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Philosophical Politics of Peace: A Critical Study of "Peace Through Strength" in Contemporary War Discourse

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Abstract

*This paper contends that current geopolitical analysis performs a conceptual inversion of "peace". Instead of designating a moral horizon that limits violence through justice, rights, and accountable institutions, "peace" is re-described as the outcome of such coercive, particularly the "deterrent", domination of escalation ladders and militarized "stability". The thesis is that "peace through strength" operates as a justificatory technology: it justifies the securitization of adversaries as existential threats, shifts reasoning from standard political debates to emergency, and reframes violence as the absence of coercive peace. This is not a neutral transformation; it is a set of ethical reductions that, while reducing peace to negative peace (that is, the suppression or postponement of overt violence), ignores the fact that positive peace involves the structural transformation of violence into a peaceful and lawful order. The analysis draws, necessarily, on Johan Galtung's negative and positive peace, the just war theory's normative limits on the use and conduct of war, Immanuel Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace* as opposed to juridical peace, and securitization theory (Copenhagen School and its critical revisions) as an explanation of how "threat" talk justifies the adoption of the unprecedented. The Iran–U.S.–Israel conflict (2025–2026) will be the main, but not only, case study. Through critical discourse analysis of U.S. official documents and statements (White House releases, U.S. strategy documents, U.S. Central Command summaries) and U.N. peace and human rights documents. The arguments are developed that show how the strategic use of the word "peace" is employed along with the ethics of war implications.*

Keywords: Redefining Peace; Peace Through Strength; Perceptual Peace; Securitization; Political and Moral Philosophy; Just War Theory; Iran–US–Israel Conflict.

1. Introduction

While the meaning and practice of peace is often unclear and chaotic, it is an important concept in political philosophy and international ethics. Furthermore, state rhetoric has often employed the word "peace" but does so superficially in a manner that obfuscates the authorizations of coercive state-sponsored violence. For example, one of the most popular phrases that has been used in this manner is "peace through strength". It is also worth noting that this is not a secondary slogan but is used a lot and given a lot of weight in many of the strategies emanating from state bureaucracies. This is also the case with the most recent (2025) U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) where there is an explanation given to the phrase and it is described as "deterrence" and "Strength is the best deterrent", is described as a guiding policy for U.S. statecraft. (The White House, 2025, p. 8)

This paper seeks to answer what happens to the philosophical politics of peace when "peace" is redefined as a consequence of "strength". In fact, the focus here is not to state that "deterrence" is irrelevant to the peace that may be achieved in the absence of violence, or that there is not an absence of violence in a state assuming security obligations. From here, the focus is that most contemporary discourse has "peace" used in a manner so that peace shrinks to the point where it does not even approach a moral limit to the violence, or coercive violence of a state, and a willingness to employ violence. In conclusion, peace is redefined to offer a system of war to virtually eliminate the need to justify the existence of "peace".

The Iran–U.S.–Israel conflict (2025–2026) serves as a contemporary and analytically compelling case study. The official U.S. talk about "precision strikes", denying the enemy's nuclear capability, and promising "peace" through overwhelming force is a good way to look at how peace and coercive order are linked in speech. (The White House, 2025, para. 1; The White House, 2025, "Vice President JD Vance on This Week"; The White House, 2026, para. 1; U.S. Central Command, 2026, p. 1)

Recent discussions in war scholarship have included the phrase "peace through strength" as an example of a conceptual justification. In this case, peace is adjusted from an idealistic stance based on the concepts of justice, rights, and the legitimate political order, to a strategic artifact of deterrent domination. By inverting peace to a condition of coercive domination and securitizing opponents as existential threats, this rhetoric encourages the normalization of exceptional violence, the weakening of just war criteria, and the deferral of the positive peace that is imperative for genuinely sustainable coexistence. (The White House, 2025, p. 8; Galtung, 1969, pp. 183-184, 190; McMahan, 2015, pp. 9-11)

2. Statement of the Problem

The philosophical question revolves around two elements: the integrity of the concept and the responsibility. Peace generally denotes (at least) the cessation of war and (at more exacting levels) a moral-political circumstance in which individuals and entities can lawfully coexist. Nonetheless, official discourse increasingly stretches "peace" as a cover for the coercive violence which, in the view of the neutralizer, created "stability" or "deterrence". When "peace" is used as the justifying discourse of war, the concept suffers a kind of self-cancellation: violence is viewed as the proof of peace and not the antithesis of it. In Galtung's terms, peace risks becoming a narrow "negative peace" (the absence of direct violence) while the obscured structural violence, domination, and the politico-justicial order. (Galtung, 1969, pp. 167, 183-184)

This theoretical change creates another ethical issue for just war reasoning. When political agents describe coercive actions as "peace", the evaluative criteria of last resort and proportionality can be fulfilled rhetorically without being. The just war theory views war as a morally significant issue. Public justification and a set of guiding principles and keep coercive practices from being equated with peace and mean that the practices are merely a form of public justification. (McMahan, 2015, pp. 1-2; Aloyo, 2015, pp. 1-2, 7-10)

3. Research Objectives

This study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) identify the conflicting philosophical interpretations of peace (justice-oriented peace vs. peace as an imposition of an order)
- (ii) detail the discursive function of "peace through strength" in legitimizing the use of coercive power
- (iii) assess this rhetoric in the context of Galtung's peace theory, the just war theory's peace pervasion "constraints", Kant's peace as a juridical imposition of order, and securitization theory
- (iv) analyze the theories in relation to the Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict as a contemporary example.

4. Research Questions

This paper is guided by the following questions:

- (i) In what ways does the rhetoric of "peace through strength" reframe the concept of peace for the purposes of contemporary warfare discourse?
- (ii) In what ways does the process of securitization turn the construction of threats into an ethical justification for extreme violence?
- (iii) How far does rhetoric of "peace through strength" fit with negative peace whilst claiming to remove positive peace?
- (iv) When diplomatic discourse invokes peace in order to legitimize attacks and escalations, are the just war criteria genuinely satisfied, or are they just being rhetorically suggested?
- (v) What does a Kantian view of peace show as absent or contradictory in the rhetoric of peace that is based on militarism?

5. Literature Review

5.1. Philosophical Conceptions of Peace

The literature on peace can be divided conceptually and normatively. Initially, peace studies after Galtung distinguished between negative peace (the absence of direct or personal violence) and positive peace (the absence of structural violence and the presence of socially just relations). Galtung argues that stating peace is the absence of direct violence is ethically deficient because structural violence can kill or reduce life chances without direct or overt control. (Galtung, 1969, pp. 167-171, 183-184)

5.2. Just War Theory and the Ethics of Force

Unlike other definitions of peace, just war theory centers on other concerns. Its main focus is on normative structures which contextualize the permissibility of war, and the management of hostilities. In the just war tradition, the decision to go to war is evaluated on the basis of just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, proportionality and, in a lot of formulations, it being the last resort. In addition, there are also other governing constraints such as proportionality and discrimination. In contemporary just war theory, McMahan has pointed out that both for the decision to go to war and for specific acts in war, the criteria of necessity and proportionality are of primary importance and that this cluster of judgments is intimately connected to issues of the moral liability and responsibility of the non-combatant (McMahan, 2015, pp. 1–2, 9–11).

Much debate exists concerning the last resort criterion in Just War Theory. Aloyo contends that the requirement can be conceptually misleading from a moral perspective if not examined critically. He claims that the essential moral query is not about a given policy being violent or non-violent, but whether it is designed to minimize severe harm to the innocent. Because of this, he maintains that a principle concerned with morally relevant harms and proportionality is much more defensible than a strict last resort requirement (Aloyo, 2015, pp. 187, 193-199).

While militaristic rhetoric encompasses peace, Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace* counteracts the militaristic rhetoric of peace by describing peace as a state of law and an institutional condition, and not merely a strategic form of silence. Kant argues that the natural state between people and states is not peaceful. It is a condition of a state of war that is not active. Thus, peace can only be secured through laws, not merely through the absence of conflict. (Kant, 1795/2009, pp. 5, 9-11)

5.3. Securitization and the Politics of Threat

Securitization theory analyzes how "security" can be issued as an emergency construct which, as a result, can sidestep normal politics. For Wæver, security is a kind of speech act: by categorizing a given phenomenon as one of "security," a political agent shifts it to a different realm where, and how, extraordinary measures can become thinkable and justifiable (Wæver, 1995, pp. 7-8). Subsequent scholarship has further refined this argument by positing that the securitization process cannot be

accounted for by merely elite speech acts. Balzacq notes that for a process of securitization to be completed, audience, context and power must be considered, while McDonald argues that the Copenhagen School is overly restrictive if it attends only to dominant discourse, particular point(s) of interventions, and the designation of a threat without paying adequate attention to context, audience and the wider discourse of security (Balzacq, 2005, pp. 172-174, 177-179; McDonald, 2008, pp. 563-566).

5.4. Human Rights and Institutional Frameworks of Peace

The United Nations, regarding human rights, considers peace as an independent construction, while the development of an agenda involves elements of construction and destruction of an inclusive social structure. The Sustaining Peace Agenda of the United Nations conceptualizes peace, not as an activity limited to post-conflict reconstruction, but as an activity that involves the prevention of conflicts with the focus of addressing and providing positive social order (United Nations, 2016, p. 2).

Additionally, the Declaration of the Right to Peace connects the two constructs, stating that peace is fundamental to the enjoyment of one's rights, protection and promotion of rights, and the fulfillment of these rights is the necessity of peace (United Nations General Assembly, 2016, p. 1). The protection of human rights is still fundamental and intertwined with the peace protection framework, as evidenced by the OHCHR, which looks at the peace protection framework as entangled with the protection of the underlying reasons to prevent conflicts (OHCHR, n.d., "Human rights, peacebuilding and sustaining peace").

5.5. Gap in Existing Literature

Although, there is considerable research on

- (i) negative and positive peace
- (ii) the constraints of just war theory
- (iii) and securitization as threat construction

However, research that synthesizes the bodies of work to examine how contemporary state rhetoric transforms the language of peace into a strategic authorization for coercive action particularly the phrase "peace through strength", and how this rhetorical transformation measures against theories of peace and ethics of war, remains scarce. This research attempts to fill this void by providing a contemporary case that exhibits extreme clarity and explicitness in official rhetoric, and combining elements of primary source analysis and empirical discourse analysis.

6. Theoretical Framework

This paper employs the following four compulsory Frameworks with individual analytical functions:

6.1. Galtung; peace as moral diagnosis (negative and positive peace):

Galtung argues peace cannot be the mere absence of direct violence and suggests that order can be structural and thereby instrumental in the avoidable death and deprivation of people. This paper analyzes the "peace through strength" discourse as an inclination to narrow peace to negative peace and to conceal structural violence and domination (Galtung, 1969, pp. 168-171, 183-184).

6.2. Just war theory; conceptual analysis of the normative aspects of coercion:

This research employs Just War Theory not as a universal legal assessment but as a normative benchmark for establishing whether the coercive measures being analyzed truly meet—or merely rhetorically invoke—the principles of Just Cause, Proportionality, Necessity, and Last Resort. In this instance, specific focus is placed on how official statements of "precision" "imminence" and "no civilian casualties" could serve as morally shorter forms of justification instead of being a substitute for the far more rigorous public justification that Just War Theory calls for. McMahan points out that necessity and proportionality are the overriding restrictions both at the level of war as a whole and at the level of particular acts of war, and these are inextricably linked to the questions of civilian liability and moral culpability (McMahan, 2015, pp. 1-2, 9-11). Similarly, the criticism of the last resort

criterion shows that if left vague, it can operate too formally and conceal the more elemental ethical consideration of whether the selected option does the most to reduce unjustifiable damage (Aloyo, 2015, pp. 187, 193-199).

6.3. Kant; long-term peace as domination by the other:

According to Kant, peace must be participatory, not one where there is domination, where fear keeps control, but peace where there is a legal order that is public, where there are institutions with legal bounds that are preventing "mutual confidence" from collapsing. So, he is saying that peace cannot be just a momentary halt of warfare. What most people refer to as peace where there is a silencing of the aggressor is simply a momentary stillness amidst an unstable situation. Real peace needs to have a framework that is legal that can make peace sustainable. (Kant, 1795/2009, pp. 4-5, 9-11)

6.4. Securitization theory; the speech act and the contexts that legitimize exceptional violence:

Wæver states that securitization is the process of moving an issue from normal politics to areas requiring special treatment by calling an issue a matter of "security". In this case, 'security' is an active performance as opposed to a passive describing (Wæver, 1995, pp. 54-57). Balzacq and McDonald provide a good antidote to an overly 'magical' understanding of speech acts, as both argue that securitization cannot be comprehended through elite utterance alone. Balzacq states that audience, context, and power play a central role in securitization, while McDonald's critique of the Copenhagen School is that they define the act too narrowly through dominant speech, under-theorize context, and consider security a mere naming of threats (Balzacq, 2005, pp. 171-173, 176-179; McDonald, 2008, pp. 563-566).

7. Methodology

The study is qualitative with a focus on philosophy, combining four methodologies:

7.1. Conceptual Analysis:

The first is conceptual analysis, which looks at different meanings of "peace", and separates peace as justice from peace as order imposed. This is grounded predominantly in Galtung and Kant. (Galtung, 1969; Kant, 1795/2009).

7.2. Normative Analysis:

The second method is normative analysis which looks at "peace through strength" arguments against a framework of just war, concentrating on burden of proof, proportionality, and last resort as analytic criteria. (McMahan, 2015/2016; Ethics & International Affairs, 2015).

7.3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):

The third method is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and in this case, it will be used to see how official statements create specific moral meanings, how the word "peace" is used with patterns of:

- (i) claims of existential threat,
- (ii) emergency temporality (imminent)
- (iii) moral dualism (good vs. evil; terror)
- (iv) and claims of precision and restraint.

For this case CDA is used more as a framework to analyze than a political program. (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) The case study method treats the Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict as a theoretically "revealing" case because of how explicit the official rhetoric is about "peace through strength" and the conflict is characterized by rapid shifts in diplomacy, strikes and escalation narratives. The case study method is used to illustrate more conceptual changes rather than provide an in-depth historical analysis of the case.

8. Data Sources and Case Selection

Primary data includes officially documented public statements which are analyzed as a discourse and not as a truthful description. The main U.S. sources are: the 2025 NSS, 2026 National Defense

Strategy (NDS), White House pieces framing the Iran operations as "peace through strength", and the official U.S. Central Command document summary of the early phase of Operation Epic Fury. (The White House, 2025; Department of War/U.S. Department of Defense, 2026; The White House, 2026; U.S. Central Command, 2026).

The UN and human rights material, in particular around the sustaining peace and the right to peace, are used as normative-reference points (United Nations General Assembly, 2016; OHCHR, n.d.).

Due to the nature of the events of 2025-2026, I am limited to using reliable reporting and official summaries (e.g. the Associated Press; fact boxes from Reuters which are reproduced in reliable outlets) as there is a lack of peer-reviewed scholarship on the rapidly changing events. (Associated Press, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

Access Note:

Some webpages of the U.S. Department of State were electronically restricted "forbidden" direct in-tool access. For the State Department language, this paper relies on:

- (i) U.S. strategy documents that mention roles of the State Department
- (ii) and declassified, publicly available joint statements reproduced on other government websites (i.e. Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs). (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, 2025)

9. Data Analysis and Discussion

9.1. Analytic distinctions: what "peace" can mean:

Conceptually, the "peace through strength" discourse may be defined with at least four distinctions:

(i) Peace as justice (normative peace) vs peace as order imposed through force

Normative peace presupposes reduced violence and order with law-abiding relations and rights-respecting relations that people see as reasonable. In contrast, imposed order may suppress violence but create domination and structural violence. Galtung shows us that order can be violent when the structural arrangements that cause the greatest harm to people are predictable and life threatening (Galtung, 1969, pp. 169-170, 183-184).

(ii) Negative peace vs positive peace

As per Galtung (1969), negative peace involves the absence of direct acts of violence, and positive peace involves the absence of structural violence and the presence of just social systems. The relevance of the distinction is not just theoretical; it poses a challenge to whether the phrase "peace through strength" is actual peace or just a way to conceal the openness of conflict. (Galtung, 1969, pp. 183–184)

(iii) Ethical peace vs strategic peace

Ethical peace focuses on moral limits on means, and moral ends accountability to people, while strategic peace focuses on stability and deterrence outcomes, often without justice, except for other means instrumental purposes. (Galtung, 1969, pp. 183–184; Kant, 1795/2009, pp. 5, 9–11).

(iv) Peace as moral concept vs peace as state rhetoric

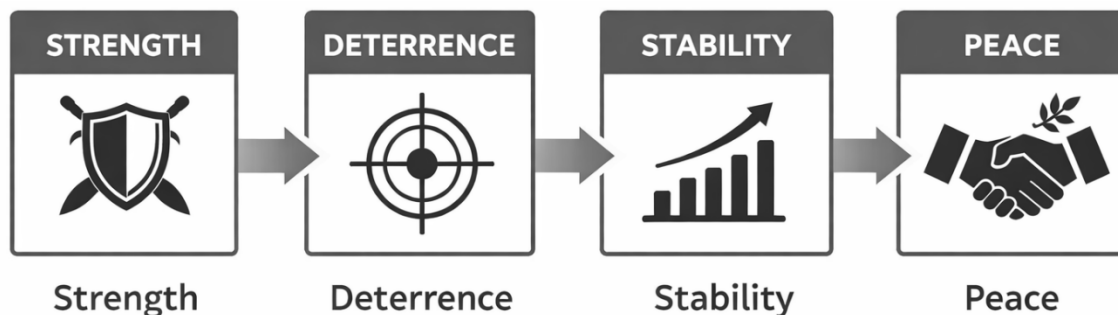
The state may use "peace" as a form of justification to take action. Theory of securitization shows that the language surrounding security and, by extension, peace, is not only descriptive; it is performative. It helps to justify actions that would seem politically or morally unjustifiable. In Wæver's view, the use of the term security moves an issue out of everyday politics and into a zone of extraordinary politics. In contrast, Balzacq focuses more on the audience's (who is the audience?) acceptance, the surrounding context, and the existing power relations (Wæver, 1995, pp. 54-57; Balzacq, 2005, pp. 171-173, 176-179).

9.2. "Peace through strength" as a justificatory technology

From peace as limit to peace as license:

Peace has traditionally been defined from a deterrence perspective in U.S. strategy documents. For instance, the 2025 National Security Strategy posits that, "Peace Through Strength – Strength is the best deterrent". It goes on to say that "deterrence" actors "will not" undermine U.S. interests (The White House, 2025, pp. 8-9). In furthermore, the 2026 National Defense Strategy repeats the same language, asserting that the Department is "laser-focused on restoring peace through strength" (Department of War/U.S. Department of Defense, 2026, p. 3).

These positions treat peace not as a moral outer limit on the use of violence, but rather, as a position in the outcome of a credible coercive capacity. The justificatory move is:



Within that logic, "peace" is the strategy that describes a future condition that is presumed as a result of a current disposition to violence.

Galtungian diagnosis; negative peace heightened, positive peace neglected:

In terms of structure, peace based on deterrence aligns with negative peace to the extent that both try to stop direct violence through the threat of costs. However, it is important to note that deterrence peace, on its own, does not tackle issues of structural violence, political exclusion, and systems of cross-border domination, which are precisely the conditions that encompass a richer definition of positive peace (Galtung, 1969, pp. 170-171, 183-184). The rhetorical danger, therefore, resides in the fact that "peace" is declared when there is only a hiatus in direct violence and the violence-generating mechanisms that lie in the context of structural violence remain (Galtung, 1969, pp. 183-184).

Kantian diagnosis; peace reduced to a precarious truce:

Kant makes a distinction between peace, where the fighting and hostilities have stopped, and a state where legal mechanisms have been instituted to provide a promise of peace and security. He states that the more natural condition of humanity is the undeclared state of war, and that to genuinely obtain security goes beyond the mere cessation of hostilities to the establishment of legal mechanisms and the public right. (Kant, 1795/2009, pp. 5, 10-11)

The phrase "peace through strength" is a form of rhetorical device, and to the extent that it focuses on the use of threats and subsequent decisional strikes as the primary means, it may end up doing what Kant would describe as an unstable phenomenon still dominated by enmity. In such cases, actors remain ready to assume a condition where each "may treat his neighbour as an enemy". (Kant, 1795/2009, p. 5)

9.3. Securitization of Iran and the authorization of exceptional violence

Securitization theory and the production of necessity:

In Wæver's theory of securitization, the term "security" is not simply a neutral descriptor. A securitizing move shifts the issue from the "normal" politics of the issue to an existential framing, and, therefore, justifies the adoption of extraordinary measures. (Wæver, 1995, pp. 54-57)

Refined by Balzacq, who argues that securitization is dependent on the audience and the context, and is a matter of power, to the point that "the linguistic manufacture of threats" needs to be very carefully examined in terms of how such threats are constructed and how discourse legitimizes (or not) various practices. (Balzacq, 2005, pp. 171–174, 176–179).

McDonald further warns that the analysis of securitization can be "narrow" if it examines predominantly the elite speech acts and ignores the wider contextual processes, and calls for greater attention to the non- positive dimensions of such processes. (McDonald, 2008, pp. 563–566)

These insights allow criticism of US rhetoric pertaining to Iran not primarily as a rational adjudication of clandestine intelligence, but as an exercise in public threat construction that increases the range of permissible violence.

Case materials; existential threat, compressed temporality, and moral polarization:

Iranian threats are portrayed by White House communications as a primary concern that is both systematic and instant. White House Communications describe the Iranian threat as a "Peace Through Strength" statement by the Executive Branch regarding Operation Epic Fury, the described campaign is a "military campaign" of "precision" and "overwhelming" impact" that will "eliminate" the "imminent" nuclear threat, "Iran's" ballistic missile, proxy, and naval threats" (The White House, 2026, para. 1).

The discursive structure, in at least three ways, securitizes.

- (i) Existential framing, by depicting Iran as an "imminent nuclear threat", the White House portrays the danger so extreme that it seems even the most routine risk management processes are insufficient (The White House, 2026, para. 1).
- (ii) Emergency temporality is an implied "now-or-never" logic which in itself, creates an immediate urgency, elicits presumption, and shifts the burden of proof.
- (iii) Moralization, an adversary, is metastasized as "evil", "terror", or a unitary source of regional instability. For example, The White House "Sunday Shows" summary highlights Iran is the instance behind "each and every problem" in the region and simultaneously calls for "peace" in the context of a coercive, denial of nuclear capability. (The White House, 2025, "Vice President JD Vance on This Week")

In securitization, these moves aim at gaining the audience's approval to legitimize the use of exceptional measures, including extensive military strikes, and presents alternative political options as reckless and irresponsible in light of existential threat to provide justification. (Wæver, 1995, pp. 54–57; Balzacq, 2005, pp. 171–174, 176–179)

9.4. Just war theory; evaluative tests versus rhetorical substitution:

Just cause and imminence:

Just War Theory usually requires a "just cause" - usually this is self-defense against an aggressor, or an imminent threat. In the rhetoric of the justifications of strikes, "imminence" is often used to justify their self-defense claim. However, Just War Theory places a moral burden on the initiators of violence to prove the "imminence" is real, and that the violence is justified. The available evidence is justified, and the violence is necessary. Contemporary debates focus on the necessity and proportionality of the violence (or the harm inflicted to) vs the violence (or the harm prevented) and the strength of the correlative relationship diminishes when available evidence is justified. (McMahan, 2015, pp. 1-2, 9-11)

In the case study, the US publicly justifies Operation Epic Fury as legally targeting the dismantling of an "imminent nuclear threat", as well as the degradation of Iran's ability to launch attacks. (The White House, 2026, para. 1; U.S. Central Command, 2026, p. 1)

However, reputable sources have reported contested and contradictory evaluations of what such pre-emptive interventions would actually achieve, including evidence that the pre-war intelligence assessments were of the position that such regime changes would not occur as a result of such interventions. (Associated Press, 2026)

The fact that this is morally relevant means that the injustice of war is due not just to the (possible) lack of good intentions, but also (possibly) the overstating of the need for such an action

Proportionality and civilian harm:

Regarding just war theory, the proportionality principle considers the balance of harm done and morally acceptable gains. McMahan's analysis states that for the principle of proportionality there is always a calculation of the negative impacts of an action relative to the impacts that action saves, and that negative impacts can be countered by using more positive, cause less harm, alternatives. (McMahan, 2015, pp. 1-2, 9-11)

In the case study, the official rhetoric emphasizes "precision" and coupled with a focus on avoiding harm to civilians, including the assertion that there are strikes that do not include civilians as targets (The White House, 2025, "Vice President JD Vance on This Week"). In contrast to the above, there are numerous independent reports on the 2026 escalation that describe highly extensive strikes and enormous humanitarian impacts, including numerous civilians becoming victims and many others being located and left to suffer as victims of those strikes. (Associated Press, 2026)

The principle is that one does not need to prove contested facts on the battlefield from public reports. The essence is to show how the rhetoric of precision and the claims of the morality that can be held elsewhere, even as "peace" is declared, and the issue of proportionality remains unaddressed or structurally under argued.

Last resort and the "diplomacy-failed" narrative:

In many public defenses of war, there is the assumption that "diplomacy failed", and therefore, the last resort should be accepted. But the last resort criterion is philosophically complicated. A leading peer-reviewed criticism of last resort argues that it can be misleading if it is understood to be a requirement of considering nonviolent options that will foreseeably cause greater harms; the morally relevant principle may instead be to focus on the morally dominant side of the harm, assuming all the other constraints of the just war are satisfied. (Aloyo, 2015, pp. 187, 193-199)

In the case-study rhetoric, the official summaries often state that diplomacy was tried and ignored by Iran, and therefore, coercion was justified. (The White House, 2025, "Vice President JD Vance on Meet the Press"; The White House, 2025, "Vice President JD Vance on This Week"; The White House, 2026, para. 1)

The ethical challenge is that "diplomacy failed" can be many things (from genuine exhaustion of all reasonable options to strategic impatience). Just war theory demands that the public reason be very precise on the justification of why the less harmful options left unaddressed. The justification becomes particularly problematic when "peace through strength" becomes the guiding frame, because it becomes possible to move from "war is an exceptional last resort" to "war is the credible demonstration that makes peace possible", which, in turn, pre-justifies escalation.

Kant's perpetual peace as a counterpoint to militarized peace rhetoric:

Kant's Perpetual Peace, which deals with the militarized peace rhetoric concerning peace as a constructed rather than a default condition, can be described as the construction of peace as law relations. He maintains that peaceful coexistence is only guaranteed through such law relations, which permit people to rationally consider the other as an enemy. (Kant, 1795/2009, pp. 5, 9-11)

Applied to the contemporary "peace through strength", Kant brings to the forefront two contradictions:

- (i) First, the peace of law versus the peace of coercive equilibrium. The 2025 NSS unambiguously equates peace with deterrent capacity (The White House, 2025, pp. 8-9). For Kant, however, a peace that is worthy of the name requires a public right, as well as an institutional framework that lessens the incentives for war, rather than simply increasing the coercive framework (Kant, 1795/2009, pp. 5, 9-11).
- (ii) The second is the moral hazard of enmity that is eternal. When domination is phrased as peace, the condition of peace is also anchored in the ability to dominate and the willingness to act in an aggressive manner to maintain such domination. This is a condition of Kant's war, or at the very least, a condition that is a mirror image of peace. Kant's views illustrate that militarized peace rhetoric can mask the substantive differences that exist between situations where there is simply the absence of combat, and where there are active relations among parties that are lawful, and in a manner which curtails the rationality of engaging in combat. (Kant, 1795/2009, pp. 5, 9-11)

9.5. Case study synthesis; Iran–U.S.–Israel conflict as an illustrative instance of peace's redefinition:

Brief timeline anchors (for conceptual analysis, not comprehensive history):

Reliable summaries and reports show that in June 2025, Israel was the first to engage in conflict by starting significant military operations against Iran which caused the conflict to escalate, and the United States of America began striking Iranian nuclear sites and engagement in military operations. This was fought by the Israel military in Congressional Research Service 2025, as in bipartisan, replicate via USNI (2025).

U.S. Cent. Command (US Cent. Command) in the report of late February (2026) UA Units from Cent. Command, initiated Operation Epic Fury. This report described a large number of targets and a big extent concerning the target descriptions (US Cent. Command 2026).

Fact boxes, based on Reuters, have described the operational timelines and the framing of the campaign as a major US military operation, which has been confirmed (Reuters 2026).

Figure 1. Timeline of Key Events and Official Peace Rhetoric

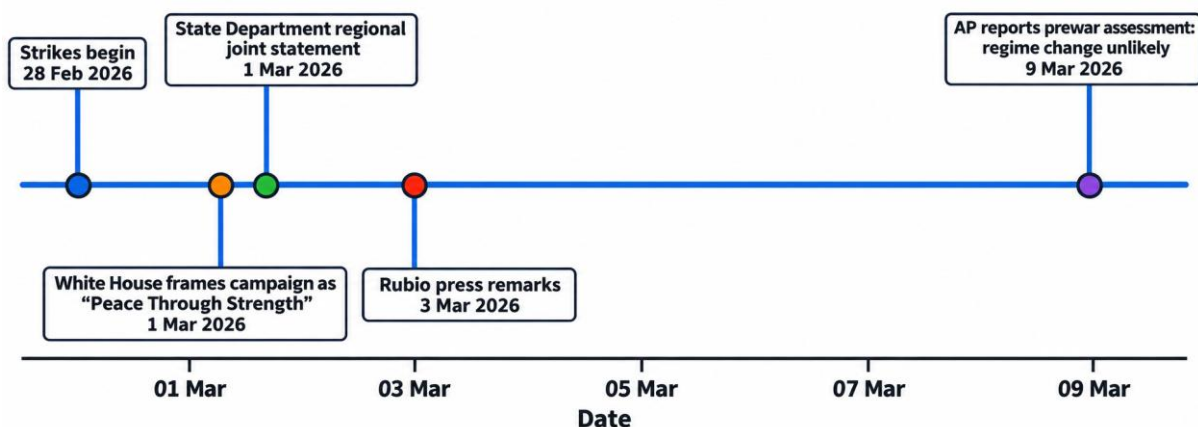


Figure 1 should be viewed as an analytical timeline capturing the sequence of military actions, official moral framing, and related reports on regional escalation. It captures the simultaneity of military actions and legitimating rhetoric.

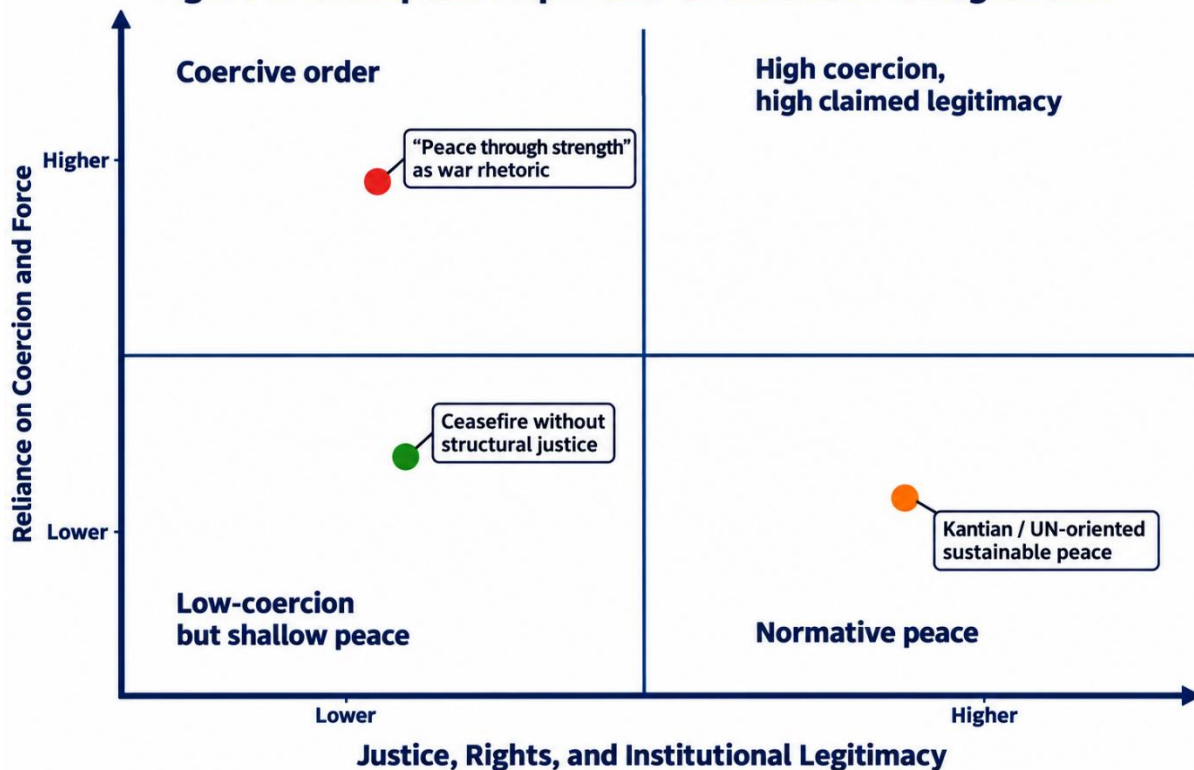
Figure 2. Conceptual Map: Positive Peace and Strategic Peace

Figure 2 shows strategic peace that is heavy on coercion is compared with justice peace that is positive, and it shows why the phrase "peace through strength" is closer to a coercive order than to the more substantive peace of Galtung and U.N. derived peace.

Rhetorical pattern: peace as the name for escalation:

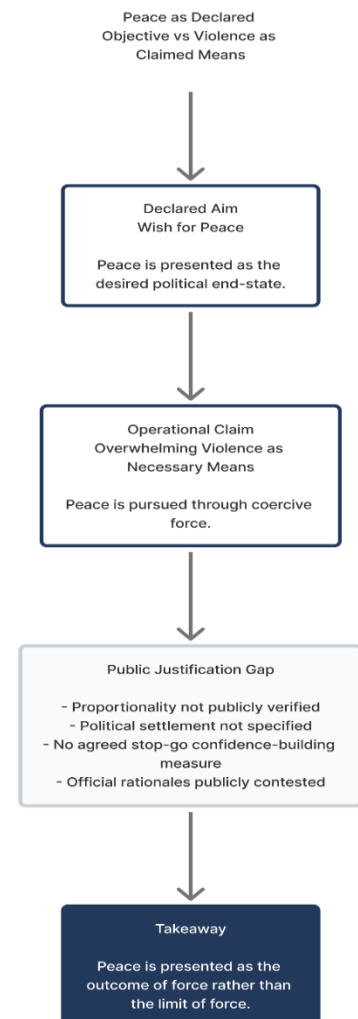
The case exemplifies a broader trend: official rhetoric not only argues that violence is necessary for peace, but also, in some cases, suggests that violence is the enactment of peace. In this context, White House statements tie "peace through strength" to the initiation and ongoing large-scale military actions in Iran and peace restoring operations. (The White House, 2026, para. 1)

Peace as strategic order (negative peace) rather than positive peace: The policy orientation in the 2025 NSS regards peace as a product of deterrence and strength (The White House, 2025, pp. 8–9). Within Galtung's framework, this situates peace principally as negative peace—the control and regulation of overt violence through dominating force — while the positive peace factors (justice in the structure, rights, inclusive democratic processes) remain largely unaddressed. (Galtung, 1969, pp. 183–184)

Contradictions and philosophical implications:

A blatant contradiction is the official rhetoric claiming

- (i) a wish for peace
- (ii) and, at the same time overwhelming violence is needed to achieve that peace, while giving almost no publicly verifiable arguments on the issue of proportionality,



political settlements, the absence of a mutually agreed upon "stop and go" confidence building measure. This becomes even more prominent where respectable reporting shows no certainty or even challenges to the official explanations (e.g., conflicting accounts sent to AP on what the "official" rationales are). (Associated Press, 2026)

This is a case where the implication is that "peace" is legitimating speech instead of a moral idea. Coercive peace, while dominated, uses the term "peace" and closes critique on the political level, because it can be articulated that peace is opposed to the policy. This is exactly the type of emergency politics the theory of securitization aims to analyze (Wæver, 1995, pp. 54–57; Balzacq, 2005, pp. 171–174, 176–179; McDonald, 2008, pp. 563–566).

10. Main findings and conclusion

10.1. Main Findings:

- (i) Current "peace through strength" discourse shifts the meaning of peace to predominantly negative peace. It views deterrence and coercive peace as peace's defining content, rather than as contingent means that should be ethically kept. (The White House, 2025; Galtung, 1969)
- (ii) The "peace through strength" logic usually works via securitization, framing opponents (here, Iran) as existential and moving political reasoning into an emergency situation where the use of exceptional violence is not only permitted, but considered morally necessary. (Wæver, 1995; Balzacq, 2005).
- (iii) Official rhetoric has been noted for performing rhetorical substitution for just war justification. Words such as "precision", "imminence", and "no civilian targets" become moral signifiers that would suggest justification by proportionality and discrimination even when independent verifiable reporting and contested burdens of proof describe profound humanitarian suffering. (McMahan, 2015/2016; Associated Press, 2026).
- (iv) A Kantian critique reveals a conceptual flaw: coercive dominance may temporarily suppress violence, but it fails to establish the juridical and institutional frameworks of peace—systems that cultivate confidence and mitigate the logic of subsequent war. (Kant, 1795/2009).
- (v) The UN and the human rights systems have a normatively thicker conceptualization of peace which is integrally related to human rights, development, and inclusion, and the addressing of root causes—this peace stands in tension with "peace" conceptualized mainly as a militarized construct (United Nations General Assembly, 2016; United Nations, 2016; OHCHR, n.d.).

10.2. Conclusion:

This paper has contended that "peace through strength" alters the meaning of peace from the ethical boundary that restricts the use of violence and reinterprets it as a tactical lexicon that legitimizes the use of violence. The Iran–U.S.–Israel conflict exemplifies how peace rhetoric reframes violence as peace by redefining peace as deterrent domination and positing that the coercive violence must be present to achieve security and stability. However, the philosophical challenge of peace is not to disregard the importance of security or deterrence, but to demand that peace remain linked to justice, rights, accountability, and lasting coexistence. Positive peace as proposed by Galtung, juridical peace as proposed by Kant, and just war theory with its extreme caveats, all point out that coercive violence cannot simply be called "peace" without loss of morality. If "peace through strength" becomes the dominant paradigm, it will further erode the difference between peace as justice and peace as an enforced order, removing the ethical requirement that the use of violence must have a very serious and publicly contestable justification. In this regard, the current philosophical politics of peace revolves around a defining conflict: Whether peace will continue to be a normative constraint on the exercise of power, or whether it will become one of the most robustly legitimating constructs of power.

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