

Thinking about Peace

Negative Terms versus Positive Outcomes

“Peace is at hand” is a famous quotation from US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in October 1972, reflecting his belief that an agreement to end the Vietnam War was imminent. From the Thirty Years’ Peace treaty between Athens and Sparta in 440 BC to the Minsk Protocol between Ukraine, Russia, and two breakaway Ukrainian republics in 2014, so-called “peace” agreements have been used to halt military conflicts. What is common to all these instances is a narrow and negative conception of peace—as the absence of war. Such a definition is common, even dominant, in the way scholars and policy makers think about peace.

In security analyses, *war* and *peace* are usually treated as a dichotomy. Widespread violence in civil conflict has to meet some threshold of severity to be labelled a war; all other situations that fail to exceed that threshold are categorized as peaceful. Prominent works on the decline of war argue that the world is more peaceful largely because of declining violent behavior—often measured in terms of battle deaths.¹ Similarly, US military strategists and government policy makers think primarily in terms of negative peace. The early use of the phrase *operations other than war* reflected military doctrine that lumped together all nonconventional military applications. Its replacement, *stability and support operations*, is more nuanced in its treatment of the “nonwar” category, but the primary emphasis on stability—suppressing violent forces—places priority on negative peace outcomes. Indeed the 2014 US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-07 is titled simply *Stability*. Even in the *Global Peace Index*, created by the Institute for Economics and Peace, virtually every one of the 27 indicators of internal and external peace used to build an aggregate index of peace for every country deals with negative peace; some examples include the homicide rate, access to small arms, military expenditures, and involvement in external conflicts.

Ending violence is certainly a laudable goal, but defining peace in negative terms leads to perverse outcomes for scholarly analysis and policy making. By most definitions, contemporary Iraq is not in a civil war (it falls short in battle deaths and other indicators of military engagement), but it is fallacious to regard the situation there as peaceful,

the outcome of US operations as desirable, or equivalent for analytical purposes to other countries with ethnic and other cleavages such as Canada. Similarly, US relations with North Korea should not be considered as peaceful merely because sustained military engagements have been absent since 1953. What scholars and policy makers need is a broader conception of peace. Why should policy makers care about such an extension? Is this merely an esoteric discourse that hinges on semantical distinctions? A broader conception of peace has dramatic implications for the military and political actions that states might take, especially in postconflict contexts such as Iraq, and if such a stage is ever reached in Syria or Yemen.

The absence of high levels of violent conflict is certainly a component of peace, but should not be considered the only one. There is no consensus on all the other elements of peace, and these might vary by context—state-state relations, national societies, and group interactions to name a few. Nevertheless, features of human rights, justice, and conflict management are commonly cited and move the conceptualization beyond an exclusive focus on violence. Accordingly, peace involves a multiple series of interactions, an ongoing and longer-term relationship rather than an event such as a war. Thus, it needs to be assessed by reference to a wide range of indicators and considerations. In addition, peace is also better understood as a continuum along which relationships vary rather than as a simple binary distinction with war.

How can scholars and policy makers take a broader notion of peace and apply it to real-world cases? Specifically, one can look at war plans and conflictual interactions but also at diplomacy, communication, and functional integration. Based on this idea, a “peace scale” of five ideal type categories emerges along which relationships between states vary: severe rivalry, lesser rivalry, negative peace, warm peace, and security communities respectively.² The two rivalry points (severe and lesser) reflect those states that are enemies to varying degrees and pose the greatest risks for conflict. Contemporary Indian–Pakistani relations and those between France and Germany for much of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries qualify as severe rivalries; note that war is not common or frequent, but the high levels of hostility are constant. Lesser rivalries include current US–Russian relations as well as the US–Nicaraguan relations during the Sandinista regime; enmity

remains strong, but military clashes are much less frequent and sometimes indirect.

Most state relationships fall in the middle category of negative peace (for example, Egypt–Israel after Camp David), in which states are neither close friends nor bitter enemies. Note that unlike the colloquial use of the term, this designation of negative peace does not include the positive peace cases described next and is distinguished from rivalry by more than war proneness.

Two categories of relationships on the positive peace side of the scale are warm peace and security communities. The existence of a shared alliance, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), alone is insufficient to be classified as either a security community or even warm peace. Indeed, Greece and Turkey are rivals given their militarized confrontations over Cyprus and the Aegean Sea and other hostile interactions. In other instances, the relationships between allies are negative peace because—other than the alliance—there is not much integration or coordination between the two states involved. Positive peace requires more than having a common enemy or some coordination in security policy. Warm peace states have similar foreign policy preferences and highly developed transnational ties but have not created institutions that ensure collective decision making as is the case for security communities. Economic interactions in warm peace are not necessarily facilitated or governed by formal institutions or arrangements as they are in security communities. For security communities, war or violent conflict is not only absent but also unthinkable between members. Thus, warm peace relationships (for example, between the United States and the United Kingdom) differ with security communities more in degree than in kind. Security communities, such as those between numerous European Union pairs of states, also might involve shared identities, values, and meanings. In addition they include extensive cooperative interactions at several levels, private as well as governmental, and common long-term interests.

The Davenport Peace Scale is another example and is more broadly applicable for states, groups, individuals, and other actors.³ This seven-point scale from “opposition” to “mutuality,” with “indifference” as the middle category, tries to capture many different kinds of interactions. Four dimensions place relationships in the seven categories: behavior, organization, language, and values. For example, mutuality involves

integrating and consistent behaviors, inclusive organizations, language that refers to shared identities and common missions, and shared and positive values of community. The Nordic states were for many years the epitome of peaceful societies.

Conceptions of peace do not stop with absence or termination of war. They do not assume disagreements will vanish but rather that conflicts will be comparatively minor and resolved through existing institutions and political processes such that the outcome is regarded as legitimate. These might be democratic institutions (for example, national courts) and procedures within a state or negotiations and common rules between states, such as the World Trade Organization. War or significant violence then is certainly less likely to erupt or resume under such conditions, and in its extreme form such behavior would not even be considered as an option when disagreements arise.

A peace agreement, one that stops the fighting and involves a cease-fire, can be a major accomplishment. Indeed, such negative peace might be a prerequisite for deepening peace between enemies. Yet cease-fires can be very short-lived; during the Bosnian civil war, there were dozens of agreements to halt the fighting—some broken just after the agreements were announced. Even when an agreement goes beyond a simple cease-fire to include provisions for the resolution of outstanding issues, the risks of renewed fighting are great. Indeed, studies have found that over 40 percent of alleged peace settlements in civil wars are broken and war returns. Thus, considering peace as only the absence of war is often only transitory.

Beyond the risk of renewed warfare, negative conceptions of peace have two potentially pernicious effects if they become the centerpiece of strategy. First, there is the tendency to halt peacekeeping, military intervention, and other actions once the fighting has stopped. In effect, national leaders believe all the goals have been achieved, and accordingly, resources and diplomatic attention are devoted elsewhere. This is most famously illustrated by a banner reading “Mission Accomplished” that hung above Pres. George W. Bush in 2003, purportedly signifying that US military efforts in Iraq had achieved a desired end state. A broader notion of peace reframes the mission, including more expansive goals. In an interstate context, these might include, for example, a reduction in arms or troop pullbacks on the Korean peninsula and more importantly greater economic integration there. The first steps toward positive

peace between China and Taiwan are evident in the expansion of trade between the two countries and most recently a meeting between heads of states. Thus, the strategy for preventing war goes beyond military deterrence, and includes more cooperative ventures as well. After civil wars, it might mean nurturing civil society institutions, for example in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and encouraging several actions that promote reconciliation.

Most significant is the necessity to build conflict-management institutions and the societal norms accepting that these are the mechanisms by which disagreements will be resolved. A military force or even peacekeeping mission are not designed for resolving disagreements between actors. At the international level, this means states will negotiate differences and rely on regional organizations such as the European Union or Economic Community of West African States; increasingly these associations, created for economic benefits, contain processes and mechanisms for conflict management. States also have recourse to judicial and quasi-judicial institutions for disagreements such as dispute resolution mechanisms that are part of the Law of the Sea and World Trade Organization. Inside postconflict states, this means creating and reinvigorating rule of law institutions, such as courts and legal codes. The aforementioned FM 3-07 focusing on stability takes several steps in this direction.

Second, the focus on stability as the primary or exclusive goal might undermine any efforts undertaken at peace in the broader sense, even by other actors such as nongovernmental organizations (NGO). Halting the violence can involve suppressing different groups or freezing a status quo that is considered undesirable by some or all parties. Stopping the bloodshed can be a major accomplishment, and it is hard to argue with an outcome that saves lives. Nevertheless, initiating efforts at elections, building civil society, ensuring human rights protection, rebuilding infrastructure, and the like—all elements of peacebuilding—might be compromised by the ways stability was achieved. It is virtually impossible to carry out elections or protect human rights, for example, when there are groups opposed to the military actions that achieved the stability. The catch-22, however, is that it might be equally problematic to carry out those same peacebuilding missions in the absence of stability.

It is one thing to call for greater attempts at deepening peace between enemies; it is another to be successful in those efforts. There are a num-

ber of limitations that make positive peace initiatives difficult, even as the payoffs might be great. The first barrier deals with the means needed for positive peace. Negative peace might come from actions that impose cease-fires or suppress violent activity, largely through military force. The military mechanisms and strategies used by the United States, NATO, or other coalitions are inapplicable to positive peace efforts. Although national militaries have made substantial strides in training and experiences with peacebuilding have provided a number of lessons learned, rebuilding societies requires different sets of skills and activities than are normally provided by military personnel. The net effect is that efforts at positive peace will require coalitions of state agencies, NGOs, and international organizations such as the United Nations (UN). The present ad hoc arrangements are likely insufficient for contexts such as the Congo, and there will be challenges ahead as different actors can have competing interests and operational protocols.

A second concern is that building positive peace is a long-term process that requires extensive and ongoing commitments by the international community. Such long-term efforts do not usually fit into the short-term political windows of democratically elected leaders. When payoffs are distant and diffuse, leaders will be reluctant to make or sustain the kinds of commitments necessary. In addition, democratic and nondemocratic leaders alike also receive little domestic political benefit from programs dedicated to far away countries. Thus, it is not surprising that UN assistance programs, for example, regularly exhibit a gap between the amount of aid that is promised and that which is actually supplied by its members.

Even with the best of efforts by external actors, success is far from guaranteed. Positive peace requires not merely acquiescence from the key players but also active cooperation from the conflicting parties. That is, positive peace is not something external actors can impose. There are some conflicts in which it might be impossible to find common ground among the key actors involved; thus, shared values, visions for the future, and integration might be an elusive quest. In such circumstances, negative peace might be the best outcome that is achievable. The evolution of the Israeli–Palestinian relationship could be headed in that direction. Furthermore, the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq and Syria makes it extremely difficult to envision reconciliation, building common institutions, and the like that

include that group. Short of military defeat, it means a “spoiler” exists, and such actors threaten not only progress toward positive peace but also the maintenance of negative peace.

If it becomes an endpoint for inquiry and policy, the focus on negative peace, or the cessation of armed hostilities, is a worthy goal but ultimately misleading and myopic for scholars and policy makers alike. Although the challenges are significant, building a broader conception of peace into strategy is more likely to promote stability in the long run and lessen the need for repeated military actions to impose or sustain stability. For scholars, abandoning conventional conceptions opens a wide range of new research and allows analysts to tackle key questions such as what factors are necessary for the transition from negative peace relationships to positive peace outcomes. **SSQ**

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Notes

1. Stephen Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011); and Joshua Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Dutton, 2011).

2. See Gary Goertz, Paul F. Diehl, and Alexandru Balas, *The Puzzle of Peace: Explaining the Rise of Peace in the International System* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), reviewed in this issue.

3. Christian Davenport, Erik Melander, and Patrick Regan, “The Peace Continuum: What It Is & How to Study It” (unpublished manuscript, 2015).

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