

The Promise of Peace, the Problems of War

In the third decade of the 21st century, we are faced with many problems. The Earth is composed of finite resources whose limits may soon be reached. Moreover, global climate change has been ongoing, already resulting in unprecedented catastrophes. Human societies contain gross maldistributions of wealth and power, another problem that has grown worse in recent years, preventing most human beings from realizing their potential and driving millions of people to despair, violent political extremism, and premature death.

Many cultural systems perpetuate regrettable patterns of economic, social, and political injustice in which racism, sexism, homophobia, militarism, ageism, religious intolerance, and other forms of unfairness abound and in which representative government is relatively rare and torture and other forms of oppression are distressingly common. The natural balance upon which all life depends has been increasingly disrupted. Global pandemics are not infrequent. Threats may also include super-intelligent and potentially malicious computers, existential risks of asteroid collisions, super-volcano eruptions, and, especially, thermonuclear war, the risk of which may well be increasing for the first time since the end of the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union. And this is only a partial list.¹

Yet, despite all of these difficulties, the remarkable fact is that enormous sums of money and vast resources of material, time, and energy are expended, not in solving what we might call the “problems of peace” but rather in threatening and actually making war on one another. Although it seems unlikely that human beings will ever achieve anything approaching heaven on Earth, or what the philosopher Immanuel Kant called “Perpetual Peace,” it seems reasonable to hope—and perhaps even to demand—that we will someday behave more responsibly and establish a global community based on the needs of the entire planet and the beings who inhabit it, a planetary society that is just and sustainable and not characterized by repeated major outbreaks of violence. Seriously, along with the many problems confronting us, there is also the hopeful reality that to some degree these problems have generated social and political involvement among people increasingly committed to solving them.

This book explores some of the aspirations, needs, prospects, and obstacles involved in achieving a genuinely peaceful world. After opening chapters on

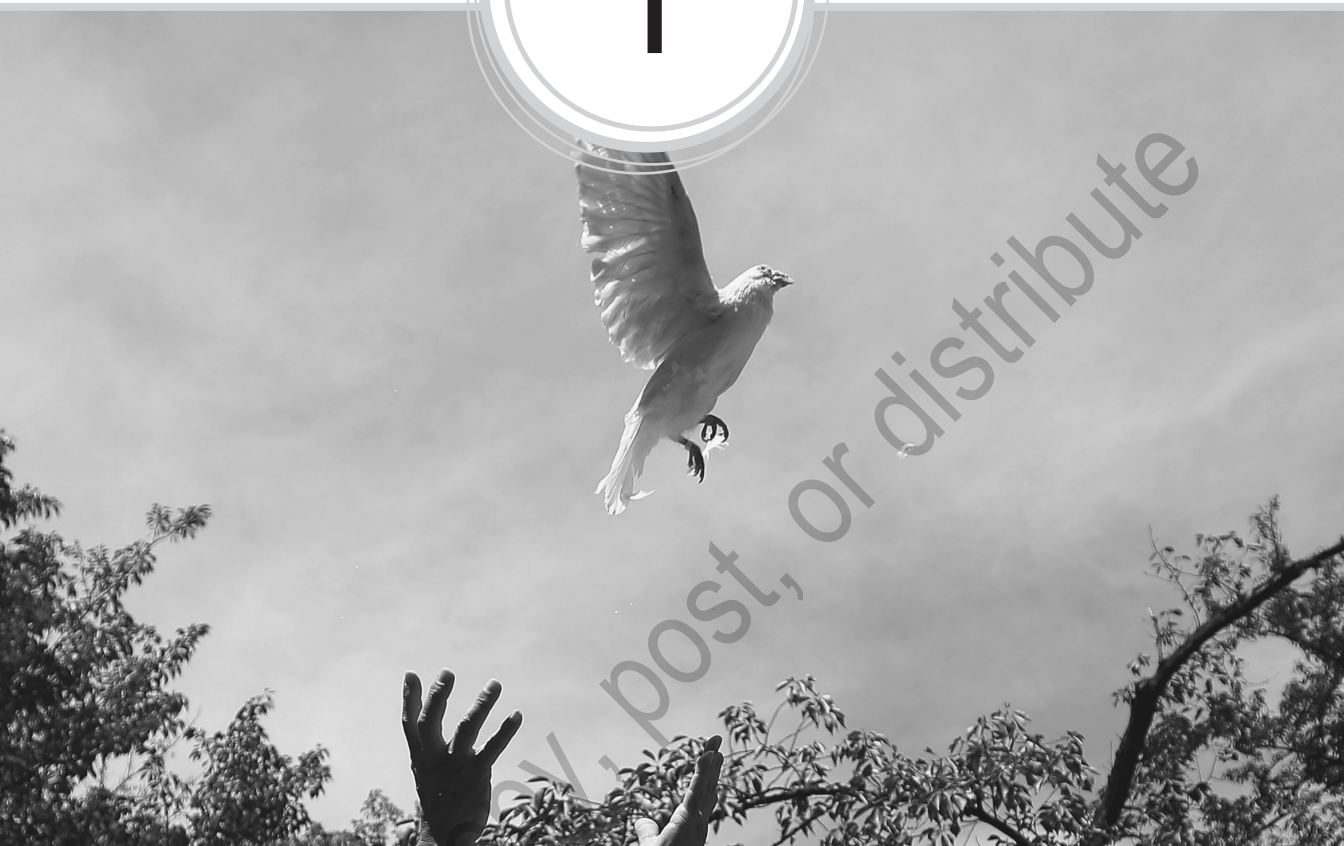
the meanings and measurement of peace, it proceeds to examine war—its causes and prevention. This is one of humanity's most serious challenges because behind the threat of war—especially nuclear and/or biochemical war—lies the prospect that human beings may end their civilization and perhaps all life on Earth.

Part I looks specifically at the promise of peace and the problems of war. Although war and peace are not polar opposites, there is a fundamental tension between them, two differing ways in which people interact. Part II considers war and its apparent causes, and Part III looks at possible routes toward preventing and abolishing war and other forms of collective violence. Part IV turns to deeper aspects of peace, examining our shared dilemmas and considering some solutions, including the creation of positive structures of peace—steps that go beyond just preventing war. Each chapter concludes with some questions for further thought and discussion, along with a few recommended readings; however, because peace and conflict are a moving target, and this book aims to emphasize material with a longer “shelf life,” it will go light on transient issues-of-the-moment. This 5th edition of *Peace and Conflict Studies* is intended not just to inform you but also to challenge you, not only intellectually but also in other dimensions of your life, and ideally to inspire you to work toward a better world.

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The Meanings of Peace

War is one of humanity's most pressing problems; peace is almost always preferable to war and, moreover, it can and must include not only the absence of war but the establishment of positive, life-enhancing values, political institutions, and social structures. We know that there is no simple solution to the problem of war. Most aspects of the war-peace dilemma are complex, interconnected, and, even when well understood, difficult to move from theory to practice. On the other hand, much can be gained by exploring the various dimensions of war and peace, including the possibility of achieving a more just and sustainable world—a way of living that can nurture life.

Throughout this book, we maintain that there is good reason for such hope, not simply as an article of faith but based on the realistic premise that human beings are capable of understanding the global situation and

recognizing their own species-wide best interests. People can behave rationally, creatively, with compassion, and, over time and with collective good will, can diminish—and, ideally, eliminate—most if not all forms of violence.

Most people think they know what *peace* means, but in fact different people often have very different understandings of this seemingly simple word. And although most would agree that some form of peace—whatever it means—is desirable, there are often vigorous, even violent, disagreements over how to obtain it.

The Meanings of Peace

Peace is surprisingly difficult to define. Like happiness, harmony, justice, and freedom, it is something we often recognize by its absence. Johan Galtung, a founder of peace studies and peace research, has proposed an important distinction between “positive” and “negative” peace. “Positive” peace denotes the presence of many desirable states of mind and society, such as harmony, justice, equity, and so on. “Negative” peace has historically meant the “absence of war.” By contrast, positive peace refers to a condition in which exploitation is minimized or eliminated and in which there is neither overt violence nor the more subtle phenomenon of underlying *structural violence*. Positive peace denotes the continuing presence of an equitable and just social order as well as ecological harmony.

Many philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions refer to peace in its positive sense. In Chinese, for example, the word *heping* denotes world peace, or peace among nations, while the words *an* and *mingsi* denote an “inner peace,” a tranquil and harmonious state of mind and being akin to a meditative mental state. Other languages also frame peace in its “inner” and “outer” dimensions.

The English language has many terms that refer to peace. In *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, for example, peace is initially defined as “freedom from civil clamor and confusion” and also as “a state of public quiet,” as well as “a state of mutual concord between governments: absence of hostilities or war.” In some cases and some cultures, the word *peace* even has an undesirable connotation. The Roman writer Tacitus spoke of making a desert and calling it “peace,” an unwanted situation of sterility and emptiness. To be *pacified*, derived from *pax*, the Latin word for peace, often means to be subdued or lulled into a false and misleading quietude. Indeed, *appeasement*—buying off a would-be aggressor—has acquired a very bad name. In probably the most notorious example of appeasement, former British prime minister Neville Chamberlain appeased Hitler in September 1938, famously declaring as he signed the Munich Agreement, which essentially gave in to all of Hitler’s demands: “I believe it is peace for our time.” (Less than a year later, Hitler invaded Poland, effectively starting World War II on the European continent.) At the time, however, public opinion had generally supported “appeasement,” seeing it as a reasonable and far-seeing effort to meet the legitimate needs of an aggrieved party and to do so short of war. Today, appeasement stands as a warning to genuinely peace-loving people that even efforts toward peace can backfire if unwisely pursued.

By contrast, even the most peace-loving among us recognize the merits of certain martial and aggressive attitudes, especially when referring to something other than direct military engagements: President Lyndon Johnson’s “war on poverty,” for example, or the medical “war on cancer,” and “battle against AIDS.”

Some Eastern Concepts of Peace

The foregoing is not simply a matter of playing with words. Fighting, striving, and engaging in various forms of conflict and combat (especially when they are successful) are widely associated with vigor, courage, and other positive virtues. Nonetheless, it is no exaggeration to claim that peace, along with happiness, may be the most longed-for human condition.

Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (6th century BCE), founder of Taoism and author of the *Tao Te Ching*, emphasized that military force is not the recommended *Tao*, or “Way.” He frequently referred to peaceful images of water or wind—both soft and yielding yet ultimately triumphant over such hard substances as rock or iron. The teachings of Confucius (approximately 551–479 BCE) are often thought by most Westerners to focus on respect for tradition, including elders and ancestors. But Confucius did not hold to these ideas because he valued obedience and order as virtues in themselves; rather, he maintained that the attainment of peace was the ultimate human goal and that it came from social harmony and equilibrium. His best-known collection of writings, the *Analects*, also emphasizes the doctrine of *jen* (empathy), founded on a kind of hierarchical Golden Rule: treat your subordinates as you would like to be treated by your superiors.

The writings of another renowned ancient Chinese philosopher and religious leader, Mo Tzu (468–391 BCE), took a more radical perspective. He argued against war and in favor of all-embracing love as a universal human virtue and the highest earthly goal, yet one that is within the grasp of each of us. Mo Tzu said, “Those who love others will also be loved in return. Do good to others and others will do good to you. Hate people and be hated by them. Hurt them and they will hurt you. What is hard about that?”² In what is now India, the Buddhist monarch Ashoka (3rd century BCE) was renowned for abandoning his successful military campaigns in the middle of his career and devoting himself to the religious conversion of his adversaries by nonviolent means.

The great ancient Indian text, the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* (written about 200 BCE), contains as perhaps its most important segment the *Bhagavad Gita*. This is a mythic account of a vicious civil war in which Arjuna, one of the principal warriors, is reluctant to fight because many of his friends and relatives are on the opposing side. Arjuna is ultimately persuaded to engage in combat by the god Krishna, who convinces Arjuna that he must fight, not out of hatred or hope for personal gain but out of selfless duty. Although the *Gita* can be and has been interpreted as supporting caste loyalty and the obligation to kill when bidden to do so by a superior party, it also inspired the great 20th-century Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi as an allegory for the de-emphasis of individual self in the pursuit of higher goals. The *Gita* was also cited by the “father of the atomic bomb,” J. Robert Oppenheimer, when he described the first atomic explosion as a contemporary incarnation of Krishna: “I am become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds.”

Some Judeo-Christian Concepts of Peace

Peace per se is not prominent in the Old Testament. The God (Yahweh) of Abraham, Moses, and David is frequently portrayed as bellicose, even bloodthirsty, and the ancient Israelites were often merciless warriors. Exceptions exist, however, such as the prophet Isaiah, who praised the reign of peace and described war as a punishment to be inflicted on those who have failed God.

Under the influence of Isaiah and later Hebrew prophets—and despite the ostensibly defensive violence of the Maccabees and Zealots (who opposed Roman rule in the lands now called Israel and Palestine and who have

sometimes been called history's first recorded terrorists)—Jewish tradition has tended to strongly endorse peacefulness. On the other hand, it can also be argued that with the emergence of Israel as a militarily threatened—and threatening—state, this tradition has substantially changed. In fact, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions all have bellicose components and elements in their history. A key question is whether such militarism—often persistent and widespread—is part of a pattern of faithfulness to, or a deviation from, their underlying religious worldview.

A deep irony underlies the concept of peace in these three great Western religious systems. “My peace I give unto you,” declares Jesus, according to the New Testament, along with “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” and the Sermon on the Mount, which famously urges followers to turn the other cheek. Christianity is, in fact, unique among Western religions in the degree to which it was founded upon a message of peace, love, and nonviolence, and yet it gave rise to one of the great warrior traditions. Although definitions of peace often vary and hypocrisy is not infrequent, most people share a positive presumption in favor of peace, in accord with the stated aspirations of most major religions.

Positive and Negative Peace

Let us recall the important distinction between positive and negative peace. Negative peace usually denotes the absence of war. It is a condition in which little, if any, active, organized military violence is taking place. When the noted 20th-century French intellectual Raymond Aron defined peace as a condition of “more or less lasting suspension of rivalry between political units,” he was thinking of negative peace.⁴ Aron's is the most common understanding of peace in the context of conventional political science and international relations, and it epitomizes the so-called realist view that peace is found whenever war or other direct forms of organized state violence are absent. From this perspective, the peace proclamations of Pharaonic Egypt, the *Philanthropa*, were actually statements of negative peace, expressions of benevolence from a stronger party toward those who were weaker. Similarly, the well-known *pax* of Roman times indicated little more than the absence of overt organized violence, typically a condition of nonresistance or even acquiescence enforced by local arrangements and the military might of the Roman legions. The negative peace of the *Pax Romana* was created and maintained, in large measure, through social and political repression of those who lived under Roman law.

An alternative view to this realist (or *Realpolitik*) perspective is one that emphasizes the importance of positive peace and that has been particularly advanced by Norwegian peace researcher Johan Galtung. Positive peace refers to a social condition in which exploitation is minimized or eliminated and in which there is neither overt violence nor the subtle phenomenon of underlying *structural violence*. It denotes the continuing presence of an equitable and just social order as well as ecological harmony.

Structural and Cultural Violence

Violence is usually understood to be physical and readily apparent. But it is important to recognize the existence of other forms of violence that are more indirect and insidious. This structural and cultural violence is typically built into the nature of social, cultural, and economic institutions. For example, both ancient Egypt and imperial Rome practiced slavery and were

highly despotic, although they were technically in states of negative peace for long periods of time.

Structural violence usually has the effect of denying people important rights, such as economic well-being; social, political, and sexual equality; a sense of personal fulfillment and self-worth, and the like. When people starve to death or go hungry, violence is taking place. Similarly, when people suffer from preventable diseases or when they are denied a decent education, affordable housing, freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly, or opportunities to work, play, or raise a family, violence is occurring, even if no bullets are shot or no clubs wielded. A society commits violence against its members when it forcibly stunts their development and undermines their well-being, whether because of religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual preference, social class, or some other factor. Structural violence is a form of oppression that can also involve mistreatment of the natural environment. However defined, structural violence is widespread, hurtful, and often unacknowledged.

Under conditions of structural violence, many people who behave as good citizens and who think of themselves as peace loving may, as Galtung puts it, participate in “settings within which individuals may do enormous amounts of harm . . . without ever intending to do so, just performing their regular duties as a job defined in the structure.”³ Analyzing the role of “normal” people, such as Adolf Eichmann, who helped carry out the Holocaust during World War II, philosopher Hannah Arendt referred to the “banality of evil,” emphasizing that routine, workaday behavior by otherwise normal, decent people can contribute to mass murder, social oppression, and structural violence.

In contrast with structural violence of starvation, underlying racism, economic impoverishment, and psychological alienation, direct violence generally works faster and is more visible and dramatic. In cases of overt violence, even those people not specifically involved in the conflict may be inclined to take sides. News coverage of these events is often intense, and because the outcome is typically visible and undeniable (e.g., wars, terrorism, as well as acts of domestic repression such as the murder and violent removal of Chinese citizens from Tiananmen Square by Chinese Army troops in 1989), the public is more likely to pay attention to what they can see rather than to the underlying structural but less visible factors that may have led to the conflict.

The concept of *cultural violence* can be seen as a follow-up to the idea of structural violence. Cultural violence is any aspect (often symbolic) of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural forms. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or that built into a social structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both, as in the Nazi theory of a *Herrenvolk* or superior (“master”) race.

Structural and cultural violence are, however, contested concepts. Clearly, they occur wherever there is slavery or gross political, cultural, and/or economic oppression; it remains debatable, on the other hand, whether social inequality constitutes structural violence and whether culture-specific norms and practices can even constitute violence. And what about skewed access to education, jobs, or medical care? Does simple social hierarchy (as, for example, in a family or classroom) constitute structural violence, and do culturally relative forms of life amount to cultural violence?

Achieving Positive Peace

Many cultural and spiritual traditions have identified political and social goals that are closer to positive than negative peace. The ancient Greek

concept of *eireinei* (the related English word is *irenic*) means harmony and justice as well as peace. Similarly, the Arabic *salaam* and the Hebrew *shalom* connote not only the absence of violence but also the presence of well-being, wholeness, and harmony within one's self, a community, and among all nations and peoples. The Sanskrit word *shanti* refers not only to peace but also to spiritual tranquility, an integration of outward and inward modes of being, just as the Chinese *ping* denotes harmony and the achievement of unity from diversity. In Russian, *mir* means peace, a village community, and the world.

Public awareness of negative peace, or the simple absence of war, usually comes about via a diplomatic emphasis on peacekeeping or peace restoring (if war has already broken out). Negative peace is a conservative, status-preserving goal, as it seeks to keep things the way they are (if a war is not actually taking place), whereas positive peace is more ambitious and bolder, implying the creation of something that, in most cases, does not currently exist.

Moreover, just as there is disagreement about how best to avoid a war—that is, how to achieve negative peace—even among decision makers who may be well intentioned, there is often disagreement about the best routes toward positive peace. Peace in its positive form is more difficult to articulate, and possibly more difficult to achieve, than its negative version. Although there is relatively little current debate about the desired end point in pursuing negative peace (most people agree that war is a bad thing), there is considerable controversy over *how* to prevent (or terminate) specific wars, as well as war generally.

People often disagree about the justification for any particular war. When it comes to positive peace, there is substantial disagreement about goals and the means to achieve them. Some theorists have argued, for example, that only negative peace should be pursued because once defined idealistically as a goal to be achieved, peace becomes something to strive for, even perhaps to the point of going to war! As Quincy Wright, one of the 20th century's preeminent researchers into the causes of war, put it:

Wars have been fought for the sanctity of treaties, for the preservation of law, for the achievement of justice, for the promotion of religion, even to end war and to secure peace. When peace assumes a positive form, therefore, it ceases to be peace. Peace requires that no end should justify violence as a means to its attainment.⁴

Other notable figures have maintained that a free society may justify—or even require—occasional violence. Thomas Jefferson, for example, wrote in 1787 that “the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” This apparent paradox—violence as a precondition for attaining its alternative—is a recurring theme in the study of and quest for peace.

Supporters of positive peace nonetheless agree that a repressive society, even if it is not at war, should be considered at peace only in a very narrow sense. In addition, a nation at peace that tolerates outbreaks of domestic violence on a widespread level, despite an absence of violent conflicts with other nations, is not really at peace with itself.

Social Justice

Having recognized the importance of positive peace, we now turn to a related notion: social justice. Although almost everyone today agrees that a

just society is desirable, there is often widespread disagreement as to what, exactly, a just society looks like, or how to achieve it. For example, whereas capitalists and individualists tend to privilege economic freedom from state intervention along with individual liberty—often at the cost of mass poverty, malnutrition, and homelessness—socialists and collectivists tend to value economic and social security, sometimes at the price of individual freedoms. Also, many Western individualists assert that nations with capitalist economies and democratic political systems seldom, if ever, go to war with one another, whereas many non-Western and dissident Western critics of capitalism claim that capitalism by its very expansionistic nature is inherently predatory and militaristic, impelling ostensibly democratic nations to invade and occupy undemocratic but economically and/or strategically important countries, usually in the non-Western world.

The Peace-War Continuum

“War is not sharply distinguished from peace,” according to Quincy Wright. Moreover,

Progress of war and peace between a pair of states may be represented by a curve: the curve descends toward war as tensions, military preparations, and limited hostilities culminate in total conflict; and it rises toward peace as tensions relax, arms budgets decline, disputes are settled, trade increases, and cooperative activities develop.⁵

Although a quick look at war and peace gives the impression that the two are clearly distinguished, a more detailed examination suggests that *war and peace are two ends of a continuum*, with only a vague and uncertain transition between the two. But the fact that two things may lack precise boundaries does not mean that they are indistinguishable. Thus, at dawn, night grades almost imperceptibly into day and vice versa at dusk. Yet when two things are very distinct, we say that “they are as different as night and day.” The transition from war to peace may often be similarly imprecise (although the move from peace to war may be all too clear and dramatic, as was evident at the beginning of World War II, both in Europe and in the Pacific).

Consider, for example, that the US involvement in Vietnam and much of the rest of Southeast Asia began in the early 1950s with economic and military aid to French forces seeking to retain their colonial possessions. It progressed to include the deployment of relatively small numbers of “technical advisers” in the early 1960s to what was then called South Vietnam. Larger numbers of American “advisers” were then added, accompanied by combat troops in small numbers, followed by limited and eventually massive bombing of all Vietnam (and its neighbors Laos and Cambodia). Finally, even though more than 500,000 American troops were eventually committed to propping up a corrupt and autocratic South Vietnamese government engaged in both a civil war and in hostilities against what was then called North Vietnam, and even though more than 50,000 Americans died as did perhaps more than 2 million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians, the United States never formally declared war! Yet there was no doubt that a state of war existed.

There is an increasing tendency—especially since the Vietnam War and notably during America’s “War on Terror(ism)” —for nations to fight wars without a formal declaration and, similarly, without solemn peace ceremonies or treaties signaling their end. The Korean War, for example, which

began in 1950, was never officially declared and has never technically ended (although there has been a prolonged ceasefire, with rare outbreaks of violence, between North and South Korea over more than a half-century). One of the most destructive wars of the second half of the 20th century, the conflict between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, was never declared, although it produced casualties that may have numbered in the millions (and Iraq probably used chemical weapons and may have been developing biological weapons). In fact, most of the world's armed conflicts involve revolutionary, counter-revolutionary, genocidal, and/or terrorist violence with no declarations of war whatsoever. Examples include East Timor, Kashmir, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and much of the rest of central Africa; the former Yugoslavia and several independent nations spawned from the former Soviet Union; and El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Afghanistan, Angola, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Cambodia. By the same token, the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were not preceded by formal declarations of war and seem unlikely to conclude with official announcements of peace.

The reluctance of most governments to declare war, as opposed to their willingness to fight or promote wars, may also result from the fact that although wars continue to be fought and to break out, most citizens and politicians are not proud of that fact. And despite theoretical arguments over the precise transitions between different stages of conflicts, most people know at a gut level what is meant by war. There is also little doubt that, given the choice, most would prefer peace.

Measuring Peace

Defining and Redefining Peace

The concept of peace remains nonetheless difficult to define. This may partly explain why there have been so few attempts to measure states of peace across nations. Although scholars have made numerous attempts to measure and operationalize “war,” it is only recently that similar efforts have been made to measure peace.

The Global Peace Index

Unlike such economic indices as gross national product or unemployment rates, the peacefulness of a country does not readily lend itself to direct measurement. However, the Global Peace Index (GPI), produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace in Sydney, Australia and updated annually, has succeeded in generating a credible assessment.⁶

The GPI offers us the opportunity not only to rank countries with regard to their peacefulness, but—more importantly—to begin assessing what factors correlate with peaceful versus nonpeaceful societies. For example, the 2019 GPI examined 163 countries, comprising more than 99% of the world's population, and used 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators that reflect three broad themes: (1) level of internal safety and security, (2) involvement in domestic or international conflict, and (3) degree of militarization. Measurements used include number of external conflicts, internal conflicts, violent domestic demonstrations, incarceration and murder rates, relations with neighboring countries, and so forth.

According to the 2019 GPI, Europe is the most peaceful region, while the Middle East and North Africa are the least peaceful. The 10 most peaceful

countries are, in order: Iceland, New Zealand, Portugal, Austria, Denmark, Canada, Singapore, Slovenia, Japan, and the Czech Republic. The United States ranks rather poorly—128th out of 163 countries—while the least peaceful country is Afghanistan, closely followed by Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Somalia, Central African Republic, Libya, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Russia, and Pakistan. Democracies consistently have the strongest level of positive peace but represent the minority of countries. Similarly, high-income countries generally rate very highly in the Positive Peace Index. The most militarized country is Israel, followed in turn by Russia, the US, North Korea, and France.

Importantly, peace is becoming more unevenly distributed. While Europe continues its long-term trend of pacification, the Middle East continues its recent tendency for belligerence, further increasing the distance between the most and least peaceful regions and countries. In Europe and in many other developed countries, homicide rates and other forms of interpersonal violence continue to drop and are at historic lows. By contrast, rates of interpersonal violence have climbed in Central America.

The economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2018 was substantial and is estimated at more than \$15 trillion, equivalent to the combined economies of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

The United States

In 2012, the United States was chosen for the first national peace index (Mexico and the UK were subsequently selected, and a second US Peace Index appeared more recently) principally due to the high quality of state-level data, dating back to the early 1980s, and the existence of a large literature of related studies, which estimate the various costs of violence as well as the costs associated with containing it.⁷ The United States performs well on citizen perception of crime within the country and on the low likelihood of violent demonstrations. But as already noted, the United States fares comparatively poorly on the GPI, especially when compared to other highly developed Western-style democracies, mainly due to its involvement in numerous wars, its exceptionally high level of military expenditures, and its civil unrest.

The United States also has a higher rate of violence than most other developed economies, although trends in crime over the past 20 years have fluctuated substantially, for reasons that have been much debated. At the beginning of the 1980s, the US crime rate was comparable to that of other developed nations, after which violence steadily increased to a peak in the mid-1990s and has since been falling. However, this reduction has been accompanied by a steadily *increasing* incarceration rate leading to an unrivaled percentage of its population behind bars—especially people of color—which has significant economic, racial, and social consequences.

Here are some significant findings from the US Peace Index: Compared to most other countries, relatively more data are available for the United States, permitting a more fine-grained analysis:

1. During the last 25 years, there has been a substantial decrease in the rates of homicide and violent crime. (Because of a drumbeat of misinformation, however, due in large part to Trump and his supporters as well as some social media, the majority of Americans mistakenly believe otherwise.) These improvements have been largely offset by increases in the incarceration rate, which, as of year-end 2018,

stood at 0.7% of resident adults, the highest in the world. Although some political conservatives claim that this is due to the greater effectiveness of US criminal enforcement activities, most experts reject this interpretation and associate the high US incarceration rate with unusually punitive social traditions and the targeting by law enforcement agencies of people of color, especially males.

2. The five most peaceful states are Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Minnesota, and North Dakota. The Northeast is the most peaceful region in the United States, with all of its states ranking in the top half of the US Peace Index. This includes the heavily populated states of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. The least peaceful states are Louisiana, Tennessee, Nevada, Florida, and Alabama.
3. Peace is linked to opportunity, health, education, and the economy. Statistically significant correlations exist between a state's peacefulness (notably low crime rate) and 15 different social and economic factors, such that higher scores in peacefulness are associated with higher scores in health, education, and economic opportunity, but not with political affiliation.
4. The potential economic gains from improvements in peace are significant. Improvements in peace would result in the realization of substantial savings for both governments and society as a whole. If the United States reduced its violence to the same levels as Canada, for example, local governments would collectively save about \$89 billion. For instance, lost productivity from assault and from incarceration constitutes the greatest share of the total cost of violence, so states with high levels of incarceration and assault tend to have a higher per capita cost. The release of "trapped productivity" via a reduction of violence would create a stimulus that could generate an additional 1.7 million new jobs. And the benefit of transferring state and federal expenditures from violence-containment industries (including the military, police, and prison-industrial complex) to more economically productive industries is significant. This can be exemplified by building more new schools than jails and by employing more new teachers than missile designers. Although such efforts would not necessarily generate additional economic activity in themselves, they would create the foundation for a more productive economy. The implementation of such additional economic activity is defined as the "dynamic peace dividend," which can result in a substantial lift in GDP, employment, and quality of life.
5. Growing incarceration is a drag on the economy and in recent years has not had a significant effect on violent crime. While homicide and violent crime rates have fallen, the economic benefits to flow from these decreases have been largely offset by the costs associated with the increase in the incarceration rate. In recent years, there has been no statistically meaningful relationship between increases in incarceration rates and decreases in violent crime.
6. There is a strong correlation between peacefulness within each state and people's satisfaction with their access to such basic services as clean water, medicine, a safe place to exercise, affordable fruits and vegetables; enough money for food, shelter, and health care; perceptions of safety within one's community, and access to necessary medical care.

Culture of Peace

In 1999, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly launched a program of action to build a “culture of peace” for the world’s children, which envisaged working toward a positive peace of justice, tolerance, and plenty. The UN defined a culture of peace as involving values, attitudes, and behaviors that

- reject violence,
- endeavor to prevent conflicts by addressing root causes, and
- aim at solving problems through dialogue and negotiation.

The UN proposed that such a culture of peace would be furthered by actions promoting education for peace and sustainable development, which it suggested was based on human rights, gender equality, democratic participation, tolerant solidarity, open communication, and international security. However, these links between the concept of peace and its alleged causes were presumed rather than systematically measured. For example, although advocates of liberal peace theory have held that democratic states rarely attack each other, the ongoing wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere demonstrate how some democratic countries can be militant or belligerent—the justification for war often being that peace is ultimately secured through violence or the threat of violence.

A Final Note on the Meanings of Peace

Neither the study nor the pursuit of peace ignores the importance of conflict. Peace and conflict studies does not aim to abolish conflict any more than peace practitioners expect to eliminate rivalry or competition in a world of finite resources and imperfect human conduct. (Analogously, medicine and public health do not realistically seek to eliminate all bacteria or viruses from the world, although they are committed to human betterment by struggling against those that generate diseases.)

Where possible, peace and conflict studies seeks to develop new avenues for cooperation, as well as to reduce violence, especially organized, state-sanctioned violence and the terrorizing violence perpetrated both by and against non-state actors. It is this violence, by any definition the polar opposite of peace, that has so blemished human history and that—with the advent of nuclear weapons, biochemical weapons, and other mechanisms of global destruction—now threatens the future of life on this planet. And it is the horror of such violence, as well as the hope for peace (both negative and positive), that make peace and conflict studies especially frustrating, fascinating, and essential.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Is peace an absolute, or are there degrees of peace, both outer and inner?
2. To what extent are peace and war mutually exclusive?
3. Under which circumstances, if any, is conflict inescapable and perhaps even desirable?

4. Under which circumstances, if any, is violence inescapable and perhaps even desirable?
5. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of empirical tools such as the GPI for measuring peace and its absence.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Notes

1. For an overview and analysis of existential risks to humanity and the Earth, see Nick Bostrom, ed. 2008. *Global Catastrophic Risks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Toby Ord. 2020. *The Precipice Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity*. London: Bloomsbury.
2. Mo Tzu. 1967. *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press.
3. Johan Galtung. 1985. "Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Responses." *Journal of Peace Research* 22: 141–158.
4. Quincy Wright. 1964. *A Study of War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
5. Ibid.
6. For the *Global Peace Index* and related documents, including *COVID and Peace*, see <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/>
7. The 2012 United States Peace Index (USPI) is available at <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/us-peace-index/#/>