

Researching war and peace issues in IR: An introduction

1. The Necessity of Too Generic Words: War and Peace in IR

'War' and 'peace' are often considered too vague and generic terms, given the many entanglements they encompass. Especially the use of the term 'peace' is considered by radical critical thinkers as too abstract. Yet it remains important to continue using them. They remind us that certain practices, often euphemized today as security, intervention, or governance, are in fact forms of making war. Conversely, practices such as mediation, negotiation, or forms of solidarity and resistance from below give substance to peace and make it less of an abstract, albeit necessary, concept. The generic quality of 'war and peace' is thus also their critical strength: these terms allow us to hold together practices that would otherwise remain obscured under more technocratic or neutral labels.

Disciplinary fragmentation (conflict resolution, peacebuilding/ conflict studies, counterinsurgency, warfare: these are important as they give specification and nuance to issues, processes that are different → BUT IMPORTANT to retrace them back to what is fundamentally PEACE and peacemaking and what is fundamentally WAR).

2. Disciplinary evolutions in IR

Traditionally, IR was born as a discipline in the aftermath of WWII, in the interstice between the end of two inter-state world wars and the beginning of the bipolar confrontation. It emerged as a strongly state-centric discipline, rooted in the idea that the *great powers* are both those that determine the outbreak of conflicts and those that can resolve them – an assumption shared by both predominant approaches of the time, realist (anarchy, security dilemmas, etc.) and idealist/liberal.

BUT NOW → new approaches, revised realism, neo-marxism, but also post-structuralism (postcolonial approaches), feminist approaches. In IR, **they pose the need to approach war and peace not merely as events**, but as political questions that shape the very meaning and practice of the 'international' itself. Connect connects long-standing concerns (armed conflict, diplomacy, security) with contemporary challenges such as post-coloniality, global inequalities, ecological catastrophes, and new forms of hybrid warfare.

3. Past and present IR research pathways (4 min)

PAST

Institutionalism and collective security: early IR scholarship after 1945 emphasized institutions (UN, Bretton Woods system, NATO) as guarantors of peace. Yet this was both a *normative project* and a deeply Euro-American framing

Cold War problematics: research was structured by bipolarity, with IR theory itself (realism, liberalism, systemic approaches) emerging in response to the East–West divide. Proxy wars, intervention logics, and the geopolitics of development were analytically subordinated to “superpower rivalry.”

Nuclear proliferation and strategic studies: the “high politics” of deterrence, arms races, and arms control dominated much of the field. Strategic studies institutionalized a technocratic language that often displaced ethical and human concerns, yet also left a methodological legacy (game theory, scenario analysis).

Peace research traditions: in parallel, alternative epistemic communities (Galtung and critical peace research) reframed peace beyond the absence of

war, highlighting *structural violence, development, and disarmament*. This strand foreshadowed later critical turns in IR, even if it was long marginalized by mainstream strategic studies.

PRESENT

Postcoloniality and global inequalities: colonial legacies still shape conflicts, peacebuilding, and security regimes, embedding racialized and economic hierarchies into the international order.

Ecological crises and militarization: climate change as “*threat multiplier*” legitimates militarized responses, with disaster relief and environmental governance increasingly entangled with security logics.

Geopolitical change and multi-crises: from Ukraine to the Sahel, multi-crises (economic, ecological, military) erode liberal peace narratives and demand frameworks beyond traditional geopolitics.

Peace beyond universalism: peace as *situated practice*, rooted in local mediations, solidarities, and non-hegemonic epistemologies, rather than a universalist institutional blueprint.

Enduring constants and tensions:

Cycles of *rearmament and disarmament*, tied to both technological change and shifting power balances in late capitalism

Phases of growing militarization (rising defense budgets, securitarian logics, **militarization of social relations**)

At the same time, there is an urgent need to study **non-violent forms**: resistance, negotiation, and everyday peace practices and ways to contain violence to civility against barbarism

And to imagine new epistemologies beyond dominant knowledges: decentering, engaging with indigenous, subaltern, and feminist perspectives. → this not to merely 'consider those voices', it's not a matter of acknowledging

4. Approaches and the Specificity of IR

Problem-solving approaches (i.e. Robert Cox) take the international order as given, working within its parameters to devise technical solutions – peacekeeping, deterrence, stabilization – thus privileging stability and managerial knowledge. (it is also ok to engage with problem solving, policy-driven approaches usually do)

Critical approaches, by contrast, interrogate the very conditions that produce violence and “peace”: the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and knowledge that structure the international. Rather than solutions, they seek transformation.

5. Methods and methodologies

Wide array of different methodologies and data collection/interpretations methods

New epistemological and methodological needs in IR on war/peace revolve around:

- **Decolonizing knowledge** (beyond Eurocentric, universalist models).
- **Relational/material/assemblage thinking** (beyond state-centric views).
- **Attention to affect and everyday practices** (beyond formal politics).
- **Ecological and technological entanglements** (beyond human-only perspectives).
- **Plural methodologies** (combining data-driven, ethnographic, archival, digital).
- **Reflexivity and ethics** (interrogating the politics of research itself).

6. (Re)taking pacifism and non-violence seriously in the XXI century

(i.e readings by Richard Jackson)

Pacifism and non-violence subjugated and even denigrated as forms of knowledge within scholarly debates including IR

Reification of militarism and the state (despite the attempt to overcome state-centric approaches), reliance on violence to meet security challenges (think about legally controlling and sanctioning the use of force – allowing exceptions) → everything revolves about use of violence

What about the NON use of violence as source of knowledge but also practice?

Pacifism and non-violence considered as morally absolute positions that as such do not have any relevance to politics, IR, security governance.

Kimberley Hutchings (feminist and care perspective) → ethico-political form of pacifism rooted in virtue and care ethics which aims to deconstruct 'the mutual imbrication of politics and war in the world as it is now, and work on constructing an ethics and politics that is not compatible with war'.

Non-violent thinking in XXI century: has to be RELATIONAL (Judith Butler). Butler has a ecological view of non-violence, whereby it's something qualcosa che non riguarda solo l'essere umano, ma tutte le relazioni viventi e intercostitutive. It's "*it's a matter of sustainable bonds*" between humans and non humans, btw humans, objects and nature. Contemporary wars are destructive in a holistic sense: destructive of pp's lives, of objects and infrastructures, but also of relational bonds that are already fragile in the age of individualism and late capitalism.