Heinz Gärtner

Positive Peace

Cooperative security arrangements

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Heinz Gärtner, Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, heinz.gaertner@univie.ac.at, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6238-114X

Zusammenfassung

Das Kapitel untersucht den Begriff des positiven Friedens und fragt, wie Frieden über die bloße Abwesenheit von Krieg und Gewalt hinaus gedacht werden kann. Ausgehend von der Unterscheidung zwischen negativem und positivem Frieden werden insbesondere Gerechtigkeit, Gleichheit, Freiheit, Kooperation und die Überwindung struktureller Gewalt hervorgehoben. Ein Schwerpunkt liegt auf dem Sicherheitsdilemma: Militärische Aufrüstung kann Sicherheit erzeugen wollen, zugleich aber Bedrohungswahrnehmungen verstärken und Eskalationsdynamiken auslösen. Demgegenüber werden politische und diplomatische Ansätze, Neutralität, nukleare Abrüstung sowie kooperative Sicherheitsordnungen als Möglichkeiten zur Reduktion von Bedrohungen diskutiert. Historische Bezugspunkte wie die KSZE und die Schlussakte von Helsinki verdeutlichen das Potenzial gemeinsamer Sicherheit. Frieden erscheint damit nicht als statischer Zustand, sondern als fortlaufender, politischer und gesellschaftlicher Prozess.

Schlagwörter: Positiver Frieden, Galtung, Sicherheitsdilemma, Friedensforschung

Abstract

This chapter examines the concept of positive peace and asks how peace can be understood beyond the mere absence of war and violence. Building on the distinction between negative and positive peace, it emphasizes justice, equality, freedom, cooperation, and the overcoming of structural violence. Particular attention is paid to the security dilemma: while military build-up may seek to enhance security, it can simultaneously intensify perceptions of threat and generate dynamics of escalation. In contrast, political and diplomatic approaches, neutrality, nuclear disarmament, and cooperative security arrangements are discussed as means of reducing threats. Historical examples such as the CSCE and the Helsinki Final Act demonstrate the potential of common security. Peace is thus understood not as a static condition, but as an ongoing political and societal process.

Keywords: Positive Peace, Peace, Galtung, Security Dilemma, Peace Research

What is Peace?

Dies When considering the question of what peace is, it has become customary to distinguish between negative and positive peace. Negative peace means the absence of violence and war, while positive peace emphasizes positive elements, such as equality and justice. In the following definition, peace is defined negatively: Peace "exists in an international system (System, international) when the conflicts taking place within it are dealt with continuously without the use of organized military violence" (Czempiel, 1998, 45). By referring to the importance of equitable distribution and welfare internally for external peaceful behavior, the positive dimension of the definition is added: Peace "can now be defined as a process pattern of the international system that is characterized by decreasing violence and increasing distributive justice" (Czempiel, 1986, 47; 1998; 1999; see also Müller, 2017).

If peace is not only defined negatively by the absence of violence and war, a number of positive aspects can be emphasized, such as social issues (distributive justice and equality) and personal freedoms (personal liberty, human creativity), but also ecological aspects (Jahn, 1984, 155; Galtung, 1971, 86).

Johan Galtung describes positive peace as the absence of personal and structural violence. It is a peace that consists not only in the absence of international violence, but in the absence of personal violence and structural violence in all spheres of society (Galtung, 1975, 33-35; Galtung, 1995, 385-418). Steps to positive peace are the creation of organizations that link governments and people across national boundaries and to integrate the states into a web of harmonious and cooperative relationships (Galtung, 1995, 388). Related to positive peace is the concept of nonviolence, which for Galtung (1995, 391-392) specifically means nonmilitary defense. For Sabine Jaberg (2023, 6) "peace and violence represent categorical opposites; while they are still intertwined, it is a matter of maximizing peace and minimize violence." The logic of peace is thus oriented toward the goal of preventing and reducing violence. It also relies on cooperative conflict management. It therefore strives for de-escalation, victim protection and non-violent (dialogue-compatible and process-oriented) conflict transformation. The argument of a part of peace research that only strength leads to peace ("If you want peace, prepare for war!"), would only take over the argumentation pattern of those strategic studies, against which peace research would have originally competed. Thus, the discipline's own aversion to violence would be lost and the security dilemma would (Security) be promoted.

This “strength-argument” was virulently discussed in peace research during the war in Ukraine after 2022: should Ukraine be supported militarily until there is peace through war and violence? A complex-oriented peace research would thus lose its multi-perspective character and its multi-causal conflict analysis (Mühlbauer/Moegling 2025). Although the arguments may be formulated specifically about the Ukrainian war, they would, according to Sabine Jaberg (2023, 8-9), be elevated to a general “law” within peace research, appearing “in the face of threatening mega-violence [...] any counter-violence would appear legitimized.”

Especially the “critical peace research” of the seventies emphasized the dimension of distributive justice. According to this, the “critical peace researchers ... defined themselves as scientific partisans of people who, as a result of the unequal distribution of social and economic life chances within and between nations (i.e. by structural violence): of the exploited, of the socially discriminated against, and of those whose physical existence is directly threatened” (Conference of “critical peace researchers” in Wannsee, April 24-25, 1971, cited in Wasmuht, 1998, 177 and Ruf, 2023, 3). This definition of “critical peace research” goes beyond the definition of peace between states and borrows from Johan Galtung's “structural violence”, thereby also posing the question of the cause of intra-societal violence.

Peace can also be defined as the ability to politically shape conflicts or conflict management: Peace “is not the state of complete absence of political conflict, but the sum of the abilities and instrumentalities to deal with them in other than violent ways” (Rendtorff, 1984, 42). A peace order “is a democratic order in which the danger of violent conflict does not (any longer) exist” (Lutz, 1999, 1); (Community, international; Society, international). Dieter Senghaas (2017, 33-41) extends the combination of negative and positive peace to four dimensions: protection from violence, the protection of freedom, the protection from hardship, and the protection of cultural diversity. From historical China to feudally fragmented medieval Europe, peace meant the prevention of warlike violence. This negative understanding of peace also shaped the modern territorial-state based peace debate. According to Senghaas, on the other hand, the four dimensions proved to be the peace-scientific basis of a lasting peace.

Almost Exclusively Military Responses

All too often, international conflicts lead to a quick resort to military responses. The ideas presented here do not reject military preparedness. However, they give priority to political and diplomatic initiatives. They are based on the observation

that security can be achieved not only by increasing military capabilities, but also by creating a less threatening environment.

The frequently observed multipolarity with multiple centers of power in the world does not in itself lead to a more peaceful world. Polarity always implies polarization and potential conflicts. In reality, however, this is a great power conflict between the U.S., China, and Russia. For now, this is being played out through mutual arms races. Alliances are being formed, ideologies articulated. The conflict could turn violent at any moment.

The excessive focus on military solutions leads to increases—indeed, disproportionate increases—in defense spending. The modernization of conventional weapons is accelerating, but nuclear capabilities are also being expanded. Current examples also demonstrate this: Russian President Putin's military attack on Ukraine, the conflicts in the Middle East are being waged with direct armed force.

The U.S. is the world's strongest military power. Although there have been periods of restraint and isolationism, the U.S. has always relied on its interventionist capabilities to often achieve its maximum objectives. Agreements are possible—but extremes cannot be ruled out either. Only if the U.S. were to view itself no longer as "exceptional" and "indispensable" but as a normal power would the swings toward one extreme or the other cease to exist.

Ideas for Breaking the Dilemma of Security and Violence

This focus on military solutions, even when intended for defense, creates a series of dilemmas. They are almost always perceived by others as a threat. The response to this is almost always military preparations and actions. This involves a delicate combination of defensive and offensive measures, interpretations of intentions, and one's own perceptions.

How can this dilemma of security and violence be interrupted? General calls for peace and the renunciation of violence are desirable, but by no means sufficient to create peaceful and less violent conditions. Peace can only be achieved by reducing the threat. Security in and of itself does not bring peace; rather, only peace leads to sustainable security.

Ideas and measures to break the security dilemma are also steps toward a "positive peace." It differs from "negative peace" in that it defines peace not only by the absence of war and violence, but also by adding positive elements such as cooperation, multilateralism, and justice.

Although tensions between the two blocs during the Cold War—the Warsaw Pact and NATO—had not disappeared and, with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, have risen again, these multilateral principles have had a lasting impact. They gave rise to independence movements in Eastern Europe, such as the Czechoslovak Charter 77 and the Polish Solidarity, which invoked them. Ultimately, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev used these principles to grant independence to the Eastern European states.

The reduction and eventual abolition of nuclear weapons, as envisaged in the 2021 Treaty on the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, aims to replace the norm of mutual nuclear threat with the norm of a world free of nuclear weapons. Even if nuclear-armed states and their allies have not acceded to the treaty, they could at least contractually agree not to threaten or use these weapons against non-nuclear-armed states.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) are regional efforts to avert the threat and use of nuclear weapons by nuclear-weapon states in these regions. Creative solutions could expand these initiatives by merging some of these zones. A nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East could not be realized because Israel wants to retain its nuclear weapons. The U.S. has repeatedly blocked such resolutions at the United Nations and in other international forums. Alternatively, the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (Semipalatinsk) could be expanded southwestward if Iran were to join, as it already shares much in common with these states historically. The North African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (Pelindaba) could be expanded northeastward if the Gulf states were to join. Israel's nuclear weapons would lose much of their purpose if it were surrounded by nuclear-weapon-free states. If the strip between Mongolia and Kazakhstan could be included, a nuclear-free belt would emerge stretching from Mongolia to Africa.

Small states may seek protection within an alliance. However, alliances' promises of protection also come with obligations. They also entail participation in war. To avoid this risk of becoming entangled in foreign wars, states can remain neutral. Neutrality can very often help reduce tensions. However, neutral states must credibly demonstrate their neutrality to the international community and also offer useful services as buffer states, mediators, or hosts in order to be taken seriously. Thus, neutrality is also a good security guarantee. History shows that neutral territory is violated almost exclusively in cases of mutual attacks by hostile states and military alliances. In any case, neutral states can avoid being drawn into the wars of military alliances through mutual defense obligations.

The Middle East is riddled with security rivalries, many of which are rooted in fundamental causes. The decades-long conflict between the U.S. and Iran is not solely about Iran's nuclear program, its support for militias in the region, or the alleged threat to Israel. At its core are narratives about the other side that shape mutual perceptions. For Iran, these include the CIA's involvement in the 1953 coup against the democratically elected President Mossadegh by the U.S., and U.S. support for Iraq in the war against Iran in the 1980s. Etched into the memory of the U.S. are the overthrow of the pro-American Shah by the 1979 revolution and the subsequent hostage-taking of American embassy staff. Reducing these mutual negative perceptions can contribute significantly to building trust.

Ultimately, a regional cooperative solution must be found in the Middle East and the Gulf region. A dialogue forum of Islamic states would have to complement the Abraham Accords that has to be based on the framework of the 2002 Arab Peace Plan, which stipulates recognition of Israel only upon the simultaneous establishment of a Palestinian state within these borders. It would have to include a sovereign Palestinian state.

From War to...

Dynamics of War Most wars follow a certain pattern. The Prussian major general, army reformer, military scientist, and ethicist Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) observed that war can end not only when the enemy is completely defeated, but also when there are peace treaties or armistices. This observation also applies to modern warfare. All wars operate within this tension between military victory and a peace agreement. The warring parties strive for victory on the battlefield before considering a peace agreement. Between Carl von Clausewitz's observation that war pushes "to the extreme" and the defeat of the enemy or a peace settlement, there is considerable nuance. War takes place in an atmosphere of "twilight," in which not only the commander but, above all, the observers operate. Uncertainties are perceived as certainties. There are six structural reasons for this uncertainty. First, it is impossible to assess the enemy's resistance. Usually, the enemy is underestimated, while one's own strength is overestimated. No one starts a war when the enemy is considered decisively superior. "We'll be home by Christmas" was the slogan for the soldiers who went to war in August 1914, a war that would last another four years. Grand ambitions are proclaimed. "The war that will end all wars" was the cry before the First World War. Secondly, if the anticipated victory doesn't materialize immediately, minor gains on the battlefield are exaggerated and even believed, and proclaimed as "acts of annihilation." To explain losses, the delay of weapons delivery is being blamed. Thirdly, if the fighting intensifies, the image

of the enemy becomes increasingly negative, regardless of its previous perception. What Carl von Clausewitz called the trinity of war sets in: hatred, enmity, and violence increase. Killing is no longer a detriment, but a virtue! The only alternative is to kill or be killed. There is no choice. Killing is only self-defense. Thirdly, if the fighting intensifies, the image of the enemy becomes increasingly negative, regardless of its previous state. Fourth, the will to negotiate dwindles. Responsibility is attributed to the enemy: they supposedly don't want to negotiate at all! Compromises are labeled as treason, ceasefires as a trick to regroup forces. There is no alternative to fighting. In the further drive toward the “extreme,” fifth, other elements come into play. Civilian targets are attacked. Nuclear weapons are brought into play, either publicly or behind the scenes. Sixth, information is simplified, abbreviated, and reduced. There is no longer any doubt that evil is the cause and greed the reason for the war. Structural analyses of the war are rejected and ridiculed. Transparency and war are opposites!

Wars always develop a dynamic of their own that media coverage fails to anticipate, unleashing forces that even the warring parties themselves can no longer control. The costs of a war always exceed the expected gains. The security dilemma A driving force behind the course of wars, indeed often their very cause, is the “security dilemma.” A security dilemma arises from the pursuit of security against an attack, which in turn makes the other side feel more insecure, leading them to prepare for the worst, even for war. Each side claims to be acting defensively. According to the principle of the security dilemma, the other actors often perceive these actions as offensive. Frequently, missile deployments intended to increase one's own security are perceived by other countries as offensive and threatening. This leads to an escalation of rhetoric, with both sides accusing each other of aggressive behavior. The security dilemma is more than just mutual military buildup. It is a delicate balance between arms efforts, threat perceptions, and intentions. The Greek observer of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides, described this dilemma with the complex of motives “fear, honor, and benefit (or interest).” A large part of international politics is thus driven by fear and uncertainty. The fear of war prompts states to prepare for it. The security dilemma can therefore escalate into war. The Cold War was significantly shaped by the security dilemma. Both sides were constantly preoccupied with defending themselves or building up their defense capabilities. One or both sides feared that the other was engaged in, or planning, aggressive action. Often, a state views membership in a military alliance as an improvement to its own defense. However, such a decision has consequences for other states.

... Positive Peace

Security cannot be achieved solely by increasing military capabilities; rather, the environment in which threats can develop can be altered. Threats can be mitigated by creating the right political, social, and economic conditions. This is how the security dilemma can be overcome. Peace can only be achieved by reducing threats. Security does not bring peace, but peace leads to sustainable security. An attempt to break the security dilemma was undertaken with the process of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The first high point was the Helsinki Conference in 1975. The Final Act of the CSCE is arguably the most historically significant document of postwar Europe. The document did not question the postwar territorial order and recognized the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, but at the same time formulated a catalog of values concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms. In contrast to contemporary security strategies, this document avoided terms like enemy, adversary, competitor, challenger, and rival. The focus was on cooperative and shared security. It emphasized the indivisibility of security, the inviolability of borders, and the necessity of cooperative security and the renunciation of force. These principles were intended to break the "security dilemma" that arose at the height of the Cold War, resulting in rearmament, mutual distrust, accusations of expansionist activities, and ideological differences.

Another model could be a conference of states—similar to the Congress of Vienna after 1815—that negotiates a realignment of the security order for renewed stability. This Concert of Europe, following the Napoleonic Wars, was intended to secure peace between the European powers of Austria, Prussia, Russia, the United Kingdom, and later France. The idea behind the Concert of Europe was based on the principle of the balance of power, in which no single power could be stronger than all the others combined. In addition, common norms of cooperation, such as free trade, were established. Colonial interventions were explicitly excluded. These principles were disrupted by the European Wars of Unification around the mid-19th century, beginning with the Crimean War. This was followed by the Austro-Italian War, the Austro-Prussian War, and the Franco-Prussian War. Peace continued afterward until the formation of alliances (between Austria-Prussia and France-Russia-Great Britain) before the First World War.

One could, for example, develop principles of peace, drawing on Kant, that are derived from his definitive article: international organizations based on Kant's right of hospitality, peaceful Kantian republics, and economic interdependence through trade. The CSCE is a historical example of a "positive peace." The idea is to create a system of common security in which security is seen as indivisible. This system

would be a counter-model to the security dilemma. Lasting and positive peace is more than the negatively defined absence of violence and war. It relies on cooperative international structures between states and organizations, as well as on social justice within states. Such peace will likely not be achieved quickly and completely. Peace is a process and can only be partially realized. One can therefore speak of a "proportional peace." Moreover, there are numerous wars and military conflicts. Therefore, there must also be numerous forms of peace. Peace is never absolute, but always relative.

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Author

Heinz Gärtner, Univ.-Prof. Dr., political scientist, was Scientific Director of the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip) and is currently Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board of the International Institute for Peace (IIP).