

Exploring Peace: Looking Beyond War and Negative Peace

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Concern about war and large-scale violence has long dominated the study of international security. To the extent that peace receives any scholarly attention, it primarily does so under the rubric of “negative peace:” the absence of war. This article calls for a focus on peace in international studies that begins with a reconceptualization of the term. I examine the limitations of negative peace as a concept, discuss “positive peace,” and demonstrate empirically that Nobel Peace Prize winners have increasingly been those recognized for contributions to positive peace. Nevertheless, scholarly emphasis remains on war, violence, and negative peace—as demonstrated by references to articles appearing in a leading peace-studies journal and to papers presented at International Studies Association meetings. Peace is not the inverse or mirror image of war and therefore requires different theoretical orientations and explanatory variables. The article concludes with a series of guidelines on how to study peace.

Research on war and traditional security concerns has dominated international studies.¹ This should not surprise us. Nor is this focus necessarily unjustified. Realist thought provided a theoretical lens that assumed conflict inheres in international affairs. It held that *realpolitik* processes overwhelmingly shaped world politics. In addition, the human and economic costs of war—and other serious forms of violence—made it of the utmost importance for scholarship and policymaking. The wars of the twentieth century directly claimed over 40 million lives (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). Countless more died indirectly as consequences of those conflicts. In 2014, governments worldwide spent almost two trillion dollars on military preparedness (SIPRI 2014)—a testament to the primacy of security issues in many national capitals. The resources and attention—in both political and diplomatic terms—devoted to war and related defense issues are substantial. They often crowd out other problems on the international agenda, including those associated with development, health, and human rights.²

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¹Indeed, the International Security Studies Section of ISA has, by far, the greatest number of members.

²Nevertheless, negative peace might be less important to other elites, notably those at the UN, see Sylvester (1980).

Scholars should not abandon a concern with war and violence. Rather, I argue that they should pay greater attention to *peace*. They should do so in a fashion that moves beyond its conventional conceptions and operational definitions.³ I begin with a critique of current conceptual approaches to peace; I focus on how the traditional “absence of war” conception limits research and leads to some absurd categorizations. Indeed, this scholarly approach lags behind more popular notions of peace, evident in the selection of recent Nobel Peace Prize winners.

The following section considers a range of scholarship, both historical and contemporary, arguing that consideration of positive peace remains a minority research focus in international studies. In the second half of the article, I redress this shortcoming by demonstrating how patterns of peace and conflict in the international system differ, how independent variables play different roles in peace and conflict studies, and, finally, how certain research choices bring us closer to giving peace its rightful place in international studies.

Conceptions of Peace

Scholarly studies usually define peace as the absence of war. Prominent works on the decline of war (Goldstein 2011; Pinker 2011) argue that the world is more peaceful largely because of declining violent behavior—particularly that resulting in battle deaths. An extensive scholarly literature explores the “democratic peace” (Russett and Oneal 2001). This depends entirely on the absence of a bona fide war between two democracies, not the absence of armed conflict or highly militarized interactions per se. Even competitors to the democratic peace, such as the “territorial peace” (Gibler 2012) and the “capitalist peace” (Schneider and Gleditsch 2010), concentrate on the absence of war rather than more positive conceptions of peace. Similarly, some call the post-World War II period the “Long Peace” (Gaddis 1987), defined as the longest period of history *without a war* between major power states. Yet, the Cold War was a period of superpower competition

³A related call is made by Regan (2014) in his presidential address to the Peace Science Society (International).

characterized by the development of extensive nuclear arsenals, unprecedented military spending, and a variety of interstate and civil proxy wars (see Westad 2007).

Defining peace as the absence of war makes sense for scholars interested in the understanding the conditions that generate war and other forms of violence. Nevertheless, it produces some absurd categorizations for those who want to focus on explaining peace. In the peace-as-not-war conception, North Korea has been at peace with South Korea and the United States for over six decades. After all, no major military engagements—in the form of sustained and direct fighting—have occurred since 1953. Similarly, we would code the Iranian-Israeli relationship, at least since 2000, as “peaceful.” The only direct hostile interactions between those two states has involved sporadic and covert action—such as the assassination of diplomats and nuclear scientists or the planting of computer viruses in the software that operates nuclear power plants. Yet most policymakers and other observers would rightly scoff at the notion that any of these relationships are peaceful. The idea that the Korean peninsula and the Iranian-Israeli relationship are just as “peaceful” as contemporary French-German or United States-Canadian relations defies common sense.

Peace as the absence of war is also problematic when looking within states. Scholars could classify Gambia as peaceful (certainly in comparison to Syria or Afghanistan) given the rarity of internal violence there. Nevertheless, from a peace perspective, it is a very poor country (182nd in GDP), with only 31 percent of the population having access to electricity (World Bank 2014) and an authoritarian government with a bad human rights record (Cignarelli, Richards, and Clay 2014). Looking only at the absence of war, scholars place Gambia in the same peace category as Sweden and Norway, despite its tremendous gap with them on all dimensions of human security. Similarly, the end of civil wars when one side achieves victory—as happened in Rwanda—is peaceful only in a negative sense. Nevertheless, given the continuing violence (albeit at lower levels than that of genocide) and human rights violations, it seems incongruous to classify that state in the same category as Belgium or India, which have had their own struggles with ethnic/linguistic differences.

In order to study peace, one needs a conceptualization that is not a mirror image of or “symmetric” to war (for a definition of symmetry in this context, see Goertz and Mahoney 2012). There exists a long-standing and extensive discussion on peace and related ideas (see Boulding 1978; Galtung 1985; Mueller 2007; Rapoport 1992; see Gleditsch, Nordkavalle, and Strand 2014; Isard 2000; and Regan 2014 for brief histories; see Carroll, Fink, and Mohraz 1983 for an early compilation of sources), but few efforts at synthesizing different conceptual ideas and even fewer at providing systematic and measurable definitions.

Most conceptions of peace begin with “negative peace,” most famously associated with Galtung (2012; see also Boulding 1978). Variations in scholarly works include different labels such as “precarious peace” (George 2000), “adversarial peace” (Bengtsson 2000), “pre-peace” (Bayer 2010), “conditional peace” (George 2000), or “cold peace” (Miller 2001). The central part of these terms is still the absence of violent conflict.

Negative peace is an important concept, and it is more nuanced than merely stating that actors are not at war. Nevertheless, it does not get at the positive peace elements that characterize many friendly relationships. In those interactions, war is absent, but many other

conditions operate. These include extensive cooperation and integration between actors. Non-traditional aspects of security, such as human security, development, and human rights characterize the relationship between states and constituent groups. Some conceptions also include key values embedded in the relationship; these include equity and justice. For example, a 2015 survey (Advanced Consortium 2015) of scholars on the concept of “sustainable peace” identified five thematic categories of key elements beyond the one dealing with violence: (i) well-being; (ii) quality of relations, cooperation, and interdependence; (iii) conflict management and resolution; (iv) access to resources, equality, and human security; and (v) institutional capacity and governance.

A full elaboration of positive peace exceeds the scope of this article, and the aspects of it may vary by context: state-state, government-population, group-group, individual-individual, and various combinations thereof. As illustrations, however, consider two recent efforts at developing continuums along which actor relationships vary.

In Goertz, Diehl, and Balas (2016), we create a “peace scale” of five ideal type categories along which relationships between states vary. Scholars often highlight two categories of rivalry (severe and lesser) as well as negative peace, defined here and elsewhere though by reference to more than violent conflict and its absence. Two categories of relationships on the positive peace side of the scale are “warm peace” and “security communities.” Consider security communities, a term that first became prominent with the work of Deutsch, Burrell, and Kann (1957) but has also received recent attention from others (see the collection by Adler and Barnett 1998a). Although conceptually a security community could include a formal merger of two political entities, in practice, states retain their sovereign independence to a substantial degree. War is not only unthinkable between members, but extensive communication links and transaction flows also bind the parties together (Deutsch et al. 1957). Security communities might also involve shared identities, values, and meanings as well as interactions at several levels (private as well as governmental) and common long-term interests (Adler and Barnett 1998b). The relationships are mutually rewarding and reflective of harmonious interests (Alker 1977).

Hallmark dimensions of “positive” peace are expectations and mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution; war or the use of military force as a means of conflict resolution is “unthinkable,” or has a zero probability. Although peace scholars differ on some of the dimensions, four related core characteristics define the extreme end of positive peace: (i) absence of major territorial claims, (ii) institutions for conflict management, (iii) high levels of functional interdependence, and (iv) satisfaction with the status quo. Goertz et al. (2016) then proceed to code all state-state relationships from 1900 to 2006 on their scale using a variety of indicators and sources. Almost all relationships on the scale including rivalries (as most are not at war at a given point in time) are “peaceful” if the absence of war were the only criterion. Using a broader definition of peace and a wider variety of indicators allows scholars to differentiate between US-Canada and India-Pakistan relations, as well as track important changes toward more peaceful relations such as those involving Israel-Egypt and US-Cuba.

The previous scale concerned interstate relationships. More broadly applicable for states, groups, individuals, and other actors is the Davenport Peace Scale (Davenport 2015).

His 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. Although Davenport (2015) briefly applies this scale to the United States and African-Americans, this has not yet been widely applied or assessed. The two efforts noted here and others (for example, Wallensteen 2015) are in their nascent stages, at least compared to conflict scales.

Positive Peace as a Priority in the Global Mindset

Decisions of the Nobel Committee in awarding its Peace Prize illustrate the importance of positive peace. Looking at the 96 prizes awarded to 129 laureates (some prizes are shared) over the 1901–2015 period reveals an increasing propensity for positive peace efforts to receive recognition. I coded all Nobel winners, by year, for the period according to whether the award was primarily for promoting negative peace, positive peace, or some combination thereof.⁴ This coding reflects the official statements and rationales provided by the Nobel Committee on its website.⁵

Negative peace efforts include all aspects dealing with the termination or moderation of existing hostile relationships, including the end of wars. Thus, efforts at disarmament, negotiating agreements that ended or moderated war and rivalries, and the like are negative peace efforts. For example, the 1994 award to Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin was negative peace diplomacy. Indeed, anything that explicitly dealt with war and its consequences was coded as negative peace. Thus, awards to the International Committee of the Red Cross (1917, 1944, and 1963) for directly assisting refugees during war and prisoners of war was regarded primarily as an effort at negative peace.⁶ In contrast, positive peace efforts deal with non-traditional security concerns that do not directly deal with war and violence. Such elements include awards for promoting development, human rights, and the status of women. For example, the 2014 winners—Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai—were both recognized for “their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education.”

Table 1 reports the patterns of Nobel winners for the full period in which the award existed, as well as for two sub-periods that were inductively determined. Overall, there appears to be a balance between positive and

Table 1. Nobel peace prizes, 1901–2015

Period	Negative peace	Positive peace	Both/Unclear
Whole Period	45.8% (44)	42.7% (41)	11.5% (11)
Pre-1945	67.7% (21)	16.1% (5)	16.1% (5)
1945 and Beyond	35.4% (23)	55.4% (36)	9.2% (6)

N = 96.

negative peace over the course of Nobel history. There are approximately equal numbers of awards for each type of peace effort and slightly more than 10 percent that recognize both kinds of contributions. Nevertheless, there are substantial differences if one disaggregates the data, with the dividing line being World War II. Prior to 1945, more than two-thirds of the awards were for negative peace; most evident was US President Roosevelt receiving the award in 1906 for helping end the Russo-Japanese War. Various international peace movements, the Kellogg-Briand Pact to end war, and the League of Nations were all dedicated to ending war. Positive peace efforts, such as the 1930 award to Nathan Soderblom for religious efforts to promote peace and human rights, were the exception.

Following World War II, there is a discernible shift in the decisions of the Nobel Committee to recognize positive peace and a broader security agenda.⁷ Although traditional negative peace awards do not disappear (they still constitute one-third), positive peace recognition now constitutes a majority. The breadth of positive peace efforts is impressive, bringing in concerns with the environment, human rights, poverty, status of women, medicine, and economic development. For example, the latter is evident by the 2006 award to Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank for micro-lending programs. Successful initiatives in these areas might decrease the prospects for war in the longer term, but their immediate purposes are to promote positive peace values such as dignity, justice, and the fulfillment of the human potential.

Peace goes beyond the absence of war, and various conceptions of peace incorporate a variety of elements and values associated with positive peace. Furthermore, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee has increasingly recognized accomplishments in the positive peace area. Nevertheless, scholarly discourse on peace has lagged behind such attention to positive peace, as is evident by the analysis in the next section.

Scholarly Myopia and Positive Peace

Despite the conceptual tools to address positive peace and increasing attention in the public sphere to such concerns, the scholarly literature has lagged behind in studying such topics. This ignorance or downplaying of positive peace is long-standing. In Quincy Wright’s classic *A Study of War* (1942), only five of the almost 1500 pages are devoted to the meaning of peace.⁸ The emphasis on war, violence, and negative peace is also evident in attempts to measure peace. The Global Peace Index purports to construct an aggregate indicator of peacefulness for each

⁴When the rationale for the award was unclear, it was coded in the same category as “both.” For shared prizes, each was coded individually and then aggregated. The majority motivation for the honorees was coded. For example, if one laureate was honored for positive peace efforts and the other for negative peace, the year was coded as “both.”

⁵http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/ (last accessed on 9 November 2015). Recent awards include a statement on the “motivation” for the award. Some earlier awards include summaries and press releases that directly or indirectly address the basis for the award. The earliest awards often contain only a brief description of the laureate; these along with other cases in which the motivation for the award was unclear required some additional biographical research in order to arrive at a coding decision.

⁶In other cases, assisting refugees in long-term repatriation and resettlement was coded as positive peace given efforts at reconciliation and other aspects of human security.

⁷One might have expected the key breakpoint in the shifts toward positive peace to be the end of the Cold War, but the patterns after 1989 are very similar to those in the first 35 years of the post-World War II period.

⁸I am indebted to Rudolph Rummel for pointing this out on his website <https://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP3.HTM> (last accessed on 7 January 2016).

country in the world.⁹ Nevertheless, virtually every one of the 27 indicators of internal and external peace used to build the aggregate index deal with negative peace; some examples include the homicide rate, access to small arms, military expenditures, and involvement in external conflicts.¹⁰

The concentration of scholarly research on violent conflict and negative peace issues is most evident by systematic reference to two relevant outlets for such research: the *Journal of Peace Research* (JPR) and the International Studies Association (ISA) annual meeting. With respect to the former, Gleditsch et al. (2014) looked at the publication patterns for that journal in its first fifty years. The authors used content analysis on the titles of articles published in the period 1964-1991, and titles and abstracts for the period 1992-2012. Using the replication data from that article,¹¹ four search terms were used to signify whether a journal purportedly dedicated to scholarly studies of *peace* focused more extensively on conflict and negative peace concerns versus those dealing with positive peace; the search terms were “peace,” “war,” “conflict,” and “violence/violent.” With respect to the ISA annual meeting, an initial search of paper titles in the 2015 preliminary program used the same search terms as above and added “security” to the list.¹²

The initial search generated a set of articles and papers that dealt broadly with peace and conflict issues.¹³ The next step was to determine whether these works focused primarily on negative or positive peace.¹⁴ Coding decisions on each source relied on a similar procedure.

Negative and positive peace are not always defined clearly, but the following conceptions were used in the coding. Negative peace is simply the absence of conflict.¹⁵ Articles or papers that explicitly treat peace as the opposite of conflict fall into this category. Others that do not

⁹See http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Peace%20Index%20Report%202015_0.pdf (last accessed on 7 January 2016).

¹⁰Even “neighboring country relations” is operationalized in terms of tension and invasions rather than integration. “UN peacekeeping funding” and “Refugees and IDPs” might include some positive peace elements, but these are strongly correlated with the outbreak and termination of armed conflict and therefore primarily deal with negative peace concerns.

¹¹<https://www.prio.org/JPR/Datasets/> (last accessed on 15 January 2015).

¹²Searching a PDF of the conference program identified every instance in which the terms listed below appeared in the title of an ISA paper. The exception was the “conflict” term, which because of a PDF encoding issue required the use of the underlying database by the ISA staff. Only instances of the term in paper titles were included in the analysis; panel titles and institutional affiliations were not.

¹³Papers received multiple counts across categories if they contained multiple search terms. In other words, a single paper could appear under “Conflict” and “War.” Some papers were not included in the data despite containing one or more search terms. In some cases, this occurred because it could not be determined, even after consulting the abstract, whether a paper employed a positive or negative conception of peace. In other cases, a term appeared but was not actually related to peace or conflict (for example, a political economy study that uses the phrase “Cold War” to describe a time period). In a few cases, search terms appear in proper nouns in studies that are not directly about peace or conflict. For instance, a study on the internal politics of the UN Security Council would only be included if it is related to peace or conflict. Some papers on conflict or peace studies disciplines themselves are not part of the data.

¹⁴There are a handful of papers with explanatory factors that relate to conflict but with outcomes that are impossible to categorize in terms of positive or negative peace; for example, a paper on the effect of war, along with other variables, on partisan alignments is really concerned with the latter and not centrally with peace and conflict per se.

¹⁵Most of the studies of war and violence never mention peace, and their implicit or explicit binary conceptualization (war/no war or violence/no violence) places them in the negative peace category.

explicitly define peace as the absence of conflict, but do not consider variation in the category of peace, are also coded as negative peace. There are several topics on which the literature almost invariably treats peace and conflict as a dichotomy. Papers on these subjects are automatically coded as negative peace, unless there is evidence in the title or abstract that a positive conception of peace is used. These include causes of war, deterrence, arms control, conflict/peace duration,¹⁶ weapons, traditional peacekeeping, and traditional security studies.¹⁷

Positive peace considers one or more dimensions of variation within the category of situations that are absent of conflict. It refers to the existence (or at least possibility) of close relationships or societal prosperity exceeding that of simple negative peace. Works that do not lump all situations in which conflict is absent into a single category, and instead capture varying degrees or types of peace, are coded as positive peace. This includes most studies that move beyond the simple presence or absence of violence to consider the underlying disagreement that produces the violence. Several categories of studies tend to fall extensively into the domain of positive peace, specifically those dealing with conflict resolution, human rights, reconciliation, justice, economic development, human security, and gender.¹⁸

Figure 1 tracks the publication of negative and positive peace articles in the *Journal of Peace Research* over the 1964-2012 period.

Even a journal dedicated to peace research has had a notable pattern of focusing on conflict and negative peace-related works. Except for a brief time at the outset of the journal, war and negative peace concerns have always been a majority in the pages of *Journal of Peace Research*. Indeed, the gap between negative and positive peace has actually increased over time. This has occurred in parallel with a shift in research focus from interstate conflict to civil war. This is not to say that the newer topics on the security agenda do not appear in the journal. Human rights, for example, are now subjects of greater scholarly scrutiny. Yet as Gleditsch et al. (2014) point out, the concentration of research in that area is primarily about the conditions for violations or repression, a negative peace concern similar to the focus on war and violence in traditional security studies. The authors conclude: “Negative peace, in the sense of reducing war, has always been the main focus of peace research” (2014, 155).¹⁹

One might expect that ISA members would be more broadly concerned with peace issues than *Journal of Peace Research* authors given that the former includes those from more than 120 different countries and those who have a

¹⁶Even studies of “peace duration” are really about negative peace as they measure the elapsed time from the end of one war to the onset of another.

¹⁷If either the theoretical or empirical components of a paper uses a negative conception of peace, it is coded as negative peace. In other words, in a study with a conceptual framework that allows for varying degrees or types of peace, but it is clear that the empirical analysis does not measure any variation in the category of peace, the paper is coded as negative peace. Similarly, if an empirical measure has the potential to capture positive peace, but is within a negative peace framework, the paper is coded as negative peace.

¹⁸If one component of a paper uses a positive conception of peace and there is no clear contradiction with another component (the theory considers positive peace and it is unclear whether it is measured empirically), the paper is coded as positive peace.

¹⁹This conclusion is based not only on the 50 year publishing history of the *Journal of Peace Research* but also on an analysis of articles in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, another prominent journal with a title that is suggestive of a positive peace orientation.

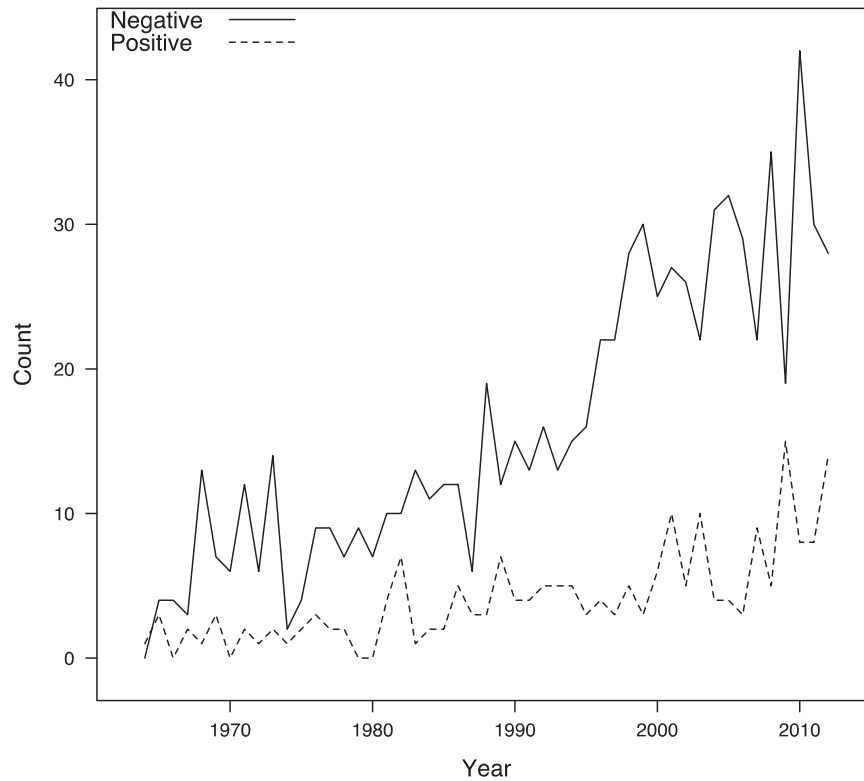


Figure 1. Journal of peace research: positive and negative peace studies, 1964-2012

Table 2. War and Peace in the ISA Preliminary Program, 2015

Title word	Negative peace	Positive peace	N
Peace	40.2% (98)	59.8% (146)	18.8% (244)
Conflict-Related	66.4% (700)	33.6% (354)	81.2% (1054)
Total	61.5% (798)	38.5% (500)	(1298)

wider set of research concerns. The methodological, theoretical, and political orientations of ISA authors are less Western-centered and more open to Global South concerns, which better incorporate positive peace issues and do not as strongly reflect traditional security conceptions. Table 2 collapses the search terms into peace and conflict-related categories. Understanding that titles, and even abstracts, can be misleading, the papers are then coded for whether positive or negative peace concerns were addressed in the research. This more nuanced analysis recognizes that even papers with titles purporting to be about peace could really only be about war and negative peace; the opposite might be true of papers that emphasize conflict or war in their titles and abstracts.

ISA conference papers with “peace” in their titles are a distinct minority, less than one-fifth (18.8 percent) of those scheduled for presentation at the 2015 meeting. In addition, over 40 percent of those articles actually deal with negative peace more than its positive aspects. These results paint a picture of an international studies discipline still preoccupied with war and violence. Yet not all the findings are discouraging for those who would advocate a positive peace research agenda. Although over 80 percent of paper titles include conflict-related words, a good portion of them (just over one-third) is, in fact, dedicated to positive peace. Thus, ISA papers are somewhat

more inclined than the published research to deal with positive peace, although it is still a minority.

The results above indicate that positive peace concerns do not receive the same scholarly attention as those focusing on war, violence, and related foci.²⁰ Giving greater attention to peace concerns, however, requires some fundamental shifts in how we approach research and the kinds of causal factors needed to explain peace.

Studying Peace

Peace as the Inverse of War?

The traditional view of peace is that it is merely the inverse of war and therefore can be explained by reference to the same variables and processes as war. This is best reflected in Geoffrey Blainey’s (1973, 293) classic work *The Causes of War*: “War and peace appear to share the same framework of causes . . . The same set of factors should appear in explanations of the outbreak of war [and the] outbreak of peace”.²¹ Such a claim, however, is inconsistent with patterns of war and peace, and indeed an analysis of various causal factors indicates that peace is far from a mirror image of or symmetrical to war (Goertz and Mahoney 2012).

In Figure 2, the incidence of civil war,²² interstate war, and “positive peace relationships” between states (taken from Goertz et al. 2016²³) at the international system level

²⁰There are different ways to define positive and negative peace and one could quibble with individual coding decisions, but the overall patterns are unlikely to be different with alternative specifications.

²¹I am indebted to Andrew Owsiak for pointing out this quote to me.

²²This includes civil war and internationalized civil war from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project as reported in Goertz et al. (2016).

²³Positive peace relationships are those in the “warm peace” and “security communities” categories referenced above.

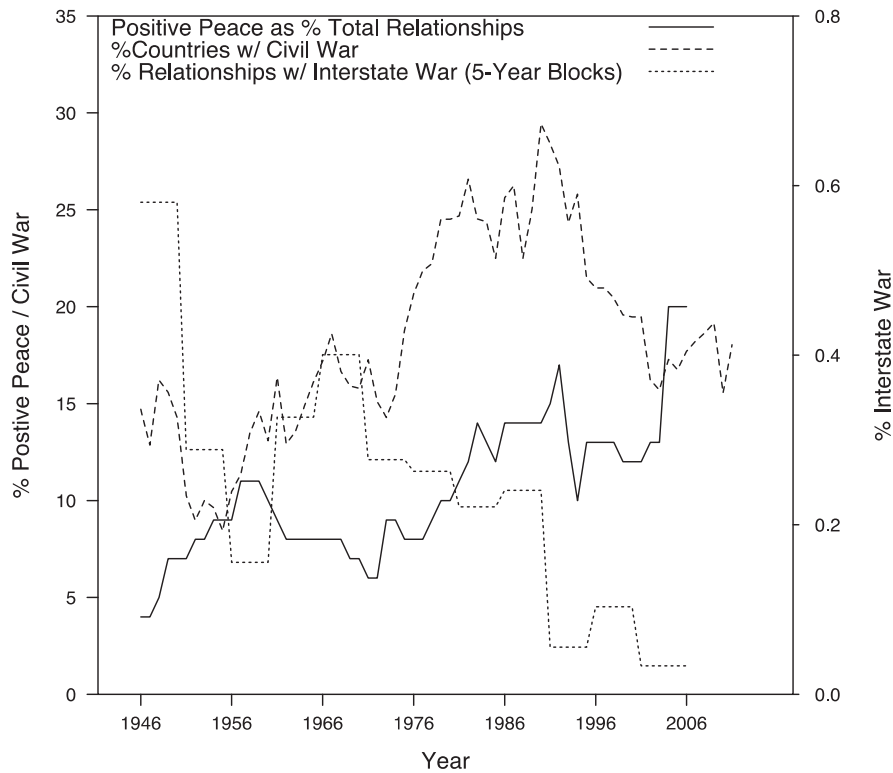


Figure 2. Civil war, interstate war, and positive peace relationships

are mapped against one another for the period since 1945 until as recently as data permit. If peace is merely the inverse of war, then the resulting patterns for conflicts ought to be the opposite of those for peace (the correlation should be strongly negative).²⁴ In fact, they are not, and this helps further establish peace as a separate and independent phenomenon.

Positive peace relationships are somewhat related to the incidence of interstate war (correlation is modest, $r = -.33$, meaning positive peace increases when war decreases).²⁵ On the one hand, it is conceivable that relationships in which war was unthinkable would be associated with lower levels of interstate war in the international system. Nevertheless, most of those states that moved into positive peace relationships did so after being in negative peace relationships, such as members of the European Union; these were unlikely candidates for war in any case. The integration processes of those states in positive peace (for example, the United States-Canada) go well beyond not fighting one another. Thus, the correlation is unlikely to represent a causal relationship.

In popular discourse, there is sometimes the claim that civil war has replaced or substituted for interstate conflict after 1989, and therefore peaceful state relationships are just a reflection of that shift. Civil conflict jumps in the 1970s and stays at high levels until the beginning of the 1990s when it declines to levels only slightly greater than those in the 1960s. Positive peace relationships generally move somewhat in tandem ($r = +.48$) with civil conflict, but this actually reverses after 1989 ($r = -.21$). Thus, for

²⁴If peace is defined only as the absence of war, the correlation between peace and war would be perfectly negative.

²⁵Because of the rarity of interstate war, values for that variable are aggregated in five-year blocks and repeated for each year. The correlation does not change substantially with alternative measures.

the period as a whole, increasingly new peaceful relationships among states are occurring at the same time that civil wars might be increasing. Yet there is no compelling rationale that the same factors are driving both phenomena, suggesting that peaceful state relationships are not closely related to other conflict phenomena. At least at the international system level, peaceful relationships are not the inverse of, or even in some cases strongly related to, conflict phenomena.

Explaining peace also requires different theoretical formulations. As an illustration of how war and peace explanations overlap and (mostly) differ, consider four different and prominent factors used in models of interstate war: geographic proximity, power distributions, alliances, and trade (see Bremer 1992 for a treatment). The causal symmetry question is whether we would find the same causal relationships—only the signs (positive or negative effects) of the coefficients in a statistical equation would change—with the same independent variables. That is, would the same factors matter, but with the opposite effects, if positive peace were the outcome variable rather than war or militarized disputes?

First, perhaps the strongest and most consistent predictor of interstate conflict is geographic contiguity. There is a strong positive correlation between geographic contiguity and positive peace. Almost all positive peace relationships involve either contiguous states or those that are linked by another peaceful relationship link between the two non-contiguous states (as in the European Union) between the states involved. Thus, geographic contiguity is positively associated with *both* war and peace. If peace and war were mirror images, this makes no sense, as the effects should be the inverse of one another.

Relative power is a critical variable in most war studies. The capability or power of states is also a central part of realist thought, as well as some post-modern treatments

that emphasize exploitation and inequality. One generally consistent finding in the conflict literature is that relative power parity is associated with war; the power transition model is based on this idea (Organski and Kugler 1981). Once the dependent variable becomes positive peace, however, it is not clear that either equal or unequal capabilities should be associated with positive peace. Systematic analyses would likely find that the relative power factor is insignificant and therefore does little to explain why some actors move to positive peace while others do not. To say that relative power does not matter means that theories of peace will be distinctive from those of war and violence.

Results about alliances in the causes of war tradition vary a great deal (Kang 2012). Alliances should be strongly associated with positive peace. Even if alliances were a causal factor for both peace and war, the causal logic behind such associations is quite different. Alliances are frequently elements of war models using a deterrent logic. In contrast, alliances could be part of positive peace, not in preventing violent conflict, but rather in further integrating political and security processes among member states. Goertz and Powers (2014) have shown that all but one multilateral alliance signed since 1989 fall within the context of multipurpose, regional organizations. Alliances become a tool of collective conflict management.

Finally, trade relations between states are a source of controversy in war studies. Scholarly disagreements exist on whether close economic ties between two states encourage more conflict, have little effect, or lower the chances for war (see Schneider 2010). In all cases though, trade is predominantly the *independent* variable, affecting the outbreak of war. In contrast, studies of positive peace would have trade and other economic ties as the *dependent* variable, the consequence of the processes promoting peace rather than the instigator.

How to Study Peace: Some Guidelines

If peace is not merely the inverse of war, then scholars need a different strategy. This is not merely a matter of choosing different research topics than the onset, dynamics, and outcomes of war. Some scholars might believe that they already study peace because their research is not about war per se. For example, human rights scholars do not necessarily deal with war (although a number study war crimes and related phenomena). Yet much of the scholarly work on this topic concerns the occurrence of human rights violations, much akin to a negative peace orientation in that scholars ignore the positive aspects of human rights formulations. Rather than violations (an important topic itself), peace-oriented research might investigate the conditions for the spread or deepening of human rights across or within societies. Similarly, studies of transitional justice that have exploded in the last decade might seemingly have the air of peace studies around them, and indeed, the focus on justice and individuals or groups (see below) move them away from traditional war and conflict studies. Nevertheless, many of these works, by definition in some cases, look at contexts following civil wars, with the shadow of negative peace around them (for example, Samii 2013). Pushing those studies to have a longer term orientation to see if transitional justice transforms attitudes, ensures functioning judicial systems, and ultimately promotes reconciliation would move them closer to understanding peace.

There is no one way to study peace, but there are some general principles that would take scholarly community in a better direction for understanding peace.

Looking Beyond and Below the State

For many years, studies of conflict have concentrated on states as the primary or exclusive political actors in the world. As a consequence, however, lower-level processes involving groups and individuals were discounted, ignored, or assumed away as in some rational actor formulations. As scholars moved to focus more on explaining civil war, the emphasis was still on the state as a whole or on the government as one of the key actors. This is not to say that research is exclusively this way or that change has not occurred, but these are general tendencies.

Positive peace occurs between states (witness the European Union), but it is still largely the exception to the mode of state relationships.²⁶ There are, however, numerous instances of peaceful processes outside of state relationships, particularly below the state level. Indeed, the last two decades has seen greater emphasis on such achievements recognized by the Nobel Committee. Rather than study the outbreak of violence between ethnic groups, a study of peace would examine how some groups have deep cooperation and integration with one another. For instance, in post-communist Romania, relations between the majority Romanians and minority Hungarians have been peaceful, perhaps due to the inclusion of the latter in the political system (Mihailescu 2005).²⁷ There are also other levels of analysis—individuals, organizations, and other entities—that exhibit peace, and these occur not merely in post-conflict environments. International studies scholarship has moved significantly beyond the state in recent decades, but this shift has not necessarily included an exploration of peaceful relationships. Foci on violence, exploitation, and inequality (important in their own right) obscure the conditions needed to move beyond these maladies and foster cooperative relationships.

Moving Beyond the Focus on Great Powers

A corollary to the previous guideline involves looking beyond the great powers. Realist and Neorealist orientations, as well as many other theoretical frameworks (for example, world systems theory), direct their attention almost exclusively to major power relations. A Western or Euro-centric orientation usually accompanies this. A focus on war and competition might be appropriate for that context, but looking only at these actors misses a wide range of peaceful behaviors even if one concentrates only on states. A useful direction would be a shift, in part not whole, toward the Global South as articulated in Acharya (2014). This requires more of a regional orientation than one focused on the global system. Even for state-centric studies, most of the “peace” is found within regional contexts, be they European Union and NAFTA or emerging security communities such as ASEAN (Acharya 2001).

²⁶Goertz, Diehl, and Balas (2016) report that positive peace state relationships are extremely rare prior to 1945 and constitute only about 17 percent of all relationships at their peak in 2006, and usually a much smaller percentage in periods from 1945 until the end of the twentieth century.

²⁷See also Varshney (2002).

Moving Beyond Political Science

Most of the articles published in this journal, the flagship publication of ISA, have authors who are political scientists. Yet theoretically and empirically, this orientation is not always well suited to address matters of peace.²⁸ Standard realist formulations and others that emphasize anarchy in the international system put a premium on the struggle for power and eschew concerns with peace.²⁹ Only negative peace, as defined by hegemony and absent concerns with justice, usually appears in those orientations.

For those in the positivist and quantitative research tradition, most of the available data are about war and other violence. The Correlates of War (COW) Project³⁰ has assembled long historical series of data that are almost exclusively state focused and deal with outcome variables about war and other high-level militarized conflicts (for example, militarized disputes). The project concentrated on realist factors (alliances, capability distribution, and the like) as initially the goal was to test realist propositions about conflict, even as it was agnostic *a priori* about their validity.³¹ The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) is similar in that its leading data collections deal with conflict, albeit these move beyond state-state interactions and have a lower violence threshold than COW.³² UCDP does have a data collection on peace agreements and their implementation, but these deal with situations in which there was a recent serious conflict, and the concentration of studies using data similar to this is on whether civil war renews or not rather than on whether positive peace is promoted. There is a lack of systematic data on peace comparable to the many and long-standing collections on war and violent conflict.³³

Many of the ideas and formulations for understanding peace will need to come outside of political science. For example, studies of psychology (for example, Bar-Tal 2000; Fry 2013) provide us with insights about attitudinal change that is essential for individuals, groups, and state leaders to regard others not merely as non-enemies, but rather as friends. Anthropological and sociological studies (Boulding 2000; Melko 1973; for an overview, see Fabbro 1978) have included “peaceful societies,” those in which not only is violence rare but also deep cooperation and integration are present. Ideas about peace, both conceptual and normative, often derive from religion, history, sociology, and other approaches. Even if political science is the scholarly orientation, insights from these other disciplines are essential. ISA now seems well-positioned for undertaking such an exploration; what was once an organization made up primarily of political scientists now counts a smaller percentage of its members from that discipline.

Long-Term Processes Versus Short-Term Events

As one moves from peace to war, there is also a shift from understanding relationships rather than single events or sets of integrated events. By definition, relationships represent ongoing and usually long-term interactions. These will necessitate modelling long-term processes leading to peace, which is likely to occur in steps or phases rather than abruptly. In contrast, with some exceptions (for example, studies of rivalries, see Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson 2007), research on war and violence centers on factors immediately preceding and following armed conflict. Whereas riots, civil wars, and militarized interstate disputes are easy to spot, peace is something that requires time to develop, and scholars will need some historical hindsight to determine whether actions or events are part of a pattern of peaceful relations that is sustaining over time rather than anomalies.

The long-term orientation has obvious implications for the research design of peace studies. Nevertheless, research design should follow from theoretical argument, and therefore more importantly, the construction of explanations for the development or dynamics of peace must reflect processes over time and across space.³⁴ For example, the spread of democracy across regions or globally might (or might not) be a prerequisite for the development of peaceful relations.

Normative Agendas with Systematic Research

Peace studies³⁵ as a subfield has a long history in international and related studies. One of its characteristics is that its research agenda has a strong normative component. That is not to say that war studies do not; most conflict scholars who study violence implicitly or explicitly do so with the view that such conflict is undesirable, and by understanding the conditions for violence, we can lessen its likelihood. Yet any conception of peace necessitates some definition of values or priorities beyond the absence of violence. As noted in the survey of scholars of sustainable peace (Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity 2015), such values can include human rights, justice, economic equality, and other aspects. Because these are perceived as falling on a leftist political agenda, such peace concerns are often dismissed by political leaders and other elites; indeed, some peace studies writing devolves away from scholarly research toward polemics.

I do not advocate that scholars of international studies reject normative concerns, but rather embrace them in studies of peace. Scholars have a unique responsibility (Singer 1985) to address contemporary political concerns and to assist in the definitions of what is important to the international community around us. At the same time, however, the rejection of value-free social science should not come at the expense of the social science component. The systematic assessment of peace must not only meet our standards of scholarship and publication but also establish the credibility necessary to contribute to the vital debates of the day on a variety of issues.

²⁸See Richmond (2008) in general for how various international relations theories treat peace.

²⁹Kupchan (2010) is one study that moves beyond the absence of war, but his concern is with slowly improving relations between former rivals and not peace between states that lack hostile interactions in their pasts.

³⁰<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/> (last accessed on 7 January 2016).

³¹Some path dependency in the form of needing to maintain a time series set of data has led updates to continue collecting data primarily on the same variables rather than venturing in other directions, including those involving peace.

³²<http://www.pcr.uu.se/data/> (last accessed on 7 January 2016).

³³The previously referenced Goertz et al. (2016) work is an exception and has coded all state relationships from 1900-2016 on a peace scale.

³⁴Many scholars of war and conflict would agree that this would be appropriate for understanding conflict as well, rather than just looking at proximate causes.

³⁵See Cortright (2008) for a history.

Conclusion

Scholars need to pay greater attention to peace as a focus for international studies research. They traditionally concentrate on war and other violent conflict and thereby consider only negative peace: the absence of war or violence. Studying peace requires, first and foremost, broader conceptions of peace. These include considerations of justice, human rights, and other aspects of human security. Recent Nobel Peace Prize awards already reflect such a focus.

There is reason for optimism that the scholarly community will pay greater attention to peace concerns. Several new works (Wallenstein 2015; Davenport, Melander, and Regan 2015; Goertz et al. 2016) take up the mantle, and their new conceptualizations should stimulate further theorizing, data collection, and empirical analyses. Scholars are also highly responsive to contemporary political phenomena (Diehl 2002); the upsurge in studies of democracy resulted, in part, from the increase in democratic movements and regimes in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As many post-conflict contexts demonstrate, the end of a war provides no guarantee that peace—both broadly and narrowly defined—will occur. Indeed many societies relapse into fighting. Thus, pressing policy concerns compel us to find not only the ways to avoid the renewal of war but also the processes that can promote deep peacebuilding. Scholars are paying some attention to these concerns and will likely do so in the future.

The call for a peace agenda should not imply an end to the prior emphasis on war. Indeed, studies of war and violence have produced a wealth of knowledge over the past decades; they remain vital elements of international studies scholarship. Even with an emphasis on positive peace, understanding negative peace might remain essential. Negative peace might transition to, or constitute tipping points for, positive-peace relationships. Yet understanding negative peace should not be an end in itself. Instead, it provides an opportunity to explore more extensive and lasting peaceful relationships.

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