Editorial

Wars and violent conflicts have devastating consequences for society. They result in loss of life and health, destroy communities and infrastructure, disrupt social progress, and often leave long-lasting trauma. Peace is not only a fundamental human need for all people in the present but also a key factor for the long-term wellbeing and development of future generations. But can humanity achieve something that seems almost unprecedented in its 300,000-year history – namely resolve conflicts without violence?

This question is of existential importance in the nuclear age. However, the answer to this question also depends on what is meant by 'peace'. Here, the common distinction between an absence of armed conflict (negative peace) and cooperation, trust, and even friendship between countries (positive peace) comes to mind. Yet, this classification does not grasp the full meaning of 'peace'. In addition to its relevance to inter-state relationships, the concept of 'peace' can also be applied to collectives, such as believers of a certain creed, ethnic groups, or politico-cultural factions within a single state that fight, for instance, 'culture wars'. Along with all these interpersonal forms of 'peace', it is also commonplace to speak of 'peace of mind' within a person (meaning e.g. tranquillity, compassion, self-control, moderation, forgiveness), which might be both a precursor for and a result of peaceful inter-state relationships. Last but not least, we should not forget 'peace with nature'.

While such a conceptual map of 'peace' might be inspirational, we should not try to achieve everything at once, but instead focus on the biggest threat: human annihilation. The possession of nuclear weapons gives humanity, for the first time in history, the means to bring about its own extinction. While the global number of nuclear warheads has been declining since the 1980s, the nuclear-armed states (USA, Russia, UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea) have been modernising their arsenals. The war in Ukraine rages on and Russia uses its nuclear missiles as an ever-intensifying threat. Israel is at war with Hezbollah, an organisation that is backed by Iran, which itself has an interest in nuclear weaponry. And the conflict between China and the West over the quasi-independence of Taiwan could be ignited by a spark at any time. The doctrine of deterrence which prevented the use of nuclear weapons through the Cold War seems to be obsolete in the twenty-first century. At that time, only two nuclear superpowers (the US and the Soviet Union) had to coordinate their mutual deterrence but the world today is much more complex. According to the Doomsday Clock, the first nuclear war is more likely today than ever before. Research on existential risks to humanity assumes a relatively high probability of large-scale use of nuclear weapons, within the lifetime of a child born today.

As we can learn from the conceptual distinctions and real-life examples above, long-term peace requires a minimum of global justice, mutual respect, and good will for the future. This brings us to the root causes of (inter-state) war. Since Immanuel Kant, a thesis has developed, which suggests that non-democratic, authoritarian (in Kant's words: despotic) governments are much more likely to start wars than democracies. Other scholars have noted that nationalism and national sovereignty are key causes for war. In this vein, one school of thought (represented by scholars such as Bertrand Russel and Albert Einstein) has proposed that a world government would ensure peace. The world government would have sole authority over armed forces but the principle of subsidiarity (graded competence) would apply. This would be comparable to the coexistence of the federal level in the US and its 50 States. Another more recent school of thought argues that national governments should be done away with completely, allowing for the rule of the individuals (backed by new communication and cooperations technologies).

A world government does seem utopian, at least for the next few decades. But is it really? For a peace theorist of the nineteenth century, eighty years of peace between the major countries of western Europe would have sounded utopian too. And yet, the European Union received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for this very reason. In the Nobel Lecture in Oslo, the then-president Barroso disclosed the secret of the European way from war to peace: binding shared economic interests very tightly and emphasising commonalities without eliminating cultural plurality. But as national identities regain power and membership of the EU is challenged, the last word has not been spoken about Europe's peace project.

In the first article of this issue, Michael Haiden addresses a divisive aspect of the United Nation's remit: humanitarian interventions. Influenced by the constructivist school of international relations, he argues that humanitarian interventions have the potential not only to save lives in the short term, but also to promote the value of global solidarity. If reformed and improved, he argues, they can weaken the norm of national sovereignty and thus realise a necessary condition for lasting peace.

The second article also argues for the importance of an international community and critiques the norm of national sovereignty. In comparison to Haiden, however, Ibrahim Khan takes a more critical view of the UN, arguing for the elimination of the veto power within the UN Security Council and for renewed disarmament efforts. He advocates for a non-hierarchical and inclusive system of global governance which integrates grassroots voices from the so-called Global South. In doing so, he builds upon the political theory of Indian scholars such as Rabindranath Tagore and Radhabinod Pal, who conceptualised a distinction between meaningful peace and an absence of war, long before Johan Galtung in the 1960s.

Finally, the IGJR 1/2024 concludes with two book reviews. The first book review continues the theme of peacekeeping, as Gordon Hertel scrutinises Andrew Fiala and Jennifer Kling's printed dialogue *Can War Be Justified? A Debate* (2023). The second review deals with intergenerational issues more generally as Helena Weinbrenner appraises Axel Gosseries' new monograph *What is Intergenerational Justice?* (2023).

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