

International Day of Peace

By Col. Robert Balcavage and Col. B.J. Constantine

International Day of Peace: The War Dividend

September 21st is the United Nations' designated day for recognizing the efforts of all individuals, organizations, and governments to end conflict and promote peace. For our Nation, at war for over a decade, this should be an important day for us, as well. Some might be dismissive of this day of observation, as we are quick to assume the pursuit of "peace" is too idealistic, and, therefore, not worth the effort to promote and enhance its conditions. Others among us may equate the concept of "peace" with diminished international engagement, particularly given the recent spate of international anti-American rhetoric.

Is the pursuit of peace realistic? Less than 8% of our world's recorded history, or 268 of the past 3,400-plus years, have been years without war (or military conflict) somewhere on the planet. There are currently twenty wars of some form raging across the globe with another twenty various conflicts in well-known areas such as Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria, to lesser-known conflicts in Kashmir, Mali, and Namibia. Yet, while world-wide sustainable peace may be difficult to achieve, the pursuit of sustainable peace supports many U.S. interests – including fostering democratic institutions that support free trade.

Therefore, we face once again – the challenging decision of providing global leadership in the pursuit of peace. Ironically, one of the ways in which we can foster peace is in the application of our military-to-peace operations support missions, in partnership with other nations interested in peaceful solutions to difficult world-wide challenges.

While we have spent the last decade in war and conflict, international peacekeeping missions continued in many other parts of the world. And while many may be reluctant to deploy our Soldiers overseas, yet again, as international partners in peace, we should know that many of our partners seek and value the organizational and planning skills our Soldiers provide to these missions – as well as our comparatively robust air, maritime, and logistics capacities. Further, our support to peace missions of the future can support U.S. foreign policy goals while simultaneously advancing the growth of democratic institutions and providing the U.S. venues for engagement at a lower cost in national treasure.

If the possibility of a sustainable International peace is unlikely, is the pursuit of such peace worth our effort and resources at a time when our own domestic challenges are so sizeable? We believe so. In the pursuit of peace, one objective is deterrence, or conflict prevention. Today, we remain armed with the right 'weapons' to attain this objective. Our Nation's greatest military capability isn't our air superiority, or our tremendous land power, or our command of the seas. Our greatest capability in the pursuit of peace is our vast number of combat-experienced leaders who have successfully executed peace and stability missions through the greater part of the past decade-plus of sustained combat operations.

There are other nations with seasoned combat leaders and military planners with extensive experience in intergovernmental and multi-national environments. However, no other nation can claim the sheer amount of experience the U.S. has in conducting shuras (Islamic deliberative counsels), working to build sustainable rule of law, and encouraging local governance. Today, the U.S. has the greatest potential to employ this experience as planners and trainers, to assist nations in addressing causes of instability, and deterring conflict, than we have ever had, or may ever have. This is our war dividend.

We are not suggesting that we embark on global Peace missions at the risk of endangering our proven capability to engage with and destroy the enemies of democracy. We must maintain this capability as a critical element of our national power.

However, on today, this International Day of Peace, let us consider how we might best employ our Nation's considerable advantage in the pursuit of conflict deterrence in the future. We must not allow reports of murdered Soldiers and diplomats and the seemingly vitriolic anti-American language in the international discourse to persuade us to give up on the ideals of global Peace or the opportunities that sustainable Peace provides our own National security and interests. Through full and active global engagement in Peace and stability operations today, we can sustain the skills and experience essential to succeed at such missions, while assisting partner nations in deterring conflict, and capitalize on our war dividend.

The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Army, Department of Defense, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or the U.S. Government.

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