense of Germany**. The report

suggests that ‘terrorist networks, failed states, weapons of mass destruction, and civil wars will become the new threats to safety and stability.

Given that the modern interdependence of states does not fully guarantee the peace, **what kind of armed conflicts could there be** and what would the reaction of the outside world – including the UN – be to them?

**A big military power** could use armed force **against a smaller state**, as the US did in Viet Nam and Russia did in South Ossetia and Georgia. Any attempt effectively to counter such armed action would mean a large armed conflict and is unlikely. The outside world, including the UN, is more likely to engage verbally with condemnations and with humanitarian assistance..

**Medium sized or small states might engage in full scale armed conflicts.** In such cases the UN Security Council might agree to intervene to end the conflict. The Council might entrust a big power – if **one can be found willing** – to enforce peace. In 1950, the Council asked the **US** to lead the UN in the **Korean war** and in 1991 to the US was asked to lead the UN action to stop **Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait**. In cases, where no big power may be willing to take on such UN mandated military lead burdens there might be only appeals, mediation and humanitarian help. This was the case in the **Iraq-Iran war** in the 1980s.

In **armed conflicts of lesser dimensions** – whether between states or inside one state -- or where larger conflicts are ending, the UN might turn more broadly to members and **their regional organizations** to provide military and other forces for a variety of functions, for instance

- **Supervising** cease fires or the surrendering of weapons
- **Keeping calm** and order in afflicted areas of various sizes
- **Guarding** borders and ensuring there are no incursions
- Running local civil administrations
- **Supervising** p.o.w. exchanges or evacuations of people.

The United Nations has a long experience of such tasks and the activity currently engages some **120 000 people in the field** – most of them in Africa. I think it is likely that we shall see a further increase in these activities. As the German report that I cited suggests, there may be **less**



**frequent need for territorial defense** and more for restoring **territorial order**.

In some cases the UN turns the task of peace keeping and peace enforcement over to a **regional organization – as the African Union or NATO**. In other cases the UN Secretariat engages directly in the organization. If the world community is to **get away from the era of warring states** it is fundamental that it organizes itself institutionally to cope with armed actions that erupt. In the same way as states once organized to cope with and tame regional **war lords**. Perhaps it may be accomplished during this century.

There have been proposals for a **standing international force, but these have not so far had extensive support**. One might suspect that big powers will prefer the **ad hoc** organization of peace missions. This enables them easier to use their position in the Security Council or the power of their purse to influence the mandate and composition of each mission.

For the organizational work this cannot be convenient. Some streamlining is achieved through the large and long experience gained by many states that provide troops to UN missions and that may have standing military groups ready to serve the UN. **However**, what we have looks like – and is -- a **somewhat primitive system** – in need of more structure.

It was not meant to be that way **in 1945** when the UN Charter was adopted. The authors looked to cooperation between the big powers winners of WW II to cope with armed conflicts that could arise. In Article 47 of the UN Charter they provided for a **Military Staff Committee** to consist of the **Chiefs of Staff** of the 5 permanent members of the Council. It was

*‘to advise and assist the Security Council on all questions relating to the Security Council’s military requirements for the maintenance of international peace and security, **the employment and command of forces placed at its disposal**, the regulation of armaments and possible disarmament.’*

It is further provided that the Committee should be responsible under the Security Council for **the strategic direction of any armed forces** placed at the disposal of the Security Council. It was authorized to establish regional subcommittees.

Not surprisingly, this Committee was **not operative during the long Cold War** and no one seems to have suggested that it should be woken up, There are **now** special UN mechanisms created under the Council to deal with peace keeping, peace enforcement and peace building.

Maybe current UN machinery can be further developed and have firmer **links to regional organizations**. However, I cannot refrain from an out of the box reflexion. Could not the well developed and long existing but somewhat **underemployed NATO** be restructured to become a **UNATO** – the United Nations Associated Troop Organization – and serve as a principal military arm of the UN.

Having **lost the enemy** for which it was once created and against which it was ably developed, NATO has **long searched for new missions**. It has, indeed, been relied upon on a large scale by the Security Council outside the transatlantic area– in **Afghanistan** and in **Libya** and it seems **increasingly unlikely to take on armed actions without Security Council authorization**.

Linking NATO more organically to the UN would, of course, require some **significant changes** in the organization. While NATO now has a council through which Russia is associated, all potential contributors of troops for operations to be undertaken at the demand of the UN would need **somehow to become active participants in the organization**.

Political voices have been raised for large expansions of NATO membership. If the organization were more closely linked to serve the UN, such expansion would be natural.

Let me conclude with some further comments on the **contribution of veterans to peace and security**. While I think the future will give **fewer veterans from purely national armed action**, there may be **more veterans from forces that have acted under UN authorization**, whether for peace enforcement or peace keeping. However, both groups should come back home **giving us eye witness reports from the field**.

**Veterans should also have things to tell the world about the need for restraints to be observed in all armed action** and that are codified in the

laws of war, most recently in the Additional Protocols of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions.

**Veterans** should speak up and explain that **respect for the laws of war is required of all and is to the benefit of all.**

Shocking violations of rules are sometimes reported and it is true that even respect for them cannot bring more than marginal alleviation of the grimness of armed action. This is no reason to be cynical about the rules or lower the demand for respect. The rules do not set unrealistic standards. They are written with the full participation of people with experience of armed conflict.

The humanitarian gains brought by the laws of war may be worth much – perhaps everything – in many situations: the prisoner who is exchanged or saved from mistreatment or humiliation, the villages who are saved from indiscriminate bombings and other attacks, the civilians who may have escaped the crippling effects of fragmentation bombs...

Armed actions inevitably leads to suffering, but the purpose of armed action is to **achieve political aims**, not to inflict suffering or bring revenge. Rather, an intentional infliction of suffering or humiliation may make the attainment of the political aims more difficult. Such conduct is not only inhumane. It is also irrational -- and illegal. Where the state responsible for the armed actions does not itself prosecute war crimes the **international criminal court** is now set up to do it.

**For UN operations** respect for the laws of war and human rights in armed conflicts is particularly important. Good knowledge about the rules must be **part of the training** of all troops that are acting for the international community and it is the duty of all in command to ensure respect. The greatest **mission of the UN** is to seek to eradicate the ‘scourge of war’ and to maintain or restore peace and security. Where the organization is forced, itself to engage in armed actions it must still do its utmost to uphold humanism.