



Time for a Peace Offensive*

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“It requires both neither gains nor losses.” – Bertrand Russell

Foreword

This article describes a proposal for a new WAAS initiative presented by the author at the WAAS General Assembly on June 27, 2024. It is intended to generate positive, practical momentum for the Academy's HS4A global campaign on Human Security for All. In these precarious, rapidly deteriorating times, a Peace Offensive could be a significant contribution to the upcoming UN Summit of the Future. In an era marked by escalating conflicts and entrenched hostilities across multiple regions, the need for innovative and robust peace strategies has never been more urgent. The concept of a “Peace Offensive,” grounded in the philosophy of mutual concessions and strategic initiatives, offers a viable path forward in resolving these protracted crises. It is founded on the premise that there is scope for positive initiative when parties to conflict recognize the legitimacy of reciprocal initiatives for compromise. This strategy calls for unilateral, symbolic gestures to encourage reciprocal actions in response. It aims to transform adversarial dynamics into collaborative relationships, even amidst the most entrenched conflicts. Drawing from historical precedents and the strategic frameworks, this paper explores the potential for Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction (GRIT) as a mechanism for de-escalating hostilities. Analysis of past successes demonstrates how unilateral concessions can serve as catalysts for meaningful dialogue and peace-building. The current geopolitical landscape underscores the urgency of adopting a peace offensive. The humanitarian crises in regions like Gaza, Syria, and Yemen highlight the destructive consequences of sustained warfare and the necessity for immediate and substantial peace efforts. The protracted war in Ukraine presents multidimensional challenges that demand innovative solutions beyond military engagements, including potential diplomatic gestures such as multiparty security guarantees, demilitarization and humanitarian cooperation. A peace offensive advocates for phased, publicized initiatives that reduce distrust and promote cooperative engagement. Implementing unilateral concessions in the initial stages and other practical steps can build confidence and establish a foundation for sustained peace negotiations. The time has come for a coordinated, global peace offensive that transcends traditional conflict management and embraces comprehensive, inclusive efforts to transform crises into opportunities for enduring peace. Such an offensive, underpinned by strategic unilateral actions and a commitment to building trust, can break the cycle of violence and pave the way for a more stable and cooperative international order.

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Abstract

In a world grappling with escalating conflicts and deep-rooted hostilities, the concept of a Peace Offensive emerges as a timely and innovative strategy for fostering global peace and security. Grounded in the principles of mutual concessions and strategic initiatives, the Peace Offensive advocates for phased, publicized actions aimed at reducing distrust, promoting cooperation, and paving the way for sustainable peace negotiations. By drawing from historical successes and strategic frameworks such as Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction (GRIT), the article explores how unilateral concessions can serve as catalysts for meaningful dialogue and peace-building efforts. Through examples spanning from the Middle East to Europe, the importance of strategic unilateral actions, building trust, and breaking the cycle of violence is highlighted. A coordinated global Peace Offensive offers a transformative approach to conflict resolution, emphasizing the significance of creating opportunities for enduring peace through innovative and inclusive efforts.

1. Introduction

Trust is not built in a single day; it originates from mutual understanding and reciprocal concessions. Giving peace a chance is in the interest of all parties directly or indirectly involved in the current multi-scaled, multi-regional conflicts. In a strongly polarized and inflamed situation, pursuing peace means investing in rebuilding fragile and precarious bridges with adversaries. The premise should be clear: giving peace a chance benefits all parties in the long run.

Human and material casualties, entrenched war objectives, elusive targets, excessive military spending, the negative effects of a war economy, and diminishing public support are among the main factors that should motivate leaders to consider any negotiation seriously. Acknowledgment of the opponent's legitimacy, even in the absence of formal recognition, is a critical prerequisite for meaningful dialogue, yet adversaries often ignore this until they are compelled to engage.

In a protracted crisis at high costs for the belligerents, resolving the deadlock is a common objective for all parties in conflict, especially as public opinion increasingly influences world leaders and calls for peace. Moreover, negotiated solutions, even when perceived as threats to power, provide a genuine path forward when internal support for war wanes and military offensives prove unsuccessful.

The current conundrum in world affairs, characterized by unabated armed conflict in the Middle East and Central Europe, many low intensity but highly destructive armed conflicts in forgotten places, and an overall deep crisis of multilateralism, demands a radical innovation in policy and an alternative approach to war. A well-timed, gradual, and progressive peace offensive might be the answer at hand.

With a peace offensive, parties to a conflict will offer unilateral concessions, even symbolic but credible, that would entice subsequent openings and reciprocity in various fields. Consequently, the opponent will upsurge to the level of an interlocutor, even if

indirectly, through mediation. The purpose of the peace offensive is two-fold: 1) break the deadlock in a never-ending confrontation through a new strategy; 2) launch a series of confidence-building measures that can transform the crisis and reverse the war spiral with time and perseverance. Such an offensive can succeed if it includes unilateral concessions, particularly in its initial phases, and genuinely addresses legitimate sources of insecurity and discontent on both sides. These concessions should demonstrate a positive stance, aiming for later reciprocation, even in the absence of significant signs of immediate reciprocity.

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2. Peace Offensive – From Theory to Practice

The rationale for a peace offensive is not as idealistic or unrealistic as it may appear. Let us recall that in virtually all situations of conflict, no matter how unjustified they may appear, there is almost always an element of genuine grievance on both sides that seeks or demands recognition and remedy. Russia’s current aggression against Ukraine appears totally unjustified to the West, yet the growing unification and security of the EU and NATO was done without regard for the sentiments of insecurity of both Russia and the Russian-speaking populations in neighboring countries. So too the growing strength of Israel and its efforts to achieve lasting peace with other neighboring countries of the region failed to address the distrust and unfulfilled aspirations of its large Palestinian population. Unilateral recognition of such threads can open up the door for legitimate efforts at compromise and reconciliation leading to lasting peace, especially in cases where increasingly dangerous spirals of continuous escalation of conflict appears to be the only alternative.

Strategically planned and systematic concessions from one party have the potential to trigger behavioral shifts that initiate a positive chain of events. This concept, introduced by Charles E. Osgood in the 1960s, is not novel in the realm of international relations. The ancient Roman formula of “*do ut des*” (“I give so that you may give”) embodies the notion of a pragmatic approach based on concessions, ranging from cooperation to the full acknowledgment of the adversary’s rights. Essentially, it serves as a strategic instrument aimed at garnering the sympathies, if not the allegiance, of the opponent.

Thoughtfully structured, phased, and well-publicized peace initiatives have the capacity to unlock significant peace-building potential. The primary goal of a peace offensive is to instill confidence by diminishing distrust and shifting the spiral of fear towards a spiral of hope. As Charles E. Osgood proposed during the height of the nuclear arms race*, fostering reciprocity from the opponent is the ultimate aim, potentially reducing the adversary’s inclination towards a heightened military buildup.

Osgood’s framework of “Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction” (GRIT) operates on the premise of conveying a genuine intent to de-escalate conflicts, commencing with minor, unilateral, and public concessions extended to the other party. These initial gestures of goodwill encourage reciprocal actions, initiating a cycle of peace that mitigates

* Charles E. Osgood “Reciprocal Initiative”, The Liberal Papers, N.Y Anchor Books, 1962

tensions. Should the opponent escalate the situation, the ability to respond proportionately is retained.

This is a reaffirmation of Machiavellian unambiguous condemnation of the exercise of violence for violence that becomes a liability and is repugnant if not quick, commensurate to the offense and with a clear end.

Historical instances of GRIT, such as Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's unilateral nuclear concessions in the late 1980s, which resonated with U.S. President Ronald Reagan, underscore the efficacy of such diplomatic strategies. Another historical example is the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel that showcase how courageous and persistent diplomatic endeavors by President Anwar Sadat could yield significant peace breakthroughs.

Unilateral concessions and peace initiatives have played pivotal roles in resolving conflicts and fostering diplomatic dialogue in various regions.

History is full of examples of the “*do ut des*” theory, all based on a calculated move to surprise the enemy, shift public attention, and give peace a chance:

In Cyprus, actions such as demilitarization and the opening of blocked checkpoints in the Green Line have demonstrated unilateral gestures of goodwill. Colombia witnessed unilateral ceasefires by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) at different points during peace negotiations, showcasing commitments to peaceful resolution. Libya has seen unilateral concessions like ceasefires and engagement in dialogue to de-escalate conflicts. In particular, the unilateral troops withdrawal from the Auzou Strip, at the Chadian border, in 1994 is widely regarded as an exemplary move by the Gaddafi's regime to appease regional tensions and rebuild confidence after the Pan-Am flight bombing. Indeed, the withdrawal from the contended Auzou Strip was a strategic gesture by Gaddafi, showcasing a willingness to promote peaceful relations in the aftermath of a turbulent period. Among other territorial disputes, Spain and Morocco have engaged in diplomatic efforts and confidence-building measures around enclaves such as Ceuta and Melilla, aiming to navigate tensions and enhance bilateral relations. These few examples underscore the significance of unilateral initiatives in building trust, reducing hostilities, and creating pathways for peaceful conflict resolution.

With time, it has become evident that a fresh peace offensive is imperative in multiple concurrent conflict zones where armed hostilities persist unchecked. Coordinated and strategic endeavors to construct sustainable peace are in the collective interests of all stakeholders involved, offering a pathway out of the destructive cycle and nurturing a brighter future for everyone.

3. A World in Turmoil: Prospects of Peace Initiatives

The Middle East, a region long plagued by contention and suffering, has the potential to benefit greatly from a renewed peace initiative. The prolonged conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and the recent war between the Israeli army and Hamas have resulted in a growing number of civilian casualties and widespread destruction, leading to unprecedented humanitarian crises. A structured peace effort that involves unilateral concessions and confidence-building

measures could lay the groundwork for sustainable solutions. By emphasizing economic cooperation, social exchange, humanitarian aid, and cultural understanding, this peace initiative could address root causes of conflict and nurture a new era of stability and prosperity in the Middle East.

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On the other hand, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine represents one of the most perilous global confrontations, involving nuclear capabilities and potential direct clashes between NATO and Russia. What initially began as a swift invasion has now transformed into a prolonged war of attrition. There are indications that both Russia and Ukraine may be open to proposals focusing not only on a temporary ceasefire but on achieving lasting peace. The nature of the conflict has evolved, and the language of its leaders has adapted accordingly. Despite this, the core objectives appear to align with those initially outlined back in March-April 2022 when the conflict erupted.

Currently, Russia controls a significant portion of Ukrainian territory (approximately 20%) and has deployed a considerable military presence (originally 180,000 troops, now exceeding 500,000 soldiers on the ground). Despite initial setbacks, Russia’s economy has rebounded due to wartime efforts that revitalized its military and related industries. However, the sense of isolation felt by Russians, stemming from severed connections with Europe and the United States, cannot be easily compensated for by alliances with China and lukewarm support from BRICS nations. Nor would even the total conquest of Ukraine address Russia’s underlying sense of insecurity.

On the Ukrainian side, while they have managed to hold their defensive positions, they have lost substantial ground in the Donbas region and are unable to retake Crimea militarily. Consequently, a population of 16 million Ukrainians now resides in territories controlled by Russia. NATO countries largely continue to support President Zelensky’s objectives, with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni echoing a shared sentiment among allied nations, emphasizing at the recent Lucerne summit, “Peace does not equate to surrender.” Nonetheless, Zelensky’s goals of reclaiming the 1991 borders and Crimea are realistically unachievable even with increased NATO weapon supplies. In several instances, Ukrainian leaders have expressed willingness to engage in renewed direct talks with Russia.

However, direct negotiations should only be considered and pursued if military options do not take precedence. In this context, a peace initiative, strategically crafted to be as impactful as a military campaign, could play a crucial role in de-escalating tensions and offering solutions without resorting to armed conflict. Initial efforts from both sides may be dismissed as mere propaganda, but as the peace initiative gains momentum with unwavering dedication, even the staunchest opponents will have to acknowledge its potential benefits.

Let's imagine that as of October 1, the Israeli occupying army will give unimpeded access to humanitarian aid in Gaza; that by October 1, water and electricity in all occupied territories in Gaza will be restored.

Let's imagine that Israel announces that by November 1, at the conclusion of its military campaign, Israel offers free medical services and technical support in various fields to Palestinians in the recovery and reconstruction effort.

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In parallel, Egypt and Israel could be spearheading an initiative for the creation of a Middle Eastern free-trade zone. Water management and desalinization technology could be boosted along with gas supply at a sub-regional level. Technology transfer and innovation diffusion to advance sustainable development objectives, such as renewable energy and agricultural productivity, would benefit all countries involved.

On the other hot front, let's assume that Russia declares that by September 1, its troops would evacuate the nuclear power plant of Zaporizhzhia, due to international concerns of possible nuclear accidents.

Let's assume that Ukraine will unilaterally declare that, as of October 1, its military objectives will exclude strikes on Russian soil.

Let's consider that scientific and educational cooperation exchanges between all belligerents resume, as a reciprocation measure, by December 1.

Furthermore, in order to reduce immediate worldwide threats and foster international cooperation, we could envision the implementation of gradual key initiatives at a global level. These would include halting nuclear proliferation and weapons production to revert to pre-2020 levels, renewing commitments to existing treaties like the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the New START agreement, and establishing new forums for disarmament dialogue.

Offering Russia assurances of a militarily neutral Ukraine and inviting Ukraine to join the European Union would build trust and stability in the region. Demilitarizing the Donbas region through a phased withdrawal of armed forces overseen by international observers can promote peace.

Easing economic sanctions on Russia could facilitate constructive dialogue based on verified actions. Proposing permanent security assurances between Russia and the West through a new international treaty emphasizing collaboration on shared security challenges can defuse tensions further.

Russia, on the other end, could take swift action to cease digital political interference and the current misinformation campaign with sprouting deep-fake news in western media. In parallel, the UN could promote the establishment of an international cyber agreement to prevent state-sponsored hacking and misinformation campaigns as a crucial step for global stability.

Let us be clear. The above wish list, among many others, is just a hypothesis and some may consider it utopistic. But it might also represent a fathomed series of events capable of triggering a large-scaled peace offensive.

The collective involvement of nations and individuals on a global scale can drive substantial change by actively participating in and sustaining peace initiatives. Various stakeholders could collaborate to shape a peaceful future together.

4. Conflict Transformation and Human Security

Indeed, the conventional approach of conflict management does not adequately address the complexities of contemporary challenges. The recent surge in armed conflicts, alongside the emergence of a new multipolar world, underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of modern multilateral relations.

As individuals and nations, there is a collective need to enhance our roles in international relations. The essence of multilateralism today traces back to historical events like the Versailles Treaty over 105 years ago, which were rooted in principles from the Westphalia agreement of 1648. Early in the 17th century, states recognized the importance of managing their relations in a multilateral manner. Multilateralism, in practical terms, signifies international cooperation. At its core, it embodies the principle of mutual support among nations, creating a level playing field in political interactions where all players are equal.

However, the present challenges facing multilateralism stem from a crisis of trust, both between nations and among people towards their leaders and international institutions. This lack of trust extends to international norms and their enforcement, often fuelled by perceptions of double standards in applying international law. The breakdown in trust is not solely attributed to the inefficiencies of global security institutions like the UN Security Council but also to the failure to uphold the foundational principles of international law. Upholding international law forms the bedrock of multilateralism; without it, navigating complex scenarios becomes increasingly arduous.

The evolving nature of crises transcends individual countries' internal and external factors, perpetuating intractable situations. Addressing such challenges necessitates coordinated efforts rather than isolated initiatives. Emerging megatrends, such as the shift from bipolar to multipolar global dynamics, climate change, migration issues, and challenges

related to the dark side of artificial intelligence and misinformation, further complicate the global landscape.

Adapting to these transformed circumstances requires a departure from traditional methods and regulations dating back to previous decades. The dynamics have altered significantly, demanding a reassessment of skills and approaches for navigating these intricate scenarios.

Prioritizing prevention and de-escalation of tensions becomes crucial given the numerous hotspots worldwide. Investing in societal well-being and ensuring that the needs of communities are heard are essential components of charting a positive future amidst prevalent threats like climate change and uncontrolled weapons proliferation.

Revamping multilateralism to address contemporary challenges is imperative. Despite the shortcomings and setbacks, global cooperation remains essential in times of crisis. Rebuilding trust, reinventing dialogue, and reconfiguring the fractured global landscape are key components of fostering positive international relations and safeguarding human security. The upcoming Summit of the Future in New York presents an opportunity to reinvigorate these efforts and reaffirm commitments towards a sustainable and secure future for all.

When discussing human security, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of considering issues that directly affect people and communities in terms of their aspirations and safety. This encompasses various dimensions such as economic security, health security, political security, food security, environmental security, and personal security. In today's technological era, these seven components of security—to which technology has been added—highlight the importance of understanding interdependencies and addressing the root causes of contemporary crises.

The concept of human security, which emerged in the 1990s through initiatives like the UNDP Human Development Report, has its origins in earlier calls for an integrated approach to address the underlying causes of conflicts. Pioneered by figures such as Boutros Boutros-Ghali*, the former United Nations Secretary-General, this approach aims to combat issues like economic distress, social inequality, and political suppression. Utilizing human security as a tool to rejuvenate multilateralism is crucial to promoting global cooperation and stability.

Countries like Costa Rica, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, Mexico, Colombia, Nigeria, Chile, Cape Verde, and Italy have championed the principles of human security. Their commitment, among other nations, reflects a broader global shift towards prioritizing people's interests within the emerging multipolar system. Enhancing efforts within the new multilateral framework while preserving effective strategies for diffusing tensions, such as methods for Pacific dispute settlements outlined in the UN Charter and invoking measures under Chapter 6 and 7 of the United Nations Charter, will be pivotal in sustaining peace and promoting diplomatic resolutions of conflicts.

Underpinning those efforts is the concept of sustaining peace, which emphasizes nurturing nascent peace movements and empowering local actors to shape peace processes. This ground-level approach, supported by sustaining peace initiatives, recognizes the

* Boutros Boutros-Ghali. (1995). "An Agenda for Peace 1995: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping." United Nations. [UN Archives](#).

importance of grassroots involvement and indigenous solutions to conflict. Embracing this approach signifies a departure from top-down interventions and encourages local ownership of peacebuilding efforts.

Revamping the multilateral system to address contemporary challenges will require aligning expectations with operational capacities and ensuring adherence to principles of international law.

The upcoming UN Summit of the Future in the fall (22-23 September 2024) in New York will consider multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow. It will be also an opportunity to reaffirm commitments to international law, human rights principles, and international peace. Upholding those principles is essential for the effective functioning of the multilateral system and the promotion of peace and stability worldwide.

The time for a global peace offensive has come.

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