

Review

“To summon the nations”: Russia and The Hague peace conferences

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A consideration of the history and importance of the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, being the first of such Conferences held otherwise than at the conclusion of a conflict and designed to lay the foundations of a global peace and to reduce the risk or effects of war. It includes a consideration of the legacy of such Conferences and plans for a third Conference, being the centenary of the first in 1999, which did not occur despite much support. It considers whether, in the current worsening state of global affairs, if there is a necessity to hold such an all-encompassing Conference of all world leaders now.

Key words: Hague, peace, conference.

INTRODUCTION

The history and results of the first two Hague Peace Conferences in 1899 and 1907, and the many calls for a third of such Conference have, apart from a burst of interest from some quarters lead up to the centenary in 1999 with no resultant third Conference received comparatively little consideration in recent times. And yet, these Conferences set a new and valuable pattern, and their legacy is arguably very significant. They provide the best means for bringing together all the nations to consider ways and means to establish a foundation of global peace, and to reduce the risk and effects of war. This study looks at the history of these conferences, including the significant involvement of Russia in them, and hopes for a better future.

Historical factors leading to the first Hague peace conference

In 1899, a historical event occurred in the transition to a

global community with the holding of the first Hague Peace Conference, an international Conference called by the Russians with the aim of achieving a more peaceful world. The roots of this Conference may, in one sense, be said to be almost as old as history itself. They lie in the ancient hope of belief that one day a comprehensive universal peace will be established on earth. This is a view derived both from ancient religious writings, and from the works of some of the great philosophers and essayists. This Conference and its achievements can be understood, not only against the background of such ancient hopes and beliefs, but also in the light of the rapidly changing international circumstances of the time. In a more immediate sense, the first Hague Peace Conference was a lineal descendant, not so much of the innumerable peace conferences held before it at the end of a particular war was able to end those wars. These began with the conferences of Munster and Osnabruck in 1648, otherwise known as the peace of Westphalia, and said to mark an important turning point in the progress of

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western civilization (Scott, 1972). This was followed by those of Utrecht in 1713, Paris in 1763, and above all the Congress of Vienna in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and that of Berlin in 1878.

The Hague Peace Conference was different from others, however, because it was the first diplomatic gathering called to discuss guarantees of peace without reference to a particular war - past, present or prospective (Holls, 1900). It set a pattern for international relations which is still evident today, whereby the leaders of the nations agree to meet from time to time to try and sort out their differences in conferences, and to cooperatively try to come to grips with the rapidly evolving nature of the contemporary global community and its interdependent needs, while at the same time clinging to their respective national priorities and sovereign interests.

The Conference must also be seen against a background of changing public perceptions and attitudes in the period leading up to it. The horrors of evolving modern warfare exercised a profound effect on the thinking of many people in the nineteenth century, in a way it has never been experienced before. Thus, for example, the first Universal Peace Congress was held in London in 1843, and the Red Cross was founded in 1863. Many proposals advocated refinement of the laws of war and humanitarian treatment of the victims of war. Ideas to prevent war, such as the use of good offices, mediation and facultative arbitration, were circulated. Proposals for multilateral disarmament were made Documents, 1921. There was extensive public debate, at least among the western countries. The Russian decision to call the 1899 Conference has to be seen in this context.

Much of the initiative for the discussion of ways to reduce the risk of war came from Russia. In some part, this may have been due to the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, who wrote to Czar Alexander II of Russia in about 1871, calling on him to arise among men and to summon the nations to God for the purpose of laying *"the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men"* Baha'u'llah, 1972. The same Tablet refers to the fact that while Baha'u'llah was in prison in Tehran, one of the Russian Ministers, Prince Dolgorouki, tried to establish Baha'u'llah's innocence and offer him sanctuary when the latter was imprisoned in Persia (Abdu'l-Baha (1979). There was therefore a direct early connection in positive terms between the Baha'i Faith and Russia. Baha'u'llah saw in this early connection evidence of the important role that Russia would play in future global negotiations concerning world peace and the elimination of war, those issues being so integral to Baha'u'llah's teachings. Thus in 1874, Czar Alexander II called for a meeting of representatives of the great powers to discuss the laws of war. Little came out of the proposal (Huddleston, 1989), although later Russian proposals bore fruit, as discussed below. This theme of the need for a universal convocation of the nations was carried forward

by Baha'u'llah's son and successor, Abdu'l-Baha (1844 to 1921). Writing as early as 1875, He said:

"True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns -- the shining exemplars of devotion and determination -- shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to the entire world and obtain for it the sanction of the entire human race. This supreme and noble undertaking -- the real source of the peace and well-being of the entire world -- should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth." (Abdu'l-Baha (1979).

The important role that Russia played in this regard, extending into the twentieth century, has not yet been fully appreciated, coloured as it has been by the later excesses of the Soviet era and the associated build up of arms by the USSR, plus more recently the increasingly nationalistic stand taken under Russian leader Putin. Proposals for considering and discussing the methods of preventing war in the Americas also emanated from the USA in the late nineteenth century (Scott, 1925), leading to the twentieth century to the major role also played by that country in international negotiations.

The first Hague peace conference

It was apparently a Russian Minister, Sergei De Witte, who was engaged in promoting the economic development of Russia, and who believed that this was hampered by the heavy cost of armaments, who first encouraged Czar Nicholas II, grandson of Czar Alexander II, to promote the holding of an international peace conference. Russia was at that time in some financial difficulties. Also, influential was the work of banker and Russian economic adviser Jean de Bloch, whose six-volume study of war reached the Czar (de Bloch, 1898; van den Dunger, 1983). De Bloch believed that modern war would become impossible because of the cost to both victor and vanquished. This gentle and humanitarian Czar, drawing inspiration from the traditions of the Imperial house, and influenced by his advisers and public opinion, decided in conjunction with his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Mouravieff, to issue an invitation to the leading nations with diplomatic representatives at the Russian court to attend such a conference Scott, 1972. The Rescript of the Russian Emperor of 24 August 1898 for this purpose is expressed in terms of the highest ideals. It recites in part:

“...to put an end to these incessant armaments and to seek the means of warding off the calamities which are threatening the whole world – such is the supreme duty which is today imposed on all states.” Scott, 1972; Documents, 1921.

The invitation was on the whole well received, and it was followed by a second circular from Count Mouravieff in which he furnished a program for discussion, emphasising the control of armaments, the revision of the rules of war, and the acceptance of the principle of good offices, mediation and facultative arbitration to prevent armed conflict. To emphasise Russian good intentions, the meeting was not to be held in that country. The Dutch Government responded by offering a venue, and the conference was born, Scott, 1972.

Twenty-six nations were represented at the first Hague Peace Conference, the greater majority of which were from Europe. There were three from Asia (China, Japan and Siam, now Thailand), two from the Americas (USA and Mexico), and two from the Middle East (Persia and Turkey). Latin American countries were conspicuous by their absence, as were the then colonial territories. It was very much a meeting of the great powers of the time plus a few smaller and medium European countries. Interestingly, some concerned private organisations and individuals also attended Documents, 1921¹. The Conference resulted in the adoption of three conventions and three declarations Baha'u'llah, 1972², as well as some recommendations and protocols. The laws of war received some attention.

A notable failure was the inability to reach agreement on any form of multilateral disarmament, mainly because of German resistance, which at the time was still seeking to establish itself as a national power of consequence. Of much greater success was the establishment by Convention of an orderly system for the arbitration of international disputes through the new Permanent Court of Arbitration, with a permanent registry to be based at the Hague and served by a permanent international Bureau. The Court itself was to be comprised of named international experts who could be called upon to arbitrate between state-parties, subsequently extended by protocol to non-signatory states, with a view to the pacific settlement of their disputes. In the usual manner of arbitration, there was no compulsory jurisdiction, merely a facultative arrangement giving nations a ready option if they could agree, rather than resorting to the use of force in their international relations. Signatories to the Convention on the Pacific Settlement of International

Disputes agreed that, with a view to obviating as far as possible recourse to force in the relations between states, they would use their best efforts to ensure the pacific settlement of international differences (Article 1). This was to be achieved by using the good offices or mediation of one of the more friendly powers, by international commissions of inquiry or by recourse to international arbitration, whether through the Permanent Court of Arbitration or otherwise. War was not outlawed, but the international community had now expressed in comprehensive terms a clear preference for alternative peaceful methods of conflict resolution in the international arena.

The second Hague peace conference

It was intended that the first Hague Peace Conference should have a successor, but initially little was done to bring this about. It was President Roosevelt of the USA who took up the cause in 1904, reminding signatory governments of the important subjects bequeathed for discussion, and questioning the extent to which they were prepared to act in the matter. He proposed a second conference at the Hague. The responses were favourable, although Russia initially sought to defer participation pending the cessation of hostilities in the Far East with Japan. Active support also came from Great Britain, which was concerned about fishing rights as well as German rearmament. The USA and Russia found a means to cooperate in the plans for the Conference, and an invitation was extended by Russia to other governments, including Latin American governments, to meet at the Hague in 1907.

The second Conference was more representative than the first. A total of forty-four countries participated, of which twenty were from Europe, nine from North and Central America, ten from South America, three from Asia and two from the Middle East. Still noticeably absent were colonial territories. Thus, the second Conference was essentially a meeting of the great powers, together with the small and medium countries from Europe and the Americas³.

The Conference prepared thirteen conventions and one declaration for signature and ratification⁴. Once again, the laws of war received prime attention and wide agreement was reached. But despite an expression of concern about rising military expenditures, there was a failure to agree on any form of disarmament. The Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes was reformulated, giving the Permanent Court of Arbitration a code of procedure to follow. But a USA proposal to make the use of the Court compulsory in international disputes was not accepted. A draft Convention relative to the creation of a Judicial Arbitration

¹ For a list of national participants see *The Proceedings of the Hague Peace Conferences*, prepared by the Division of International Law of the Carnegie Endowment for International Law under the supervision of J B Scott, Oxford University Press, New York, 1920, pp 1-7; Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume II, pp 62-77.

² The texts can be found in Scott, *The Hague Peace Conferences*, volume II, pp 80-159, and in the annexes to *The Proceedings of the Hague Peace Conferences*.

³ For a list of national participants, see Scott, “1972”, volume II, pp 257-285.

⁴ Texts can be found in Scott, “1972”, volume II, pp 288-527.

Court plus a Report was adopted by the Conference, and was drawn to the attention of potential signatory powers. The draft Convention was prepared with a view to bringing it into force as soon as agreement could be reached on the selection of judges and on the constitution of the proposed Court (Scott, 1920). The Conference called for a third such peace conference within the period of 1915.

Assessments of the first and second Hague peace conferences

In the aftermath of the first two Conferences, it was not uncommon to understate their importance (Davis, 1962). It is true that they did not, in practice; result in significant change in the conduct of nation-states in the years immediately after they were held. The Conferences were said to be the result of the work of the international law movement, which was criticized both for its naiveté about power and its lack of attention to the concrete workings of modern industrial societies (Murphy, 1994). The threat of, and the actual use of, force in international affairs continued and was even heightened, culminating in the devastation of the First World War.

The proposed third Hague Peace Conference did not occur, although a landmark conference of women was held at the Hague in 1915. The fact that a third 'unofficial' peace conference was held in The Hague under the auspices of the International Women's Movement in 1915 has however been swept in a dusty corner of history. After the Great War, attention was directed more towards the establishment of the League of Nations and the new Permanent Court of International Justice. President Woodrow Wilson, who was instrumental in the creation of the League of Nations (Walworth, 1986), paid little regard to the Hague traditions (Davis, 1975).

The interest was centered more on the establishment of standing international institutions rather than intermittent meetings of national leaders. The Hague Conferences had not been able to prevent a major global conflict, and had achieved very little towards mitigating the ferocity of modern war, so new solutions were sought. The international institution formed in 1899, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, although continuing to exist up to the present day, was and has continued to be under-utilized and has had limited beneficial effect (Scott, 1920; Davis, 1975; Huddleston, 1989; Gross, 1982). In this scenario, it has been easy to minimize the achievements of these Hague Conferences and their promoters.

But support for the Hague Peace Conference concept continued before the Great War and, to a lesser extent, after it. Following the 1907 Conference, the impetus created by the Hague system led to the organized peace movement flourishing as never before. The Permanent Court of Arbitration made some ten awards in 1914, indicating some prospects for its successful operation

(Scott, 1920; Davis, 1972; Murphy, 1994; Walworth, 1986; Davis, 1975; Huddleston, 1989). President Roosevelt called for the development of the Hague system. The USA began preparation for the third Hague Peace Conference. The Hague Peace Palace was constructed⁵. But it is clear that the Great War undermined the Hague system and diverted attention by highlighting more pressing needs.

Proposals for a peace conference after the Great War received little government support. The peace movement, in contrast, continued its advocacy of the Hague concept. Among its leading supporters were an American group, the League to Enforce the Peace, and the American Peace Society. Peace movements based at the Hague and elsewhere, such as the Central Organisation for a Durable Peace, also pursued their work (Balyuzi, 1987). Calls for a third Peace Conference involving all nations continued (Scott, 1925) notwithstanding the creation of the League of Nations. These calls have never been totally abandoned.

Work on plans for a permanent international court in association with the League was commenced in 1920 by an expert committee of jurists meeting at the Hague. At the second session of its advisory committee, the acts and deliberations of the second Hague Peace Conference were advocated as the basis for deliberations, including the draft Convention for a Court of Arbitral Justice. It was agreed that the permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague should act as the nominating body for judges of the new international court, with appointments by the League to follow. The draft statute for the new court was prepared, presented to the League, and adopted with slight changes (Davis, 1962). Thus there is a direct link between the Hague Conferences and the Permanent Court of International Justice (Hudson, 1943). That Court is in turn the forerunner of the present International Court of Justice, which also meets at the Hague. There are no direct links, on the other hand, between the Hague Conferences and the League of Nations.

Assessments of the value of the first and second Hague peace Conferences have tended to be more favourable in recent times. Thus CA Davis, in his preface to his valuable and far-sighted work on the second Hague Conference, stated that further research had led him to change some of his evaluations of the first Conference, even though the Conferences had failed to avert war (Davis, 1975). The Conferences were better seen as part of the long evolution of international law and international judicial institutions, and the occasional sporadic attempts of the international community to arrest races in armaments. Any assertion that the Conferences were essentially a failure seemed to him to be an

⁵ This building itself attracted much interest. Its benefactor was Andrew Carnegie, who described it as a "*Temple of Peace*". It became the seat of the International Bureau of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1913, and it is the seat for hearings of the International Court of Justice and housed the Hague Academy of International Law.

overstatement.

A more generous assessment is that the first Hague peace Conference was the first general international conference concerned with building a world system based on law and order, helping to break the monopoly of the great powers of the Concert of Europe in matters of war and peace, and proclaiming a new era of cooperation. This leads indirectly to the view that a standing global organization to keep the peace and to promote interstate cooperation was now a possibility (Riggs and Plano, 1988). It has been suggested that in the light of history, the Conference was of great importance (Huddleston, 1989).

The two Conferences were said to be the first real attempts to ensure peace by law (Suter, 1990), or at least the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Any assessment that they failed to achieve their objectives must be considered in the context of the international situation at the time, dominated as it was by rising militarism and the continuance of the belief in the legitimacy of war, at least on the part of some key governments and high commands. While the Conferences did not bring about peace themselves and did not break the assumed link between the alleged right of individual nations to use force on the one hand, and questions of their security and welfare on the other, it is suggested that they can, in hindsight, be seen as more a part of a much wider evolutionary process; that is, in the struggle to construct a new, more peaceful world order under the rule of law with the elimination of war between nations.

In this regard, the great importance of encouraging the initiative of national leaders, the primary decision-makers in international affairs, in coming together in conference from time to time to refresh and invigorate the global order cannot be underestimated. Such conferences, it is suggested, provide the real impetus for global order change, more so than the ongoing work of established international institutions, although the two can go hand in hand. Some prominent writers, such as J B Scott, never lost faith in the Hague system, as his valuable written contributions testify. Another ardent supporter, Secretary of State for the USA Elihu Root, said:

*"..the achievements of the two conferences justify the belief that the world has entered upon an orderly process through which, step by step, in successive conferences, each taking the work of its predecessor as its point of departure, there may be continued progress toward making the practice of civilized nations conform to their peaceful professions."*⁶

Revival of interest in the Hague conference system and proposals for a third Hague peace conference

With the unfolding of the Second World War and the

creation, in its aftermath, of the United Nations Organisation and the International Court of Justice, the Hague Conferences tended to slip from prominent view. But they continued to live through the work of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, by reference to the Conferences in some publications (Gross, 1992), and by the holding of a few isolated events related to the Conferences.

The idea of the third Hague Peace Conference was given new life as the end of the 20th century approached. Work to this end began with a 1989 meeting of foreign ministers of the 102-nation Non-Aligned Movement at the Hague to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the first Hague Peace Conference. From this meeting emerged the proposal to proclaim the United Nations Decade of International Law. The Non-Aligned Movement, at its 11th Summit in Columbia in 1995, reiterated its support for a third international peace conference (World Federalist Movement, 1996). The Decade was included in a Declaration entitled *"The Hague Declaration on Peace and the Rule of Law in International Affairs"*, and included a call to hold the third Hague Peace Conference at the end of the Decade in 1999, the centenary of the first Conference.

On 28 November 1990, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/40, entitled *"United Nations Decade of International Law"*, and by resolution 44/23 of the General Assembly declared the period 1990-1999 as the United Nations Decade of International Law and requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of member-states on the possibility of holding a third international peace conference or other suitable international conference at the end of the Decade (United Nations, 1991).

Drawing upon its long history in the promotion of multilateral steps towards the peaceful settlement of international disputes, and being consistent with the proposals of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Russian Federation thereafter advocated in favour of the view that a third peace conference should be held at the end of the Decade of International Law to address fundamental issues of peace and security. In a letter to the Secretary-General of May 1994, the Russian Federation observed:

"One hundred years is a tremendous historical span, especially in the dynamic twentieth century. Nevertheless, leafing today through old documents of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conferences, one is constantly amazed that, even at that time, such lasting values were established."

President Boris Yeltsin of Russia, speaking on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1995, repeated the call for a third peace conference. In addition, the Hague Peace Initiative, a non-governmental project started in 1993 in the Netherlands called a "Group of Ten" which supported the goals of the UN Decade of International Law, envisaged a high level conference in 1994, with a final report in 1995 to 1996 as well as the

⁶ Quoted in J Scott, *The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1972*

holding of a meaningful inter-governmental conference at the end of the Decade.

A number of private organisations, apart from those already mentioned, have indicated support for a conference along these lines. In a statement on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995, the Baha'i International Community urged world leaders to convoke a "*World Summit on Global Governance*" (Baha'i International Community, 1995). Both the World Federalist Movement and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation supported such a concept (World Federalist News, 1994). The World Federalist Movement, in association with the Danish United Nations Association, has mounted an international non-governmental organisations (NGO) campaign for the third Hague Peace Conference in 1999 (World Federalist News, 1996).

In 1995, the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, the International NGO Task Group on Legal and Institutional Matters and the World Federalist Movement prepared a draft resolution on the proposed third Peace Conference for consideration of the United Nations Sixth (Legal) Committee and the Non-Aligned Movement (World Federalist News, 1996). The World Parliamentarians in support of the United Nations, at their Conference II held in Japan in 1995, under the "GIFU Declaration", resolved that:

"We, in quest for a world without war, call for a world conference on the peaceful settlement of disputes and the prevention of war (the No War Summit) to be held before the end of the century (United Nations, 1999)."

The Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance (Swedish Prime Minister's office, 1991), and subsequently the Commission on Global Governance in its Report entitled *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Commission on Global Governance, 1995; Issues of Global Governance, 1995), both recommended that a world conference/summit on global governance be held, the Commission recommending that this be called by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1998, with the decisions that conference to be ratified and put into effect by 2000.

Conferences that came to mind include the World Summit for Children of 1990, the Security Council Summit of January 1992, the Rio Conference on Environment and Development of June 1992, the Vienna Conference on Human Rights of June 1993, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development of 1994, the Copenhagen Conference on Social Development of March 1995, The Beijing Fourth Conference on Women of August-September 1995, plus the meeting of world leaders in New York on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. These have been followed by later world conferences, such as the Millennium Summit, which was a meeting among many world leaders lasting three days from 6 September to 8 September, 2000 at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. On 8 September, 2000

the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration. However, nothing official emerged from these discussions about a further comprehensive Hague Peace Conference.

It is said that these conferences of world leaders have established a new methodology for global deliberations on critical issues (Baha'i International Community, 1995), facilitating regular meetings of world leaders on these issues and creating in them a growing awareness of the need for cooperative global solutions. Two international meetings were held to commemorate the Centenary of the First Hague Peace Conference⁷, the Report of which records as follows:

"Pursuant to United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 51/157, 52/154 and 53/99, regarding the Action dedicated to the 1999 Centennial of the First International Peace Conference of 1899 and to the closing of the United Nations Decade of International Law, the Governments of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Russian Federation called meetings of experts for consideration of the reports and comments pertaining to the themes of the 1899 First International Peace Conference and its 1999 Centennial celebrations: disarmament questions, humanitarian law and laws of war, and peaceful settlement of disputes. These activities were undertaken within the framework of the United Nations Decade of International Law, with a view to serving as a useful basis for carrying the results of the Decade of International Law into the next millennium."

Two meetings of experts, plus observer States and relevant international organizations, were held in the Hague in May 1999 and in St Petersburg, Russia, in June 1999. But they had no authority to adopt any treaties or conventions, and the views expressed were not binding on any state party. Many international topics were discussed, but there was no decision or recommendation to hold further Hague Peace Conferences at a later time, Government of the Netherlands and the Russian Federation, 1999,

There was in the end insufficient support from most of the Great Powers for the idea of a comprehensive peace conference of the nations. Even with the support from Russia and the Netherlands, as well as many NGOs, for a third Hague Peace Conference of the nations of the world in 1999, it simply did not occur. The only significant commemoration was a major citizens' Peace Conference held at the Hague in May 1999. Some 10,000 participants attended, including some world leaders and Nobel Peace Laureates. The Conference developed *The Hague Conference Agenda for Peace in the 21st Century*. It had little impact on world leaders. Despite the initial preparatory work within the United Nations Organisation

⁷ United Nations General Assembly document A/54/381, published in "*The Centennial of the First International Peace Conference: Reports and Conclusions*" (Frits Kashoven, Ed., Kluwer Law International, 2000)."

for the holding of the proposed centenary conference at the Hague, nothing equivalent to the First and Second Hague Peace Conferences eventuated.

But the idea of a genuine third Hague Peace Conference has not been abandoned, and it continues to be discussed in conferences and in learned papers. The whole Hague concept could conceivably be resurrected in future as a real prospect as the present world order continues to suffer from many global maladies of an increasingly serious nature. It is already clear that in the period since the 1999 meetings up until the present in the twenty-first century, there have been and continue to be immense dangers facing the peace and security of the global community which have yet to be effectively tackled. The need for a comprehensive change in the global order and a settlement of the major issues facing the nations of the world seems to be an idea whose time has come.

CONCLUSION

What importance is to be made of all these developments? The centenary of the first Hague Peace Conference in 1999 passed without any action of significance. Clearly there was some resistance to that idea from certain national quarters, not necessarily vented in the public arena, and perhaps rooted in the politics of national sovereignty and perceived national self-interest. And yet the world is now faced with a number of increasingly critical and deep-seated global problems that threaten its peace and security, demanding a global response.

There are conflicts and mass violence, human rights abuses, financial and governmental breakdown, environmental disasters, the great disparities between nations, threats of global diseases, issues of poor governance and corruption, drug abuse and crime across borders, the spread of dangerous weapons, etc. Individual national action, based on what is an outdated notion of national sovereignty, will no longer suffice in an increasingly interdependent world. The main concerns of the 1899 Conference, in particular that of the establishment of world peace, including the prevention and effective resolution of international conflict plus multilateral disarmament, remain largely unsolved more than a century later. This suggests that the present world order is seriously lacking in its capacity to adequately address these concerns.

This resistance of certain nation states to enter into comprehensive negotiations on changes to the global order is not altogether surprising, given the historically divided nature of our present world order. This study would argue that as long as nation-states continue to place so much emphasis on their own primary role in international affairs, in particular on their perceived self-interest as separate, independent, sovereign states, then

it is unrealistic to expect that they will make significant concessions to work towards creating some radically different and more united global order. They would only be prepared to do this if they were convinced that it is in their own national interests to do so. So far we have not reached national unanimity on this point.

But the clear fact remains that a peaceful and more united world order, to be truly effective and lasting, must be built upon a whole-hearted consensus of all the nations, and that can only be achieved in a comprehensive conference through attendance of their national leaders. That is, a global conference on the Hague model. It cannot be achieved through the operation of the normal machinery of existing national and international institutions, because those very institutions must be amenable to significant change or even replacement.

A more comprehensive and holistic approach is called for, one that goes to the heart of the many deficiencies of the present global order and which devises integrated and holistic international solutions. The critical point in deciding whether the nations should participate in such an approach will be reached when the leaders of a sufficient number of nation-states perceive that the national arguments favouring participation in comprehensive global negotiations begin to outweigh those favouring non-participation. This could occur by a process of gradual realisation by different nations at different times, or it could be the much quicker outcome of some extremely serious international crisis or disaster. The latter cannot be ruled out in the current volatile international situation.

It is not the purpose of this study to argue that a third Peace Conference should be held at the Hague. Rather, it is purpose of this study to review the background to the Hague tradition, its history and purposes, including the particular involvement of Russia, and the calls for a third such conference. What is of significance is that the first and second Hague Peace Conferences have left a significant and lasting legacy, which is still having an influence on the thinking of a number of people of prominence in world affairs. The real question of importance is whether the world needs to hold a new conference of all the national leaders to recast the global order to meet the needs of this interdependent global age. In the writer's view it certainly does.

The parallels between the Hague system and concept on the one hand, and the principles and proposals of the Baha'i Faith on the other hand have been noted. The Founder of the Baha'i Faith and His followers were in contact with the Ruler of Russia on this matter from the earliest time. What is remarkable is the way in which the calls made in the wider world, and in particular by Russia, for comprehensive international negotiations on peace and related issues have, consistently since the nineteenth century been paralleled by Baha'i statements calling for a great convocation of all the nations to lay the foundations

of a new world order and a permanent global peace.

Viewed against the historical background, and despite the current political climate in Russia, we may well anticipate a future central role for Russia in these momentous future global developments.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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