

The Alternative to War

Introducing FP's Peace Channel and PeaceGame, in collaboration with the U.S. Institute of Peace.

By David Rothkopf & Kristin Lord

Peace is back.

Sergei Lavrov's proposal to rid Syria of its chemical weapons -- whatever intentions lie behind it -- not only headed off the imminent use of military force by the United States, but also put the idea of a negotiated settlement back on the political agenda. The renewed focus on peace caught the U.S. administration by surprise. It also seemed to relieve most Americans. According to a [September poll](#) by the *Washington Post* and ABC News, 79 percent of Americans support the Russian plan. Only 30 percent support U.S. military strikes against the Syrian government.

At the same time, U.S. President Barack Obama and Iranian President Hasan Rouhani are testing the waters for a diplomatic solution to their countries' decades-long nuclear standoff. Whether their pinky-toe diplomacy will go any further than it has already remains to be seen, but for the first time in years, a peaceful resolution has entered the realm of the possible (though not yet the realm of the probable). Similarly, Israel and the Palestinians are back at the negotiating table in an effort that one regional leader characterized during conversations at the United Nations General Assembly meeting as "the most promising in the past 14 years."

The recent flurry of activity underscores how far diplomacy has been from the center of discussions of national security in recent memory. This is all the more striking in the aftermath of more than a decade of war during which the limitations of force became all too evident. Despite the thousands of lives and billions of dollars sacrificed during the war in Afghanistan, that country's future hinges on the success of a democratic political transition after Hamid Karzai steps down as Afghan president in 2014. Force alone is insufficient to bring about peace. Only legitimate elections, the avoidance of an economic collapse, and eventual talks with the Taliban can lay the foundation for sustainable security -- but such issues receive far less attention and certainly vastly fewer dollars than the military dimension.

In short, it is time to get serious about peace.

Imagine, for a moment, what foreign policy would look like if we did take peace seriously. Not peace as an unattainable utopian ideal. Not peace as a warm chestnut served up in speeches. Rather, what if we approached the achievement of peace with the same kind of time, energy, resources, and realism with which we approach preparing for wars? What if we viewed peace not as the cessation of hostilities, a coda to the serious work of projecting force, but rather as the achievement of the political, economic, social, environmental, cultural, and other factors that lead to stability, organic growth, and conflict resolution -- within rather than apart from a system of laws?

This is the premise of a new series of ventures by **Foreign Policy** in collaboration with the United States Institute of Peace. This series will include **FP's** new Peace Channel, a forum for cutting-edge analysis and

reporting on how to build peace; PeaceGame, a counterpoint to Washington's traditional emphasis on war games; and an educational outreach initiative to engage young people who are the natural constituents of peace. Our goal is to reintroduce peace not only as an idea, but also as a pragmatic policy option. To do this, we need a forum to debate the merits of both policy and practice. We need expertise and new voices at the table to address the drivers of violence.

Peace is hard work, and we do not take these initiatives lightly. But war is costly, too, on almost every level.

According to the [World Bank's 2011 report](#) on conflict, security, and economic development, wars can wipe out an entire generation of economic progress. A typical civil war in a medium-sized country costs more than 30 years of GDP growth. It takes an average of 20 years for trade levels to recover after a major episode of violence.

The Institute for Economics and Peace estimates the cost of containing violence at \$9.46 trillion in 2012, or roughly 11 percent of gross world product. This equates to nearly twice the value of the world's agricultural production, nearly five times the size of the global tourism industry, and almost 13 times the annual output of the global airlines industry. And none of this assesses the incalculable human costs of conflict -- not just the loss of lives and the dislocations, but the pain and suffering that manifestations of man's inhumanity to man brings.

Turning from costs to opportunities, we know that peace is possible even where it seems improbable. Who would have predicted that Kenya's 2013 election would have passed without significant violence after a 2007 election that resulted in hundreds killed and hundreds of thousands displaced? Who would have imagined that Rwanda (for all its continuing human rights violations and its pernicious role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's civil war) would emerge from genocide to become one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa? Who would have foreseen Disney cruise ships making port calls in Cartagena, Colombia?

*David Rothkopf is CEO and editor at large of **Foreign Policy**. He is the author of **Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power**.*

Kristin Lord is executive vice president of the United States Institute of Peace.