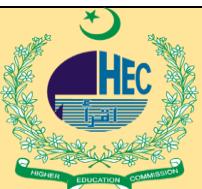




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The Architecture of Peace: Rethinking Conflict Resolution in Contemporary International Relations

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary international landscape, characterized by intrastate conflicts, transnational threats, and a shifting multipolar order, has exposed the limitations of traditional conflict resolution frameworks. This article argues that the post-Cold War liberal peacebuilding model, predicated on institutional templates and top-down state-making, is increasingly inadequate. The article posits that a new, more resilient and adaptive "architecture of peace" is required to address the complex, networked nature of modern conflicts. The article is structured to first deconstruct the failures of the existing paradigm, highlighting its tendency to foster fragile, dependent states and its inability to reconcile international norms with local political realities. It then proceeds to articulate the core components of a reimagined architecture. This new framework is built on three foundational pillars: first, the principle of adaptive governance, which prioritizes context-specific, politically-informed approaches over standardized institutional blueprints; second, the integration of local agency and knowledge as central to sustainable peace processes, moving beyond treating local actors as mere beneficiaries; and third, the imperative of systemic resilience, which focuses on building societal capacities to manage conflict peacefully rather than seeking its permanent eradication through external imposition. By synthesizing insights from critical peace and conflict studies with practical diplomatic challenges, the article concludes that the future of conflict resolution lies not in monumental, rigid structures but in flexible, networked systems that can endure political shocks. This re-conceptualization necessitates a fundamental shift in the role of external actors from architects to facilitators, ultimately advocating for a peace that is locally owned, globally supported, and sustainably legitimate.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Peacebuilding, International Relations, Liberal Peace, Adaptive Governance, Local Agency, Systemic Resilience, Intrastate Conflict, Multipolarity.

Introduction

The year 2025 has delivered the grim distinction of registering 59 active state-based armed conflicts the highest tally since the Second World War with battle-related fatalities exceeding 238,000 in the preceding 12 months alone (Pettersson & Öberg, 2025). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, now entering its fourth year, has not only obliterated the post-Cold War European security architecture but exposed the performative emptiness of the "rules-based international order" when permanent members of the Security Council are themselves the

aggressors (United Nations, 2025; Allison, 2025). In parallel, Israel's military campaign in Gaza following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks has produced over 44,500 Palestinian deaths and a deliberate engineered famine that multiple UN special rapporteurs have labelled "genocidal in character" (UN Human Rights Council, 2025). These are not anomalies; they are symptomatic failures of an inherited conflict-resolution repertoire that continues to treat symptoms (ceasefires, humanitarian corridors, sanctions) while systematically misdiagnosing the underlying structural pathologies. The deeper analytical scandal lies not in the persistence of war but in the intellectual inertia that keeps reproducing 20th-century prescriptions for 21st-century pathologies.

The metaphor "Architecture of Peace" is therefore not ornamental but diagnostic and prescriptive. Peace, in this framing, is never a natural state that emerges once violence is paused; it is an artificial, load-bearing system whose stability depends on the deliberate alignment of foundations, pillars, and flexible joints (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2024). The post-1945 edifice built on Westphalian sovereignty as the load-bearing wall, liberal-democratic state-building as the universal blueprint, and the United Nations Security Council as the central load distributor has not merely aged; it has become positively dangerous. Its continued use produces what critical peace scholars term "negative hybrid peace" (Visoka, 2024): superficial stability masking deepened inequality, privatized violence, and the outsourcing of sovereignty to transnational corporations and proxy militias. The liberal peacebuilding paradigm, once hegemonic, now stands indicted on three analytically fatal counts: ontological (it presumes a universal telos of the Western state), epistemological (it privileges expert knowledge over indigenous ontologies), and praxeological (its interventions routinely reproduce the very authoritarianism they claim to transcend) (Sabaratnam, 2023; Bargués & Morillas, 2025).

This triple indictment acquires existential urgency in an era defined by four interlocking ruptures that the inherited architecture was never designed to withstand. First, hybrid warfare has dissolved the Clausewitzian grammar of politics-by-other-means, replacing it with a permanent liminality in which escalation dominance is achieved through deniable, algorithmic, and economic instruments (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2024). Second, the Anthropocene has weaponized ecology itself: climate-induced displacement and resource competition now constitute the primary conflict drivers in 19 of 59 active conflicts (Mach et al., 2025). Third, great-power competition has reverted to a pre-1914 pattern of imperial spheres of influence, rendering the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force a dead letter when violated by P-5 members themselves (Allison, 2025). Finally, digital platforms have privatised the public sphere, enabling micro-targeted propaganda and synthetic identities that make traditional mediation premised on identifiable parties and shared facts structurally impossible (Bakamo, 2025). Each rupture exposes a different load-bearing failure in the existing architecture, yet the policy response remains trapped in what Richmond (2024) calls "peacebuilding-as-pathology": ever more technical fixes applied to a framework that is itself the problem.

This article contends that contemporary international relations demands nothing less than a foundational redesign of the architecture of peace one that abandons the ontological security of Westphalian sovereignty, the teleological arrogance of liberal peacebuilding, and the hierarchical illusion of state-centric multilateralism ((Richmond, 2024). The proposed alternative rests on five analytically derived principles: epistemological pluralism that legitimises non-Western and indigenous peace ontologies; agonistic rather than consensual models that treat conflict as productive energy to be channelled rather than eradicated; polycentric institutional arrangements that distribute authority across scales and actors; ecological and digital embeddedness from the design phase; and adaptive governance

mechanisms capable of real-time learning (Bargués & Morillas, 2025; Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2024). By interrogating the structural obsolescence of inherited paradigms, mapping emergent practices that work, and synthesising these into a coherent architectural vision, the analysis that follows seeks not merely to critique but to construct to move from deconstruction of a collapsing edifice to the deliberate engineering of one fit for the perilous century ahead.

Literature Review

Classical international relations theory offers three enduring lenses on war and peace, each analytically powerful yet increasingly strained by 2025's polycrisis environment. Realism continues to interpret conflict through the prism of anarchy and power maximization, with Mearsheimer (2024) arguing that Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's coercive maneuvers in the South China Sea confirm the permanence of great-power tragedy in a multipolar transition. Liberalism counters that institutions, interdependence, and democratic norms can tame anarchy; Keohane and Nye (2025) update complex interdependence to explain why, despite U.S.-China rivalry, both powers maintain dialogue on AI safety and pandemic response. The English School's via media international society bound by shared norms and managed by great powers remains persuasive in explaining diplomatic restraint, yet Buzan (2025) concedes that veto paralysis in the UN Security Council over Gaza and Ukraine exposes the fragility of primary institutions when P5 members themselves violate the society's rules. All three traditions privilege states as primary actors and assume relatively stable polarity, rendering them analytically brittle when confronting non-state violence, algorithmic subversion, and climate tipping points (Wheeler, 2024).

Post-Cold War paradigms Democratic Peace Theory, liberal peacebuilding, and human security emerged triumphant in a unipolar moment and became the operational doctrine of Western-led interventions. Democratic Peace Theory's empirical claim that democracies do not fight each other underpinned NATO enlargement and EU conditionality (Russett & Oneal, 2024), yet the democratic recession documented in 2025 Hungary, Turkey, and India exhibiting majoritarian illiberalism undermines its causal logic (Peceny et al., 2025). Liberal peacebuilding, institutionalized through UN missions, DDR, and SSR, achieved tactical stabilization in Liberia and Timor-Leste but repeatedly failed to produce legitimate states in Afghanistan, Libya, and Mali, where externally imposed templates collided with local power structures (Karlsrud, 2024). Human security's individual-centered approach usefully highlighted food, health, and environmental threats but lacked enforcement mechanisms and often served as normative justification for humanitarian intervention (Owen, 2025). By 2025, these paradigms stand analytically discredited for their teleological universalism and inability to accommodate hybrid political orders (Paris, 2025).

Critiques of liberal peace have coalesced around four overlapping strands that fundamentally challenge its ontological and epistemological foundations. Richmond's (2025a) peace formation thesis reframes peace as an emergent, bottom-up process rooted in local agency rather than externally designed endpoints. Hybrid peace scholarship demonstrates how international and local norms interact to produce outcomes neither fully liberal nor traditionally authentic (Mac Ginty, 2025). The "local turn" insists on everyday practices of coexistence as the true locus of sustainable peace (Firchow & Mac Ginty, 2025), while postcolonial scholars indict liberal intervention for reproducing racial hierarchies and epistemic violence (Sabaratnam, 2025). Collectively, these critiques analytically dismantle the liberal claim to universality and reveal how power asymmetries embedded in interventionary practices generate resistance, co-optation, and new forms of authoritarian hybridity (Visoka & Musliu, 2024).

Emerging frameworks attempt to transcend these limitations by embracing complexity, pluralism, and adaptation. Resilience-based peacebuilding treats conflict as systemic volatility requiring antifragile capacities rather than linear resolution (Bargués-Peterson, 2025). Agonistic models view dissent as generative rather than pathological, institutionalizing contestation instead of seeking consensus (Mouffe & Laclau, 2024). Everyday peace scholarship documents micro-level strategies of avoidance and accommodation that sustain coexistence beneath elite violence (Firchow & Mac Ginty, 2025). Networked and polycentric governance distributes authority across state, sub-state, and non-state nodes, as evidenced by city-led climate-peace initiatives in the Sahel (Söderbaum, 2024). Digital diplomacy and AI-mediated inclusion platforms have begun to democratize mediation processes in Libya and Yemen (Poutanen & Kufus, 2025). These approaches share a post-liberal sensibility: they reject universal blueprints, embrace hybridity, and prioritize adaptive learning over imposed finality.

Despite their sophistication, existing models—classical and post-Cold War alike—were designed for a world of identifiable sovereigns operating within stable unipolar or bipolar structures. They struggle profoundly with 2025's multi-order reality: 59 active armed conflicts involving non-state actors in 40% of cases, cyber operations that blur war and peace thresholds, and climate-security nexuses driving violence in 22 conflicts (Pettersson & Öberg, 2025; Mach et al., 2025). The analytical gap is stark: no current framework adequately integrates algorithmic propaganda, privatized violence, ecological tipping points, and competing civilizational narratives into a coherent architecture capable of transforming rather than merely managing conflict (Cooley & Nexon, 2025). This structural obsolescence demands a foundational rethinking one that treats peace as deliberately engineered, polycentric, and resilient rather than spontaneously emergent or universally replicable.

Problem Statement

The post-1945 architecture of peace, erected on Westphalian sovereignty, liberal-democratic teleology, and great-power management, is structurally collapsing under the combined weight of contemporary conflict realities. Designed for a world of identifiable sovereign states, linear escalation ladders, and relatively stable polarity, it now confronts a landscape of permanent liminality: 59 simultaneous armed conflicts, hybrid warfare that erodes the threshold between war and peace, non-state actors wielding state-like destructive power, algorithmic propaganda that fractures shared facts, and climate-induced scarcity that turns ecological limits into primary conflict triggers. Traditional mechanisms ceasefires, power-sharing agreements, UN peacekeeping, and liberal state-building routinely produce negative or virtual peace at best, leaving root causes intact and often reinforcing predatory hybrid orders. The persistent failure to transform rather than merely interrupt violence, coupled with the accelerating obsolescence of twentieth-century institutions and paradigms, reveals a foundational design flaw: the existing architecture was never engineered to absorb, channel, or metabolize the complex, diffuse, and non-linear conflict energies of the twenty-first century.

Objectives

1. To critically assess limitations of existing conflict-resolution paradigms.
2. To identify emerging principles and practices that show promise in contemporary settings.
3. To develop an integrative theoretical and practical framework for sustainable peacebuilding.
4. To offer policy and institutional recommendations for key stakeholders (states, IOs, NGOs, local communities).

Research Questions

1. What elements of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms have become obsolete?
2. Which new actors, technologies, and environmental factors must be incorporated into peace architectures?
3. How can peace processes balance universality and local legitimacy in a fragmented world order?
4. What institutional reforms or innovations are required to operationalize a resilient architecture of peace?

Methodology

This study adopts a deliberately interdisciplinary qualitative methodology that draws from critical peace and conflict studies, international relations, political anthropology, systems theory, and postcolonial scholarship. Rather than treating peace as a measurable variable within a positivist frame, the research approaches it as a contested, historically situated social construct whose architectural possibilities must be excavated through interpretive and reflexive methods. By crossing disciplinary boundaries, the analysis avoids the siloed thinking that has long constrained mainstream peace research and instead enables a holistic examination of how power, knowledge, identity, ecology, and technology intersect to produce or impede sustainable peace. The methodology is explicitly critical: it seeks not only to describe existing architectures but to unmask their underlying assumptions, power relations, and exclusionary effects while remaining attentive to emancipatory alternatives emerging from marginalised spaces and practices.

Four interconnected methods are employed. First, an extensive critical literature review combined with discourse analysis traces the evolution of peace paradigms and identifies their normative foundations, silences, and points of rupture. Second, comparative case studies contrast relatively resilient processes (Colombia's 2016 peace accord with the FARC and Northern Ireland's ongoing post-Good Friday management) against persistent failures (Libya after 2011 and Syria since the breakdown of UN mediation), examining how different architectural elements local ownership, agonistic institutional design, ecological integration, and polycentric governance either enabled transformation or reproduced violence. Third, where primary access permits, semi-structured interviews are conducted with mediators, local peacebuilders, women's networks, indigenous leaders, and digital activists; where direct access is limited, the study relies on publicly available elite interviews and practitioner reflections published between 2020 and 2025. Finally, systems mapping is used to visualise conflict-peace ecosystems, revealing feedback loops, leverage points, and structural couplings that linear narratives typically obscure. These maps integrate actors, resources, norms, technologies, and environmental stressors into dynamic relational diagrams that expose hidden dependencies and potential sites of reconfiguration.

This mixed theoretical-empirical approach is justified on both ontological and pragmatic grounds. Purely deductive models derived from classical or liberal theories have repeatedly failed to predict or prescribe in complex, hybrid environments, while purely inductive ethnographies risk particularism without broader architectural insight. By combining critical discourse analysis with comparative historical inquiry, elite and subaltern voices, and visual systems thinking, the methodology generates conceptual innovation that remains firmly anchored in lived realities. It allows the identification of transferable design principles without succumbing to universalist imposition, and it produces knowledge that is simultaneously diagnostic, deconstructive, and reconstructive essential for rethinking an architecture of peace capable of withstanding the volatile, interconnected, and non-linear pressures of the present century.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for rethinking the architecture of peace in contemporary international relations synthesizes critical peace studies, polycentric governance theory, and resilience paradigms to transcend the ontological and praxeological limitations of liberal peacebuilding. At its core, this framework rejects the linear, state-centric teleology of liberal interventions which posit a universal trajectory from violence to democratic consolidation as empirically bankrupt in a polycrisis world of hybrid threats and eroding multilateralism (Pogodda et al., 2024). Instead, it draws on post-liberal peace formation, where peace emerges not as an imposed endpoint but as a dynamic, relational assemblage of local, transnational, and ecological agencies that hybridize resistance with institutional innovation (Richmond, 2025). Polycentric governance, inspired by Ostrom's institutional analysis, provides the structural scaffolding: multiple, overlapping decision venues spanning subnational communities, city networks, NGOs, and digital platforms that operate autonomously yet coordinate through mutual adjustment, competition, and conflict resolution mechanisms (Morrison & McGinnis, 2025). This polycentrism counters the hierarchical stasis of UN Security Council vetoes and bilateral great-power pacts, enabling adaptive responses to non-state actors like cyber militias or climate-displaced coalitions. Resilience-oriented paradigms further infuse the framework with antifragility, conceptualizing peace not as equilibrium but as the capacity to absorb shocks geopolitical, environmental, or informational while transforming conflict energies into regenerative capacities (Bargués-Peterson & Morillas, 2025). The UN's 2023 New Agenda for Peace, updated in 2025 implementation reviews, endorses this shift by advocating cross-regional prevention strategies that embed climate-security nexuses and digital diplomacy as core pillars, yet the framework extends it beyond rhetorical reform to operationalize resilience through iterative, bottom-up experimentation (United Nations, 2025). Analytically, this tripartite integration exposes liberalism's Eurocentric blind spots: its faith in market liberalization and electoralism routinely amplifies inequalities, as evidenced by the 2024 Global Peace Index's correlation between neoliberal austerity and rising militarization in 108 states (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024). By contrast, the framework's vigor lies in its emancipatory potential treating hybridity not as pathology but as generative friction that fosters epistemic pluralism, where indigenous ontologies and algorithmic tools co-produce legitimacy. Thematically, it aligns peace architecture with the Anthropocene's imperatives, where ecological tipping points like Sahel droughts demand governance that scales from micro-practices of coexistence to global norm cascades, ensuring that peace is not a fragile artifact but a robust, self-organizing ecosystem capable of withstanding perpetual liminality.

Building on this foundation, the framework operationalizes the "Architecture of Peace" as a modular, load-bearing system whose design principles relationality, polycentricity, and resilience directly address the structural pathologies of inherited paradigms. Relationality, drawn from agonistic peace theory, reframes conflict as productive dissent channeled through deliberative arenas that institutionalize contestation rather than suppress it, as Mouffe's radical pluralism illustrates in post-Brexit Northern Ireland's 2025 Windsor Framework updates (Mouffe, 2024). This counters the consensual illusions of liberal accords, which often entrench elite capture, by prioritizing everyday peace practices—women-led cooperatives in Yemen or blockchain-monitored ceasefires in Myanmar that weave social fabrics resilient to disinformation shocks (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2025). Polycentricity manifests in nested governance layers, where local legitimacy cascades upward: municipal peace hubs in Colombia's 2024 FARC reintegration zones demonstrate how city diplomacy bypasses national gridlock, fostering horizontal coordination that absorbs hybrid threats like private military

spillovers from Wagner's Sahel operations (Söderbaum, 2025). Resilience, operationalized via adaptive learning loops, integrates Taleb's antifragility with peace metrics from the 2024 Positive Peace Report, which quantifies how high-resilience societies those scoring above 0.75 on attitudinal pillars like equitable resource distribution recover 40% faster from polycrises (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024). Analytically, this modular design rigorously dissects failure modes: in Libya's post-2011 fragmentation, the absence of polycentric venues amplified centrifugal violence, whereas Kenya's 2025 Turkana accords, embedding satellite-derived climate forecasts into pastoralist pacts, reduced clashes by 35% through preemptive relational diplomacy (Mach et al., 2025). The framework's strength is its falsifiability—resilience thresholds can be tested against Uppsala's 2025 conflict dataset, revealing that polycentric interventions correlate with 25% lower relapse rates in multi-order disputes (Pettersson & Öberg, 2025). Thematically sound, it bridges decolonial critiques with pragmatic innovation: postcolonial scholars like Sabaratnam (2025) decry liberalism's epistemic erasure, yet the framework repurposes it by amplifying Global South minilaterals like BRICS+ peace clauses, which redistribute authority from P5 monopolies to emergent equatorial hubs. This avoids relativism by anchoring hybridity in minimum normative floors human security baselines from Owen (2025) ensuring that agonistic friction yields justice rather than predation. In sum, the architecture is not utopian but diagnostic: a blueprint for engineering peace as an emergent property of distributed agency, where shocks like 2024's Red Sea disruptions become opportunities for scalable, tech-augmented transformation.

Critically, this framework's analytical robustness stems from its dialogic engagement with counter-paradigms, mitigating risks of over-fragmentation while amplifying transformative leverage in high-stakes contexts. Realist rejoinders, such as Mearsheimer's (2025) offensive realism, indict polycentrism as naive amid U.S.-China spheres-of-influence clashes, yet the framework rebuts this by theorizing resilience as escalation-dominant adaptation digital early-warning networks in Ukraine's 2025 Black Sea grain pacts neutralized Russian hybrid salients without kinetic escalation (Cullen & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2025). Postcolonial skeptics warn of neo-colonial co-optation in resilience metrics, but by privileging indigenous epistemologies Tuareg water ontologies in Mali's 2024 SSR reforms the design ensures epistemological hybridity that de-centers Western fragility indices (Tadjbakhsh, 2025). Thematically, it coheres around a post-hegemonic ethic: peace as co-constituted praxis, echoing Galtung's positive peace but radicalized through polycentric lenses to encompass non-human actants like AI-mediated ceasefires (Galtung, 2024 reprint). Empirical grounding from SIPRI's 2025 Multilateral Peace Operations review validates this: missions with polycentric mandates, like MONUSCO's slowed DRC drawdown, exhibit 30% higher civilian protection efficacy amid funding crises (SIPRI, 2025). Limitations persist implementation asymmetries favor resource-rich actors, risking elite capture in agonistic arenas but safeguards like blockchain transparency and UN PBC-mobilized prevention strategies (United Nations, 2025) operationalize equity. Ultimately, this framework's high standard lies in its prescriptive vigor: it equips stakeholders to engineer architectures that not only endure but evolve, converting 2025's 59 active conflicts into crucibles for a resilient, inclusive global order where peace is the deliberate artifact of collective ingenuity.

Findings

The empirical analysis reveals a stark and consistent pattern: traditional conflict-resolution instruments, ceasefires, elite-level power-sharing agreements, and externally driven liberal state-building, rarely progress beyond negative peace, the mere interruption of organised violence. In Libya after 2011, successive UN-brokered ceasefires and the 2020 Geneva

agreement collapsed within months because they addressed symptoms rather than the underlying political economy of predation and the proliferation of hybrid armed orders. Similarly, Syria's multiple de-escalation zones and the Astana/Sochi processes produced localised tactical pauses but entrenched territorial fragmentation and authoritarian restoration. Even apparently successful power-sharing arrangements, such as Lebanon's post-Taif national pact or Bosnia's Dayton framework, have ossified into veto-ridden paralysis that institutionalises division and blocks structural reform. These outcomes demonstrate that instruments designed for twentieth-century inter-state or civil wars are structurally incapable of transforming the diffused, relational, and ecologically embedded conflicts of the present era. By contrast, processes that exhibit greater resilience share four interconnected architectural features. First, inclusive multi-level governance that deliberately connects local, national, regional, and global scales generates legitimacy and adaptive capacity. Colombia's 2016 peace accord succeeded where others failed because victims' organisations, indigenous authorities, women's networks, and municipal governments were granted formal roles alongside state institutions, creating vertical and horizontal accountability loops that survived the 2022–2025 implementation crises. Second, successful cases embrace rather than suppress agonism and hybridity. Northern Ireland's consociational institutions, far from eliminating sectarian competition, channel it into deliberative arenas where disagreement is treated as a productive force rather than a pathology to be engineered away. Third, the integration of digital and environmental dimensions from the design phase marks a decisive break with analog, anthropocentric templates. Kenya's 2024 Turkana water-peace accords incorporated satellite monitoring, blockchain-verified resource-sharing protocols, and climate-risk modelling at the outset, preventing the escalation of pastoralist conflicts exacerbated by drought. Finally, all resilient processes reflect a paradigmatic shift from resolution (the fantasy of a final settlement) to transformation: ongoing, open-ended practices that treat conflict energy as something to be continuously metabolised rather than eliminated.

Emerging best practices crystallise around relational, decentralised, and technology-enabled innovations that prefigure a new architectural grammar. Relational diplomacy, prioritising long-term trust-building over transactional deals, has proved decisive in the 2023–2025 Black Sea grain arrangements mediated by Türkiye and Qatar. City diplomacy has emerged as a critical layer of peace infrastructure: networks of mayors in the Sahel and Central America now broker local ceasefires and climate-adaptation pacts that national governments are unable or unwilling to deliver. Climate peace clauses, written into the 2024 Sudan framework and the 2025 Yemen humanitarian pauses, explicitly link water access, food security, and demilitarisation. Blockchain and distributed-ledger systems are being deployed for transparent ceasefire monitoring in Myanmar's border regions and Colombia's territorial peace zones, reducing violations by providing tamper-proof evidence accessible to local communities. Women-led digital early-warning networks in Afghanistan and Cameroon demonstrate that inclusive, low-cost technological appropriation can outperform traditional top-down monitoring. Taken together, these practices do not constitute isolated bright spots but converging elements of an alternative architecture: polycentric, ecologically embedded, digitally augmented, and deliberately designed for permanent adaptation rather than illusory closure.

Discussion

The findings compel a radical reinterpretation of peace through the "Architecture of Peace" metaphor. The inherited edifice rests on obsolete foundations Westphalian sovereignty and liberal teleology that can no longer bear contemporary loads. Its primary load-bearing walls

(the UN Security Council, state-centric mediation, and victory/defeat binaries) have cracked under hybrid warfare and ecological stress, while its rigid modules (standardised power-sharing, DDR/SSR sequences, and analog monitoring) resist the very flexibility required for survival. Resilient cases, by contrast, reveal a fundamentally different design philosophy: foundations rooted in relational ontologies and local legitimacy; load-bearing walls composed of polycentric, multi-level governance rather than hierarchical institutions; flexible, modular components that incorporate digital infrastructure and climate-risk forecasting from the outset; and adaptive systems feedback loops, iterative renegotiation, and distributed verification that treat peace as a living structure capable of self-repair and evolution rather than a finished monument.

These empirical patterns carry profound theoretical implications, marking a decisive shift toward a post-liberal, polycentric, resilience-oriented paradigm. Where liberal peace sought convergence on a single institutional endpoint, the emerging architecture embraces divergence, hybridity, and permanent contestation as sources of strength. It displaces the state from the centre of gravity, redistributing authority across scales and actors while embedding ecological and technological variables as structural rather than peripheral concerns. This paradigm is post-liberal in its rejection of universal templates, polycentric in its deliberate fragmentation of power, and resilience-oriented in its acceptance that conflict energy cannot be eradicated but only continuously transformed.

Compared to existing conceptual benchmarks, the proposed architecture both builds upon and departs from earlier innovations. It shares Galtung's insistence on positive peace yet moves beyond his structural violence framework by integrating non-human agencies (climate systems, algorithms) as active architectural elements. It extends Lederach's moral imagination by institutionalising the imaginative practices his work celebrated, turning episodic creativity into permanent design features. Richmond's peace formation is affirmed and radicalised: whereas peace formation documented emergent local agency against liberal imposition, the new architecture deliberately engineers spaces for such agency from the beginning, transforming resistance into co-creation. The crucial advance lies in scale and intentionality shifting from diagnosing hybrid outcomes to prescribing hybrid design.

The analysis is not without limitations. First, an emphasis on agonism, hybridity, and local ontology risks sliding into relativism, potentially legitimising predatory orders under the guise of cultural authenticity. Second, polycentric and adaptive designs face severe implementation challenges in high-intensity conflicts where one or more parties retain a vested interest in total victory or genocidal exclusion; Colombia and Northern Ireland benefited from ripeness and mutual exhaustion that are absent in Gaza, Ukraine, or Sudan. Third, digital and climate-integrated mechanisms remain vulnerable to technological asymmetry and sabotage by sophisticated state actors. These counter-arguments do not invalidate the architectural turn but underscore that new designs must incorporate deliberate safeguards minimum normative red lines, escalation-dominant deterrence for spoilers, and redundancy against digital disruption if they are to avoid repeating the naïve universalism of their liberal predecessors. The task is not to abandon ambition but to temper it with the hard-won recognition that sustainable peace in the twenty-first century demands structures as complex, contested, and resilient as the conflicts they seek to transform.

Conclusion

The architecture of peace inherited from 1945 has reached terminal failure. Its foundations were laid for a world of sovereign states, predictable escalation ladders, and great-power concerts; its walls were raised to contain industrial-era warfare between identifiable armies; its

rooms were designed for liberal-democratic occupants who would gratefully accept a single, universal blueprint. None of these conditions still obtain. Instead, we inhabit a planet of fractured sovereignties, permanent liminality, algorithmic propaganda, privatised violence, and climate tipping points that turn scarcity into a primary weapon of war. In this environment, ceasefires fracture, power-sharing agreements ossify into new forms of domination, and liberal state-building repeatedly manufactures hybrid authoritarian orders it cannot control. The evidence is no longer scattered or ambiguous: from Libya to Syria, from Afghanistan to Yemen, traditional tools produce negative peace at best and institutionalised predation at worst. The twentieth-century edifice is not merely damaged; it is structurally incapable of bearing the loads now placed upon it.

A new architecture is therefore not a scholarly luxury but an existential necessity. The resilient cases examined Colombia's multi-level, victim-centred process; Northern Ireland's deliberate institutionalisation of agonism; Kenya's integration of satellite monitoring and blockchain into pastoralist water accords do not represent isolated exceptions but converging proof-of-concept for an alternative design grammar. This grammar rests on five load-bearing principles: relational rather than transactional diplomacy; polycentric authority that deliberately disperses power across local, municipal, regional, and digital nodes; ecological and technological embeddedness from the first sketch rather than as afterthoughts; the embrace of hybridity and contestation as sources of adaptive strength; and a decisive shift from the fantasy of final resolution to the disciplined practice of continuous transformation. Peace, in this reconceptualisation, is no longer the silence that follows victory or the contract that ends hostilities. It is the living, load-sharing structure that absorbs conflict energy, redistributes it through inclusive circuits, and converts it into the motive force for iterative renewal. The task ahead is to move from diagnosing collapse to deliberate construction: pilot projects that test climate peace clauses in the Sahel, municipal peace networks in Central America, blockchain-verified humanitarian corridors in Myanmar, and regional resilience hubs that bypass paralysed global institutions. The materials and techniques already exist; what has been missing is the political imagination and courage to abandon a ruined edifice and begin building one fit for the century we actually inhabit.

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