



## NAVIGATING A WORLD ON EDGE: WHY TEACHING WAR AND PEACE IS ESSENTIAL AMID RISING GLOBAL TENSIONS IN 2025

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## NAVIGATING A WORLD ON EDGE: WHY TEACHING WAR AND PEACE IS ESSENTIAL AMID RISING GLOBAL TENSIONS IN 2025

2025 brings with it a cascade of unresolved political crises and escalating global tensions. Notable events include the protracted war in Ukraine, which is nearing its third year, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, which has drawn in various neighboring states. Meanwhile, the fall of the Assad regime in Syria signals significant shifts in the Middle East, though the implications of this change remain uncertain. According to ACLED's (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) December 2024 analysis, global conflict levels rose by 25% compared to the same period in 2023, nearly doubling since 2020. Researchers suggest that the unprecedented levels of violence recorded in late 2024 will likely continue into 2025 (Raleigh & Kishi, 2024). In their analysis for 2025, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)

found that since they started their Preventative Priorities Survey in 2008, never have so many contingencies at the same time be rated with a high likelihood/impact than at the end of 2024 (Stares, 2025). The expert respondents to the CFR survey also expressed a level of anxiety that has never been higher than at the end of 2024, looking at 2025 (ibid). If we look at the Emergency Watchlist of the International Rescue Committee, they mention the top 10 humanitarian crises in the world, which also overlap with those mentioned in the ACLED report such as Israel/Palestine, Myanmar, Syria, and the Sahel region. Those grapple with (the aftermath of) war, terrorism, climate change, gang violence and related problems such as internal displacement, health crisis, food insecurity, sexual violence and ethnic cleansing, among others

(International Rescue Committee, 2024). And while Donald Trump vowed during his campaign for reelection to fix some of those conflicts quickly, such as vowing to end the war between Russia and Ukraine "within one day" and to bring "peace" to the Middle East (Bateman, 2024), the complexities of these conflicts suggest that any resolution will likely leave a bittersweet aftertaste. An example of the complexity in both countries is the issue of rebuilding everything that was destroyed

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during the war and the financial burden this entails. Furthermore, no agreement will fully satisfy the partners to the agreement, creating a pretext for future escalations between the warring parties. In addition to those big plans on the agenda, in a news conference on 7th of January, Donald Trump shared his expansionist ideas of annexing Greenland, reclaiming the Panama Canal, and absorbing Canada—plans which might trigger even more conflicts in 2025 than were anticipated just one month prior (Smith & Lee, 2025).

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and the hope for peace. The October 7th terror attack

on Israel by Hamas, for example, has led to spikes in both Islamophobia and antisemitism in Western countries (Broekaert et al., 2024), further amplifying the need for balanced and informed dialogue in educational settings. Since 2025 will likely keep us on our toes concerning the development of conflicts all over the world, those conflicts and discussions will remain present within classrooms and during breaks while playing in the schoolyard. Therefore, the impact of global developments on classrooms cannot be negated and consequently increases the need for educators to address the realities of an interconnected and conflict-ridden world.

### **Why Teaching War and Peace Matters**

Teaching about war and peace is not merely a response to current events but a foundational step in fostering critical thinking and civic responsibility among students. If we take the example of Germany and Austria, the reason lies in the very specific assignment which teachers have. In 1976 educators met in the south German city of Beutelsbach to agree on a way forward in the field of political didactics. The result of the event was the so-called “Beutelsbach Consensus,” which still today lays the ground rules for political education in Germany and in Austria. Its three ground rules are the “Prohibition against Overwhelming the Pupil”, “Treating Controversial Subjects Controversial” and “Giving Weight to the Personal Interests of Pupils” (Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg, n.d.). These three concepts are as follows: It is forbidden to overwhelm students with an opinion and thus prevent them from forming an independent judgement, thus clearly describing the boundary to political indoctrination.

It is then important that what is discussed controversially in politics and science is also discussed in class. The teacher even has a corrective function in order to address points of view that are foreign/contrary to the students’ own opinions. Finally, it is important to generate an environment and situation in which students can analyze a political situation and their own attitudes towards it. Those ground rules provide the tools for the students to develop their own opinion. In the context of rising global tensions and the unfiltered flow of information on social media, these principles are more relevant than ever. Children and youth are increasingly exposed to graphic images, polarizing narratives, and misinformation (Winter et. al., 2023). Equipping them with tools to critically analyze such content is essential for nurturing informed citizens who can contribute to peaceful societies.

To effectively teach these topics, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Starting with programs in the field of conflict resolution will help children to understand the origins and roots of conflict in small cases such as classroom fights and give them the tools to manage disputes nonviolently. Critical media literacy needs to be another step in training students about where to find sources, what biases are and how not to fall into the trap of mis- or disinformation. However, implementing war and peace education comes with challenges. Teachers must navigate sensitive topics without bias, address the emotional toll on students with direct or indirect experiences of conflict, and work within curricular constraints that may limit discussions on political issues. Over the last years, important steps have been taken within this direction, as educational NGOs have prepared workshop

concepts to tackle these issues in schools and specific teaching guides for sensitive topics (Ellison, 2023) were created by universities.

If current predications are correct and we continue to see violent conflicts all over the world, comprehensive education on war and peace will become ever more important to challenge the unfiltered information that the younger generation receives on their phones. By equipping the younger generation with the necessary skills, such as media literacy or non-violent conflict resolution, a foundation for a more peaceful and informed global society can be laid.



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