

The Problem of the Twentieth Century: A Study in International Relationships

By Lord David Davies

Abstract

The Problem of the Twentieth Century, published in 1930, is a book about justice, security and disarmament. It argues for the establishment of an International Police Force (IPF) as the first real and effective mechanism to enforce international sanctions.

Lord Davies' first book, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, is no less than an endeavour into removing the causes of war and fulfilling "the eternal quest for justice."¹ The book makes a great effort to illustrate that justice cannot be achieved without the abolition of national armies, because maintaining the high levels of armaments will inevitably mean that war will be retained as an instrument to reach justice. For Lord Davies, true security stems from "a combination of circumstances that the possibility of an attack is reduced to a minimum."² Consequently, feelings of true security can only arise out of the assurance that in an event of an attack the international community would assist the attacked. In other words, security does not exist without the availability of effective sanctions. As the book puts it, "[t]he prevention of war, therefore, involves the creation of machinery for security and international justice; justice, in turn, is dependent upon disarmament; disarmament cannot be obtained without security; and security cannot be purchased without the establishment of sanctions."³

This interplay of disarmament, security and sanctions is at the core of *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*. The establishment of sanctions to uphold and enforce international law would not entirely eliminate war. Rather the sanctions would lead to a relative reduction of aggressive behaviour of

¹ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.2

² Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.3

³ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.3

nations, “just as the presence of the judge and policeman has helped to reduce the number of criminals.”⁴ Subsequently, the prevention of war has to be seen in relative, and not in absolute terms. The establishment of sanctions to prevent war is, nevertheless, just one side of the coin. The other is an efficient alternative settlement procedure, which would resolve disputes peacefully. Lord Davies acknowledges that establishing peace at any cost may lead to feelings of revenge in the long run. Thus peace and justice have to be settled truthfully and impartially by a substitute: an international authority. Only a peace based on justice can be of permanent durability. An international authority, equipped with effective sanctions, could assure nations, leaders and citizens that international law and therefore justice would be impartially implemented. This would ultimately enhance security of nations and their citizens. In Davies’ words, “[t]he provision of sanctions is again the connecting link between justice on the one hand and security on the other.”⁵ What is more, Davies envisages that when the international authority, equipped with meaningful sanctions exists, nations will break the circle of never ending armaments. With justice and security becoming reality, armaments would lose their attraction and usefulness to nation states.

The importance of the International Police Force (IPF), as outlined in *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, has been widely acknowledged. Among others, the need for more security was expressed by the French officials, who advocated after the First World War for a peace based upon security and a new union of nations endowed with the means of enforcing its decisions.⁶ Despite such considerations, the League of Nations, founded in 1920, incorporated neither sanctions nor their effective enforcement. It lacked a police force and did not address the problem of disarmament properly. Although Lord Davies supported the League of Nations due to the lack of a better alternative, he noted his disapproval because it “offers only a mild form of security against the ravages of war.”⁷ Lord Davies’ argument for the establishment of an international authority and an

⁴ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.4

⁵ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.28

⁶ Pugh, Michael, ‘Policing the World: Lord Davies and the Quest for Order in the 1930s’, *International Relations*, 16(1), 2002, p. 103; 104

⁷ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.143

IPF emerges out of what Hedley Bull called the domestic analogy.⁸ This theme reappeared in Davies' later work *Force*, published in 1934. The reign of law in nation states rests on decisions of courts, which are executed by national governments, precisely because they possess the authority and ability to enforce the letter of the law whenever necessary. To the detriment of international security no such sanctions exist in international law: "[n]either the peace nor the war rules represent more than a series of resolutions or customs which may be broken with impunity. The only deterrent is the fear of war which may result from a flagrant violation of these rules."⁹ The existence of effective sanctions enforced by an international authority, as advocated by Lord Davies, has further ramifications for the right of self-defence. In earlier times, this right was absolute since no authority existed to which a state could have been summoned in case of aggression. In line with Davies' argument justifying the need for such an authority, the right of self-defence would become relative. The state would have to prove its rightful use and may face sanctions in the case of misuse. This development could lead to increasing disarmament, since states would become aware that with the existence of an international police force, their own armaments would no longer be required.

Lord Davies agrees that for the first time in history, the advancement of science has made it possible to distinguish among the weapons possessed by a nation. The weapons a nation needs to fulfil its obligations for maintaining law and order within its own boundaries are in general less powerful, since in civilised communities citizens are bound by mutual interest and morality to uphold law and order. In contrast, a nation only needs more powerful weapons for waging war and inflicting cruelty and misery upon its equals. Based on this principle of differentiation, as Lord Davies calls it, the latter kind of weapons should be handed over to the international authority. Without impairing the ability of the national police forces to fulfil their duties of law and order these advanced weapons, controlled by the International Police Force, guarantee the enforcement of sanctions under the letter of international law. Providing the IPF with these advanced weapons, which no nation state

⁸ Bull, Hedley 'Society and Anarchy in International Relations', in H. Butterfield and M. Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966, p.35

⁹ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.169

possesses, would ensure its superiority and ability to stand for justice, security and in the end for long-lasting peace. In the quest for justice and security the IPF would “become the executor of Right and the custodian of Peace. As such, it imposes impartially the will of the whole community, as expressed in its laws, upon all its members.”¹⁰

Lord Davies’ argument falls within a deeper tradition. With Dante, he shares the conviction that a monarch, “representing international justice, should be equipped with all the attributes and all the power which make it possible for him to exercise his functions in the interests of all to the highest possible degree.”¹¹ With Saint-Pierre he has in common the belief that a quota system ought to be established, in which all states shall submit a certain number of forces to the international authority in case of emergency. Davies’ notion of unmatched superiority of the IPF owed to the advancement of science and can be found in a similar way in the words of President Wilson in 1917.

As should be evident from the above, Lord Davies’ *The Problem of the Twentieth Century* strongly related to the historical events in Europe and its security environment in the 1920s. The war reparations imposed on Germany were, as history illustrated, no foundation for a lasting peace. Rather they paved the way for its re-emergence accompanied by a sense of revenge. Examining the advancements of science to the art of war and the shortcomings of the League of Nations, Davies acknowledged the need for major adjustments within the security architecture of the community of nations, so that another catastrophe could be prevented. In this sense, Lord Davies’ vision of a more secure world and his views how to accomplish it, can be summarized in the following way: “a righteous and lasting peace cannot be secured until Right is reinforced by Might.”¹²

¹⁰ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.344

¹¹ Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.71

¹² Lord Davies, David, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, Great Britain, 1930, p.299

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