Evolving Definitions of War and Peace:
A Historical Analysis of the Last Two Centuries

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Abstract: *This study looks at the evolution of war and peace concepts from 1800 to 2024, assessing how global political shifts, technology advancements, and shifting societal standards have shaped these key concepts. By examining significant historical events and shifts in the international landscape, the study hopes to provide a complete picture of how conceptions of war and peace have evolved over time and continue to impact contemporary international relations. The study helps to provide a better grasp of these dynamic notions in our modern, interconnected world.*

Keywords: *war, peace, historical analysis, international relations, global politics*

Introduction and Rationale

War and peace have long been important notions in human culture and international affairs. Nevertheless, their meanings have not remained constant (Iriye, 2013). These notions have evolved significantly over the last two centuries, reflecting changes in global politics, technological breakthroughs, and growing societal standards (Giroux, 2018). This research seeks to objectively explore the historical nature of war and peace definitions from the early 19th century to the present day, giving a thorough analysis of the forces influencing these changes and their consequences for modern international relations.

The time period under examination, which runs roughly from 1800 to 2024, includes tremendous transformations in the international landscape. It encompasses the rise and fall of empires, two World Wars, the Cold War, and the formation of an intricate, multipolar world order populated by state as well as non-state actors (Blagden, 2015). During these centuries, the perception and expression of war and peace has been constantly altered, demanding a rigorous historical analysis to grasp its present concepts (Strandmann, 1992).

The rationale for this study

The rationale for this study is multifaceted:

1. Theoretical Significance: The study adds to the theoretical underpinnings of international relations, political science, and peace and conflict studies. It offers a historical background for understanding current views and controversies in these areas.

2. Policy Relevance: The evolving conceptions of war and peace have far-reaching ramifications for international law, diplomacy, and military strategy. This research intends to educate and inform both policymakers and practitioners on the historical context of these notions, which may have an implication on the future policy formulations and conflict resolution strategies.

3. Interdisciplinary Approach: This study draws on various fields, particularly history, political science, international relations, and law. By combining insights from various many domains, it provides a comprehensive grasp of the subject.

4. Contemporary Context: In an age of hybrid warfare, cyber conflicts, and arguments over the meaning of peace, appreciating the historical history of these notions is critical for addressing present global difficulties.

5. Methodological Contribution: This study highlights the importance of historical perspectives in fully understanding present international occurrences through the use of a longitudinal historical analysis.

The literature review will draw on a variety of sources such as primary historical texts, academic studies, and modern academic publications. It will look at the way prominent thinkers like Carl von Clausewitz and Johan Galtung impacted conversations on war and peace (Jaberg, 2021). It will also look at how key historical events, technical advancements, and changes in global power dynamics have altered these definitions.

This study is especially important given the present international setting. The development of non-state players, the frequency of hybrid warfare, and the introduction of new fields of conflict, such as cyberspace, all call into question traditional ideas of war (Banasik, 2016). Similarly, modern definitions of peace have grown past the mere absence of violence to include ideas such as human security, sustainable development, and social justice (Bönisch, 1981).

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the evolution of war and peace by closely examining their historical definitions. This comprehension is critical for tackling current global concerns and developing more successful ways to resolve conflicts and build peace in the twenty-first century.

Through this comprehensive research, the researcher her hopes to contribute to the continuing academic debate on war and peace, as well as provide useful insights for politicians, diplomats, and professionals in international relations and conflict resolution.

Research Aims and Questions

Research Objectives:

1. To systematically analyze the evolution of war definitions from the early 19th century to the present day, identifying key conceptual shifts and their historical contexts.

2. To examine the transformation of peace concepts since the early 19th century.

3. To identify the primary factors that have influenced changes in the definitions of war and peace, including technological, geopolitical, social, and intellectual developments.

Research questions:

1. How have definitions of war evolved over the past two centuries?

2. How have definitions of peace changed since the early 19th century?

3. What factors have influenced these changing definitions?

Methodology

Research Philosophy and Design

This study used a critical realist epistemology, which acknowledges the existence of objective reality while also admitting the role of social constructions in creating our perception of war and peace. The research design aimed to synthesize qualitative historical analysis.

Data Collection Strategies

The study methodology was extensive, incorporating contemporary discourse assessment, and conceptual mapping. It examined academic literature, and governmental documents to track the evolution of war and peace definitions. The analytical framework included diachronic conceptual mapping, discourse-historical analysis, and a comparative epistemological investigation.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected materials were first subjected to content analysis, which involved identifying and coding major themes, concepts, and terminology linked to war and peace. Discourse analysis was also used to study the contextual use of these concepts, taking into account the sociopolitical setting in which they arise. The diachronic aspect was handled by mapping conceptual changes chronologically to identify crucial times of definitional transition. Various sources, periods, and cultural situations were contrasted using comparative analysis.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Table 1: Inclusion/Exclusion Matrix

Dimension	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Temporal	1800-2024	Pre-1800 sources	Focus on modern conceptualizations
Linguistic	Primary: English, French, German	Languages without reliable translations	Ensure accuracy in interpretation
	Secondary: Translated works from other languages		Broaden perspective
Authorial	Recognized scholars, policymakers	Popular media, non-expert opinions	Maintain academic rigor
Contextual	Sources reflecting major geopolitical shifts	Localized conflicts with limited global impact	Focus on paradigm-shifting events
Disciplinary	International Relations, Political Science, Philosophy of War	Purely technical military documents	Emphasize conceptual over operational aspects

Source: Created by the author

Study limitations

The first limitation was the language. The study faced language challenge because all the sources used were in English. The study addressed potential Anglophone bias, a pervasive issue in international relations scholarship. Another limitation was ideological bias. To reduce the impact of researchers' ideological biases, the study used a multifaceted strategy. The researcher kept thorough reflexivity logs, recording potential biases and how they evolved during the research process. Furthermore, the study underwent many rounds of peer review by scholars with varied ideological backgrounds, guaranteeing a balanced interpretation of the results.

Findings

Evolution of war definitions
19th century: Clausewitzian perspective

The views of Carl von Clausewitz, especially his renowned work "On War" published in 1832, dominated military theory in the nineteenth century. Clausewitz described war not as a mere clash of guns, but as "an act of force which forces our enemy to do our will (Dexter, 1950)." He famously maintained that war was merely an extension of politics, carried out through violent means (Holmes, 2007). The viewpoint emphasized many fundamental features of warfare:

– *War as a Tool of Statecraft*
Clausewitz regarded war as a logical mechanism used by the state to attain definite political goals. Military acts were not ends in themselves, rather they were tools to be employed in pursuit of larger political objectives (Kelly, 2016).

– *Decisive Battles*
Clausewitz emphasized the necessity of gaining decisive wins in battle. He felt that by delivering

a catastrophic defeat to the adversary, a country might compel them to yield and obey its political objectives (Kelly, 2016).

– *Political Objectives Drive Strategy*

According to Clausewitz, military tactics ought to constantly be secondary to the war's broader political objectives. Commanders had to fit their strategies and campaigns to the particular political aims defined by the state (General, 1986).

The Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) excellently illustrated Clausewitz's philosophy of warfare. Napoleon Bonaparte, an outstanding strategist, carried out large-scale battles such as Austerlitz and Jena-Auerstedt, with the goal of crushing enemy forces and imposing favorable peace terms (Heuser, 2010).

Early 20th century: Impact of World Wars

The two World Wars of the twentieth century drastically altered public perceptions of conflict. World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, was the first "total war" in which entire countries gave everything they had to fight (Calder, 1969). Scores of soldiers died in horrific fights using modern weapons such as machine guns and tanks. World War II, which lasted from 1939 to 1945, pushed things even further. Civilians were purposefully bombed, and the first atomic bombs were dropped on Japan (Baumann & Hellmann, 2010). Erich Ludendorff, a German general, published a book called "Total War" in 1935, predicting that future wars would involve everyone in a country. These huge conflicts demonstrated how destructive combat can be and represented an important turning point in the way wars are conducted (Wilson 2012).

Cold War era: Nuclear deterrence and proxy conflicts

The Cold War (1947-1991) radically changed the notion of war, bringing new and unappealing elements:

– *Nuclear Deterrence and Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)*

The Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, had enormous nuclear arsenals. This generated a dark scenario known as MAD, in which a full-fledged battle between them would end in the total destruction of both countries. This standoff necessitated a new strategy to combat, with direct military action becoming unimaginable due to the risk of nuclear calamity (Konyshev & Sergunin, 2018).

– *Proliferation of Limited Wars and Proxy Conflicts*

Avoiding direct confrontation, the US and USSR frequently battled indirectly through proxy wars. These were conflicts fought between smaller countries heavily backed by one superpower and the other's supporters (Powaski, 1997). Examples include the Vietnam War (1955-1975), in which the United States supported South Vietnam against communist North Vietnam, which was backed by the Soviet Union, and the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-

1989), in which the Soviets engaged directly in Afghanistan. These proxy conflicts, albeit lower in scope than a direct superpower conflict, resulted in widespread suffering for humans and chaos in the region (Kuryinanov, 2022)

– *Ideological Warfare and Psychological Operations*

The Cold War was fought ideologically rather than on physically. Each side actively propagated its philosophy, whether it was democracy and capitalism (US) or communism (USSR), using propaganda, media manipulation, and cultural exchange programs (Banneth, 2019). Psychological operations (PsyOps) were additionally used to reduce opposing forces' morale and support from the public. This ideological conflict intended to affect hearts and minds as well as territories (Mohamad & Afkar, 2022).

As a result, the Cold War revealed that war might be fought on more than one battlefield. It emphasized the destructive power of nuclear weapons, the intricacies of proxy conflicts, and the significance of ideological struggle in establishing the world order (Kuryinanov, 2022).

Post-Cold War: Asymmetric warfare and terrorism

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signified the end of the Cold War, but it did not end the war. In the post-Cold War era, new definitions of warfare have emerged:

– *Rise of Non-State Actors*

Wars are nowadays not only fought simply between big nations. Non-state actors, such as terrorist groups and militias, have gained prominence. These groups frequently lack traditional military resources but can be very disruptive through unusual methods (Bussolati, 2015).

– *Asymmetric Conflicts and "New Wars"*

Scholars such as Mary Kaldor refer to these post-Cold War battles as "new wars." compared to traditional wars with distinct combat lines, these conflicts frequently involve non-state players, obscure the distinction involving civilian and armed forces, and are driven by causes such as poverty, resource shortages, and ideological fanaticism (Brzoska, 2014).

– *Terrorism as a New Form of Warfare*

The horrific events of 9/11 exemplified a new form of warfare – terrorism. Terrorist groups use violence and intimidation to achieve political goals, deliberately targeting civilians to sow fear and chaos (Kydd & Walter, 2016).

– *Cyber Warfare and Information Operations*

Besides physical battlegrounds, the digital domain has emerged as a new battleground. Cyberattacks can devastate infrastructure, steal confidential information, and disrupt critical services. The goal of information operations is to affect public opinion and prompt conflict within adversary societies by using propaganda and social media exploitation (Whyte, 2020).

The post-Cold War era emphasizes the complicated and multidimensional

nature of war in the twenty-first century. Non-state players pose new problems, as do unconventional tactics and the changing use technology plays in warfare (Colasanti, 2022).

Table 1: Evolution of War Definitions

Era	Key Concept	Primary Actors	Nature of Conflict	Example
19th Century	Clausewitzian War	Nation-states	Conventional, decisive battles	Napoleonic Wars
Early 20th Century	Total War	Nation-states, entire societies	Mass mobilization, civilian targeting	World Wars I & II
Cold War	Nuclear Deterrence, Proxy Wars	Superpowers, client states	Limited conflicts, ideological warfare	Vietnam War
Post-Cold War	Asymmetric Warfare, Terrorism	States, non-state actors	Irregular warfare, cyber conflicts	War on Terror

Source: created by the researcher

Evolution of peace definitions

Peace definitions have evolved significantly during the nineteenth century, during the balance of power and concert development. During the nineteenth century, peace was defined as the maintenance of balance

among great nations, as part of the Concert of Europe system established following the Napoleonic Wars. There was a focus on diplomatic conferences and alliances (Kende, 1989)

19th Century: Balance of Power and Concert of Europe (Maintaining a Delicate Equilibrium)

– *A Chessboard of Power*

Imagine Europe as a massive checkerboard. Every single major power (Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia) was a player, continually adjusting its strategy to maintain its own strength and influence. Any big transfer in power could upset the balance and spark a conflict (Xiao, 2002).

– *Diplomacy as a Shield*

The Concert of Europe was formed after the Napoleonic Wars to avert similar disturbances. This informal structure was highly reliant on diplomacy. Leaders gathered at conferences such as Vienna (1814-1815) to address conflicts, make alliances against prospective opponents, and revise borders so as to keep stability Fladeland, 1966).

– *The Limits of Balance*

Although the Concert of Europe provided relative calm for much of the nineteenth century, it had flaws (Slantchev, 2005). It aimed largely to safeguard the status quo by suppressing revolutionary movements that challenged the established order. In addition, it ignored smaller nations and non-European powers, resulting in long-term hostility and instability (Elrod, 1956).

Early 20th Century: Collective Security and League of Nations (A Dream of Cooperation)

– *From Rivalry to Responsibility*

According to Bantakas, 1999, the devastation of World War I undermined the notion of a safe balance of power. Nations recognized that averting big crises necessitated a more proactive strategy.

– *Wilson's Idealism*

US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (1918) served as the foundation for this new strategy. They stressed open diplomacy, independence (nations' right to self-government), and collective defense, which is the belief that all nations will defend a victim of invasion (Throntveit, 2011).

– *The League's Struggles*

The League of Nations, founded in 1920, exemplified these objectives of collective security. However, the League lacked actual power. It was unable to execute its decisions, and powerful countries like the United States eventually decided not to take part completely. This hampered the League's ability to deal with crises such as the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, laying the stage for World War II (Calahan, 2018).

Post-WWII: United Nations and Pax Americana (A New World Order)

– *Learning from Failure*

The atrocities of World War II inspired the formation of the United Nations in 1945. The UN wanted to be a more powerful institution than the League. It incorporated a Security Council with 5 permanent members (victors of WWII) which could sanction military actions to prevent hostility (Yurtsever, 2019).

– *The American Ascendancy*

The United States emerged as the dominating worldwide power (Pax Americana). Its economic and military prowess were critical in sustaining some sort of peace throughout the Cold War, an era of fierce ideological competition with the Soviet Union (Layne, 2018).

– *Containment and its Limits*

To prevent communism from spreading, the United States established a containment policy, as stated in George Kennan's "Long Telegram" (1946). This policy entailed offering economic and military assistance to countries endangered by Soviet dominance. Nevertheless, Pax Americana included proxy wars and operations that weakened certain regions (Mayers, 2018).

Late 20th/Early 21st Century: Positive Peace and Human Security (Beyond the Absence of War)

– *Peace as More Than Quiet*

Johan Galtung's notion of "positive peace" (1969) questioned the conventional concept of peace as

the absence of war. It advocated tackling the root reasons of conflict, which included poverty, inequality, and social injustice (Alger, 2007).

– *Security for All*

The notion of human security was first introduced in the UN Development Programme's Human Development Report of 1994. This extends past national security to safeguard individuals from violence, hunger, sickness,

and other risks to their good health (Zyla, 2019).

– *Building a Sustainable Peace:*

Today, global efforts are centered on peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This includes tackling social and economic inequities, fostering dialogue and reconciliation, and building systems to prevent violence from spreading (Doyle & Sambanis, 2020).

Table 2: Evolution of Peace Definitions

| Era	Key Concept	Primary Mechanism	Example
19th Century	Balance of Power	Diplomatic alliances	Concert of Europe
Early 20th Century	Collective Security	International organization	League of Nations
Post-WWII	Institutional Peace	Global governance	United Nations
Late 20th/Early 21st Century	Positive Peace	Social justice, human security	UN Peacebuilding Commission

Source: created by the researcher

Factors influencing definitional changes

There are many factors that have influenced these definitional changes.

The table below summarized these factors;

Figure 1: Factors influencing definitional changes
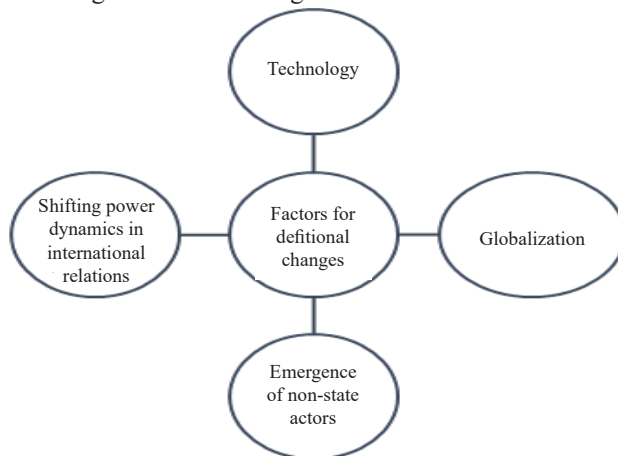
Source: Created by the researcher

Technological breakthroughs have fundamentally altered warfare. Nuclear weapons brought previously inconceivable levels of damage, demanding a thorough rethinking of strategic planning (Lee, 2008). Precision-guided weapons, first used in the 1991 Gulf War, transformed tactics by allowing for targeted attacks with few casualties among civilians. The impact of this has been new challenges for arms control and disarmament (Lautenschläger & Olive, 1983).

The advancement of the internet and cyberwarfare abilities has created totally new battlefields in which information supremacy and technological disruption are critical. Globalization and interconnection, powered by multinational firms and worldwide supply networks, have resulted in an intricate network of dependence that can be abused during crises. The rapid spread of knowledge via media and social networks can exacerbate conflict dynamics.

This has led to increasing focus on economic interdependence as a peace factor (Maness, & Valerian, 2016).

The balance of power in international affairs is also changing. European supremacy diminished, giving way to US primacy in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, the emergence of China, the return of Russia, and the increasing prominence of regional countries such as India and Brazil all indicate a world that is multipolar (Slimia, 2023).

Non-state actors are also playing an increasingly important role. Transnational businesses hold considerable economic power, whilst non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International shape human rights rhetoric. Terrorist organizations increasingly challenge existing state-centric security paradigms, necessitating novel solutions. This has increased the number of stakeholders in peacebuilding (Bah, 2023).

Unexpected findings or contradictions in the literature

Research of peace in a continually changing society produces some unanticipated conclusions and paradoxes in the extensive literature on the subject. Here are a few significant examples:

Persistence of Clausewitzian thinking even though there is changing nature of warfare

Clausewitz, a 19th-century military strategist, famously described war as "the continuation of politics by other means." His views on war as an encompassing event and the necessity of political goals remain pertinent today. Nevertheless, the development of non-state actors,

cyberwarfare, and the blurring of war and peace frontiers call into doubt Clausewitzian thinking's overall applicability. Can a paradigm designed to comprehend interstate wars properly examine these new types of conflict? (Gratale et al.,2013)

Contradictory impacts of nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons were intended to bring in a period of "mutually assured destruction," preventing large-scale fights. However, the presence of these weapons raises significant strategic concerns. The potential of unintended escalation or

proliferation of nuclear weapons by hostile regimes remains a long-standing concern. This presents a contradictory situation in which nuclear weapons might avert major wars while simultaneously introducing new and perhaps existential risks (Wray, 2006).

Tension between state sovereignty and collective security in peace definitions

The traditional notion of peace frequently emphasizes national sovereignty, or a nation's freedom to rule itself without foreign interference. Yet, this concept may conflict with the idea of collective security, in which the international community steps in to avert atrocities or aggression. This tension becomes especially crucial in discussions concerning humanitarian operations (Kolb, 2016). This poses a question as to whether international intervention to protect civilians is justified, even if it breaches a country's sovereignty?

Divergence between academic and policy-oriented definitions of war and peace

Academics and policymakers define peace differently. Academics frequently look deeper into the underlying causes of violence, such as poverty and inequality. In contrast, policymakers frequently prioritize preserving a stable international order over immediate security concern. This disparity might result in contradictory concepts of peace, impeding the creation of comprehensive plans to attain it. Addressing this gap is critical for achieving a future in which theoretical understanding and practical action work together to create a more peaceful world (Levi, 1964).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This review of the literature demonstrates a nuanced and shifting concept of peace. The main results include Clausewitzian thinking's continuing impact in the face of evolving warfare, nuclear weapons' paradoxical deterrence and destabilization effects, the conflict between state sovereignty and collective security, and academics and policymakers' differing definitions of peace. These shifting definitions have important repercussions.

International law and diplomacy must evolve to confront emerging dangers such as cyberwarfare and non-state actors. In today's world, the distinction between war and peace is becoming increasingly blurred. Peace-building initiatives ought to concentrate not only on preventing violence, but also on resolving underlying factors such as poverty and inequality.

Future studies ought to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical approaches to peace, and policy considerations should address the problems of a multipolar world, with an emphasis on inventive solutions to new dangers.

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