# The State of Peace: An Exercise in Doublethink

## David Brenner

**Abstract:** The underlying assumption of the liberal peace paradigm is that thanks to its socio-economic system the West is living in peace. Its model should, hence, be emulated by war-torn and poverty-stricken societies of the Global South. Yet, recent upheavals in the Middle East evidence once again how simplistic this understanding is. While most debates attempt to explain why the adaptation of Western institutions and norms to other contexts is easier said than done, this paper takes issue on a more fundamental level. It scrutinises the peace that common-sense suggests we are living in. It argues that while war is the violent reordering of power relations, the current state of peace is the violent maintenance of power relations. Social order in the world's centre is maintained by a constant struggle to defend peace against alleged enemies with a combination of warfare in the world's periphery and increasingly de-territorialised *biopolitics*.

## 1 Introduction

> "Ignorance is Strength. Slavery is Freedom. War is Peace"

This is the slogan of the totalitarian party that is ruling the fictive mega-state Oceania in George Orwell's dystopia 1984. It explains how the exploitative regime is able to maintain its control over the masses and perpetuate the societal hierarchy by manipulating the truth, keeping the population enslaved in the economic system, and waging an unending war. Orwell's forbidden book within the book "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism" explains that this eternal war:

> "is merely an imposture. […] But though it is unreal it is not meaningless. […] The war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquest of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact. The very word 'war,' therefore, has become misleading."[1]

In common-sense perception these dystopian predictions for the year 1984 are proven wrong. Europe is viewed as enjoying its longest period of enduring peace since the end of the Second World War. The underlying assumption of the liberal peace paradigm is that thanks to its socio-economic system the West is living in peace and, thus, its model should be emulated by war-torn and poverty-stricken societies of the Global South. Yet, recent upheavals in the Middle East, particularly the dramatic advances by the Islamic State (IS) group in post-invasion Iraq, evidence once again how simplistic this understanding is. While most debates attempt to

explain why the adaptation of Western institutions and norms to other contexts is easier said than done, the following discussion takes issue on a more fundamental level. It scrutinises the peace that common-sense suggests the West is living in.

The essay concludes that peace is not the absence of direct or structural violence. Peace is rather a process of maintaining the social order that prevailed in a former war. It argues that while war is the violent reordering of power relations, peace is the violent maintenance of power relations. As will be shown, the West maintains these relations with a constant struggle to defend its peace against alleged external and internal enemies with a combination of direct warfare in the world's periphery and *biopower* at the domestic level. With globalization the distinction between internal and external enemies has become increasingly obsolete and global governance has gradually displaced the state in its role to defend peace through merging warfare and increasingly de-territorialised *biopolitics.*

To develop these arguments, the essay will first discuss the inherently violent nature of real-world peace as a regime that is mainly concerned to maintain itself and the social order it is based on. Against this background, it will illustrate how modern states have come to defend their peace regimes against real or alleged enemies. To do so the discussion will centre on the defence against internal threats with population control techniques that Foucault termed *biopower.* The next chapter will show how states in the world's centre defend peace against external enemies through warfare in the world's periphery. Building on that, the essay will exemplify how global governance has taken over the state's role in defending peace against an increasingly global enemy.

## 2 "Ignorance is Strength" - the violence of peace

According to the former UN general secretary Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 Agenda for Peace, "the concept of peace is easy to grasp".[2] Surprisingly many peace and conflict scholars seem to agree with his opinion and commonly define peace simply as the opposite of violence. Consequently, the meaning of peace would derive from the degree of definitional broadness of violence. According to the negative peace concept, peace is achieved when direct violence is absent. Yet, many Western states never ceased to engage in direct violence by fighting limited wars in the world's periphery. The state of peace that is commonly assumed to prevail in the West, is, thus, only explicable by the gradual disconnection between the professional armies and their societies.

Positive peace relies on a much broader concept of violence. For Johan Galtung structural violence is "present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential."[3] Positive peace, thus, regards power relations as entrenching violence into society's structure. This structural violence is then articulated in economic exploitation or political repression and can ultimately lead to direct violence as well. In a medical analogy Galtung suggests that violence is a disease that has to be cured. On this assumption he prescribes a comprehensive treatment by changing political, economic, military power relations, which include the democratization of the United Nations and increased South-South cooperation among others. In his opinion, such measures can

lead to positive peace that also prevents direct violence.[4] Proponents of his approach, however, fail to grasp power relations that are not tangible as they commonly understand power as mere authority and ability to control.

Spinoza defined this kind of power as *potestas* and contrasted it with another, primordial form of power to which he referred to as *potentia*, which means power as authorisation rather than mere authority. *Potentia* reflects the notion that in the natural state "the right to do" derives only from one's extent of power. With this understanding in mind, peace becomes ultimately a function of power that allocates rights and privileges in every society at the time it is constituted. Hence, peace is attached to violence at a primary level and inevitably produces forms of structural violence.[5] Foucault's reflections on the genesis of the modern nation state in the sixteenth century are influenced by Spinoza's understanding of power. This led him to inverse Clausewitz's famous statement about war as the continuation of politics by other means into politics as the continuation of war by other means.[6] War is, thus, the primordial technique of domination. Its power relations become institutionalized in a peace settlement and can only be reversed by another outbreak of massive political violence.

Peace, hence, becomes a regime based on a social order whose rules are set by the ruling elite that prevailed in the former war. Therefore, war is a violent power struggle, whereas peace is primarily concerned with its own stability by entrenching its constitutive power relations and perpetuating social hierarchies, hence, structural violence. Peace is, thus, the violent maintaining of power relations. This understanding of peace dovetails with St Augustine's definition of peace as "the tranquillity of order".[7] Rousseau's assessment that a "tranquil life is also had in dungeons"[8] reveals that peace is, therefore, not the opposite of either narrow or broad definitions of violence, but rather an inherently violent regime itself.

## 3 "Freedom is Slavery" - maintaining peace with *biopower*

The primacy of peace to maintain its order demands that states defend their peace regime against real or alleged enemies. The emergence of the modern nation state exemplifies how the means to defend against internal enemies gradually became more sophisticated and developed into today's *biopolitical* population control techniques.

Thomas Hobbes points out that an almighty Leviathan - unaccountable to his subjects but nevertheless holding the monopoly on violence - is still more desirable than the constant insecurity of the English Civil War.[9] The changing nature of warfare in the 16th century brought about this possibility to monopolize violence. Ever growing armies of foot soldiers took over the battlefields from the mounted mans-at-arms and guns gradually made the siege of renegade warlord's castles and, thus, the efficient control of larger territories feasible. Due to the rising costs of warfare the need to tax the population grew at the same time and in turn led to the expansion of bureaucratic administration.[10] After a millennium of instability and civil war in central Europe, war gave birth to the modern state apparatus and peace as order came finally within reach after the Peace of Westphalia had institutionalized the state as the uncontested provider of domestic order and conductor of external war.[11] This is what Charles Tilly described in his famous statement: "War made the state, and the state made war."[12]

Although eternal war obviously came to its end, as Hobbes' wolfs pride was tamed by the state's monopoly on violence, the new order still resembled the medieval one. On the one hand, it was based on the rulers' need to fight external and internal threats to justify the unjust social order that allegedly needed to be defended in the name of peace. On the other hand, it rested on the cleric's divine authorisation of the secular elite and their enforcement of this order, as the suffering in this world was to be compensated by just peace after death.[13]

The constant need to defend society and its order from internal enemies was articulated, for instance, in the wide spread witch-hunts when humans resorted to "magical thinking" to explain their torment without scientific explanations.[14] Although witchcraft declined as a universal reasoning, the psychological phenomenon of bridging the gap between the problem and its solution has persisted. Hannah Arendt, for instance, explains the appeal of Fascism to the masses in Nazi-Germany on account of its clear identification of the Jews as the internal enemy. In a time in which modernization created economic and social distress whose real causes were not easily tangible, rallying around the fascist flag and fighting the alleged origin of one's own suffering had a comforting effect.[15] The witch-hunt logic still exists in modern liberal democracies. Although less violent, it is still a common governmental technique to maintain and justify the established social order of peace regimes. The fear of being portrayed as the public enemy disallows for questioning the social order as well as the witch-hunt itself, and can be found in the US McCarthy era but also more recently in conservative reactions to critiques of the US Patriot Act[16].

With increasing bureaucratic sophistication the modern state, however, did not rely merely on warfare and witch-hunts to purge alleged internal enemies and maintain its peace regime. It rather developed a wide range of rationalized policies that are concerned with securing life, such as public health policies or environmental protection to govern its population directly.[17] Nevertheless, these practices that Foucault calls *biopolitics* or *biopower* bear a crucial similarity with warfare: the need to destroy the public enemies in order to survive. *Biopower* became the new means to defend society from its internal enemies such as criminals, diseases, social risks or sexual perversion. *Biopolitical* government techniques gradually substituted for the monarch's right to declare and execute the public enemy with policy decision about life that has to be weeded out in favour for life that is worth living.[18]

The War on Drugs exemplifies the logic of witch-hunt and the utility of rationalised *biopolitics* when fighting internal enemies in the modern state. Although it has obviously failed to achieve its suppositious goal of reducing drug usage, it has been unperturbedly continued by the US administration.[19] This is because it, in fact, serves a wide range of *biopolitical* functions that maintain the current peace regime, such as criminalizing drugs and the mostly marginalized drug addicts. It, thus, portrays them as the cause of social defaults instead of its outcome. This in turn deviates from real structural causes of wide spread drug consumption.[20] Besides filling prisons with black underclass drug offenders, the materialistic name of the anti-drug campaign, however, hints to its further instrumental role in maintaining peace in the world's centre: perpetual warfare in the world's periphery.

**4 "War is Peace" – maintaining peace with perpetual warfare**

Writing at the end of the Second World War Orwell's pessimistic predictions in *1984* do not merely point to the dangers of totalitarian regimes, but rather to the nature of the upcoming global order: the Cold War. The eternal global war in the novel *1984* is not fought within the territories of the three adversarial empires, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, but in the peripheries of the world, in Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. The war is not, however, meant to be won, because limited but perpetual global warfare serves all three super-states primarily as a tool to maintain internal order and to entrench domestic power relations. This chapter will show that Orwell was, indeed, correct and warfare has become an instrumental technique to stabilise their peace regimes in the world's centre.

Echoing *1984*'s political geography, Noam Chomsky observed that the confrontation between the West and the East in the latter stages of the Cold War was not about competing ideologies as well. According to him, the superpowers did not fight each other so much as they fought their own satellite states and non-complying regimes in the global south.[21] Increasing intercontinental nuclear missile capacities rendered traditional warfare in the world's centre obsolete and a bipolar stability based on nuclear deterrence led to a "Cold Peace". The concept of international peace, thus, again changed with the altering nature of war, as could be observed before, for instance in the peace of Westphalia or the conception of peace as a European power balance.[22] As war retreated from the world's centre, it shifted more and more to its peripheries, especially with the decolonisation process that led to continuous civil wars in the global south. These conflicts have often been misperceived as mere proxy wars between the Cold War superpowers. However, they were first of all a process of internal reordering after the imperial order had waned. Although East and West welcomed this opportunity to spread their own systems, they most often ended up supporting authoritarian regimes that had little in common with the liberal or communist ideologies.[23]

The endurance of the Cold War order can be explained by the functional utility of the constant limited warfare in the world's periphery and the permanent threat scenario to the elites on both sides.[24] On the one hand, the threat of external enemies led to a permanent state of exception, which was instrumental to purge domestic dissent, as was most obvious under Stalin in the USSR as well as during the era of McCarthyism in the US. On the other hand, the constant threat scenario led to an intensifying arms race that entrenched the war economies in the East and West. Whereas this eventually led to the collapse of Soviet communism, it consolidated growth in Western capitalist societies. The very military-industrial complex US President Eisenhower had warned of in his farewell address in 1961 has not just hijacked democratic decision making processes but fundamentally structured the US economic model by subsidising high-tech industries through military developments financed by the government.[25] In combination with security related economic Cold War policies, such as the Marshall Plan, this mode of growth did not only create jobs by opening up foreign markets but also laid the foundation of modern transnational corporations.[26] The alleged defence from external enemies with perpetual limited warfare in the world's periphery has, thus, not only lubricated the repressive peace order in the former Soviet Union but has also proven conducive to maintain the economic and political foundations of the peace regime in the West as it served to reproduce its social hierarchies and patterns of structural violence. War is, hence, not

only feeding itself as the Latin saying "bellum se ipsum alet" from the Thirty Years' War is suggesting, but limited warfare also seems to feed peace.

It is, therefore, not surprising that with the end of the Cold War elites in the US as well as elsewhere needed to find new threats from which they could defend their societies. Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace, indeed, identified manifold threats that emerged after the end of bi-polarity, primarily from within the global south.[27] Unsurprisingly, the US-led War on Drugs escalated in Latin America, so-called failed states in Africa started to threaten global peace and stability, the Arabic world came into the crosshairs of the War on Terror, and environmental degradation, poverty, diseases, migration and a myriad of other non-traditional security threats have occupied the West since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In light of this ever-growing threat-scenario, it seems the common- sense perception of peace in the West seems peculiar. Most Western states have never stopped waging limited warfare in the world's periphery. What changed is that Western societies are increasingly unaware of their own wars. This is because of the gradual disconnection to their professional armies whose soldiers are mostly drawn from their lowest strata. With the end of conscription in most Western countries death has been eradicated from the social contract. The ongoing privatization of warfare – which has taken-off since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 - does not make the West's violent conduct more accountable to its constituency either. Following the Kantian democratic peace logic, the outsourcing of perpetual war to the world's periphery as a technique to maintain peace in the world's centre is, hence, not going to cease any time soon.[28]

## 5 Global enemies of peace – maintaining peace with global governance

The need to preserve global social order and its hierarchies made the distinction between internal and external enemies increasingly obsolete. Globalisation created a global society that requires being defended globally as well.[29] This is reflected by new security concepts, such as human security, that shift the security referent from the state to the individual and localizes an incoherent laundry list of non-military security threats in the world's periphery.[30] This led to the *securitisation* of poverty, migration, public health, and the environment. The fight against these increasingly complex and concatenated global enemies led to the merging of warfare techniques and de-territorialised *biopolitics* in order to preserve the new global peace regime. This is best evidenced in the evolving security-development nexus, the increasing militarization of humanitarian aid.[31]

As world history has shown, even imperialism needs some basic legitimacy. European colonial empires normally gained this by incorporating local elites and most importantly by maintaining political and economic stability and, consequently, a regime of peace.[32] This pattern could also be observed in the Cold War when the superpowers supported authoritarian regimes. Yet, it is still at work today. Post-1990 Western interventions in the Global South reflect this tradition. Their focus increasingly rests on creating technical state institutions rather than supporting accountable governments.[33] While only paying lip service to liberal norms and values,

the partnering with local political elites and the integration into global governance as well as international markets preserves international stability and, hence, first and foremost peace in the world's centre.[34] At the same time it perpetuates the international order and subjects the population in states of the global south directly to the de-territorialised biopower of global governance institutions.

Yet, the hollowing out of state sovereignty as well as liberal norms has also gradually taken place in the world's centre itself. As Giorgio Agamben observed, the need to defend peace from ever increasing global threats gave rise to a permanent state of exception as the new paradigm of government. Policy makers all over the world are waging a permanent global civil war against drugs, terrorists, fiscal instability and all other kinds of internal and external threats to deliberately extent their power beyond curtailing liberal norms of governance such as democracy and rule of law.[35] Crisis decision making as the rule and not the exception, thus, leads to the institutionalisation of arrangements outside the normal juridical order that legally reduces citizens to their bare life that is subjected to ultimate management by technocratic global governance regimes.[36]

This development is evidenced, for instance, by the continued circumvention of electoral legitimacy in the European Union. The financial crisis has stripped European governments of their democratic facade, a development that has already disempowered sovereign governments and their electorates in developing countries decades ago.[37] German Chancellor Merkel's expression for the need for more "market-conform democracies" that leave "no alternatives" to austerity enforcing institutions, such as the "troika" in Greece, show how far-reaching the measures to preserve the social order have become.[38] Whereas the medieval order was based on a symbiosis between warrior elites that waged war to preserve social stability and the church that legitimised this unjust order, in the age of neoliberal globalization a similar unholy alliance has evolved. While technocrats are maintaining the peace regime by defending against global enemies with a combination of *biopolitics* and warfare, rating agencies, economists and other "scientific priests" legitimise the social order by depoliticising its entrenched power relations that perpetuate structural violence. The increasing fear and indifferent condemnation of the intensifying political violence in Greece that threatens the country's and the European peace regime show how well the perpetuation of unjust social hierarchies in the name of peace is still working in the new age of global governance.[39]

In 2014, the dramatic upheaval created by the IS group in Iraq and Syria have threatened to sweep away the established states system in The Middle East together with its borders and plunge the World further into insecurity. This seems to have shaken the docility with which Western societies have come to view global peace and conflict since the end of the Cold War. With Europeans killing Europeans in Syria and Iraq, we are well aware of this transnational threat, fearing about violent attacks on our own soil. Yet, we have not yet apprehended the underlying relations of power that binds our peace at home together with conflict elsewhere in what appears to be a well-lubricated mutual enterprise.

## 6 Conclusion

The common-sense perception that at least our Western societies are peaceful now than ever seems like an exercise in, what Orwell calls, *doublethink:* the simultaneous acceptance of two contradictory beliefs. In the same way in which the members of the novel's totalitarian party believe that "democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy",[40] we tend to believe that we live in peace but the battle stations of peace have to be constantly manned in our perpetual war against the looming nuclear, environmental, jihadist or financial Armageddon. In the dystopia 1984 *doublethink* is the central discursive control technique that serves to retain the society's underlying power structures through reconciling the contradictions of rhetoric and practice.

Bearing this in mind, this essay demonstrated that the concept of peace which informs most policy and scholarly debates on peace is a regime that maintains the social order it is built upon. Although the concept of positive peace defines peace as the absence of structural violence, it fails to address primordial power relations that constitute any social order and, thus, the peace regime that is maintaining it in the first place. In Foucault's words, power is a "sort of generalized war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the state" and, hence, "peace would be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it".[41] Yet peace is distinct from war. Whereas war is the violent reordering, or at least attempted reordering, of power relations, peace is the violent maintenance of power relations. For the purpose of preserving the existing social order, peace entrenches structural violence by its constant struggle against suspected internal and external enemies. With globalization the boundary between internal and external enemies has become increasingly blurry and global governance is gradually replacing the state in maintaining the new global peace regime and its social order through a combination of warfare techniques and de-territorialised *biopolitics*. Thus, our current state of peace is not the absence of neither direct nor structural violence but an inherently violent project itself.

**David Brenner** is a PhD Candidate in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He specialises in Peace and Conflict Studies and works on traditional and non-traditional security and development issues in East and Southeast Asia. He currently researches the politics of insurgency and transition in Myanmar (Burma). His work can be followed on twitter: @DavBrenner.

## 1 *Endnotes*

Orwell, G. (1950). 1984. New York: Signet Classic, p.199.

2 Boutros-Ghali, B. (1992). An Agenda for Peace. Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping. United Nations report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992. Retrieved November 22, 2014, from http://www.un.org/docs/SG/agpeace.html.

3 Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. In: Journal of peace research, 6 (3), 167–191, p.168.

4 Galtung, J. (1996). Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization. London: Sage Publications Ltd, pp.1-3.

5 Polat, N. (2010). Peace as War. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 35 (4), 317–345, pp.312-323.

6 Foucault, M. (1979). Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison. London: Penguin, p.168.

7 St Augustine (2009). The city of God: London: Random House, chapter 13.

8 Rousseau, J.J. (1987). The Basic Political Writings. Cress and Gay (ed. and trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, p.144.

9 Zagorin, P. (2009). Hobbes and the law of nature. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.68.

10 Howard, M. (2000). The invention of peace. Reflections on war and international order. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.13.

11 Ibid., p.16.

12 Tilly, C. (1975). "Reflections on the history of European state-making." In: The formation of national states in Western Europe. Tilly and Ardant (eds.). Princeton: Princeton University Press. p42.

13 Howard, M. (2000). The invention of peace, p.8.

14 Keen, D. (2006). Endless War? Hidden functions of the 'War on Terror'. London: Pluto Press, p.96.

15 Keen, D. (2008). Complex emergencies. Cambridge: Polity Press, p.88.

16 Keen, D. (2006). Endless War?, pp.180-183.

17 Foucault, M. (1998). The history of sexuality. London: Penguin, p.140.

18 Foucault, M. (2004). Society must be defended. In: Bertani, Fontana, and Ewald, (eds.), *Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1975-76. London: Penguin, p..240-241.

19 Global Commission on Drug Policy (2011). War on Drugs. Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy. Retrieved November 22, 2014, from http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/Report, p.4.

20 Johns, C.J. (1992). Power, ideology, and the war on drugs. Nothing succeeds like failure. New York: Praeger.

21 Chomsky, N. (1991). Deterring democracy. London: Verso.

22 Howard, M. (2000). The invention of peace, p.78.

23 Ibid., 87.

24 Chomsky, N. (1991). Deterring democracy.

25 Adams, W. (1968). The military-industrial complex and the new industrial state. *The American Economic Review*, 58 (2), 652–665.

26 Chomsky, N. (2003). The umbrella of US power. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the contradictions of US policy. New York: Seven Stories Press, p.9.

27 Boutros-Ghali, B. (1992). An Agenda for Peace.

28 Kant, I. (2004). Zum ewigen Frieden. Milano: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.

29 Medovoi, L. (2007). Global Society Must Be Defended. *Social text*, 25 (2 91), 53–79.

30 Chandler, D. (2008). Human security: The dog that didn't bark. *Security Dialogue*, 39 (4), 427–438.

31 Duffield, M. (2006). 'Human security: linking development and security in an age of terror'. In: Klingebiel (ed), *New Interfaces between Security and Development*, pp.11-38. Retrieved November 22, 2014, from http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=95955.

32 Howard, M. (2000). The invention of peace, p.4.

33 Chandler, D. (2010). The uncritical critique of 'liberal peace'. *Review of International Studies*, 1 (1), 1–19.

34 Howard, M. (2000). The invention of peace, pp.96-97.

35 Agamben, G. (2005). State of exception. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.2.

36 Agamben, G. (1998). Homo Sacer: Sovereignty and bare life. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, p.176.

37 Ferguson, J. (1990). The anti-politics machine. "Development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

38 Lucke, A. von (2011). Souverän ohne Volk. Der Putsch der Märkte. *Blättter für deutsche und internationale Politik,* 12, 5–8.

39 Vassalos, Y. (2012). Breaking with fear in Greece. Transnational Institute. Retrieved November 22, 2014, from http://www.tni.org/article/breaking-fear-greece.

40 Orwell, G. (1950). 1984, p.35.

41 Foucault, M. (2000). Power. New York: New Press, p.124.