

JFK, *One World or None* and “A New Effort to Achieve World Law”

By Harris Wofford and Tad Daley

In the wake of the extraordinary media focus on the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's assassination and on the search to define his legacy, a significant element was overlooked: the story of a young congressman joining in a legislative initiative to advance no less than the solution to the problem of war. It is an initiative Kennedy pursued again in a major address in his creative last season as president.

On June 10, 1963, President Kennedy delivered the commencement address at American University in Washington, DC. That speech is often remembered for a pair of nuclear announcements – the suspension of American atmospheric tests and the opening of negotiations on a comprehensive test ban treaty. It is usually forgotten that JFK also presented in this speech the idea of a pathway toward “not merely peace in our time but peace in all time.”

In the speech, President Kennedy asked Americans to reexamine their pessimism about the human prospect. “Too many of us think ... that war is inevitable, that mankind is doomed, that we are gripped by forces we cannot control.” But he insisted that “human destiny” remained in human hands. A durable peace, said JFK, could be constructed “not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions ... World peace, like community peace, does not require that each man love his neighbor. It requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement.”

Then President Kennedy became more specific: “We seek to strengthen the United Nations ... to develop it into a genuine world security system ... This will require a new effort to achieve world law. ... Our primary long range interest ... is general and complete disarmament ... to build the new institutions of peace which would take the place of arms.”

Fourteen years earlier, JFK had endorsed a legislative action that described the kind of “new institutions of peace” that would constitute “a genuine world security system.” In June 1949, Representative John F. Kennedy – along with more than 100 other sitting members of the House and the Senate – proposed the transformation of the United Nations into a world federation.

House Concurrent Resolution 64 read as follows: ". . . [I]t is the sense of the Congress that it should be a fundamental objective of the foreign policy of the United States to support and strengthen the United Nations and to seek its development into a world federation, open to all nations, with defined and limited powers adequate to preserve peace and prevent aggression through the enactment, interpretation, and enforcement of world law."

The measure was co-sponsored in the House by 91 members. The list notably included Representatives Jacob Javits, Mike Mansfield, Abe Ribicoff, Peter Rodino, Henry Jackson, Walter Judd, Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Charles Eaton, future Eisenhower Secretary of State Christian Herter, first-term Congressman Gerald Ford, and second-term Congressman John F. Kennedy, all of whom served in senior U.S. government leadership positions in later years.

On the Senate side, the 21 co-sponsors included Senators Paul Douglas, Russell Long, Wayne Morse, future vice-presidential candidate John Sparkman, and future Vice President Hubert Humphrey; here again, all became major leaders in the U.S. government.

This resolution did not spontaneously appear in the halls of Congress. The idea of abolishing war through the establishment of a world government was already then very old. It had been expressed in centuries past by figures like Dante Alighieri, William Penn, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Victor Hugo – even Ulysses S. Grant. (Last year marked the tercentenary of the 1713 *Project for Perpetual Peace* by the Abbey of Saint Pierre -- which influenced both Kant and Rousseau.) The long historic background of the idea is charted in Strobe Talbott's 2008 book, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest for a Global Nation*. Talbott pegs his account on Plutarch's report that one of the indictments of Socrates, for which he chose to drink the hemlock, was his declaration that he was not an Athenian or a Greek but "a citizen of the world."

Few generations in human history had experienced as much upheaval as those living through two cataclysmic world wars (with a great depression in between) in the space of three decades. The new United Nations that emerged from the San Francisco conference in June 1945 fell far short of an institution able to keep the peace, with a Security Council that could only act to prevent aggression if unanimity prevailed among its five permanent members. Then came the atom bomb in August 1945, an apocalyptic addition to the human predicament.

Out of these experiences, a genuine grassroots movement started to emerge during the Second World War, advocating the establishment of a federal and democratic world government in order to bring about the elimination of national armies and the abolition of war. Its central contention was

that humanity could no longer permit anarchy on the world level, and that the civil society, constitutions, and rule of law that prevailed within nations now had to be instituted among nations as well.

An organization known as the Student Federalists, founded in 1942 by author Wofford, over the next several years formed 367 chapters on high school and college campuses around the country. (A 2001 book by Gilbert Jonas, *One Shining Moment*, chronicles that story.) The chancellor of the University of Chicago, Robert Maynard Hutchins, convened a group of distinguished scholars from Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, and St. John's College as well as Chicago, and grandly designated them the "Committee to Frame a World Constitution."¹ (As an undergraduate at Chicago, author Wofford assisted the Committee in the launching of their draft world constitution.)² By 1949, the United World Federalists, which aimed "to strengthen the UN into a world government," had established 720 chapters and enlisted nearly 50,000 members and was led by future U.S. Senator Alan Cranston – who at various times served as a mentor to both of the authors of this essay. Between 1941 and 1951, more than half the state legislatures in the United States passed resolutions advocating some form of world federation with power adequate to prevent war.³

Albert Einstein declared: "The world's present system of sovereign nations can lead only to barbarism, war and inhumanity. There is no salvation for civilization, or even the human race, other than the creation of a world government."⁴ That sentiment was endorsed by many more luminaries of the day, including Oscar Hammerstein II, Clare Booth Luce, Carl Sandburg, Bertrand Russell, H.G. Wells, Dorothy Thompson, Albert Camus, Arnold Toynbee, and U.S. Supreme Court Justices William O. Douglas and Robert H. Jackson (chief prosecutor at Nuremberg). Even Winston Churchill proclaimed in 1947 that if "it is found possible to build a world organization of irresistible force and authority for the purpose of securing peace, there are no limits to the blessings which all men may enjoy and

¹ The group met regularly for more than two years, published a monthly magazine known as *Common Cause* which deeply explored the structure, benefits, costs and risks of a hypothetical future world government, and issued in 1948 its *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution*. The preamble of that document still stands as an eloquent expression of the ultimate purposes of a world republic.

² Text of the preamble: "The people of the earth having agreed that the advancement of man in spiritual excellence and physical welfare is the common goal of mankind; that universal peace is the prerequisite for the pursuit of that goal; that justice in turn is the prerequisite of peace, and peace and justice stand or fall together; that iniquity and war inseparably spring from the competitive anarchy of the national states; that therefore the age of nations must end, and the era of humanity begin; the governments of the nations have decided to order their separate sovereignties in one government of justice, to which they surrender their arms; and to establish, as they do establish, this Constitution as the covenant and fundamental law of the Federal Republic of the World." The draft constitution appears in its entirety, along with extensive commentary, in a 1965 monograph published by The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, California, called *A Constitution for the World*. The preamble appears on page 26.

³ The full story of these resolutions (and hearings) in both state legislatures and the U.S. Congress, along with much else on the lineage of the world government idea, is told in the masterful two-volume historical work by Joseph Preston Baratta, *The Politics of World Federation*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004.

⁴ Einstein served as the founding chair of the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists -- an affiliate of the Federation of American Scientists -- and was named in 1999 by *TIME Magazine* as its "Person of the Century."

share." And in 1950 he revealed his appraisal of the stark alternative: "Unless some effective world super-government can be set up and brought quickly into action, the prospects for peace and human progress are dark and doubtful."

Many of the young members of the Student Federalists were filled with not just activist energy, but also an intellectual engagement with the great issues of the day. A number were profoundly influenced by literary works including *The Anatomy of Peace* by Emery Reves, *How to Think About War and Peace* by Mortimer Adler, and *The Wild Flag: Editorials from The New Yorker on Federal World Government* by E.B. White.

As instrumental as any of these was a 1946 collection of essays from Manhattan Project scientists and others, assembled by the Federation of American Scientists, called *One World or None: A Report to the Public on the Full Meaning of the Atomic Bomb*.

Not all the articles in this compilation directly grappled with proposals for world government. A few forecast the danger of nuclear terror – called by Los Alamos Associate Director E.U. Condon "the new technique of private war." Others examined the promise (but not much of the peril) of the yet-to-be-realized development of nuclear energy. Others still focused on the likely inescapable advantages of offense in the new atomic age, and the contention that, in the title of radar pioneer Louis N. Ridenour's essay, *There is No Defense*.

However, many asserted that the primeval scourge of war must now be brought to an end -- through the creation of supranational institutions with the power to enact and the means to enforce supranational law. "Conflicts in interest between great powers can be expected to arise in the future ... and there is no world authority in existence that can adjudicate the case and enforce the decision," said Leo Szilard, who first conceived the nuclear chain reaction. But humanity had at its disposal, he insisted, "the solution of the problem of permanent peace ... the issue that we have to face is not whether we can create a world government ... (but) whether we can have such a world government without going through a third world war."

"The greatest need facing the world today is for international control of the human forces that make for war," said General of the Army Hap Arnold, the only Air Force officer ever to hold the rank of five stars, in his final official statement as head of the U.S Army Air Forces. The atom bomb, he declared, presents "a tremendous argument for a world organization that will eliminate conflict ... we must make an end to all wars for good." (After his retirement from the military, General Arnold served as founder of the RAND Corporation.)

Finally, "there are few in any country who now believe that war itself ... can be regulated or outlawed by the ordinary treaties among sovereign states," said Walter Lippmann, a founder of both *The New Republic* magazine and the Council on Foreign Relations. "No one can prove ... what will be the legislative, executive, and judicial organs of the world state. ... (But) there are ideas that shake the world and change it. The project of the world state is now such an idea ... the ideal of the union of mankind under universal law."

In 2007 the Federation of American Scientists and the New Press republished *One World or None*, with a new introduction by Richard Rhodes, which is available in bookstores.

With the coming of the Cold War and the arms race, the steam went out of the movement. One powerful spokesman for the United World Federalists, Cord Meyer, who often ended his talks saying, "If this hope is naïve, then it is naïve to hope," left to become an important strategist for the CIA. Senator Cranston ran for president in 1984 on a platform for nuclear arms control and the strengthening and transformation of the United Nations – in a losing campaign. By the early 1950s, the idea of a world federation was no longer debated in dormitories, at dinner parties, and in public forums.

As we reflect upon the tragic end of John F. Kennedy's presidency, we should recognize the central proposition he offered at the beginning of his inaugural address: "The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life." He went on to say that our goal for the United Nations should be: "To enlarge the area in which its writ may run . . . and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations."

"So let us begin anew," Kennedy said. He called for "a new endeavor, not a new balance of power, but a new world of law, where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved."

We cannot know what Kennedy would have done if he had lived, and been elected to a second term. Would he have stopped the mounting war in Vietnam? Would the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty have become the first stage of the new endeavor for peace he promised? One of Kennedy's big commitments was fulfilled, on his timetable of one decade: "to land a man on the moon and return him safely to earth." Would Kennedy have gone on to build enduring world peace through the world rule of law, and to cultivate an allegiance to humanity, with the same can-do spirit that took us to the moon?

We cannot say. But we do know that in July 1979, on the tenth anniversary of that landing, Neil Armstrong was asked what had been going through his mind as he stood on the moon and saluted

the American flag. "I suppose you're thinking about pride and patriotism," he replied. "But we didn't have a strong nationalistic feeling at that time. We felt more that it was a venture of all mankind."

Former U.S. Senator Harris Wofford (D-PA) served as President Kennedy's Special Assistant for Civil Rights, and as Special Representative of the Peace Corps to Africa; while in the Army Air Corps in World War Two, he wrote It's Up To Us: Federal World Government in Our Time (Harcourt Brace 1946).

Tad Daley, who directs the Project on Abolishing War at the Center for War/Peace Studies (www.abolishingwar.org), is the author of Apocalypse Never: Forging the Path to a Nuclear Weapon-Free World (Rutgers University Press 2012). He previously served as a policy analyst and speechwriter for both former Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) and the late U.S. Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA), and received his Ph.D. before that from the Frederick S. Pardee RAND Graduate School.