Peace: The Elusive Dependent Variable and Policy Goal

Gary Goertz, University of Notre Dame
ggoertz@nd.edu

The Peacebuilding Puzzle: Political Order in Post-Conflict States. By Naazneen H. Barma. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 281p. $110.00 cloth, $29.99 paper.

Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding. By Susanna P. Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 306p. $99.99 cloth, $34.99 paper.

Humanitarian Hypocrisy: Civilian Protection and the Design of Peace Operations. By Andrea L. Everett. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017. 284p. $55.00 cloth.

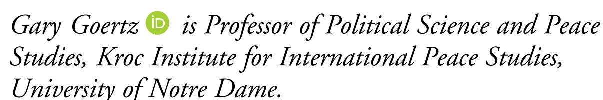
Peace Formation and Political Order in Conflict Affected Societies. By Oliver P. Richmond. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 264p. $125.00 cloth, $32.95 paper.

Paul Diehl (2016) and Patrick Regan (2014) in recent presidential addresses for the International Studies Association and the Peace Science Society, respectively, have called to task conflict and peace scholars for their lack of attention to peace. They note that academic research and policy action are focused almost exclusively on conflict and violence.

In this review essay I take up their call and explore these four books from the perspective of "peace." Notably all four books include peace in their title: "peacebuilding," "local peace," "peace operations," and "peace formation." All of these books are clearly about peace, although they focus on different aspects of the concept.

- For Naazneen Barma, "peacebuilding" is the creation of competent, Weberian bureaucracies and democratic governments in conflict and post-conflict settings. Focusing on Afghanistan, Cambodia, and East Timor, she analyzes the attempts of international actors such as the United Nations to create quality states.
- For Susanna Campbell "local peace" involves looking at the actions of NGOs such as CARE, as well as international actors such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Kingdom's development agency, Department for International Development (DFID), and how they try to manage the conflict in Burundi. She focuses on these organizational actors, how they follow and are constrained by international norms, and the extent to which they break free of them to act locally with responsibility and sensitivity.
- For Andrea Everett "peace operations" involve the use of military action in severe humanitarian crises to protect local populations. She conducts a large-N statistical analysis, as well as doing intensive case studies of Rwanda, Darfur, and Australia in the Pacific.
- For Oliver Richmond "peace formation" is about local action, respecting and using local norms, culture, and the like, in contrast and usually in opposition to international actors and norms. He provides vignettes of peace formation activities in a variety of civil-war–connected settings.

The term "peace" has been problematic from the beginning in peace and conflict studies. It has also been problematic within the United Nations with its use of various peace-related terms. For example, classic United Nations "peacekeeping" was really about cease-fire maintenance (Diehl 1993). In the quantitative literature the



Gary Goertz is Professor of Political Science and Peace Studies, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame.

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same problem arises: peace is almost always defined as the absence of the recurrence of civil war. One would be hard-pressed to find quantitative studies defining peace in any other way.

New terms such as "just peace" (or "JustPeace") also illustrate the grip that peace as the absence of violence has on our minds. Adding "just" to the term "peace" reinforces the notion that peace is merely the absence of violence and that we need to add other terms to express the notion of quality peace. The Wikipedia section on JustPeace in the "Peacebuilding" entry also defines it in terms of an absence of violence: "'Justpeace' (or 'just peace') refers to the absence of all three types of violence enumerated above: direct, structural, & cultural."

These four books are emblematic of the elusive nature of the concept of peace as a dependent variable and policy goal. What constitutes peace is rarely made explicit across the books; rather, it must be inferred from the nature of the study. For example, Everett is very clear about the goal of peace operations: for her it is to protect civilians in humanitarian crises. That is certainly a laudable goal, but the question is whether that is synonymous with peace.

A related question concerns the means and policies designed and used to achieve peace. The standard international approach to dealing with post-conflict situations involves rebuilding or, more often, just building for the first time a competent and democratic state. Barma is very clear and explicit about that as a peace-building goal. Richmond in contrast strongly criticizes this particular goal of international society in conflict settings. Although many might agree that building a competent and democratic state is a valuable goal, it is also not synonymous with peace.

This essay explores some of these issues and argues for an extended sense of peace as the absence of overt violence by the state and societal actors, including the absence of state repression and human rights violations. Using the terminology of Erik Melander (2018) and Peter Wallensteen (2015), one can call this "quality negative peace." Such a view stresses how extensive violence and armed conflict are in post-conflict settings. Given the analyses in the case studies in the books under review, quality negative peace might be an extremely difficult goal to achieve.

Defining Peace

It is quite rare to see explicit conceptualizations of "domestic peace," in contrast to interstate peace. Only a handful of works in recent years have explicitly conceptualized domestic peace. Most of the time, as illustrated by the books under review, it remains the elusive policy goal and dependent variable.

Christian Davenport, Patrick Regan, and Erik Melander (2018) have recently produced one of the few systematic attempts to conceptualize domestic peace. Proving how difficult the task is, their book is a compilation of basically three separate reports and analyses by the three authors. Another core examination of this problem is Peter Wallensteen's (2015) book on "quality peace." Finally, looking at things from the bottom up is Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty's "Everyday Peace Indicators" project (Firchow 2019; Firchow and MacGinty 2017).

Davenport and Melander focus on what I think is the core and crucial dimension of thinking about peace in post-conflict settings: peace is not just the absence of civil war but is also the absence of violence by groups and the state against each other within society, including lower-level armed violence. This includes violence associated with terrorism and rebel groups, as well as the absence of violence by the state against civil society actors, such as ethnic groups and groups opposed to those running the state.

Melander quite explicitly includes women's and gender rights in his conceptualization of peace. If women are the target of violence by their partners and society and this targeting is often enabled and tolerated by the state (if not a matter of state practice directly), then there is not domestic peace. Similarly, Davenport argues the same basic position regarding ethnic groups. By this metric, the South in the United States has almost never been in a state of domestic peace. The threat and use of force by groups like the Ku Klux Klan and now white supremacist groups encouraged by Trump, which often coordinate with the state against African Americans, means that there has been no domestic peace in the American South.

The Everyday Peace Indicators project, instead of using a top-down approach, asks local groups and individuals what they think peace means. Surveys and focus groups are usually conducted in areas that have recently undergone civil wars. Not surprisingly, individuals focus on issues of personal security vis-à-vis the state and other domestic actors, including organized crime and rebel groups, not to mention opposing ethnic groups. In their discussion of the project, Firchow and McGinty (2017) list the 10 most frequently cited indicators of peace coming out of their surveys and focus groups.[1] They are overwhelmingly violence related, such as whether it is "safe to walk the streets" and whether there are "strong police." However, a few indicators, such as adequate health care and the education of children, are clearly not along these lines.

We can explore the books under review from this perspective. What is the implicit or explicit conceptualization of peace as the dependent variable or policy goal in each case?

Barma is very clear that the goal of international efforts is to create a competent, democratic state. Presumably this will produce a more peaceful society.

For Everett the core concept, or dependent variable, is the "resources-ambition gap," which is the "gap between the protection that soldiers are asked to provide and the

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resources available for doing so—as a way to balance competing normative and material pressures both to protect civilians and to limit the costs and risks of any such efforts" (p. 3). This gap has implications for peace in the form of protecting civilians in these crises, which might be related to reducing violence to them, but the dependent variable is not peace at all.

For Campbell peace is actually exogenous to the study because it is defined by the international, state, and nongovernmental organizations that are pursuing peace-building goals. Whatever it is that they are trying to achieve is thus implicitly their definition of peace. For each organization one can assess the extent to which it has some peace-building goals and what they are.

Core to the Richmond book is the concept of peace formation, and he offers a section defining it:

> A DEFINITION OF PEACE FORMATION. It goes without saying that such processes and their outcomes can only qualify as peace formation if they are nonviolent; respect equality, dignity and human rights; offer pluralism and intercultural understanding; are transparent and accountable; and offer participation for all, regardless of identity, class, or gender. . .. To recap, peace formation processes may be defined as relationships and networked processes in which indigenous or local agents of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, or development, acting in customary, religious, cultural, social, or local political or local government settings, find ways of establishing peace processes and sustainable dynamics of peace. (p. 33)

Richmond's definition focuses on the process of peace formation. The outcome of the process mentioned at the end is peace. However, this tells us little about the content, ontology, or meaning of peace in theoretical or concrete terms. This definition tells us how to get there, but not what peace is.

"Post-Conflict" Settings

All of the books under review analyze policies and actions in "post-conflict settings." This is yet another example of very unfortunate terminology: *none of these societies, countries, and states is in a post-conflict setting*. The case studies in the volumes under review make this crystal clear. In some cases, such as Afghanistan, the conflict is a civil war starting not long after the US-led invasion. But in other cases such as Cambodia or Burundi, the narratives make it clear a variety of ongoing forms of armed and militarized violence are continuing throughout the so-called post-conflict era. In this respect Richmond's terminology is much more apt when he talks about "conflict-affected societies" (virtually all of these are related to civil war), indicating clearly that conflict is an ongoing issue and is not in the past.

As the case studies also show, the state is often at the origin of much of this violence and armed conflict. While a new government and state are being constructed after civil war, groups are struggling to control the state and its resources. They use violence to win elections and to keep other groups out of power. Campbell's discussion of Burundi illustrates well the constant struggle for power and control over the central government and how all parties use armed force to influence policy, gain control, and obtain financial and other resources. The same is true in Barma's discussion of Cambodia, where one party has more or less complete control over the state and uses organized repression to maintain its control.

In short, what the field of peace and conflict studies needs is a conceptualization of peace that make sense for these kinds of settings, where often the state before the civil war was weak and repressive, thereby generating the civil war in the first instance. There is no surprise that after the civil war the same problems and behaviors are still there.

I propose that "quality negative peace" constitutes a reasonable criterion for evaluating peace-building policies. It is a very ambitious goal that is rarely achieved in post-conflict settings. Success for all of the books under review here would thus mean moving countries toward this outcome, because they all are really about protecting lives and reducing armed conflict.

Evaluating Success: Ideal versus Comparative Outcomes

A reasonable conceptualization of domestic peace also provides standards for evaluating the success of policies in these conflict-affected societies in producing peace.

A strong tension exists within the policy evaluation literature about criteria of policy success in peacekeeping, peace building, and conflict management. The standard for causal evaluation in the methodological literature clearly involves the counterfactual of what would have happened if the actors had chosen some other policy or done nothing at all. That is the standard definition of a significant policy impact; it is significantly better than nothing or policy alternatives.

Note that this is different from evaluating the outcome vis-à-vis some ideal policy goals. One essentially has two choices in evaluation: How much better are things now than they would have been versus how far are things away from some desirable or even optimal goal? This is why having a realistic conceptualization of domestic peace matters: people evaluate policy vis-à-vis ideal goals. They rarely follow the methodologists' lead and ask what would have happened in the absence of the treatment.

This tension between making comparisons to ideals versus comparisons to alternative politics arises directly in the human rights literature. Kathryn Sikkink devotes a whole chapter of her recent book, *Evidence for Hope*, to this critical issue of evaluating the effect of human rights actors on the behavior of the government and other societal actors. One can apply it *mutatis mutandis* to the literature on peace, replacing everywhere the term "human

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rights" with the term "peace"[2]; her conclusion applies to evaluating peace policies as well:

> Depending on the choice of metric, one can arrive at very different conclusions about legitimacy, effectiveness, or the progress of human rights. If I compare the International Criminal Court (ICC), for example, to my ideal of justice, I reach a different evaluation than if I compare the world today, with an ICC, to the world before 1998, when such a court did not exist. Both evaluations are valid and can lead to useful conclusions, but scholars need to be more explicit about their chosen metrics to help us interpret their claims. Because of the problems with comparisons to the ideal, I prefer systematic comparative empirical research as a basis for my evaluation of progress. (Sikkink 2017, 17)

Peace-Building Policies

Once one knows what one is aiming at, then one can evaluate policies and actions based on these goals. Following the analogy with human rights, the peace literature does not have the luxury of universal conventions that define the goals to be achieved. Although these universal conventions are certainly not the perfect ideal, they at least provide a starting point.

The books under review focus on the means or policies or methods for achieving the elusive peace dependent variable. As seen earlier, the concept of peace formation encompasses a set of techniques, policies, and actions that local actors can take to achieve conflict management and peace. The ambition-resources gap means that it will be hard to deploy peacekeeping and UN forces to protect civilians in humanitarian crises, thus increasing the number of lives lost and implicitly producing a less peaceful situation. Campbell argues that, if organizations can develop local trust and legitimacy while maintaining connection with international norms, they can be effective in achieving whatever they define as peace building. Barma quite clearly describes the problems in developing and creating a competent democratic state. She argues that there are all kinds of pressures and conflicts that generate what she calls neopatrimonial states, which are less able and useful in promoting peace than competent democratic ones.

With a more well-defined standard for policy success, it becomes clear what policies might achieve it. Campbell is very eloquent in discussing organizations and NGOs that are involved in peace-building processes. She very insightfully discusses how some are directly involved in peacemaking activities, whereas others are only indirectly involved. She discusses organizations such as CARE and the UNDP that typically have other developmental or humanitarian goals. Her analyses suggest that it is hard for organizations whose focus is elsewhere and whose experience is often not in conflict-affected societies to incorporate peace-building activities into their organizational DNA. She covers both the UNDP and the UK's DFID, which attempted to target and deal with conflict-affected states. However, she also makes it clear that it was very hard for them to get beyond their traditional development policies to really engage in peacemaking.

For me, the most fascinating part of the Richmond book is his discussion of peace infrastructures. This part describes the creation of institutions and organizations, often within the state, specifically devoted to dealing with conflict management and resolution. For example, Timor-Leste is introducing a Ministry of Peacebuilding and has a network of community mediators who have been particularly successful in helping families resettle or return. In the Philippines, Government Peace Negotiating Panels were established that assisted in formulating a National Peace Plan.

One way to connect outcomes with policies is to ask what was driving the violence to begin with. If the absence of various kinds of armed conflict and violence defines the policy goal, then the policy means must be connected to the causes of violence and hence to the maintenance of at least negative peace. This means one needs to really link the literature on the causes of violence with the policies designed to promote peace (e.g., Loyle and Appel 2017). One can use the analogy of medicine: unless you know the disease you are interested in curing, you are pretty much shooting in the dark when trying to cure it. But to have a cure requires identifying clear causal mechanisms by which the disease is being produced, an understanding that is then used to develop various medical options.

Conclusion

At various points I have made reference to the literature on human rights. Almost all of the core methodological, theoretical, and conceptual issues that arise in the literature on peace have very direct parallels in the literature on human rights. That literature is also directly relevant because quality negative peace within a society means respecting human rights. So there is a direct substantive connection between human rights and domestic peace: if the state is involved in massive repression, there cannot be domestic peace.

I propose that, for conflict-afflicted societies, attaining quality negative peace is a way to make conceptual, empirical, and theoretical progress. It means addressing the multiple forms of violence and armed conflict in a society. In post-conflict settings, this goal is rarely achieved. Quality negative peace focuses attention on the forms of armed violence that plague these societies. The books under review describe many of the kinds of violence that exist in post–civil war countries.

In particular, I think the UCDP program is very well positioned to work on quality negative peace. Over the years it has investigated many forms of violence and armed conflict within states. It is well suited to develop something akin to a Post-Conflict Peace Index (PCPI)

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that tracks quality negative peace over time in post-conflict settings that are actually settings of ongoing armed violence.

With a clearer understanding of what peace consists of in this setting, state, international governmental organization, and NGO actors might then have a better sense of the success of their policy interventions. We will not know whether hybrid peace interventions, peace infrastructure, and various peacebuilding activities have any impact on violence and armed conflict within conflict settings until we have conceptualized the elusive dependent variable and policy goal of peace. These four books offer much useful food for thought that needs to be taken into account by peace researchers interested in achieving this difficult goal.

Notes

1 Note that this table is based on pilot studies; see Firchow 2019 for an extended analysis of the different categories in more recent studies.

2 Her discussion of neoliberalism also fits extremely well with the problems of popular peace studies critiques of neoliberalism.

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