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## Transitions from War to Peace

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# Transitions from War to Peace

## **Abstract**

*The Elgar Handbook of Civil War and Fragile States* brings together contributions from a multidisciplinary group of internationally renowned scholars on such important issues as the causes of violent conflicts and state fragility, the challenges of conflict resolution and mediation, and the obstacles to post-conflict reconstruction and durable peace-building. This chapter examines the state of current knowledge regarding transitions from war to peace following civil wars.

## **Keywords**

civil war, reconstruction, peace

## **Disciplines**

International Relations | Military, War, and Peace | Peace and Conflict Studies | Political Science

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## 17 Transitions from war to peace

*Caroline A. Hartzell*

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### 17.1 INTRODUCTION

El Salvador, the site of a civil war from 1979 to 1992, has not experienced any recurrence of fighting since the end of that conflict. The country has become more democratic in the ensuing years, recently electing a member of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, the former mass-based guerrilla group's political party, to the presidency, and its economy has registered steady economic growth following a period of post-war recovery. El Salvador's transition from war to peace can be contrasted with that of Chad. Six civil wars have been fought in Chad since that country's independence in 1960. Although opposition parties were legalized following the end of one of Chad's armed conflicts, the last set of presidential elections was boycotted by the opposition. The country, which is plagued by corruption, has consistently been ranked as one of the poorest in the world.

How much do we know about why some countries, such as El Salvador, have been able to make the transition from war to peace while others, like Chad, struggle with serial civil wars? An overview of the growing literature on civil war termination indicates that although scholars have identified some factors that can facilitate the shift from war to peace – for example, the presence of peacekeeping forces – there is much we still must learn in order to be able to provide useful advice to countries emerging from civil war. In particular there is a need to revisit what has been the central argument of theories regarding the ability of countries successfully to move from war to peace – that is, that the means by which a country ends its civil war plays a central role in determining whether the peace will prove stable or war will recur. If, as evidence now suggests, these outcomes do not have the type of impact on the peace they traditionally have been thought to exercise, researchers will need to develop new models to help us understand why some countries are more readily able to build peace after civil war than are others.

This chapter assesses the state of current knowledge regarding transitions from war to peace following intra-state conflicts. I begin by discussing what we thought we knew, evaluating long-held claims regarding the relationship between civil war outcomes and the stability of the peace (Section 17.2). I next review what we know about the factors that facilitate

or impede the transition from civil war to a civil peace (Section 17.3). I conclude with some thoughts on what we need to learn (Section 17.4) focusing on two themes: what we mean by the peace, the ability of the international community to promote different versions of the peace, and the content of the peace or the types of civil war settlements adversaries construct to end civil wars.

## 17.2 WHAT WE THOUGHT WE KNEW: CIVIL WAR OUTCOMES AND THE STABILITY OF THE PEACE

One of the longest-held tenets in research on transitions from civil war to peace is that the outcomes of intra-state conflicts play a central role in determining whether or not countries will experience a durable peace. I review this claim below, taking note of changing trends in civil war outcomes and the inconclusive results that have been produced by efforts to test this claim.

### 17.2.1 Trends in Civil War Outcomes

Civil wars have ended in a number of different ways during the post-Second World War period. The most common means by which these conflicts have been terminated is military victory. Fifty-five (51 per cent) of the 108 civil wars that were fought and ended, at least for some period of time, between 1945 and 1999 were concluded with one party claiming victory and the other(s) admitting defeat. Negotiated agreements ended 38 civil wars (35 per cent) after the representatives of opposing factions met to discuss and agree to the terms on which they would terminate the fighting. Eleven civil wars (10 per cent) were concluded following negotiated truces, an outcome which saw adversaries focus on the modalities of stopping the fighting in the short term while delaying an ultimate resolution of war-related issues. Four civil wars (4 per cent) ended with the imposition of a peace by third parties acting either on their own or in conjunction with one of the sets of combatants (Hartzell and Hoddie 2007). Finally, some civil wars peter out for a while, with the number of deaths in the conflict falling below civil war thresholds, only to flare back up at a later point in time.

Table 17.1 highlights trends in the means by which civil wars were ended during the 1945–99 period. During the Cold War period the majority of intra-state conflicts (69 per cent) were terminated via military victory. The first post-Cold War decade saw a major change in the way civil wars

Table 17.1 *Trends in civil war termination, 1945–1999*

Termination type	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Military victory	5 (62.5%)	11 (79%)	8 (80%)	13 (65%)	8 (62%)	10 (23%)
Negotiated agreement	2 (25%)	3 (21%)	1 (10%)	6 (30%)	3 (23%)	23 (54%)
Negotiated truces	0	0	0	0	1 (8%)	10 (23%)
Peace negotiated with or imposed by third parties	1 (12.5%)	0	1 (10%)	1 (5%)	1 (8%)	

*Source:* Data from Hartzell and Hoddie (2007).

were ended, with 54 per cent of the conflicts concluded through negotiated agreements and another 23 per cent through negotiated truces. Employing somewhat different datasets, both Fortna (2009) and Toft (2010) identify the same trends in civil war termination for the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. This trend in civil war outcomes has become even more pronounced during the first decade of the twenty-first century with negotiated agreements stopping the fighting in 12 of the 16 civil wars ending between 2000 and 2007.<sup>1</sup>

### 17.2.2 Claims Regarding the Effects Civil War Outcomes Have on the Peace

The means by which civil wars end has been the focus of an ongoing debate among scholars who believe that these outcomes play an important role in the process of securing a durable peace.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of this debate is the argument that war, once initiated, will only end when adversaries arrive at a bargain they prefer to continuing to fight and that peace will last only as long as the groups remain committed to the new bargain (Fearon 1995, 1998; Reiter 2003). Parties will stick to their bargains, and the peace will endure, as long as rival groups have convergent expectations regarding the outcome of a future hypothetical war. As a number of scholars have

<sup>1</sup> Identification of trend based on author's data. Although he uses a lower battle-death threshold to identify civil wars, Mack (2008) also finds that a growing percentage of intra-state conflicts have been ended via negotiated agreements.

<sup>2</sup> This section draws on Hartzell (2009b).

pointed out, however, agreements are not likely to be adhered to, and war will become more likely, if these expectations change (Wagner 1993; Werner and Yuen 2005). Based on this explanation of civil war recurrence, the challenge for those who seek to foster an enduring peace is to find the best means to reduce uncertainty and to stabilize expectations among the parties to the conflict.

What is the best method for accomplishing this? According to one group of scholars, it is to end civil wars via military victory (Licklider 1995; Luttwak 1999; Wagner 1993; Walter 1997). The claim in this case is that the victors of civil wars use their superior strength to destroy or dismantle the organizations of their adversaries, thereby checking future armed challenges to their power. By leaving the defeated parties with little doubt regarding the outcome of future military encounters, military victories increase the likelihood that the losers will stick to the bargain they agreed to at the war's end. According to this school of thought, in the absence of the information that the defeat and destruction of rival factions' organizations is thought to produce, groups' expectations regarding the possibility of winning a future war and thus securing a better deal for themselves may change, thereby encouraging a return to war. It is for this reason that the post-Cold War trend of ending civil wars via negotiated agreements is of concern to scholars who believe that it may be followed by a wave of renewed intra-state conflicts initiated by factions seeking new and better bargains for themselves.

Other scholars have argued that, if properly constructed, negotiated agreements can serve to secure the peace. This school of thought posits that negotiated agreements can also be used to secure the peace, not that they are the *only* means of doing so. Agreements that provide rival groups with a means of checking one another's actions and that include provisions that raise the costs to the groups of returning to war can serve to stabilize expectations and reduce uncertainty (Hartzell and Hoddie 2007; Mattes and Savun 2000). Particularly useful in this respect is the inclusion in agreements of power-sharing measures, provisions that call for the distribution of political, military, territorial, and/or economic power among contending groups. Agreements by adversaries to share power can prolong the peace, according to this school of thought, by providing rivals with a stake in the future in the form of access to state power. Power-sharing bargains can also alter rivals' preferences in a manner that makes for a stable peace. Finally, because power-sharing provisions such as those that mandate the integration of rivals' troops into the state's military make it more difficult for adversaries to return to armed conflict, opposing factions that implement these measures should

be more likely to abide by the terms of the bargain they agree to at the war's end.

Which of these sets of arguments does the evidence best support? Tests of the effects military victories and negotiated agreements have on the stability of the peace following civil war have produced a variety of different results. Licklider (1995) finds support for the argument that military victories yield long periods of peace while negotiated settlements are more apt to be followed by recurring war. Doyle and Sambanis (2006) find that ending wars via treaties or negotiated agreements makes for a more durable peace while ending wars via military victory has no significant effect on the peace. Walter (2004) fails to identify either type of war outcome as having a significant effect on the duration of the peace. Toft (2010) finds that military victories by rebel groups (but not by the government) produce more durable settlements of civil war while negotiated agreements are more apt to be followed by renewed civil war. Quinn et al. (2007) conclude that both rebel victories and negotiated agreements, supported by peacekeeping forces serve to stabilize the peace. Finally, Fortna (2008a) and Hartzell (2009b) find that both military victories and negotiated settlements can produce a durable peace.

What can one conclude about the relationship between civil war outcomes and the duration of the peace given these results? None of these results can be considered conclusive because none of the studies directly tests the effects that the two different types of civil war outcomes are hypothesized to have on the stability of the peace. Scholars have assumed, for example, that military victories result in the destruction of the losers' organizational structures while negotiated agreements preserve them. In the absence of data on the fate of factions at the end of civil wars it has been difficult to know whether this is a reasonable assumption. Scholars have also assumed that power-sharing measures are associated only with negotiated settlements of civil wars. Lacking data on whether offers to share power have been made following military victories it has been difficult to assess the stabilizing effects of these measures. In short, even in those instances in which an association was found between military victories and/or negotiated agreements and the duration of the peace, we cannot be certain why the type of outcome had the effect it did on the peace.

A new dataset on power-sharing measures and the fate of factions following all civil wars fought and ended at some point between 1945 and 1999 sheds some light on these issues. Among other things, the data indicate that military victories do not consistently give rise to the destruction of rival groups' organizational structures at the end of civil wars. In

fact, nearly 42 per cent of all wars that end via military victory see the preservation of the organizational structures of factions other than that of the victor. In addition, fully one-fifth of the wars that end in negotiated agreements see the destruction of the organizational structures of all but the winning faction. Interesting details regarding power-sharing measures also emerge from the data. These indicate that provisions for power sharing have been agreed to following some military victories and negotiated agreements sometimes include very limited or no measures for sharing power (Hartzell 2009b).

Tests of the impact civil war outcomes have on the stability of the peace when one controls for the fate of factions and power-sharing measures yield some interesting results. First, the destruction of rival factions' organizational structures is found not to have any significant effect on the duration of the peace. Second, the inclusion of power-sharing measures in a war-ending agreement is associated with a longer-lived peace. Finally, both military victories and negotiated settlements are found to lower the likelihood that peace will fail (*ibid.*).

The foregoing results suggest two avenues for further research regarding the relationship between the means by which wars are ended and the ability of countries to establish a stable peace. One is to think theoretically about other features of war outcomes that have a stabilizing influence on the peace. Since both military victories and negotiated agreements have a positive impact on the duration of the peace, it may be that they share some common, as yet undiscovered, characteristics that produce this effect. An alternative path scholars should consider focusing on is to look not at war-outcomes but on the effect civil war settlements have on the peace. I return to this issue later in this chapter. First, however, I review what we have learned about the impact a number of factors have on the transition from war to peace.

### 17.3 WHAT WE KNOW: FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON THE TRANSITION FROM WAR TO PEACE

Studies indicate that a handful of factors appear to have an effect – in some cases positive and in other cases negative – on the likelihood that countries will successfully make the transition from war to peace. Given differences in the datasets and methodologies researchers employ, the fact that these factors have been found to exercise an effect on the peace across a number of studies speaks to their significance. For the sake of convenience, I divide these factors into three categories:



'inherited risk factors' (Bigombe et al. 2000), characteristics of previous conflicts, and the presence of peacekeepers. I address each of these below.

### 17.3.1 Inherited Risk Factors<sup>3</sup>

Countries with low levels of economic development have been found to be particularly vulnerable to lapsing back into armed conflict (Collier et al. 2003; Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Hartzell 2009b; Quinn et al. 2007; Walter 2004). One explanation that has been offered for this relationship is that the cost of recruiting people to fight is very low in poverty-stricken societies. Finding themselves with few economic options, individuals are believed to be more willing to join rebel forces. In light of the negative economic effects that civil war has on a country's economy, individuals may be faced with even more stark choices regarding strategies for survival in the aftermath of such a conflict. Low levels of economic development have also been hypothesized to be a proxy for state weakness (Fearon and Laitin 2003). In this instance, states, weakened by civil war, are thought to be at a higher risk for renewed conflict because of their inability to exercise control effectively over their territory, including contending with any remaining pockets of armed resistance.

Rates of post-conflict economic growth have also been found to have an impact on countries' ability to make a successful transition to peace (Collier et al. 2003). Countries with higher rates of post-conflict economic growth should see a lower risk of conflict to the extent that that growth provides economic opportunities for the population. Economic growth that is achieved through policies that seek to promote social inclusion – for example, government spending on education and healthcare – has been found to play a particularly important role in stabilizing the peace after war (Collier and Hoeffler 2004a). By prioritizing inclusive social policies following a civil war, governments are thought to signal their commitment to the peace. In addition to proving reassuring to former rebel groups, such a move may encourage foreign investors to invest domestically with positive effects on the economic growth rate and thus on the peace.

<sup>3</sup> Although a number of additional risk factors, such as the extent of natural resource rents and factors related to ethnicity have been identified in the literature, I do not discuss them here because of the contradictory results produced by studies that have employed these measures. See Section 17.2 for extensive discussion of these various factors.

### 17.3.2 Characteristics of Previous Conflicts<sup>4</sup>

Attributes of civil wars have been found to have an impact on the likelihood that a country will make a successful transition to an enduring peace. One such feature is the duration of a civil war. Numerous studies have found that lengthy civil wars lower the likelihood that armed conflict will recur (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Fortna 2008a; Quinn et al. 2007; Walter 2004). Long civil wars are thought to have this effect by providing parties to the conflict with an extended opportunity to gather information concerning their chances for victory (Mason et al. 1999). Wars that drag on for many years are believed to produce a sense of pessimism among belligerents regarding their potential for winning a future conflict. This has the effect of encouraging them to stick to the peace once a war ends.

The intensity of a civil war, or the number of deaths produced by the violence, also has been found to have an impact on the duration of the peace (Fortna 2008a; Hartzell 2009b; Mukherjee 2006; Quinn et al. 2007). In this instance, more intense civil wars make it more likely that countries will slip back into armed civil conflict. Wars characterized by high casualty rates are thought to foster low levels of trust among actors and a desire for retribution once the conflict ends. These factors make it less likely that former opponents will be able to cooperate to manage conflict in the post-war state. High levels of war deaths also lower a society's stock of human and social capital, making it more difficult to recover economically from the war (Doyle and Sambanis 2000). Together, these factors erode antagonists' commitment to the newly established peace.

### 17.3.3 Presence of Peacekeepers

The deployment of peacekeeping forces in the aftermath of civil wars has been found to be helpful in facilitating countries' transition from civil war to peace. Peacekeeping missions, which have been led by the United Nations, regional organizations, and ad hoc groups of states, have been found significantly to reduce the risk that civil war will resume. Peacekeepers are thought to have this effect by altering parties' incentives to engage in conflict, by providing adversaries with reliable information regarding each other's intentions, and by helping to prevent and/or cope

<sup>4</sup> A number of scholars have focused on the effects whether or not a previous conflict was fought over identity issues – that is, issues pertaining to ethnicity, race, religion and/or language – have on the stability of the peace. I do not focus on this characteristic here because a clear consensus has yet to emerge on the significance of this factor to the transition from war to peace.

with accidental violations of the peace (Fortna 2008a). Although peace-keeping forces at times fail to keep the peace following civil war, this may well reflect the fact that these missions tend to be deployed to some of the most challenging cases of civil war (Bigombe et al. 2000; Fortna 2008a).

## 17.4 WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN

There is, of course, a great deal we still need to learn about transitions from war to peace. Rather than construct an exhaustive list of all of these topics, I concentrate here on two factors that I believe should be at the top of any agenda for future research and action on this issue.

### 17.4.1 What We Mean by 'Peace' and the International Community's Capacity to Promote Different Versions of the Peace

Thus far I have focused on the current state of knowledge regarding transitions from civil war to a durable peace. Although the stability of the peace is clearly important, it is not the only component of the peace that post-conflict societies and other actors care about. Other relevant issues include personal security and a respect for human rights, democracy, and economic development and the provision of public goods.

Can all of these elements of a post-civil war peace be advanced at the same time with some real degree of success? Should they be sequenced in some particular fashion (Lake 2010)? What, if there are trade-offs involved among some of these peace-related goals? If that is found to be the case, which definition of the peace should be given prevalence – one that emphasizes stability, democracy, or development? What version of the peace do the leaders and populations of post-conflict countries support? *Despite a lack of answers to such questions, international actors have sought to promote a variety of these goals as part of a model of post-conflict reconstruction. How well has the international community fared in its efforts to implement a multi-faceted version of the peace? Not well, according to one analyst who notes that this 'is due both to the enormous difficulty of the undertaking and to the fact that in most countries the international community lacks the political will to really try' (Ottaway 2003, p. 315)*

This dilemma highlights the need for the international community to come to some agreement regarding what it means by peace. This decision should be based, in no small measure, on an evaluation of the ability of international actors to help promote transitions to different versions of the peace. Although, as I noted above, we know something about the

factors that have an impact on the stability of the peace, we know much less about what is involved in establishing a wider-ranging 'participatory peace' (Doyle and Sambanis 2006). Topics in need of study include, for example, an assessment of the impact democracy assistance programmes have on democratic outcomes and the stability of the peace; an appraisal of the effects security sector reform (SSR) and demobilization, demilitarization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have on peace, duration and domestic security; and an evaluation of the effects IMF and World Bank programmes to liberalize post-conflict economies have on development, human rights and the stability of the peace. Although they do not focus specifically on post-conflict countries, Abouharb and Cingranelli (2007) find evidence that IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes, used to promote economic liberalization, have adverse effects on a range of human rights practices and increase the probability of rebellion. Hartzell et al. (2010) find that IMF structural adjustment programmes increase the risk of civil war onset. If we find that efforts to promote some of these goals negatively affect other objectives, difficult choices will need to be made. Doing so in an informed fashion is critical, however, since failed efforts to promote more complex versions of the peace could have a variety of negative effects. These include undermining a stable peace, eroding domestic actors' commitment to the peace, and weakening the international community's willingness to participate in future efforts to help countries make the transition from war to peace.

#### **17.4.2 The Effects Civil War Settlements have on the Peace**

We should seek to learn more about how countries can successfully make the transition from civil war to peace via means that rely less intensively on the actions of the international community. I do not make this point in order to absolve the international community from any responsibility it has to play a role in helping to end civil wars. Rather, I seek to take into account three limitations associated with depending too heavily on the international community to play the central role in this process. First, 'as actively as international actors have been involved in helping to end civil wars in the past two decades, not all post-conflict cases see the level and types of international resources directed to them that have been associated with successful efforts to secure the peace (Ottaway 2003). Fortna (2004b) finds, for example, that international peacekeepers were deployed in only 36 per cent of the civil wars that were ended between 1947 and 1999. Second, recent developments such as the costly wars the United States is fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, in conjunction with the current global economic crisis, raise questions about external actors' ability and

willingness to dedicate attention and resources to helping countries make the transition from civil war to peace. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a durable peace requires that post-conflict governments be seen as legitimate by their societies. This is an objective that regimes that are perceived to be overly dependent on the international community for their survival may be particularly hard-pressed to achieve.

Focusing on the settlements constructed at the end of civil wars holds promise as a means of learning more about what actors in civil war states have done to construct a lasting peace in some instances and one that has failed to hold in others. Virtually all civil wars, whatever their outcome – military victory, negotiated agreement, or truce – see adversaries agree to terms of some kind at the war's end (Iklé 1991; Kecskemeti 1958; Reiter 2003; Wagner 1993). These terms, or civil war settlements, consist of decisions regarding 'who gets what and when' in the post-conflict state (Werner and Yuen 2005, p.262). One can distinguish among civil war settlements on the basis of the rules they construct regarding these issues. Broadly speaking, settlements whose terms eliminate some of the factions that participated in civil wars or that seek to limit their ability to participate in efforts to determine the benefits of the peace may be deemed *exclusionary* in nature. Settlements whose terms call for allocating state power and resources among adversaries can be conceived of as being of a *distributive* type (Hartzell 2009a).

Why focus on the role settlements play in the transition from war to peace? One important reason is because the terms of settlements are subject to human intervention. If we find that particular types of terms increase the likelihood that the peace will prove durable or serve better to protect human rights or to promote development in the post-war environment, civil war adversaries can be encouraged to construct settlements of that nature while also tailoring them to their country's particular circumstances. Second, as the evidence cited earlier noting that power-sharing measures have been adopted in the wake of military victories and rival factions' organizational structures have sometimes been eliminated following negotiated agreements suggests, settlement terms are not necessarily determined by war outcomes. This is important since it means that no matter what the trend is by which civil wars are being ended, agency matters: actors have the latitude to design settlements, including, hopefully, those whose terms can help facilitate the transition from war to peace. Finally, once we know more about the effects different types of settlements have on the peace, members of the international community can be encouraged to support the design and implementation of settlements that are most appropriate for helping countries make the transition from war to peace.

## 17.5 CONCLUSION

The fact that most intra-state conflicts now end via negotiated agreements and that these are followed by a more durable peace than was associated with this type of civil war outcome in the past suggests that something has changed in such a manner as to help facilitate the transition from war to peace (Mack 2008). Just what the nature of this change is we do not know. Part of the explanation is likely to be found in the international community's increased support for post-conflict peacebuilding, although not all of these efforts have been equally fruitful. This chapter has suggested that we also take a closer look at the choices conflict actors have been making as they craft civil war settlements. One thing is clear. Some countries have been able to make the transition from war to peace more successfully than others. Learning more about why and how some countries succeed in securing the peace could prove useful to other countries as they seek to end civil wars.