Global Conflict, Autonomous Agreements and the Challenge of Quality Peace*

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Peacebuilding and Quality Peace

Peacebuilding emerged as a way of describing a society or an inter-societal relationship that is able to maintain peaceful and constructive relations over a long period of time, perhaps even forever. In this chapter, it is applied to conditions after a war, but generalized into identifiable dimensions that together constitute a measure of the quality of that new situation: quality peace. Quality peace can be used whether the war was terminated with a victory or a negotiated settlement. Thus,

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it is more general than peacebuilding or consolidation of victory. In this chapter, however, the focus is on negotiated settlements.

The term 'peacebuilding' is now a part of the common parlance. It has not been so for long. It was first coined by Johan Galtung, (Oslo, Norway), in the 1970s and referred to a society or a relationship that was able to deal with its internal issues in a dynamic and creative way. It would, for instance, be a social order that was self-regulating in managing its conflicts. Today it is used to describe more specific situations. It is a term for the post-conflict period of warring actors. The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali called it 'post-conflict peacebuilding.' With this, he had in mind “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.” Thus, peacebuilding has come to portray a situation after a war and its function is to prevent recurrence of war. The context indicates that Boutros-Ghali was thinking of a country after a negotiated settlement. That is something that many researchers have pursued. A good example is the work by Doyle and Sambanis, for whom peacebuilding addresses “the sources of current hostility and ... local capacities for conflict resolution” after a negotiated peace.

However, reverting back to a broader understanding, it is also important to include situations where other war endings are possible, including victory. Parties fighting wars claim that society and relationship will be ‘better’ if they prevail. If that is to be considered, we need a term for the conditions after a war that is not limited to those achieved through negotiations between the parties. This is what a term, such as ‘quality peace’, can do. Thus, building on previous contributions, such a peace is here defined as the conditions that “provide the post-conflict conditions that make the inhabitants of a society secure in life and dignity now and for the foreseeable future”. In this chapter, it is argued that the application of such a concept will offer an approach that is more likely to prevent the recurrence of war and lay the ground for sustainable development. This is done here by first providing an overview of global patterns of conflict and peace efforts, pointing to the penetrating effect of major power relations also for local situations, and then asking whether peacemaking autonomous from these powers is possible and sufficiently durable to constitute quality peace. This leads to a few observations on some
contemporary peace agreements as well as concluding notes on today's predicaments.  

The Global Picture

Data on armed conflict for the period 1946-2016 show that the number of armed conflicts was at its peak around 1992 (i.e., the end of the Cold War), and then declined rather rapidly. In recent years, a new spike can be observed in the number of armed conflicts as well as in casualties. It has now been on a level of about 50 annual conflicts for several years. This continuously high level of conflicts differs from the patterns we have seen during previous periods and thus gives reason for concern.

In addition, data on battle-related deaths by regions for the period 1989-2016 demonstrate that such deaths rose sharply in Africa in the late 1990s, where the Ethiopia-Eritrea war stands out in casualty rates. More recently, the Middle East has topped these statistics. Here we can primarily think of the conflict situations in Syria, Libya and Yemen. To this we have to add the situation in Ukraine, meaning that the annual casualty levels are comparatively high. The world is facing a large number of challenges and many are also highly deadly.

There is one body that is designed to deal with this: the UN and its various components, primarily the UN Security Council (UNSC). Data on the UNSC resolutions during the period 1946-2016 display the long period, from the early-1960s to the late-1980s, when there were very few UN decisions. It was only in 1990 that the UNSC started to react; this is seen in the rise in the number of resolutions that were passed. The record of the Cold War was one of a high level of vetoes against draft resolutions. In some years of the 1950s, vetoes were more frequent than resolution passed. Today, vetoes are fewer. However, Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reports that the number of conflicts has increased sharply in the last few years without a corresponding rise in UN resolution statistics. One could have expected more decisions; the lack of such increased activity demonstrates the inability of the UN and the international community to respond to several of the new situations.

As can be understood from this information, the fluctuations in armed conflicts as well as in international conflict management relate closely to
the global concentration of power and relations among central powers. The five permanent members of the Security Council (P5) are also the countries with the largest military establishments, all of them not only holding nuclear weapons, but also a capacity to move forces over long distances, even across continents. For the period 1948 to 1988, i.e., for forty years, the confrontation between the Soviet Union (for most of the period with the People’s Republic of China on its side) and the Western powers was at the centre of international affairs. It was termed the ‘Cold War’ but statistics demonstrate that it was far from a ‘cold’ war in large parts of the world (East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East, Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, South and Central America), which instead saw protracted and devastating wars where the Cold War antagonists played central roles. The Cold War, in other words, was accompanied by increasing numbers of armed conflicts, providing for intensive wars in many parts of the world.

The post-Cold War period can be said to have begun with the relaxation of major-power tension following the ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev to the helm in the Soviet Union. It was followed by the active construction of a new architecture for international security as seen in the first treaty abolishing a set of nuclear weapons, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty of 1987, eliminating so-called intermediate range nuclear forces.\(^{10}\) In turn, this was accompanied by an increase in major power cooperation for solving international conflicts. The reduction of armed conflicts, as seen in the UCDP data, captures this change. With a cooperative relationship between the major powers, the settlement of conflicts where they were influential, also became possible. The 1990s thus saw a decline in the numbers of armed conflicts. New conflicts did not lead to the typical conflagration between major powers. In retrospect, it appears to have been a creative time when much seemed to be possible. However, since 9/11, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq (led by the United States of America and the United Kingdom and with opposition from the other P5 states), international relations became more problematic. With the Arab Spring, beginning in 2011, the divides became even sharper. The Western powers used the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to strike at Libya, while Russia gradually and substantially became a supporter of the al-Assad regime in Syria. The conflicts in the Middle East
again became globalized—even to the point of replacing the contradictions over the Palestinian issue as a primary regional concern. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the following wars in eastern Ukraine again brought territorial conflicts to Europe.

What this overview shows is that major-power relations have a strong impact on the global picture of conflict and peace. But the rigidity of the Cold War is no longer present, allowing space for other actors to pursue their own agendas. Thus, the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea did not follow the major power interest (but the United States was instrumental in bringing about the Algiers peace agreement). The terrorist actors that entered the stage beginning with the bombings of the United States embassies in East Africa in 1998 had their own independent financing as well as goals. On the whole, the P5 states have had a unified position in dealing with terrorism, but that has not prevented them from having their own conflicts (e.g., over Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, Southeast Asian waters). Thus, the rivalries today take on different forms than during the Cold War: there is a mixture of sharp conflict as well as shared interests. The contours of a tripolar world are emerging with novel features that do not replicate those of the Cold War.¹¹

This means that peace efforts now, and in the future, have to deal with a global overlay that is less predictable, both in supporting warring actors (as during the Cold War) or peace efforts (as in the 1990s).¹² The state of relations between the major powers disseminates through the layers of the global fabric, affecting regional, national and local levels. We can also observe that the ways major powers react to some local situations affect the relations between the majors. There are interaction effects that reinforce conflicts at all levels. Sometimes this can encourage war actors, sometimes it can lead to support for peace efforts. However, it raises the question of whether local situations can be isolated from global efforts? Is there even an advantage for local or national peacemaking to be as autonomous from major power relations as possible? If so, are there alternatives for such peacemaking other than resting on the major powers? For instance, the UN Secretary-General has a position that is formally different from the Security Council, and thus potentially supportive of autonomous peace initiatives. Central to this, and important for the possibility of building quality peace, is that
war endings emerge through peace agreements. Let us thus look at recent efforts that also have the trait of being reasonably autonomous from major power dynamics, to be able to discuss the importance of such autonomous peacemaking. We may not arrive at a definitive conclusion, but at least the question has been raised.

**Autonomous Peace Agreements**

As previously noted, there was a period of reduction in armed conflict in the 1990s. One way in which many conflicts came to an end was through peace agreements. They can be analyzed systematically and that has been done by two academic projects, UCDP and Peace Accords Matrix (PAM) of Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame. Here the focus is on those agreements that are reasonably autonomous from major power dynamics.

There are criteria for identifying a peace agreement: It should be a document concluded between the fighting parties; it should deal with basic disagreements as well as with insecurity; it should end violence; and, most importantly, it should be implemented. Agreements meeting these conditions are the actual starting point for a process of peacebuilding, with the prospect of establishing quality peace. To this we add the requirement that the arrangements would also largely be done without the direct involvement of major powers. The number of cases immediately shrinks, as peacemaking in many parts of the world directly affects the interests of the major powers and they are unlikely to refrain from influencing the outcomes.

Still, modern history provides several such agreements. A first example is the Esquipulas Peace Agreement for Nicaragua and Central America done in 1987. It was an effort largely led by Costa Rica (and its President Oscar Arias who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for this) and involved five countries developing their own framework for settling the conflicts in the region. By 1996, there were durable peace agreements for all the conflicts in the region. A second example is the one on South Africa, negotiated 1990-94, leading to democratic elections in 1994 and the election of the first black president of the country (Nelson Mandela, also a Nobel laureate in Peace). An additional example is the complicated peace process in Nepal leading to an agreement in 2006 resulting in an end of the
monarchy, a broad-based government including Maoists in the government, and a federal constitution. In all these cases, the parties actively prevented any formal influence on their processes from international powers. All of these agreements changed the societies involved for the foreseeable future.

There are also two more recent peace agreements and one older one, where the process has been reignited, that are relevant for this discussion. The agreement that was concluded between the Colombian government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and signed in 2016 is one example. A revised version of the treaty passed the Colombian Congress, despite a negative vote in the referendum of October that year. Following the elections in 2018 there might be some revisions to the treaty, but most of the basics seem to be intact. A second example is the agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), on the issue of the Bangsamoro in Mindanao, signed in 2014 and finally becoming operative in 2018.

One could add a more recent example to this discussion, the one of the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace agreement. As mentioned, it involved the US as a major actor in ending the vicious war in the year 2000. A series of peace initiatives followed and an arbitration process (the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission, EEBC) came to a conclusion on the border issue in 2002. Ethiopia refused to implement the outcome, pointing to technical issues. Although pursuit of the peace agreement stalled, the treaty was not terminated. Implementation was the issue, not the agreement as such. However, the ensuing tensions involved expensive military measures on both sides and an intense rivalry between the two states involving neighbouring countries (notably Somalia). The situation seemed frozen but, in 2018, the new Ethiopian government announced that it fully accepted the terms of the 2000 peace agreement and the 2002 outcome. It was an unexpected change, although many had worked for it. The implementation of the peace agreement received a new impetus, emerging autonomously from the new government. There is little evidence that the major powers had influence on this development. Ethiopia’s new position created hopes for this part of Africa.

These three examples demonstrate that there are peace processes, they have yielded results, and they have taken place in three different regions and
in very different types of conflict (one is a conflict about government, another is about territorial autonomy, and the third one concerns an interstate border conflict). These are positive signs in turbulent times. Also, in line with the thesis here, they were largely derived through autonomous action.\textsuperscript{14}

The actual content of these three agreements corresponds to a broader pattern of what such treaties do. One could say that all the existing peace agreements provide a data bank, a repository of practical ideas, for settling of armed conflicts.\textsuperscript{15} The autonomous treaties thus build on experiences from other places, but adapt them to the specifics of the particular situation. When the issue of contention is about government, peace agreements consider issues, such as autonomy, federalism and even independence. Thus, the Bangsamoro treaty adopted an elaborate scheme of local governance. Interstate agreements often regulate intricate border issues, but may also include matters, such as local demilitarization or the opening of trade. Thus, the border issue was submitted to arbitration, but the actual shift in Ethiopia’s stance also included the opening of transportation routes and cross-border trade. It should be noted that there are many more agreements regarding governance issues than territorial issues. This suggests that the latter is much more difficult to agree on and, thus, if there is an agreement, it is likely to be the final one. If it means redrawing boundaries, it involves action that later will be difficult to change. The territorial distinctions are fundamental to the operation of today’s states and, thus, border issues or matters of regional self-governance are particularly hard to regulate.\textsuperscript{16}

It is also interesting to observe the personalities involved in peace processes. One is Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, the Philippines' chief negotiator with the MILF. She is the first woman to sign a peace agreement as a chief negotiator. Although the number of peace negotiations has increased in the last fifteen years, the participation of women in negotiations has not reached a satisfactory level. The limited experience we have so far strongly suggests that women’s participation helps to introduce new ideas and makes connections to civil society for a peace process.\textsuperscript{17} Of course, Coronel-Ferrer was appointed by and was acting on behalf of the country’s
leadership, in her case President Benigno Aquino III, pointing to the importance of political leadership. Another negotiator of significance is President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia who won the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for the Colombia agreement. The example of the Colombian President should encourage governments to take initiatives for peace processes. Similarly, the rise to power of Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia is historical, as he comes from the Oromo population group that has never before held such a decisive position, the one of Prime Minister. A determined leader can play a role in changing dynamics in protracted conflicts in a way that provides for both creativity and autonomy from external actors.

In these cases, there were also third parties, facilitators or mediators. In the Colombian case, this role was held by Norway and Cuba, as well as supporting states in South America; in the Philippine case, Malaysia had a third-party role along with support from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states; and for the Horn of Africa, there were also efforts by other states. For the accompanying settlement of internal Ethiopian conflicts, not only neighbours (notably Kenya) but also nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) played a role.18

Thus, autonomous efforts can draw on the support from neighbouring countries as well as NGOs. There are additional resources that also can be of use. One example is the PAM project, which follows peace agreements for their first ten years, whether they are implemented or not or, more accurately, to which degree they are implemented.19 This is a type of research that can have direct impact on negotiations. PAM has demonstrated that only half of the agreements have been fully implemented after ten years. This finding is not encouraging, as much effort was spent to make them comprehensive. However, it means that governments can learn a lot from historical examples and, indeed, PAM was used by the negotiators in the Colombian case.20

From the study of implementation of peace agreements, we can also observe that there are differences in what is actually put into reality. Clearly, issues of physical security take priority, as can be seen in agreements on amnesty for the fighting sides as well as in the comparatively quick positioning of international peacekeepers. As the origins of internal conflicts often relate to issues of discrimination, a disturbing finding is that
provisions of human rights have a much lower degree of implementation. This leads to the issue of ‘quality of peace’. Peace agreements need to meet certain criteria to ensure the quality of the new conditions. If they do not, they are not ‘peace’ agreements but, rather, ‘war termination’ arrangements. This should be particularly important for autonomous peace agreements, as they may be controversial for major powers and run the risk of being undermined by external efforts. Thus, it is important to conclude these reflections with a closer look at quality peace.

**Components of Quality Peace**

Quality peace points to the “post-conflict conditions that make the inhabitants of a society secure in life and dignity now and for the foreseeable future”. It gives a broad picture of what to include as valuable for a peace that is lasting, meets standards of quality and has empirical support. This way of expanding the understanding of peace is parallel to the trend among development economists, as seen in the term ‘human development’. Amartya Sen has elaborated on how, for instance, economics has to have other goals than a mere increase of GDP or even GDP per capita. He suggests that individual freedom is the actual purpose of economic activity specifying five different ‘freedoms’. Not unexpectedly, political freedom and economic facilities are among them, but he also includes social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security, i.e., not purely the liberal freedoms. Social opportunities have to be equally distributed; transparency means that power centres are transparent and, thus, more predictable; and protective security means that power in society is used for the safety of all inhabitants. One could say that these five freedoms simultaneously have individual and societal aspects. There is an interaction where individual freedoms enrich society which, in turn, benefit from this in growth and thus generate an interest in the protection of such freedoms.

The ideas of human development are also applicable to conditions after a war, to safeguard against the recurrence of a recently terminated conflict. It has an affinity with quality peace. The operationalization of quality peace refers to society as a whole: it is the society’s ability to provide for the security of all inhabitants at the same time that it respects their
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It adds expectations: there have to be reasonable prospects that these conditions are lasting, i.e., that a peace agreement is not taken as a simple contract that is quickly overturned, but one that is firmly anchored in society, thus allowing inhabitants and society to invest in a peaceful future. In that way, there is a reinforcing cycle of interactions among the different elements of quality peace.

If a treaty meets the criteria of quality peace, it should have a greater chance of resulting in lasting peace. This means that, for internal conflicts, whether dealing with governance issues or territorial concerns, there is a documented respect for human rights as well as minority rights and women's rights. The greater attention there is to such concerns, the less likely is a return of the war. Furthermore, physical security (safety) needs to be ensured for all inhabitants, not only for a particular group, such as former guerrilla leaders, army officers or elites. Disarmament measures and reintegration of former combatants (DDR) has that quality. These are measures that reduce fear in society, thus increasing the chances of a durable peace. In particular, this includes economic security, i.e., jobs and a functioning economy. If these conditions are maintained over time and with accumulated experiences of solving new crises with peaceful means, the expectations increase that peace will continue. The new conditions established after a war would then have the qualities that reinforce the existing peace. A closer analysis of the two agreements on internal conflicts, the 2016 Colombia peace agreement and the 2014 Bangsamoro agreement would reveal if they meet these criteria. These are comprehensive treaties that do include many of these aspects that are central for quality peace. Thus, both of them would have good prospects of actually achieving an end to decades-long conflicts. Such a study is needed.

None of the quality peace criteria applies directly and in the same way to interstate conflicts. However, they can be translated into a different set of measures. This includes adherence to principles of non-interference with military means in the internal affairs of the opponent. This can be regulated in an agreement and demonstrated through concrete actions as well as avoidance of certain actions. Concerns over, for instance, border arrangements have to be settled in a way the parties can accept, and respect the integrity of the parties (i.e., not being seen as imposed deals.
due to the weakness of one side). Making sure that the settlement follows established ways of dealing with such conflicts (i.e., processes of arbitration or international law) is, thus, a counterpart to the human rights provisions for internal conflicts. Withdrawal of forces from border areas, reduction in armaments and avoidance of provocative positioning of new weapons can be seen as confidence-building measures among states that reduce fear of attack, in the same way as internal disarmament works within states. To this can be added internal changes: Power struggles within one of the parties may reduce confidence, while the rise of new leaders who support a peaceful approach may reinforce trust. There is a close connection between internal and interstate relations. Similarly, the third criterion points to the importance of predictability of the newly established peaceful conditions. It is again something demonstrated in daily actions and in the way new issues are handled among the parties. The more frequently a peaceful approach is applied, the more likely it is that the next crisis will be managed in a similar way. Thus, expectations of lasting conditions increase and reinforce the peace. These elements of quality peace can be applied to the 2018 developments in the relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. A number of them have actually been implemented by the two sides, suggesting that the prospects are positive. However, these are still very new events and it is too early to make an assessment. From the quality peace perspective, it is important to follow this case closely.

Thus, a central element in quality peace is predictability. It is a self-fulfilling part of a peace agreement or post-war condition. If a (formerly) fighting party believes that peace will last, it behaves in such a way that peace actually becomes durable, and acts to reduce tension in society or between states. On the other hand, if the parties do not expect that peace will be lasting, their self-protective actions will soon undermine the process and, as a result, peace will not remain, as predicted by the classical security dilemma, both for internal as well as interstate relations. The issue of predictability has many components and needs much more research to be fully understood. For instance, if the parties, through their understanding of history (as taught in schools and universities and/or used in political discourse and in media) have an expectation that the “other” side will be friendly, that may very well be the way leaders approach each
other. If, however, ‘history’ results in expectations of hostility, that will also be reflected in the approach they take. Matters of history, culture, political psychology and other variables will have a role in determining expectations. This should be on the agenda of future research.

Concluding Note

It has to be noted that the number of wars and battle-related deaths in armed conflicts are declining in several regions around the world, such as in East Asia and South America. In areas like South Asia and the Middle East, however, the pattern is not the same. Particularly worrying is that the major powers are less interested in cooperation and there is reduced respect for agreements, by non-state actors and some state actors. There is a risk that we are witnessing, on the global level, the emergence of a world of tripolar conflict configurations with reduced predictability in the pursuit of conflict management and conflict resolution (e.g., among the US, Russia and China). There is also a discernible trend toward increased autocratization of governments, i.e., that elections are favouring candidates for whom the preservation of basic values of democracy, human rights and human security are not the priority although formally adhering to that framework. These are challenges to the notion of quality peace. Additionally, there are the tests to global leadership of human migration and planetary climate change. Therefore, we have to conclude that the predicaments of peace and security and, hence, peacebuilding and quality peace remain with us, and that peace research and peace education are more important than ever. Thus, we should be happy to welcome new centres in this field, such as the one in Bangladesh. There is need for new perspectives to analyze the complexities as well as the solutions.
Notes


4. Thus, peacebuilding is different from ‘peacemaking’ which involves the actual settlement of the incompatibilities or disagreements among the parties. Peacemaking is close to matters of mediation and negotiation. The focus in this chapter is on peacebuilding as a matter of preventing the recurrence of war.


6. Peter Wallensteen, 2015, op. cit.

7. A short note on sources: Materials from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Peace Accords Matrix (PAM) at the Kroc Institute are main sources of inspiration and evidence for the discussion here. In addition, the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as the three-volume report of the International Panel on Social Progress (www.ipsp.org) have helped to broaden the discussion on the connections between war endings and quality peace.

8. For data see, Marie Allansson, Erik Melander and Lotta Themnér, “Organized Violence, 1989-2016”, Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2017, pp. 574-587. The definition used by UCDP is that an armed conflict is a contested incompatibility concerning government and/or territory, where armed force is used between two parties of which one is the government of a state and which results in at least 25 battle related deaths in one calendar year. When there are more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in one calendar year, the armed conflict is defined as a war. See, www.ucdp.uu.se.


10. On 20 October 2018 US President Donald Trump announced that the US would withdraw from this treaty. To many it has been a cornerstone for reducing the fear of nuclear war.


In the interest of full disclosure, the present author initiated UCDP and led it until 2015. He was also involved in setting up PAM at the Kroc Institute until 2016.

Obviously there are also other peace agreements during this time, notably over Mali, and where the international community has been heavily involved, e.g., through the UN Special Representative and peacekeeping operations.

This is the topic of Wallensteen’s book titled Understanding Conflict Resolution in the updated and expanded fifth edition (2019).


Civil society can come in different forms and not all civil society is necessarily peaceful. That can be observed in Europe today: the rise of a civil society that is xenophobic and/or racist. Thus, with respect to this question, we have to define which type(s) of organizations and non-governmental bodies can be constructive in the creation of peace.


The project now has a spin-off organization, the Barometer project that monitors the implementation, as specified in that agreement by the two parties.

Madhav Joshi and John Darby, op. cit.

Peter Wallensteen, 2015, op. cit.

The UNDP Human Development Report is an outcome of these deliberations. Mahbub ul Haq was instrumental in bringing it to fruition together with Amartya Sen. It has an autonomous status within UNDP. The first report was published in 1990. An off-shoot has been the Arab Human Development report. Since 2002 six such reports have been issued, pointing in particular to the lack of human development in a large number of Arab states, in comparison to other regions.
Possibly these reports played a role in the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 and for its more hopeful initial phase.


A pertinent question here is whether future conflicts are more likely to involve issues relating to climate change, for instance, disputes around water resources (access to wells, dividing international river water between concerned states, etc.). Historically, such concerns have been handled with traditional means or interstate diplomacy. It is important to discuss whether that will be possible in the future.