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A prelude to revisionism? The stalemated peace model and the emergence of multipolarity in international order

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ABSTRACT

Stalemated peace processes are indicative of serious problems for international order, relating to its legitimacy and viability. They may indicate potential opportunities or herald revisionist moments. Yet, the dominant research methodologies, conceptual, and practical doctrines of the post-Cold War order, related to peacemaking, have indicated a convergence around limited goals for peacemaking, peace missions, international mediation, and conflict resolution. At best, this has led to negative forms of peace, stalemates, or a victor's peace in many conflict-affected states and regions. Such problem-solving approaches, which operate within the often contradictory frameworks of the liberal international order, Realism, multipolarity, and geopolitical pragmatism, have led to unintended consequences because of such parsimony. This article examines the post-Cold War consequences of these developments in peacemaking and related UN and other peace approaches in practice and in theory. It focuses on the emergence of the concept of "stalemated peace".

KEYWORDS Stalemated peace; peacemaking; peacebuilding; UN

The dominant research methodologies, conceptual, and practical doctrines of the post-Cold War order related to peacemaking, such as "hurting stalemates", "ripe moments" (Zartman, 2001), and "backsliding" (Wade, 1996) operate within a conflict management framework associated with negative forms of peace (Galtung, 1969, pp. 167–169). This framework was updated after the end of the Cold War with a broader, more positive "liberal peacebuilding" paradigm (Paris, 2010). Both frameworks, to varying degrees,

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indicated a Northern/Western convergence around limited goals for peacemaking, peacekeeping, international mediation, and conflict resolution, but it is only recently that the implications have become clearer at a systemic level as well as for institutions and civil society. There is a more convincing interpretation now available, however: this Eurocentric approach has ultimately led to a “stalemated peace” model of peacemaking, which has affected UN peace missions more generally, undermining the UN’s normative purpose and its practical tools.

This model is, in turn, now being disrupted significantly by internal inconsistencies within the liberal peace (outlined in previous critical work on liberal peace, mine included, see Richmond, 2005, 2002), and challenges from outside, whether from the Global South or by regional geopolitical actors (as explored in other contributions to this Special Issue). The “stalemated peace” model this article develops draws on a “conflict management” ontology rooted in post-war Western interests and knowledge systems, a deeply pessimistic view of human nature, the concurrent behavior of states, and the consequently limited objectives of any peace praxis (including for that of the UN and its peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding functions). Unexpectedly, the stalemate model may also contribute to systemic, geopolitical tensions, and conflicts in world politics, making it much more unstable than previously thought.

This epistemological weakness has allowed scholars and analysts to describe the “grand stalemate” of the Minsk agreements after 2015 as the “... best outcome ...” (Peters & Shapkina, 2019, p. 1), one which might have achieved “stabilization”. The stalemated peace model may, in addition, provide camouflage for strategies of forced displacement and partition, with long-standing consequences in Cyprus, Kosovo, Syria, Israel/Palestine and Gaza, Armenia/Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, and in many other recent wars (Tokmajyan, 2024, pp. 2–4). This association with a “negative peace”, limited “conflict management” and power-driven pragmatic policy compromises ultimately contributes to the re-ignition of war, such as with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. A stalemated peace process may hold out the potential for a sudden or eventual agreement, but in an unstable international environment driven by geopolitical, material, and ideational concerns (as Sara Hellmüller and Fanny Badache also infer in their Introduction to the Special Issue, see Hellmüller & Badache, 2025) it often leads to war in the longer term, rather than providing a basis for progress.

In the spirit of reconnecting IR and Peace Research (see Hellmüller & Badache, 2025), this contribution critically examines the post-Cold War consequences of the dominant epistemological developments in peacemaking, contributing to the broader themes that have emerged from this Special Issue on “World Politics and UN Peace Missions”. It draws on and extends the themes developed in my book, *The Grand Design: The Evolution*

of the *International Peace Architecture*, which outlined and critiqued the historical and often contradictory dynamics of the evolution of the history of peace in International Relations, including its many micro-level blockages and concurrent, parasitic dynamics of “counter-peace” (Richmond, 2022b, p. 130; Pogodda et al., 2023). Many international and UN-backed peace processes and peacekeeping operations, and more contemporary attempts at peacebuilding have been subject to these contradictory dynamics, leading to stalemated or degraded outcomes, or “backsliding”. Drawing on what appear to be widespread patterns within “hurting” and “comfortable” stalemates across different UN peace missions, as well as non-UN peace processes, this article attempts to provide some conceptual shape to their implications.

It first argues that significant problems were obscured by the development of apparently pragmatic concepts such as those of “hurting stalemates” and “spoilers”, which actually disguised “backsliding” where UN peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and political missions could not bring about sustainable peace (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021, pp. 1–4; Newman & Richmond, 2006, p. 102; Stedman, 1997, p. 5; Zartman, 1985, 2001). This weakness cannot be addressed without a conceptual shift from problem-solving (or “stabilization”) to new, more emancipatory frameworks for peacemaking where political claims are addressed across the wide scope of peacemaking, including issues of local and global justice and sustainability (e.g., see Richmond, 2022a). These possibilities transcend the liberal peace model significantly, they mainly exist in the scholarship or among social movements, have been translated into doctrine only in extremis, and are long overdue. Hints can be seen in UN documentation on “sustaining peace” (UN, 2018a) or in long-running debates within the Non-Aligned movement dating back to the 1960s (Menon, 2022). Their insights remain unimplemented, underpinning stalemates rather than the redressal of unmet political claims, meaning that peacemaking and UN peace missions have become depoliticized from the perspective of civil society while preserving political power-structures with only minor checks. Global order and security have thus become increasingly detached from the structural implications of critical peace and conflict research’s insights into local political claims in conflict-affected societies (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013).

Related to only minor theoretical innovations (even if embedded in international doctrine, see UN, 2018a) and the increasing dysfunctionality of the state and international system, this has meant the stalemated peace model has often been regarded as acceptable to international actors and disputants. Indeed, the fear of a related loss of power because of any concessions made under any agreement has encouraged key actors in peace processes to consider escalating violence as an alternative to compromise (as with Charles

Taylor in Liberia, see Waugh, 2011). This dilemma has also been touched upon by some civil society actors who have envisioned further escalation in Ukraine in order to produce a victory before a liberal peace settlement can be attained (Hopko & Kubilius, 2024).

Consequently, this article examines the proposition that long-standing stalemates may not be a platform for a future breakthrough as previously thought, but instead may inculcate revisionist and revanchist sentiments, which also involve the revival of violence—both direct and structural—as legitimate political tools. To this end, the article explores the conceptual through to pragmatic formulations for peacemaking that have led to such stalemated peace frameworks and models. It draws on examples such as the post-Dayton political reform process in the Bosnian context (described by Richard Holbrooke as a “stalemate machine”, see Chollet, 2006, p. 45) as well as UN mediation in the Cyprus context (long described as a “graveyard for diplomacy”, see Gruenbaum, 2017) going back to the 1960s at least (a term also used in the case of Myanmar and others, see Moe, 2007). It looks at the implications of this stalemated peace model for peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding where its results can be seen across central Africa with the resurgence of authoritarianism, in Sri Lanka after its aborted peace process, in the Middle East since the failure of the Oslo process, Syria and the failure of UN mediation, in Central and South America where long-standing peace agreements remain fragile, and in Ukraine where such broad-ranging failures set the scene for the later failure of the Minsk Agreements and the war that followed (Allan, 2020).

A “stalemate machine” and related conceptual patterns for peacemaking

Problem-solving approaches for peacemaking drew on and reproduced an epistemological framework that acted as a basis for thinking about conflict resolution, transformation, and peacebuilding (Pugh, 2004, p. 39). They were limited in the sense that they operated within the historical international system and its structures, attempting domestic or micro-political reform rather than structural change. This had negative consequences for UN peace missions (Hellmüller & Badache, 2025). Their goals have been too limited to accrue local legitimacy in conflict-affected societies and they may have counter-intuitively encouraged state and international actors to drag their feet and reorganize.

Theoretical approaches have tended to follow suit. Liberal peace approaches confirmed the hierarchical states system’s architecture, highlighted the role of global capitalism, assumed individualist notions of rights, and blocked expanded understandings of historical and distributive forms of justice in association with peace (Pugh, 2004). Thus, they operated

in the context of a hegemonic, northern status quo, working to maintain it through conflict management type tools, which increasingly claimed to represent more than they actually achieved. This deficit opened the way for later post-colonial and multipolar critiques of the liberal model (Sunca, 2023).

From these dynamics, stalemated forms of peace have emerged, in which violence is minimized, but none of the political, security, or social issues inherent in any conflict situation are resolved. The conflict structures may be mitigated but not altered or reformulated, other than by the preceding war itself. Instead, long-standing political, diplomatic, security, and social processes are developed in the relatively abstract, rarified, conceptual settings of peace processes, conflict management or even transformation, mediation and diplomatic efforts, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and political reform discussions. These processes may even lead to agreements that emerge during or after crises and under huge pressures, between disputants in international forums. These may exist on paper but remain unimplemented or heavily contested in national or local contexts, however. The stalemated peace model helps to uncover the empirical reality of what appear to be benign conceptual and theoretical frameworks associated with conflict management, resolution, transformation, and peacebuilding. This means it is not just a phenomenon associated with liberal peace (Doyle, 1986; Paris, 2004; Richmond, 2005) but also with more basic forms of conflict management. Its emergence is partly due to the well-known theoretical limitations of peacemaking tools in the International Peace Architecture when measured against more emancipatory concepts (see Chander, 2017; Richmond, 2022b), including within (and also beyond) the liberal peace framework, its hypocrisy, and widespread global disagreements (Lawson & Zarakol, 2023), as well as a lack of political will in implementation.¹

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

The associated “negative peace” or “conflict management” rationality represents a mix of a Eurocentric, scientific application of knowledge across a range of cases, the projection of American and Western power, and Eurocentric knowledge associated with hegemony, parsimony, and pragmatism (Ikenberry, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2019). Target and subject populations, civil societies, social movements, and elites have often been willing to accept the apparent superiority of such frameworks in the hope of a

subsequent peace dividend, eventual human security, and ultimately integration into the western and global political economy and security communities. This grand bargain has been struck time and time again after 1989, and yet it has failed to deliver much more than short to medium-term stalemates and “stabilization” outcomes or has been reneged upon or blocked by local, elite, regional, and international actors (Jett, 2023, pp. 1–9). In the absence of any potential convergence between disputants, and local and international actors, guided by liberalism, stalemates were the most likely outcome. Thus, *de facto*, the stalemated peace model of peacemaking has emerged as an empirical consequence of such theoretical limitations, yet is often assumed to be a platform for future improvement. Beyond the stalemated peace model lies the risk of ideological conflict and a more general destabilization of the international peace architecture.

The slow, refrigerated, frozen, and backsliding dynamics of peacemaking in conflict-affected societies (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021, pp. 1–4; Soares de Oliveira, 2011; Smetana & Ludvik, 2018) can be described as representing short-term international convergence on a stalemated model of elite peacemaking. Holbrooke noted the “gigantic stalemate machine” around the Dayton Peace accords for Bosnia–Herzegovina early on in the Post-Cold War era (Chollet, 2006, p. 45). Within this model, civil society was disempowered, elites bode their time for geopolitical and other power-shifts while harboring revisionist aims, and international actors assumed a stalemated status quo would be grounds for improvement in the longer term. However, international actors also pragmatically used the stalemated peace model as a cover to gradually reduce their engagement if it appeared to have become embedded as has been the case in the Middle East after 1993–1998, Ukraine after 2012, and more recently in Cyprus where the UN Special Representative position fell into abeyance after failed peace talks in Crans Montana in 2017 (Report of the Secretary-General, 2018). Or revisionist actors may use the stalemated peace model as a basis to challenge and reorganize international order.

Overall, the pattern in stalemated peace processes across the local, state, and global scales of international relations can be summarized as follows: a weak and defunded civil society pitted against a dominant state controlled by political elites, and operating in the context of a contested regional and international set of geopolitics in which donors, peacekeepers, and peacebuilders may withdraw, lose interest, or are unable to intervene (Pogodda et al., 2023). Such patterns add nuance to the work of conflict management (and later conflict resolution) specialists (Zartman, 1985) where stalemates were seen not necessarily as a frozen situation that might collapse into war but as a platform for progress. This was implied by the concept of the “hurting stalemate” and by the concurrent “ripe moment” concept, which indicated that disputants perceived that it was too painful to fight on, too

painful to lose the conflict, and thus a peace process allows for an escape route (Zartman, 1985, 2001).

Yet, the stalemate model effectively also requires (and enables) minimal investment from all parties, especially power holders and international actors, to the detriment of social and civil peace actors. An alternative might be the example of Northern Ireland, where enormous resources were expended after the Good Friday Agreements in 1996 to make slow progress (which was in the end often down to back-channel processes, as well as civil and institutional connections) (O Dochartaigh, 2021). As in Bosnia or Cyprus (Belloni, 2019; Ker-Lindsay, 2005), the stalemated peace model indicates that progress is infinitesimal, implementation is weak, and any revisions to the peace process risk unravelling both completely without such an alignment.

Wider consequences

While pragmatic, however, the stalemated peace framework has also undermined the legitimacy of the liberal international order (LIO) and UN system because it retards local, social claims for rights, justice and democracy, as well as development, as in Afghanistan before the US withdrawal in 2022 (Dodge, 2021) or in Sri Lanka over the last two decades (Åkebo & Bastian, 2021). While keeping elite power-sharers engaged, the stalemated peace allows elites to develop a longer-term strategy that preserves their control. This often depends on the utility of violence as a political tool to counter any social movements that may support a peace process. Elites tend to respond by shifting toward authoritarian modes of governance, as in Cambodia (Fforde & Seidel, 2015, pp. 79–99), with the misplaced acquiescence of the UN and other donors who do not want to upset the status quo. Yet, this reduces the legitimacy of any peace process compared to liberal norms or critical scholarship, as well as for civil society, indicating the dominance of elites and the close relationship between policy tools and unscientific thinking inherent in illiberal and authoritarian practices. The stalemated peace enables politics to maintain pre-eminence over law and socially oriented conceptions of peace in this more populist-nationalist epoch, camouflaged by bureaucratic (and technocratic) praxis (Mac Ginty, 2012). Stalemated peace processes are thus unstable, empower state elites, regional powers, and community populists over the critical norms and standards inherent in a peace process (for example, non-violence, rights, justice, cooperation, polylogue, and consensus, see Richmond, 2022b, pp. 138–140).

The replication of stalemated peace processes can be characterized as having led to a long and slow escalation of global conflicts after the end of the Cold War, which now threatens the LIO via illiberal and authoritarian outcomes as well as spurring wider ideological challenges (Lewis, 2022).

Multipolar tensions hinge upon the continuing salience of violence and war as a tool of contemporary, illiberal politics (de Oliveira, 2011; Paris, 2020), as opposed to rights, dialog, democracy, constitution-making, law, cooperation, and institutionalization. A pattern of weak civil societies, powerful elites and co-opted states, and withdrawn or distracted international actors unable to stand up for normative or legal standards has clearly emerged (Pogodda et al., 2023, p. 497; Paris, 2020). These patterns have facilitated hegemonic divergence rather than consensus (Richmond et al., 2023, p. 127), Eurocentrism rather than global justice, and a focus on aspirational data supposedly devoid of politics (Bigo et al., 2019).

The conceptual, epistemological, and methodological limitations widely used in policymaking and scholarship have had complex consequences: the resulting and widespread stalemated peace processes have become a platform for authoritarian regimes and illiberal political processes, particularly since the start of the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq. They have led to stabilization thinking which has undermined Western peace approaches to some degree, pointing, in part, at least to consequences such as the American failure and withdrawal from Afghanistan (Dodge, 2021, pp. 47–58).

Backsliding dynamics (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021) also indicate a lack of international political will or consensus about the nature of peacemaking and resultant political order, in particular, caused by often inadvertently pandering to political elites and failing to address the political goals of local populations and civil society. Convergence has led to stalemated peace processes rather than alignments of interests and norms, paradoxically undermining legitimacy, and escalating conflicts, and it has become a platform for geopolitical conflict. This is in direct contradiction to what some scholars assumed would be a more positive dynamic as far back as the 1970s (Nelson, 1978). The stalemated peace framework may maintain geopolitics and dominant power-relations (Kissinger, 2015). Doyle, for example, (among others) identifies a “cold peace” in which global authoritarians and global capitalism squeeze out justice, rights, and representation, often using digital technologies (Doyle, 2023).

There was and is an alternative to this tendency for peace processes to fall into unimplemented and degraded stalemates or worse. Alternatively, the road not traveled includes critical, feminist, and post- or decolonial work on local agency, hybridity, justice, and sustainability, as well as the constructions of new global systems of order connected to global justice and pluriversality (Richmond et al., 2016, pp. 1–17). Because of these omissions, civil and local societies have come to be highly critical of the processes and outcomes of peacekeeping and peacebuilding even where they seem to have stabilized the situation (Adebajo, 2021; Autesserre, 2014; Mac Ginty, 2012). Liberal external actors have accepted a dilution of their proposed standards in the name of keeping at a minimum a negative peace alive. In

parallel, ideological challenges have been mounted against liberal formulations of peace, and local or post-colonial challenges have also been mounted against its cultural and historical lack of contextuality or justice. These dynamics can be observed from Cambodia to the Balkans in the 1990s, Timor Leste, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in the 2000s, to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and the Middle East and Ukraine (Jett, 2023). In the next section, I outline the main generations of approaches that have led to a convergence on a stalemated peace model of peacemaking.

Antecedents of contemporary stalemated peace processes

Stage one: Diplomacy, mediation, and international order and balance as inertia

Since the 19th century, it has been common to focus on elite diplomacy, and the potential of high-level mediation, to respond to conflict at the systemic level (Kissinger, 1957) in the context of a geopolitical and imperial balance of power. This set the parameters for all conflict management exercises, it established their limits and meant that any more sophisticated efforts beyond those limits would also be blocked.

Earlier, civil wars tended to end in a victor's peace; however, until the realization, they could escalate into regional conflicts that would require conference diplomacy and mediation (Kissinger, 1957). Underpinning the slow development of these peacemaking tools was the realization of the systemic and industrialized risks of conflict escalation (realized with the outbreak of WW1), the development of the tools of diplomacy, especially conference diplomacy, and the need for treaty agreements to be signed by elite actors, such as with the Congress of Vienna in 1815 or the Paris Peace Treaty after WWI (Bercovitch & Regan, 1999; Kissinger, 1957). This evolution also set out some epistemic parameters for peacemaking henceforth: it remained in the domain of Western elites and was focused on security interests and balances of power of hegemonic actors.

Conflict management theories, as they developed from the 1960s, followed this state-centric and Eurocentric track, also sparking some critical debates (Zartman, 1985). They incorporated elite conferences, high-status diplomacy and mediation, and legal treaties focused on territory, borders, and ownership (Bell, 2008; Kissinger, 1957) within the existing imperial and state-centric orders of the day. They tended to be unconcerned with local consent, politics, or marginalized political claims, especially in the Global South and former colonies, and peace was not to be equated with justice, essentially, but with interests and security. The levers available were crude, conservative, and disinterested in moving beyond European statecraft and imperialism.

Thus, early on, peacemaking tools could be seen somewhat ambivalently as status quo oriented, maintaining systemic integrity against external and international challenges, and preserving hierarchies of power and interest in an established domestic order and global political economy. This first-generation approach (Richmond, 2002), or conflict management approach (Crocker, 2011), was popular in Western European and American academic and policy circles during the Cold War. It preserved the legitimacy of Western conceptions of political and international relations, reducing the scope and cost of peacemaking by focusing on power, status, and security, stabilizing the core powers in order to stabilize the periphery. This was very influential for UN peacekeeping and its mediation and diplomacy in early stages (James, 1969), as was on view later when the Cyprus conflict broke out in 1964 (Ker-Lindsay, 1997). Key concepts that emerged from this phase carried forward inertia in terms of not prioritizing wider scholarly findings, however, over geo-political (and geo-economic) practices. Thus, stage one created the foundations of long-term stalemates in conflict-affected societies, at the regional level and created perplexing policy and epistemological limitations for critical thinkers to grapple with.

Stage two: Peacekeeping and mediation as order maintenance through stalemates

This early stalemate dynamic was echoed in the next stage of development from about the 1950s. Many of the conflicts, addressed within this framework and during this era, saw UN peacekeeping and UN mediation become locked into long-term engagements which saw little progress but, in some cases, offered some semblance of stability, the Cyprus conflict being emblematic (James, 1969; Goulding, 1993, pp. 451–464). These emerging tools were fundamentally less ambitious than those used in the immediate post-WWII period in Western Europe and Japan. Rather than dealing with structural security and economic problems, they sought to placate and pacify post-colonial conflicts.

During the post-war and Cold War transition away from direct imperialism, a revised version of peacekeeping came to be associated in UN circles with conflict management after the Suez Crisis of 1956 (Urquhart, 1987). It was soon to be conceptually complemented with international mediation, notable in Cyprus and the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s, again within the limited parameters of conflict management and first-generation approaches to peacemaking (James, 1969). This set the scene for the Oslo Accords, among other examples. The addition of mediation to the conflict management framework was a response to the inability to move out of a cease-fire situation solely through peacekeeping, or limited diplomacy, as became clear in the Congo in the early 1960s, and the perceived need,

especially in the UN and diplomatic circles, to be able to achieve more to prevent conflicts from escalating or the balance of power from being eroded (Bercovitch & Regan, 1999). The underlying normative intent of the UN Charter was a significant part of this pressure, eventually to incorporate human rights and social claims (which eventually pointed to the incorporation of human rights in peacemaking after the Helsinki Final Act in 1975; see Soutou, 2000, pp. 340–341), as well as an understanding that cease-fires and stalemates were inadequate if even minor conflicts as in Cyprus after 1964 were not to risk leading to major regional wars and super-power conflicts (such as potentially between Greece and Turkey during the Cold War, see Ker-Lindsay, 2005).

In other words, it was understood by the mid-20th century that the balance of power was either inoperative in stabilizing great power relations, or unjust in dealing with conflict-affected societies in the Global South especially, and that a cease-fire or a stalemate was unstable situations: that further tools or layers of the international peace architecture would be required to deal with the next steps was a common argument. Efforts followed for more comprehensive approaches to peacemaking in the form of coordinated peacekeeping, mediation, and diplomacy (with conflict resolution and transformation debates also beginning to emerge). However, the key point was that more might be achieved by coordinating different mechanisms for peacemaking. This implied, and indeed required a convergence of systems, norms, as well as interests in an international order where functional cooperation was expected to yield peace then as now in much of the literature (Visoka & Doyle, 2016, p. 864).

Yet, this understanding of the need for parallel, multidimensional processes faded from view in the 2000s, as it soon began to appear that long-term cease-fires might be viable for stabilization purposes.

Stage three and stalemated peace: From “hurting stalemates” and “ripe moments” to refrigerated conflicts

Under conceptual pressure, theories began to expand their scope to align themselves with western liberalism after the end of the Cold War, to domesticate realism, and to engage, to a more limited degree, with the Marxist and Global South critiques that had emerged by the 1980s. There were several attempts to deal with such limitations within the confines of realist and conflict management thinking, particularly for mediation and conflict resolution, notably through contributions by Bercovitch, Zartman, (Bercovitch & Regan, 1999; Zartman, 1985, 2001; Touval & Zartman, 1985) and others. There were also significant attempts to augment realpolitik and institutionalist thinking in the area with the emergence of second-generation thinking on conflict resolution and transformation, which, in particular, elevated the

status of social actors in peacemaking, as well as related methods and goals (Lederach, 1995, 1997). Political liberalism enabled scholars and policymakers to chart a middle way through the two poles of social and power-based approaches, which would be closer to the norms of the UN Charter and might be legitimate across the local, state, and international scales of global politics, without upsetting regional geopolitics or the remaining superpower.

This dynamic tended to operate, however, through an exceedingly light touch in view of continuing and unequal power-relations, which, to a large degree, were maintained. The end of the Cold War meant there was an almost automatic social and global legitimacy across the scale for wider peacebuilding methods that purported to end violence, reform states, and provide public goods (Boutros Ghali, 1992). The question was whether they would be able to respond to the hegemony inherent in US foreign policy and its preferred neoliberal ideology, particularly in the context of conflicts in the global south (Pouliot, 2016) where post-colonial critiques were becoming more significant (Darby, 2009, p. 700).

This was a reformist rather than radical agenda at best, and it led to a generation of work in the field that operated in bureaucratic and programmatic modes within the narrow intellectual confines set by liberal and neoliberal policymakers. Stalemated peace models of peacemaking were predictable in other words, less demanding, and less challenging. These confines were sometimes set from within the UN Security Council, but they were policed in the UN Agencies and Secretariat as well as among donors, normally at the regional and state level, meaning the national and regional interests of the most powerful actors tended to dominate. Hegemonic modes of peacemaking, associated in this case with liberal peace, peace-enforcement, and R2P (but increasingly in a more neoliberal version), found it difficult to move forward (Crossley, 2018, p. 425).

The shift of attention toward civil society methodologies on the liberal platform that emerged during this phase also inadvertently might have overloaded civil actors with implausible tasks, contributing to stalemated peace processes. These included aspirations for trickle-up dynamics, facilitating norm “cascades” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 887–917), and promoting democratization, for local reconciliation and justice, often proposed but with very limited resources and little leverage over war lords and other structural actors or dynamics. In other words, the liberal, problem-solving methodologies of this phase operated mainly on subaltern actors who were often already supportive, rather than the powerful actors invested in conflict and violence. These subaltern actors- civil society, social movements, as well as more direct conflict actors- were forced to make political claims within the parameters of the historical stalemate that dominated the first two stages and now shaped stage three. This helps to understand why the “refrigerated” and “frozen conflict” conceptualizations, often deployed in the 1960s literature on peacekeeping and mediation (James, 1969), returned in the 2010s as

important conceptual frameworks (Smetana & Ludvik, 2018, p. 2). This version of the stalemated peace model ultimately favored conservative renderings of power and hierarchy in conflict-affected societies and the international system.

Stage four: Liberal peacebuilding, state building, “backsliding” and its boomerang effect on international order

What was becoming clearer was that meeting rights claims within a peace agreement or political reform process was significant in establishing legitimacy for political authority, but this could not proceed in the context of historical stalemates. Liberal peacebuilding, post-1990, was, to a large extent, focused on building a liberal state and set of institutions governed by global or western norms and law (Doyle, 1983; Paris, 2004). Social engagement was, therefore, needed for a new political contract to be built by a much more comprehensive peace praxis as was being demonstrated in the development of liberal peacebuilding (Paris, 2004; Richmond, 2005). As such claims expanded, pressure on the system grew, as did expectations and opposition, sparking a discussion of the Kantian concept of “backsliding” (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021).

A rights-based attempt to accrue legitimacy during the 1990s soon gave way to a more neoliberal approach, where security and capital were deemed more significant than rights after 9/11 with the emergence of securitized state-building projects. These were driven more by US interests and international financial institutions than by the UN and its norms (Richmond, 2014, p. 10). Political authority simulated acquiescence and effectively disguised the long-standing protection of power structures, stratification and privilege through the peace processes of this brief era, rather than directly opposing injustice as social movements and civil society would expect (Kaldor et al., 2006). Scholarship during this period was making major advances, but in doing so it was also mounting more of a challenge to state-centric, eurocentric, and capitalist renderings of peace epistemology inherent in the stalemated peace model (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015), especially as environmental debates added their weight on related matters of justice and sustainability (Krampe et al., 2021). From this perspective, the parsimonies of the stalemated peace model enabled emerging counter-peace dynamics (Richmond et al., 2023, p. 3), producing new kinds of stalemates and hastening their deterioration. In other words, stalemates evolved through different stages, each becoming temporarily stabilized by evolving peace tools, meaning that new ripe moments became less likely as “backsliding” emerged.

Concepts, such as “hurting stalemates”, “ripe moments”, and “backsliding”, contributed to an immanent rather than structural critique, highlighting internal competitors who resisted power sharing, democracy, and rights,

while aiming to assist international actors in navigating blockages to the emergence of stability (DFID, 2019). They set the scene for more comprehensive approaches to emerging at some future point, which would apply pressure through aligned, multidimensional strategies, rather than directly addressing the root causes or power relations that perpetuated the conflict. These were to be only indirectly addressed through peace and development tools and approaches. Their deficiencies ultimately led to “stabilization” oriented thinking, which in itself became a platform not for the expansion of rights but for the return of authoritarian capitalism and multipolarity as the basis for political order (de Coning, 2023; Paris, 2020; von Billerbeck & Tansey, 2019).

This meant that the conceptual and policy apparatus that was being deployed in the post-Cold War environment was destined for failure by design- or at least had coalesced around medium- to long-term stalemated peace outcomes. In any case, short-term, short-range agreements, tended not to stand up to scrutiny when social, local, and ethical standards and methods were applied. Settling for disguised stalemates was an indication of the loss of legitimacy and capacity of the overall system, as well as of its intellectual underpinnings. This rationality was linear and reductionist, mismatched with an era of growing multiplicity, entanglement, and complexity (Connolly, 2017), as well as emerging multipolarity.

With hindsight, the constrained conceptual apparatus signalled by peace missions as forms of “problem-solving” and “riot control” (Pugh, 2004, p. 41) highlighted the deeper lack of consensus in the West about what its responsibilities and commitments were to the rest of the world since 1945, and after 1989. This failure meant conflicts were easily converted into multiple stalemates during the Cold War and after 1989, with little hope of progress even if they appeared to represent a solid platform from which to proceed—at least to the myopic gaze of the West in this era. This dynamic echoes on in the current global politics around the ongoing Ukraine and Gaza wars, what to do about them, and how far responsibilities reach in ending them (Powell, 2023).

In short, international order in stage four and since has seen few viable peacemaking tools, when defined as practical, resourceable, and indicative of a broad consensus for non-violence, rights, development, and sustainability in the hope of future, incremental reform or implementation. Their role has for a while at least preserved—or at least not upset—long-standing stalemates and balances. An order that cannot maintain and repair itself is at best in a transitional state of decline, at worst doomed, from a critical perspective, however. The stalemated peace model of this fourth stage has contributed to the contemporary situation where a misaligned, multipolar international order has few plausible tools for its own maintenance.

The stalemate model of peacemaking in practice

In the various stages outlined above, the parameters of a stalemate are established in conservative, regional, and geopolitical terms by stage one. The subsequent stages either try to refine its balance of power, mitigating geopolitics at regional or international levels (as with stages one and two), or struggle to move beyond it in order to connect peace not just with a new status quo, but with rights, democracy, in practice, and justice, to varying degrees (as with stages three and four). Stage four also lagged some way behind more critical, contemporary debates about peace in international order (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022; Torrent, 2021).

The case of peacekeeping and peacemaking in Cyprus spans all of the stages outlined above, as a long-standing strategic and political space and “problem” for the international community (often referred to as a “graveyard” for diplomacy as noted previously), which also received mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding as time progressed. However, it has been dominated by the first two stages: the underlying balance of power, basic mediation, and peacekeeping models. The peacemaking experiment of the post-war world saw the addition of UN mediation to peacekeeping in the initial UN Resolution establishing the peacekeeping force, UNFICYP, in 1964 (UN, 1964, para. 7). This was in order to try to avoid the problem that had arisen in other early peacekeeping cases (e.g., with UNEF) where a lack of a political process meant a frozen conflict at best. Even despite these efforts, UN mediation was soon deflected into lengthy political processes involving multiple rounds that have spanned decades, in which talks have been mainly about point scoring, peripheral and minor political agreements, and avoiding blame for the talks’ collapse, rather than resolving core issues of land, justice, return or recognition (Ker-Lindsay, 2005; Richmond, 1998).

The low-level war continued as a form of limited counter-peace during the period until 1974, when a stalemate was consolidated after the war of that summer in which Turkish forces had moved outside of the political process in order to establish a new status quo. This was based upon the partition of the island (as opposed to the previous mixed model where enclaves of Turkish Cypriots existed and were constantly being attacked, see Dodd, 1998). There was a recognition that the new status quo offered a basis for talks by the international community, which was now quick to recognize the danger that renewed conflict could lead to a regional war. Thus, there was an unspoken but all-encompassing consolidation of the informal but practical and militarized partition of the island involving forced displacement: a relative balance of power was replicated where one recognized state was balanced against another, militarily buttressed, but unrecognized state. Negotiations over a Cyprus solution took up a substantial amount of

political energy (Anastasiou, 2008; Hannay, 2005), bringing together regional and global actors as well as civil society to try to “domesticate” and dress up the ugly situation that scarred this unusual political order (Bryant & Hatay, 2020).

The constant rounds of mediated talks from 1975 onwards led to unimplemented agreements, near misses, or failures, but the UN remained committed under its mandate, and foreign diplomats assumed that the problem was resolvable if the right combination of strategies could be aligned in practice. The Cypriot disputants preferred new rounds of talks after failure over a regression into violence, though on occasions in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s there were outbreaks, albeit of declining seriousness after 1974. Given that any agreement would require substantial compromises and concessions by both sides the process moved into a stage four, liberal peacebuilding approach in the 1990s. Yet, with hindsight, negotiating for a stalemate appeared to be the aim of talks, including for third parties, given that a frozen stalemate was still perceived as better than outright war. The failure to consolidate the Annan Plan process, which culminated in a failed referendum in 2004 (Asmussen, 2004), illustrated a lack of political will for local compromise or for further international pressure, even though the agreement was perhaps, in scholarly terms, the most advanced example extant (at least since the Good Friday Agreements in 1998, see Mitchell, 2023).

This case is one of the few where the stalemate after 1974 appears to have held for the long term, but short of the stalemated environment and its geopolitical architecture becoming the “solution”, the situation remains fragile and unstable. The UN-backed, regional, and local political process is a significant part of what keeps it “manageable” if not “stable” (Confidential Source, 2023a, 2023b). It is this dynamic that conceptually sets the scene for stalemated peacemaking and illustrates its limitations. Such a situation is very vulnerable to accidental and purposeful destabilization (as with counter-peace tactics and dynamics). The Cyprus example is one where the stalemated peace has held (though negotiators and peacemakers’ careers have come and gone over several decades), allowing the UN to claim some success, it has prevented war in the region, but allowed domestic populations and elites to consolidate their positions.

Other stalemates have more obviously led to negative consequences, including the long drawn-out Oslo process, where the failure to implement the agreements after 1993 or to build on them with new agreements, allowed domestic opposition to grow, international actors to become disinterested and the process to fail by 1999 (Mekelberg, 2024; Millar, 2023; Barak, 2005, pp. 719–736). The historically predictable result has been a series of wars (Khalidi, 2021; Princen, 1991, pp. 57–69) in which stages one to three have failed to provide a semblance of balance, long-term stability or predictable peace processes. It has further seen the failure of state building

in Palestine, the radicalization of Israeli engagements with Palestinians and vice versa, and a series of wars, not least the war in Gaza since 2023. The short stalemate that the Oslo Accords appeared to fall into soon after 1993 has done little to hold off violence, nor maintain itself, nor galvanize the international community since. Peacemaking has been derided by many Palestinians since who have seen it as a cover for Israeli interests and Western hypocrisy. From a local perspective, it came to be seen as a sort of counter-insurgency process, which any stalemate also disguised (Turner, 2015). This indicated that stalemates are too risky to consider long-term as a mitigation of the geopolitical landscape (as has been widely—but probably foolishly—often considered to be in Cyprus). Nor does a stalemated peace offer a stable platform for further progress across the other stages toward rights, democracy, and development or justice. It implies that all of these escalatory and war dynamics have to be addressed—pre-emptively, during, and after wars—by successful peace processes, as perhaps the case of Northern Ireland illustrates to some degree (O Dochartaigh, 2021). Drifting stalemates, a lack of political will, and international disengagement, resting mainly on a reliance on disguised counter-insurgency approaches, and inconclusive rounds of repeated talks only manufacture the appearance of activity.

These dynamics lead to war, eventually if not sooner, as also in the Sri Lankan case. In the very limited peace process in Sri Lanka in the early 2000s, which had seen elements of a stage two and a stage three stalemated peace model, a short, contested peace process soon collapsed because it was constrained by the sensitivities of the government and its nationalists. The stalemated peace process was soon followed by all-out civil war (Welikala, 2019), the concurrent marginalization of civil society, the rise of a populist government, alliances outside of the LIO, and ultimately economic collapse (Confidential Source, 2023a, 2023b; Lewis, 2010, p. 666). These steps were all clearly linked.

In Cambodia, on the other hand, war has not returned since the Paris Agreements in 1991 but the apparent stasis of peacemaking in stage four form also indirectly allowed for the consolidation of autocratic rule and the removal of political opposition (Simangan, 2018, p. 1531), while international donors and actors have been reluctant to pressure the government to maintain liberal standards for fear they are excluded completely (Schröder & Young, 2019, p. 16). In Bosnia, Holbrooke thought that the Dayton Agreement of 1995, based on mainly stage three approaches, was unfortunately, pre-designed for stalemate rather than for peace in the implementation phase (Chollet, 2006, p. 45), and was then kept in place only by concerted international and regional involvement (Banning, 2014). If external support or pressure dissipated or deviated toward nationalism (as it might under the conditions of multipolarity) the stalemated peace would have long collapsed (Hansard, 2021).

Non-implementation, authoritarianism, and autocracy appear to be the beneficiaries of stalemated peace in any of its stages, in practice. Such stalemated peace models, created by agonistic (Strömbom & Bramsen, 2022, p. 1238) and geopolitical dynamics combined, have also had knock-on consequences, where peacemaking has been conceptually redesigned to produce implausible agreements or unimplemented agreements. These do little to maintain the dam between peace and war, as with the Minsk Agreements in Ukraine in the 2010s (Allan, 2020), and as was also the case with Trump's Middle East Peace plan of 2020 (Khalidi, 2020). It has become common that agreements and processes continue despite the continuation of war (as in Syria and Ukraine), or they remain unimplemented (as also in Ukraine after 2010), or they do not address core issues in a particular conflict (as with Trump's efforts on Middle East, which did not involve any Palestinian actors). In many other similar examples, across sub-Saharan Africa, such as in Sierra Leone, Liberia, DRC, and Mozambique, or in South America, in Colombia (UN, 2024) or Nicaragua and El Salvador, various forms of stalemate together with non-implementation, have blurred the boundaries between peace and war.

Thus, stalemated peace models do not rescue or stabilize peacemaking, but rather advance its hollowing out and undermine its legitimacy: they indicate the need for redoubled efforts rather than acquiescence or withdrawal, as has often been the case. There may be no direct causal link between a stalemated peace and the re-ignition of war, but clearly, there is a significant pattern emerging. There are also various types of stalemates, which may be characterized by different permutations of political will, unstable engagements, geopolitical and structural as well as social blockages to change, which together may settle into a substitute for an actual agreement (as appears to be the case in Cyprus). The range of examples included above indicate the frequency of the breakdown of the stalemated peace model (long noted in the literature (Pogodda et al., 2023; Westendorf, 2015)) even where it has appeared formerly—or perhaps still—fairly stable.² Its stability is at best short- or medium-term, not long-term, and this has important implications for those surviving stalemated conflicts and contested agreements such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, or Cyprus. The stalemated peace model, then, should not be assumed to be “good enough”, long-term, or much more than a pause in a conflict. “No war, no peace”, to utilize a historical aphorism, has few saving graces, and indeed, far less than some more optimistic renderings have noted, the implications of this pointing to the urgency with which to address such stalemates before conflict reignites. This was certainly the aim and the case in Northern Ireland where substantial efforts were made to move beyond what might be described as a violent stalemate before the Good Friday Agreements, indicating that there is a chance that the stalemated peace model might be a platform for future progress. However, this

required urgency which faded at the end of the 1990s, with the advent of the War on Terror, the financial crisis of the late 2000s, the fragmentation of international order and other challenges to liberal peace. A lack of global engagement has been particularly visible over the last 15 years.

The strongest arguments for the utility of the stalemated peace model are that it is better than war, and it pushes back the reignition of war into the medium term, allowing action to be taken in the meantime. Nevertheless, it offers little in response to the subsequent deceleration of, and failure to, construct successful peacemaking processes, as well as the dependence on new forms of counter-insurgency and stabilization in the context of growing global polarization. Such methods, as deployed in Chechnya, Sri Lanka, or Syria, may lead to the stalemated peace model becoming a platform from which to impose a victor's rather than a just peace. This replays older debates about revolutionary war, suggesting the stalemated peace model risks sparking wider escalation, as is currently clear in conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. Fighting major wars to bring about a victor's peace repeats the same escalatory dynamics in which war is deemed a legitimate political tool. Victor's peace arguments have created a lot of theoretical confusion, and the stalemated peace model in practice normally heralds a victor's peace at best.

A platform for peacemaking in a multipolar order

In all four of the above-stalemated peace frameworks, there is a common tension between the idea of a unified and aligned (liberal) order from local to global scales, and a misaligned international order made up of diverse local and regional systems (i.e., multipolar). Given the strong demands from the global south and regional actors including the BRICS, for a looser international system, one which is less aligned, and less dependent on liberal values or driven by Euro-Atlantic institutions and power, stalemated peace processes offer a dilemma. Does the stalemated peace model offer a platform in response to the deficits of the LIO (in terms of leading to a recognition of difference and challenges to hierarchy), or does stalemated peace lead to an eventual rejection of non-violence, rights, democracy, as related values and political tools in international order?

A misaligned system appears to offer the possibility of innovations in a more diverse system of peacemaking, perhaps in terms of a potential institutional approach to polylogue and pluriversality. This, however, also means a looser, shallow consensus at best, as a bulwark against the risk that universalism may underpin new forms of colonialism or domination. However, there are also very high levels of risk of international misunderstandings as well as clashing regional interests because of the heightened polarization multipolarity entails. The consequence of such deficiencies,

methodological, conceptual, and theoretical, has been that long-term stalemated outcomes and refrigerated conflicts have become institutionalized. Some of them go as far back as the 1960s, as with the Cyprus quagmire. Their slow degradation is now escalating as geopolitical rifts since 9/11, Syria, and the Ukraine wars have increasingly threatened the development of a cooperative and sustainable international order, let alone a liberal order (Doyle, 2023). The long wait for a “ripe moment”, and for spoilers to be neutralized after a hurting stalemate (Stedman, 1997, p. 5; Zartman, 2001) has led to an escalating form of backsliding (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021). These blockages have led to counter-peace networks, which have reversed the flow of ideas, political will, and capacities from civil and international networks which many peace theories and processes supported, back towards the Leviathan, meaning territorial sovereignty, geopolitics, or even towards the concept of Empire.

At the macro level, the stalemated peace heralds a conservative and counter-revolutionary shift that reinstates geopolitical and imperial thinking within the international political economy (the putative Authoritarian International Order (AIO) it may lead to shares an interest in neoliberal capital and new technology with the LIO), along with its historical tendency to align with power and hegemony contra rights and democracy. The stalemated peace may have created a vacuum in which geopolitics has regained a foothold, along with authoritarian and illiberal domestic politics in conflict-affected societies, and their sponsors. Drawing upon what in the liberal past were often seen as marginal or small-scale phenomena (Pogodda et al., 2023), these developments have involved pushing back at civil society, state reform, human rights, and the use of public goods to gain favor for ethnic, sectarian, and nationalist interests. A peace process underpinned by democratization, rights, and development in other words, may work when convergence points to improved structural and material conditions in conflict-affected societies and in comparison to already advanced political economies. A peace process cannot succeed when it merely reiterates comparative, historical and structural injustice in domestic and international politics (Buzan & Lawson, 2015). The emerging framework of multipolarity is related to the failure of the LIO (and of liberal peacebuilding) to innovate in structural terms, but multipolarity and a potential AIO is also unlikely to produce any innovations in the area.

The renewed divisions in international order indicate a reversion to state-centric interests, regional hegemonic contests, and global ideological struggle. In this environment, peacemaking is replaced mainly by weak “refrigeration” strategies of a geopolitical and balancing nature—such as early-generation peacekeeping, counter-insurgency, and basic cease-fire agreements, where a decisive victory cannot be attained. This means that conflict remains active in those contexts (as say in Colombia or El Salvador)

(Hristov, 2014, p. 4; Negroponte, 2011, p. xi) while proxy conflicts may rage elsewhere (as can be observed in Central Africa, Ukraine, and Syria) (Allan, 2020; Malyarenko & Galbreath, 2016, pp. 113–138; Hinnebusch, 2017).

Grand-scale bilateral meetings may take place, along with the occasional multilateral conference (for example, the UN's recent "Summit of the Future" in 2024 which is part of the Common Agenda),³ or recent secret bilateral meetings (such as between Russia, the US, and the EU over Nagorno-Karabakh) (Gavin et al., 2023), but these are heavily constrained by the interests of their most powerful participants, for whom liberal peace—or more sophisticated concepts of peace—are an obstacle to their strategic interests. This connects the difficulties in implementation that may cause a stalemated peace dynamic with concurrent opposition to rights and democracy, and the continuing utility of war and violence.

Peacemaking in the stalemated and refrigerated conflict in a new multipolar order may thus face a familiar historical dynamic: peace would be negative and minimally defined by the clashing interests of the great powers most willing to resort to violence (Hinsley, 1963, p. 1). Peace missions, such as there may be, would be limited to victor's peace environments within regional blocs. Peacemaking would tend to be secret, limited, and not inclusive of any civil society actors, nor small powers or minor disputants, even if active. The findings of scholarship on the nature of political order and related peacemaking tools would be rejected until the next, inevitable systemic collapse. Civil, regional, and proxy wars would tend to escalate into a threat to global order. Global order would be unstable in the event of such wars, existing institutions would not be able to respond, and such failures may presage the collapse of great powers or their agreements with others. Human rights, development, representation, and innovation to deal with global problems would be suppressed and retarded at best. Peacemaking in such a context would be limited, and conflicts would tend to escalate, threatening the integrity of international order, perhaps until more sophisticated peacemaking methods are developed.

Conclusion

Long-standing stalemates may inculcate revisionist and revanchist sentiments, which also means that violence remains a legitimate political tool. Even short- and medium-term examples indicate this risk. Yet, many conflicts settle into a stalemated peace pattern, perhaps because the conflict issues appear to be intractable, because international actors and their tools are inadequate, or because regional geopolitics dominate. This has significant implications for cases such as the long-standing Cyprus talks, where outcomes similar to the wars in Sri Lanka or Ukraine, are an ever-present (and obvious) risk. This analysis indicates, along with that of

other authors in this Special Issue, that UN approaches to peace were indeed “Children of their Time” (as described by Sara Hellmüller and Fanny Badache (2025)). Innovations are desperately required to overcome what appears to be a default stalemated peace model of convenience within the LIO, one which is being exploited and challenged in a multipolar setting. A macroperspective (again, as advocated for in the Introduction), which is connected to rich critical understandings of peace and peacemaking that have recently emerged, is necessary.

The stalemated peace model’s stages one to three tend to work within the parameters of geopolitics and the balance of power, resulting in conflict management and negative peace. Stage four developed a connection of peace with rights, democracy, and development, and in more critical theoretical debates, much more complex notions of justice emerged, paradoxically making the stalemated peace even more embedded, complex, contradictory, and unwieldy. Stalemates in terms of crude ceasefires, or in more sophisticated forms as non-implementation of agreements or counter-peace dynamics, have been the result for the most part. The resultant stalemated peace model has not been able to accrue wide legitimation as a consequence. However, it allows for a reprieve from violence and the difficulty of compromise between power-holders and blocs and isolates conflict from the perspective of the (liberal) international community. Even so, stalemated peacemaking praxis may worsen under any emergent multipolar order. Previous tools designed for an aligned and converging order under hegemonic, western and American epistemologies of order are now far too limited to deal with contemporary conflict in the new international political order, though they may continue to operate for legacy conflicts from the Cold War and early post-Cold War era.

The stalemated peace model that has emerged appears to be accidental and unfortunate and also points to strategic advantages in that it does not undermine existing power relations and acts as a system of containment,⁴ though it certainly does not lead to an emancipatory framework for peace. The stalemated peace model may be intellectually and ethically unstable, but in practice, because power relations are balanced in the short to medium term, it may superficially indicate apparent stability and even further potential. Stalemates are also often justified with reference to super-ordinate goals including not undermining regional or global order and security. Yet, when power relations are disrupted the stalemated peace model is too. Ultimately, this connects stalemated peace more directly to the formation of political blocs and the polarised ideological positions that then arise.

The short-term optics of stalemated peace as merely a form of stability to ward off violence and provide a platform for future progress appear more important than substantive reform in the LIO or in the model of

multipolarity (which appears to have had even fewer peacemaking capacities). The superficial stability of the stalemated peace model of peace and order has until the Syria, Ukraine, and now Middle East conflicts encouraged more deviant foreign and domestic policy, reduced investment in the multilateral order, undermined the proscription of violence as a political tool, and undermined the salience of social and civil society contributions. This has severed the relationship of peace with justice and sustainability, damaging human rights and protection instruments at the same time. In other words, stalemated peace appears to be a widespread pattern that, far from heralding future potential in most peace processes, instead indicates further backsliding and very negative structural outcomes when viewed through the prism of democracy, rights, justice, and potential emancipatory forms of peace.

Notes

1. Thanks to external reviewers for these points and related clarifications.
2. Thanks again to external reviewers for these points and related clarifications.
3. <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda/summit-of-the-future>
4. Thanks to Roger MacGinty for this point.

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