

A dynamic theory of peace: a review

John W. Burton, *Peace Theory: Preconditions of Disarmament*

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This book, though it is somewhat reminiscent of discussions of peaceful change before World War II, intends to be a trail-blazer. It approaches the whole matter of peace from an unusual angle, an angle so different as to lead the author to say: "The important aspects of international relations are not international organization, deterrents, resource distribution, balance of power, and the many other matters which frequently are included in conventional studies of the subject" (p. 189). His rejection of these topics as not relevant to peace is by no means captious or ill-informed. He has been Secretary of the Australian Department of External Affairs and a delegate to many important international conferences, including the United Nations Charter Conference. Moreover, he has thought through a tentative theory of peace.

Dr. Burton's conception of peace is a dynamic one. It is a condition in which nations allow "natural" changes to occur in other countries, neither trying to prevent nor to promote them. It is a state in which natural change within a country does not give rise to policies calculated to manipulate other countries. Live and let live.

According to this conception, it is attempts to control others that give rise to conflict and endanger the peace. Nation B

can understand that Nation A's growing population may cause internal problems and can accept with good grace the changes in policy that result. Nation B can even accept changed tariff rates by A if they are seen to be caused by internal difficulties and are nondiscriminatory in their application. But B cannot accept the situation if A has deliberately fostered population growth in order to threaten B or if A has imposed a discriminatory tariff to hurt B economically; or if A is reacting aggressively to some natural change in B.

Attempts at international control under the guise of enforcement of international agreements or laws are no less suspect to Dr. Burton. He says that what is behavioristically important is the frustration felt by the controlled party, that this always fosters aggressiveness in the latter, and that a spiral of conflict is thus engendered. He believes that peace is made nationally, not internationally. The way to peace and ultimately to disarmament is through what he calls the conditioning of national policies. Nations must learn that in exercising their sovereignty they will be well advised not to adopt policies that appear to other nations coercive or even meddlesome. As guidelines to such policies, he suggests political as well as economic nondiscrimination and

full observance of national independence—no interest in the internal affairs of other countries even if their “legitimate” governments are being upset.

The author sees that such policies will be very difficult to practice in the face of citizen fears about what is going on abroad and citizen desires to influence the course of events. But he believes that nations must learn to adopt rational accommodations to changed external circumstances rather than trying to hold them in check. The changing nation itself can help the accommodation process by giving advance warning of the change and by offering compensating advantages to the aggrieved nation.

In keeping with this whole analysis, Dr. Burton sees the objective of international organizations as the encouragement of positive neutralism in all countries. He cites three basic characteristics of such organizations that would have this effect: they should be associative rather than dissociative, decentralized rather than centralized, and specialized rather than general. What he really wants is associative regionalism (we mind our own business, settle our own disputes, and don't interfere with other regions), associative functionalism (already well-developed in the United Nations Specialized Agencies), and the withering away of central political activities in the United Nations. Two interesting ideas that he discusses in connection with regionalism are that underdeveloped countries might agree to accept economic aid only from international organizations, and that they might agree to restrict the size of Great Power embassy and consular staffs in their countries. Both of these policies would, he believes, cut down Great Power manipulation. Under functionalism, he suggests that new specialized agencies be set up in the political field dealing with arms control, the con-

trol of intelligence activities, and the like. He further suggests the desirability of a political and sociological research agency under United Nations auspices that would conduct studies in a more objective manner than is possible under national auspices.

It is Dr. Burton's hope that once an elaborated peace theory is developed and validated, it will encourage countries to pursue the long-run advantages of positive neutralism rather than the short-run advantages of manipulation and enforcement. Theoretical principle will be preferred to expediency. All nations will see the superiority of what he calls a condition of peace. Only after this has happened and trust has been developed will it be possible to achieve disarmament.

Enough has been said to show that this book is somewhat of a trail-blazer. But it is a fair question to ask whether the trail it indicates is likely to lead the world to disarmament at all, or at least whether more quickly than alternative paths.

To political scientists of the Morgenthau persuasion, the book will seem simply visionary. That nations could learn not to use the power they have out of hope that a condition of peace can be established in the future—a condition that will require unanimity of renunciation—is indeed an optimistic notion. What the book lacks is any convincing demonstration that the power elites could be persuaded to put this peace theory into practice.

Quite apart from the question whether this trail will ever reach its goal is the fact that it is terribly circuitous. The time involved appears interminable. Studies have to be made to validate the theory, it then has to be communicated to leaders, they have to persuade their publics to accept policies based upon it, regional and functional organizations have to be modified in

character or newly created, a condition of peace must emerge. Then disarmament is possible. How many generations will it take to establish the preconditions? And is it not likely that it will be easier to achieve disarmament more directly?

A different sort of criticism is that the theory absolves a country from any responsibility for the external consequences of changes it deems "natural." Are there not occasions when nations should check their natural tendencies in the interests of others? Can no criterion of acceptability to the outside world be brought to bear?

Yet to make these criticisms is not to dismiss the book. The author's theory is arresting. It merits rumination. If not a satisfac-

tory theory in its own right, it may contribute to a satisfactory theory. The emphasis on peace as dynamic is valid and timely. Dr. Burton's preference for national restraint rather than the assertion of power is refreshing. His insistence that we get out of old intellectual ruts and think imaginatively is richly justified. Perhaps other students of international relations, using these valid strands of his thought and combining them with other strands fashioned from different premises, can weave a more inclusive and persuasive theory.

REFERENCE

BURTON, JOHN W. *Peace Theory: Preconditions of Disarmament*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.