Limits of Negative Peace, Faces of Positive Peace

Patricia M. Shields

ABSTRACT: This commentary reminds policymakers of the opposing forces of positive and negative peace within the sphere of national defense. Lest leaders balance the dominate strategy of active defense with the state of positive peace, the world is destined to repeat such a negative peace as the Pax Romana.

Clearly some notion of peace is implicit in national security and peace. The absence of war is the predominant conceptualization of peace within the security community. This designation, also known as negative peace, has many pitfalls; its dominance is being questioned by leaders in international security.[1] This commentary examines the limitations of negative peace and explores the contested and complicated notion of positive peace. In a world where militaries are called upon to intervene directly and indirectly in contentious and violent civil wars, such as those in Syria and Libya, or to engage in lengthy, volatile postwar stabilization, such as that occurring in Iraq and Afghanistan, both negative and positive peace can, and should, be useful conceptual tools. Army leaders can use them to craft short-term and long-term strategy as well as to advise civilian leaders.

An Army rightly focuses on preparing for war; at the same time, its leaders have a vested interest in peace and are often cautious about moving toward the use of force. General Colin Powell illustrated this in his memoir *My American Journey*. Here he recounts a conversation with Madeleine Albright, the US ambassador to the United Nations, during a briefing on the crisis in Bosnia. She was incredulous about the options he laid forth asking, "What is the use of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?"[2] This prompted a "near aneurysm." His soldiers were not toys to be brought out to solve the latest international crisis, they were human beings to be deployed only when absolutely necessary. General Powell clearly revealed a strong and visceral vested interest in peace!

The roots of negative peace's dominance are easy to trace. Historically, war was about conquest or defending one's boarders. Peace such as, Pax Romana, was a military peace, one with the goal of growing an empire, reaping its bounty, and maintaining order. This was, of course, a brutal negative peace where threats, like the Jewish rebellion at Masada, were violently suppressed. In a world where slaves

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1   Paul F. Diehl, "Exploring Peace: Looking Beyond War and Negative Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (March 2016): 1–10, doi:10.1093/isq/sqw005; Paul F. Diehl, "Thinking about Peace: Negative Terms versus Positive Outcomes," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 3–9; and Gary Goertz, Paul F. Diehl, and Alexandru Balas, *The Puzzle of Peace: The Evolution of Peace in the International System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

2   Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine, 2003), 576.

were commonplace, militaries had free reign to use any means necessary to ensure order—the absence of war.[3] Concerns and constraints about human rights and social justice were millennia away. Peace, in Western society, was experienced as the order that accompanied the end of a war. Negative peace also aligns well with the Hobbesian notion that men are, by their nature, warlike. Peace is the anomaly. Realism, the underlying theoretical framework used to draft our security policy, traces its roots to Thomas Hobbes.

The young fields of peace studies and peace research have come to be dominated by negative peace. Scholars, well-schooled in statistical methods, develop and use sophisticated data bases where war and peace are a single variable with the values of zero and one. Over time, the study of peace and war often became conflated as if mirror images of each other. The *Journal of Peace Research* noted this irony through a meta study with the remarkable title, "Peace Research: Just the Study of War?"[4]

Although it certainly may not feel like it, interstate war has been on the decline since the end of World War II.[5] Nevertheless, it certainly does not appear we are in a comfortable state of peace. There is a growing recognition that the singular dominance of negative peace limits how national security is conceptualized and has perverse outcomes for policymaking.[6] This is not to say negative peace should be discarded. Rather, the limits of negative peace should be understood, and more comprehensive notions of peace should be acknowledged and used in national security discourse.

Limitations of Negative Peace

"Peace is not merely the inverse of war" and therefore requires a different theoretical orientation and place in military strategy.[7] Negative peace uses a short-term time horizon, which reinforces a tendency to see the job as complete once the fighting stops. It undermines efforts for a broader peace by freezing the status quo, and it potentially leaves the door open for human rights abuses to continue unabated.

Militaries are often intimately associated with decisions made at that nexus of conflict and its cessation. These decisions should take into account the longer-term horizon of a sustained peace. By signaling an end, negative peace shifts focus away from the hard work of putting mechanisms in place that can repair fractured relationships as well as nurture resilient and just institutions. These efforts are not about explicit nation-building but rather a recognition that choices about institutional structures and personnel can have long-term consequences. Choices informed by an implicit short-term horizon can undermine a healthy sustained peace, which is a long-term goal. President George W. Bush proudly claimed "mission accomplished" at the end of the hot war with

3   Brad Highum and Lynnae Sorensen, "The Peace of God in Its Fullness," *Global Virtue Ethics Review* 7, no. 3 (2016): 14–20.

4   Nils Petter Gleditsch, Jonas Nordkvelle, and Havard Strand, "Peace Research—Just the Study of War?," *Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 2014): 145–58, doi:10.1177/0022343313514074.

5   Goertz, Diehl, and Balas, *Puzzle of Peace*, 1.

6   Diehl, "Thinking about Peace"; and Patricia M. Shields and Joseph L. Soeters, "Peaceweaving: Jane Addams, Positive Peace, and Public Administration," *American Review of Public Administration* 47, no. 3 (April 2017): 323–39, doi:10.1177/0275074015589629.

7   Diehl, "Exploring Peace," 8.

Iraq.[8] This moment of victory quickly lost its luster as the situation on the ground deteriorated. Clearer acknowledgement that the complicated road to sustained peace was yet ahead would have been helpful.

The negative definition of peace is less compatible with the post-Cold War, post-September 11, 2011, postmodern security environment. Here "the very tools of war are slipping out of [the] control of nation states as the employment of organized violence becomes more and more characteristic of terrorists, armed bands, and gangsters."[9] At the same time, national hostilities, and even the tools of aggression, such as Facebook and Twitter, have changed. The Clausewitzian assumptions about war are replaced by a world with blurred distinctions.[10] The one-size-fits-all nature of negative peace is ill-suited for the fractured postmodern security environment.

Negative peace fits neatly into our natural tendency to frame security threats in absolute terms. Winning is the goal, the enemy is wrong and evil. During World War I, the Sedition Act reinforced this impulse. This frame of reference may be effective at generating support for the war effort, but it can also undermine the peace. Dichotomies like friend/enemy, victory/defeat, and war/peace oversimplify the postmodern security environment.[11] Defining peace as the inverse of war enshrines absolute thinking, making it difficult to form or to change damaged relationships undermining the cooperative potential of human nature.[12]

Militaries and soldiers prepare for war knowing armed combat requires strength, courage, valor, and self-sacrifice. If peace is viewed as the inverse of war, it becomes associated with weakness, cowardice, spinelessness, and self-serving behavior. Why would a soldier seriously identify with this concept? This tension can create an unnecessary us-versus-them mindset, and negative stereotyping, on both sides. The likely possibility that the military and peace advocates share long-term goals is lost in their inflexible belief systems.

American Nobel Peace Prize winner, Jane Addams recognized this problem in *Newer Ideals of Peace*.[13] She argues dedication to peace can also involve self-sacrifice, tenacity, and courage without diminishing the valor of the soldier. Addams emphasized that promoting peace often took courage. Particularly during war, peace advocates can be viewed as traitors or as warped and twisted sentimentalists.[14] Israel's honored soldier, statesman, prime minister and Nobel Prize winner, Yitzhak Rabin, embraced the Israeli-Palestine peace process, including the Oslo

8   George W. Bush (speech, USS *Abraham Lincoln*, near San Diego, California, May, 1, 2003).

9   Charles C. Moskos, "Towards a Postmodern Military?," in *Democratic Societies and Their Armed Forces: Israel in Comparative Context*, ed. Stuart A. Cohen (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 4.

10   Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, David R. Segal, *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

11   Patricia M. Shields and Donald S. Travis, "Achieving Organizational Flexibility through Ambidexterity," *Parameters* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 65–76.

12   Maurice Hamington, *The Social Philosophy of Jane Addams* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 106. Indeed, polarized, rigid belief systems can lead to internal conflicts. Witness the resources Russia used to reinforce belief systems during the 2016 presidential election.

13   Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1907).

14   Patricia M. Shields, "Jane Addams: Peace Activist and Peace Theorist," in *Jane Addams: Progressive Pioneer of Peace, Philosophy, Sociology, Social Work and Public Administration*, ed. Patricia M. Shields (New York: Springer, 2017), 31–42.

Accords, and paid dearly for his decision. His death is a tragic reminder of the cost of courage in promoting peace.

A single nation cannot be an island at peace. Peace is about the quality of relationships, which are ideally friendly, between nations or groups. By not taking into account the relational nature of peace, negative peace can lead to absurdities. Although none are at war, can one really say the United States and North Korea or Israel and Iran are at peace? In addition, peace as the absence of war provides little guidance about approaches for identifying or for building support structures that strengthen and solidify shaky relationships that might be headed toward conflict.[15]

Complications with Positive Peace

The straightforward concept of negative peace has many limitations. A more organic, diverse, and dynamic sense of positive peace exists alongside the dominant negative version. These positive visions of peace incorporate a host of concepts and values such as justice, democracy, sympathy, cooperation, effectiveness, freedom, engagement, order, harmony, and collaboration. Positive peace can also have religious origins and overtones, such as "blessed are the peacemakers."[16] Unlike negative peace, which has a simple definition, there are many inconsistent voices examining the nature of positive peace. While these disparities make it more difficult to make sense quickly of positive peace, it also provides the postmodern security environment with useful tools.[17]

Most cultures have a concept of peace that goes well beyond the absence of war. These conceptualizations vary widely. *Santi* (Indian— to maintain a tranquil mindset even in suffering or conflict), *ahimsa* (Indian—to kill no living creature), *heiwa* (Japanese—aligning oneself to the common good and social order), *eirene* (Greek—prosperity and order), and *al-Islam* (Arabic—to be at peace in alignment with the will of Allah) illustrate the variety of meanings across cultures.[18]

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, is translated as prosperity and as a sense of wholeness. A society is whole when it is rich in righteousness and justice. Or as Enns writes, "Shalom is the integrity, wholeness and well-being that arise from justice. . . . In short, shalom means a full life, in life-enhancing relationships."[19] The intimate relationship between justice and peace found in Shalom is demonstrated in Psalm 85:10 of the Living Bible, "Justice and peace have kissed." One needs only look at the words of Martin Luther King Jr. to see the profound influence of the Hebrew bible on our understanding of positive peace: "Without justice there can be no peace."[20]

15   Diehl, "Thinking about Peace."

16   Mathew 5:9 (King James Version).

17   Grant Rissler and Patricia M. Shields, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Positive Peace—A Missing Critical Immeasurable in PA Theory" (paper presentation, annual meeting of the Public Administration Theory Network, San Antonio, TX, May 20–22, 2016).

18   Takeshi Ishida, "Beyond the Traditional Concepts of Peace in Different Cultures," *Peace Research* 6, no. 2 (1969): 133–45.

19   Fernando Enns, "The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Just Peace?," *Ecumenical Review* 63, no. 1 (March 2011): 44–53. doi:10.1111/j.1758-6623.2010.00092.x.

20   Michael Floyd, "Peace in Its Fullness: Biblical Perspectives on Aspects of Peace," *Global Virtue Ethics Review* 7, no. 3 (2016): 44–51.

Twenty-five years after World War II, Japanese scholar Takeshi Ishida considers the paradoxes of positive peace. As noted above, the Hebrew notion of Shalom connects peace and justice. Paradoxically, this very connection justifies violence when encountering injustice. The Japanese and other Eastern concepts of peace emphasize harmony in community or "peace in the village," which have a puzzling implications. In this case, the overriding goal of harmony can be so strong that injustice is tolerated as a way to secure peace in the village. Ishida notes the creativity that both King and Gandhi brought to these challenging paradoxes. King incorporated the Eastern tradition of nonviolence as he used direct action to counter the injustice of racism. Gandhi, used traditional nonviolent sensibilities and direct action to challenge the injustice of colonialism. These cases show the importance of creativity in the application of peace concepts and that cultural norms shape the ideas of positive peace.[21]

Although notions of positive peace have been around for millennia, Johan Galtung, a noted peace scholar, is credited with bringing the distinction between positive and negative peace to prominence in the first issue of the *Journal of Peace Research*. He defined positive peace as "the integration of human society." He also emphasized that positive and negative peace "should be conceived as separate dimensions. One can have one without the other."[22]

Most contemporary definitions of positive peace echo these ancient themes. All of the definitions, however, include a long-term perspective. Anderson Royce sees positive peace as an ongoing and challenging process. It is also a "condition in which individuals, families, groups, communities, and/or nations experience low levels of violence and engage in mutually harmonious relationships."[23] The Institute for Economics and Peace defines positive peace as "the attitudes, institutions and structures which create and sustain peaceful societies."[24] Fischer defines positive peace as "an unfolding worldwide process, which nurtures human life and promotes social justice."[25] Galtung expands on his definition noting structural positive peace substitutes "freedom for repression and equity for exploitation," and then reinforces them with dialogue.[26] These long-term perspectives can be in tension with an immediate goal of ending conflict.

Jane Addams includes perplexity and sympathetic understanding in her conceptualization of peace. Sympathetic understanding, or the willingness to put oneself in another person's shoes, is a way to overcome the rigid moralisms that facilitate conflict. These rigid moralisms are undermined by perplexity. Perplexity allows the questioning of personal belief systems without abandoning them, which cultivates sympathetic

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21 Ishida, "Beyond Traditional Concepts."

22 Johan Galtung, "An Editorial," *Journal of Peace Research* 1, no. 1 (March 1964): 2.

23 Anderson Royce, "A Definition of Peace," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 10, no. 2 (2004): 103, doi:10.1207/s15327949pac1002_2.

24 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *Positive Peace Report: Conceptualising and Measuring the Attitudes, Institutions, and Structures That Build a More Peaceful Society* (Sydney: IEP, 2015), 4.

25 Marilyn Fischer, "The Conceptual Scaffolding of Newer Ideals of Peace," in *Jane Addams and the Practice of Democracy*, ed. Marilyn Fischer, Carol Nackenoff, and Wendy Chmielewski (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 175.

26 Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 32.

understanding.[27] Perplexity and sympathetic understanding do not mean adopting the position of an adversary; rather, they open space for productive dialogue, relationship building, and creative problem-solving.

To distinguish positive peace as unique, some practitioners include "just" as a modifier of the word peace, parallel to the "just war" concept.[28] Just peace recognizes the degree to which a deeper understanding of peace requires justice in order to be sustainable.[29] It also focuses attention on the welfare of the most vulnerable. This metric, also called lateral progress, has the potential to get at the root of many causes of conflict.[30]

Another cultural source for conceptions of positive peace is the African concept of ubuntu, or humanity toward others. South African apartheid (1948–91) was a brutal system of institutional racial segregation and discrimination condemned the world over. Yet, South Africa was able to end apartheid without descending into a violent, endless, civil war. Leaders such as P. W. Botha, F.W. de Klerk, Nelsen Mandela, and Desmond Tutu helped shepherd a transformation in institutions and attitudes. Nelson Mandela's message of peace can be summarized as, if you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.[31] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa (TRC), a place where enemies could become partners, relied on the concept of Ubuntu, according to its chairperson and Nobel Peace laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

"Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language . . . you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. "A person is a person through other persons. . . . A person with ubuntu is affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed."[32] Ubuntu has a radically relational basis, asserting not just that individuals should be aware of the interests of others but that an individual's existence or humanity is dependent on how they relate to others.

Like the peace research community, the conflict resolution field was also largely characterized by the general dominance of a negative peace framing.[33] This focus began to change in the late 1980s and 1990s, when the field oriented toward a positive peace. This reconceptualization led to a shift in focus from conflict resolution to conflict transformation and eventually to peacebuilding. The United Nations picked up these ideas and responded in 2005 by institutionalizing a peacebuilding

27   Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1902).

28   Robert E. Williams, Jr. and Dan Caldwell, "*Jus Post Bellum*: Just War Theory and the Principles of Just Peace," *International Studies Perspectives* 7, no. 4 (November 2006): 309–20, doi:10.1111/j.1528-35852006.00256.x.

29   John P. Lederach, "Justpeace," University of Vienna, November 15, 2017, http://homepage .univie.ac.at/silvia.michal-misak/justpeace.htm.

30   Shields and Soeters, "Peaceweaving."

31   Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Boston: Little Brown, 1994).

32   Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 25–26.

33   Louis Kriesberg, "The Evolution of Conflict Resolution," *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk, and I. Williams Zartman (London: SAGE, 2009).

structure alongside its more traditional peacekeeping operations.[34] This reframing is also evident in the Institute of Economics and Peace's new index of positive peace measured by elements such as a well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, and acceptance of the rights of others.[35]

Conflict resolution was criticized because it was biased toward ending a given crisis without sufficient focus on deeper long-term structural, cultural, and relational aspects of conflict.[36] Conflict transformation emerged as an alternative term through a need to identify and mitigate root causes and to engage multiple levels of society beyond elites. Strategic models help build a just peace—one where people within a society are able to participate in shaping systems that meet their needs. These efforts require a core of cultivated skill sets, including problem-solving, active listening, dialogue, mediation and negotiation skills, as well as trauma awareness, appreciative inquiry skills, self-reflection, and cultural competency skills that allow practitioners to understand and account for their own biases and cultural frames, especially as they work with others.[37]

Goertz, Diehl, and Balas have developed a continuum of peace categorization scheme that focuses on the relationships at the heart of peace, which includes a continuum of peace states.[38] These categories provide a way to distinguish between different types of peace or different levels of nonviolent conflict that could lead to war. The state-to-state relationship is the unit of measure. Their framework eliminates absurdities of the simple definition where similar levels of peace are credited to the US-Canada relationship and the North Korea-US relationships. When relationships are terribly deteriorated and on the brink of a prolonged outbreak of hostilities, the new framework attributes states of severe and lesser rivalry. Examples might include the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics during the Cold War or Bulgaria and Greece from 1908–13.

The term negative peace is used to describe conditions where the underlying conflict between the pair of states is somewhat resolved but tensions still can run high. The current rapport between Israel and Egypt is illustrative. A warm peace occurs when diplomatic relationships are well established with highly developed intergovernmental and transnational ties. Romania and France or Germany since 1995 also fit here. Finally, strong allies form the security community and include joint war-planning, diplomatic coordination, and extensive institutionalized functional agreements. Current relationships between the United States and Canada and between Denmark and Sweden are examples.

This commentary is not about providing answers but perhaps about bringing new and more nuanced questions to the table. For positive peace or a long-term view, leaders should bring vision and wisdom to the task. To date, the security sector has focused on the shorter decision

34   Rob Jenkins, *Peacebuilding: From Concept to Commission* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
35   IEP, *Positive Peace Report*.
36   John P. Lederach, "Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Network," in *Conflict Transformation*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 201.
37   Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (New York: Good Books, 2004).
38   Goertz, Diehl, and Balas, *Puzzle of Peace*.

calculus. Surely there is room for wisdom. Positive peace, such as that between the United States and Canada, may be impossible to achieve globally, but is still worth considering.

Lastly, Abraham Lincoln, in his second inaugural address called for a positive peace as the Civil War drew to a close. How would our lives be different today if he had had a chance to implement his vision?

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."[39]

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39   Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address" (speech, Washington, DC, March 4, 1865).

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