

Stable Peace or Secure Peace?

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What Peace Is Not

We had a bad decade. The 1990s, and well into 2000, were bloody awful. Post-Cold War wars, savage mass killing rampages, rape as an instrument of war, and the diffusion of technologies for weapons of mass destruction were just a few of the global epitaphs of this fin de siècle.

However, would we have known peace if it were at hand? Like the blind men and the elephant, we often erroneously identify peace from transient and partial encounters with some vague form of quiescence or stability. Many times, we infer that conditions should be labelled as “peace” from incomplete observation when, in fact, we're dealing with something quite different.

We can be sure, however, that peace is not many things. Indeed, peace is not what we too often think it ought to be.

Peace is not the aftermath of war. Policing the battlefield and cleaning up carnage - these are activities to which the world community assigns UN blue helmets or, by default, non-governmental organisations with charitable or humanitarian identity. Everywhere combatants have fought in the late 20th century, multilateral institutions and private voluntary organisations rushed in when guns fell silent and, sometimes, even while fighting continued. Hundreds of these deployments have now occurred, involving huge financial and personnel commitments.

Unfortunately, such roles do not evoke settlement or quiescence, but suggest the melancholy prelude to later retribution. IFOR and KFOR do not implement “peace”, but rather create a cessation of hostilities between combatants while mass graves are located, infrastructure rebuilt, and critical services restored. Unless accompanied by a vigorous enforcement of justice and assiduous efforts to distribute equitably the resources for reconstruction, war's aftermath is nothing more than a time when humiliation and resentment build into a yearning for retribution and revenge.¹

Peacekeepers almost never keep the peace; they often arrive following hostilities, or the cessation of war. They count the dead and assess the destruction, having prevented neither. Peacekeepers maintain stalemate; they do not generate or ensure peace.² Peacekeeping fails, in one sense, because we have no real peacekeepers – and, by the time we act, there is no longer any peace to keep. Further, absent dedicated forces for peacekeeping, we send in troops trained for war to define, demarcate, and enforce peace. At individual and small unit levels, they often acquit themselves well and strive for the best outcomes. Still, the mismatch between means and ends are palpable. Tanks intimidate but make bad diplomats and lousy peacekeeping instruments; they make deep ruts in the roads, but have superficial and temporary effects on efforts to ensure peace. When military peacekeepers withdraw, the status quo ante quickly reasserts itself.

¹ A synthesis of literature evoking such a motif is Robert E. Harkavy's “Defeat, National Humiliation and the Revenge Motif in International Politics”, *International Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (September 2000).

² See Laura Neack and Roger M. Knudson, “The Multiple Meanings and Purposes of Peacekeeping in Cyprus”, *International Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (December 1999).

Once the parades are over and the floats have been stored away, the making of peace is quite separate from winning battles. Peace is not post-“victory”. Defeating the Germans and Japanese in World War II still required a lengthy “cold war” of global competition. Although defeated militarily, neither Saddam Hussein nor Slobodan Milošević lost politically in the near-term. Formal or de facto, states of war persist long after military victories seem to have been won. High levels of military tension, coupled with intense political confrontation, follow indecisive wars - in the Korean peninsula, in Kashmir and around the world.

Peace is surely not stasis, since that might mean confusing peace with lengthy and stultifying regimes — a Zhivkov’s Bulgaria, Ceaucescu’s Romania, Duvalier’s Haiti, Stroessner’s Paraguay, and the Shah in Iran. Amid such stasis, violent death may be rare, but public suffering can be endemic. In Ceaucescu’s twenty-five year dictatorship, he may have ordered few killings – but he certainly made millions of Romanians so miserable that they wanted to die.³

Stagnation is no worthy peace, although it may have distinct advantages for those who are most powerful. The benefits of such pseudo-peace for a narrow stratum can be gauged; as stasis continues, inequalities grow, and sinecures of power become filled more and more by familial loyalists or ideological sycophants.

Regime and policy stagnation, however, typically will not ensure complete or endless domestic tranquillity. Communist regimes or other authoritarian systems are not immune from the emergence of trade union movements coupled with intellectual dissent (e.g. Solidarity in Poland) which are an outgrowth of social and economic strife. Once unleashed, such domestic conflict within and beneath a superstructure of “stagnation-stability” can lead to fundamental political change.⁴ Stasis qua stagnation is inherently superficial, and always impermanent.

Peace is, likewise, not stability. Again, the immobilisme or pseudo change designed to ensure that no shift is radical, no innovation is severe, and no revolution is revolutionary could presage an end to peace, not its assurance. Many systems that appear to establish long-term stability exhibit repeated and episodic reforms, restructuring and retooling. New constitutions, new cabinets, and new elections revamp institutions, rewrite laws, and recycle political personalities, all without changing much more than cosmetics. No violence, minimal upheaval, sans turmoil- – if it walks like peace and sounds like peace, must it be peace? But, rather like Potemkin villages, it is a stability façade ... with the sights and sounds of quiescence and gradualism concealing a backstage of festering, unattended turmoil.

Anyone who has lived through personal relationships in which tensions, consciously or unconsciously, are contained or suppressed knows that the catharsis of conflict can be a route to lasting peace. As long as it is not mutually destructive, conflict is not a danger to be forever avoided. Peace ought not be seen solely or primarily as the absence of conflict. Genuine peace may require running the gauntlet of conflict. Emerging on the other side of cathartic conflict, obstacles towards democracy, market and security may have been eliminated or pushed out of the way. Risky, perhaps – but probably far better than waiting and assuming that leaders and regimes such as in Serbia will moderate, behave and respond to positive inducement.

³ Regarding the Romanian case of destructive stagnation, see Daniel N. Nelson, “The Romanian Disaster”, in Zoltan Barany and Ivan Volgyes, *Legacies of Communism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 198-226.

⁴ I was reminded of this conflictual undercurrent within the superstructure of stagnation-stability by my colleague, Dr. Andrzej Karkoszka, former deputy defense minister of Poland.

Indeed, containment of conflict is never peace because it implies acceptance of low-level, geographically or temporally limited disputes. Unresolved and unreconciled, contained conflicts are the raw material for a later infectious spread of a far more lethal turmoil.

Managing crises should likewise not be confused with peaceful conditions. Whether entirely national or political, or complex and international, the intensity and peril of crises evoke the potential for catastrophe. When authorities fail during crises, internal violence may arise out of desperation, while external violence is invited against a demonstrably weak state. But, even “successful” crisis managers do not resolve, fix or make crises permanently go away.

When states are not at war, they may not be at peace. The absence of inter-state war, so often coded as “peace” in data sets of so-called “liberal peace” research, may contain fulsome attempts to harm other states. Such attempts include covert means, embargoes, denial of credits and investments, or other steps to weaken, subvert or foment internal conflict. Proxy war also belies the dyad focus of liberal peace literature; the USSR and US did not go to war against each other, but fought (via proxies) in Angola, Afghanistan, Nicaragua and in many other locales. Soviet and American policy was often and clearly directed towards harming the welfare of each other.

Confusing Stability and Security

Our definitions of peace, then, are wanting. For regions plagued by incessant conflict in recent years – areas of the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, Central Africa, and other locales – these mistaken notions of what might be peace sustainable over time lead us to pursue false hopes and distant horizons.

At the core of these conceptual failings lies a confusion of stability with security.

Donors’ have, as of spring 2000, committed almost \$2.3 billion for projects collected under the rubric of the “Balkan Stability Pact” – the German-developed idea, endorsed at the Sarajevo Summit in July 1999. While most of these monies are not new, and the amount is paltry given the needs after a decade of conflict, the Pact and its donations evince Western guilty and fearful reaction to wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, plus state failure in Albania and precarious existence in Macedonia.

The Balkan Stability Pact is a typical shell game introduced by the casualty-adverse, deployment-exhausted countries of NATO. It is an effort to buy stability cheaply and to substitute stasis or quiescence for balancing threats and capacities.

The problem with this approach is clear: trying to create stability when there is no security is a formula for unsustainable peace. Peace that accompanies mere stability is unlikely to outlast that which precludes movement, motion, or change. Realistically, when troops like IFOR and KFOR leave, the lid will blow because a secure peace does not exist.

Real security, where a dynamic balance between threats and capacities exists, may first require substantial instability. The old may need to be uprooted, and the catharsis of social upheaval may be necessary to excise threats. In a region such as Southeast Europe, the elimination of an aggressive nationalism and the removal of leaders that utilise such ideologies to reinforce their own hold on power cannot be accomplished if “stability” is one’s principal criterion.

Sustainable peace has been illusive; we obtain cease-fires, separate combatants, occupy and distribute humanitarian aid – but we nurture few of the sinews needed with which to hold, consolidate or institutionalise peace. Besides poor definitions, what is wrong?

Obtaining “sustainable” peace, in the first instance, is a low, low standard. That we may be able to reach conditions absent overt violence in regions where war has been waged, and may be able to continue such non-conflictual conditions for an extended period, is a weak substitute for a secure peace. Sustainability connotes tending and managing. More and more management. More “stability”.

And, this is the problem. By setting low standards and wrong standards, we seek a kind of peace in the Balkans and in other volatile regions that is little more than a myth.

A Secure Peace?

A truly **secure peace** vis-à-vis stable or sustainable peace acknowledges, first, the nature of security – a dynamic balance between threats and capacities. Building armies, joining alliances, or expanding economies are capacity-focused and only part of the story.

Peace grounded in a capacity-focused strategy is unsustainable. An ample, and longstanding literature exists on the “security dilemma” – whereby one’s own efforts to gain more capacities to ensure security generates others’ efforts to protect themselves from your strengths with their own heightened capacities. We can be confident that peace qua capacities to protect, enforce and deter is a non-peace.

But, a **secure peace** must be sought differently. The same balance inevitably requires attention to abating threats – reducing external peril through negotiation, arbitration, disarmament, confidence building measures while vigorous internal efforts are made to provide justice, employment, and health. Where ambient threat is reduced, fewer capacities are needed, a balance more easily obtained, and opportunities for democratic development enhanced.

We have neglected or avoided creating mechanisms for threat abatement. Aspects of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), such as the High Commissioner for National Minorities, provide a small (but welcome) contribution to the notion of early warning of impending conflicts, and a low-overhead effort to defusing tensions among ethnic groups. In combination with an army of non-governmental organisations, and the norms established by the Council of Europe, OSCE and other organisations, an emerging regime of minority protections may be, slowly, reducing the incidence and severity of “ethnic conflict”.⁵

Still, these are ad hoc, jerry-rigged efforts - not permanent, well-oiled mechanisms. Dependent on the forbearance of great powers, and the finances of benevolent or guilt-ridden governments, such threat-abatement enterprises cannot stem the tide alone.

That security requires a dynamic balance between threats and capacities is the first and foremost step in obtaining lasting peace. To assume that peace can be obtained via greater strength alone, or through Munich-like capitulation to potential peace-breakers, ignores the quality of dynamic balance. Raising capacities generates the same response from others, while a Chamberlainesque declaration of “peace in our time” will be effective only until the ink dries.

Recognising that peace is best gained through security, and security held only via a balance between threats and capacities, are logical constructs in the framework that must guide our approach to crises from the Baltic to Balkans and Central Europe to Central Asia.

⁵ See Ted Robert Gurr, “Ethnic Conflict”, *Foreign Affairs* (May-June, 2000).

Another Bad Decade?

These are the lessons of post-Yugoslav wars, and especially the 1999 warfare in and around Kosovo. With insistent repetition, and horrendous consequences, we thought capacities would deter heinous behaviour, and then waited for capacities to end conflicts, and for capacities to generate renewed “peace”. We warned of dire consequences, bombed, and then occupied. Nevertheless, raw materials for conflict remained and, perhaps, were made worse. That such an approach was desperately wrong is now, hundreds of thousands of deaths later, evident.

We should have learned that minimalist approaches are the worst. **Secure peace**, which is the only sustainable peace, can be obtained solely by transiting rough waters - by going through the unstable and perilous times in order to eradicate the root cause of aggression, inhumanity, and threat. Such a **secure peace** is not likely to be the product of waiting until political winds rationalise intervention, and then only in a limited fashion. Further, nothing that is sustainable will be found with a capacity-driven approach alone. Separating combatants, keeping the "lid on", and minimising casualties usually ignore that post-conflict reconstruction will just be bricks and mortar unless guns are collected, crimes prevented, health care and other services begun anew, and war criminals apprehended.

Peace, in other words, follows from security - not stability. Security, in turn, comes from a combination of threat abatement and a timely use of capacities. Where there is no effort to reduce long-term threats, and a reluctance vigorously to commit capacities when available, no **secure peace** will ever be found. Unfortunately, that is precisely where we stand in regions such as the Balkans. It may be another very bad decade.

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