

Promoting peace - not war

June 2024, input at a peace conference

There is significant uncertainty as to whether the instruments of civil conflict management, diplomacy and negotiations are still effective. We are confronted with a crisis of the international order. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in violation of international law, we are experiencing a rapid political paradigm shift, driven by leading politicians and reinforced by the media, which describes a peace policy based on reconciliation and negotiation as naive or often polemically devalues it. In just two years, the coordinates of peace and security policy have shifted massively. It seems as if we have returned to Cold War thinking, its logic of deterrence and its dichotomous images of the enemy.

On the other hand, a great deal of skepticism among the population to follow a purely war-logical way of thinking can be observed, as can be seen in the surveys on arms deliveries and negotiation options to end the war between Russia and Ukraine. Heribert Prantl, columnist for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, calls in his new book "Den Frieden gewinnen - Die Gewalt verlernen" (Winning peace - unlearning violence) for people to become "capable of peace" rather than "capable of war".

How can we become "capable of living in peace"?

Peace and conflict researcher Hanne-Margret Birckenbach has worked intensively on the question of how sustainable peace can be established. To this end, she has analyzed peace processes with regard to the question which steps increase or decrease the probability of peaceful understanding and confidence-building, e.g. in the Northern Ireland conflict. The impetus for the conceptualization came in the early 2010s from the Platform for Peaceful Conflict Transformation, the German nationwide civil society network for overcoming violence.

Hanne - Margret Birckenbach published her findings in the book "Friedenslogik verstehen" (Understanding the logic of peace). In the subtitle „Peace is not something you have. Peace must be made“, she emphasizes the processual nature of action and the task of constantly striving to create conditions for peace and taking the appropriate steps. She states that "peace does not happen somehow and at some point; in a globally connected world full of interdependencies, peace must be understood and organized as an unconditional, political and intergenerational task for the present" (cf. Birckenbach, 2023,16).

But what kind of peace do we mean when we talk about peace?

The best-known definition of peace is that of Johann Galtung, a Norwegian peace and conflict researcher, who distinguishes between negative and positive peace:

Negative peace is defined as the absence of direct personal violence, in particular the absence of organized military use of force. Positive peace means peace that consists not only in the absence of direct violence, but also in the absence of structural and cultural violence in all areas of society. This includes the fulfillment of basic needs: Survival, well-being, identity, freedom and nature.

Galtung's understanding of positive peace has been taken up and further developed in many different contexts.

The German Peace Education Network states “Peace is understood as a goal-oriented, dynamic process of continuous conflict resolution using non-violent means to establish justice and overcome violence and lack of freedom. In this understanding, peace is more than the absence of war and cannot be achieved by military means.”

Church papers and statements also link peace and justice and speak of “just peace”.

The UN has included peace as one of the goals of the 2030 Agenda “We are determined to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies, free from fear and violence. Without peace there can be no sustainable development and without sustainable development there can be no peace” (Preamble Transforming our world).

The logic of peace is based on these broad concepts of peace and complements them:

1. peace can arise in social relationships, in the willingness to cooperate to solve problems and to recognize each other's interests and needs
2. peace can arise in the way in which conflicts are resolved. This is about the willingness to learn, expand and use forms and skills to manage conflicts in a non-harmful way.
3. peace is promoted by socio-political structures that are democratically constituted and characterized by the rule of law and the separation of powers (cf. Birckenbach, 2023, 30 ff.).

The concept is based on the assumption that peace follows its own inherent logic, which manifests itself in five peace-logical principles of action. These principles provide a guideline for peace policy action. It is a sequence of steps and conditions that are coordinated with one another. Individual principles are spelled out in a variety of measures, activities and methods from the fields of civil conflict transformation and diplomacy, while others are used for normative orientation and the evaluation of actions.

(1.) The principle of violence prevention:

That is, the goal of reducing violence in relationships between individuals, groups and states (cf. Birckenbach, 2023, 41).

Peace-logical thinking and action starts where violence is impending, takes place or has taken place - regardless of the level. This applies to all forms of violence: direct, personal and visible violence; as well as structural violence (impairment of life chances, e.g. through climate change, discrimination, unjust trade relations) and cultural violence (e.g. the justification of direct or structural violence, such as the prohibition of an indigenous language or racist justifications for oppression). The logic of peace adopts a victim perspective.

The first task is to avert imminent violence and contain acute violence. This should be followed by opening up scope for improving living conditions, which will help to contain violence in the medium and long term.

Many instruments for preventing violence have been developed both at a political level and in the context of civil society. The United Nations play a special role. The UN has developed detailed procedures for the prevention of violence and non-military conflict management. (Little known to the public is the important mediating role played by the then UN Secretary-General during the Cuban

Missile Crisis). After the end of the Cold War, the “Agenda for Peace - Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping” was developed, followed by further differentiations and additions. International and domestic prevention of violence is now firmly anchored in many UN institutions. A process is currently underway to further develop the “Agenda for Peace”, where UN Secretary-General António Guterres is calling for stronger multilateral cooperation for peace and security.

Note: The reality, however, is that the UN is massively weakened as an actor and is being marginalized.

Violence prevention also plays an important role at civil society level. At the beginning of the 1990s, a broad debate took place in peace organizations on how violence prevention methods could be taken up, differentiated and anchored - also against the background of the Bosnian war. Here, the Civil Peace Service can be mentioned, which ultimately received political support. Since then, peace organizations from different milieus and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have been actively involved in the Civil Peace Service and send peace experts internationally. Furthermore, programs for violence prevention and peace education have been set up in schools and in community conflict management (dispute resolution programs, neighborhood mediation, round tables, dialogue initiatives).

(2.) The second principle relates to conflict transformation,

i.e. the way to deal with the background to violence in a solution-oriented and cooperative manner (cf. Birckenbach, 2023, 41).

Conflicts will always exist at all levels of human coexistence; the second principle focuses on understanding how violence escalated and what approaches are available to change this.

The logic of peace is about transformation, not just containment or management. Conflict transformation goes further and aims not only to deal with a conflict at certain points, but also to initiate deeper changes and look at possible structural and cultural causes. This requires a comprehensive conflict analysis: who are the actors, what are the causes of the conflict and the interests involved? What structural or cultural factors are involved? What is the level of escalation? Here, among others, the conflict escalation model to analyze the intensity of the conflict, developed by peace researcher Friedrich Glasl can be applied. He has identified nine downward stages of escalation. Concrete planning of a peace process and corresponding activities follow on from the conflict analysis.

In terms of the logic of peace, a central aspect of the analysis is the identification of one's own role in the conflict and the reflection of the willingness to change one's own actions. Recognizing one's own responsibility for the escalation has an enormous potential to get things moving, this is an experience that applies both in the interpersonal and the political sphere. Especially in highly escalated conflicts, a unilateral change can be a step towards de-escalation. A famous example of this is Mikhail Gorbachev, who announced unilateral disarmament steps by the USSR in the second half of the 1980s in order to break the spiral of nuclear deterrence and persuade the USA to enter into disarmament negotiations.

In principle, peace action can take place at all levels of society, and it is often the case that grassroots groups lead the way or prepare the ground which was the case in the Northern Ireland conflict. Ideally, all levels of society should be involved in sustainable peacebuilding.

Example at grassroots level: “Youth initiative for human rights” in the Western Balkans, which organizes exchange programmes for young people in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Example for the state level: the peace process in Colombia, where the government has conducted negotiations with the guerrillas after more than 60 years of civil war and continues to do so.

(3) Third principle: Dialogue compatibility:

This principle reflects the means and measures used. Are these suitable for promoting dialogue between opposing parties? Peace must be achieved by peaceful means.

What sounds like a banality is central. The means used to contain violence and create a more peaceful situation must themselves be non-violent in order to avoid triggering negative effects or even a shift in violence. It is about de-escalating, confidence-building, cooperative means, consequently means that are conducive to dialogue - and about opening up spaces for thinking and cooperation. Examples include: conflict-sensitive communication, moderation, negotiation, mediation, victim-offender mediation, truth and reconciliation commissions and national dialogues. In many of these processes, it is important to be aware of the other side's suffering as well as your own. It is about listening to each other. Dialogue is more than just talking to each other, it is also different from a debate in which attempts are made to convince the other party. In a dialogue, it is accepted that there can be different perspectives.

It is conducive to de-escalation to keep channels of communication open even in highly escalated conflicts. Ideally, the communication style should be adapted, i.e. no threats, humiliation, stereotypes or fait accompli. It is helpful to identify topics where cooperative action can begin.

Examples of a dialogue project:

Project: Speakup: Israel. - Palest. Dialogue seminars at a youth academy near Cologne

Dialogue project by Shai Hoffmann, who has Jewish roots, and Jouanna Hassoun, who comes from a Palestinian family

(4.) Fourth principle: norm-oriented development of interests:

What principles guide our actions and how do we justify them? This is about ethical guidelines for action and their implementation. It should be noted that Germany is normatively bound to respect human rights by articles of the Basic Law, international agreements and UN conventions, as well as international law.

In reality, however, there are permanent gaps between ethics and behavior - in many areas of life. Behavior is often oriented towards one's own interests. Examples include economic interests, such as the preservation of sales markets (in China), cheap production (in Bangladesh), practices that are hazardous to health, e.g. the mining of rare earths such as cobalt in the DR Congo using child labor.

The logic of peace approach identifies these contradictions, but does not rely on confrontation; instead, it seeks to mediate in this field of tension through a discursive approach and the participation of as many social groups as possible. It is not about accusation, but about the question of alternatives, e.g. in textile production.

However, it should be noted that the principle of norm-oriented development of interests is a principle with enormous potential for conflict, as it can lead to the abandonment of privileges or financial losses.

(5.) Fifth principle: Error friendliness:

The willingness to engage in critical self-reflection in the face of failure, to admit mistakes and to learn from them.

Even when working for peace with the best of intentions, mistakes can occur in analysis, in the choice of means, in concrete action, in the participation or exclusion of certain actors. The UN and international institutions have developed differentiated concepts for evaluation. Non-governmental organizations involved in peace work apply among others the “Do no harm” principle and the “Reflecting on Peace Practice” method, as an analysis and evaluation tool for critically preparing and evaluating one's own peace work.

Process-accompanying reviews of effects, also through independent evaluations, make sense. Error-friendliness additionally means creating an atmosphere that does not sanction the admission of mistakes.

In summary, it can be said that the concept of the logic of peace describes both a method of thinking and a political program or political action derived from it.

Can this concept still provide orientation or impetus in today's times of highly escalated conflicts and wars?

It should be noted: “From a peace-logic perspective, in view of functioning early warnings, every war today ... is also the result of missed opportunities for violence prevention and conflict transformation, the choice of the wrong or inadequate means of dealing with problems ... and a lack of willingness to think about undesirable developments in good time” (cf. Birckenbach, 2023, 9).

This statement is true for both major conflicts reflected here, for the war between Russia and Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas. To name just one example: the Israeli writer David Grossman made an appeal at the 2017 Munich Security Conference:

“We need your help. We, the Israelis and the Palestinians, who want to live in peace, who are against occupation and terror. Who abhor violence of any kind...we appeal to all rational forces willing to engage in dialog...if peace and security are important to you, then do something to save Israel and the Palestinians from the cycle of self-destruction” (cf. Grossman, 8).

In other words, we are talking about many missed opportunities to avert the threat of escalation between Israelis and Palestinians, for example. In view of the history of the war between Russia and Ukraine, it is also important to analyze which opportunities for pacification were missed.

What needs to be done? What peace-logical impulses can be provided by civil society groups and by church and other institutions? These groups and institutions are not involved in government action, but can contribute to driving forward discussions and preparing the ground for peace through lobbying and their own peace action, even in acute war situations. The German society is intertwined

and affected by both wars, with population groups with family in one of the wars; there are strong polarizations along the lines of conflict and affiliations, leading to fault lines within society.

1st impulse: Keeping the peace policy discourse going

We are experiencing a very polarized, sometimes poisoned debate about the possibility of opening negotiations in the Ukraine/Russia war. From the perspective of the logic of peace, it is about advocating the exploration of all options to end the violence and then entering into what will certainly be a very complicated negotiation process. Since the beginning of the war, there have been attempts and concepts to start negotiations. Debates on this must be possible without belittling the opposing position.

Furthermore, we should warn against falling back into Cold War thinking with the familiar binary patterns and a reduction of the concept of security to purely military security as the sole response to the Russian invasion.

Many peace groups are active in this sense, writing appeals, holding vigils and demonstrations and inviting people to discussions.

In Israel's war against Hamas, the impulse for peace is to put an immediate end to the war and to push for negotiations that focus on the security of both Israel and the Palestinians, including the situation in the West Bank. It is widely agreed on that Israel can only live in security if the Palestinians can also live in security, this was underlined recently by Shira Efron, an Israeli political scientist. Suffering and trauma must be recognized and mourned on both sides. Likewise, the violation of human rights and international law both by Hamas and by Israel must be named, condemned and prosecuted. The German government has remained silent for far too long on violations of human rights and international law by the Israeli army and on blockades of aid deliveries to Gaza. As a result, there are now accusations of double standards and the German government has suffered a massive loss of reputation in the Arab world.

Early on, directly after the Hamas attack, the Israeli historian Moshe Zimmermann claimed that German *raison d'état* should primarily mean working for a just peace, including the abolition of a two-tier justice system in the Westbank.

Keeping the peace policy discourse going also means organizing talks, meetings, sometimes joint prayers with people of Jewish and Palestinian, Ukrainian and Russian origin living here.

2nd impulse: Strengthening voices for peace

In times of polarized debates, it is particularly important to strengthen voices for peace from all sides that continue to be active despite the war and speak out in favour of a peaceful solution, often in the face of hostility from their own community. These voices exist in Israel and Palestine and it is paramount to offer them a forum and make them known; they are doing an incredible job at this time. Why do we hear so little about them in our media? In terms of the logic of peace, it helps to work with what unites and not to reinforce what divides, as can often be seen in talk shows and articles. As an alternative, experts are calling for "peace journalism" that focuses on solutions and initiatives which are building bridges instead of deepening tensions (Deutschlandfunk, 17.05.2024).

Here a few examples: two representatives of the Israeli - Palestinian peace organization "Combatants for Peace" on a lecture tour through Germany supported by peace initiatives, other peace groups in Israel and Palestine such as the "Rabbis for Human Rights", the "Tents of Nations" or „Women wage

Peace“, „Breaking the silence“ can be invited virtually. Israeli - Palestinian initiatives in Germany offer workshops in schools. Ironically, the „Combatants for Peace“ were not allowed access to public spaces everywhere, so they had to move to expensive private rooms; once their event video was removed from the internet.

Other voices of peace: There are Russian conscientious objectors and other activists from Russia who reject Putin's war. They are supported by the German non-governmental organization Connection e.V.

These voices of peace receive far too little public and media attention, what can be done to strengthen them?

3rd impulse: Continue international networking and support

This relates to two aspects: on the one hand, maintaining contacts in order to keep channels of communication, and on the other hand, supporting international cooperation partners.

From a logic of peace perspective, it is counterproductive to break off contacts at civil society or institutional level, as happened in many cases after Russia's attack on Ukraine. Examples include the termination of scientific cooperation between universities, the termination of city partnerships and the end of cooperation in the arts and culture. It was wrong to exclude Russian artists per se and thus deepen the rift between these institutions. The point is to keep channels of conversation open even in times of war in order to explore shades of gray.

Examples: a Protestant peace group from Bonn regularly organizes virtual meetings with Russian scientists to maintain contact. Another example is the opportunity to take part in international virtual events to show solidarity and support. In May, the above-mentioned Combatants for Peace internationally issued a virtual invitation to participate in a joint Israeli-Palestinian memorial service, at which relatives of victims on both sides spoke, including the son of murdered Israeli peace activist Vivian Silver as well as Palestinians, some of whom have lost entire groups of family members.

City partnerships also play a role: the city of Neuwied, for example, maintains a partnership with an Israeli and a Palestinian municipality at the same time and actively continues these partnerships in times of war.

4th impulse: Opening up (discussion) spaces:

Both wars, the war between Israel and Hamas as well as the Ukrainian-Russian war, have a strong impact on the members of the affected groups and religions living in Germany. Some previous contacts are broken off, some people fall silent, a lot are angry. We are experiencing debates that are completely at odds with each other, in case of the war in Gaza combined with accusations of anti-Semitism or accusations of not being heard or canceled on the side of Palestinian protest against the war. The often restrictive policy of German authorities especially at the beginning of the war concerning Palestinian protest led to the impression that Palestinian lives matter less. This deepens rifts.

A deciding step is the acknowledgement of humanity on both sides as well as the acknowledgement of traumatization of both groups. We need to open up spaces for exchange where members of the opposing parties can express their dismay and their grief, their protest and where there is room to name and mourn the victims of both sides.

Opening up spaces for discussion can initially also mean creating a protected setting in which questions can be asked, reproaches and a lack of understanding can be expressed.

How can peace be established in highly escalated conflicts? The five principles of the logic of peace offer guidance on which steps are useful for maintaining or restoring peace. The text provided impulses for the engagement of civil society groups and institutions to prepare peace and corresponding examples of peace action.

We face the risk of massive escalation of violence in the Middle East on the Lebanese-Israeli border on top of the ongoing war in Gaza. The war between the Ukraine and Russia has become a trench warfare. Peace groups and institutions, including the churches, which have an implicit peace mission, must not be silent or resign themselves now. They can become active in peacemaking and bridge-building in order to promote peace.

Peace is not something you have. Peace must be made.

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