



CHAPTER 3

**STALEMATED PEACEMAKING IN
THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND
THE PROBLEM OF PEACEMAKING
UNDER MULTIPOLARITY**

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Abstract

The dominant research methodologies, conceptual, and practical doctrines of the post- Cold War order widely related to peacemaking indicated a convergence around limited goals for peacemaking, international mediation, and conflict resolution. These problem-solving approaches, which operated within the contradictory frameworks of the liberal international order, Realism, and geopolitical pragmatism, have led to possibly unintended consequences because of such parsimony. Unable to capitalise on momentum from critical scholarship drawing on work in conflict-affected societies for a positive, hybrid and locally legitimate peace, they have perhaps inadvertently given rise to a range of authoritarian, stalemated, and unimplemented outcomes. This paper examines these post-Cold War consequences of the dominant epistemological developments in peacemaking. In summary, conceptual though pragmatic formulations for peacemaking have led to stalemated peace processes and indicate that peacemaking in a multipolar order may be complex, crude, and unstable at best.

Keywords

Multipolar Order, Peacemaking, Authoritarian Outcomes, Liberal Peacebuilding, Hybrid Peace

Introduction

The dominant research methodologies, conceptual, and practical doctrines of the post-Cold War order related to peacemaking, such as ‘hurting stalemates’, ‘ripe moments’ (Zartman, 2001) and ‘backsliding’ (Wade, 1996) operate within a ‘liberal peacebuilding’ paradigm (Paris, 2010). From the perspective of critical international relations theory, as well as peace and conflict studies, they indicated a Northern/Western convergence around very limited goals for peacemaking, international mediation, and conflict resolution. This has led to a ‘stalemate model’ of peacemaking. A ‘conflict management’ ontology is rooted in a deeply pessimistic view of human nature, the concurrent behaviour of states, and the objectives and potential of peacemaking. For example, it has allowed scholars and analysts to see the “grand stalemate” of the Minsk agreements after 2015 as the ‘best outcome’ (Peters & Shapkina, 2019, p. 1), which might have achieved ‘stabilisation’. This sort of understanding of ‘negative peace’, ‘conflict management’ and pragmatic policy compromises ultimately led to war in 2022, rather than providing a basis for progress.

This paper briefly and critically examines the post-Cold War consequences of the dominant epistemological developments in peacemaking. It first argues that significant problems were covered over by the development of apparently pragmatic concepts such as ‘hurting stalemates’ and ‘spoilers’, which actually disguised ‘backsliding’ where UN peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and political missions could not bring about progress. This problem cannot be addressed without a conceptual shift from problem-solving (or ‘stabilisation’) to new, more emancipatory frameworks for peacemaking where political claims are addressed across the wide scope of peacemaking. These possibilities mainly exist in the scholarship, and amongst social movements, and have been translated into doctrine only in extremis and long overdue. Even so their insights have often remained unimplemented, underpinning stalemates rather than the redressal of political claims, meaning that peacemaking has become depoliticised from the perspective of civil society while preserving political power-structures with only minor checks. Related to only minor theoretical innovation, and the increasingly dysfunctionality of the state and international system, this means stalemate processes are often regarded as acceptable. Furthermore, the fear of a related loss of power under peacemaking has encouraged key actors in peace processes to escalate violence as an alternative as with Charles Taylor in Liberia (Waugh, 2011). Secondly, this paper also examines the proposition that short and long-standing stalemates may inculcate revisionist and revanchist sentiments, which also involve the revival of violence as a legitimate political tool.

To this end the paper outlines the conceptual though to pragmatic formulations for peacemaking that have led to such stalemated peace models, in examples such as the post-Dayton political reform process in the Bosnian context (described by Richard Holbrooke as a ‘stalemate machine’) (Chollet, 2006, p. 45) as well as UN mediation in the Cyprus context (long described as a ‘graveyard for diplomacy’) (Gruenbaum, 2017) going back to the 1960s at least (a term also used in the case of Myanmar and others) (Moe, 2007). It looks at the implications of this stalemate model more recently for peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding, the results which can be recently seen across central Africa with the resurgence of authoritarianism, in the Middle East since the failure of the Oslo process, Syria and the failure of UN mediation, and Ukraine where such broad-ranging failures set the scene for the later failure of the Minsk Agreements and the war that followed (Allan, 2020).

Finally, the paper concludes that stalemated peacemaking praxis may worsen under any emergent multipolar order, ultimately. Previous tools were designed for an aligned and converging order under hegemonic, western and American epistemologies of order and are now far too limited to deal with contemporary conflict in this new international political order, though they may continue to operate for legacy conflicts from the Cold War and early post-Cold War era.

A ‘Stalemate Machine’ and Related Conceptual Patterns for Peacemaking

Problem-solving approaches for peacemaking drew on and reproduced an epistemological framework that acted as a basis for thinking about conflict resolution, transformation, and peacebuilding. They were limited (or ‘lazy’) in the sense that they operated within the historical international system and its structures, attempting domestic or micro-political reform rather than structural change. Their goals have been too limited to accrue local legitimacy in conflict-affected societies and they may have counter-intuitively encouraged state and international actors to drag their feet.

These approaches also confirmed the states-system's architecture, highlighted the role of global capitalism, assumed individualist notions of rights, and have blocked expanded understandings of historical and distributive forms of justice in association with peace. They operated in the context of a hegemonic, northern-status quo, working to maintain it through conflict management type tools, which increasingly claimed to represent more than they actually achieved.

Increasingly, this framework can be argued, from a long-range and critical perspective, to be retrogressive in the context of scholarly and scientific findings on peace and peacemaking as well as the exigencies of the current 'polycrisis' (Tooze, 2022). Indeed, it has diluted the attractiveness of the framework of meaning necessary for agency in peacemaking, as well as the legitimacy of the overall international peace architecture. Its achievements have been limited in practice, as in Cyprus, Sri Lanka, and notably post-Oslo Accords in the Middle East (Economist, 2023).

The associated 'negative peace' or 'conflict management' rationality represents both the Eurocentric, scientific application of knowledge across a range of cases, the projection of American and Western power and knowledge hegemony, parsimony, and pragmatism (Ikenberry, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2019). Target and subject populations and elites were often willing to accept the apparent superiority of such frameworks in the hope of a peace dividend, human security, and integration into the western and global political economy and security communities. This grand bargain was struck time and time again after 1989, and yet failed to deliver much more than short to medium term stalemates and 'stabilisation' outcomes, or was reneged upon or blocked by local, elite, regional, and international actors (Jett, 2023). In the absence of potential convergence between disputants, local and international actors, guided by liberalism, stalemate was the most likely outcome as can be seen in practice. Thus, de facto, the stalemate model of peacemaking has emerged as an empirical consequence of such theoretical limitations. Beyond such practical and conceptual stalemates lie the risk of longer term ideological challenges to the LIO and a more general destabilisation of the international peace architecture.

The slow, refrigerated, frozen, and backsliding dynamics of peacemaking in conflict-affected societies (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021, pp. 1-4; Soares de Oliveira, 2011; Smetana & Ludvik, 2018) can be described as representing a convergence on a stalemate model of elite peacemaking. Holbrooke noted the 'gigantic stalemate machine' around the Dayton Peace accords for Bosnia-Herzegovina early on in the Post-Cold War era (Chollet, 2006, p. 45). Within this model, civil society is disempowered, elites are biding their time for geopolitical and other power-shifts, harbouring revisionist aims, and international actors assume a stalemated status quo would be grounds for improvement in the longer term but use this as a cover to gradually reduce their engagement, as has been the case in the Middle East after 1993-8, Ukraine after 2012, and more recently Cyprus where the UN Special Representative position fell into abeyance after failed peace talks in Crans Montana in 2017 (UN, 2018).

Overall, the pattern in peace processes across the local, state, and global scales of international relations can be summarised as represented by a weak and defunded civil society, a dominant state controlled by political elites, and a contested regional and international set of geopolitics in which donors, peacekeepers, and peacebuilders, withdraw, lose interest, or are unable to intervene (Pogodda et al., 2023). Such patterns are indirectly visible in the work of conflict management (and later conflict resolution) specialists (Zartman, 1985) where stalemates were seen not necessarily as a frozen situation that might collapse into war but as a platform for progress, as with the concept of the 'hurting stalemate' and the concurrent 'ripe moment' concept (meaning that disputants perceive that it is too painful to fight on, too painful to lose the conflict, and a peace process allows an escape route) (Zartman, 2001).

However, by removing the expectations of progress, the stalemate model of peacemaking effectively also requires minimal investment from all parties. This is unlike say in Northern Ireland, where enormous resources have been expended since the Good Friday Agreements in 1996 to make slow progress (which was in the end often down to back-channel processes) (O Dochartaigh, 2021). As in Bosnia, as well as in other conflict-affected cases like Cyprus (Belloni, 2019; KerLindsay, 2005), progress is infinitesimal, implementation is weak, and any revisions to the peace process risk unravelling it completely.

While pragmatic, however, this stalemate peacemaking framework also leaches legitimacy because it is slow in delivering a positive social contract or does not deliver at all from the perspective of conflict-affected communities. The latter now command or demand rights and are empowered to vote under a liberal settlement, as in Afghanistan before the US withdrawal in 2022 (Dodge, 2021) or continue to agitate for democracy where it is limited, as in Sri Lanka over the last two decades (Akebo & Bastian, 2021). While keeping elite power-sharers onside, it also allows elites to play a long game which preserves their dominance and the utility of violence as a political tool. They tend to respond by shifting towards authoritarian modes of governance, as in Cambodia (Fforde & Seidel, 2015, pp. 79–99), with the acquiescence of the UN and other donors who do not want to upset the status quo. Yet, this reduces the legitimacy of any peace process compared to liberal norms, critical scholarship, as well as for civil society, indicating the dominance of elites and the close relationship between policy tools and unscientific thinking inherent in illiberal and authoritarian practices. Politics has been given pre-eminence over law and socially-oriented conceptions of peace in this more populist-nationalist epoch, camouflaged by bureaucratic (and technocratic) praxis (MacGinty, 2012). Stalemated peace processes are thus unstable and deeply flawed ways to engage with peacemaking, which empower state elites, regional powers, and community populists over the norms and standards inherent in a peace process (for example, non-violence, rights, justice, cooperation, polylogue, and consensus).

Such complex dynamics can be characterised as having led to a long and slow escalation of global conflicts after the end of the Cold War, which now threatens the Liberal International Order (LIO) via illiberal and authoritarian outcomes as well as wider ideological challenges (Lewis, 2022). The latter also hinge upon the continuing salience of violence and war as a tool of contemporary, illiberal politics (de Oliveira, 2011; Paris, 2020), as opposed to rights, dialogue, democracy, constitution-making, law, cooperation, and institutionalisation. A pattern of weak civil societies, powerful elites and co-opted states, and withdrawn or distracted international actors unable to stand up for normative or legal standards has clearly emerged (Paris, 2020). These have stemmed from hegemonic convergence rather than consensus, Eurocentrism rather than justice, and a focus on data supposedly devoid of politics (Bigo et al., 2019).

Relatedly, the conceptual, epistemological, and methodological limitations widely used in policymaking and scholarship have had complex consequences: the resulting and widespread stalemate peace processes have become a platform for authoritarian regimes and illiberal political processes, particularly since the start of the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq. They led to stabilisation thinking which has undermined Western peace approaches to some degree, pointing in part at least to consequences such as the American failure and withdrawal from Afghanistan (Dodge, 2021). In practice, such conceptual limitations have undermined the political legitimacy of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, around the world and in turn reduced the salience and viability of liberal international order. 'Backsliding' dynamics (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021) also indicate a lack of international political will or consensus about the nature of peacemaking and resultant political order, in particular caused by often inadvertently pandering to political elites and failing to address the political goals of local populations and civil society. It represents, in addition, a theoretical position centred on Eurocentric notions of peace tempered by political realism. This has meant that liberal peacebuilding and mediated peace processes over the last thirty years have suffered both from limited political support and low levels of local legitimacy, being mainly focused on security, stabilisation, and counterinsurgency in order to defuse any potential escalatory dynamics. Convergence has paradoxically undermined legitimacy, escalated conflicts, and become a platform for geopolitical conflict, in other words (in contradiction to what some scholars assumed would be a more positive dynamic as far back as the 1970s) (Nelson, 1978). Geopolitics (just as with Kissinger's arguments) maintains its influence (Kissinger, 2015).

There was an alternative to this tendency for peace processes to fall into unimplemented and degraded stalemates or worse. The road not travelled included critical, feminist, and post-colonial work on local agency, hybridity, justice, sustainability, and a range of related interdisciplinary areas, which has long illustrated the limitations of liberal and realist (pragmatic) concepts, methods, and theories when it comes to the politics of peace (Richmond et al., 2016, pp. 1-17). It indicates that these problem-solving approaches (Pugh, 2004), which operated within the contradictory frameworks of the liberal international order, Realism, western hegemony, and geopolitical pragmatism, which

drove limited, problem-solving approaches to peacemaking have (perhaps inadvertently) given rise to a range of authoritarian, stalemated, and unimplemented outcomes (Lewis et al., 2018; Pogodda et al., 2022). Doyle, for example, (among others) sees a 'cold peace' in which global authoritarians and global capitalism squeeze out justice, rights, and representation, often using digital technologies (Doyle, 2023).

In addition, civil and local societies have come to be highly critical of the processes and outcomes of peacekeeping and peacebuilding even where they seem to have stabilised the situation (MacGinty, 2011; Autesserre, 2014; Adebajo, 2021). Liberal external actors have accepted a dilution of their proposed standards in the name of keeping at least a negative peace alive. Ideological challenges have been mounted against liberal formulations of peace, and local challenges have also been mounted against its cultural and historical lack of contextuality. These dynamics can be observed from Cambodia to the Balkans in the 1990s, Timor Leste, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in the 2000s, to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and perhaps Ukraine more recently. This lack of alignment in peace praxis also partly explains the weak and failed states across sub-Saharan Africa since the end of the Cold War, as well as perhaps why a peace process in the Middle East which once seemed promising has collapsed into several wars (including in Gaza in 2023) and has spent so long on life-support.

In what follows, I outline the various generations of the conceptual and theoretical debates and practices that have led to a convergence on a 'stalemate model' of peacemaking.

Historical Antecedents of Stalemated Peace Processes

Stage One: Diplomacy, Mediation, and International Order

Since the 19th Century, it has been common to focus on elite diplomacy, and the potential of high-level mediation, to respond to conflict at the systemic level (Kissinger, 1957). Earlier, civil wars tended to end in a victor's peace (Richmond, 2005), however, until the realisation they could escalate into regional conflicts that would require conference diplomacy and mediation (Kissinger, 1957). Underpinning the slow development of these peacemaking tools was the realisation of the systemic and industrialised risks of conflict escalation (realised with the outbreak of WW1), the development of the tools of diplomacy, especially conference diplomacy, and the need for treaty agreements to be signed by elite actors, such as with the Congress of Vienna in 1815 or the Paris Peace Treaty after WW1 (Kissinger, 1957; Bercovitch, 1999; Richmond, 2022). This evolution also set out some epistemic parameters for peacemaking henceforth: it remained in the domain of elites, and was focused on security interests and balances of power.

Conflict management theories, as they developed from the 1960s followed this track, also sparking some critical debates (Zartman, 1985). They incorporated elite conferences, high-status diplomacy and mediation, and legal treaties focused on territory, borders, and ownership (Kissinger, 1957; Bell, 2008). They tended to be unconcerned with drawing on local consent, politics, or marginalised political claims, and peace was not to be equated with justice, essentially, as the levers available were crude, conservative, and disinterested in moving beyond European state-craft and imperialism. Thus, early on peacemaking tools could be seen somewhat ambivalently as status quo oriented, maintaining systemic integrity against external and international challenges, and preserving hierarchies of power and interest in an established domestic order and global political economy. This first generation approach (Richmond, 2002) or conflict management (Crocker, 2011) was popular in Western European and American academic and policy circles. Key concepts emerged from this phase carried forward an inertia in terms of prioritising scholarly findings over political practices.

Stage Two: Peacekeeping and Mediation as Order Maintenance

This early stalemate dynamic was repeated in the next stage of development. Many of the conflicts addressed within this framework and during this era saw UN peacekeeping and UN mediation become locked into long-term engagements which saw little progress but some semblance of stability, the Cyprus conflict being emblematic. During the post-war and Cold War transition away from imperialism, a revised version of peacekeeping came to be associated in UN circles with conflict management after the Suez Crisis of 1956.

It was soon to be conceptually complemented with international mediation, notable in Cyprus and the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s, again within the limited parameters of conflict management and first generation approaches to peacemaking (James, 1969). It set the scene for the Oslo Accords, and others, in the 1990s. The addition of mediation to the conflict management framework was a response to the inability to move out of a cease-fire situation with peacekeeping, or limited diplomacy, as became clear in the Congo in the early 1960s, and the perceived need, especially in the UN and diplomatic circles, to be able to achieve more to prevent conflicts from escalating or the balance of power from being eroded (Bercovitch, 1999). The underlying normative intent of the UN Charter was a significant part of this pressure (which eventually pointed to the incorporation of human rights in peacemaking), as well as an understanding that cease-fires and stalemates were not enough if in particular, minor conflicts as in Cyprus after 1964, were not to lead to major regional wars and superpower conflicts (such as between Greece and Türkiye during the Cold War) (Kerlindsay, 2005).

In other words, it was understood by the mid-Twentieth century that a cease-fire or a stalemate were still very dangerous situations, and that further tools would be required to deal with the next steps. However, the key point was that more could be achieved by coordinating different mechanisms for peacemaking: a stalemate or worse merely a ceasefire was not enough. This understanding of the need for parallel processes faded from view on the 2000s, as it soon began to appear that long-term cease-fires were viable because of the application of more comprehensive peacemaking tools, and that failed mediation processes could endlessly be repeated, thus preventing conflict even without achieving a solution.

Stage Three and ‘Stalemated Peace’: From ‘Hurting Stalemates and ‘Ripe Moments’ to Refrigerated Conflicts

Under conceptual pressure, theories began expand their scope to align themselves with western liberalism, to domesticate realism, and to engage also with the Marxist and Global South critiques that had emerged by the 1980s. There were several attempts to deal with such limitations within the confines of realist and conflict management thinking particularly on mediation and conflict resolution, notably through contributions by Bercovitch, Zartman, (Bercovitch, 1985, 1999; Zartman, 2001; Touval & Zartman, 1985) and others. There were also significant attempts to augment realpolitik and institutionalist thinking in the area with emergence of second generation thinking on conflict resolution and transformation, which in particular elevated the status of social actors in peacemaking, as well as related methods and goals (Lederach, 1995, 1997). As ever political liberalism enabled scholars and policymakers to chart a middle way through the two poles of social and power-based approaches, which would be closer to the norms of the UN Charter and might be legitimate across the local, state, and international scales of global politics, if only through an exceeding light touch. The end of the Cold War meant there was an automatic social and global legitimacy across the scale for peacemaking methods that would end violence, settle states, and provide public goods.

However, the explanation for when conflicts might be amenable to such new methods meant that scholars and activists focused on looking for infrequent opportunities rather than on determining the structural openings necessary for peacemaking to move forward. This was a reformist rather than radical agenda at best, and it led to a generation of work in the field that operated in bureaucratic and programmatic modes within the narrow intellectual confines set by policymakers. This were sometimes from with the UN, but normally at state level, meaning the national and regional interests of the most powerful actors tended to dominate. Even hegemonic modes of peacemaking, associated in this case with the liberal peace, found it difficult to move forward.

The shift of attention to civil society methodologies also inadvertently might have overloaded civil actors with implausible tasks. These included creating the potential for trickle-up dynamics, promoting democratisation, local reconciliation and justice where the state and international actors could not achieve anything, influencing war lords and other structural actors. In other words the liberal, problem-solving methodologies of this phase worked on the weak who were often already convinced, rather than the powerful actors invested in the conflict already. This helps to understand why the refrigerated and frozen conflict conceptualisations, often deployed in 1960s literature on peacekeeping and mediation (James, 1969), returned in the 2010s as key conceptual

frameworks (Smetana & Ludvik, 2018). The conceptual log jam introduced by conflict management thinking merely disguised a victor's peace and undermined the more ambitious connection of conflict resolution with peacekeeping and mediation, favouring conservative renderings of power and hierarchy in conflict-affected societies.

Stage Four: Liberal Peacebuilding, Statebuilding, 'Backsliding' and its Boomerang Effect for International Order'

What was becoming clearer was that rights claims against a peace agreement or political reform process were significant in establishing legitimacy for political authority. Liberal peacebuilding, post- 1990, was to a large extent focused on building a liberal state and set of institutions governed by global or western norms and law (Doyle, 1983; Paris, 2004). Social engagement was therefore needed for a new political contract to be built by a much more comprehensive peace praxis, as was being demonstrated in the development of what was called liberal peacebuilding (Richmond, 2005). But as such claims expanded, pressure on the system grew, expectations grew, and opposition also grew, sparking a discussion of the Kantian concept of 'backsliding' (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021). Political authority simulated acquiescence and effectively disguised the long-standing protection of power-structures, stratification and privilege through the peace processes, rather than directly opposing injustice as social movements and civil society would expect (Kaldor et al., 2006). Scholarship during this period was making major advances, but in doing so it was also mounting more of a challenge to state-centric and capitalist renderings of peace epistemology (Rampton & Nadarajah, 2017), especially as environmental debates added their weight on matters of justice and sustainability (Krampe et al., 2021).

It thus soon became clear that peace processes were not dynamic enough to enable expanded rights, justice or sustainability in direct terms because they were too narrow, not implemented properly, and not externally supported in any concrete way. This undermined both their local legitimacy in context, the legitimacy of the LIO, and allowed counter-peace actors to challenge and undermine them (Richmond et al., 2023). Indeed, they had been designed this way by scholars following policy directives in the previous stages of the debates (outlined above). Concepts such as hurting stalemates, ripe moments, and backsliding emerged to help understand the weakness of embryonic theories or realist order as an imminent rather than structural critique. These concepts pointed the finger of blame towards internal competitors who resisted power sharing, democracy, and rights, aiming to assist international actors in navigating blockages to the emergence of stability (DFID, 2019). They set the scene for more comprehensive approaches to emerge at some future point, which applied pressure through aligned, multidimensional strategies, rather than directly addressing the roots causes or power-relations than perpetuated the conflict. These were indirectly addressed through peace and development tools and approaches, but their deficiencies have ultimately led to 'stabilisation' oriented thinking, which in itself has been a platform not for the expansion of rights but for the return of authoritarian capitalism (meaning capital takes precedence over rights and democracy, which requires authoritarian rule rather than a liberal state) as the basis for political order (von Billerbeck, & Tansey, 2019; Paris, 2020; De Coning, 2023). In other words, stalemates became fixed and ripe moments less likely, meaning backsliding was the next phenomena to be theorised anew (centuries after Kant had first noted it as a phenomena).

In other words, this meant that the conceptual and policy apparatus that was being deployed in the post-Cold war environment was destined for failure by design- or at least had coalesced around medium to long term stalemated outcomes, and in any case only short-term, short-range agreements, which tended not to stand up to scrutiny when social, local, and ethical standards and methods were applied. Settling for disguised stalemates was an indication of the loss of legitimacy and capacity of the overall system. This rationality was linear and reductionist, mismatched to an era of growing multiplicity, entanglement, and complexity (Connolly, 2017). Such problems have been felt most strongly in the Global South, in South East Asia, parts of South America, and in the former Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and beyond, of course, where post-colonial and post-socialist conflicts abounded after 1989. The failure of the conceptual and policy tools that the West and the Global North developed rapidly after the end of the Cold War did not just affect these regions but also undermined the very liberal elements of the order the West seemed interested in propagating.

With hindsight, the constrained conceptual apparatus signalled by what Pugh called ‘problem-solving’ and ‘riot control’ (Pugh, 2004) approaches highlighted the deeper lack of consensus in the West about what its responsibilities and commitments were to the rest of the world since 1945, which was mostly easily converted into multiple stalemates during the Cold War and after 1989, with little hope of progress even if they appeared a solid basis from which to proceed- at least to the myopic gaze of the West in this era. This lack of ambition and confidence was amplified by the advent of global terrorism and the West’s response undermined its own legitimacy to a large degree. This dynamic echoes on in the current global politics around the ongoing Ukraine war, what to do about it, and how far responsibilities reach in ending the war (Powell, 2023). The internal populist responses to the 2008 financial crisis in the West undermined political goodwill and scholarship’s progress on peacemaking within the North as well as outside.

In short, international order in stage four and since has few viable peacemaking tools, when defined as practical, resourceable, and indicative of a broad consensus for non-violence, rights, development, and sustainability. An order that cannot maintain and repair itself is at best in a transitional state, at worst doomed. The conceptual log jam introduced by conflict management thinking undermined the more ambitious, comprehensive and liberal goals of later stage versions of peacebuilding, in other words, favouring conservative renderings of power and hierarchy in conflict-affected societies, which has led to a situation presently where international order has few plausible tools for its own maintenance.

Counter-Peace and the Return of Geopolitical Multipolarity

In all four of the above frameworks that have evolved for praxis about peacemaking recently, there is a common opposition between the idea of a unified and aligned order from local to global scales, and a misaligned international order (i.e. multipolar). Given the strong demands from the global south, regional actors including the BRICS for a looser international system, one which is less aligned, and less dependent on liberal values or driven by Euro-Atlantic institutions and power, counter-peace, stalemated processes, and regional blocs offer a dilemma. Do they offer a way forward which is a response to the deficits of the liberal international order, or does they indicate a rejection of non-violence and peacemaking as related values and political tools in international order? A misaligned system appears to offer the possibility of polylogue and loose, shallow consensus at best, with very high levels of risk for misunderstanding as well as clashing regional interests. It perhaps follows the Cold War framework more than it does the LIO. It reiterates a tendency towards a territorially based system of competing empires, with only blunt, negative peace-oriented tools. It is potentially a platform for resurgent interests and clashes, which may include the use of force and victor’s peace type frameworks and tools. This looks substantially worse than the post-war liberal institutionalist framework, which also offered some basis for improvement, further inclusion, redistribution, and development.

Conclusion: Peacemaking in a Multipolar Order?

The consequence of these deficiencies, methodological, conceptual, and theoretical, have been that long term stalemated outcomes and refrigerated conflicts have become institutionalised. Some of them go as far back as the 1960s, as with the Cyprus quagmire. Their slow degradation is now escalating as geopolitical rifts since 9/11, Syria, and the Ukraine War have increasingly threatened the development of a cooperative and sustainable liberal international order, let alone a liberal order (Doyle, 2023). The long wait for a ‘ripe moment’, and for spoilers to be neutralised as a hurting stalemate (Zartman, 2001) hopefully provides a platform to break down any opposition to peace, has actually created opportunities for more negative elements of politics to take control of peace processes, in an escalating form of backsliding (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021). These blockages have led to counter-peace networks, which have reversed the flow of ideas, political will, and capacities from civil and international networks which many peace theories and processes supported, back towards the Leviathan or even towards the concept of Empire.

This is a conservative and counter-revolutionary shift that reinstates geopolitical and imperial thinking within the international political economy along with its historical tendency to align with power and hegemony. This has created a vacuum in which geopolitics has regained a foothold, along with

authoritarian and illiberal domestic politics in conflict-affected societies, and their sponsors. Drawing upon what in the liberal past were often seen as marginal or small-scale phenomena (Pogodda et al., 2023), these developments involved pushing back at civil society, state reform, human rights, as well as the using the provision of public goods to gain public favour for ethnic, sectarian, and nationalist interests. A peace process underpinned by democratisation and rights, in other words, may work when convergence points to improved structural and material conditions in comparison to already advanced political-economies, but not when it merely reiterates comparative, historical and structural injustice in domestic and international politics. This suggests that peacemaking is not possible, or at best is extremely limited, when empire and autocracy, underpinned by geopolitics and geo-economics (Buzan & Lawson, 2015) remain practical categories in international relations.

Partly, the emerging framework of multipolarity is related to the failure of the LIO and of liberal peacebuilding to cope with the limitations of its own framework. A wave-like relationality and connectivity between inconsistency, inequality, injustice, and authoritarianism and illiberalism across scales (local, state, regional, and global) can clearly be discerned, which were products of hegemonic hypocrisy (Suthaharan & Rampton, 2015). The slow pace of multilateralism, diplomacy, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding has been circumvented by the speed of operation and multidimensionality of new forms of global and local conflict. This relationality and connectivity operates in negative and positive terms. It has led to hybridity, operates in a framework of extreme complexity, and has probably surpassed the analogue nature of international relations to manage or to make peace in in this new 'digital' environment (Hirblinger et al., 2022; Richmond et al., 2023). Innovations in peacemaking are thus required because such relationality indicates more than ever before how failures in peacemaking create threats across international order, foregrounding justice and sustainability in the next phase of the IPA. Multipolarity appears less an innovation than an obstacle to peacemaking, in other words.

The renewed divisions in international order indicate a revision to state-centric interests, regional hegemonic contests, and global ideological struggle, and in this environment, peacemaking is replaced mainly by refrigeration strategies- such as early generation peacekeeping, counter-insurgency, and basic cease-fire agreements, where a decisive victory cannot be attained. This means that conflict remains active in those contexts (as say in Colombia or El Salvador) (Hristov, 2014, p. 4; Negroponte, 2011, p. xi) while proxy conflicts may rage elsewhere (as we can observe in Central Africa, Ukraine, and Syria) (Allan, 2020; Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016, p. 113–138; Hinnebusch, 2017).

Grand scale bilateral meetings may take place, along with the occasional multilateral conference (for example the UN's proposed 'Summit of the Future in 2024' which is part of the Common Agenda),¹ or recent secret bilateral meetings between Russia, the US, and the EU over Nagorno-Karabakh (Politico, 2023), but these are heavily constrained by the interests of the most powerful actors, for whom liberal peace is mainly an obstacle for their strategic interests and the utility of war and violence remains salient to their ambitions.

Peacemaking in stalemated and refrigerated conflict in a new multipolar order would thus face a familiar historical dynamic: peace would be negative and minimally defined by the clashing interests of the great powers most willing to resort to violence (Hinsley, 1963, p. 1). Peacemaking would tend to be secret, limited, and not inclusive of any civil society actors, nor small powers or minor disputant, even if active. The findings of scholarship on the nature of political order and related peacemaking tools would be consigned to the dustbin of history until the next, inevitable systemic collapse. Civil, regional, and proxy wars would probably escalate into a threat to global order. Global order would be unstable in the event of such wars, existing institutions would not be able to respond, and may presage the collapse of great powers or their agreements with others. Human rights, development, representation, and innovation to deal with global problems would be suppressed and retarded at best. Peacemaking in such a context is limited, failing, and conflict tends to escalate, threatening the integrity of international order such until more sophisticated peacemaking methods are developed (as happened after 1918, 1945, and 1990) (Richmond, 2022).

1 <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda/summit-of-the-future>

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