Moving from Unstable to Stable Peace

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Phase Boundaries

Our world has changed, and so must our perceptions and relations to it. Virtually all the systems with which we are familiar have the capacity for change, some so slowly as to be hardly perceptible, others more rapidly, still others so rapidly as to exhibit "phases." Many chemical substances have a solid, liquid, and gaseous phase – such as ice, water, and steam. Even within these larger phases there may be subphases, such as the varieties of ice crystals. The phase in which a substance exists depends on its environment, for instance, pressure and temperature. We can also usually identify phase boundaries in our physical environment. Crossing such boundaries normally causes a phase to change, as when ice melts or water boils.

Biological systems likewise exhibit phase boundaries, such as between life and death or health and sickness. These environments are more complex, since they include not only pressures and temperatures, but also available materials (like water and food of different kinds) and energy sources (predators, prey, and so on). Ecosystems also have phase boundaries between them, rather like the boundary between the tundra and the forest.

Social systems also exhibit phases and phase boundaries in great variety and complexity. These are most easily seen in terms of the niche a particular institution occupies in a given social system. For example, the niche for

stock markets in the communist countries has shrunk practically to zero; the niche for communists in the United States, while it exists, is extremely small. On the other hand, both the communist and the capitalist worlds have niches for steel mills and the organization which surrounds them, for department stores, and for armed forces. If we listed all the social species, like families, churches, political parties, retail stores, taxis, and so on, in the so-called First, Second, and Third Worlds, we would find both important differences and very large similarities.

Of all social systems, organizations, patterns, and structures, war and peace probably have the sharpest phase boundaries. Most historians can tell you with some confidence whether country A and country B were at war or at peace on a given date. There are a few fuzzy boundaries. We might not be quite sure exactly when the United States got into war with Vietnam, but there is a certain fuzziness in all systems that exhibit complexity beyond a certain level. We may not be able to identify the exact date at which a marriage disintegrates, although we can usually put a pretty accurate date on the moment of divorce, another phase boundary. Wars are seldom declared any more, but we can identify pretty sharply the date at which the Iraq-Iran War started or the moment at which a war ends, though there may be a somewhat fuzzy boundary between a cease-fire, an armistice, and a peace treaty.

Inclusive Peace

Both war and not war (what I have sometimes termed "inclusive peace") have different qualities and subphases within them. War may be limited, in the sense that some means of available destruction are not used. Thus in the first few months of World War II there was no civilian bombing. There is a somewhat hazy boundary between war and terrorism, since one is tempted to define a terrorist as a soldier without a government. Civil wars involve a considerable variety of situations. Wars of "national liberation" or of revolution begin as internal wars and sometimes end in the formation of a new state, like the United States, or a new regime, like that brought to power by the Russian Revolution. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish internal from external war when external states support internal conflict in another state. Peace also has many different phases within it. It can encompass greater or lesser justice, oppression, competence, enrichment, impoverishment, and so on.

Possibility Boundary

The transition from war to peace is very much involved in what might be called the "taboo line." This is an important and surprisingly neglected aspect of human behavior. Economists are familiar with the concept of a "possibility boundary," which separates what we can do from what we

cannot do. At the moment I am writing this in California. Tomorrow I could go to New York, but I could not go to the moon. The possibility boundary is defined partly by physical, partly by biological, and partly by social limitations.

Taboo Line

Within the possibility boundary, however, there is a taboo line which divides everything I can do into two parts: what I do not refrain from doing and what I refrain from doing. For example, there are no physical or biological obstacles to spitting in someone's face, but I have never done it. A great deal of social interaction and behavior is governed by taboos. These we learn, some in childhood, some in later life; some are imposed by fear of the law and of the consequences. For these reasons I rarely drive more than five miles above the speed limit and I have refrained all my life from robbing banks. Sometimes we refrain from going over the taboo line for fear of external consequences, such as disapproval or punishment; sometimes we refrain because of internal consequences, a sense of shame or guilt. However, unless taboos are internalized, they are apt to be rather ineffective, for we cannot hold external consequences in our minds all the time.

The essential difference between peace and war lies in the position of the taboo line of political and military decision makers. A country with what I call a "unilateral national defense organization," that is, a military organization, may have the power within its possibility boundary, certainly in the physical and biological sense, to invade its neighbor, bomb its neighbor's cities, sink its ships, and so on. Similarly, a person with a kitchen knife has within his or her possibility boundary the act of killing somebody. The world indeed has overkill in table knives. Peace, therefore, is a taboo on the use of armed forces. Of course, if armed forces did not exist, this taboo would become part of the possibility boundary. We cannot use weapons that do not exist. Over most of human history, however, it has been the taboo line rather than the possibility boundary that has prevented the utilization of the means of destruction. It is perhaps a linguistic matter as to whether we regard this taboo line as a social possibility boundary. Whatever we call it, it is very different from a physical or biological possibility boundary.

We can divide an economy, whether of a country, a region, or the whole world, fairly clearly into what might be called a "war industry" and a "peace industry." An economy consists of that part of human activity which involves the production, consumption, evaluation, transfer, and exchange of human artifacts: food, clothing, furniture, bicycles, houses, and weapons. It also involves the use of these things: wearing clothes, driving cars, living in houses, and using weapons. The war industry, which is fairly

accurately measured by military budgets of states, rebels, and terrorists, is presently on the order of 6 to 8 percent of the world economy, with a larger percentage in some countries than in others. It is also a highly fluctuating proportion over time. For example, in the US, the war industry was less than 1 percent of the economy in the 1920s and the early l930s, 42 percent by 1944, 14 percent in the Korean War, some 7 to 8 percent today. This situation is similar for the USSR.

Threat System

Threat, especially when it is legitimized, is the basis of all political systems. Without it, people would certainly not pay their taxes, and hence the political system would not be able to buy the foods and services that it needs without inflation. Within a nation-state, however, these threats are directed mainly at individuals: "You pay your income taxes or you will go to jail." In the international system, they are directed against other governments and the groups which they represent. Civil war, as we have seen, is a somewhat intermediate case.

The dynamics of the threat system depend on the responses to threat. There are at least six different classes of responses:

1. People can submit, as when we pay our taxes.

2. People may defy the threatener, which throws the action of the system back to the threatener, who has to decide whether or not to carry out the threat. This is often very costly to the threatener as well as to the threatened.

3. The threatened party can run away out of reach of the threat. This has been very important in the spread of the human race around the planet.

4. The threatened party can develop threat-reducing devices: armor, castles, city walls, bullet-proof vests, and bomb shelters. This also includes disarming behavior: "You wouldn't do that to me, would you? After all, we are good friends and I can do good things for you."

5. The threatened party can also develop devices and behavior which destroys the threat capability of the threatener by destroying his weapons. This is sometime called "defense," but it is very different from defensive structures and has a very different effect. It might more properly be called "counterforce."

6. Finally, there is counterthreat: "You do something nasty to me and I'll do something nasty to you." This may lead into deterrence, in which each side abstains from carrying out its threat for fear of the consequences.

All six of these phenomena have been important in human history. The responses that are most likely to lead to crossing the phase boundary from peace into war are defiance, counterforce, and counterthreat. Submission may lead to an uneasy and unstable peace unless it is legitimized by integrating the threatener and the threatened into a larger social unit. Flight is

only successful if there is somewhere to go and if it takes the threatened party out of the range of the threatener. Threat-reducing devices, such as a medieval castle, may stabilize a system of unstable peace somewhat. Historically, however, they have had very temporary effects, because they always seem to have been overtaken by threat-expansion devices, such as the cannon and the nuclear weapon.

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A fundamental principle which underlies all these systems is that threat has a cost of transport and hence diminishes in intensity and effectiveness as we move away from the threatener. The importance of flight in human history testifies to this, as do the limits that evolve in the area of conquest. As a conqueror moves into a hostile territory, the conqueror's threat becomes weaker and the countermeasures stronger. This is as true of the spread of ideologies as it is of empires.

Deterrence

Deterrence is a situation in which neither party destroys the other's means of threat, but each has the capability to damage the other if the peace is broken. An impressive example is the nuclear deterrence based on mutual assured destruction (MAD) that we have had between the US and the USSR now for forty years. There have been many previous examples of short periods of peace through deterrence, but these periods have seldom exceeded one or two decades. But there is a very good reason for the ultimate instability of deterrence: If deterrence was stable in the long run, it would cease to deter in the short run. We can see this certainly in the present situation, where if the probability of nuclear weapons going off were zero, they would not deter anybody. Deterrence, therefore, always has a positive probability of breaking down and anything which has a positive probability will happen if we wait long enough. Peace through deterrence in the prenuclear era was something like a twenty-year flood, that is, a flood with an annual probability of 5 percent, which is fairly probable even in twenty years and extremely probable in forty or sixty years. Nuclear deterrence may be more like a one-hundred-year flood, with a probability of 1 percent per annum (this is just a guess), but even this would have a 63 percent probability of occurring in a hundred years and a 98 percent probability in four hundred years. It is an illusion, therefore, to think that deterrence can be ultimately stable.

Of the various responses to threat, the two that seem most likely to bring peace are submission and disarming behavior. Of course, submission has a bad name and gives peace a bad name, although we do it all the time in private life. For example, when a police car approaches us from the rear with its lights flashing, we pull off the road and submit. We pay our taxes. We obey our employers and our teachers, and occasionally even our spouses. Indeed, without a certain amount of submission, social life would be impossible.

Turning 'Them' to 'We'

What is very important in history is the development of a combination of submission and disarming behavior which turns "them" into "we." We can see this phenomenon in the rise of the national state and in the development of courtesy and manners, both of which turned the threatener and the threatened into a "we" group. Historians have been singularly insensitive to these processes, and we need a very careful study of what might be called the evolution of "gentleness." It is quite significant, for instance, that the baron became a "gentleman," that the Vikings turned into the modern Norwegians, that we gave up wearing swords, that dueling disappeared, and so on.

A very significant innovation, mainly in the twentieth century, is the combination of defiance with disarming behavior, particularly associated with the name of Gandhi and with nonviolent struggle. This is perhaps less successful in developing larger integrative structures, as its principle objective was to gain national independence. This may or may not achieve stable peace. Thus, India and Pakistan do not have stable peace even today.

There are difficult problems here which are far from being resolved, such as the optimum structure of political organization and the optimum integrative structure. This goes back to the whole problem of the relation of the "I" to the "we" and the long seesaw conflict, perhaps more apparent than real, between individualism and collectivism. This in turn involves the skills of conflict management, the legitimization of the institutions of property, and a whole host of social problems which we cannot go into here.

A very important question in the interpretation of history is how we see war: as an interruption in the evolution of peaceful behavior, or as the essential dynamic of history, where peace is just an interval between wars. I would argue strongly for the former of these two positions. Over the history of the human race, I would guess that peaceful pursuits - plowing, sowing, reaping, producing, falling in love, having children, dancing, singing, having fun, learning, studying - represent somewhere between 85 to 95

percent of human activity, and that over the years war has rarely been more than 5 to 15 percent. Adam Smith says in *The Wealth of Nations*: "Among the civilized nations of modern Europe.. not more than one-hundredth part of the inhabitants of any country can be employed as soldiers, without ruin to the country that pays the expense of their service." (1) The basic truth is that war is a parasitical part of the economy, particularly when it becomes professionalized. Professional armies cannot feed or clothe themselves or even provide themselves with weapons. This has to be done by the civilian population. Even looting is a very poor way of getting rich. There is abundant evidence from history that maintaining an empire impoverishes the imperial power, eventually to the point where the empire collapses.

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Since the rise of science and its applications to production, the inefficiency of threat systems has become even more striking. In the nineteenth century it was not the imperial powers that got rich rapidly. Instead it was countries like Sweden and Denmark, which abstained from building great armies and expanding and devoted their resources to minding their own business. Both Britain and France have increased their rate of economic development substantially since they gave up on their empires. If I had to express this in a one-sentence interpretation of history, it would be that wealth creates power and power destroys wealth. It may have taken us 5,000 years to catch on to this truth.

Just as the transition from peace to war or from war to peace involves the crossing of a phase boundary in the behavioral character of social systems, so one can detect phase boundaries in the total system of war and peace itself. I have distinguished four such phases. (2) At some times and places we have had stable war, in which war is virtually continuous over considerable periods. Southeast Asia, which has had almost continuous war for at least forty-five years, is perhaps the major example of this in the twentieth century. Stable war, however, is so debilitating and destructive that it tends to be interrupted by periods of peace. This might be called unstable war, a situation in which war is regarded as the norm but is interrupted by periods of peace. Examples of this are plentiful. In the twentieth century, the Middle East is perhaps the best example. Unstable war frequently passes almost imperceptibly through lengthening periods of

peace and the rise of more integrative structures, into what might be called unstable peace, in which peace is regarded as the norm but is interrupted by periods of war. European society from 1648 is an example.

Since the Napoleonic Wars, however, we have developed a somewhat new phenomenon in the world, curiously unnoticed, which could be described as stable peace. An increasing number of independent states have no plans whatever to go to war with each other. Stable peace can almost be measured by the amount of dust on the plans for invasion in the various war offices.

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It seems to have begun in Scandinavia, sometime after the Napoleonic Wars, when the Swedes and the Danes stopped fighting each other, after they had done so for centuries. The Danes, of course, were involved in a war with Germany over Schleswig-Holstein, but the Swedes did not intervene. Stable peace spread to North America by about 1870, perhaps through a succession of lucky accidents. Certainly the United States did not have stable peace in the War of 1812. However, this war was followed by the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 between Britain and the United States. This remarkable event, which disarmed the Great Lakes, has gone almost unnoticed, even in the United States. It was followed by the settlement of the boundary between Canada and the United States, in spite of a presidential election and the slogan "54_40 or Fight!" which reflected the fact that the United States wanted what is now British Columbia, and the Canadians and British wanted what is now Washington and Oregon. Eventually this dispute was settled and the forty-ninth parallel went peacefully to the Pacific. In my opinion, what finally established stable peace between Canada and the United States was the fact that Britain did not intervene militarily in the American Civil War, even though it came close to doing so. It seems that it is very hard to persuade historians that what did not happen, sometimes almost by a hair's-breadth, is often much more important than what happened.

One thing that limits the expansion of states and empires is their desire not to be too heterogeneous. This may explain why the United States got stable peace with Mexico after the Mexican War of 1846 and the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. Stable peace arrived in Western Europe after World War II, assisted no doubt by the development of the Common Market and the enormous expansion of trade and tourism. It is not often realized that the volume of international trade increased about sixfold between about 1950

and 1980. We now have what I have called a great triangle of stable peace, stretching from Australia to Japan, across North America, to Western Europe, Scandinavia, and Finland, with about eighteen countries that have no plans whatever to go to war with each other.

Conditions for a Stable Peace

If we ask ourselves, "What are the necessary conditions for stable peace?" the answer turns out to be surprisingly simple. The major condition is that change in national boundaries should be completely removed from the political agendas of the countries concerned, except by mutual consent. Again, this is an operation of taboo. This preserves a degree of national sovereignty with the development of what Karl Deutsch calls a "security community," in which each country finds its own security in the security of the others. (3) National sovereignty is a kind of political property, and property mutually agreed upon is a great source of peace. The English proverb that "good fences make good neighbors" perhaps only works if the neighbors can talk across the fence. But certainly secure boundaries make good neighbors. Oddly enough, national boundaries may be taken off the agenda for two quite opposite reasons: either because they are natural boundaries, like the water separating Sweden and Denmark; or because they are completely artificial, like the forty-ninth parallel between the United States and Canada. If we can get people to regard national boundaries as rather insignificant accidents of history and national states as arbitrary conveniences, a great deal of the sting will go out of the whole system. A second condition for stable peace is that there should be a minimum amount of intervention by one country in the internal affairs of another. Just where this minimum lies is hard to say. It is probably not zero, but it should not be threatening to the sovereignty or the integrity of either country.

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Perhaps the greatest question facing the human race at the moment is: Can we expand the present triangle of stable peace to include the Soviet Union? The area of stable peace would then include the whole temperate zone. Understandably, the Soviet Union, after its long history of invasion, feels very insecure about its boundaries. If the Kellogg Pact of 1928 had

outlawed boundary change, this would have been much more effective than outlawing war itself. The next question is: How do we expand stable peace into the tropics? There are difficulties here, especially in Africa, where the national boundaries resulted from the geographical ignorance of the European powers when Africa was divided among them in 1878. These boundaries often divide tribal, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups. Even so, there has been surprisingly little international war in Africa since independence, with the exception of Ethiopia and Somali, some rather minor incursions elsewhere, and a good deal of internal war, for example, in Nigeria, Angola, and Uganda.

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The nuclear weapon has changed the international system so profoundly that the immediate past is a very poor guide to the future. One of the tragedies of the world is that many of the people in powerful positions are still dominated by the experience of World War II, which is now almost totally irrelevant. To find a parallel to the present situation, we would really have to go back to the Thirty Years War in Central Europe. In this war we might say, the nuclear equivalent was the development of the enormously destructive cannon. It is a fundamental principle that what can be defended with weapons depends on the nature, particularly on the range and the deadliness, of the deadly missiles. The development of the effective cannon around the year 1500 brought the feudal system to an end, almost within a generation. The baron who stayed in his castle got blown up with it. Germany, of course, did not become a national state at that time, which is one reason why it was the battleground of the Thirty Years War. This was an ideological war with no serious economic conflicts behind it. Similarly, the conflict between the USSR and the US is an ideological conflict: There is virtually no economic conflict between them. Then in 1648 the conflicting powers said "Let the Protestants stay Protestant and the Catholics stay Catholic, and let's not fuss about it." As a result, change in existing boundaries was taken off the agenda. The settlement still holds. Prussia and Scandinavia are still Lutheran; Austria, Bavaria, and the Rhineland are still Catholic; and nobody seems to be much worse off for that. So what we have to look for between the capitalist and the communist world is what I have called a "Westphalian solution," which says in effect:

"Let's each do our own thing and see how it works out. But let's declare the boundaries to be fixed."

The alternative, as we all know, is total, perhaps irretrievable catastrophe. The combination of the nuclear warhead, the guided missile, and the worldwide accurate information system, has turned the whole world into a battlefield. How bad the "nuclear winter" will be we do not really know, but it is quite possible that a nuclear war would mean irretrievable catastrophe for the evolutionary process on earth. Nuclear war, however, will be an inevitable result of the existing system of national defense. National defense is now the greatest enemy of national security. I confess I want national security because I do not really want a world state. I want

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diversity, I want experiment, I want people to be able to pursue their own identities, I want people to have a homeland and homes. Above all, I want variety, for this is the essence of evolutionary change, a fundamental condition of it. Stable peace is now the only security that is available. Star Wars, the Strategic Defense Initiative, is nonsense, as are Soviet plans to counter it. Both would increase the probability of war. In the nuclear age, there are no castle walls nor suits of armor. An increased threat against the threatener can only increase the probability of war. There are no technical solutions to this problem. There are only political and moral solutions. Fortunately, these are available. Anything that exists must be possible. Stable peace exists, so it must be possible. It is not only possible, it is necessary, and it must be expanded.

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