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Peace and Resistance in Nonwestern and Western Countries

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamic interplay between peace and resistance initiatives, comparing Western and non-Western frameworks to reveal how cultural, historical, and philosophical traditions shape their conceptualization and application. Drawing from critical peace studies, decolonial thought, and comparative political philosophy, the research examines whether resistance precedes peace, follows it, runs in parallel, or even undermines it—across diverse contexts. Western paradigms often define peace as the absence of conflict and resistance as a response to tyranny, framed through Enlightenment ideals of civil disobedience, individual rights, and liberal democracy. In contrast, non-Western perspectives emphasize holistic peace rooted in justice, spiritual balance, and relational harmony, while resistance is often embedded in collective survival, epistemic sovereignty, and cultural renewal. Through detailed analysis of both traditions—including inner resistance in Eastern philosophies, Indigenous struggles for land and cosmology, and Western theories from Locke to Foucault—the paper argues that resistance and peace are not antithetical but interdependent. Nonviolent resistance, spiritual defiance, and cultural resilience are shown to be essential forms of peacebuilding, particularly in non-Western contexts where structural violence and colonization persist. This rethinking of peace-resistance relations suggests that sustainable peace must engage with, rather than suppress, acts of resistance aimed at justice and dignity.

Keywords: peace, resistance, non-western and western.

INTRODUCTION

Peace and resistance initiatives exist globally and can vary widely depending on historical, cultural, political, and social contexts. Here's a comparative overview of peace and resistance initiatives in non-Western and Western countries, highlighting examples, types, and themes.

The key questions are:

1. Does resistance precede peace initiatives?
2. Does a peace initiative follow a resistance movement?
3. Do resistance and peace initiatives run in parallel?
4. Are there differences between Western and non-Western peace and resistance initiatives?

WESTERN CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS OF PEACE

The roots words* of Western peace are:

* https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Definitions+of+peace

> *"Etymology. From Middle English pees, pes, pais, borrowed from Anglo-Norman peis and Old French pais ("peace"), from Latin pāx ("peace"), from Proto-Indo-European *peh₂ḱ- ("to fasten, stick, place"), related to Latin pacīscor ("agree, stipulate"), Latin pangō ("fasten, fix"); see pact."*

Google teaches us the following about peace, which is then followed by the Western definition of peace itself. A definition of peace† is:

> *"Absence of, or cessation of war or hostilities; the condition or state of a nation or community in which it is not at war with another. absence of noise, movement, or activity; stillness, quiet."*

Possible synonyms for Western peace‡ are:

1. Peace is a state of tranquillity or quiet: such as
   - Freedom from civil disturbance
   - A state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom
2. Freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions
3. Harmony in personal relations
4. A state or period of mutual concord between governments
   - A pact or agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war or in a state of enmity
5. Used interjectionally to ask for silence or calm or as a greeting or farewell

What does Western peace truly mean§?:

> *"Peace is freedom from violence from peers, partners, family, strangers, and the state. Peace is compassion for others. Peace is being able to grow and thrive and be who you are. Peace is freedom from binary concepts and thinking. Peace is accepting of various religious practices, or the lack thereof."*

The deep meaning of Western peace is:

> *"Peace** is a solid, enduring relationship of harmonious living together, based on respect, serenity, cordiality and mutual understanding. It is founded as much on the heart as on reason. It is through human warmth that we can transcend violence."*

NON-WESTERN CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS OF PEACE

Reframing Peace: Insights from Non-Western Perspectives

Non-Western conceptions of peace often transcend the narrow Western understanding that equates peace with the mere absence of war. Instead, they emphasize inner tranquillity, harmony, justice, and a holistic sense of well-being. These perspectives illuminate the profound

† https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Definitions+of+peace
‡ https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/peace
§ https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Definitions+of+peace
** https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Definitions+of+peace

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interconnection between individual, societal, and cosmic balance as the foundation for enduring peace (Galtung, 1969).

> *"Galtung's 1969 article†† is significant because it offers a novel perspective on violence, considering it not only as direct action, but also as a consequence of social inequalities and structural injustices. Galtung is a prominent figure in peace studies and, according to Wikipedia, his work has significantly impacted our understanding of violence and peace."*

Inner Peace and Harmony:

In many Eastern traditions, such as Buddhism and Taoism, peace begins within. Inner tranquillity—achieved through meditation, mindfulness, and the cultivation of compassion and wisdom—is seen as essential for fostering harmony in the broader community (Thick Nhat Hanh, 2015). For instance, the Chinese concept of *heping* (和平), often translated as "world peace," is closely linked with *an* (安, calmness) and *mingsi* (明思, clarity of thought), suggesting that societal peace is rooted in personal serenity (Newman, 2022). Similarly, the Hebrew concept of *shalom* and the Arabic *salaam* go far beyond the absence of conflict. These words encompass a profound sense of completeness, justice, and harmony—within the self, the community, and the world at large (Abu-Nimer, 2003).

Harmony and Justice:

Peace in many non-Western traditions is inseparable from justice and balance. Rather than a passive condition devoid of conflict, peace is understood as an active, dynamic equilibrium—a state of harmony in which justice prevails and relationships are rightfully ordered (An-Na'im, 1990). The ancient Greek term *eirēnē* (εἰρήνη)—the root of the English word "irenic"—embodied not just peace, but a harmony born of justice. In a similar vein, many indigenous and Eastern traditions view peace as a balance of powers and responsibilities, reflecting an ecological and spiritual interdependence rather than a legalistic social contract (Watene et al., 2015).

Beyond the Absence of Violence: Positive Peace:

Although the concept of "positive peace"—which includes social justice, equity, and human rights—has gained traction in Western discourse, many non-Western traditions have long integrated these dimensions into their understanding of peace (Woodhouse, 2010). In these frameworks, peace is not simply the cessation of violence but the presence of fairness, dignity, and sustainable development. In some contexts, this may manifest through a prioritization of collective well-being and stability over individual political participation, sometimes reflected in centralized governance structures and conditional approaches to aid (Chabal et al. 1999).

The Role of Religion and Philosophy:

Religious and philosophical traditions have deeply shaped the peace paradigms of non-Western societies. The teachings of Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Confucius emphasize inner calm, ethical conduct, and social harmony as cornerstones of a peaceful life (Harvey, 2013; Chung, 2021). These principles are not only spiritual ideals but are woven into social institutions and cultural norms, reinforcing the integration of moral and civic order.

†† https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=galtung+1969

Cultural Expressions of Peace:

- Confucianism: Emphasizes social harmony, hierarchy, and filial piety, promoting a peaceful order rooted in mutual respect and ethical responsibility.
- Islam: The concept of salaam reflects a multifaceted vision of peace encompassing personal well-being, social justice, and alignment with divine will (Tu Weiming, 1996).
- Indigenous Traditions: Indigenous worldviews often perceive peace as a sacred balance between humans, nature, and spirit. Peace is embedded in relationality, communal rituals, and a deep reverence for the land (Watene & Yap, 2015).

Conclusion:

Non-Western understandings of peace offer rich and nuanced alternatives to dominant Western paradigms. By centring inner harmony, justice, spiritual integrity, and holistic well-being, these perspectives invite a more comprehensive and sustainable vision of peace—one that is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of balance, justice, and flourishing for individuals, societies, and the planet alike.

WESTERN CONCEPTS OF RESISTANCE

Western Concepts of Resistance

In Western political and philosophical thought, resistance has often been framed as a reaction against tyranny, injustice, and domination. Rooted in classical enlightenment, and modern traditions, Western notions of resistance emphasize individual liberty, the right to rebel, civil disobedience, and the moral imperative to confront oppressive structures. These ideas are central to the development of democratic theory, revolutionary movements, and critiques of power.

Classical Foundations

Resistance to Tyranny:

The earliest Western articulations of resistance appear in classical antiquity. Philosophers like Cicero and Aristotle defended the right of citizens to resist tyrants who violated natural law or the public good.

- Aristotle argued in Politics that unjust rulers could be overthrown because they governed for private interest rather than the common good.
- Cicero, in De Re Publica, emphasized the role of law and virtue, suggesting resistance was justified when rulers failed to uphold justice (Cicero, On the Republic, ca. 54–51 BCE).

  "A tyrant is one who rules for his own good, not for the good of the people." — Aristotle, Politics"

Religious Resistance and the Right to Revolt:

During the Reformation and early modern period, resistance was linked to divine law and the moral right to oppose unjust secular authority.

- John Locke, in his Second Treatise of Government (1689), famously defended the right to rebellion if governments violated natural rights to "life, liberty, and property." This became a cornerstone for liberal democratic theory.

- Calvinist resistance theory, particularly from thinkers like Theodore Beza and Christopher Goodman, argued that lower magistrates could resist a tyrannical sovereign (Skinner, 1978).

  "Whenever the legislators endeavour to take away and destroy the property of the people... they put themselves into a state of war with the people." — John Locke, Second Treatise"

Revolutionary Resistance:

The Enlightenment further developed resistance as a political and moral imperative. Resistance became tied to revolutionary movements such as the American and French revolutions.

- Thomas Paine, in Common Sense (1776), argued that it was not only a right but a duty to resist and overthrow oppressive regimes.
- Rousseau, in The Social Contract (1762), posited that sovereignty resides with the people, and any government not reflecting the general will is illegitimate and can be resisted.

  "When the people fear the government, there is tyranny. When the government fears the people, there is liberty." — Thomas Jefferson (attributed)"

Modern Theories: Civil Disobedience and Structural Critique:

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Western theories of resistance shifted toward nonviolent resistance, civil disobedience, and structural critique of power.

- Henry David Thoreau's essay Civil Disobedience (1849) inspired generations of activists by arguing for individual moral resistance to unjust laws.
- Hannah Arendt explored the power of collective action and public space as resistance in On Revolution (1963).
- Michel Foucault reconceptualized resistance as a constant counterforce to power—embedded within social relations. For Foucault, resistance is dispersed, every day, and decentralized (History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, 1976).

  "Where there is power, there is resistance." — Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality

Contemporary Approaches: Identity, Intersectionality, and Global Resistance:

Today, resistance is often discussed in terms of identity politics, intersectionality, and decolonial theory, especially in the context of Western democracies.

- Judith Butler (1997) explores the performativity of resistance, arguing that political agency can emerge from marginalized identities.
- Angela Davis and Cornel West have written extensively on race, systemic oppression, and the ongoing need for organized resistance within democratic frameworks.
- Nancy Fraser links resistance to global capitalism and social justice, emphasizing the need to confront economic and cultural domination simultaneously.

Conclusion

Western concepts of resistance encompass a wide spectrum—from armed revolt to nonviolent protest, from philosophical justification to everyday subversion. Whether through Locke's theory of rights, Thoreau's moral protest, or Foucault's critique of power, Western traditions

have long seen resistance as an essential feature of political life. These ideas continue to shape democratic movements, civil rights activism, and anti-authoritarian struggles across the globe.

NON-WESTERN CONCEPTS OF RESISTANCE

Non-Western Concepts of Resistance

While Western traditions often frame resistance in terms of civil disobedience, political rights, or social contracts, non-Western approaches to resistance emphasize collective identity, spiritual resilience, relational ethics, and decolonial struggles. These concepts often emerge from Indigenous, African, Asian, and Islamic worldviews and are deeply rooted in histories of colonization, spiritual cosmologies, and communal survival.

Spiritual and Inner Resistance:

In many Eastern and Indigenous traditions, resistance begins with the self, emphasizing inner transformation, self-discipline, and spiritual clarity as acts of defiance against oppressive systems.

- Gandhian Satyagraha, meaning "truth-force," is a form of nonviolent resistance rooted in Ahimsa (non-harm) and self-suffering. For Gandhi, resisting British colonial rule involved moral and spiritual purification (Gandhi, 1927/1993).

  "You may chain me, you may torture me... but you will never imprison my mind." — M.K. Gandhi, Autobiography"

- Buddhist resistance to war and violence is seen in the tradition of engaged Buddhism (Thich Nhat Hanh), where mindfulness and compassion are tools for social change (King, 2009).
- Islamic resistance, especially in the Sufi tradition, often frames struggle (jihad) as both internal (against the ego) and external (against injustice), emphasizing moral and communal obligations over violence (Abu-Nimer, 2003).

Indigenous Resistance: Land, Identity, and Sacred Relations:

For Indigenous peoples around the world, resistance is fundamentally about defending land, language, cosmology, and community from colonial erasure.

- Land as resistance: Indigenous epistemologies regard land not as property, but as kin. Resistance means maintaining spiritual and practical relations to land (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017).
- Cultural and epistemic resistance: Practices like storytelling, ceremony, and oral traditions are acts of resistance that preserve Indigenous worldviews in the face of epistemic violence (Smith, 1999; Grande, 2004).

  "Our resistance is not only political—it is spiritual, ecological, and intellectual." — Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, As We Have Always Done

African and Afro-Diasporic Resistance:

In African and Afro-diasporic traditions, resistance has been expressed through communal ethics, anti-colonial struggle, and cultural survival.

- Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes collective humanity and interconnectedness. Resistance arises through community-building and healing rather than confrontation (Ramose, 1999).

- Pan-Africanism and Negritude: Thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire framed resistance as a reclaiming of dignity, Black identity, and cultural self-determination (Fanon, 1961; Césaire, 1955).
- Everyday resistance: As described by James C. Scott, enslaved and colonized peoples often resist through covert means—silence, sabotage, storytelling, and cultural preservation (Scott, 1985). This is widely applicable across non-Western contexts.

Asian Resistance Movements and Philosophical Frameworks:

In many parts of Asia, resistance has taken the form of intellectual, cultural, and spiritual endurance as well as direct political action.

- Confucian resistance is subtle and ethical, emphasizing moral protest against unjust rulers through principled withdrawal or critique (Ivanhoe, 2002).
- Daoist resistance critiques coercive power and promotes wu wei (non-action) as a form of resistance to hierarchical control (Ames & Hall, 2003).
- Postcolonial resistance in Asia has included anticolonial movements (e.g., Vietnam, India, China), where the reclaiming of history, language, and sovereignty are acts of cultural and political resistance (Said, 1978; Prakash, 1994).

Resistance through Aesthetics and Culture:

In many non-Western societies, art, music, poetry, and storytelling are vehicles for resistance—subtly or overtly challenging hegemonic narratives.

- Palestinian resistance poetry (e.g., Mahmoud Darwish) embodies cultural defiance in the face of occupation.
- African music traditions, like Fela Kuti's Afrobeat, critique neo-colonialism and state repression through rhythm and performance.
- Indigenous languages and songs carry embedded histories and relationships that resist assimilation.

Conclusion

Non-Western forms of resistance are often multidimensional—spiritual, relational, cultural, and ecological. They emphasize resilience over revolution, relationality over individualism, and survival over sovereignty. These perspectives reveal that resistance is not just about toppling regimes, but also about preserving life, culture, and sacred relationships in the face of enduring structural and epistemic violence.

THE INTERRELATION OF PEACE AND RESISTANCE INITIATIVES

The relationship between peace and resistance initiatives is both complex and deeply intertwined. Rather than being opposites, peace and resistance often operate in a dynamic relationship: resistance can be a necessary precondition for peace, especially in contexts of structural violence, oppression, or injustice. Below is an analytical overview of this relationship.

The Interrelation of Peace and Resistance Initiatives

Resistance as a Pathway to Just Peace:

In peace studies, a distinction is often made between negative peace (the absence of direct violence) and positive peace (the presence of justice and equity) (Galtung, 1969). Resistance becomes essential in transforming negative peace into positive peace.

- Johan Galtung emphasized that peace cannot be achieved without confronting *structural violence*—the social, economic, and political inequalities that prevent people from reaching their full potential.
- Resistance initiatives—such as civil disobedience, grassroots mobilization, and nonviolent protest—seek to dismantle these structures and thereby *create the conditions for sustainable peace*.

"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict." — Dorothy Thompson

Nonviolent Resistance and Constructive Peacebuilding:

Nonviolent resistance is often explicitly framed as a peaceful means of resisting oppression while building more inclusive social orders.

- Gene Sharp's strategic nonviolence theory outlines how resistance—through boycotts, strikes, and non-cooperation—can challenge unjust power structures without using violence (Sharp, 1973).
- Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's empirical research shows that nonviolent movements are twice as likely to succeed as violent ones and tend to lead to more democratic and peaceful societies (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011).

"Peace is not passive. It is active resistance to injustice." — Martin Luther King Jr.

Resistance Against "Peace Without Justice":

Resistance can also oppose certain forms of peace—especially when peace processes ignore the demands of justice, dignity, or recognition.

- Paulo Freire argued that the oppressed have the right to resist any "peace" imposed by dominant groups that maintains the status quo (Freire, 1970).
- Fanon similarly critiqued colonial "peace" as a veil for violent domination, suggesting that resistance is necessary to restore humanity to the colonized (Fanon, 1961).

In these views, peace that silences resistance is not truly peaceful—it is pacification.

Peace Through Every day and Cultural Resistance:

Many non-Western traditions emphasize that resisting cultural erasure, ecological destruction, or spiritual domination is also a form of peace work.

- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Linda Tuhiwai Smith write about Indigenous resistance as acts of renewal and protection of sacred relations, viewing these as peaceful yet defiant responses to colonialism (Simpson, 2017; Smith, 1999).
- This aligns with "everyday peace" frameworks, which suggest that small-scale resistance in daily life—such as refusing to internalize colonial values or speaking Indigenous languages—can cumulatively contribute to peace (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Resistance Within Peacebuilding Frameworks:

Contemporary peacebuilding increasingly incorporates resistance movements as partners rather than obstacles.

- The United Nations' Sustaining Peace agenda acknowledges that local actors and civil society resistance groups often play a key role in sustaining peace by addressing root causes of conflict (UN, 2016).

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- Feminist peace scholars also highlight the importance of resisting patriarchal and militaristic systems to create spaces for transformative peace (Cockburn, 2004; Puechguirbal, 2010).

Conclusion

Resistance and peace are not opposites; rather, resistance is often a vital strategy for building just and durable peace. From challenging structural violence to preserving cultural identities, resistance can be a moral, political, and spiritual endeavour that upholds the dignity of oppressed communities. The effectiveness and legitimacy of peace depend on its capacity to recognize and integrate resistance—not silence it.

TWO EXAMPLES OF WESTERN RELATIONS BETWEEN PEACEKEEPING AND RESISTANCE

These examples show how resistance can emerge *against* peacekeeping efforts perceived as unjust or imperial, or how peacekeeping missions can incorporate resistance actors in their efforts to build sustainable peace.

NATO Peacekeeping in Kosovo and Serb Resistance

Context:

After the Kosovo War (1998–1999), NATO intervened militarily through a bombing campaign against Serbia, followed by a peacekeeping mission under KFOR (Kosovo Force) to stabilize the region and protect ethnic Albanians. The mission was supported by the UN (UNMIK) and Western powers.

Resistance:

- Local Serb populations in northern Kosovo resisted both NATO peacekeepers and the establishment of Kosovo's independence, viewing Western peacekeeping as an imposition and a threat to Serbian sovereignty.
- This resistance took the form of protests, non-cooperation, roadblocks, and rejection of Kosovar institutions backed by international actors.

Interpretation:

- From a critical peace studies lens, this case illustrates how peacekeeping can provoke resistance when seen as violating local self-determination or exhibiting bias (Richmond, 2011).
- Critics argue that the mission prioritized order and Western geopolitical interests over inclusive justice or reconciliation (Chandler, 2006).

UN Peacekeeping and Civil Resistance in Haiti (MINUSTAH Mission)

Context:

After political upheaval in Haiti, including the 2004 ousting of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the United Nations deployed MINUSTAH, a Western-supported peacekeeping mission aimed at stabilizing the country.

Resistance:

- Grassroots and civil society groups in Haiti—especially in poor urban areas like Cité Soleil—resisted the peacekeeping forces, accusing them of:
  - ❖ Supporting elite and foreign interests

- ❖ Using excessive force in marginalized neighborhoods
- ❖ Suppressing pro-Aristide activists

- MINUSTAH was viewed by many as an occupying force rather than a peacekeeper, particularly by those loyal to Aristide's Lavalas movement.

Interpretation:

- This example highlights the disconnect between external peacekeeping goals and local perceptions of justice, leading to civil resistance and delegitimization of international actors.
- It demonstrates how peacekeeping missions can become targets of local resistance when they fail to address root causes like inequality and exclusion (Hallward, 2007).

Summary

Case	Peacekeeping Actor	Resistance Group	Key Issue
Kosovo	NATO / UN (KFOR, UNMIK)	Kosovo Serbs	Sovereignty, legitimacy of intervention
Haiti	UN (MINUSTAH)	Lavalas supporters, civil society	Political exclusion, occupation, violence

These Western-led peacekeeping missions illustrate how resistance often arises when peacekeeping fails to address local power dynamics, justice, or legitimacy—revealing a deep interconnection between peace and resistance.

TWO EXAMPLES OF NON-WESTERN RELATIONS BETWEEN PEACEKEEPING AND RESISTANCE

Here are two illustrative examples of non-Western relations between peacekeeping and resistance, highlighting how peacekeeping efforts—whether led regionally or internationally—interact with resistance dynamics in local contexts. These examples underscore that resistance can emerge in reaction to or alongside peacekeeping, especially when peacekeeping efforts are perceived as externally imposed, politicized, or unjust.

African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Al-Shabaab Resistance

Context:

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was established in 2007 to support Somalia's transitional government, fight insurgents, and help stabilize the country after years of civil war. Although AMISOM is an African-led peacekeeping force, it has been financially and logistically supported by Western powers and the UN.

Resistance:

- The Al-Shabaab insurgency frames its violent resistance against AMISOM and the Somali government as a struggle against foreign occupation and illegitimate authority.
- Al-Shabaab leverages nationalist, anti-Western, and Islamist rhetoric, portraying peacekeepers as puppets of external actors, and uses resistance to consolidate its power in rural areas.

Interpretation:

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- This case reflects the blurred line between peacekeeping and counterinsurgency, especially when peacekeepers are engaged in direct combat.
- It demonstrates that even regional, non-Western peacekeeping missions can face strong resistance when they are perceived as being externally directed or lacking local legitimacy (Williams, 2013; de Waal, 2015).

India's Internal Peacekeeping in Kashmir and Kashmiri Resistance

Context:

India's military and paramilitary deployment in Jammu and Kashmir is often framed domestically as peacekeeping and counterinsurgency aimed at maintaining internal security and public order. India views the region as an integral part of the state, while many Kashmiris view the presence of Indian forces as militarization and occupation.

Resistance:

- Widespread resistance movements—both militant and civil—have challenged India's control. These include pro-independence protests, civil disobedience, and armed rebellion.
- Kashmiri civil society frequently denounces India's actions as violations of human rights and political repression under the guise of peacekeeping or counterterrorism.

Interpretation:

- This case shows how state-led "peacekeeping" can be perceived as coercive or colonial, especially in contested regions.
- Resistance here is not only armed; it includes nonviolent mobilization, media advocacy, and legal challenges—illustrating the breadth of resistance in response to domestic "peacekeeping" (Kaul, 2018; Bose, 2003).

Summary Table

Case	Peacekeeping Actor	Resistance Movement	Key Issue
Somalia	African Union (AMISOM)	Al-Shabaab	Perceived foreign occupation, religious/political legitimacy
Kashmir	Indian military forces	Kashmiri activists & insurgents	Sovereignty, self-determination, human rights

CONCLUSION

These non-Western cases reveal that peacekeeping efforts—especially when top-down or militarized—can inadvertently fuel resistance, particularly when they lack local legitimacy, fail to address root causes, or are seen as serving external or elite interests. Understanding local perceptions and historical grievances is critical to transforming resistance into participatory peacebuilding.

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