

CCNY College-wide Research Vision (CRV) Initiative Concept White Paper
Mitigating the Effects of War on Vulnerable Populations

Project Team

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Project Concept Description:

Objective: There are currently more than forty inter-state conflicts and civil wars being fought in every region of the world. Advancements in military, communication and transportation technologies – as well as the breakdown of political authority in many parts of the world – have dramatically increased the detrimental effects of war on civilians, refugees, and wounded soldiers. These groups are protected classes under international law, yet efforts by national governments and international organizations have proven woefully inadequate for shielding them from the effects. Climate change, the depletion of natural resources, and new deadly pandemics threaten to increase international and internal conflict, making this problem increasingly urgent.

The purpose of this project is to mobilize the efforts of faculty in the Colin Powell School, the School of Medicine, the Division of Humanities and the Arts, and the Center for Worker Education to develop a comprehensive plan to mitigate the effects of war on the protected groups.

Approach: The enormity of this task requires a wide-ranging effort by researchers from a broad array of fields. The project will bring together the following: Political Scientists, who focus on public policy and international law; Sociologists and Anthropologists, who explore issues related to refugees; Psychologists, who work with soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as victims of torture; Philosophers, who address the ethical and moral responsibilities of military leaders and public officials toward non-combatants; Historians, who examine the evolution of war in the modern age; and medical researchers, who explore how to improve care for disabled veterans and reduce suffering caused by armed combat. Each discipline will contribute to a comprehensive project aimed at mitigating effects of war on protected groups.

City College is uniquely positioned to undertake this project. Both the uptown campus and the Center for Worker Education have robust human rights programs, and there are at least a dozen faculty members in the Colin Powell School, the Humanities, and School of Medicine who conduct research on political violence, human rights, refugees, the alleviation of suffering, and humanitarian law. Our location in New York gives us access to the United Nations (UN) and the primary human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organizations (such as the International Rescue Committee). The CUNY Law School, which works closely with CCNY's Master's Program in International Relations, has faculty specializing in international law. Professor Akinsulure-Smith is Senior Staff Psychologist at the Bellevue Program for Survivors of Torture, an organization with whom we plan to collaborate. The School of Medicine is

dedicated to serving disadvantaged populations, many of whom are the primary victims of war. CCNY's undergraduate student body has many students who come from countries experiencing armed conflict, and can provide invaluable practical knowledge and skills as research assistants.

Outcomes: The long-term objective is to develop new legally-binding treaties, create a new federal agency in the U.S. and a new department within the Secretariat of the U.N., and form a new international body that would coordinate the efforts of non-governmental organizations working on the ground in conflict zones throughout the world. Alongside new research that will have an impact on policy and culture, we envision a permanent new research center at CCNY focused on War and Human Rights. There is significant external funding available from private foundations (Carnegie, Open Society), the U.N., and governments. We will use the planning period to apply for that support to make this a new, high profile area of strength at City College.

Expected Products: In the short-term, we expect to produce a series of policy reports similar to those published by think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations and the Brookings Institution. These would be directed at government officials and representatives to international organizations such as the U.N., African Union, and Organization of American States. We will also convene a series of meetings and conferences to develop new ideas. In the long-term, we plan to work with the International Law Commission and the U.N. to develop a comprehensive treaty designed to provide increased protection to the three groups. We will also develop legislation for the United States and other countries to create a federal office with the authority to oversee and regulate (1) the protection of civilians and refugees by U.S. forces and (2) the treatment of soldiers suffering from physical and psychological trauma.

Breakthrough: The effects of armed conflict on protected groups have reached a breaking point, requiring an innovative, comprehensive approach. Current international treaties, national institutions, and military rules of engagement are inadequate to address new technologies (such as drone warfare and cyber attacks) and the breakdown of authority and institutions throughout the world. This project will focus on increasing the protection of protected classes by developing legal, ethical, political, and medical solutions that address the protected groups as a single problem requiring a comprehensive approach. Researchers in each of the disciplines bring a unique set of skills that must be coordinated to avoid the kind of piecemeal approach that has prevented political leaders from addressing the universe of effects of armed conflict.

Merits: The U.S., Russia, and NATO have been at war almost constantly over the past thirty years. Their cutting-edge military technologies have made war far more lethal. At the same time, internal conflicts in Africa and the Middle East – though lacking advanced technology employed by the major powers – are increasingly deadly to entire populations. The rise of nationalism has eroded the compact countries adopted after World War II to care for refugees fleeing deadly conflicts. Advancements in medical science have reduced the number of soldiers killed in battle, at least among the major powers, but national institutions are unprepared for treating the influx of thousands of veterans who are saved from death but suffer from debilitating physical disabilities and psychological wounds. Civilian casualties and suffering continue to rise at an astronomical level, accompanied by the spread of infectious disease and malnutrition. Yet international organizations are unable to stem this tide. By undertaking a project to address these ills comprehensively, we expect to make significant strides toward mitigating the effects of war on vulnerable populations.