

Thomas G. Walsh
July 17, 2025



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HJI MISSION STATEMENT

"HJI provides advanced academic and professional education for women and men who aspire to serve the wider society and world as transformational leaders in faith-based ministries or professional fields related to religion, peace, and public leadership."

A circular inset photo showing a group of approximately ten people, including men and women of various ages, standing and sitting together in an indoor setting.

HJI Board of Trustees Approves New Mission Statement

As part of a months-long comprehensive initiative involving the participation of HJI leadership and stakeholders in developing HJI’s Strategic Plan for 2025-2030, the Board of Trustees recently approved a revised Mission Statement in alignment with HJI’s Strategic Plan and Objectives. For full details, click below.

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Announcing the First Inaugural Issue of International Journal for Peace and Public Leadership

President Thomas G. Walsh recently announced the launch of a new HJI publication, the International Journal for Peace and Public Leadership (IJPPL), “dedicated to providing informative, scholarly perspective on topics related to the pursuit of lasting peace.” For Dr. Walsh’s complete statement, and to access Volume I of the journal, click below.

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HJI is Hiring!

HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership (HJI) is seeking a Director of Alumni Relations to lead and strengthen engagement with its alumni community. This part-time, remote position is ideal for someone who enjoys relationship-building, strategic communication, database management, and fundraising projects. No on-campus office hours are required.

[More Details](#)



Dr. Thomas Ward Presents at Event Held by International Media Association for Peace

On June 24, 2025, Dr. Thomas Ward, Chair of the HJI Peace Studies program and Professor of Peace and Development, joined co-presenter Ms. Cheryl Wetzstein, Senior Advisor, Times Global Media Group and former reporter at The Washington Times to speak on the topic “Lasting Peace Through Conflict Transformation: Opportunities for Communication Media's Contribution.” The program was moderated by Mr. Ray Lipowcan, Executive Director, UPF Western Pennsylvania, and current HJI student. The program was organized by the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP).

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Dr. Thomas G. Walsh Participates in "The Washington Brief"

On Tuesday, May 5, Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, HJI President, joined co-presenters Ambassador Joseph DeTrani, envoy to the Six Party Talks, and Dr. Alexandre Mansourov, Professor of Security Studies at Georgetown University, to speak on the topic, “The Relevance of Peace Studies to Conflict Resolution,” as part of the series entitled The Washington Brief sponsored by The Washington Times Foundation. Dr. Michael Jenkins, President of the Washington Times Foundation, and HJI graduate, was the moderator.

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Mission & Accreditation

Mission

HJI Mission Statement

HJI provides advanced academic and professional education for women and men who aspire to serve the wider society and world as transformational leaders in faith-based ministries or professional fields related to religion, peace, and public leadership.

Our Vision

HJI will emerge as a center of excellence in higher education.

Core values

- Hyo-jeong, a Korean term, is a virtue, similar to filial piety, that is expressed by reverence for God, humanity, and the environment.
- Peace is a goal toward which we strive, one characterized by harmony, mutual respect, mutual prosperity and cooperation.
- Public Service is practiced by living for the sake of others and, in the context of HJI, living for the sake of our students, our community and the wider world.
- Dialogue underscores the importance of respectful person-to-person engagement, listening and learning, growing and developing.

Strategic objectives from the 2025-2030 strategic plan

1. Provide resources that equip students to become transformational leaders who serve the public good
2. Expand the reputation of HJI as a center of innovative academic inquiry and thought leadership
3. Expand and strengthen partnerships and institutional affiliations
4. Generate support that contributes to HJI's mission, strategic plan, and financial health

Accreditation

HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership is chartered by the Regents of the State of New York. All its academic degree programs are registered by the New York State Education Department at the Office of College and University Evaluation, 89 Washington Ave, Room 960 EBA, Albany, NY 12234, Phone: (518) 474-1551:

- Theological Professions – HEGIS 2301.00

Master of Arts in Religious Studies

Master of Divinity

Doctor of Ministry

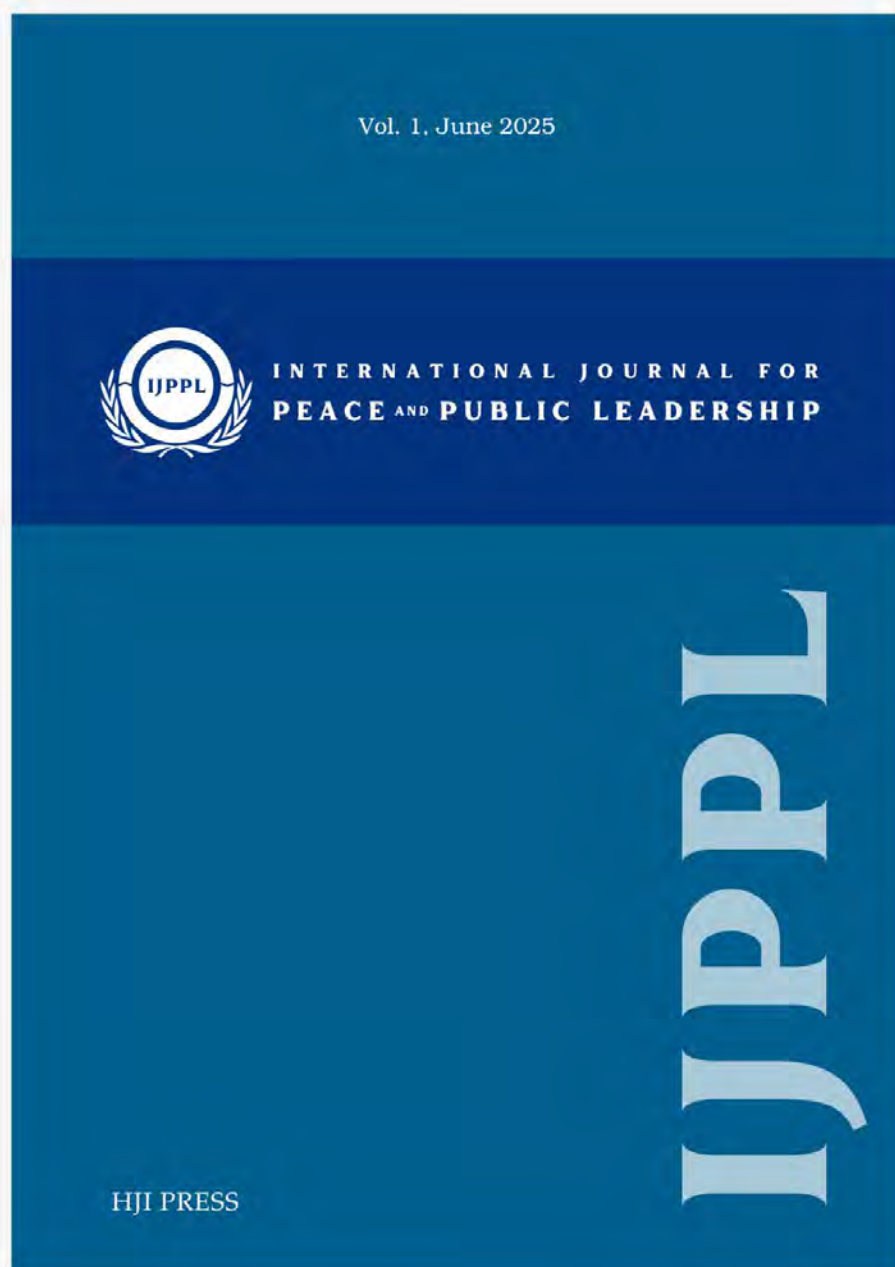
Foundation Program Graduate Certificate

- Humanities and Social Sciences – HEGIS 4903.00

Master of Arts in Peace Studies

HJ International is an accredited institution and a member of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) www.msche.org. HJ International's accreditation status is Accreditation Reaffirmed. The Commission's most recent action on the institution's accreditation status on June 27, 2024 was to reaffirm accreditation.

MSCHE is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) to conduct accreditation and pre-accreditation (candidacy status) activities for institutions of higher education, including distance education and correspondence education programs offered at those institutions, throughout the United States. USDE recognizes accrediting agencies deemed authorities on the quality of higher education. Under the Higher Education Act's (HEA's) federal student aid programs, accrediting agencies recognized by the United States Department of Education must meet the Department's regulatory criteria. MSCHE is a Title IV gatekeeper and is a link to federal programs, and institutions access Title IV through MSCHE accreditation



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Public Leadership

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Executive Editor's Welcome

Thomas Walsh

Executive Editor

International Journal for Peace and Public Leadership

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Welcome to Our Readers!

On behalf of both our editorial team and our sponsoring institution, the HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership (HJI), I am honored to introduce the inaugural issue of the *International Journal for Peace and Public Leadership (IJPPPL)*, dedicated to providing informative, scholarly perspective on topics related to the pursuit of lasting peace.

At the outset, I want to express appreciation to HJI, an academic institution engaged in the preparation of a new generation of public leaders and peace professionals who face challenges stemming from a lack of global consensus on the norms, protocols, and the expectations that should inform the agendas of the multilateral institutions that mitigate conflict and further interstate dialogue and cooperation.

At a time when our world is characterized by increasing polarization on the national and global levels, and as war and conflict seem dangerously close to disastrous escalations, the IJPPPL seeks to be a platform for intelligent, constructive engagement with the critical issues of our day, while also offering insight that may inform practices that contribute to the advancement of a more peaceful world.

The articles contained in this first volume represent our maiden voyage. We are venturing out on turbulent seas. Yet, we have high hopes that our efforts will make modest, yet significant contributions toward the creation of a more peaceful world.

I take this opportunity to express appreciation to our Editor-in-Chief, Claude Perrottet; our Senior Editor, Thomas Ward; Managing Editor, Angelika Buczynski; the members of our international Advisory Board; and most certainly the authors who have submitted the fine articles that appear in this first volume.

We hope you will find the contents of this issue to be enriching and stimulating. We would love to hear from you and look forward to your comments and feedback.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas G. Walsh, Executive Editor

Editorial**Claude Perrottet***Editor-in-Chief**International Journal for Peace and Public Leadership*

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The publication of this first issue of the *International Journal for Peace and Public Leadership* is an appropriate occasion to ask ourselves: why pursue peace in a world rife with division and conflicting agendas? When an immigration officer recently asked me the standard question about my occupation, I candidly responded that I was a professor of Peace Studies. The uniformed gentleman almost shouted at me: “You people are doing a terrible job!” To try to explain to him that, without people like us, things would be even worse did not feel like an appropriate response. I nodded but was left to ponder: “Is damage control my only ambition? Is that all that I can hope for?”

As a Kantian scholar, I was naturally reminded of his 1795 *Perpetual Peace* that offers helpful approaches to this question. At the very end of this short volume, Kant admits that a world of permanent peace can only be reached through endless approximation.¹ An ideal world of perfect peace will forever elude us because of the selfish, hence mutually exclusive, nature of our individual desires.² Very few will disagree with him on that sobering assessment. But, Kant adds that there is something we can nevertheless look forward to: arriving at a point of no return, where we have made irreversible progress toward the goal of peace. This notion of irreversible progress towards peace, however, deserves deliberative attention and introspection.

For example, the question arises as to whether any efforts made towards peace can be expected to lead, though only incrementally, to lasting change for the better. Just a few years ago, it was possible to affirm that, in spite of widespread violence around the globe, the number of wars and war casualties had been in steady decline, and that territorial conquest had come to be seen as illegitimate. As the Cold War came to a close, Francis Fukuyama and others speculated about whether our descendants would, perhaps, live in a world free of war.³ And yet such speculation would quickly be invalidated as new causes and threats emerged to challenge the anticipated fulfillment of *pacem in terris*. Today, stating that “the present era marks a set of conditions further removed from lasting peace than ever before”⁴ can seem to make more sense. This leads to another question: “Is it enough, in the spirit of Kant, to dedicate oneself to ‘perpetual peace,’ when the fruits of this peace will at best only be enjoyed by people living much later, if by anyone at all?”⁵

Needless to say, the optimism of the celebration of the End of the Cold War and a New World Order of the 1990s already needed qualification prior to the breakout of the recent hostilities in Europe and the Middle East. The admission that intra-state war, civil war and violence by non-state actors had largely replaced the negatives of traditional warfare reflects our reality. However, it leaves unspoken the developments outside of military violence that are a direct threat to peace: all the conditions summarized under such names as social injustice, pollution, and climate change. Even though war itself has become less prevalent (on the face of it, a nearly miraculous development), the conditions for future outbreaks of violence remain with us.

The resurgence of war leads scholars and practitioners of Peace Studies to renew their efforts towards the substantive removal of hidden causes of conflict and to speculate on the potential of transcending previously irreconcilable oppositions. This, of course, requires the parties to engage each other, something that often begins within the confines of civil society, rather than in formal political arenas.

Accordingly, *IJPPL* focuses on the role that civil society and NGOs play within the framework of global forums and local field activities. But it is equally dedicated to the discussion of geostrategic issues of war and peace. Discussing the impact of *realpolitik* on policy, including peace efforts, is a legitimate part of the context and it does not imply cynicism. It provides a necessary reality check and needs to be part of the discussion. Nancy Wei's article in this first issue of *IJPPL* presents an application of Sun Tsu's *Art of War* to the situation in Ukraine and offers a unique perspective on one of today's most consequential conflicts.

In his article, James R. Fleming, a leading expert on climate change, offers a rarely discussed historical perspective ranging over a period of more than two thousand years. At least as important is its effort to apply Johan Galtung's famous slogan, *peace by peaceful means*, to the often contentious discussion of peace-related topics, such as climate change and global warming. Civil discourse should be more than politely discrediting views one does not agree with.

Joseph DeTrani's "Why We Should Care" is a *cri du cœur* by one of the historical actors in the ultimately unsuccessful Six Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear program. Beyond providing the views of an insider, it makes a strong case for not giving up on that country – for strategic reasons, but also for humanitarian ones.

The human aspect is further central to the article by Beth Fisher-Yoshida and Joan Camilo Lopez on peace professionals' experiential learning. The article emphasizes the need to combine peace studies as an academic pursuit with field experience, because the field is where conflict concretely occurs. The authors also introduce circumstances and an ambiance that allow students of peace from various origins to forget their differences when they meet under favorable conditions – prioritizing their common human identity over divisive subcategories.

This transformation can extend to inimical relations. Long ago, Georg Simmel had already recognized that, in relationships, the only real negative is indifference. Conflict brings together different parties and, on occasion, can turn previous opponents into friends.⁶ More recently, and perhaps over-optimistically, Lewis Coser affirmed that "hostile interaction thus often leads to subsequent friendly interaction, conflict being a means to 'test' and 'know' the previously unknown. The stranger may become familiar through one's struggle with him."⁷

Edmond Charley's article on the role of women as peace mediators in Africa brings together two long neglected but currently central themes: the African continent and the irreplaceable role of women in peacemaking. No single article can answer our question about the future of peace studies. But addressing something that has not been seriously and systematically tried in the past and, at the same time, has obvious potential for being a game-changing component is a promising step. One central conclusion of Edmond Charley's article is that women in Africa have shown a fortunate ability to

produce near-miracles on the grassroots level where previous efforts had been in vain, but that often they are still absent when formal peace deliberations take place.

The insightful articles that constitute this first issue of IJPPL serve to offer welcome perspectives that are not unrelated to the question posed at the outset of this editorial. Moreover, I remain confident that few among those who are seriously involved in peace work will abandon their calling due to disappointing world events. And few will even ask themselves why they are doing what they are doing. The answer comes to each of us, with undeniable immediacy, in every step taken to bring a situation – large or small – into greater conformity with that most legitimate of all aspirations: the desire to share happiness and community with others in a safe and peaceful environment.

Claude Perrottet, Editor-in-Chief

Notes

¹ Immanuel Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, Pauline Kleingeld (ed.), Yale University Press, 2006 [1795], 109.

² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott. Raleigh, NC: Alex Catalogue, 1998 [1788], 72.

³ Siniša Malešević, "Is war becoming obsolete? A sociological analysis," in *The Sociological Review*, 62:S2,. 65–86 (2014).

⁴ Bert Olivier, "Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795) and the Russia-Ukraine/NATO Conflict," *Phronimon* 25 (2024): Article 14.

⁵ Burkhard Liebsch, "War as an Anachronism and apparently unavoidable Threat," in *War and Peace*, Bernardeth Caero, Luca Ferracci, Danny Pilario, and Michelle Becka (eds.), *Concilium* 60:1 (2024), 16.

⁶ Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of Conflict: I," in *American Journal of Sociology* 9 (1903): 490-525.

⁷ Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, The Free Press, 1956, p. 122-123.

Why We Should Care

Joseph DeTrani

*US Ambassador; Former Special Envoy for
Six-Party Talks with North Korea*

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Ninety-two countries are involved in conflicts beyond their borders. Over 110 million people are either refugees or internally displaced due to violent conflict, with sixteen countries each hosting more than half a million refugees. More than 30 million people in twenty-two countries are in a severe food crisis and are on the brink of starvation. Half the world lacks access to essential health services, many experiencing medicine shortages. According to the World Health Organization, about 4.5 billion people (half the global population) were not fully covered by essential health care.¹

The world has become more dangerous, with some of the nine nuclear weapons states threatening to use nuclear weapons. Geopolitical blocs have proliferated: AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom and the U.S.), the QUOD (Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (China, Russia, Iran, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), and the Global South (134 countries), with China determined to prove that their system of governance is far superior to the liberal democracy in the U.S.

The media effectively covers geopolitical conflicts daily. Whether it's Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the war in Gaza or the internecine conflict in Sudan, the media is on the ground, reporting developments. For that we must be grateful.²

However, the humanitarian crises are less visible to the international community. Most of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) doing this work are mission-driven, nonprofit organizations not known to the public. Their work, however, is critical to the well-being of millions of people. I witnessed this personally, as the U.S. Special Envoy for Six Party Talks with North Korea.³

My background and focus were on the denuclearization of North Korea. I was also the U.S. representative to the Korea Energy Development Organization (KEDO), responsible for the construction in North Korea of two light water reactor nuclear power plants for civilian energy. I was knowledgeable of the famine in North Korea in the 1990s, with about one million reportedly dying of starvation. I was also aware of the political prison camps throughout North Korea and the harsh treatment of the inmates. But my principal job was to get North Korea to agree to denuclearize. Working with China, the chair of the Six Party Talks, and South Korea, Japan and Russia, in September 2005 we got North Korea to agree to complete and verifiable denuclearization, on an action-for-action basis, in return for security assurances, economic development assistance and a path to normalization of relations between our two countries.⁴

During this time, I was fortunate to have met Dr. Stephen Linton, president of the Eugene Bell Foundation. Mr. Linton knew North and South Korea better than anyone I knew. He was Reverend Billy Graham's interpreter and adviser when Rev. Graham visited North Korea in 1992 and 1994. And in 1995, Mr. Linton established the Eugene Bell Foundation, initially providing food aid to North Korea. Eventually, this developed into providing multidrug-resistant tuberculosis treatment across North Korea, where 440 of every 100,000 people are afflicted with this disease. By 2008, Mr. Linton told me his Foundation treated about 250,000 patients who go through 18 months of therapy.⁵

It was this exposure to Mr. Linton that encouraged me to also focus on some of the humanitarian issues affecting the lives of the 26 million people in North Korea: food scarcity, shortage of medicines and a backward health care system. It was clear that NGOs like the Eugene Bell Foundation needed access to North Korea and the people who are hurting. This continues to be a challenge, given the sanctions imposed on North Korea for their repeated violation of Security Council resolutions penalizing them for their missile launches and nuclear tests.

Thus, as a negotiator I became fully aware of the need to assist North Korea in coping with food scarcity and the lack of medicines in a health care system requiring lots of attention. Normalizing relations with the U.S., and eventually reunifying with South Korea and establishing relations with Japan, was the goal to resolving some of these humanitarian issues. We were almost there in 2005, with the Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks, but more work must be done.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the focus my negotiating team and I devoted to the political prison camps in North Korea. In negotiations with North Korea, we made it clear that we would eventually normalize relations with North Korea when, in addition to denuclearization, progress was made with these political prison camps. We asked for access to these camps and requested that North Korea start to close these camps.⁶

As a member of the National Committee on North Korea (NCNK), I am fortunate to meet and collaborate with several NGOs whose sole mission is to provide humanitarian assistance to North Korea. Recent developments with North Korea have been difficult, but these NGOs are determined to contribute to the well-being of the 26 million people in North Korea.⁷

My experience has been with North Korea. But there are an ever-increasing number of countries in need of humanitarian assistance. The brave NGOs in Gaza and the Eugene Bell Foundation in North Korea are models of the important and unique role of NGOs—and other organizations and advocates—that provide humanitarian assistance to so many countries in need.

Leadership

So much depends on the leadership of people who contribute to ensuring that humanitarian needs of the people are addressed, but also those leaders who work toward preventing conflict and war while nurturing dialogue and cooperation. Leaders can be heads of state or anyone in a position to effect change for the common good. Indeed, in democracies, voting for representatives who advocate for

peace and stability is a basic right—and responsibility—of the people. And the representatives elected should make decisions to pursue peace and enhance the well-being of the people.

Leadership makes a difference. Indeed, enlightened leadership can bring peace and cooperation to a world that currently is in disarray.

I highlight the leadership and vision of three world leaders who worked to bring peace and cooperation—for their own people and to people in the global community: former U.S. President Richard Milhous Nixon, former People's Republic of China Chairman Deng Xiaoping, and former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Richard Milhous Nixon

The U.S. and China were enemies when Nixon was elected president on November 5, 1968. The Korean War (1950-53) resulted in over 37,000 American troops killed and over 92,000 wounded, with China having over 110,000 Chinese troops killed and over 380,000 wounded.⁸ Tension between the U.S. and China (People's Republic of China) persisted through the 1960s. During this tense period, U.S. and Chinese representatives were meeting in Warsaw to ease tensions and improve relations. In February 1970, after 139 meetings in Warsaw between ambassadors from the U.S. and China, Nixon became impatient with the lack of any progress in these talks.⁹

A classified U.S. document said China thought conflict with the U.S, a capitalist imperialist country, was unavoidable and war was probable.¹⁰ In 1965, McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's national security adviser, said China was a problem for all peaceful people. But it was Nixon in his inaugural address on January 20, 1969, who said: "Let all nations know that during this administration our lines of communications will be open. We seek an open world... a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation."¹¹

And on February 21, 1972, Nixon traveled to China. He was a conservative and an avid anti-communist who had the vision and courage to make this breakthrough and reach out to China, a communist country that viewed the U.S. as the enemy. In his first meeting with China's Chairman Mao Zedong, in Mao's packed-with-books study, Nixon asked Mao: "Why did the Soviet Union have more troops (forces) on the border facing you (China) rather than on the border facing Western Europe?" He then asked Mao, "Which was the greater danger: American aggression or Soviet aggression?" Mao said a state of war did not exist between our countries (China and the U.S.).¹²

During Nixon's visit, the Shanghai Communique was signed, which stated in part: "The U.S. acknowledged all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China."¹³ To this day, the Shanghai Communique is cited as the authoritative document that led to the normalization of relations between the U.S. and China. Indeed, Nixon's objective was to normalize relations with China during his second term. However, on August 9, 1974, President Richard Milhous Nixon resigned from the presidency due to the Watergate scandal.¹⁴ On January 1, 1979, the U.S. and China normalized relations, moving the U.S. Embassy from Taipei to Beijing.¹⁵

Nixon's visit to China was the beginning of a strategic partnership between the U.S. and China that eventually contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was a Chinese leader who seized on the normalization of relations between the U.S. and China to make China the global power that it is today. That man was Deng Xiaoping.

Deng Xiaoping

When Mao died in 1976, he was briefly replaced by Hua Guofeng. But in December 1978, Deng Xiaoping took over as China's supreme leader, the Chairman of China's Communist Party and President of the People's Republic China. Deng previously was purged twice, by Mao and by the radical Gang of Four, headed by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. But Deng returned to power given the support he had from Party leaders who viewed Deng as a patriot and visionary, capable of making China great again.

Deng's vision of market-oriented reforms and opening to the outside world for investment, technology, and trade met with opposition from some in leadership positions, but Deng persisted, knowing China needed an infusion of foreign technology. He visited the U.S. in 1979 and in meetings with President Jimmy Carter made it clear that China was looking to the U.S. for help with its economic modernization. Returning from the U.S., Deng moved quickly on decollectivization of agriculture, land reform, establishing free markets well-received by the public, and with his decision to encourage foreign investment in China. Indeed, Deng encouraged Chinese students to study in the U.S., noting that even if only 10% return, China would benefit. To this day, there are over 300,000 Chinese students studying in the U.S.¹⁶

Deng also implemented an ambitious political reform program that called for collective leadership and term limits, with a strong Communist Party in the lead. Deng often referred to the four little dragons—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan—as economic models for a poor China.

With Deng's encouragement, in 1979 American Motors entered discussion with China to build jeeps in China, with the Jeep Cherokee XJ coming off the production line in 1985. Today, there are hundreds of U.S. companies doing business in China.

From a poor and struggling country in 1978, China developed into the world's second largest economy with a GDP in 2023 of \$17.8 trillion USD.

Geopolitically, Deng ensured that China worked closely with the U.S. on national security issues. This was a time when the Soviet Union was marching to the tune of the Brezhnev Doctrine: Soviet interference in Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Yemen, Libya, Czechoslovakia, Nicaragua, Grenada and in 1979, Afghanistan. It was Deng who decided to have China cooperate with the U.S. to defeat the Soviet Union in an Afghanistan that Moscow invaded. China, working with the U.S. and Pakistan, ensured that weapons reached the Mujahideen and in November 1986, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev made the decision to withdraw all Soviet combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of 1988. Gorbachev said Afghanistan had become a bleeding wound.

China's collaboration with the U.S. on its economic modernization program, and with the U.S. and Pakistan to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, are just some of the legacies of Deng Xiaoping, a great leader who died on February 19, 1997.

Bill Clinton

In 1993 North Korea had refused to permit International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitors to visit a suspect area at their Yongbyon nuclear reactor facility. North Korea threatened to leave the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and threatened to make South Korea's capital, Seoul, a "sea of flames." There was much senior-level discussion in Washington at that time to bomb North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear reactor.¹⁷

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter informed the Clinton White House that he was prepared to visit Pyongyang and meet with their leader, Kim Il Sung, as a private citizen interested in peace on the Korean Peninsula. There was much bureaucratic opposition to permitting Carter to travel to Pyongyang for meetings with Kim Il Sung. Despite this opposition, Clinton approved Carter's trip to North Korea, as a private citizen, representing the Carter Foundation and not the U.S. government.

On June 15, 1994, Carter, with his wife, Rosalyn, crossed the DMZ and after a ride into Pyongyang, and a banquet hosted by North Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carter did meet with Kim for an amicable discussion. This and further discussions led to the establishment of the Geneva Talks, with the U.S. and North Korea finally agreeing that North Korea would not reprocess their spent fuel rods from the facility at Yongbyon and cease with the construction of two large nuclear reactors under construction, in return for light water proliferation-resistant reactors the U.S. would provide. And while the two light water reactors were being built, at Kumho, North Korea, the U.S. would provide North Korea with heavy fuel oil for their energy needs. The U.S. then reached out to South Korea, Japan, and the European Union to help finance this project and established the Korea Energy Development Organization.

Clinton navigated the U.S. through this process, despite the Republican Party taking control of the Congress in 1994 and restricting payments for the two light water reactors, thus the establishment of KEDO, with allied participation...

The period from 1994 to 2000 was eventful. Kim died in 1994, after his meetings with Carter, and was replaced by his son, Kim Jong Il. At that time, mainly due to flooding caused by excessive rain, North Korea's agricultural production reached a new low, resulting in food scarcity and a reported significant number of North Koreans dying of starvation. The U.S., working with the United Nations World Food Organization, provided significant amounts of food aid, but this was not enough for a population of 25 million.

Despite the economic distress caused by food scarcity, the period of 1994-2000 was a period of hope, with the U.S. and partners building light water reactors and North Korea permitting IAEA monitors to have access they needed at Yongbyon to certify North Korea was in compliance with nuclear safeguard agreements.¹⁸

Primarily at the United Nations and through Beijing, the U.S. was in communications with North Korea. In fact, the dialogue was upbeat, with the U.S. inviting North Korea's second most powerful official, Vice Marshall Jo Myong-rok, to visit the U.S. and meet with President Clinton. The historic October 2000 meeting with Clinton at the White House went extremely well, with both talking about peace on the Korean Peninsula and normalization of relations. During Jo's visit, he invited Clinton to visit North Korea and meet with Chairman Kim Jong Un. Indeed, Clinton contemplated taking this trip but with the upcoming presidential election Clinton announced on December 28 that he would not travel to North Korea before the end of his term.

One week after Vice Marshall Jo Myong Rok concluded his unprecedented visit to Washington and meeting with Clinton, Secretary of State Madeline Albright traveled to Pyongyang as the highest-level U.S. official ever to visit North Korea. Her visit was explained as an effort to discuss and resolve nuclear and missile issues and discuss the possibility of a future visit by President Bill Clinton.¹⁹

Her meetings with Chairman Kim Jong Il went well, with Kim noting that Albright's visit was the first secretary of state to visit North Korea. Kim said: "This is a new one from a historical point of view ... I am really happy."

Returning to Washington, Albright briefed the Congress and the Cabinet on her visit and the positive discussions she had with Kim. As previously mentioned, Clinton was preoccupied with the upcoming presidential elections and did not travel to North Korea, despite his interest in such a visit.

The George W. Bush Administration took over in January 2001, and in 2003, with the help of China, established the Six Party Talks, hosted by China, with South Korea, Japan, and the Soviet Union joining the U.S. in this multilateral effort to resolve the nuclear issue with North Korea.

During the Obama Administration, Clinton did eventually travel to North Korea, this time as a private citizen. In August 2009, Clinton visited North Korea on a humanitarian mission to receive the return of Euna Lee and Laura Ling, two American journalists who were captured by North Korea for reportedly illegally entering North Korea. During Clinton's visit he did meet with Chairman Kim and exchanged pleasantries. He did not, however, discuss bilateral relations and ongoing negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea. In fact, Clinton was told not to discuss these issues and just focus on receiving and returning with the two U.S. journalists. Clinton's mission was successful, although some said it was also a missed opportunity to discuss bilateral relations, given Clinton's intimacy with issues related to North Korea, starting with the Agreed Framework in 1994, and the high-level visit of Vice Marshall Jo to Washington and Secretary Albright to North Korea.

More on Leadership

Especially now, with the proliferation of wars and conflicts and the dire economic situation in so many countries, with food scarcity and poor health care institutions, enlightened leadership is necessary: leadership to prevent wars and conflicts, and to provide aid from wealthy countries to those economically struggling countries.

NGOs and other human rights organizations make a difference. We saw it in Gaza. I continue to see it in North Korea. A global campaign is necessary to address the myriads of food scarcity and health care issues challenging so many countries. Indeed, the United Nations and affiliated organizations, like the World Food Program, are doing some of this, but more must be done.

And that's where leadership kicks in, leadership at all levels, to prevent wars and conflicts and to work for the common good. I cited two world leaders—Richard Milhous Nixon and Deng Xiaoping—who made an immense difference in preventing conflict and bringing peace to the people of China and the U.S. They also brought economic well-being to the people of China. That's what global leaders can do. And that's why each person in our global community must, when possible, demand that their leaders do more to bring peace and stability to the world we live in. It's a fragile world and we must do more to ensure that our children and their children have a world where peace prevails and those in need are cared for.

A final word on what Richard Milhous Nixon and Deng Xiaoping might say were they to assess U.S.-China relations today. And what about North Korea, with thirty years of negotiations and the history of NGOs addressing the humanitarian needs of the people?

China

Richard Milhous Nixon would say he was correct in reaching out to China and eventually normalizing relations. He would, however, be disappointed that the bilateral relationship had deteriorated to the point of some in the U.S.—and China—predicting conflict and war, whether over Taiwan or in the South China Sea. Nixon would ask why diplomacy wasn't able to manage some of these bilateral irritants. He would be critical of those leaders in the U.S. who didn't do more to prevent China from becoming an adversary, given that it was the U.S. that China looked to for economic development assistance. And indeed, it was China that the U.S. relied on to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Nixon would wonder how China, a country originally concerned about Soviet aggression, would now become an ally of the Soviet Union. Indeed, it was this concern about Soviet intentions that contributed to Mao Zedong's openness to a Nixon visit in 1972, and memorializing the Shanghai Communique. In little over fifty years, U.S. relations with China have deteriorated to a low never anticipated when Nixon reached out to China. So, Nixon would ask what our leaders are doing to reverse this negative trend, to ensure that there is no war with China? He would ask why it's not acceptable in the U.S. to use the term "peaceful coexistence" when referring to China?

Deng Xiaoping would be equally distressed with China's relationship with the Russian Federation and confused with China's apparent acceptance of Russia as an ally. Deng remembered the Soviet Union (now the Russian Federation) as a threat to China's national security, which was why Deng personally agreed to work with the U.S. to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Deng would be pleased with China's economic modernization and the achievement of the world's second-largest GDP. But Deng would acknowledge that it was because China worked closely with the

U.S. on its economic development plan. Indeed, it was the U.S. who provided China with most-favored-nation status in the late 1990s and got China into the World Trade Organization in 2001.

Deng would be disappointed with President Xi Jinping's decision to embrace Putin and provide dual-use materials for their war in Ukraine, a sovereign country invaded by a bigger neighbor. He would also be disappointed with Xi's decision to seek a third term as Chairman of the Party and President of the country, when Deng espoused a two-term Chairmanship, with collective leadership.

But most disappointing to Deng would be the deterioration in relations with the U.S. and the possibility of conflict in the Taiwan Strait of the South China Sea.

North Korea

The Clinton Administration worked hard to improve relations with North Korea. Approving the visit of former President Carter to North Korea at such a tense time was a stroke of brilliant diplomacy. Carter traveled as a private citizen and had meaningful talks with Chairman Kim Il Sung. This led to the Geneva talks and the Agreed Framework that halted all activities at their Yongbyon nuclear reactor, while halting construction at two larger reactors for nuclear weapons. Providing humanitarian food aid and the invitation of Vice Marshall Jo to meet with Clinton and Albright's visit to meet with Chairman Kim were moves in the right direction. Unfortunately, Clinton didn't visit North Korea as planned but in 2009 did visit as a private citizen to return with two imprisoned U.S. journalists.

It's likely Clinton regrets recent developments with North Korea. Indeed, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs must concern him, as well as North Korea's recent allied relationship with the Russian Federation. We were so close in the late 1990s, but it unfortunately escaped us.

For those NGOs that worked for decades in North Korea, like the Eugene Bell Foundation, and those diplomats who spent hundreds of hours negotiating with North Korea, the current bilateral relationship with North Korea and its leader, Kim Jong Un, is both sad and tragic. How could a North Korea that sought a normal relationship with the U.S. for over three decades, now be aligned with the Russian Federation? Why is North Korea providing artillery shells, drones and over 10,000 Special Forces troops to Russia for its war of aggression in Ukraine?

Given the mounting number of sanctions imposed on North Korea, and policy decisions on who can visit North Korea, how can the 26 million people in North Korea receive the humanitarian assistance needed? How can the people in North Korea be assured that they will have access to the multidrug-resistant tuberculosis treatment?

How can there be peaceful reunification with South Korea when North Korea memorialized in its constitution that South Korea and the U.S. are their principal enemies, while eschewing any form of reunification with South Korea?

A nuclear North Korea, now aligned with the Russian Federation, is a threat to South Korea and the region. And indeed, with the successful launch of the Hwasong-19, an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile capable of targeting the whole of the U.S., North Korea is becoming an existential threat to the U.S. Relations with North Korea have deteriorated to its lowest level since the Korean War. How did this happen? Could the leadership in the U.S. and South Korea have done more to prevent these negative developments? Our job will be to convince our leaders to work even harder on all issues related to North Korea. Resuming negotiations with North Korea should be our goal, with an eventual peace treaty that will bring peace to the Korean Peninsula.

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<https://doi.org/10.63470/RREQ7624>**Beth Fisher-Yoshida***Professor of Practice, Columbia University***Joan Camilo Lopez***Lecturer in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, Columbia University***Abstract**

There are new initiatives in the field of educating peacebuilders so that the classroom and the field are mutually informing one another. The artificial separation of these different locations of learning has given advantage to the academic setting over local knowledge learned in context. This paper addresses that dichotomy with evidence of our approach that bridges the academic and field contexts so that students who become peacebuilding professionals gain from both sources of knowledge. In addition, the use of a Participatory Action Research approach (PAR) assures that local grassroots peacebuilders contribute to and benefit from this mutually beneficial learning experience. Cultural orientations are noticed and addressed as all involved become sensitized to the many variations of perspective and learn to appreciate what each has to offer to conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Keywords: peace education, experiential learning, conflict transformation, peace professionals

Introduction

In this article, we demonstrate the importance of enhancing traditional classroom learning with fieldwork experiences. We believe there is a need for peacebuilding students, who will become professionals, to be familiar with the theories that underpin the field in combination with real-life applications in order to develop as scholar-practitioners. Being peacebuilding scholar-practitioners and educators ourselves, we have been working at the nexus of research, practice, and education. We draw from different disciplines to inform our work and thus our teaching, including social psychology, anthropology, communication, and conflict resolution. Our research orientation favors Participatory Action Research (PAR) and this philosophical decision manifests in how we engage with our partners in the field, modeling by example what and how we teach (Chevalier & Buckles 2019).

Our approach is informed by the more than 10 years of fieldwork that we have conducted, and continue to conduct, mostly in Colombia, among grassroots peacebuilders who seek to negotiate spaces of peace in the middle of violent conflicts. The educational journey we propose is centered in the field, which we conceive as the area where local knowledge about conflict and conflict transformation takes place. We designed a peacebuilding practicum course where students can learn about the theory and practice of peace and conflict resolution, both in the classroom and in the field, as part of the master's program in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University, where

Dr. Fisher-Yoshida is director, and both authors are faculty. In this article, we share reflections from students who validate how this approach has shaped their learning.

Bridging Theory and Practice

We all seek knowledge to transform our realities. We produce, obtain, and share knowledge so that the human experience corresponds more to individual and collective desires for basic needs such as freedom, order, human security, pleasure, and beauty. Theories have been produced about how humans meet these needs politically, economically, and through war and peace, since at least the birth of the academy in ancient Greece. For the Greeks, the establishment of the academy and the lyceum were meant for the transformation of the world. To them we owe the idea of a government that represents different sectors of society; to them we owe the idea of democracy. Additionally, if we think of the role of theoretical work in more recent times, we find that one of the legacies of the Enlightenment thinkers is that theory becomes valid only if it has consequences in the concrete world. To Montesquieu (Montesquieu 1989), Hobbes (Hobbes 1982), Kant (Kant 1991), and Locke (Locke 1988), we owe the birth of the State as we know it and the idea that human beings are equal in their capacity to reason and thus apt to choose who is fit to represent their interests in government.

The making of theory and its application to the physical world is inextricably associated with everyday, ordinary human needs. Indeed, it is through our understanding of constraint that we seek freedom, of chaos that we strive for order, of vulnerability that we want human security, and of boredom and futility that we aspire for pleasure and beauty. Our knowledge of these experiences is nourished by our concrete everyday lives and also by what our families, friends, acquaintances, tell us about them. The knowledge and practice associated with meeting basic human needs are nourished by individual and collective everyday experience, and this is what made Paulo Freire conclude that education comes from a communion among history, the world, and human beings—all interacting in a particular moment and *in context* (Freire 2018).

Out of this communion, educational systems have been constructed. Some are formal and others are not, but ultimately, humans have learned to navigate and transform their societies, including their conflicts, through concrete representations of knowledge/theory in practice. Given this, we hold that if knowledge/theory is central for the transformation of societies, and the process of sharing knowledge, i.e., education, is communal—then education must be an experiential and collective endeavor. Our experiential learning model is informed by these premises.

While doing fieldwork research and practice in conflict zones for more than 10 years, we have always thought of how to integrate our practice-oriented research in our teaching in the classroom. As much as we are interested in teaching to our students the fundamental theory and method in the fields of peace and conflict studies, we are also concerned with how to do this in a way that the learning becomes practice-oriented and transformative. When we teach, we are interested in creating spaces where learning is most effective. Our objective is for students to learn theory and method in a way that allows them to apply it to the field, to their practice.

Thinking about how we have learned and applied peacebuilding strategies, much of which is documented academically (Fisher-Yoshida and Lopez 2021) (Lopez and Fisher-Yoshida 2024), we arrived at the conclusion that it is the field—in communion with the people that inhabit it—that has proven to be an exceptional learning space. It was with this in mind that we designed our fieldwork course that incorporates theory and method, heavily centered in fieldwork experiences, so that students experiment with theory and its application to real-life conflicts. The course has proven to be a rich pedagogical experience for our students, for grassroots peacebuilders, and for us as peacebuilding practitioners and educators.

The Relevancy of “the Field” in Education

You would ask, why the centrality of “the field”? Think of any violent conflict: where does it develop and where do people come to navigate it, to transform it? It is *in the field*. Violent conflicts are not abstract; *they are lived*. Think of the field as a stage—the stage where conflicts develop, are navigated, and are ultimately resolved. There is practical knowledge in the field that if identified, analyzed, and disseminated, can be used to strengthen the work of peacebuilding practitioners in conflict zones, and to ultimately bring more peaceful spaces to a world that screams for peace.

There are two areas of knowledge that we have identified in the field, which we have documented and that are central to our peacebuilding experiential teaching. We call these two areas of knowledge *conflict knowledge* and *peace knowledge*. We define conflict knowledge as “firsthand, contextual knowledge of conflict that is rooted in and specific to particular cultures and societies” (Fisher-Yoshida and Lopez 2021, 35). Peace knowledge refers to the “contextual knowledge of specific peacebuilding and peacekeeping strategies that are rooted in and specific to particular cultures and societies” (idem).

The field is full of information about conflict but less so with the foundations for sustainable peace (Coleman 2019). Indeed, “violent conflicts are contextual [...] they are specific to a place, a time, and also, to specific groups of people with all of their inherent cultural norms and social dynamics” (Fisher-Yoshida and Lopez 2021, 35). If peacebuilding education is done in the abstract, i.e., away from the field, practitioners miss the cultural nuances that are central to the conflict as well as to its potential transformation. In our book titled *Redefining Theory and Practice to Guide Social Transformation* (Fisher-Yoshida and Lopez 2021), we intentionally included seven grassroots peacebuilders from Medellín, Colombia, whom we have been working with, as co-authors. This further supports our orientation that what we bring from the academy comes to life when in partnership with the people who inhabit these contexts who can bring with them their access to the local knowledge about the cultural and social dynamics. Through their lives they lived the experiences to more intimately understand the root causes of the conflict, the ways it is recreated over time, and most importantly, their informed *responses on how to transform them* (Fisher-Yoshida and Lopez 2021, 35).

Thus, coming closer to the field, entering in conversation with the people who inhabit conflict zones, allows peacebuilding practitioners to engage in deeper analysis of the conflict at hand, as well as to design interventions that are context-sensitive and culturally relevant. Our contributions from the

academy are to offer different frameworks to apply for conflict analysis and transformation and concepts to make sense of their experiences toward transformation and sustainable peacebuilding. It is in the field that theory, method, and practice meet.

Reciprocity: The Dialectics of Learning in the Field

Peacebuilding professionals benefit from learning how theory and methods manifest in the field, since that is where their practice is nourished by local context-based peace and conflict knowledge. “One thing is to arrive to the field as a tourist, and a very different one is to arrive as a peace scholar,”¹ claimed Mateo, a student from our 2022 cohort. Indeed, educating peace professionals requires setting the conditions to facilitate a shift in perspective. It requires approaching the field with a different attitude and mindset than how one would approach it for tourism or business purposes. Our approach to experiential learning invites students to arrive at the field with a sense of responsibility; they are invited to use keen observations to contribute to the work of grassroots peacebuilders. This is one way in which a PAR mindset is useful as the people the students interact with in the field receive mutual benefits from their experience together.

Cultivating keen observation is central to our approach, as only by being able to identify areas that are ripe for transformation can peacebuilding professionals learn about and contribute to processes of peacebuilding in conflict areas. This is one way in which students are able to apply their conflict-analysis tools to perceive what they are witnessing from multiple perspectives. It is an opportunity for them to add value to the local peacebuilders because they are able to shed light on a situation from an external perspective that those local to the potential transformation might not be aware of.

Another conceptual tool that is central to our approach is *listening power*. This refers to “the ability to construct shared understandings of subject matter, as in violent conflicts, between local actors and researchers to draw conclusions in a sometimes, dialectical process” (Fisher-Yoshida and Lopez 2021, 36). Equipped with this, students listen to the testimonies of people in the field and are guided to dig deeper into people’s experiences and knowledge of the conflict at hand dialectically. Grassroots peacebuilders and students come to conclusions, make academic contributions, and what’s most important, identify potential interventions. Building *listening power* as part of a peacebuilding skillset enriches peace professionals’ capacity to identify ripeness for transformation, create rapport with community members, learn the intimate experiences of the effects of violence, and design strategies to intervene doing no harm.

To engage rigorously with the concept of *listening power*, we modeled our approach on the pillars of Participatory Action Research (PAR). One of the definitions of PAR is that “it aims at creating an environment in which participants give and get valid information, make free and informed choices (including choosing to participate), and generate internal commitment to the results of their inquiry” (Argyris and Schon 1989). But PAR is as broad as the world of engaged researchers, and thus Chevalier and Buckles use the “big tent” metaphor to explain what PAR is. They claim: “Tricksters and mythic characters prone to disobey rules and conventional behavior [...] come in all shapes and forms, male and female, human and animal; They can mix attitudes from different species and transform

themselves to further subvert life as we know it [...] PAR is a similar phenomenon” (Chevalier and Buckles 2019, 11).

We define PAR as “being participatory in that relevant voices are heard, action oriented so that whatever is created and decided is implemented, and research-based in that there is rigor in how data is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and used” (Lopez and Fisher-Yoshida 2024, 59).

Guided by PAR, our approach instills a profound sense of commitment and co-responsibility to peacebuilding students. They leave the course committed to work in participatory ways and with a sense of responsibility to contribute to the work of grassroots peacebuilders, to academia, and to transforming the conditions that harm people.

Another important aspect of PAR is the effect that it has on the inner dynamics of grassroots peacebuilders. They take their work to be an object of research and also a vehicle for social transformation, and thus the knowledge and methodologies they acquire while engaging in PAR is integrated into their peacebuilding initiatives. One of the groups of community leaders that has engaged in PAR with us has been shown to benefit from our collaborative work. They utilize the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), a method we taught to them, to constantly reframe their own story as peacebuilders, to reorganize their yearly planning, and to reorient their work with the community. In workshops they offer to the children and youth of their neighborhood, they teach some of the findings we’ve gathered in the field, as well as utilize the theoretical and methodological tools we used in our collaborative research projects to deliver more effective workshops. In addition, we have seen how grassroots peacebuilders gain more legitimacy, especially in academic and government spaces, by being able to demonstrate collaborative work with researchers from institutions such as Columbia University.

How Students Engage with the Concepts

Another one of our students, Conrad, told us that being able to learn a method in the classroom and then teach it to others in the field was gratifying and insightful for his own practice. He said: “some of the most meaningful learning came from the fieldwork experiences and direct stakeholder engagement [...] to learn CMM² as a student then teach it back as an instructor in settings like *Colombo Americano* and *Fundacion Juanfe* in Medellin still resonates with me.”³

Learning can—perhaps should—be chaotic at times. There is learning in wrestling with the challenges that sometimes the field poses. For our Columbia University students, one of the challenges is the language. Conrad tells us: “I thought not being fluent in Spanish would have been a weakness, but the little Spanish I did know humbled me and I formed some wonderful connections with my classmates from Los Andes University simply by trying to speak Spanish with them.” At the end, what seemed chaotic and challenging, was transformed into being humbling and connecting.

Valeria, one of our students from Universidad de Los Andes, also reflected on the limitations of language. She said: “it was difficult talking about what moves me in English, talking about grief while experiencing my own grief,” but then she adds, “more than a difficulty, it was an invitation to think about learning [...] to always contextualize the position of others and understand that ideas that may

seem distant from you, and that may feel unacceptable, are also the result of the other person's context."

Here Valeria alludes to the importance of context even to thinking about her own positionality in the field and with her classmates. Valeria also claims that "thinking about peacebuilding is thinking about the construction of a process [...] it seems that the glue that cements such processes take[s] the physical form of joy, dance, and music [...] it also pushes me to recognizing myself outside the stories I carry to make sense of life, to come closer to others in the egalitarian territory of the senses."

Our work in the field is a long iterative process, with successes and failures. The end goals are as important as the process itself. To achieve the end goals we believe the process is key, and this is integrated into our experiential learning approach. We tell students: *protect the process!* Valeria's reflection demonstrates this point.

Laura, another of our students, reflects on the collective and participatory nature of our experiential learning approach. She said: "change doesn't necessarily start by implementing new public policies, but by standing firm in collective goals and purposes that guide actions towards a better future for all." Then she explains this in more detail: "one of the learnings that stood out the most for me is the importance of resilience in bottom-up peacebuilding [...] despite the multiple challenges that many community leaders face when they are creating and sustaining peacebuilding initiatives, such as painting 'living portraits' when the armed actors who committed the crimes are still active, or the lack of support they receive from government institutions, they still manage to persevere in their efforts to create a new reality apart from violence."

With these reflections from our students, we reaffirm our commitment to experiential learning and to engaging with Participatory Action Research approaches to guide our research, practice, and educating peace professionals.

Educação Popular: Conscientização

A central figure to our approach is the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian sociologist and educator, and architect of *popular education*.⁴ Freire's work, especially in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 2018), has been insightful to our experimental learning approach and has guided our research and practice. Freire's fundamental teaching is that education is to be liberating and that the more fully we enter into the social reality of those who experience the effects of violent oppression, "he or she can better transform it" (Freire 2018, 38).

Experiential learning is to be guided by Freire's concept of *conscientização*. He claims that to have truly liberating education, people should be conscious about their "fear of freedom" (Freire 2018, 35). *Conscientização* has to do with learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.⁵ It is to become conscious of the sociological contradictions that sustain oppressive conditions.

Indeed, peacebuilding is all about transforming the conditions that produce and reproduce violence and oppression in our societies. To do this, peacebuilding professionals need to be keen in understanding the contradictions of the systems that perpetuate the cycles of violence. We need, according to Freire, to break from our “circles of certainty” and be, on the one hand, critical about the conditions that perpetuate violence, and on the other, creative in establishing new conditions (Freire 2018, 38). The status quo that keeps us trapped in the “circles of certainty”—the same that keep us away from transforming our societies for good—must be put into question (Freire 2018, 36).

Doubt about our own assumptions, curiosity for the unknown and the stories of others, collective responsibility, trust in the processes, generosity, and indeed, *conscientização*, are the pillars that sustain our approach to experimental learning and liberating education for peace professionals and scholar-practitioners. Theory/knowledge that does not correspond to a social reality and that cannot be made practical, is theory/knowledge unable to transform the world.

In the field of peacebuilding there is a lot of work in the making (theoretical and practical), though most is crafted in offices of non-governmental organizations and university libraries. The field—where conflicts occur and are lived—are taken as mere receptors of the theory that is crafted in the comfort of offices and cafes.

Contributing to a Field

The impetus animating our work comes from our experience in the field; this led us to identify the lacunae existing in peacebuilding education. Our work contributes to ongoing educational tendencies that seek to prepare peacebuilding professionals in more rigorous ways and to ongoing conversations on research, practice, and education in the field of peacebuilding.

Here are some other initiatives taking place that our work responds to and seeks to contribute towards. “The United States Institute of Peace offers a course on peacebuilding that is described as an overview of the peacebuilding field and introduces the skills needed to succeed in it. Guided through an exploration of USIP’s 30+ year experience engaging with local partners in conflict zones around the world, learners are exposed to a set of key theories, skills and approaches to building peace and to real-world examples that exemplify the complex challenges of peacebuilding” (USIP n.d.).

The components of the course are as follows:

- Explain global trends in conflict over time and how these trends have given rise to the field of peacebuilding.
- Define many of the key factors that impact peacebuilding: in particular, peace, conflict, violence, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, resilience, and reconciliation.
- Understand how conflict sensitivity and inclusion, as well as local solutions for local conflicts, are pillars of peacebuilding.
- Outline key peacebuilding priorities, actors, and approaches.

The School of Professional Studies at New York University (NYU), offers a course titled, “Peacemaking and Peacebuilding.” This course is described as an exploration of “contemporary methods for peacemaking and peacebuilding as responses to real and pertinent internal and external conflicts, relating to internal and international peacebuilding measures. There will be an emphasis not only on addressing conflict through high-level diplomacy—often thought of as “peacemaking”—but also with an emphasis on what local communities increasingly understand as “peacebuilding” in the form of restorative justice and long-term peacebuilding efforts which consists of, but are not limited to, a set of highly interdependent social, religious, and political approaches to interpersonal, international conflict” (New York University n.d.). Also, the Jackson School of Global Affairs at Yale University constructed a peacebuilding initiative that offers a variety of courses on the theme of peace for undergraduate and graduate students. The objective of the peacebuilding initiative at Yale is to:

develop peace-based course offerings at the graduate and undergraduate levels. These courses will address political, economic, ethical, cultural, and biosocial dimensions of peacebuilding. Students will learn theoretical and methodological tools to think critically about what drives conflict and sustainable peace, learning from concrete examples of peacebuilding in regions of Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, and gaining in-depth understanding of issues related to human security, health and human rights, social inclusion and post-conflict justice. Students will apply their analysis to a range of peace-related research, practice, and policy. This knowledge will inform their coursework at Yale, summer internships, and careers in peacebuilding, public policy, global affairs, global health, and humanitarian work. (Yale University n.d.)

Similar to these courses, ours is guided by current theory and method on conflict and peace studies. The value added of our work is that we take such theories and methods to the field, with our students, and assess their applicability or lack thereof. In doing this, we have designed an experiential learning approach to peacebuilding that brings attention to the importance of doing fieldwork with students, as well as on the potential benefits that constructing knowledge in participatory ways can have in the fields of peacebuilding and conflict studies, through a collaborative process.

Format of the Class: The Peacebuilding Practicum

The Peacebuilding Practicum course takes place on multiple platforms: in the field, at universities, and online. The main part of the course is centered in the field for ten days, preceded by an orientation session online a few weeks before leaving. It is followed with assignments due after the students return.

We’ve been conducting this course for several years and partnering with another university in Colombia. It started with us being focused in Medellin and partnering with EAFIT University. We added an initial time in Bogota before heading to Medellin, and have been partnering with Universidad de Los Andes. Therefore, students from a university in Colombia and Columbia University come together to participate in the course.

At the orientation session, we provide an overview and address the assignments, especially those that need to be completed before departure, such as the readings. We want the students to have a firm conceptual understanding of the field and how to frame the learning they will have when coming together in the classroom and in the field with local peacebuilders. We review the agenda and cover logistics so students can be appropriately prepared. The ten days in the field are filled to the brim with activities and local travel, from morning until evening, including several evenings that have sessions as well. There isn't much time available for students to begin their preparations because they need to rest, enjoy the sights beyond the classroom, and engage in conversations with new colleagues they are meeting. In other words, they hit the ground running and need to be prepared scholastically, emotionally, and physically fit for the lively pace of the course.

One of the most amazing observations made by the instructors is how the students blend together. The students from within each of the participating schools may not know each other before the course and they certainly don't know students from the other university. The first day of class they sit in different clusters. As the days progress they intermingle so well with each other, you forget to which university they belong. This joining together is replicated once they meet with others in the field. Deep friendships are forged and we know that many stay in contact with one another long after the course is completed.

In the Field

Students from Columbia University travel to Bogota on their own and arrive by Sunday, so they will be prepared to begin learning together with their classmates at Universidad de Los Andes on Monday morning. The first four days are spent in Bogota with lectures and presentations in the mornings and fieldwork excursions in the afternoons. Being in Bogota provides opportunities for us to invite guest speakers to present on their work in journalism, or as a member of the Truth Commission, or as holders of political office. It provides an added depth of perspective from the inside out and a chance for students to interact with major players on the ground whom they would not have had access to otherwise.

The fourth evening we fly to Medellin for the more intensive fieldwork portion of the course. Both groups offer different perspectives and skills to the understanding of the Colombian conflict and the peacebuilding efforts. The students from Los Andes have more intensive and personal takes on the conflict over the years, with family members having been more directly affected in certain cases. The Columbia University students are more familiar with the concepts and tools we cover, and together they have informed conversations. Here is where we witness natural leadership qualities emerging. There is a lot of group work with an assortment of tasks. Different members of the group come forward at different times because someone may be familiar with the method for systems mapping, while another might be good in visual representation, and a third familiar with the historical context. We have been working with different community groups, art-based groups, and those youth-led, in Medellin for more than ten years. That is why we are able to have deep access into what is happening on the ground in the peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and human rights arenas, especially in Medellin. Members of these groups present to our students and the students have chances to interact

and apply the concepts and skills they are learning to these real-life scenarios. They share their learning with the youth community leaders.

Some of the groups we've been working with address conflict transformation through the arts. For example, *Casa Kolacho* was formed after a famous rapper, "Kolacho," was killed by the paramilitary shortly after a large-scale violent attack called Operation Orion in comuna 13, Medellin. They work with youth to provide alternatives to violence through the four lines of hip-hop. Another group in the same comuna 13, Son Bata, work with Afro-Colombian youth in conflict transformation and identity conflict, also using hip-hop and more recently, technology.

Escuela Popular de Arte (EPA),⁶ focuses on implementing skills and discipline in youth through teaching the schools and forms of graffiti. They have a chance to express themselves creatively and change their narratives about themselves, from the violence and seemingly limited opportunities around them, to what they can accomplish with a sense of agency. *Las Pirañas* is a women's graffiti crew who want to "feminize the streets." Graffiti is a male-dominated art form and painting in the streets can be rough for women. This group is also studying feminism in their graduate courses and they recently made a documentary about their work to reach a wider audience.

Learning takes place on multiple levels, including informally through perspective sharing. Together, the students and these groups of youth-led peacebuilders forge deep understanding and mutual respect by what they each contribute. The youth leaders in these organizations benefit from the conflict analysis the students offer and the respect they are given by students deeply admiring what they have been able to accomplish. The students have a chance to see conflict transformation at work and it brings to life the theories, tools, and skills they are learning in the classroom.

Demonstrating Learning

There are opportunities throughout the course for students, individually or in groups, to reflect on site visits, readings and other resources, presentations by invited speakers, and applications of class content. The culminating activity is a group conflict analysis with intervention recommendations for one of the organizations we met during our time in Bogota, Medellin, or a third city we selected for the trip that year. Students apply a variety of concepts and tools we covered in class, some required, such as creating a conflict map that includes the identification of actors, structures, and dynamics that both contribute to the conflict, reduce the likelihood it will emerge, or lessen its intensity.

In addition, students are asked to apply a dynamical systems approach because of the complexity of the prolonged "*violencia*" of 60+ years. In this activity they use a shared platform called MIRO, so that all group members have access to the map at the same time. As part of this mapping, group members will identify the different elements in the system, such as cultural norms, historical events, actors, institutions, policies, that have both led to prolonging or escalating the violence, as well as reducing the violence. They identify feedback loops that connect the elements and reveal the dynamic patterns. The goal is to understand how the energy moves around the system to identify openings for intervention that will transform violent dynamics to produce spaces of peace and coexistence.

They are asked to be creative and utilize whatever else is relevant to them and the perspective they are taking. Ideally, they gain insights from the group at the center of the case study because they have been working in the field to transform their local conflicts. The mapping and analysis the students engage in is a way to elevate and enhance the work of these groups to be more effective in achieving sustainable peace.

The groups present for 20-30 minutes and all members must present one part of the case study. The audience is their fellow classmates and some people they have met in the field. Following the presentations, we engage in a lively discussion where we all have a chance to reflect more deeply on the cases. As a follow-up, we send the presentation and accompanying materials to the group at the center of the case study for their continued learning. This follows the PAR approach we amplify, and the organizations in the case study participate in and benefit from this analysis and recommendations.

Along the years, we have noticed some patterns in the proposals/recommendations presented by students. Sustainability, both in time and in financial resources, of the peacebuilding initiatives is a general concern for students. Most tend to recommend ways to create more sustainable initiatives by appealing to funding opportunities outside of the city's participatory budgeting and for increased social entrepreneurship opportunities. In terms of sustaining initiatives over time, they tend to propose revised organizational structures based on the methods learned in class, such as the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). In their conflict maps, they tend to identify similar issues across the years. Matters such as "invisible borders"⁷ within communities affected by violence, lack of participation in the decision-making process in public policy, and a general disconnection between public policy and community needs, are mostly present in students' analysis of the cases.

Commentary

Several students have acknowledged how privileged they felt by meeting people in the field. One quote, "Thank you so much for giving us access to your network," reflects this appreciation. We were moved by these sentiments and at the same time didn't think otherwise in planning the course. All parties benefit from the interactions. It did give us pause to acknowledge that indeed, we have built special relationships over the years and the value of continuing to show up should not be underestimated.

Notes

1. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8yg89WYy7E>.
2. CMM is the Coordinated Management of Meaning, a practical communication theory developed by W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen in the 1970s.
3. Taken from informal conversations with students after the course, between September and October 2024.
4. Popular education is a concept based on critical theory and class to refer to a type of education that seeks to transform societies. Developed by Paulo Freire.
5. In Freire (2028), see chapter 3—translator's note.
6. The name of this organization is influenced by Paulo Freire's concept of *popular education*. See footnote 3.
7. Invisible borders are imaginary divisions created by gangs to geographically distribute their territorial control. These borders condition the way inhabitants of the neighborhoods move from one place to another.

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**Climate Change as a Significant
Global Challenge:
Pathways to Civil Discourse***International Journal for Peace and Public Leadership*

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<https://doi.org/10.63470/OYRR8376>**James Rodger Fleming***Charles A. Dana Professor of Science,
Technology, and Society, Emeritus, Colby College***Abstract**

Climate change is widely recognized as a pressing global challenge. While it is commonly framed as a scientific and environmental issue, its complexity extends far beyond atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations and international treaties. Climate change is deeply rooted in historical, political, and humanitarian contexts, necessitating a broader, interdisciplinary approach. Despite its significance, public discourse surrounding climate change remains polarized and contentious, often driven by media sensationalism. This paper seeks to illuminate the historical and cultural dimensions of climate change discourse, linking contemporary concerns with longstanding environmental apprehensions. By drawing on the history of environmental determinism and climate-related anxieties, it offers a more nuanced understanding of the factors shaping today's debates. The goal is to move beyond ideological entrenchment and cultivate a more constructive, informed, and balanced conversation, aimed at establishing pathways to civil discourse, better cooperation, and responsible environmental stewardship.

Key terms: Climate change, Environmental determinism, Ideological entrenchment, Polarization, Public and civil discourse, Responsible environmental stewardship.

Climate change is a significant global challenge, deemed by many to be an existential threat. It is now at the center of an international agenda to increase scientific understanding, protect the environment, and ameliorate suffering. More than a topic of scientific investigation, climate change constitutes, above all, a complex set of political and humanitarian problems with deep historical roots—problems that cannot be reduced to the mere concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere or solved by international treaties.¹ Unfortunately, climate change has become a contentious and litigious issue, a polarizing topic ripe for new approaches and new insights that open avenues for shared dialogue and build constructive relations. Most people know very little about climate change other than what is reported in popular media. No one has yet linked current climate issues to their deeper cultural roots. Here we intend to do so.

Climate change is a seriously polarized issue in need of fresh air and sunshine, discussion, debate, and thoughtful decision-making. Full, fair, and extensive expositions of its extraordinary complexity—including historical, scientific, political, and cultural dimensions—are not readily available. Today's information landscape—print, broadcast, and online—typically offers limited or one-sided views, making it quite difficult to gather reliable information and quite easy to avoid the

full diversity of reasoned viewpoints. Name calling, cancel culture, and partisan media are all too real and get in the way of the discourses that make democracy healthy and effective. Here, drawing from the long history of environmental determinism and the history of climate change ideas, we investigate the deep roots of climate apprehensions and animus and place these ancient sentiments into conversation with current science and pressing public policy issues, seeking to supplant the modern-day rancor with new pathways to a more enlightened, peaceful, and civil discourse that provides new hope for lasting and just solutions to protect the citizens of Earth and the planetary environment.

In recent decades, humanity has arrived at the realization that global environmental change involves the collective activities, intentional or not, of us all. Resource extraction and ecosystem disruption have reached unprecedented levels, equal or perhaps surpassing those of natural forces. Since the mid-20th century, apprehensions have intensified regarding a number of issues, including population growth, energy consumption, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and pollution. This is occurring on the largest levels, and we find ourselves questioning the sustainability and even future habitability of the planet. Much of the concern is rightfully focused on changes in the atmosphere caused by human activities, including acid deposition, stratospheric ozone depletion, and unsustainable climate warming. These highly complex technical issues are not the sole purview of scientists and engineers; the problems they represent are rooted in collective human behavior—they belong to us all.

In addition to an ever-growing number of scientific and technical studies, there is a growing awareness that understanding the human impact on the environment is equally important. This sentiment is manifest in the rising tide of initiatives, regulations, laws, and treaties intended to alter human behavior in fundamental ways. New voices from the press, the public, the state, and the environmental movement have flooded the literature, providing new, often polarizing perspectives. Along with the need for clarity on what must and should be done, a cacophony of perspectives makes it appear that those who understand the climate system most profoundly have lost control of the narrative. Reasoned perspectives have given way to voices that alternatively conjure or deny the apocalypse based on a global temperature change of less than one half of one percent. Those sometimes referred to as “warmists” and “green extremists,” with little knowledge of the climate, claim to speak on behalf of the planet, with voices ever more shrill and strident. Some even make the unreasonable claim that climate science, in all its complexity, is settled. Others, deemed “skeptics” (a venerable scientific position), claim there is still much to learn about the climate system, while so-called “climate change deniers” ostensibly believe the risks are exaggerated, maintaining that there is no real emergency and we can and should do little to nothing about climate change. The result has been inaction, in large part due to public uncertainty and lack of awareness of environmental risks.

Climate is multidimensional. It is a spatially and temporally variable entity, divided, according to the classification scheme developed in the early twentieth century by Wladimir Köppen, into five main types and some thirty subtypes based on temperature and rainfall criteria.² However, climate is much more than the average state of the atmosphere as indicated by weather statistics; it is

something much more fundamental. Climate is the fabric of our lives, conditioning where we live, what we eat, what we wear, and fundamentally, what we choose to do, and a multiplicity of other things, both profound and quotidian. Climate, society, and culture are intertwined. It shapes agricultural practices, religious and ideological sentiments, and perceptions of vulnerability to extreme conditions. The atmosphere is both intimate and universal; it is within our lungs and it constitutes the global commons.³ It is as personal as a breath of fresh air or a refreshing drink of spring water. Yet, with every passing storm, cold wave, or heat wave, and even under a clear blue sky, our perceptions of nature have been altered by widespread warnings of the destructive reach of global civilization on the planet and its climate.

Scientists equate climate to average weather, or the long-term pattern of weather in a particular region. More recently, given the rise of computer modeling, scientists refer to climate as “the slowly varying aspects of the atmosphere–hydrosphere–land surface system.”⁴ Climate and climate change are intimately related. Both are at the center of the debate over greenhouse warming and the frequency and intensity of tropical storms. Some argue that climate and weather are distinct, but they are intimately related. For instance, any alteration in the Earth’s radiation or heat balance (like brightening clouds or dimming the sun) would impact the general atmospheric circulation, affecting the jet stream and storm tracks. This would, in turn, change the weather. On the flip side, changing the intensity or path of severe storms, or modifying weather over large areas would alter cloudiness, temperature, and precipitation patterns. These changes could have significant effects on monsoonal flows and the overall atmospheric circulation. Systematic repetition of such interventions would ultimately influence the global climate. Thus, although weather and climate involve distinct temporal and spatial scales, they are indeed connected.

Historical Perspectives

The historical dimension of global climate change is worthy of increased scholarly attention.⁵ Climate science is more than an assemblage of insights from established disciplines such as astronomy, chemistry, geography, geology, meteorology, and physics. As a newly emerging hybrid field of inquiry, it requires much deeper interdisciplinary understanding of the long-term interactions of climate and culture. Nevertheless, the scientific and policy literature, with notable exceptions, tends to be ahistorical and rather narrowly focused on current issues.⁶

Given the gaps in existing literature, historians have a unique opportunity to enhance our understanding of global environmental change. This is especially true because, over decades, centuries, and millennia, our ideas about the global environment have evolved alongside the environment itself. History matters. However, this insight has yet to fully reach the science and policy communities. With climate change as the focal point, a new interdisciplinary perspective is emerging, encompassing both elite and popular concerns. What experiences, knowledge, and fears have people had about climate change in the past? How have they intervened? What paths have led us to the current state of climate apprehension? Why is the discussion so heated and filled with animus? Can we truly claim to fully understand climate change and address environmental protection without considering intellectual, social, and cultural history? In essence, what can the

study of history offer toward finding a peaceful and lasting solution to current environmental challenges?

Roots in Antiquity

In ancient times climate was thought to be determined by geographical setting, depending only on the height of the sun above the horizon and the slope of the land. The temperate habitable zones were located between the (too frigid) poles and the (too torrid) equatorial zone. The medical geography of Hippocrates of Kos (c. 460–c. 370 BCE) linked human health and climate. In this tradition, illness was attributed to an imbalance in bodily fluids (the four humors), due, in large part, to the effects of a person's exposure to seasonal changes and other geographical factors. In this tradition, airs, waters, and places exerted direct influences, if not control over human health. Again, the healthiest places to live were in the temperate regions of the earth.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) held strong opinions regarding character and climate. According to his political philosophy, people from a cold climate, as in northern Europe, are “full of spirit, but wanting in intelligence and skill.”⁷ While they are free, they lack political organization and are incapable of governing others. On the other hand, those from hot regions, specifically the natives of Asia, are intelligent and inventive, but “they are wanting in spirit, and therefore they are always in a state of subjection and slavery.”⁸ According to Aristotle, the Hellenic race, which is situated in temperate climes between them, is likewise intermediate in character, being high-spirited and also intelligent. “Hence it continues free, and is the best governed of any nation, and if it could be formed into one state, would be able to rule the world.”⁹ Aristotle's student, Theophrastus (c.371–c.287 BCE) held that local climates can be modified by concerted human agency through deforestation and irrigation.¹⁰ Such notions helped inform, if not determine, attitudes of cultural superiority among groups that considered themselves “civilized,” while fostering prejudice and discrimination against “barbarians”—those uncultured peoples from different climes perceived to be primitive, passive, savage, or in modern terms, underdeveloped.

Race remained a major factor throughout history. The Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406 CE) linked skin color to environmental conditions. He wrote that black skin was directly attributable to the hot climate of sub-Saharan Africa. Like his predecessors, he argued that human behavior and culture, including customs and governance structures, were climatically determined. Khaldun's influential writings were widely disseminated. In translation, they served to reinforce and support cultural prejudices during the era of European colonial expansion.¹¹

Enlightenment

Climate determinism, transmitted by generations of scholars, became a perennial philosophy, reinforcing attitudes of cultural superiority and disdain for others. For example, Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Baptiste Abbé Du Bos (1670–1742 CE), member (later perpetual secretary) of the French Academy, linked climate change to cultural changes and creativity. In his 1719 work, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*,¹² ostensibly an essay on aesthetics, Du Bos advanced the notion of temperate zone superiority, arguing that artistic genius flourished only in countries with suitable climates (always between 25 and 52 degrees north), that changes in climate

must have occurred to account for the rise and decline of the creative spirit in particular nations, and that, largely due to cultivation and settlement, the climate of Europe and the Mediterranean area was now warmer than it had been in ancient times. For Du Bos, environmental changes, many of which were human caused, explained both the cultural differences between nations and differences within the same nation in different eras.

As I have argued previously, the basic argument of Du Bos may be encapsulated as follows: “As the grapes of one particular region or year produce a characteristic vintage, so, according to Du Bos, the inhabitants of a particular nation in a given epoch represent a cultural vintage distilled from the overall quality of the air and soil. Only the most favored nations and epochs produced superior cultural distillations; most produced table wines or vinegars.”¹³ He cited four examples of “illustrious ages” which gave rise to extraordinarily creative cultures: Greece under Philip of Macedon, Rome under Julius and Augustus Caesar, sixteenth-century Italy at the time of Popes Julius the Second and Leo the Tenth, and his own—seventeenth-century France under Louis the Fourteenth, thus placing the art and culture of Europe at the center of world history.

Du Bos, who derived his idea that climate influenced culture from the writings of the ancients, also had a significant influence on his contemporaries, most notably, the French philosopher Charles de Secondat Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755 CE), who, in his influential book of 1748, *De L'Esprit des loix*, advanced the theory that geography and climate exert powerful influences on individuals and societies. Following Aristotle, Montesquieu wrote that people living in warmer countries possess fiery, but vicious personalities, whereas people from northern nations are braver, but cold and rigid, thus reintroducing climatic determinism to modern thought. An adherent of Hippocratic medicine, Montesquieu claimed that the health of individuals and the governance of nations were directly influenced by hot, cold, and temperate climates.¹⁴

The Scottish savant David Hume (1711-1776 CE) professed a racial theory of climate. He declared the supremacy of “whites” over people of African descent, asserting that they must constitute two distinct species. On the subject of climate change, Hume followed Du Bos explicitly, writing in his essay, “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations,” that the advance of cultivation in the nations of Europe had caused a gradual change in the climate in the past two millennia. He also thought similar, but much more rapid changes were occurring in the Americas, with the land becoming more temperate in proportion as the woods are felled.”¹⁵

The ideas of Du Bos and those influenced by his thinking generated a powerful vision of the climates of Europe and America strongly influencing culture and in turn, strongly linked to human agency through the efforts of settlers and colonists. By the end of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers had come to the following conclusions regarding climate change, culture, and cultivation:

1. Cultures are determined or at least strongly shaped by climate.
2. The climate of Europe had moderated since ancient times.
3. The change was caused by the gradual clearing of the forests and by cultivation.
4. The American climate was undergoing rapid and dramatic changes caused by

settlement.

5. The amelioration of the American climate would make it more fit for European-type civilization and less suitable for the primitive native cultures.¹⁶

Such ideas crossed the Atlantic in two directions. Initially, travel accounts from the New World influenced some of the climate ideas of European thinkers. Their works, in turn, influenced generations of colonials and early American nationals.

Scientific Developments

Travelers and settlers in North America observed that, compared to conditions in the Old World, the atmosphere was more variable, the climate harsher, and the storms more intense. Understanding the reasons for these differences in a region situated further south than most European nations posed a significant challenge in natural philosophy. Many Europeans disparaged the climate of the New World and considered the colonists reckless for risking their lives, health, and families in such an environment. On the other hand, colonists held out hope that the American climate was becoming more moderate due to their efforts to clear the forests and drain the marshes. Those more philosophically inclined thought that it would take many years of observations to resolve the issue.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826 CE) advocated a practical policy: "Measurements of the American climate should begin immediately, before the climate has changed too drastically. These measurements should be repeated . . . once or twice in a century, to show the effect of clearing and culture towards the changes of climate."¹⁷ This was the beginning of more systematic data collection and the beginning of more informed scientific analysis, moving the discussion away from philosophical and literary generalizations.

In 1842 Dr. Samuel Forry (1811-1844 CE) published an analysis of weather data gathered by the U.S. Army Medical Department over three decades at over sixty military posts. Forry's analysis indicated that: (a) climates are stable and no accurate thermometric observations warrant the conclusion of climatic change, (b) climates are susceptible of melioration by the changes wrought by the labors of man, but (c) these effects are mainly local and are much less influential than those of physical geography.¹⁸ Lorin Blodget (1823-1901 CE), an associate of the Smithsonian Institution and author of *Climatology of the United States* (1857), agreed. After preparing a massive compilation of all the available temperature data, he concluded that climates must be assumed permanent until proven changeable. A decade later, Charles A. Schott (1826-1901 CE), a scientist with the U.S. Coast Survey, reported that his analysis of climatic records indicated no change in temperature or rainfall since measurements began.¹⁹ Cleveland Abbe (1838-1916 CE), chief scientist in the U.S. Army Signal Office, the national weather service of the time, agreed that the old debates about climate change had finally been settled, with no important climatic change yet demonstrated since human history began.²⁰ In 1899 Abbe defined the climate as "the average about which the temporary conditions permanently oscillate; it assumes and implies permanence."²¹ Abbe dismissed unproven notions that the growth or destruction of forests, the building of railroads or telegraphs, and the widespread cultivation of crops had systematically changed the

climate. Thus, the shift was complete, circa 1890, from literary to empirical studies of climate—complete, that is, until the carbon dioxide theory of climate change became dominant and 20th-century ideas about climate determinism again reared their ugly heads.

Carbon Dioxide and Climate Change

The debate over climate change caused by human settlement ended just about the time that scientists discovered that the earth had experienced ice ages and interglacial epochs—tremendous advances and retreats of the glaciers over geologic time periods. These discoveries, especially the need to explain multiple glaciations, generated a plethora of complex but highly speculative theories of climatic change. Leading theories included those of John Tyndall (1820-1893 CE), Professor of Natural Philosophy at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, who, beginning in 1859, measured energy absorption by different gases and showed that water vapor and carbonic acid, the hydrated version of carbon dioxide, absorb energy at a much greater rate than regular air. He thought that changes in the amount of these gases in the atmosphere could have produced “all the mutations of climate which the researches of geologists reveal.”²²

In 1896, the renowned Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius (1859-1927 CE), published an article “On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air Upon the Temperature of the Ground.” In this work, which was based on his modeling efforts, he attempted to explain alternating glacial and interglacial periods by the ability of carbon dioxide to absorb infrared radiation. He argued that variations in this trace component of the atmosphere could have a very great influence on the overall heat budget. His calculations, which were based on a very limited understanding of infrared radiation, indicated that a halving of the percentage of carbon dioxide in the air would lower the temperature of the Earth’s surface by 4° C; on the other hand, a doubling of the percentage of carbon dioxide in the air would raise the temperature by the same amount. Arrhenius was not concerned about increasing levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels. That would come later, from others. Industry played a minor role. He regarded “volcanic exhalations” as the chief source of carbonic acid for the atmosphere. Despite his recently growing reputation as a “father” of the greenhouse effect, his work was motivated by a desire to explain the ice ages.²³ Rather than being unique or especially prophetic about the effects of a CO₂ doubling, his results were only superficially similar to the results of today’s climate models. You might say he got the right answer for the wrong reasons.²⁴

Until recent decades, most scientists did not believe that rising CO₂ levels would contribute to global warming. The prevailing thought was that a small amount of CO₂ would absorb all the available longwave radiation, thus any further increases in CO₂ would not affect the planet’s radiative heat balance. This perspective contrasts sharply with both the Enlightenment view, which held that human intervention in the form of land clearing and cultivation would beneficially alter the climate, and today’s understanding of a harmful “super greenhouse effect” driven by industrial emissions and widespread deforestation. In fact, it was not until the latter half of the 20th century that increased CO₂ was recognized as a significant factor in climate change.

In 1938, the narrative began to shift when British steam engineer G.S. Callendar (1897-1964 CE) presented a paper to the Royal Meteorological Society. He argued that CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel consumption had led to a slight but measurable increase in Earth's temperature, approximately one-quarter of a degree Centigrade over the previous fifty years. The following year, Callendar emphasized that humanity was significantly altering the slow-moving carbon cycle by "throwing some 9,000 tons of carbon dioxide into the air each minute."²⁵ In a remarkable series of papers, published between 1938 and 1961, Callendar combined the record of rising temperatures in the early twentieth century, estimates of rising CO₂ concentrations from industry and deforestation, and new understandings of the infrared spectrum to warn that anthropogenic global warming was a novel, real, and possibly unwelcome phenomenon. He considered it "a commonplace" that humanity had the capacity to speed up natural processes and had interfered with the carbon cycle, the composition of the atmosphere, and thus the climate. The noted oceanographer Roger Revelle referred to the warming of the early twentieth century linked to industrial emissions as the "Callendar Effect."²⁶

In the 1950s, technological developments in computer modeling and access to space provided new tools for climate change science, while raising public awareness of geophysical issues. In 1955, the U.S. government established the first major climate modeling center, the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory, now located at Princeton University. The International Geophysical Year of 1957-58 provided an organizational and financial boost to academic geophysics, including meteorology. Regular measurements of the CO₂ content of the atmosphere, initiated at this time, showed a worrisome secular increase.

The Reemergence of Climate Determinism

Nineteenth-century geographers like Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904 CE) claimed that there were multiple influences of nature on the body and spirit of each individual, on the migration and expansion of populations, and on the social structure and formation of nations.²⁷ Through his influence, the perennial philosophy of climate determinism reached the 20th century where it became a pervasive ideology, the remnants of which are still with us today. In 1997, the U.S. Department of Education website advised that, "climate very much affects the character of a place" and that "the amount of sun or rain, heat or cold, the direction and strength of the wind, all determine such things as how people dress, how well crops grow, and the extent to which people will want to live in a particular spot."²⁸ The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency *World Fact Book* uses the pejorative term "enervating" to describe the equatorial climate of the Republic of the Congo and the effect of high temperatures and humidity on visitors. Do they really mean to impugn an entire nation like the Congo with the multiple negative connotations attached to the term enervating (physical weakness, nervous impairment, indolence, wanting in strength of character, spiritless, unmanly, effeminate)?²⁹ In 1990, the United Nations Environmental Programme convened a workshop, "On Assessing Winners and Losers in the Context of Global Warming." Discussion centered on possible social impacts of climate change under the assumption that global warming would influence different areas of the world in different ways, both negatively and positively, and the losers would be predominantly the Southern tier or developing nations, which could expect border conflicts and environmental refugees. They concluded that all people would likely suffer

physiological and psychological stress in part due to erratic weather patterns caused by global warming, but it would be more extreme in developing nations.³⁰

Al Gore, author of the widely discussed book, *Earth in the Balance*, flirted with climate determinism in a chapter titled “Climate and Civilization: A Short History,” where he made the following gross generalizations linking both human evolution and social stability directly to climate change: that (1) our distant ancestors, *Australopithecines*, left the forests five million years ago and stood on hind legs because of global cooling; that (2) the ice ages led to the emergence of *Homo sapiens* because “incredible ecological change put a premium on the larger brains needed to adapt to rapidly changing climate conditions”; and that (3) the widespread food riots, unprecedented crime epidemics, and a dramatic increase in the number of suicides and executions following the “year without a summer” (1816) gave great impetus to the “bureaucratic, administrative tendencies of the modern state.”³¹

Beyond climatic determinism, there is also a recent tendency I call “molecular reductionism” that focuses attention on a particular microscopic entity—an atom, molecule, or virus—in an attempt to codify and characterize an era and its widespread concerns. We know firsthand that we are living immediately downstream from the deadly variants of the virus COVID-19. We also know what that did to society. Here are some other examples: Radium, uranium, and plutonium symbolized the dawn of the nuclear age, promising both new medical treatments and unlimited energy, but also threatening total annihilation (including omnicide from nuclear war and the death of the biosphere from nuclear winter). DNA promised to serve as the “code of codes” for life itself, reducing the complexity of organisms to their macro-molecular sequences. Regarding weather and climate, the molecule silver iodide (AgI) was considered to be a “trigger” mechanism for cloud seeding that would allow widespread modification or even control of the weather. In the 1970s and 1980s the focus shifted to reducing acid rain and protecting stratospheric ozone (O₃) through the Clean Air acts and the Montreal Protocol. In the 21st century carbon dioxide (CO₂) has become the most feared molecule on the planet, an international symbol of human intervention in the climate system, codifying both affluence, inequity, and apprehension. In trace amounts it is increasingly being called a “climate killer”—toxic to civilization.³² In much more concentrated amounts, it is a narcotic or asphyxiating gas, known in antiquity as *spiritus letalis*—but to agriculturalists, it is plant food.

Recent Developments

Since the mid-1980s, the primary environmental concern has been global warming due to increased levels of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases. In 1988, NASA scientist James Hansen informed Congress and the world that “global warming has begun.” He claimed to have detected the “signal” in the climate’s natural variability, suggesting that we might face extreme warming, potentially akin to a runaway greenhouse effect.³³ Although Hansen later amended his statements, his initial declaration marked the beginning of widespread concern about global warming. This, coupled with ongoing alarming reports about the stratospheric ozone layer since 1985, fundamentally changed humanity’s relationship with the Earth’s atmosphere. What was once a clear blue sky now seemed threatening. How can one enjoy a beach day knowing the risk of sunburn could lead to skin cancer? Are devastating hurricanes the result of human impact on the climate? This is not yet proven. What

about heat waves, droughts, and floods? Again, not directly. Nevertheless, both realists and skeptics must acknowledge that human activities have indeed altered the chemical composition of the atmosphere and our attitudes about it.

The question is not whether human agency has contributed to environmental change. That was answered in the affirmative long ago by the likes of Theophrastus, David Hume, and G.S. Callendar. More significant questions today involve the magnitude and consequences of damages caused by anthropogenic stresses and how to formulate just, effective, and lasting solutions.

In 1988, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environmental Programme established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an organization of 193 governments, to provide “regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation,” and “to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies.”³⁴ This new emphasis on the global environment coincided with the end of the Cold War. One year later the Berlin Wall came down, and in 1991 the Soviet Union dissolved into its component republics.

The first IPCC assessment report in 1990 underscored the significance of climate change as a global challenge, urging the need for international cooperation. This report laid the groundwork for the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Rio in 1992. This pivotal treaty aims to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at levels that prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.³⁵ Additionally, the Rio conference saw the enactment of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which aspires to “make peace with nature.” This convention acknowledges that biological diversity encompasses more than just plants, animals, and micro-organisms along with their ecosystems. It also pertains to human beings and our collective necessities, such as food security, medicinal resources, clean air and water, shelter, and a healthy environment in which to live.³⁶

The FCCC supports the annual Conference of the Parties (CoP) which, in its annual meetings adopted the Kyoto Protocol (1997), setting binding emission reduction targets for industrialized countries; introduced the Bali Roadmap (2007) to include all countries in a collective effort to mitigate climate change; agreed at Copenhagen (2009) on a goal to keep global temperature increases below 2 degrees Celsius while providing financing to developing countries; and adopted the Paris Agreement (2015), aimed at limiting global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees C. Although these treaties and conferences have done much good, especially in raising international awareness, major threats to biodiversity and human welfare remain, greenhouse gas concentrations continue to rise, and scientists still do not agree on what constitutes “dangerous” anthropogenic intervention in the climate. No matter how often or how loudly the claim is repeated, there is no agreement that an incremental increase in an atmospheric trace gas constitutes an existential threat to humanity. In 2022 the U.S. Congress passed the Global Catastrophic Risk Management Act requiring the Department of Homeland Security to conduct an expert assessment of potential global catastrophic and existential risks from a number of perceived threats, including artificial intelligence (AI), super volcanoes, asteroid and comet impacts, nuclear war, severe

pandemics, and sudden and severe changes to Earth's climate.³⁷ While the adverse effects of climate change are undoubtedly increased by human activity, their report concluded that climate change did not constitute a global or existential risk; the impacts are primarily local or regional, for example in severe storm damage or regional drought conditions.

The Conference of the Parties

In November 2024, the 29th Conference of the Parties (CoP 29) took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, attended by some 83,000 representatives of 193 United Nations member states, as well as non-governmental organizations, and related stakeholders. Delegations from developing nations dwarfed in numbers those from Europe and North America. The presidents of the United States and the European Union and the Premier of China, did not attend. Recognizing that climate change extends beyond environmental degradation and intensifies migration, resource competition, and social unrest, particularly in vulnerable regions, the meeting spotlighted connections between climate change and global conflict. The Baku conference focused more on finance than on cutting emissions, with developing nations seeking massive increases in funding from the developed world.

At the conclusion of the meeting, many conference delegates and climate activists expressed their dissatisfaction with the process. Some representatives from developing nations, hoping for, but not receiving a larger financial commitment from the West, left a week early in disgust. After two weeks of rancorous debate and bitter name calling, the richer countries offered to pay \$300 billion per year by 2035 to promote mitigation and adaptation, well short of the \$1.3 trillion requested by the poorer countries. China refused to pay a cent, and Azerbaijan, a petrostate, made it clear that it was not going to abandon its God-given gift of oil and gas. A representative from Nigeria called the final conference agreement “a joke.”³⁸ With the large influx of delegates, accommodations in the city of Baku were severely stressed. Prices for a standard hotel room peaked at \$676 per night, several hundred percent higher than normal. Adding in airfare, including private jets, food, hospitality, and incidentals, yields an estimated cost for the meeting well north of \$500 million and possibly much more. These UN summits often feature big promises with little follow-through. Wealthier countries have, over time, pledged greater financial support to poorer countries, but there are questions about how much of that money is actually new—and how much is just existing aid that gets relabeled. Such is the sad state of climate discourse. As a result, some experts have concluded that it's time to rethink the structure of U.N. climate summits, which have been going on since 1995, and try something else.

A Path Forward

Tackling the full environmental, social, and cultural dimensions of climate change are enormously difficult tasks that must involve designing cleaner, quieter cities, more equitable allocation and use of natural resources, and most importantly, getting beyond the ancient and perennial tendency to denigrate others. The solutions need to be irenic—aimed at constructive discourse and reconciliation—not agonistic, combative, or aggressive. They need to take place in a critically important layer of air we all inhabit within two meters of the ground. It is the layer where the atmosphere interacts directly with humans. You live in this layer, and you can experience it at the dining table and the conference table (1 meter) and where people gather to stand and talk (2

meters). It is the “Critical Zone,” the sphere of human affairs, and the most influential layer of Earth’s atmosphere where we express our opinions. Our future and the future of the planet will be decided here.³⁹

Hippocrates and Aristotle invoked natural philosophy, but rather than building on universal principles, they set the tone for environmental determinism and animus between nations and between peoples from different regions and environments. During the Enlightenment, ideas based on these questionable philosophical assumptions were revived by Abbé Du Bos and his followers. These ideas resonated with American colonists and early patriots who believed that settlement and cultivation were improving the New World’s climate. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this culture-bound discussion of climatic change was replaced by ostensibly objective but still culturally influenced scientific attempts to measure and study the atmosphere and its changes, and reduce atmospheric phenomena to equations of motion, chemical constituents, and other “manageable” components. However, the atmosphere is too complex and its influence cannot be reduced to its constituent parts.

We need to think more holistically and practice greater care as we seek a peaceful resolution. The Golden Rule principle, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,”⁴⁰ constitutes a universal aspirational goal for human behavior. On a larger, but still human scale, it is the mission of world religions, “to realize world peace in the new context of the global village.”⁴¹ There is more to be done, however. No matter how large the U.N. or other meetings become, they remain contentious. We are in need of a golden rule for the environment that will move challenging climate conversations beyond their current focus on science, policy, and economics, beyond their current acrimony, and well beyond the ancient and perennial animus of environmental determinism to open up new pathways to civil discourse, peaceful reconciliation, and global environmental protection.

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“No Angel”: Sun Tzu on the Russia-Ukraine War and Zelensky’s Quagmire

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Abstract

Ukraine’s path to peace remains uncertain as the Russia-Ukraine War enters its fourth year. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky faces a four-pronged crisis—military, political, economic, and diplomatic—that has significantly weakened his country’s strategic position. Despite continued resistance, prolonged conflict has placed Ukraine in an increasingly precarious situation. Further, President Trump criticized the Ukrainian leader for being “no angel” in the war and pulled a diplomatic Kabul stunt on Ukraine. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth delivered a three-no’s outline in Brussels, stating that Ukraine’s NATO membership is not realistic, that its border with Russia cannot go back to the pre-2014 line, and that the U.S. is not sending boots on the ground. From a blameless national hero to today’s abandoned pawn, Zelensky and his country have experienced a dramatic roller coaster in global politics in the last three years. Where did things go wrong for Zelensky and Ukraine? What led to this four-pronged crisis? Does Trump’s criticism hold merit?

*This article examines Zelensky’s strategic decisions through the lens of Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, alongside alliance theory, particularly the risks associated with the patron’s dilemma. The first section explores alliance theory, particularly the dangers of the **patron’s dilemma**. The analysis applies two key principles from *The Art of War*: “Know your enemy and know yourself” and “Don’t Enter into Alliances Unless You Know the Designs of Your Potential Allies”—labeled **P1 and P2 respectively**—to assess Ukraine’s strategic miscalculations. This case study provides valuable insights for smaller states navigating great-power politics, highlighting the risks of overreliance on external allies. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of strategic prudence for weaker powers caught in great-power competition.*

Keywords: Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*; Vladimir Putin; Volodymyr Zelensky; Donald Trump; Patron’s Dilemma.

Introduction

Ukraine’s path to peace looks grim and uncertain. As the Russia-Ukraine War is heading toward its fourth year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky finds himself in a quadruple crisis. Militarily, his troops are losing on the eastern frontlines as Russia’s winter offensives continue to gain ground. Data from the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) indicate that Russia seized nearly 4,000 km² of Ukrainian territory in 2024 alone—albeit at a huge cost in human lives—including 610 km² in October, 725 km² in November, and 593 km² in December. In the first month of 2025, Moscow has taken nearly 500 km², along with the resource-rich transportation hub of

Kurakhove in the war-torn region of Donetsk.^[1] Given this speed, Russia has little incentive to stop its military operations. Thus far, Ukraine has lost not only two northern oblasts rich in rare earths^[2] (Luhansk and Donetsk) but also two additional southern coastal oblasts (Zaporizhzhia and Kherson). Now its fifth oblast, Dnipropetrovsk, is within ranges of Russian military advancement.^[3] Coupled with Crimea, which was lost in 2014, a quarter of Ukraine's 1991 territory—home to much of its Soviet-era industrial base—is now in Moscow's hands. Military failures are certainly taking a toll on the morale of Ukrainian forces and the societal moods.

Politically, the once-glorified Zelensky is now under intense pressure. As expected, the more Russia advances, the less popular the 47-year-old leader gets. His approval rating has slipped from 90 percent in March 2022 to only 52 percent in December 2024. At the same time, the percentage of population that does not trust him has increased from 7 to 39 percent.^[4] A poll conducted by the Social Monitoring Center in Kyiv finds that only 16 percent of citizens would vote to re-elect him for a second term, and about 60 percent would prefer Zelensky not to even stand for re-election.^[5]

The danger of Zelensky's political future does not only come from internal sources; it also encounters external pressures. His five-year term of office would have expired in peacetime on May 20, 2024, but the martial law imposed as a result of Russian invasion allows him to stay in office with no term limit so long as the war proceeds. It is no surprise that Putin has termed him "illegitimate" since then, calling for new elections. Further challenges for Zelensky came from U.S. President Donald Trump. In Trump's first sit-down interview with the media since he returned to the White House, the U.S. president rebuked his Ukrainian counterpart for war, saying he is "no angel" and "shouldn't have allowed this war to happen" in the first place,^[6] a significant departure from his predecessor Joe Biden who blamed everything on Russia instead. Further, the Trump administration has echoed Putin's call for elections that could potentially replace Zelensky.^[7] A former Ukrainian minister interprets the development as "the first evidence" that Putin and Trump both "want Zelensky out."^[8]

Economically, Ukraine is proved a sore loser of this three-year-long proxy war. Under Zelensky's leadership, Ukraine has been gradually pushed into a desperate situation. Economic and civilian infrastructures—industries, power grids, highways, ports and bridges, along with medical, cultural, and educational facilities—are damaged or destroyed; half of natural resources are under Russian control; and fatigue is growing in his war-battered country. Without the power grid, Ukraine's winter is unlivable. Hundreds of thousands of young, healthy men have been killed or wounded, and millions of women and children have fled to other countries. A year ago, the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank estimated Ukraine's cost of reconstruction and recovery after two years of war to be around \$486 billion,^[9] more than double the country's pre-war GDP of less than \$200 billion (2021). A new release this year would certainly add at least additional billions of reconstruction cost to account for the damage incurred in the third year of war. President Trump has implemented a 90-day freeze on military, economic, and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, pending further decisions.^[10] Ukraine now owes mounting unpayable debts which Trump wanted it to repay using its mineral reserves, or simply tie new aids with Ukraine's "rare earths and *other things*."^[11] A fate of bankruptcy is awaiting the country.

Diplomatically, Zelensky's dream to join the NATO is shattered after Secretary Hegseth's bombshell speech (see below); he is under tremendous pressure to make concessions on territory, a core national interest for any country, to end the war via negotiations with Russia. At the 2024 Munich Security Conference (MSC) in Germany, then-U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a powerful analogy in blunt language: "If you are not at the table in the international system, you're going to be on the menu."^[12] Zelensky likely recalled these words when news broke that Putin and Trump had agreed to meet in Saudi Arabia to negotiate Ukraine's future—without inviting either Zelensky or European leaders. He could do little when Trump has radically altered American foreign policy toward Russia at the expense of Ukraine. The news of Trump-Putin talks raises alarm among Ukrainian frontline soldiers and commanders, further shaking their conviction to fight.^[13]

The walls are closing in and the moment of truth has arrived. The longer Ukraine fights, the more territory it loses, and the poorer the country gets. From a hero to an "obstacle" to peace, Zelensky's standing is falling fast in the United States. At the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022, he was widely hailed as Ukraine's Winston Churchill—though he disliked the comparison^[14]—giving speeches from capital to capital receiving standing ovations wherever he went because he stood up as an icon of resistance against Russian invasion. Today, he remains steadfast in his denunciation of Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin, yet he is treated as a hardliner who refused to negotiate. His erstwhile partners and financiers now become silent or turned against him. Political winds have drastically shifted in Washington with Trump's return, which will undoubtedly affect the global atmosphere that Zelensky needs to operate in. It is much colder than he had expected.

Zelensky now faces a grim reality: Ukraine may end up worse off than Afghanistan, the last misadventure of the U.S. foreign policy. While the Afghan people retained their country, Ukraine stands to lose at least 20 percent of its territory—and possibly more. Where did things go wrong for Zelensky and Ukraine? What led to this four-pronged crisis? Does Trump's criticism of Zelensky hold merit?

This article analyzes Zelensky's role in the war through the lens of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. The first section explores alliance theory, particularly the dangers of the **patron's dilemma**. The following sections apply two key principles from Sun Tzu—labeled **P1** and **P2**—to assess Ukraine's strategic missteps. This case study offers valuable lessons for weaker nations caught in great-power competition, highlighting the risks and consequences of overreliance on external allies.

Alliance, Veto Player, and the Patron's Dilemma

As Carl von Clausewitz famously asserted, war is not merely about killing and destruction; it is a means to achieve political objectives.^[15] At the heart of the Russia-Ukraine war is the latter's aspiration to join the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a move that Russia has vehemently opposed. Before Trump, successive U.S. administrations publicly endorsed Ukraine's NATO membership, formalizing this stance at the 2008 Bucharest Summit. The essence of this contest is that Russia demands to be a veto player while pre-Trump-II U.S. and its NATO allies denied Russia this role by reiterating "NATO's Open Door Policy."^[16]

Typically, in an alliance, the strong partner fears entrapment while the weak, abandonment. Facing security threats, the patron decides whether to grant a potential client a formal ally status or simply providing arms, with the former implying a serious commitment while the latter a much weaker tone. This is because alliances that last are mostly asymmetric, and asymmetric alliance creates dependence. Their strategic bargains lead to two types of “pathologies,” undercommitment and overdependence.^[17] The patron faces a dilemma in its relationship with the client, with “[s]trong commitments worsen[ing] the risk of entrapment, whereas weak commitments intensify fears of abandonment.”^[18] Undercommitment displayed by the strong ally precedes abandonment, and it creates anxieties and abandonment fears in the other. The Trump Administration’s rhetoric and deeds, including the president’s phone calls with Putin and Secretary Hegseth’s messages in Brussels, are interpreted as attempted abandonment, while Biden’s Administration’s provision of arms, not NATO membership, to Ukraine was viewed as undercommitment, using the wording of Victor Cha.^[19]

The United States, as the leader of “the free world,” has a global presence, leading a series of global alliances, from the multilateral organization like the NATO to the bilateral ones with South Korea, Japan, and Israel. It must act strong on Ukraine’s membership in order to sustain its reputation and to deter further aggression, but it always faces a delicate balancing act as alliance relations have significant spill-over effect. As scholars of alliance politics would tell us, strong commitment by Washington could lead to entrapment by a reckless junior partner into an unwanted war or conflict. Those familiar with U.S. diplomatic history would recall President Eisenhower once warned the U.S. not to allow its allies to “mak[e] a sucker out of Uncle Sam.”^[20] On the other hand, a weak commitment could engender feelings of abandonment on the part of the client such as South Korea’s Syngman Rhee who refused to sign on the armistice agreement that ended the Korean War. Both undercommitment and overdependence could lead to a weakened alliance as trust breaks down.^[21] A stronger U.S. commitment to Kyiv could also produce a frosty U.S.-Russian relation. A weaker commitment leaves Kyiv feeling unsupported, producing incentives for the latter to seek rapprochement with Moscow. The real test to Washington’s commitment lies not in rhetoric but in action. This gap between stated policy and strategic behavior defines America’s power play.^[22]

Ukraine’s eventual membership is to be determined by the result of the multi-layered bargaining between Washington and Moscow, and among the NATO allies. In any case, Ukraine is sandwiched and has to endure the punches from all sides. This is not a smart situation to be in, but Ukrainian leaders of the last decade unfortunately or unwittingly brought it to themselves. Ukraine’s situation is a typical scenario described by the well-known Kenyan proverb, “when elephants fight, the grass gets trampled,” or by the less famous Chinese saying, “a fire on the city gate brings disaster to the fish in the moat” (*chengmen shihuo, yangji chiyu*). Both proverbs are meant to alert us of the negative spill-over effects to the weaker actors in an ecosystem.

Of course, in international relations, weaker states are not the “grass” or the “fish” that cannot protect themselves. Nation-states, however weak or insignificant, can take strategic actions to avoid, or at least minimize the level of, damage that the external environment may inflict on them. One of history’s most enduring military texts, Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, offers crucial insights for leaders navigating asymmetric conflicts. Written near the end of China’s Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC) to

advise King Héliú of the State of Wu, the text remains influential worldwide. Today, his teachings and strategies are widely studied, forming the basis of advanced military philosophy across the globe, with both Russian and Ukrainian translations. His most important insight is that knowledge is power—leaders must act independently, prioritizing their own national interests rather than relying excessively on external allies.

P1: Know Your Enemy and Know Yourself

While war is not solely about killing and destruction, it does lead to serious mass deaths and destruction, reasons why Sun Tzu started his treatise by stating that “war is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin.”^[23] He advises that war is a subject of inquiry which needs to be “thoroughly studied” by national leaders and top generals. Sun Tzu is strongly against gambling on a nation’s future for unattainable goals (for more see P2 below). He emphasizes the importance of meticulous evaluation of one’s possibility of victory long before the war starts. His first principle for decision-makers in any conflict, be it military, economic, or political, is to “know your enemy and know yourself” (*zhi bi zhi ji*, 3E:26^[24]; 10E:34). Demonizing an adversary, as seen in Russophobic narratives, distorts strategic assessments and can lead to misguided decisions that inadvertently strengthen the opponent. He stresses that if one knows neither the enemy nor himself, he will be defeated in every single battle. For that purpose, he specifically lists seven areas for leaders to compare their enemy’s strengths and weaknesses against those of their own, ranging from national political leaders’ qualifications to the military commanders’ personalities, from territorial sizes to states’ economies, from timing to geographical favorability, and from stable supply of weapons to the soldiers’ preparedness in fighting (Chapter 1).

In Chapter 3, Sun Tzu accentuates the importance of political and military decision-makers to a nation’s survival: “the leader (general) is the bulwark of the State. If the bulwark is complete at all points, the State will be strong. If the bulwark is defective, the State will be weak” (3E:13). If Sun Tzu were advising Ukraine, he would stress the importance of understanding Russian leadership and their perspectives, as this is the foundation of any sound strategy. He would certainly not have treated lightly Putin’s repeated oppositions to Ukraine’s NATO membership,^[25] certainly not when the latter has amassed sizable military forces on Ukraine’s border, as simply “propaganda” or “smokescreen” to explain away unpalatable facts. Sun Tzu would have noted Putin’s track record of three successful military adventures in a row—the 2008 war with Georgia, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and his 2015 military intervention in Syria that secured Bashar al-Assad for a decade. The planning and executions of these victories would have demonstrated that Putin is a remarkably sophisticated strategist who should never be ignored. In fact, Putin’s annexation of Crimea via referendum in March 2014 with a 97 percent approval rate—a historically Russian territory which Nikita Khrushchev gifted to Ukraine in 1954 when Russia and Ukraine were still republics within the Soviet Union^[26]—would please Sun Tzu as an application of his philosophy that the “supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting” (3E:3). Sun Tzu would have noted that the KGB, the main security agency of the Soviet Union from 1954 to 1991, had used his book as training manuals during the Cold War^[27] and that the intelligence, demeanor, and personality of the former KGB chief—quiet, calm, and calculative—make him a formidable adversary. Echoing Sun Tzu, a *New York Times* article noted: “There is no world leader today with a better track record when it comes to using

military power than President Vladimir V. Putin.”^[28] Professor John Mearsheimer of Chicago University, the most influential international relations theorist on offensive realism, also referred to Putin as “a first-class strategist.”^[29]

Sun Tzu would have pointed out the logic of great power behaviors. The U.S. opposed Russian missiles in Cuba in the 1960s, so why would it assume Russia would accept American and NATO missiles in Ukraine? Like it or not, making foreign policy against the security interests of one’s giant neighbor is to court demise. Sun Tzu would also point out the following passages to Ukrainian leaders. Geopolitical analysts including former U.S. national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski recognized Ukraine’s importance to Russia. “Without Ukraine,” he wrote in *The Grand Chessboard*, “Russia ceases to be an empire..... The loss of Ukraine was geopolitically pivotal, for it drastically limited Russia’s geostrategic options,”^[30] relegating it to a medium-sized power. Russian political analyst Alexander Dugin, who is called “Putin’s philosopher” in the west, has written many books explaining that Russia’s policy on Ukraine is “either neutral or ours,” suggesting that neutrality is the maximum that Russia would concede.^[31] Putin certainly shares that view of Ukraine as an existential interest that he is willing to take great risks to keep within Russia’s sphere of interest. Given this reality, Sun Tzu would likely have advised Ukraine to adopt neutrality as the optimal path for its survival and prosperity. The 2014 Ukrainian translation of *The Art of War* should have served as a guide for strategic decision-making.

Ignoring these geopolitical realities, President Petro Poroshenko led Ukraine to abandon its neutrality status in 2014 and enshrined the ambition of NATO membership in the constitution in 2018—moves that directly contradicted the Minsk Agreements. In March 2021, President Volodymyr Zelensky further inflamed tensions by signing a law mandating the reclamation of Crimea and Sevastopol.^[32] This author contends that this decision, along with NATO membership aspirations, made war with Russia inevitable.

Unlike his adversary, the Ukrainian leader appeared ill-prepared while navigating an unfamiliar and turbulent geopolitical landscape. He started his acting career when a teenager, gaining popularity via mocking corrupt politicians and their lifestyles. Ironically, the comedian who despised politicians becomes one whose government is being accused of corruption.^[33] An idealist with little political experience, the President lacks the knowledge base to understand international relations, the salience of statecraft and the ability to navigate in global undercurrents. He inherited a weak hand—a young country fraught with corruption and right in the middle of a low-level war with a powerful neighbor since 2014.

Frequent observations indicate that the Ukrainian leadership underestimated the likelihood of war and was unprepared for its severity. Five incidents should suffice to illustrate why Sun Tzu would have been dismayed by Ukraine’s strategic miscalculations:

1. *Underestimating the Enemy.* We see how risks of a full-scale war were dismissed, military advice to fortify Ukraine’s borders ignored, and how the president perceived the war, not through the

intricacies of global politics but through humanitarian perspectives. Zelensky's biographer, Simon Shuster, recounted the president's initial reactions to the war in its early days:

Through his actions before the invasion, Zelensky bore at least some of the blame for the flimsy state of the nation's defenses. He had spent weeks playing down the risk of a full-scale invasion and he'd refused the advice of military commanders to fortify the border.... Astonishingly, he seemed to believe that if he could only take Putin on a tour of the warzone, if he could let him peer down at the [maimed dead] bodies, the war might stop.^[34]

2. Internal Discord. A senior advisor to Zelensky told *Time* magazine in 2023, "He deludes himself ... We're out of options. We're not winning. But try telling him that."^[35] This indicates a disconnect between leadership perception and battlefield realities.

3. Fearmongering as Strategy. Zelensky warned the U.S. that the war could escalate into a global conflict, stating, "A third world war could start in Ukraine, continue in Israel, and move on from there to Asia, and then explode somewhere else."^[36] His rhetoric, though aimed at securing Western support, lacked an understanding of historical instances where major powers sacrificed smaller states for their own interests. A leader without knowledge of history is dangerous.

4. Misjudging War Duration. Zelensky had an overly optimistic outlook about the war, expecting the conflict to end within a year. In Shuster's words: "It was spring 2022, the 55th day of the Russian invasion, and Volodymyr Zelensky asked when I planned to finish my book about him. I told him my aim would be to capture the first year of the war, then publish. His face fell. 'You think the war will not be over in a year?'"^[37] This follows the same optimism as his country marked the first anniversary of the Russian invasion in February 2023. The president boasted on Twitter that 2023 would be a "year of victory" for Ukraine.^[38]

5. Lack of Enemy Analysis. Sun Tzu would be appalled to have read the remarks by the Head of the Chief Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine's Defense Ministry, reported in a Ukrainian newspaper in September 2022:

I never said [the war would last] 2 or 3 weeks. If you remember my statements in late May, I revealed how it would work. I said that in June, we would, unfortunately, suffer certain losses; in July, there would be a relative stalemate; and in August, we would start moving to reclaim our territory. In winter, the war will fade away, to a large extent. After the winter is over, the conflict will start reaching its end; the first stage would be us reaching the administrative borders [of Ukraine] as of 1991.^[39]

War is at least a two-player chess game. His remarks made no reference to Russian strategy, how that would affect his side's response, and how the interaction could alter the trajectory of the war, illustrating a lack of comprehensive military assessment. In fact, the intelligence chief boasted repeatedly that the Ukrainian military would soon be able to liberate Crimea to reclaim all its 1991 borders.^[40]

These examples suggest that Ukrainian leadership neither understood their enemy nor themselves. But a final question remains: do they truly understand their allies?

P2: Don't Enter into Alliances Unless You Know the Designs of Your Potential Allies

Sun Tzu rarely repeats himself, yet he emphasizes Principles 1 and 2 twice, signaling their utmost importance. He states: “We cannot enter into alliances until we are acquainted with the designs of our neighbors” (*buzhi zhuhou zhi mou zhe buneng yu jiao* 7:13; 11:56). This means every country has a set of distinct interests that may be different from yours. Alliances in warfare are essential, but potential partners often have their own agendas and may use deceitful tactics (“All warfare is based on deception” 1E:23). It is therefore crucial to understand their true interests, motivations, and even ulterior motives. Without a thorough grasp of the past, the present, and even future trajectory of a potential ally or the decision rules of a bloc of allies, partnership may collapse, leaving you the worst loser in the whole game. History books are filled with countless examples of such tales.

State-to-state relationship faces an unsurmountable ceiling: self-interest or self-survival. Alliance theory suggests that key NATO allies, like the United States, fear entrapment in an unwanted war. Zelensky should have asked himself these two fundamental questions: “Why would NATO risk a conventional war with Russia to admit Ukraine?” and “Would they risk a nuclear war?” History has already shown that great powers—including the United States—think carefully before engaging Russia in a conventional war even when vital national interests are at stake. Napoleon and Hitler’s misadventures serve as stark warnings. Similarly, Russia has long opposed Ukraine’s NATO membership precisely because it fears encirclement. The fact that it has taken Russia three years to occupy only a quarter of Ukraine highlights the difficulty of the conflict, but no country today would fight a nuclear-armed Russia over Ukraine. NATO’s reluctance to fast-track Ukraine’s membership reflects this hard reality. The West’s only major countermeasure against Russia was economic sanctions. Once those proved ineffective, the outcome of the war became increasingly clear. If Zelensky failed to grasp this, he should have at least prepared for the possibility that Ukraine might be abandoned. This again echoes P1’s reasoning: Sun Tzu would likely have advised Ukraine to remain neutral and trade with both the EU and Russia.

The real problem is that Ukraine’s leadership refused to face reality in its geopolitical constraints. Instead, they allowed themselves to be misled by the Biden administration, whose goal was to weaken Russia’s great power status through a proxy war.^[41] After the initial shocks following Russia’s invasion, Zelensky eventually understood the relationship between his country and the NATO allies as a partnership in the war. He told the Americans in one of his speeches, “You’re giving money. We’re giving our lives.”^[42] But can this *modus vivendi* be trusted? Three examples in the form of questions should suffice to illustrate its flaws, which will undoubtedly harm any war strategy:

First, Sun Tzu advises the weak to use surprise tactics on the battlefield: “Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt” (7E:20). Ukraine has been relying on the United States, the EU, and the G7 for military and economic aid since the beginning of the war. When these allies publicly announce the types and quantities of weaponry they are sending—often to score political points—how could you achieve any potential surprise effect on the battlefield?

Second, if you rely on foreign funding and weapons, can they be delivered in the necessary quantity, quality, and timeframe to counter Russia's logistical advantage? If not, what leverage do you have? The fact is that Kyiv has no guarantees on any of these fronts. Russia produces and delivers its own weaponry for the battlefield needs while Ukraine must constantly adjust its strategy based on whatever weapons and ammunitions it receives—if any. Even the best commander in history could not produce a victory under such constraints. In reality, Ukraine's counteroffensive was doomed from the onset. It could not go as planned because structural reasons in the U.S. and European Union blocked a promised military assistance package for months in 2023 and 2024. In a high-profiled speech at Oxford University, EU Vice-President Josep Borrell blamed "political polarization" in the U.S. Congress and the sabotage of Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán for the significant delay in sending the assistance packages to Ukraine. "In a Union governed by unanimity," lamented Borrell, "[the EU's] policies on Russia are always threatened by a single veto."^[43] By providing inadequate military aid and not in a timely fashion, the West effectively leaves Ukraine alone to fight with a much more formidable foe. These are all signs of undercommitment from Washington and Brussels, signaling an acute collective action problem.

Third, does Ukraine have the manpower to sustain a war against an enemy five times its population? Journalist Simon Shuster, who spent a year with the Ukrainian president and his team, wrote that Zelensky at times "[felt] betrayed by his Western allies" and suspected that "they have left him without the means to win the war, only the means to survive it."^[44] He recalled that one officer complained that "[the frontline commanders] don't have the men or the weapons" and wondered in frustration "Where are the weapons? Where is the artillery? Where are the new recruits?"^[45] One of Zelensky's close aides told Shuster that even if the U.S. and its allies delivered the weapons in time, "we don't have the men to use them."^[46]

When the long-expected counteroffensive failed and Ukraine's strategy altered from offense to defense, the Biden Administration also shifted from promising to back Zelensky for "as long as it takes" to providing support "as long as we can"^[47]—a sign of waning commitment. Despite that, Ukrainians blindly trusted the U.S. and now they, along with the Europeans, are being thrown under the bus by the Trump Administration—a sign of imminent abandonment. At the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, a day before the MSC in 2025, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth delivered three blunt messages in Brussels regarding the new government's Ukraine policy: 1) Ukraine cannot return to its pre-2014 borders and must accept territorial losses; 2) Ukraine will not join NATO; and 3) American troops will not be sent to Ukraine under any peace deal.^[48] The day after delivering these messages, Hegseth stated in a press conference that the policy shift was based on "a recognition of hard power realities on the ground,"^[49] a tacit admission that the West has lost the proxy war in the battlefield.^[50] Further, the Hegseth Outlines dovetailed with the Russian demand for peace, effectively declaring that Kyiv's NATO dream is dashed and the tide in the United States has turned against Ukraine. As Hegseth bluntly put it, "chasing the illusionary goals only prolong the war and cause more suffering."^[51] Now that Boris Johnson and Joe Biden are out of office, Zelensky has no one to blame for Ukraine's predicament but himself.

Did Ukraine do its homework on NATO before they rushed to enshrine this goal into their constitution? Lord Ismay, NATO's first Secretary General, famously uttered that the purpose of NATO was to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."^[52] Let that sink in. NATO membership follows a unanimity rule and one without the U.S. approval is unthinkable. After the Hegseth Outlines, Ukraine's defense minister Rustem Umierov ignored his message, stating that "[Ukrainians] have to get used to all kinds of statements. Our position has always remained unchanged. We want to be a NATO country. We will be a NATO country."^[53] He refused to believe that the game—which started during the Bush Jr. Administration—is over, suggesting how delusional the country's top leadership has become.

Ukrainian leaders underappreciated the structural reasons behind their allies' unpredictability. First, states have different national interests, and no alliance lasts forever—another reason why countries must prioritize self-reliance. The 19th-century British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston famously stated, "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."^[54] His axiom aligns with Sun Tzu's strategic caution: "Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical" (12E:17).

Second, national security is largely subjective, shaped by political perspectives and external circumstances. Multiple authors have frequently pointed out: "National security, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder."^[55] Is Russia a threat to U.S. national security? Different factions in the U.S. have provided starkly different answers. Polls indicate that Democrats are three times more likely than Republicans to view Russia as an enemy.^[56] While former President Biden defined Russia as a national security threat,^[57] President Trump has taken a markedly different stance.^[58]

Third, the volatility of electoral cycles exacerbates alliance instability. Western democracies, including the U.S., hold elections every four to five years, with parliaments changing even more frequently. Each new administration appoints a different set of cabinet members, who may redefine national security priorities—often shifting policy directions in ways that contradict their predecessors, including on the Russia-Ukraine War. This political turnover makes long-term commitments less reliable, underscoring the risks of overreliance on external allies.

The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Ukraine did not fully understand its enemy, itself, or the fickleness of its allies. In an interview, Trump criticized Zelensky for "wanting to fight the war despite massive military deficiencies"^[59]—a fair assessment. Sun Tzu warns against engaging a far stronger opponent: "If equally matched, we can offer battle; if slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; if quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him" (3E:11). Ukraine should have sought an exit from the war as soon as possible. Instead, Zelensky gambled his country's future on an unwinnable conflict.

Conclusion: The Cost of Ignoring Strategic Prudence

Sun Tzu's teachings emphasize the necessity of knowing the enemy and knowing oneself, and the broader strategic environment before committing to war. As analyzed in P1, Ukraine's failure to heed

this principle led to an overestimation of its own strength and a distortion of Russia's resolve. Instead of pursuing neutrality and balancing its relationships between the West and Russia, Kyiv gambled on NATO membership, triggering Moscow's aggressive response. Sun Tzu would have advised against provoking a much stronger foe without the certainty of overwhelming support—a mistake Ukraine made by relying on promises rather than hard commitments from the West.

Similarly, P2 stresses another critical lesson from *The Art of War*: alliances should not be formed without a clear understanding of partners' intentions. Ukraine assumed that NATO's rhetorical support and arms transfers would translate into unwavering military and political backing. However, as history has repeatedly shown, great powers prioritize their own interests, and Western hesitation—demonstrated in delayed weapons deliveries, political gridlock, and shifting rhetoric—revealed the inherent fragility of Ukraine's alliance strategy. The recent shift in U.S. policy under the Trump administration underlines Sun Tzu's warning: "We cannot enter into alliances until we are acquainted with the designs of our neighbors." Zelensky's miscalculation ultimately left Ukraine in a precarious position, abandoned by Washington which never fully committed to his country's war effort.

The overarching lesson from Sun Tzu's philosophy is that wars should only be fought when victory is assured through superior strategy, resources, and alliances. Ukraine, failing to heed these principles, has found itself locked in a prolonged conflict with little hope of achieving its original goals. For the West, it is clear that military aid alone cannot substitute for a coherent strategy. In the end, the war serves as a stark reminder that misjudging both enemies and allies can lead to disastrous consequences. Had Ukraine's leadership embraced a more pragmatic approach—grounded in Sun Tzu's principles of strategic foresight, alliance management, and self-awareness—it might have avoided the devastating quagmire in which it now finds itself. In that sense, Trump's "no angel" assertion is of merit.

Notes

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⁴⁵ Shuster, “‘Nobody believes in our victory like I do.’”

⁴⁶ Shuster, “‘Nobody believes in our victory like I do.’”

⁴⁷ Michael Hirsh, “The Biden Administration Is Quietly Shifting Its Strategy in Ukraine,” *Politico*, December 27, 2023, accessed February 8, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/12/27/biden-endgame-ukraine-00133211>; Leo Litra, “The limits of ‘as long as it takes’: Why Ukraine’s allies need to update their

strategy,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, December 19, 2023, accessed February 14, 2025, <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-limits-of-as-long-as-it-takes-why-ukraines-allies-need-to-update-their-strategy/>.

⁴⁸ Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth’s opening remarks at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, Feb. 12, 2025 can be accessed here: accessed February 15, 2025, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact/>.

⁴⁹ Transcript of Defense Secretary Hegseth’s press conference following NATO Ministers of Defense Meeting in Brussels, Feb. 13, 2025, can be accessed here: accessed February 15, 2025, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4066734/secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-press-conference-following-nato-ministers-of/>.

⁵⁰ This author concurs with Professor John Mearsheimer of Chicago University (along with two European experts) who stated in the Duran program that the Hegseth quote in effect constitutes a tacit admission of defeat on the battlefield by the Trump Administration. To quote Mearsheimer, “Hegseth’s statement at the press conference—‘a recognition of hard power realities on the ground’—means that the Trump Administration understands that we [the U.S.] have lost this war; the tide has turned against Ukraine” (39:07-42). Proxy wars are those that allow a state to hurt an adversary without actually declaring war and sending in troops. Senator Lindsey Graham described the nature of the proxy war best. He said in the face of Zelensky at the Munich Security Conference, “I want to tell you and your people, you’re the ally I’ve been hoping for all my life. Not one American has died defending Ukraine. You’ve taken our weapons, and you’ve kicked [the Russian] ass and I’m very proud to have you as our ally....” See the video and Twitter, UNITED24 Media (@United24media), “I want to tell you [@ZelenskyyUa] and your people, you’re the ally I’ve been hoping for all my life. You’ve taken our weapons, and you’ve kicked their ass. I’m very proud to have you as our ally.’ — Senator @LindseyGrahamSC at #MSC2025,” Twitter, February 14, 2025, 11:53, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://x.com/United24media/status/1890429281441927240>. The Duran, “Trump To Force Ukraine Peace on Europe - John Mearsheimer, Alexander Mercouris & Glenn Diesen,” YouTube Video, 39:07-42, Feb. 15, 2025, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5-L5pyXLZQ>.

⁵¹ Hegseth’s opening remarks at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, Feb. 12, 2025.

⁵² “NATO Leaders: Lord Ismay,” NATO website, accessed February 15, 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_137930.htm.

⁵³ “‘We Will Be a NATO Country’– Defense Minister Stands Firm on Alliance Membership,” *Kyiv Post*, February 13, 2025, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/47029> (accessed February 14, 2025); Tetyana Vysotska and Valentyna Romanenko, “Ukraine wants to be in NATO and it will be, Ukraine’s defense minister says in response to Pentagon chief’s remarks,” *Ukrainska Pravda*, February 12, 2025, accessed February 14, 2025, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/02/12/7497998/>.

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⁵⁷ "We don't walk away from our allies; we stand with them. We don't let tyrants win; we oppose them. We don't merely watch global events unfold; we shape them. That's what it means to be the indispensable nation. That's what it means to be the world's superpower and the world's leading democracy" vowed Biden emphatically last year, adding that "There is a bipartisan consensus for that kind of American leadership. That's exactly what we'll continue to deliver." Quote from Biden's speech "Remarks by President Biden on the Passage of H.R. 815, the National Security Supplemental," The White House (website), April 24, 2024, accessed May 12, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/04/24/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-passage-of-h-r-815-the-national-security-supplemental/>.

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**Gender and the Role of Women in
Peacebuilding:
A Case Study of Select African Nations**

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Abstract

Effective conflict resolution requires leaders who carefully consider the impact of their decisions. There is a need for special attention to the gender composition of the national peacebuilding panels to achieve broad impact. This article addresses the role of female leaders in achieving peaceful post-conflict results following a case study qualitative methodology. This research has five main sections—introduction and background, literature review, methodology, results and discussions, conclusion—and focuses on five crucial African nations: Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Sudan, Rwanda, and Congo (DRC). The core inclusion criterion for these countries was that they have had protracted warfare and used intricate peacebuilding processes to restore (or attempt to restore) peace. The finding indicates that female leaders Zainab Bangura, Fatima Maada Bio and Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff (Sierra Leone), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee, and Comfort Freeman (Liberia), Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior and Rita Lopidia (South Sudan), Jeannette Kagame and Odette Nyiramilimo (Rwanda) and Julienne Lusenge and Chouchou Namegabe (DRC Congo) have made notable contributions to post-conflict negotiations, achieving long-term peace agreements. However, ingrained cultural norms and gender stereotypes, the absence of political will to incorporate women into leadership and peacebuilding positions, security issues, and the widespread occurrence of gender-based violence still hinder women's full participation in post-conflict efforts. Expanding female leadership and decision-making roles will enhance and improve their contributions to African peacebuilding.

Keywords: women, peacebuilding, Africa, peacemaking, conflict, leadership.

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Introduction and Background

Introduction

The role of women in peacebuilding has recently garnered increased attention in numerous international conversations about conflict resolution and reconciliation processes. Regional frameworks, such as the Maputo Protocol from the African Union (AU) member states, encourage female participation in areas with protracted hostilities.¹ Many male leaders and male-dominated institutions have historically disregarded or underappreciated female leaders' contributions to peacebuilding. Moosa, Rahmani, and Webster note that the male elites have dominated these formal initiatives for many years, denying women an opportunity to make a similar impact.² While these challenges adversely impact the female population, Erzurum and Berna Eren observe that female leaders make notable contributions to peace through mediation to resolve conflict as they build trust.³ On October 31, 2000, the UNSC (United Nations Security Council) adopted Resolution 1325, which affirms the importance of including women in conflict resolution, humanitarian efforts, and post-conflict rebuilding. This resolution also addresses issues of safety and equality, to ensure "girls' protection from conflict-related sexual violence and women's equal participation in all stages of the prevention and resolution of conflict."⁴ The resolution further declared an in-depth affirmation of females' decisive role in approaching armed conflicts, thereby reflecting their acknowledgment of the disproportionate impact that such conflicts have on women.

In Africa specifically, sociocultural constraints restrict women's participation in formal peace discussions and decision-making processes. According to a policy brief by True, these barriers become even worse due to the systemic disparities that disproportionately impact female groups globally in economic prospects, political representation, and education.⁵ Despite these challenges, women actively participate in peace-based initiatives in many African countries, typically motivated by their traditional roles as nurturers, mothers, and caregivers.⁶ Moreover, although improvements have been made, gender inequality still exists, even occurring in academic settings, which results in lower literacy rates among women.⁷ As such, this inequality persists and translates to other situations such as peacebuilding and diplomacy.

Research Problem

The central research problem is as follows: While women's contributions to peacebuilding have continuously achieved wider acknowledgment, they constitute a disproportionately small portion of formal peace processes, particularly in Africa. Men still extend their supremacy on formal negotiation boards as their female colleagues often take on subordinate roles.⁸ While this patriarchal structure persists, females are frequently faced with stereotypical and sexist labels such as "unmarriageable" or "adulterous" when they attempt to engage their colleagues in conflict resolution conversations.⁹ Consequently, capable female leaders are constrained when it comes to peacebuilding. In fact, peace deliberations and ensuing agreements overseen by women are more likely to optimize stability and sustainability because they deploy socio-emotional, yet objective strategies.¹⁰ Nonetheless, organizational impediments—political unwillingness, constrained leadership duties, and cultural predispositions—deter women from active engagement in post-conflict efforts. This underrepresentation and disregard for female contributions compromises the impact of peacebuilding programs.¹¹

Moreover, improper policy (national and international) implementation impairs the problem of low participation among women who want to lend input to peacebuilding efforts. Although the UNSC Resolution 1325 and other frameworks offer the basis for female participation in peace and security initiatives, African countries have had difficulty properly incorporating these policies into their national agendas.¹² Thus, based on historical and current issues, this study analyzes five African countries (Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia, and DRC) to assess the utilization of women's skill sets and knowledge to influence peace in conflicting communities.

Research Objectives

This paper will address the following objectives:

- i. To analyze how women participate in peace processes in the context of peacebuilding efforts in a few African countries.
- ii. To determine the obstacles preventing women from taking part in peacebuilding and recommend solutions to increase their engagement in efforts to resolve conflicts.

Research Questions

For this study to achieve the above objectives, it will focus on answering the following central questions:

- i. How do women contribute to peace initiatives, and what unique roles do they play in post-conflict resolutions and peacebuilding within particular African countries?
- ii. What are the primary obstacles hindering women's full involvement in peacebuilding initiatives, and how can they overcome these challenges?

Theoretical Framework

Based on the scope of this study, four crucial theories and perspectives are relevant to understanding women's leadership place in peacebuilding.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory influences this study's analysis of gender inequality dynamism and its impact on participation in post-conflict reconciliation. Patriarchal systems that minimize women's contributions to conflict settlement cause their exclusion from official peace procedures.¹³ These cultures are more present in some African countries. Feminism is a "conceptual toolkit" where systems place a higher value on masculine leadership styles while downplaying the strategies that females frequently use, exposing the "hierarchical and mutually exclusive gender binaries" to justify the scope of conflicts.¹⁴ While relying on such a definition, this research highlights the gendered power disparities that prevent women from participating in formal negotiations and leadership positions within peacebuilding frameworks. Feminist theory underscores how state-driven activities headed by men precede women's grassroots attempts to promote peacetime after wartime.¹⁵ However, instead of including women in the peace process, others reject the feminist approach, noting that the female population deserves more coping strategies in warring areas and post-conflict society.¹⁶ Nonetheless, women's experiences and viewpoints are crucial, and this approach affirms the superiority of inclusive peace processes.

Representation

This study critically assesses the involvement of women in leadership positions for peacemaking efforts in African countries using representation theory. Research indicates that feminine views

go unnoticed during formal peace talks, with glaring underrepresentation in decision-making organizations.¹⁷ Institutionalizing women through gender-inclusive membership on peacebuilding teams guarantees adequate representation, ensuring broad and bigender participation.¹⁸ Representation theory posits that some decisions ignore gender-specific issues such as gender-based marginalization and sexual abuse by silencing female voices, despite the value of negotiations for everyone. When a war ends and leaves a high incidence of displacement, women try to restore peace using gender-focused methods such as aesthetic considerations.¹⁹ Regardless, these meaningful efforts are not always adequate to justify women's broad involvement. Representation theory builds the foundation for comprehensive and longstanding peace treaties sensitive to the interests of all community members—regardless of gender—through the purposeful equitable addition of females in the peace process.

The Equality Lens

The equality perspective highlights the necessity of gender parity in all areas, including peacebuilding. It questions the structural factors that result in unequal gender involvement.²⁰ The concern is the effective integration of every individual's perspective, thereby giving women equal standing and normative power over the issues they face. Dunn observes that the equality viewpoint also contains the Liberal Feminist Theory, wherein women prioritize equity in the foundation.²¹ This is crucial for women, enabling them to achieve positive outcomes on a par with their male counterparts. As such, this theoretical view explains how deeply ingrained societal norms defend male dominance and its place in leadership. Based on the perception of equality, women's absence from peacebuilding roundtables enables the extension of uneven gendered power relations. Furthermore, this framework asserts that peace consensuses do not converge within women's unique needs. From an equality perspective, more female presence in post-conflict reconstruction programs is crucial for maximizing representation and adhering to their human rights.²² Global politics contribute to conflicts; however, advancing feminine rights helps to ensure that these military disputes will result in less violence and intensity.²³ Therefore, the equality perspective also illustrates that removing institutional barriers that sustain inequality is as essential as including women in peacebuilding to achieve substantive equality.

Global Leadership Theory

Globalized politics provides another crucial perspective: global leadership. Integrating people from all over the world into proper coordination to form a broader society is not easy, as leaders must ensure peace for prosperity.²⁴ Successful global leaders need to be inclusive, flexible, and cross-culturally aware. Indeed, women exhibit these qualities—particularly inclusivity—in peacebuilding, through their grassroots strategies.²⁵ Female leaders embody many attributes that are compelling and rational for peacebuilding initiatives, and they champion collaboration and trust with their male counterparts throughout the decision-making process.²⁶ Applying this theory underscores the discrepancy between these traits and the official power structures that tend to minimize the contributions of women. Paradigms that seek to overcome these limitations that women face should feature meta-level conversations across operative resolutions.²⁷ Hence, a pillar structure like the UN system must incorporate gendered strategies for conflict prevention and reconstruction mechanisms.

Literature Review

Commission on the Status of Women

The UN formed the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1946, marking one of the crucial outcomes of the feminist movement. CSW is “the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.”²⁸ Scholars like Bent observe that the Commission traces and appraises the advancement of feminine rights because it values socioeconomic and legal progression.²⁹ CSW works with UN member nations and other UN-based agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to annually scrutinize and deliberate gender-related global issues, especially those involving equality. The Commission is crucial in forming policies and establishing international standards for women’s rights.³⁰ CSW performs these functions by focusing on accomplishing the objectives of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was a historic development for gender equality. Yet, Rincker and others note that some state leaders appoint CSW delegates who oppose these progressions of feminine rights.³¹ Consequently, they fail to seek resources and deliberately circumvent the Commission’s goal of empowering women. Likewise, Brannon argues for a consistent rise in appointing male representatives to the CSW.³² These actions partly indicate that the Commission is losing its central objective of optimizing global gender equality.

While challenges continue to emerge, one of CSW’s primary responsibilities is recommending policy reforms prioritizing the promotion of gender-based equality. Some areas that need transformation to advance inclusivity are healthcare and education access, economic enabling, and participation in crucial decision-making discussions.³³ The Commission organizes annual meetings with themes that correlate with contemporary issues, such as enhancing gender equality, preventing violence against women, and even climate change. The CSW continues to influence the global agenda on feminine rights through its resolutions and support of women’s international movements.³⁴ Therefore, it encourages member states to enact more robust domestic gender policies and mainstream gender perspectives in all UN operations.

United Nations Women and its Role in Africa’s Peace and Security Initiatives

As the UN organization continued its dedication to women’s empowerment, it founded the UN Women formally in 2010. Its function is to unify the work of other UN entities that previously concentrated on gender equality.³⁵ Its establishment signaled a dramatic change toward a more cohesive and coordinated strategy for tackling female rights worldwide. Women take part in critical decision-making and analyze policies to optimize gender mainstreaming.³⁶ UN Women targets its work to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which addresses gender equality and empowering all female populations, young and old.³⁷ Additional goals include eliminating violence against females and advancing their economic empowerment. UN Women also focuses on guaranteeing female involvement in leadership positions in public and political life.³⁸ This leadership objective is pertinent to strengthening women’s contributions to post-conflict resolutions.

In Africa, there is heavy reliance on regional plans to address issues of peace and security. The continent uses the “African Union Peace and Security Council” (AUPSC) and Regional Economic Commissions (RECs).³⁹ The groups function under the coordination and guidance of the UN system. Additionally, the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) has hosted forums since 2017 to discuss action-based initiatives to improve female leaders’ capacity to bring transformative

changes.⁴⁰ AWLN also facilitates women's direct engagement with regional organizations that mediate peace and seek to resolve conflict. In 2018, this institution mobilized over 120 female African leaders to develop the 2018-2020 Plan of Action.⁴¹ They aimed to strengthen women across all societies in Africa. The peace and security pillar of AWLN has amplified and scaled up females' profiles to ensure they also participate in the continent's decision-making.⁴² Through the UN Women, Africa continues to hold strategic workshops to share diverse agendas. A report by Popovic shows that the western and central parts of this continent conducted gender-responsive peacebuilding workshops to maximize the benefits of conflict preventive and recovery measures.⁴³ Females use such meetings to discuss case studies of civil unrest and determine which roles they can continue playing to restore peace.

Moreover, UN Women provides capacity-building programs, fosters collaborations with civil society, and offers member states technical assistance and expertise in creating and applying policies.⁴⁴ Some of these professionals could be gender experts who give the agency new ideas and address current issues. UN Women uses numerous advocacy initiatives, such as the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence," to implore men and boys to promote gender equality.⁴⁵ The program's target is to raise awareness of valuable issues that affect women and girls and to champion collective actions. Another notable campaign is "Heforshe," which asks men and all others to support making bold moves to guarantee a world that values gender equality.⁴⁶ Thus, UN Women continues to play a critical role in advancing and defending female voices as it elevates them, which is crucial for encouraging their participation in peacebuilding initiatives.

Women and Peacemaking

Women have traditionally been essential to peacebuilding, especially at the local level. They often spearhead initiatives to restore communities that conflicts have ripped apart.⁴⁷ As Gaynor stresses, while higher level discussions include national government representatives driving decision-making, it is sometimes more challenging for women to develop peace-based strategies at the lower levels.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, they persist in engaging in this peacebuilding due to their distinctive responsibilities as educators and mediators within families and communities.⁴⁹ Through encouraging communication and establishing trust, women facilitate the reconciliation of divisions between conflicting groups. Additional studies demonstrate their crucial function in the peacebuilding process, highlighted by their ability to mobilize community resources and deliver essential provisions such as food, shelter, and medical care.⁵⁰ Women have been essential in post-conflict reconstruction in numerous African nations, including Rwanda, particularly at the village level.⁵¹ They engage actively in community development and reintegration activities.

Conversely, women's participation in formal peacebuilding processes remains significantly underrepresented despite their substantial contributions. Structural barriers, including patriarchal norms and their exclusion from political leadership, obstruct women's involvement in peace negotiations and decision-making processes.⁵² Rinck defines patriarchal civilizations as "gendered orders" reliant on "a power hierarchy of masculinities and femininities" wherein the ideal of hegemonic masculinity is overriding.⁵³ International frameworks, including UNSC Resolution 1325, emphasize the importance of including women in peacebuilding initiatives. Notwithstanding considerable progress, the implementation of these guidelines remains inconsistent, and females continue to face challenges in securing formal roles in peacebuilding initiatives.⁵⁴ By disregarding women's unique perspectives and experiences, their exclusion from

peacebuilding undermines gender equality and diminishes the impact and scope of peace initiatives.

Arostegui's literature suggests that efforts to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding aim to tackle these structural barriers through legislative reforms and capacity-building programs.⁵⁵ Governments, international organizations, and NGOs increasingly acknowledge the importance of integrating gender views into peacebuilding frameworks. These stakeholders aim to promote more inclusive, enduring peace processes and solutions by educating women in leadership and creating platforms for women's viewpoints in peace negotiations.⁵⁶ Such support lends itself to gender-inclusive peace accords, and women's engagement in community-based programs in nations such as Nepal, where they serve as compensated mediators, illustrates their ability to generate more thorough and enduring post-conflict accords rooted in the Resolution of fundamental conflict causes.⁵⁷ Consequently, these studies confirm that women's involvement is essential for enduring peace.

Women and Peacemaking – A Negotiation Perspective

One crucial, yet underutilized, tool in conflict resolution is female participation in peacemaking, especially at the national and international levels. As Adjei mentioned, formal peacemaking processes have historically excluded females while men continue to dominate.⁵⁸ Regardless, women have proven exceptionally skilled at promoting peace. Their activities in unofficial or communal contexts, such as violence-prone areas in Kenya, portray their mediation abilities to aid in settling conflicts and averting violence.⁵⁹ Further, women have a greater awareness of the psychological and social effects of war. According to Sherwood, their efforts to promote peace come from their own encounters during conflict.⁶⁰ Thus, they can support all-encompassing peace accords that consider justice, reconciliation, and human rights because of their personal experience with conflict.

Furthermore, the environment of male supremacy in the peace and stabilization process is one of the biggest obstacles preventing women from engaging.⁶¹ This is a significant hurdle in military-dominated peace talks. Some parties view female contributions as peripheral to the formal procedures prioritizing military agreements, territorial disputes, and ceasefires.⁶² Often, females are relegated to supporting roles as opposed to leadership and decision-making positions, which disregards their value. On the other hand, research indicates that peace accords can be inclusive, long-lasting, and sustainable when women participate.⁶³ Female leaders are more likely to stress the significance of social cohesiveness, restoring trust, and attending to the concerns of oppressed groups. These actions come from their instincts for the necessity of achieving lasting peace.⁶⁴ Hence, women's participation in peacemaking will affirm that their concerns are addressed and included, and will encourage increased accountability for gender-based violence (GBV).

The issues of gender parity in peace talks as well as challenges to traditional gendered conventions have become front and center in attempts to boost women's involvement in peacemaking.⁶⁵ The creation of female-led peace organizations and the promotion of gender-sensitive mediation techniques have continued to gain momentum. Establishing quotas is one initiative that attempts to give women more opportunities as well as ensuring accountability within the delegation.⁶⁶ These actions seek to establish a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to peacemaking that acknowledges the value of women's voices in bringing about peace and guarantees women's representation at the negotiation table.⁶⁷ This approach addresses the

end of hostilities and the more extensive social and economic circumstances required for lasting peace and stability.

Gender, Stereotype, and Leadership

The discussion of peacebuilding and women triggers the need to establish the connection between gender, stereotype, and leadership related to post-conflict actions. Shulika writes that long-standing gender stereotypes have affected the perception of leadership, leading to the exclusion of women from positions of authority.⁶⁸ Conventional stereotypes link masculinity to leadership traits such as strength, assertiveness, willingness, and independence.⁶⁹ Conversely, women are often characterized as emotional, passive, and nurturing. According to Mueller-Hirth, these qualities make females seem incompatible with leadership, distorting the importance of their peace process engagements.⁷⁰ Despite proof that women have critical leadership abilities, prejudices continue to prevent them from achieving leadership roles in various fields such as politics, business, and peacebuilding.

According to Mueller-Hirth, female leaders typically take a more inclusive and cooperative stance to achieve peacebuilding objectives.⁷¹ Thus, women use such strategies to create a setting that values cooperation, empathy, and communication, which are crucial for successful peace negotiations. Interestingly, Minarova-Banjac observes that women who exhibit traditionally masculine leadership attributes become subjects of harsher criticism than their male counterparts.⁷² They appear, via a pro-masculine lens, to be excessively aggressive or unfeminine. By punishing women for breaking gender norms and maintaining such double standards, the cycle of female marginalization persists.⁷³ Therefore, a cultural change that embraces a range of leadership philosophies and dismantles inflexible gendered norms is necessary to overcome these prejudices.

Women Participating in Peace Education

Women have played a significant role in advancing peace education, especially in conflict-affected regions where they frequently take on the roles of educators and advocates for peace.⁷⁴ They develop these interests and organizational skills through empowerment and educational programs, sharing critical information and teaching the skills and tactics necessary to settle disagreements amicably.⁷⁵ These sessions are valuable in guiding individuals toward harmony, as the women foster the collaboration, lenience, and non-violence that they embrace from their own experiences.⁷⁶ They conduct grassroots, peace-themed education campaigns in African countries. Adjei stresses that women capably tackle diverse concepts, particularly human rights, gender-based violence, and social justice.⁷⁷ Female peace educators assist in altering people's perceptions about conflict, replacing them with peace and paving the way to reestablish cohesiveness, making these teachings valuable after a conflict.

Despite women's proven abilities, their involvement in official peace education programs for the government remains unacknowledged.⁷⁸ Their engagement in peacemaking endeavors is constrained by structural barriers which hinder efforts to meaningfully engage. Okafor and Akokuwebe write that conventional patriarchal standards and controlled access to leadership in instructive institutions continue to be significant challenges.⁷⁹ Notably, even though many African nations' constitutions contain a provision for female involvement, these complications persist. International protocols like Resolution 1325 asked for more support to ensure that peace education involves women, underscoring the significance of considering all perspectives.⁸⁰ Over

the years, efforts to guarantee the inclusion of gender-sensitive subjects in the education system have increased. Goraş-Postică insisted that women's participation in peace education benefits learning institutions and programs that embrace inclusivity.⁸¹ These practices serve to prevent conflict and attain lasting peace; therefore, these studies indicate the need for participation by women in peace education in order to develop future leaders who seek to promote social justice and diplomacy.

Factors Inhibiting Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

There are notable factors that inhibit female participation in peacebuilding. According to Atuhaire and Ndirangu, systematic inclusivity of female decision-makers in peace and security issues is paramount to guaranteeing peaceful negotiations.⁸² Such inclusion also facilitates the consideration of women's interests and, while these positive effects are evident, a study by Meagher and others revealed that security concerns are substantial barriers that prevent females from taking leadership positions.⁸³ Indeed, they further limit women's capacity to gain experience and develop valuable skills in post-conflict talks. Yet another barrier is the political arena, where women face marginalization. Wilson and others note that women face low representation in nations like Nigeria.⁸⁴ Meagher and others add that these political obstacles minimize females' opportunities to lead since "political parties and de facto authorities led to the implementation of practices and policies, excluding women as central decision-makers."⁸⁵ As a result, these women have zero to no chance of actively engaging with peacebuilding efforts.

Additionally, females consistently face "threats and intimidation" whenever they express their interest in taking leadership positions in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding initiatives.⁸⁶ Scholars like Maloiy Jonck and Goujon add that male dominance enables even the threat of violence, barring women from making any effort to become leaders.⁸⁷ Women in peace dialogue committees and mediation forums are stigmatized, though there is little expression of intergenerational gaps due to capacity building, sensitization, and persistent engagement.⁸⁸ People in these committees feel that female members' involvement makes them unruly. Even at informal mediation panels for peacebuilding, stigmas do occur.⁸⁹ Another notable obstacle that relates closely to stigmatization is stereotyping. Women's desire to engage in reconstruction and peacebuilding encounters "restrictive gender norms and stereotypes" that discourage them from taking the first step toward voicing their concerns or influencing decisions.⁹⁰ Thus, these obstructive actions portray women as lacking knowledge, social status, or skills to transform any post-conflict actions.

Methodology

Research Method and Design

This research adopts a qualitative case study methodology, like the scholarly work of Patricia Rinck, to determine women's leadership roles in peacebuilding.⁹¹ The design focuses on five specific nations: Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia, and Congo (Democratic Republic). It is appropriate as it guided similar studies to determine women's contribution to post-conflict reconstructions.⁹² Below are factors that influenced which countries were crucial for this analysis.

Inclusion Criterion of Case Studies

The first inclusion characteristic of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Congo (Democratic Republic), and South Sudan is their history of protracted warfare and intricate peacebuilding procedures. These countries are ideal for studying women's roles in peacebuilding because they have seen major internal conflicts that have had long-lasting effects on social, political, and economic institutions. Second, there are substantial examples of disregard for women's involvement in post-conflict reconstruction efforts in these nations. Additional inclusion criteria are the varied approaches to peacemaking, ranging from formal discussions to grassroots movements, which will offer a thorough understanding of how women's participation (or lack thereof) affects the viability and longevity of peace initiatives. Finally, these African nations share the challenges associated with political unpredictability, economic recovery, and social reconciliation. Due to these difficulties, there is a need to understand the structural obstacles and potential that exist for women in leadership and peacebuilding.

Textual Analysis and Research Sources

The study uses textual analysis like Turner and Swaine to examine gender and the role of women in peacebuilding.⁹³ The goal is to identify themes that explain how gender-inclusive participation impacts outcomes when women are part of the peace and security initiative. Additionally, primary and secondary sources that focus on Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia, and Congo (Democratic Republic, DR)—individually or in combination—are assessed, including journals, policy briefs, conference papers, dissertations, and some book chapters with historical details.

Research Findings

The texts reveal that women have a significant role in post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives. The following cases illustrate female participation and contribution to the peace processes in select African nations.

Case Study 1: Sierra Leone

After Sierra Leone's violent civil war (1991 to 2002), the significance of female peacebuilders became increasingly apparent. Lifongo writes that women in Sierra Leone suffered disproportionately from the conflict.⁹⁴ These challenges were products of pervasive gender-based violence and displacement; nonetheless, they made substantial contributions to peacebuilding, especially in community reconstruction and reconciliation initiatives at the grassroots level.⁹⁵ Women's organizations were instrumental in establishing peace, as their objectives were to address the aftermath of war: needs of survivors, disarmament, reintegration of former combatants, promotion of healing, and provision of counseling services in post-war communities.⁹⁶ Women remained primarily out of official peace talks and decision-making procedures even though these initiatives demonstrated the enduring structural obstacles they had to overcome themselves. Notably, the analysis shows that addressing social fairness and promoting long-term stability required women's participation at the local level.⁹⁷ The Sierra Leone case serves as an example of women's vital role in informal localized peacebuilding as well as the continuous barriers they face when trying to be involved and constructive.

The following women have made significant contributions to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone:

Zainab Bangura

During and following Sierra Leone's civil war, activist and leader Zainab Bangura was instrumental in fostering peace in her nation.⁹⁸ She kept her fervent advocacy for peace and women's rights after the war and, in 1996, helped to start the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG).⁹⁹ Civil society group CGG was committed to furthering democracy and openness. Ndongo writes that CGG is currently championing the restoration of "ethical standards" of how public institutions manage state resources.¹⁰⁰ Through her efforts, she galvanized women's groups to seek accountability from conflicting factions and the government, advocating for peace discussions and equitable elections. Bangura's contributions were essential in enhancing the incorporation of civil society perspectives at the Lomé Peace Accord 1999.¹⁰¹ The agreements enabled the conclusion of the conflict. Furthermore, Bangura's efforts transcended Sierra Leone. She was named the "United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict" in 2012, where she strongly noted that "Attacks against women have not only ruined lives; they have devastated economies, undermined faith in governments, and stifled stability on the continent."¹⁰² She capably tackled worldwide concerns regarding sexual violence.

Bangura's accomplishments garnered international acclaim, including the Africa Prize for Leadership in the Sustainable End of Hunger. Her post-conflict peacebuilding efforts included advocating for gender equality and facilitating the reintegration of women impacted by the fighting.¹⁰³ While even acting as an expert witness in some of the conflicts that undervalue the dignity of women, Bangura's unwavering pursuit of justice underscored the significance of incorporating women in peace negotiations.¹⁰⁴ Her actions demonstrate that their distinct viewpoints contribute to more inclusive and effective peace solutions. By increasing awareness of the impact of sexual assault in conflicts, she established a benchmark for tackling gender-related issues in post-conflict recovery in both Sierra Leone and worldwide.

Fatima Maada Bio

Fatima Maada Bio is Sierra Leone's First Lady. She actively fosters peace and champions children's and women's rights. Fatima's "Hands Off Our Girls" program started in 2019 to address sexual assault and child marriage.¹⁰⁵ The program focused on issues that usually became more severe during and after wars. Her projects address the fundamental causes of inequality and violence, safeguarding at-risk areas and advancing social unity.¹⁰⁶ Fatima's project guarantees that victims of violence obtain justice and healing, promoting peace immediately.

Using her platform, Bio has promoted women's leadership in politics, gender equality, and the value of female involvement in government and peace projects and has won awards for promoting human rights and social justice.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, she has contributed to Sierra Leone's development and stability by focusing on community-centered initiatives and using her platform to highlight issues that predominantly affect women.¹⁰⁸ Bio best illustrates the transformational impact of women in leadership during post-conflict rehabilitation. Her emphasis on education and economic development for women comes from her belief that "life for women and girls will not improve by chance. It will get better by intentional change."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, Bio shows dedication to fostering a resilient and peaceful community.

Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff

Promoting women's involvement in peacebuilding and government has also been greatly aided by eminent human rights lawyer and gender campaigner Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff of Sierra Leone. She

was crucial in encouraging women's participation in peace talks throughout the terrible civil war that tore through the country.¹¹⁰ She contributed to the post-conflict rehabilitation initiatives as well. As a co-founder of the "Mano River Women's Peace Network" (MARWOPNET), she endeavored to mobilize women throughout the region to participate in discussion and conflict resolution.¹¹¹ Through this organization, Jusu-Sheriff facilitated the alleviation of tensions and fostered sustainable peace. Her endeavors contributed to establishing a framework for gender-sensitive peacebuilding tactics in Sierra Leone. Jusu-Sheriff has been a vigorous proponent of law reforms aimed at combating gender-based violence and discrimination, noting that women usually "belong to some kind of collective" that counters their forceful removal from political parties.¹¹² She ensures that women's rights are integral to Sierra Leone's reconstruction efforts. During an interview with MEWC, she acknowledged that the "Women's Response to Ebola in Sierra Leone" (WRESL) campaign strengthened the position of civil societies in Sierra Leone and West Africa.¹¹³ Jusu-Sheriff has demonstrated, via her legal acumen and activism, that women's participation in peacebuilding can transform cultures, promoting inclusivity and enduring stability.

Case Study 2: Liberia

Another noteworthy illustration of the transforming role females play in conflict reconciliation and post-conflict healing is Liberia. The country experienced various peacebuilding efforts, especially during and after its 1989-1997 and 1999-2003 civil wars.¹¹⁴ Liberian women were instrumental in ending the second civil war by partnering with organizations such as the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, which organized protests that led to President Charles Taylor's resignation.¹¹⁵ Liberian females compelled politicians to hold peace talks and organized demonstrations, sit-ins, and talks with opposing groups, resulting in the 2003 Accra Peace Agreement.¹¹⁶ Women benefited from the accord as it addressed earlier reluctance to fulfill political rights.

Furthermore, the mass action demonstrated the suitability of collaborative efforts between refugees, Muslims, and Christians alongside women's guidance for peaceful protests.¹¹⁷ Contrarily, lawmakers' reactions affirmed their lack of desire to resolve these concerns. Reid notes that as of the end of 2004, many Liberian legislators opposed bills like the one meant to grant women electoral quotas.¹¹⁸ Despite these disappointments, women persisted and sought legal alternatives in their earlier agreement with the government. Leib observes that the peace brought about by Liberian females has ensured stability.¹¹⁹ These accomplishments only became evident after the post-conflict era; nonetheless, they affirm that when women secure peace, they achieve stability.

The following women have made significant contributions to Liberia's peacebuilding:

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

As the first female president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was the continent's first non-male leader and significantly contributed to peacebuilding after the nation's civil wars. Upon her election in 2005, she emphasized national reconciliation, institutional reconstruction, and the advancement of women's rights, establishing a foundation for a more stable country.¹²⁰ Sirleaf's government endeavored to fortify the rule of law and reestablish public confidence in governance by addressing corruption and promoting economic development. Under her direction, the "disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration" (DDR) initiatives necessary to stabilize Liberia

after the war were less complicated.¹²¹ As a global advocate for women in peacebuilding, Sirleaf emphasized the importance of women serving in leadership roles and recognizing their role in promoting social justice and lasting peace.

Sirleaf received the Nobel Peace Prize (2011) in acknowledgment of her efforts to advance peace and free women.¹²² Liberia passed laws under Sirleaf's direction addressing gender inequality, including those encouraging women's political and educational participation. Her campaign went beyond Liberia; she became a symbol of women's fortitude and will against suffering related to violence wherever it is found.¹²³ Although specific problems persist, Sirleaf's government demonstrates the potential of female leadership in rebuilding nations devastated by war in order to create a foundation for peace.

Moreover, as Liberia's former president, Sirleaf subsequently used her position to encourage women to participate in peacebuilding initiatives. While giving a Nobel lecture in Oslo in 2011, Sirleaf told Liberia's Nobel Prize winner, Leymah Gbowee, "You are a peacemaker. You had the courage to mobilize the women of Liberia to take back their country."¹²⁴ These were words of affirmation and appreciation of Sirleaf's fellow women's effort to end conflict. Sirleaf understood that women's involvement in peacebuilding was risky and that their actions constituted warrior-like bravery.

Sirleaf believes that women can lead the human race to freedom. In 2019, she spoke at a TED conference on "How women will lead us to freedom, justice and peace." She noted that:

I wanted to put women in all top positions, but I knew that was not possible. And so, I settled for putting them in strategic positions. ... The first woman chief of police to address the fears of our women who had suffered so much during the civil war ... another, the first minister of gender, to be able to assure the protection and the participation of women ... numerous women in junior ministerial positions.¹²⁵

The ex-president wanted to show women that, like men, they were capable of taking the top leadership positions and make long-term reforms. While responding to an interview question with the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security podcast about how her administration was inclusive, Sirleaf noted that they had "talented, strong, educated women with all the technical skills," and they "put them in all those key positions: Justice Ministry, Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Finance."¹²⁶ Women are change makers. The former president stated, "There is nothing more predictable than a strong woman who wants to change things."¹²⁷ Women-led peace initiatives were more likely to succeed. Sirleaf noted that, if given a chance:

Women bring to negotiations a commitment, a consistency and compromise in trying to achieve peace ... I believe the experience shows very clearly that when women are involved, the durability of peace can be secured. And so, we also know that so many times women are involved in the discussions, in taking actions to bring about peace, to end wars. And when the time comes, around the table, the women are not there.¹²⁸

One of the obstacles that women face in leadership is the perception that only men can hold some position. However, this was not the case with Sirleaf. She said:

I was never deterred from running for president just because there had never been any females elected head of state in Africa. Simply because political leadership in Liberia had always been a "boys' club" didn't mean it was right, and I was not deterred. Today, an

unprecedented number of women hold leadership positions in our country, and we intend to increase that number.¹²⁹

In a 2022 interview during the International Day of Women, Sirleaf remarked, “Even though women are the victims, they are the ones who stand up. They are the ones who can promote peace and reconciliation.”¹³⁰ Sirleaf perceived women as the interlinking force between conflict, peace, and long-lasting reconciliation. She utilized WIPNET’s Mass Action for Peace¹³¹ and workshops alongside other women to demand a stop to the international community’s funding until the peace talks resulted in an agreement.

One of her notable achievements was the “Women’s Situation Room” (WSR). Even after retiring, Sirleaf continued to use WSR to promote a peaceful and inclusive electoral process in African countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Kenya.¹³² Another achievement is “Sister Aid Liberia” (SALI). Her administration supported SALI, whose objective is to promote gender transformation and mentor and train women on the need to participate in politics and peacebuilding by eliminating harmful masculine influences.¹³³ Therefore, the ex-president believed in inclusive societies where gender is not a barrier to participating in post-conflict reconciliation.

Leymah Gbowee

Throughout the Second Civil War (from mid-1999 to August 2003), Leymah Gbowee inspired Liberian women to fight and champion peace. Leading the “Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace” (MLMAP) movement, she organized ecumenical gatherings of Muslim and Christian women carrying out nonviolent marches, sit-ins, and demonstrations.¹³⁴ These deeds helped the war-torn factions to compromise. Under Gbowee’s direction, former President Charles Taylor’s participation in peace negotiations in Ghana produced the Accra Peace Agreement signed in 2003.¹³⁵ Her movement’s emphasis on grassroots participation and nonviolence highlighted how well group efforts might advance peace.

In acknowledgment of her remarkable contribution, Gbowee received the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize (together with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Yemen’s Tawakkol Karman). After the war, she continued her activism for women’s rights and peacebuilding as the creator of the Women, Peace, and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa).¹³⁶ WIPSEN-Africa was committed to strengthening female leaders throughout the continent. Her efforts have garnered international acknowledgment of the significance of women’s involvement in conflict resolution and post-war reconstruction.¹³⁷ Gbowee’s leadership illustrates how women can proficiently unite factions and champion enduring peace in profoundly fragmented cultures.

Comfort Freeman

Comfort Freeman, a distinguished Liberian peacebuilder, significantly contributed to reconciliation and healing during and after Liberia’s civil wars. As the president of the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI), Freeman facilitated mobilizing women from various backgrounds to advocate for the cessation of violence.¹³⁸ Her activities focused on creating safe surroundings for children and women affected by the war. Using church recruitment, she supported peace at the local level and supplied tools for trauma healing.¹³⁹ Freeman reveals the need for community-oriented solutions to consider unique local needs and situations in achieving lasting peace.

In the post-war period, Freeman’s civil peacebuilding encompassed economic empowerment and social togetherness.¹⁴⁰ She emerged as a proactive leader in advocating for small-scale

enterprises for women. Freeman assisted in reconstructing their lives and enhancing the revitalization of their towns. Working with foreign organizations, she addressed trauma and displacement as part of the long-lasting effects of the war.¹⁴¹ Her dedication to the social and economic empowerment of women emphasizes their vital part in transforming societies touched by protracted conflict.

Case Study 3: South Sudan

Studies reveal that political instability, ethnic conflict, and civil war (2013-2015) have substantially impacted South Sudan's social fabric since winning independence in 2011.¹⁴² Women in this country use the Honyomiji, institutions of the "South Sudanese indigenous women" working for national peacebuilding.¹⁴³ Honyomiji also helps them organize and offer educational and social support as well as valuable leadership. South Sudanese female groups have encountered substantial obstacles to joining formal peace discussions because political and military elites marginalize them.¹⁴⁴ Despite these constraints, studies affirm women's extensive advocacy and conflict mediation involvement.¹⁴⁵ Even though Adeogun and Muthuki acknowledge South Sudan's unwillingness to absorb women due to tokenism leadership,¹⁴⁶ Chol observes that their grassroots programs are noteworthy for resolving humanitarian adversities.¹⁴⁷ Hence, South Sudanese women engender social interrelation among sharply divided communities to enable reconciliation between warring parties.

The following women made significant contributions to South Sudan's peacebuilding:

Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior

While serving in South Sudan government, Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior has been a well-known peace and reconciliation activist in her nation. She became a uniting agent once the nation acquired independence in 2011 and after the 2013 civil war.¹⁴⁸ De Mabior's job is to promote collaboration and negotiations among the disagreeing parties. Her commitment to encouraging inclusivity in peace projects was evident in the process of the Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS).¹⁴⁹ Programs by Nyandeng encouraging women's involvement in political and peace-building areas have raised their profile and value in the policy-making processes. She has concentrated chiefly on helping with humanitarian situations such as GBV and displacement that disproportionately impact women's and children's lives.¹⁵⁰ Combining her political force with grassroots activism, she considers women leaders' critical role in facing challenges following the war and advancing long-lasting peace.

Rita Lopidia

Rita Lopidia, a South Sudanese activist, has been an unwavering proponent of peace and women's rights. She was instrumental in inspiring women to speak out for the war's end and giving reconciliation a top priority during the Civil War.¹⁵¹ Lopidia has worked in other countries as well. She participated in the 2018 peace talks, pushing for the inclusion and consideration of women's voices and experiences in post-conflict resolution projects.¹⁵² Her leadership underscores the transformative influence of grassroots women's groups in advancing peace initiatives. Additionally, Lopidia acknowledges that psychosocial support from NGOs and UN agencies cannot address conflict's repercussions.¹⁵³ Instead, she assists women impacted by relocation and violence. Through the EVE Organization, Lopidia advocates for education, livelihood initiatives, and leadership development for women in South Sudan.¹⁵⁴ Her work illustrates how grassroots activism and international campaigning may close gaps in peacebuilding and guarantee more inclusive results for all societal members.

Case Study 4: Rwanda

Rwanda, an East African country, is a distinctive illustration of peacebuilding, given the devastating genocide that occurred here in 1994. Mansab acknowledges women's contributions to Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction since they were crucial in promoting transition justice, education, economic growth, and reconciliation.¹⁵⁵ After the genocide, women filled the void created by the depleted male population by taking on leadership positions in a variety of fields.¹⁵⁶ Females participated in Gacaca courts and promoted community-based reconciliation. According to Ugorji, these judicial systems were to handle genocide-related offenses, as the local initiatives remained vital components of grassroots peace programs.¹⁵⁷ With women occupying the majority of seats in Rwanda's parliament (over 63 percent), the post-genocide government has made significant progress in encouraging women's participation in official peacebuilding and political leadership.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, the analysis shows that Rwanda considers gender inclusivity central to its peace and general development goals.

The following women made significant contributions to Rwanda's peacebuilding:

Jeannette Kagame

Since 2000, First Lady of Rwanda Jeannette Kagame has been valuable in promoting healing and peace following the 1994 massacre. While using her lobbying and leadership, she has pushed initiatives meant to rebuild Rwanda's social fabric.¹⁵⁹ She works on the concerns of underprivileged areas and the empowerment of women. Restoring dignity and hope for genocide survivors, Kagame founded the Imbuto Foundation, which supports initiatives for educational, health, and financial development.¹⁶⁰ Her initiatives support harmony and peace by helping many organizations coordinate and interact. Rwanda is now an example of gender inclusiveness thanks primarily to Kagame's commitment to advancing female leadership.¹⁶¹ From a global perspective, her projects indicate women's crucial role in sustainable development and post-conflict healing. Kagame's position as first lady is a crucial resource for contributing to peacebuilding missions.

Odette Nyiramilimo

Odette Nyiramilimo, a physician and former senator of Rwanda, has played a significant role in promoting peace and healing in the nation. Throughout and after the genocide, she rendered essential medical assistance to survivors, emphasizing the restoration of physical security and emotional health in ravaged communities.¹⁶² Then, Nyiramilimo turned to political leadership and used her platform to advocate for women's participation in politics and the need to undo the long-lasting effects of war.¹⁶³ Her efforts highlighted rebuilding trust and encouraging diversity in policymaking, qualities that are essential in Rwanda's post-genocide recovery. As a member of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), Nyaramilimo has participated regionally in promoting peace cooperation.¹⁶⁴ Her ability to combine political activity, social welfare, and healthcare shows how women in authority have helped bring peace and healing. For cultures that have suffered significant violence, these activities are increasingly impactful.

Case Study 5: Congo (DRC)

DRC has extreme cases of GBV with female victims, which negatively portrays its presence in the society, as combatants use these atrocities as war weapons.¹⁶⁵ Even while facing these barriers, females in Congo lead peacebuilding programs, using civil society establishments and grassroots movements.¹⁶⁶ DRC women also organize small groups aiding sexual assault victims to obtain

support, championing human rights, and seeking justice and peace.¹⁶⁷ Gender-based institutions (for females) actively push for inclusivity in peace negotiations.¹⁶⁸ Other scholars like De Almagro note that advocates of movements in Bukavu and Goma in DRC created spaces in which to express their concerns and become political leaders, rather than always waiting to benefit from peacebuilding procedures.¹⁶⁹ However, institutional obstacles that prevent them from fully participating in peacebuilding and decision-making processes include persistent violence and deeply ingrained patriarchal norms.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, the analysis shows that DRC still needs more inclusive strategies to reduce ongoing conflicts.

The following women made significant contributions to DRC's peacebuilding:

Julienne Lusenge

While working in DRC as a human rights activist, Julienne Lusenge has been a fervent opponent of GBV and a steadfast advocate for peace. Lusenge, who co-founded Female Solidarity for Integrated Peace and Development, has diligently provided psychological and legal support to sexual violence survivors.¹⁷¹ She also founded the Congolese Women's Fund, whose core focus is offering economic help. Lusenge has constantly emphasized the systematic employment of sexual violence as a weapon of war, drawing the attention of the world community to these horrors through her addresses to the United Nations and other global forums.¹⁷² Her grassroots initiatives have concentrated on empowering women to serve as peacebuilders in their communities by providing training in conflict resolution and leadership. Lusenge's achievements exemplify her unwavering dedication to justice and peace in the DRC, and other consistently conflicting nations worldwide.

Chouchou Namegabe

Chouchou Namegabe, a distinguished journalist and activist from the DRC, has harnessed the influence of the media to champion peace and promote women's rights in her conflict-ridden nation. As the creator of the South Kivu Women's Media Association, Namegabe has concentrated on elevating the narratives of sexual violence survivors.¹⁷³ She chronicles their experiences to reveal the crimes perpetrated throughout regional conflicts. Through her radio broadcasts and advocacy initiatives, she has heightened awareness regarding the struggles of women and demanded accountability from those who commit acts of abuse.¹⁷⁴ Her work has illuminated the human cost of conflict and inspired survivors to articulate their experiences and regain their agency. Namegabe's endeavors have garnered international recognition, including prizes such as the Knights International Journalism Award (2009).¹⁷⁵ Her activism underscores the essential function of communication and narrative in peacebuilding and confronting entrenched injustices in conflict areas.

Factors Hindering Women's Participation at the Highest Level in Patriarchal African Societies

A significant obstacle to women's involvement in high-level peacebuilding within patriarchal African nations is the prevalence of ingrained cultural norms and gender stereotypes. Cultural expectations often restrict women to conventional roles such as caregivers and homemakers. Such obstacles deter their participation in decision-making processes. Moreover, these norms establish structural disparities that restrict women's access to educational and leadership resources, crucial for participation in peacebuilding initiatives. Despite women's capabilities,

these biases erode their credibility, hindering their recognition as legitimate participants in peace processes.

The absence of political will for change further hinders the role of women in leadership and peacebuilding positions. While global efforts for gender inclusiveness are evident, peacebuilding continues to be predominantly spearheaded by male leaders and elites who frequently marginalize women from negotiations and high-level conversations. Institutional obstacles, such as biased regulations and insufficient enforcement mechanisms for gender quotas, intensify this exclusion. Justino, Mitchell, and Müller noted that women frequently encounter systemic obstacles, including restricted access to resources, money, and networks. The lack of this support lessens their ability to achieve influence and visibility in peacebuilding initiatives.

Security issues and the widespread occurrence of gender-based violence in conflict zones also inhibit women's active involvement in peacebuilding efforts. Female leaders and activists frequently become victims of assault and intimidation, deterring them from taking on significant positions in conflict resolution. These dangers, coupled with insufficient legal protection and accountability measures, foster an atmosphere in which women are disproportionately at risk. Overcoming these obstacles necessitates transformative initiatives to confront patriarchal frameworks, advance gender equality, and guarantee women's safety and participation in all phases of peace processes.

Discussion and Conclusions

Women's Overall Contribution to Peacebuilding

Women have been crucial to peacebuilding in areas devastated by conflict; yet men continue to overlook and dismiss their contributions. Their work in local programs supports victims of violence and stimulates peace and justice. Further, grassroots activities also promote healing, which adds value to female participation. Citizens in countries like Rwanda are organized to advocate for post-conflict reconciliations as their Liberian counterparts spearhead nonaggressive resistance. Women have a vast, noteworthy impact on peace agreements; however, literature reveals that leaders leave them out of formal peace talks and decision-making processes. These challenges limit their potential to impact policies that deal with the underlying causes of conflict. As females acquire positions at the peacebuilding table, they safeguard peace agreements that are all-inclusive, lasting, and representative of diverse socioeconomic factors.

Recommendations

First, institutional reforms that value women's input in formal peace negotiations and decision-making organs are needed, which will guarantee the inclusion of women's viewpoints into national and international peace processes. Second, governments, NGOs, and global organizations should invest in enhancing women's capacity and acquiring and training senior leaders. This will help female grassroots organizations engage in peace initiatives more effectively. Reinforcing and upholding legal structures that support gender equality are necessary for preventing discriminatory behaviors such as excluding women. Third, stakeholders should gather more detailed data to monitor and assess the impact of female participation in peacebuilding. Such data is crucial for highlighting the real advantages of their involvement and guiding future peace and post-conflict reconciliatory policies.

Finally, women should engage in politics in order to be elected to office, which will help them to be in positions to more effectively address gender inequalities. Via participation in governance, women attain the ability to influence policies aimed at promoting gender equality and other issues that impact them disproportionately. Also, these roles allow them to address protections against gender-based violence, educational access, and reproductive rights. Political engagement will enable women to contest patriarchal conventions and redefine cultural views on leadership, proving that women are equally competent in high-stakes decision-making positions. Women in leadership roles can inspire future generations to pursue similar careers and disrupt the cycle of underrepresentation. Programs that integrate leadership development, gender-sensitive and inclusive political reforms, and financial assistance are vital to establishing systems that will mitigate barriers and cultivate an environment that promotes women's effective political involvement.

Notes

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**Mr. Churchill in the White House:
The Untold Story of a Prime Minister and
Two Presidents by Robert Schmuhl
(Norton 2024) Book Review**

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Robert Schmuhl's *Mr. Churchill in the White House* provides a remarkable and previously unknown account of episodes in the twentieth century, during which the White House served as a "home away from home" for British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The text attests to Schmuhl's well-honed skill of interpreting and providing insights into the inner workings of public figures through a masterful assemblage and decoding of vignettes, anecdotes, correspondence, and journals, including the written commentaries and reflections of witnesses—whether to pivotal events or to the behind-the-scenes developments that shaped them.

Schmuhl, long before serving as the Walter H. Annenberg–Edmund P. Joyce Chair in American Studies and Journalism at the University of Notre Dame, had already sharpened his talents in explicating and framing the attitudes and intentions—whether noble or flawed—of the individuals he has chosen to profile. He developed a five-decade-long friendship with Theodore Hesburgh, Notre Dame's towering academic leader, who, over his thirty-five-year tenure as president, instilled in the university and its stakeholders an innovative and compelling sense of institutional identity. Hesburgh's leadership attracted a world-class faculty, and led to the expansion and modernization of an already enviable physical campus, and to the building of a massive endowment, making Notre Dame one of the wealthiest universities in the world.

Hesburgh grew increasingly convinced that Schmuhl understood him better than anyone else and could best explain what made Hesburgh "Hesburgh," honored with both the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal; the first priest to serve as President of the Harvard University Board of Overseers; Chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission—dismissed by Richard Nixon for daring to criticize him; and the recipient of more than 150 honorary doctorates for his contributions to education, religion, civil rights, and government.

In his final years, Hesburgh approached Schmuhl, expressing his desire for him to author his definitive biography. Humbled and touched by the request, Schmuhl reluctantly declined due to preset commitments. Yet, he could not entirely set aside Hesburgh's wish. The result was *Fifty Years with Father Hesburgh: On and Off the Record* (2016), a moving and deeply personal study of the priestly leader whom Schmuhl had known from his student days through Hesburgh's retirement. Even in later years, despite physical impediments—including near blindness—Hesburgh remained steadfast in his convictions, deeply engaged with contemporary challenges, welcoming visitors to his office, and always open to sharing his thoughts. Schmuhl met with him regularly over five decades, preserving and chronicling the insights of a remarkable life.

Schmuhl's primary research interest has been the relationship between American political life and popular communication. He is uniquely gifted as a storyteller of public service and public servants. The propriety

of this characterization of his focus is reflected in *Mr. Churchill in the White House* (2024). Just prior to this latest work, he wrote *The Glory and the Burden: The American Presidency from FDR to Trump* (2019), profiling each of the presidencies within this timeline of U.S. history. As expected, Schmuhl did not shy away from casting a critical light on ill-fated or flawed presidencies of that period. In *The Glory and the Burden*, he also outlined in detail his reservations about existing protocols in the Democratic and Republican parties' presidential primaries, particularly how early-voting states influence the later primaries and signal to candidates where to focus resources to improve their chances. Schmuhl also outlined his concerns about America's continued reliance on the Electoral College to make the final call in the selection of each American president. He advocates for states allowing their electors the option to vote for the winner of the popular vote rather than simply represent the vote in their home state.

No doubt, Schmuhl's study of the modern presidency provided an entrée for his latest writing on Churchill, a figure whom he has long admired. In *Churchill in the White House*, the author studies the relationships fostered by Winston Churchill with American Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight David Eisenhower and reflects on uplifting and disappointing outcomes of those chapters in the history of what Churchill described as the US-UK "Special Relationship." Schmuhl's account allows the reader to appreciate the ways in which the rise of the United States and the observable and inevitable decline of the British Empire, for which Churchill lived each day, led him to ponder and propose strategies to leverage Britain's weakened hand in the "American Century." He advocated not just for another alliance, but even potentially a formalized union with the United States, the world's uncontested power of the time. Churchill managed to "float" this proposal in his commencement address to Harvard's graduating class of 1943. The ostensible downgrade in British primacy may have been easier for Churchill to accede than many of his countrymen because of his American roots on his mother's side. Indeed, Schmuhl reminds readers that, on December 27, 1941, three weeks after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, Churchill became the first foreign head of state invited to address the United States Congress in the twentieth century. He pointed out to the Members of Congress who welcomed him that his "American forbears" had "for so many generations played their part in the United States" and then quipped to his hosts that "if my father had been American and my mother British, instead of the other way around, I might have got here on my own."

In traditional diplomacy, the period leading up to the signing of summit agreements, peace treaties, or even sweeping trade agreements between heads of state, is typically precluded by extended deliberations amongst the advisors and envoys of the heads of state and government involved. A president and prime minister, such as FDR and Churchill, would normally only preside over a celebratory final ceremony where congratulatory remarks and the final signing of accords were featured. Schmuhl's *Churchill in the White House* contrasts such protocols with the bold, pre-emptive diplomatic plunge taken by Churchill, following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. In his desperation to stop Hitler's continued onslaught against Britain, Churchill circumvented the normal pomp, bureaucracy, and protocols, crossing "the Pond" himself to engage Roosevelt directly and repeatedly in the White House and even the Roosevelt Estate in Hyde Park, New York to "seal" an ever evolving "deal."

At moments in their partnership, Schmuhl relates how the two world leaders functioned virtually as co-leaders of a single government with Roosevelt, holder of the key assets needed to pursue the campaign, often deferring to Churchill, the chargé d'affaires, who dared to summon and provide direction not only to his own entourage but to members of the President's cabinet as well in the unfolding war effort against the Axis powers in Europe and Northern Africa.

On December 22, 1941, just fifteen days after Roosevelt's declaration of war against Japan, Germany, and Italy, Churchill arrived in the United States, choosing to stay in the Rose Bedroom on the White House second floor, rather than the Lincoln Bedroom recommended by Mrs. Roosevelt, because he found it more spacious and accommodating to his needs. The Rose Bedroom would serve as the base camp for each of Churchill's subsequent visits. On his first visit, he was scheduled for a one-week stay but he ended up remaining Stateside for twenty-four days. Between 1941 and 1944 Churchill returned to Washington to claim the Rose Room five more times. On four occasions, Churchill would also travel to "Springwood," the Roosevelt family home in Hyde Park, New York, where FDR was born and raised, and looked forward to return to for solace once each month throughout most of his Presidency.

Schmuhl chronicles the ways in which Roosevelt discovered an empathic comrade in arms in Churchill who, prior to but like him, as the head of government of a world power, even if a diminishing one, had sustained the shock and yet resolutely responded, while underprepared, to an offensive of massive proportions in accordance with the mantle assigned to them as leader of a nation under assault. While FDR and Churchill both loved storytelling, they contrasted sharply in their approaches to war and to politics. Churchill, ever the historian, was a master at contextualizing the present through the optic of the past. FDR, visionary and master of political maneuvers, referenced not the past but the future in strategizing and in addressing challenges, always carefully weighing how best to leverage present circumstances to contribute to his architecture of the future.

Each regarded the other as the greatest leader at a critical juncture in history. Schmuhl relates that Roosevelt trusted Churchill to such an extent that, when FDR absented himself from Washington for a few days in September 1943 in favor of his beloved Hyde Park, he entrusted the White House to Churchill, the resident-in-chief. Churchill, in FDR's absence but with his seemingly unqualified support, convened a conference of high-ranking British and US cabinet officials in the White House to review plans for the "Allied" or what FDR, with Churchill's support, dubbed the "United Nations" plans for the invasion of Italy as the "Grand Alliance" crept its way towards victory over the Axis powers.

Britain had been targeted and devastated by German attacks following the 1940 Nazi aggression against Poland. In contrast, the United States' "Day of Infamy" had been perpetrated not by a German but a Japanese air attack that had decimated its meager naval assets. Although the United States' seeming principal enemy was credibly Japan, Schmuhl studies Churchill's sincere yet persistent campaign to convince FDR that the Allied priority target had first to be Hitler's annihilation and only then could Japan's demise follow. Churchill, who functioned not only as Britain's Prime Minister but also as its Defense Minister, helped to shape the Allied focus and operations in Africa, and the offensive on Europe's Southern Flank, leading to a costly liberation of Italy, when German resistance proved far stronger than Churchill had anticipated. Unlike Eisenhower and Roosevelt, Churchill viewed the Southern Flank offensive as the strategic priority and he managed to drag the Allied forces' collective "foot," postponing the launch of D-Day or the cross-Channel attack on the German-Axis stronghold until 1944, an offensive which Stalin had been pleading for since the United States' entry into the War in order to deflect Hitler's relentless onslaught against Moscow, which he unleashed in 1940.

For Churchill, Britain needed not just to defend itself militarily but to find a way forward that would allow it to maintain its global relevance and prominence. Churchill's 1943 Harvard Commencement address, already referenced, also included in its entirety in the appendices of the book, divulged Churchill's calculated aspirations for the strengthening of ties between the two powers that could even lead to a

formalized federation. Through this initiative, which Churchill strongly favored, one can read between the lines that the United Kingdom would retain its voice as part of the world's new principal power. "The English speaking peoples," as Churchill liked to frame it, and their shared cultural heritage, could thus provide the pivotal thrust for what he viewed as the world's geopolitical destiny, reconfiguring and yet reaffirming the United Kingdom's cultural, linguistic, political, military, and economic footprint.

For his part, Roosevelt, the visionary, came to fix his sights on a different prize—the world itself, that would resonate with the American ideal and FDR's vision of Four Freedoms—Freedom of Worship, Freedom of Speech, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. To achieve this goal, Roosevelt decided, as the war proceeded, to become more reliant on a new consort, the Soviet Union. The realization of an America-inspired, indeed, an FDR-inspired United Nations System, required Roosevelt to forge an alliance with Stalin and the Soviet Union as his principal partner. FDR grew convinced, though somewhat deluded, that he might induce Stalin to embrace his vision. As the war progressed and the defeat of the Axis Powers increasingly became a given, Roosevelt seemed, in the eyes of the British Prime Minister, to prioritize his relationship with Josef Stalin over Sir Winston. Schmuhl relates an occasion when Churchill found himself the brunt of an FDR joke designed to cull favor with Stalin. Churchill inferred from this and other gestures that Roosevelt was prepared to downplay Britain's role in the future world order and scale down the Prime Minister's level of participation in some of the interaction between Stalin and Roosevelt, which led to an apparent cooling in the relationship between Churchill and FDR.

When FDR, the man for whom Churchill had crossed the Atlantic six times, passed away in April 1945, Churchill opted against another voyage across the Atlantic to honor and bid a final farewell to his partner in their shared charge against tyranny. Schmuhl's account suggests that the two leaders' trusting relationship had begun to sour because of Churchill's sense of having been cast aside. Instead of prioritizing the special relationship, Churchill painfully came to recognize that, with the winding down of the war in Europe, FDR envisioned Russia, rather than Britain, as his key partner in building the United Nations System and in facilitating its implementation. Woodrow Wilson, chief architect of the League of Nations, witnessed the collapse of his dream in 1919 when, by a vote of 49 against and 35 in favor, the United States Senate voted against American participation. FDR, feeling that more than the United States Senate which would strongly endorse the creation of the United Nations in 1945, he needed "Uncle Joe," as the Soviet dictator was known affectionately in circles in the West, to commit to the project. Churchill suffered the humiliation and pain of a jilted lover in the process and yet would later lament that his failure to attend FDR's funeral as the most serious *faux pas* of his entire political career.

My wife's grandfather, New York Congressman Hamilton Fish III, and FDR, beginning with FDR's creation and implementation of the New Deal, were bitter enemies. The hostility between Roosevelt and Fish would worsen as Hamilton Fish, then a sitting member of Congress in a district that included Roosevelt's beloved Hyde Park, recognized that in spite of his assurances of peace, and his 1940 campaign promise to Americans that "Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars," Roosevelt was subtly sending signals that the United States would soon find itself enveloped in war against Japan and Germany. In his writings, Fish also claimed that Roosevelt had shared with those in his inner circle that his ultimate ambition was not the United States' presidency; he claimed that FDR wanted to be the first Secretary General of the United Nations. Valid assertion or not, FDR was a key architect of the United Nations project and he understood that, without the support of the Soviet Union, the formation of the United Nations, a dream that FDR clung to at least as much as Wilson did to the League of Nations, would be out of the question.

In the later part of *Mr. Churchill in the White House*, Schmuhl turns his attention to the relationship between Winston Churchill and Dwight David Eisenhower whom Churchill had partnered with during the Allied Offensive on Europe led by Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander. In the Eisenhower presidency, Churchill, who was re-elected Prime Minister in 1951, would again find refuge in the White House's Rose Bedroom following the inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower as President in 1953. Churchill, ever wanting to preserve a role for Great Britain as a major player in the Post World War era, aspired anew to lobby Eisenhower, as he had Roosevelt, regarding his hope for a greater and formalized US-UK partnership going forward. On his agenda in their 1954 White House meetings was a proposal for an improbable summit amongst Eisenhower, Stalin, and Churchill. Eisenhower tactfully deflected Churchill's proposal and the Prime Minister returned to 10 Downing Street with his plans for a diplomatic triumph dashed. He stepped down as Prime Minister in 1955 although he remained a Member of Parliament until 1965.

Churchill returned to the Eisenhower White House once again in 1959. On this occasion, Eisenhower could welcome him not with tact and hesitation but as an esteemed and valued friend. There was no longer any jockeying for position. Eisenhower went out of his way to convey his respect and affection for the former Prime Minister, World Statesman, and friend. Schmuhl quotes Anne Whitman, Eisenhower's personal secretary, who observed that Eisenhower related to Churchill "like a son would treat an aging father and was just darling with him," even bringing Churchill to his own "Hyde Park" in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where he personally drove Churchill in a golf cart around his 200-acre property and then escorted him to the Gettysburg Battlefield.

At the time of Churchill's passing in January 1965, Eisenhower did not repeat the Churchillian error of abstaining from paying tribute to one of the most important figures of the Twentieth Century. He flew to Great Britain to attend Churchill's funeral and, in a broadcasted eulogy to the Prime Minister, he observed that Britain and the United States could both commemorate Churchill as a "soldier, statesman, and citizen." The title of "citizen" must be credited to President John F. Kennedy, a World War II naval veteran of the European front, who, as Schmuhl points out, in April 1963, just seven months prior to his assassination and less than two years before Churchill's passing, took the extraordinary step of conferring honorary American citizenship upon Winston Churchill. At least on a personal level, Churchill's dream of the united English-speaking peoples thus became a reality. Schmuhl writes that, although Churchill was the 1953 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, he considered the conferral of honorary American citizenship to be his greatest public recognition.

In compiling this unique text on a largely unstudied segment of Churchill's life, Schmuhl often provides his readers with not just one original source's recollection of an event but three, four, or even five. In preparing this study of Churchill, FDR, and Eisenhower, Schmuhl has deftly navigated diaries, personal notes, memoirs, and the formal writings of countless public figures and private individuals who share their takes on various incidents in the lives and encounters of these three historical figures.

Probably more than most presidencies, the team effort of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, a couple whose relationship saw its share of turbulence and triumph, needs to be studied. They did not necessarily agree on all matters. Eleanor chided FDR for his silence on the continuing lynching of blacks and for his decision, in spite of Eleanor's fierce opposition, to go forward with the detention of US citizens of Japanese descent during World War II.

Schmuhl shares an encounter between Eleanor and Churchill, where having sensed her reservations to his handling of matters in the White House, and potentially to matters of State as well, Churchill remarked to her that she had never really “approved” of him and Eleanor quickly retorted that she did not recall ever having “disapproved” of him. It may have been of interest to have pursued the ups and downs of the “Eleanor Factor” in the “Special Relationship.” One wonders whether Eleanor, had Churchill not relied so heavily, as Schmuhl points out, on a circle exclusively composed of males in the pursuit of his agenda, could have helped Churchill to convince FDR of the primacy of the US-UK relationship.

Schmuhl references Churchill’s claim that “No lover ever studied every whim of his mistress as I did those of President Roosevelt.” Ironically, one finds an apparent and ironic lacuna in Mr. Churchill’s analogy—the First Lady herself. Throughout his entire life, FDR spent a grand total of approximately three weeks in Great Britain. For her part, Eleanor Roosevelt studied in London from 1899 to 1902 in the exclusive Allenswood Academy for girls. The Academy’s Headmistress Marie Souvestre mentored Eleanor during those three years. The First Lady would reference Allenswood and Souvestre as foundational in the formulating of her core values, in the fostering of her appreciation for social causes and civil rights, and in shaping the defining dimensions of her public leadership role. Eleanor may have had a greater fondness and far more of an affinity and empathy for Churchill’s celebrated future vision for the “English speaking peoples” than he calibrated in mapping out the best way to approach FDR and gain support for the Churchillian view of the future world order.

The “Big Picture” provided by Schmuhl of the Prime Minister’s relationship with two American presidencies is needed even to explore this and surely many other tangential questions invited by his study. We are indebted to the author for sifting through and proffering so many unknown dimensions of this chapter of history. He provides his readers with so much to appreciate, reflect on, and speculate about as one arrives, as one must, to the closing pages of this significant work. Schmuhl has provided historians and their emulators with a personalized study of statecraft at the highest level, conducted in the midst of a seismic shift in geopolitics, shaped, to a large extent, by the decisions and behaviors of the personalities once again brought to life by Schmuhl.

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Dr. Thomas Ward Presents at Event held by International Media Accociation for Peace of UPF



On June 24, 2025, the International Media Association for Peace of the Universal Peace Federation held an event on the topic "Lasting Peace Through Conflict Transformation: Opportunities for Communication Media's Contribution."

Dr. Thomas Ward, Chair of HJI's Master of Arts in Peace Studies and Professor of Peace and Development, participated as guest speaker along with Ms. Cheryl Wetzstein, Senior Advisor, Times Global Media Group and former reporter at *The Washington Times*. The event was moderated by Mr. Ray Lipowcan, Executive Director, UPF Western Pennsylvania, and current HJI student..

We invite you to enjoy the recording of this enlightening conversation on Conflict Transformation, which explores ways to move from merely managing disputes to truly transforming relationships.

[Watch the recording!](#)



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Dr. Thomas G. Walsh Participates in “The Washington Brief”



On Tuesday, May 5, Dr. Thomas Walsh, HJI President, was featured as a guest panelist invited by the The Washington Times Foundation’s presentation of the The Washington Brief on the topic, “The Relevance of Peace Studies to Conflict Resolution.” Dr. Walsh joined Ambassador Joseph DeTrani, former Six-Party Talks envoy, and Dr. Alexandre Mansourov, Professor of Security Studies from Georgetown University in this revealing conversation. Dr. Michael Jenkins, President of The Washington Times Foundation, and HJI graduate, was the moderator.

In his remarks, Dr. Walsh stated, “We live in a highly charged and conflicted world, one burdened by frozen conflicts, steaming hot conflicts, and conflicts waiting to flare up. While traditional political and economic approaches to peace are essential, they are not entirely adequate in addressing or resolving some of the root causes of conflict. With this in mind, our discussion will focus on the relevance and role of a wide range of aspects of the human experience, including intercultural and interreligious dialogue, education and diplomacy in the effort to redirect human energies toward peace rather than conflict.” Click on the link below to watch the entire program.

[Watch the recording!](#)



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