A Structural Assessment of the Bahá'í Peace Program

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Introduction

From Pierre Dubois's arbitration scheme of 1306 to the League of Nations Covenant of 1919, peace proposals grew progressively more elaborate in their institutional design and more refined in their theoretical ambition. Nevertheless, despite these advancements, they failed to overcome five recurring structural problems: bounded solidarity, the enforcement gap, compliance under pressure, the disarmament dilemma, and the lack of a broad moral foundation to support collective action. These weaknesses worsened due to the alliance system and the doctrine of the balance of power, as both consistently put peace behind competitive calculations of nation-states seeking advantage.

Early peace plans were typically presented as finished and self-contained designs, shaped by and intended for the conditions of the age in which their authors lived. Many reflected narrow national interests rather than loyalty to the agreed upon arrangement, while others possessed abstract appeal that could not be translated into workable institutions. Moving from schemes rooted in Christian unity to later federations of sovereign rulers, they shared a common rigidity that made no provision for adaptation to changing political realities.

Among these proposals, a handful carried some degree of cosmopolitan sentiment, though they emerged in a world not yet prepared to receive them. Émeric Crucé offered one of the clearest expressions of this impulse in the early seventeenth century, asking how peoples as different as *"the Turk, the Persian, the Frenchman, the Spaniard, the Chinese, the Tatar, the Christian, the Jew or the Mohammedan"* could ever be brought into accord, before answering that *"all nations are bound together by a natural and consequently indestructible tie, which ensures that a man cannot consider another a stranger."* That sentiment, however, remained the exception rather than the rule, and even where it surfaced, it never found institutional form. The inherited tradition of peace thinking never developed the structural, normative, or motivational foundations that practical and lasting peace requires.

This article asks whether Bahá'u'lláh's peace program, as expressed in the declaration that *"the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens,"* represents a categorical departure from earlier peace traditions and, if so, on what grounds. The question is not whether it refines that tradition but whether it breaks from it, offering a distinct level of conceptual grounding, structural coherence, practical realizability, and attention to the transformative conditions peace requires. Because any serious peace program must rest on sound structural foundations, the analysis proceeds through International Relations theory and the comparative history of peace design.

Early Peace Proposals: A Historical Survey

The tradition of formal peace proposals extends across four identifiable periods, each generating institutional designs that reflected the political conditions and material capacities of the era while consistently encountering the same structural limitations. Reviewing this tradition in detail establishes the baseline against which the Bahá'í framework's structural claims can be assessed.

Medieval and Renaissance Proposals (c. 1300–1464)

Medieval European peace schemes share a defining structure: the dual logic of internal peace and external mobilization. *Pierre Dubois,* in 1306, envisioned binding arbitration among Christian sovereign states. This would be backed by economic sanctions and collective force against violators. He was among the first to propose an international court of arbitration. He also suggested redirecting the resources freed by the end of the war to create international schools. Yet, his arrangement had a key paradox: peace among insiders depended partly on projecting coercion outward. Internal solidarity, built through external exclusion, became the chief limitation.

Dante Alighieri's work De Monarchia advanced a vision of universal political order under a single supreme emperor, whose authority would override the competing claims of lesser rulers and thereby eliminate the interstate conflicts that perpetual rivalry among sovereigns produced. Within this framework, individual states retained their own laws and a degree of local autonomy, but only in matters particular to their own circumstances; all affairs common to humanity as a whole fell under the jurisdiction of the monarch.

Marsiglio's treatise Defensor Pacis made its most consequential contribution through the concept of representative government, grounding political authority in the civil community rather than the ecclesiastical hierarchy and thereby laying the intellectual groundwork for later federalist thought. Building upon this foundation. *George of Poděbrady*, King of Bohemia, carried the trajectory further by proposing an international parliament among sovereign states, a project that moved closer than any prior scheme to a standing union of equal members. However, its narrow membership and inability to generate credible collective enforcement illustrated the persistent gap between institutional aspiration and material precondition that characterized the entire pre-modern period.

Early Modern Proposals (1517–1648)

Erasmus's Querela Pacis placed little confidence in treaties and held that war should be undertaken only with full unanimous consent. Rather than designing institutions to restrain rulers, it challenged the legitimacy of war itself and sought to reshape the moral climate within which rulers made their decisions. Its limitation, however, was the lack of an institutional framework: it offered no clear procedural alternative when leaders confronted grave security threats and no effective enforcement mechanism when moral condemnation alone proved inadequate.

Crucé's Le Nouveau Cynée represented a significant advance by expanding membership beyond Christendom to include the Ottoman Empire, Persia, China, and other non-European polities, grounding the case for peace in commercial interdependence rather than religious unity and anticipating what liberal institutionalism would later formalize. Yet the arrangement remained voluntary, and an assembly dependent on persuasion and the obligation to act could be disregarded whenever interests were at stake.

Sully's Grand Design proposed a reorganization of Europe into states of roughly equal power, with provisions to expel from the European order any power that refused to comply. In this respect, it recognized what legalist and moralist proposals consistently overlooked: that lasting peace requires organized enforcement capacity, not merely law and good intentions. Its weakness, however, was distributional. Any planned equilibrium embeds contested territorial settlements, and those settlements invite resistance precisely from the actors whose consent is most indispensable to the arrangement's survival.

Enlightenment Federalism and the Turn to Arbitration (1693–1795)

From the late seventeenth to the eighteenth century, peace proposals took on federative and juridical forms. They centered on a dilemma: should peace be secured by a global sovereign, at the cost of autocracy? Or should it rest on a voluntary league of states, risking defection?

Grotius's De Jure Belli ac Pacis (1625) is often cited as among the most cognet proposal of its period. He is sometimes called the "Father of International Law." Grotius offered a systematic account of the law of war and peace, grounded in natural law and the law of nations. By clarifying lawful causes of war, he showed that public norms and legal reasoning could narrow opportunism and create common expectations among states. The main weakness, apparent even then, was the absence of enforcement. Without standing courts, legal arguments could be used selectively to legitimize, rather than constrain, wars chosen by powerful actors.

Penn's Essay, Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe, proposed a European parliament to settle disputes. It would rely on the combined force from member states to ensure compliance. Its weakness was clear: stronger powers were unlikely to submit willingly, and it assumed disarmament would follow just from creating the framework. The *Abbé de Saint-Pierre's* project offered a detailed institutional plan with binding arbitration, collective sanctions, and fixed borders. However, *Rousseau's* critical commentary summed up the main issue. The sovereigns who would benefit most from peace are least likely to accept limits, since each seeks advantage in relative power, not collective welfare.

Kant's Perpetual Peace is the most consequential text in this tradition. It created the theoretical base for the democratic peace thesis, liberal institutionalism, and cosmopolitan political theory. Its weakness is its reliance on political transformation and voluntary compliance. This leaves incentives for defection whenever rulers face internal instability or external threats. *Bentham,* who first used the word "international," proposed a world court, disarmament, and the renunciation of colonial territories. Despite its clarity, his proposal was out of step with political realities, and its demands were far beyond what states could accept.

Nineteenth-Century Experiments (1815–1914)

The nineteenth century made peace proposals more feasible by transforming the underlying apparatus of diplomacy. Railways, steam shipping, and the telegraph accelerated communication and made repeated international conferences practical. The Congress of Vienna and the Concert of Europe introduced a new form of crisis management through sustained consultation among the great powers. This approach helped Europe avoid another major continental war for several decades. Yet, the system's limits were clear. It was oligarchic and dominated by five great powers, while smaller states had little real voice. Without written rules and permanent institutions, it depended entirely on the agreement of the great powers. This foundation weakened as national interests diverged and the forces of nationalism and liberalism grew beyond its control.

As the decades progressed, the Universal Postal Union demonstrated a different model: states could delegate routine functions to standing international bodies and accept common rules, provided the gains were concrete and the sovereignty costs were limited. This functional approach normalized permanent international administration in ways that made later institutional experiments politically imaginable.

Building on these precedents, the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907 produced the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the first codified rules of interstate conduct at a genuinely multilateral level. But the Court had no compulsory jurisdiction, its legitimacy in major-power disputes remained untested,

and the conferences produced no collective commitment to respond to aggression. They established institutional precedents without collective security.

Period	Key Thinkers	Core Mechanism	Main Weakness	Key Inhibitors
Medieval & Renaissance c. 1300–1464	Dubois; Dante; Marsiglio; Podebrady	International arbitration (Dubois); universal monarchical authority (Dante); civil over ecclesiastical legitimacy (Marsiglio); proto-sovereign standing union (Podebrady)	Narrow membership; legitimacy and sovereignty primacy; religious outsiders are permissible targets for aggression	Slow communication; limited administration; honor costs of submission to a standing body; clerical-secular conflict
Early Modern 1517–1648	Erasmus; Crucé; Sully	Universal consent to start wars (Erasmus); permanent non-religious inclusive assembly linked to commerce (Crucé); council governance with collective force (Sully)	Persuasion without coercive capacity; distributional conflict embedded in equilibrium design; law without authoritative interpreter or enforcer	Prestige politics; weak monitoring and verification; strategic distrust; elastic legal categories exploited by the powerful
Enlightenment 1693–1795	Penn; Saint-Pierre / Rousseau; Kant; Bentham	Parliamentary assembly model (Penn); detailed European federation with binding sanctions (Saint-Pierre); federation of free republics linked to constitutional order (Kant); arbitration as rational institutional design (Bentham)	Voluntary entry and compliance; Rousseau's criticism — sovereigns perceive collective benefit yet choose unilateral advantage; no coercive authority	Sovereignty resistance; unequal power; domestic political costs of costly collective enforcement; regime insecurity
Nineteenth Century 1815–1914	Concert of Europe; Universal Postal Union; Hague Conferences; Permanent Court of Arbitration	Great-power crisis management through multilateral consultation (Concert); permanent administrative cooperation with concrete gains, codified arbitration procedures, and standing support	Great-power oligarchy; problems when interests diverge; its reliance on voluntary jurisdiction reduces its capacity in major-power disputes; enforcement entirely political	Nationalism; industrial militarism; great-power divergence; no independent enforcement capacity

What the history of peace proposals reveals is not merely a lack of workable mechanisms, but also a recurring failure to generate the solidarity on which durable peace depends. Most schemes assumed that sovereign rulers would accept binding judgment and bear enforcement costs, yet those assumptions repeatedly collided with sovereign self-interest. Powerful states exercised discretion in interpreting rules, weaker states doubted compliance would protect them, and legal or moral frameworks became rhetorical whenever enforcement was uncertain. Balance-of-power arrangements, though more realistic about power distribution, proved no more reliable, resting on temporary great-power alignment and the dominance of a few major states.

The Bahá'í Framework: From Fragmented Loyalties to a Unified Identity

The formation of the American nation illustrates how broader political identities emerge through institutional and constitutional change. At independence, the United States was not yet a nation in the full sociological sense but a union of former colonies still marked by strong state loyalties, with many citizens regarding their state as the primary political community and the Union as secondary.

The Civil War forced a resolution of that uncertainty. The defeat of the Confederacy and the Fourteenth Amendment rejected the premise that states could leave the Union and anchored citizenship more firmly at the national level. What changed was not the disappearance of differences but the realignment of

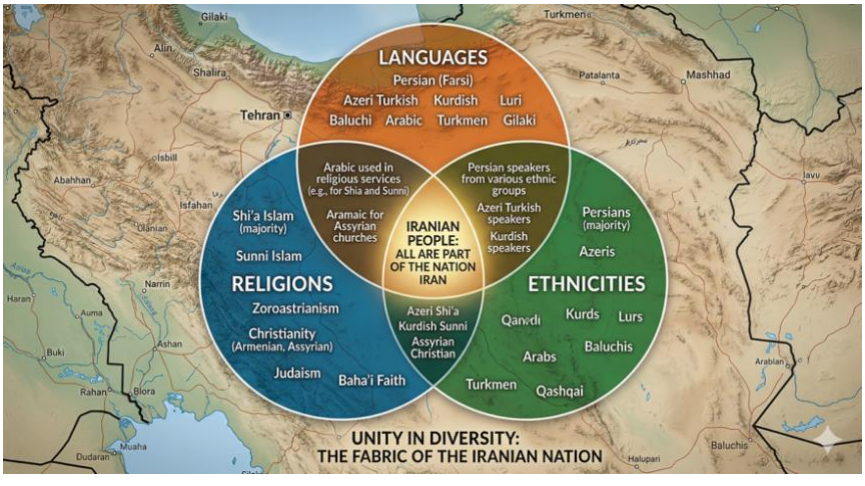
loyalties. The broader lesson is that durable political communities are formed not by eliminating plurality but by placing narrower loyalties within a more inclusive civic identity.

Solidarity and Its Limits: The Problem of Partial Identity

Any identity, at its core, is a form of unity organized around a common denominator: lineage, language, territory, political membership, or shared historical experience. Race, nation, and party are all modes of association that gather individuals into recognizable communities, yet they remain partial unities, and this partiality is not incidental but structural. By defining who belongs, each also defines who does not, making the construction of an outgroup inseparable from the formation of the ingroup. Each may generate solidarity within its own scope, but that solidarity is acheived at the cost of distinction, suspicion, or outright antagonism toward those outside it, and their fruits are therefore confined to the sphere of their own limitation. None, consequently, can offer the basis for an inclusive human order.

Furthermore, a distinction exists between various groups of humankind according to lineage, each group forming a racial unity separate from the others. There is also the unity of tongue among those who use the same language as a means of communication; national unity where various peoples live under one form of government such as French, German, British, etc.; and political unity which conserves the civil rights of parties or factions of the same government. All these unities are imaginary and without real foundation, for no real result proceeds from them. The purpose of true unity is real and divine outcomes. From these limited unities mentioned only limited outcomes proceed whereas unlimited unity produces unlimited result, and these limited unities are liable to *"liable to change and disruption"*

A further difficulty arises when one person belongs to several partial unities at once, such as a racial community, a religious tradition, a linguistic group, and a national polity, each of which claims loyalty and solidarity. Where these affiliations align, they may reinforce one another; where they diverge, they create competing obligations and weaken the coherence each unity claims to provide. In a country such as Iran, a Kurd, a Persian, or a follower of the Zoroastrian faith may stand at the intersection of identities whose demands do not fully harmonize. Because each partial unity is defined in relation to those outside it, membership in several such communities multiplies the boundaries one is expected to maintain. These limited unities are therefore not only narrow in scope but unstable and prone, as Bahá'í writings observe, to "*change and disruption*."



From a Bahá'í perspective, the limits of partial identity come from the narrowness of its underlying structure. A unity built around race, nation, or party yields results only as broad as its own reach. No combination of such partial unities can serve as a lasting foundation for solidarity. What is needed is a different kind of unity. Bahá'í writings state, *"the unity which is productive of unlimited results is first a unity of mankind."* This unity does not suppress difference; instead, it is grounded in shared humanity - a bond that comes before and goes beyond any partial identity. Because it is the only denominator everyone shares, it alone is universal enough to sustain all of humankind.

Evolution of Identities and Processes for Unity

There is a central divide in peace theory: the contrast between an order based on managing power and one based on a universal obligation to resist aggression. The balance of power treats peace as a temporary product of rivalry, leaving weaker states vulnerable to the whims of stronger states. A system of common obligation moves beyond this by treating aggression against any state as an attack to the whole system. Yet such a system also depends on high levels of trust, consensus, and collective resolve, the very conditions earlier peace proposals failed to generate and seldom explained.

Cosmopolitan IR theory holds that moral duty transcends borders, and a just world order must protect human rights and shared humanity. But its solutions are mostly procedural and based on individual rights. It says what to protect, but not how to create the deep social, cultural, and psychological unity or the personal change needed to support it.

The Bahá'í perspective holds that advances in technology and communication have made the integration of these social identities not only necessary but practically achievable for the first time in history. It provides explicit guidance on how each form of unity is to develop, tracing the path from narrow and partial loyalty toward a universal one. These expressions of unity are:

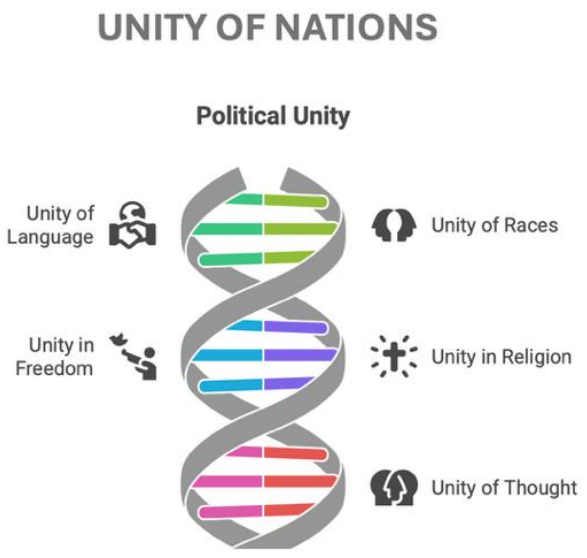
Unity of Nations: Distinct national entities, each with its own identity and consciousness, are progressively combined into a universal human community grounded in a sense of world citizenship.

Unity of Political Entities: Sovereign states are integrated into a political world order, culminating in the emergence of a world government that supersedes the fragmented, rivalrous system of competing sovereignties.

Unity of Races: The various races are progressively integrated, recognizing that humanity constitutes a single race, with membership in the human race, with all its diversities, as the primary and most fundamental form of racial belonging.

Unity of Religions: The world's faith traditions converge toward the recognition of one common faith, understood not as the dominance of any single religion but as the mature expression of a single progressive revelation.

Unity of Language: The diversity of tongues moves gradually toward a shared auxiliary medium and, ultimately, a single universal language adequate to the scale of humanity's collective life.



As the diagram above suggests, unity of nations serves as the overarching umbrella within which all other forms of unity converge and reach their mature expression. It is the broader consciousness that arises when the racial, religious, linguistic, and political processes complete their developmental arcs and are integrated into a single comprehensive reality.

What distinguishes the Bahá'í Peace Program is its explicit identification of each aspect of human unity and identity, tracing the trajectory each must pass through and treating them not as separate concerns but as interdependent processes. When these processes mature and converge, the result is not merely a more cooperative international system but a genuine transformation of human consciousness in which every person recognizes their membership in one universal human community.

It is the view of this author that:

> *What sets the Bahá'í Peace Program apart from earlier peace proposals is its simultaneous treatment of the full range of human social identities, racial, religious, linguistic, and political, its deliberate hierarchical ordering and integration of those identities within a coherent system, and its provision for a universal institutional framework capable of sustaining and regulating their development. The Bahá'í Peace Program also provides an explicit account of the moral and spiritual conditions needed to expand those identities beyond their limited boundaries into an all-inclusive global order culminating in a shared consciousness of world citizenship.*
>
> ***Distinguishing Features of Bahá'u'lláh's Peace Program***

Racial Unity and the Primacy of the Human Race

"Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch", "There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God."

Racial identity is a limited form of belonging, binding persons through perceived common descent, shared memory, and common experiences of exclusion or solidarity. It can sustain cultural continuity and support collective resistance to injustice. Yet from a Bahá'í perspective, it cannot serve as the final ground of human association. Its fuller development lies in the recognition that humanity itself constitutes one race, and that membership in the human race is our primary racial identity.

The problem is not racial diversity but racial hierarchy. When difference becomes a degree of worth and power, it functions as a structure of domination, shaping the distribution of resources, the administration of law, and political representation in ways that advantage some while marginalizing others. It also narrows the sphere of moral concern, rendering the suffering of other racial groups less urgent and less binding on conscience. Racial prejudice is therefore not only an individual failing, but a structural barrier to peace, and Bahá'í writings identify it as such on precisely these grounds: unity cannot emerge where one part of humanity is elevated above another.

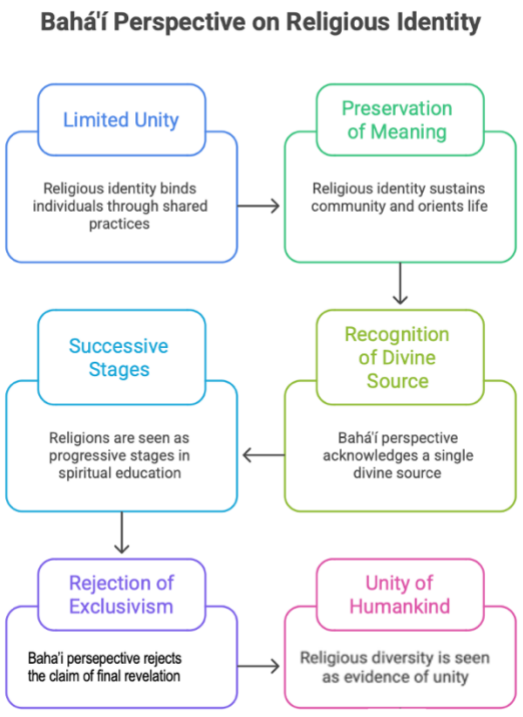
The Bahá'í view does not, however, seek to abolish difference. Like the flowers of one garden, human beings find their collective beauty in variety rather than sameness. Racial unity requires not the erasure of particular identities but their reordering within the wider principle of human oneness, so that diversity becomes an expression of the shared life of humanity rather than a basis for hierarchy.

Religious Unity: One Common Faith

"That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated"

Religious identity is also a limited unity that binds persons through shared revelation, sacred history, ritual practice, and common worship. It can preserve meaning, sustain community, and orient human life toward transcendence. Yet from a Bahá'í perspective, it cannot remain confined to the claim that one tradition alone contains the whole of divine truth. Its fuller development lies in a more universal religious consciousness: the recognition that the great religions derive from the same divine source and represent successive stages in the spiritual education of humankind.

This view does not reduce religions to interchangeable expressions of one truth. Their deeper unity appears when enduring spiritual principles are distinguished from the social laws and practices that have varied across historical ages. The problem lies not in religion itself but in religious exclusivism, the claim that one revelation is final and that other communities stand outside divine guidance. When that occurs, religion narrows moral vision and becomes a source of exclusion and conflict rather than peace and transformation. Religious unity, therefore, does not require the erasure of traditions, but their ordering within a wider horizon in which humanity is understood to be guided by one God through progressive revelation. In this view, religious diversity is not a source of rivalry but evidence of a single unfolding revelation moving toward the unity of humankind.



Linguistic Unity: Beyond the Mother Tongue Toward a Common Language

"O members of parliaments throughout the world! Select ye a single language for the use of all on earth, and adopt ye likewise a common script. This will be the cause of unity, could ye but comprehend it, and the greatest instrument for promoting harmony and civilization, would that ye might understand!"

Historically, linguistic identity is a source of dissension. A shared language creates a common field of memory, meaning, and communication, carrying culture across generations and fostering intimacy among its speakers. Yet from a Bahá'í perspective, a language cannot remain confined to a particular culture. Its fuller development lies in a wider unity in which the native language is preserved while communication extends beyond the boundaries of tribe, nation, and civilization. The problem is not linguistic diversity itself but the fragmentation and mutual incomprehension that arise when language barriers obstruct understanding.

Bahá'í writings present this as a developmental process moving from single language communities toward international intelligibility through the use of two languages: one's native tongue and a universal auxiliary language. Local identity is thereby retained while being situated within a larger communicative order. Such a language is not merely a practical convenience but a moral and political instrument of unity, reducing misunderstanding, widening fellowship, and enabling the freer circulation of knowledge across the world.

In its furthest horizon, Bahá'í writings speak of a time when humanity will share one universal language and one common script. Diversity of tongues may persist as a cultural fact, but it can no longer remain a barrier to world consciousness. If the true purpose of language is to foster understanding among human beings, then the particular form of the medium is secondary to that end, and attachment to one's own tongue must ultimately yield, in part, to the wider needs of human communication. Just as racial unity

culminates in the recognition of one human race and religious unity in one common faith, linguistic unity culminates in a common medium adequate to the scale of humanity's collective life.

Political Unity and the Emergence of a World Superstate

"We pray God—exalted be His glory—and cherish the hope that He may graciously assist …the kings of the earth …to establish the Lesser Peace. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries. It would be preferable and more fitting that the highly honored kings themselves should attend such an assembly, and proclaim their edicts"

Political identity means having a shared government, laws, and citizenship within a defined community. It helps maintain order, protect rights, and enable people to live together. But from a Bahá'í view, this identity shouldn't stay limited to nations. It should grow wider, moving from tribes to cities, from cities to nations, and eventually to a larger human community.

Tribes joined to form kingdoms, small principalities united into nation-states, and separate countries formed federal unions. Each chose to give up some independence to a higher authority, thereby creating stronger political systems. Today, Bahá'í thought sees us at a new step in this journey. The problem is not loving our nation but thinking it is the highest loyalty. When nations see themselves as the top authority, they can't create strong shared decisions or lasting peace.

Bahá'í writings describe the next political development. The Lesser Peace is a firm agreement between states that see that balance-of-power politics no longer works for peace. Further still, there is a world commonwealth with a global legislature, an international executive, and a top court with final authority. Nations would give up the right to wage war and certain powers to this higher system, while retaining self-rule within it. What is lost is not identity but unlimited freedom to act alone, and this change means humanity reaches political maturity.

Unity of Nations and the Emergence of Consciousness of World Citizenship

National unity and political unity are linked but different. Political unity is about building institutions that can make and enforce decisions in a set area. National unity is deeper: it's the sense of belonging and duty that gives these institutions life and respect. Both are needed because the world order requires strong institutions and a sense of togetherness.

Unity of nations is the broad framework for all other unities. Racial, religious, linguistic, and political unity are each an important milestone, but none alone is enough. Baha'u'llah's words, "*the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens,"* illustrates that our most important identity is being human. Smaller group identities matter most when seen as part of this larger whole.

Addressing the absence of this deeper substratum of global solidarity requires intentional and sustained effort, by individuals and leaders alike, to foster a genuine consciousness of common human belonging. Trust and a sense of shared obligation must be actively cultivated if institutions are to be animated with the moral energy that durable collective action demands.

The following diagram shows that unity among nations results from unification of different identities - religious, racial, linguistic, and political - being brought together into a single global system.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of the ultimate endpoint of humanity leaves little ambiguity about the scope and depth of the unity toward which this entire process tends:

"All nations and kindreds will be gathered together under the shadow of this Divine Banner, which is no other than the Lordly Branch itself, and will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be eliminated. All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race, and become a single people. All will dwell in one common fatherland, which is the planet itself."

This passage shows the final goal, in which all types of unity - racial, religious, linguistic, political, and national - come together, and everyone sees the planet as their common home. Shoghi Effendi explained what this means:

"This is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world unity."

The trajectory is clear and the direction irreversible, but its realization depends on a cumulative shift in consciousness rather than a sudden one. The Bahá'í Peace Program calls on world representatives and individuals alike to undertake, proactively and with deliberate commitment, the work of promoting world citizenship. The program offers explicit guidance on expanding the boundaries and developing all-inclusive national, political, religious, racial, and linguistic allegiances. It shows how each identity can advance from its limited form to its full expression within the framework of a united world.

Lesser Peace: The Structure to Prevent War

In a broader sense, the Lesser Peace may be understood as an intermediate stage, a necessary stepping stone toward a more complete and spiritually grounded order, the Most Great Peace. The relationship between the two is analogous to that of a body without spirit and a body animated by it: the Lesser Peace provides the structural form, the institutional skeleton of world order, while the Most Great Peace infuses that structure with the moral and spiritual vitality that alone can sustain it. As Bahá'u'lláh addressed the rulers of the world:

"Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents."

The sequence is deliberate. Just as a living body requires sound physical structure before the spirit can fully express itself through it, the Lesser Peace establishes the structural and institutional preconditions without which the Most Great Peace cannot take root. It is, in this sense, less an endpoint than a foundation, the indispensable but incomplete first stage of a peace whose full realization depends on dimensions that institutions alone cannot supply.

The main function of the Lesser Peace, as conveyed in Bahá'í writings, is to remove the very foundations of war in all its forms, not only between nations but across the religious, racial, and economic fault lines that have historically torn human societies apart. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the culminating effect of this world-unifying process, it will:

'Cement together the Orient and Occident, remove forever the foundations of war and upraise the ensign of the Most Great Peace."

Shoghi Effendi provides the following interpretation of the quote above, equating the removal of the foundations of war with the establishment of the Lesser Peace.

"...to the political unification of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, to the emergence of a world government and the establishment of the Lesser Peace.. It must, in the end, culminate in the unfurling of the banner of the Most Great Peace."

As noted above, its structural core, the Lesser Peace, is a political unity among sovereign states. Shoghi Effendi expands on this concept of political unity.

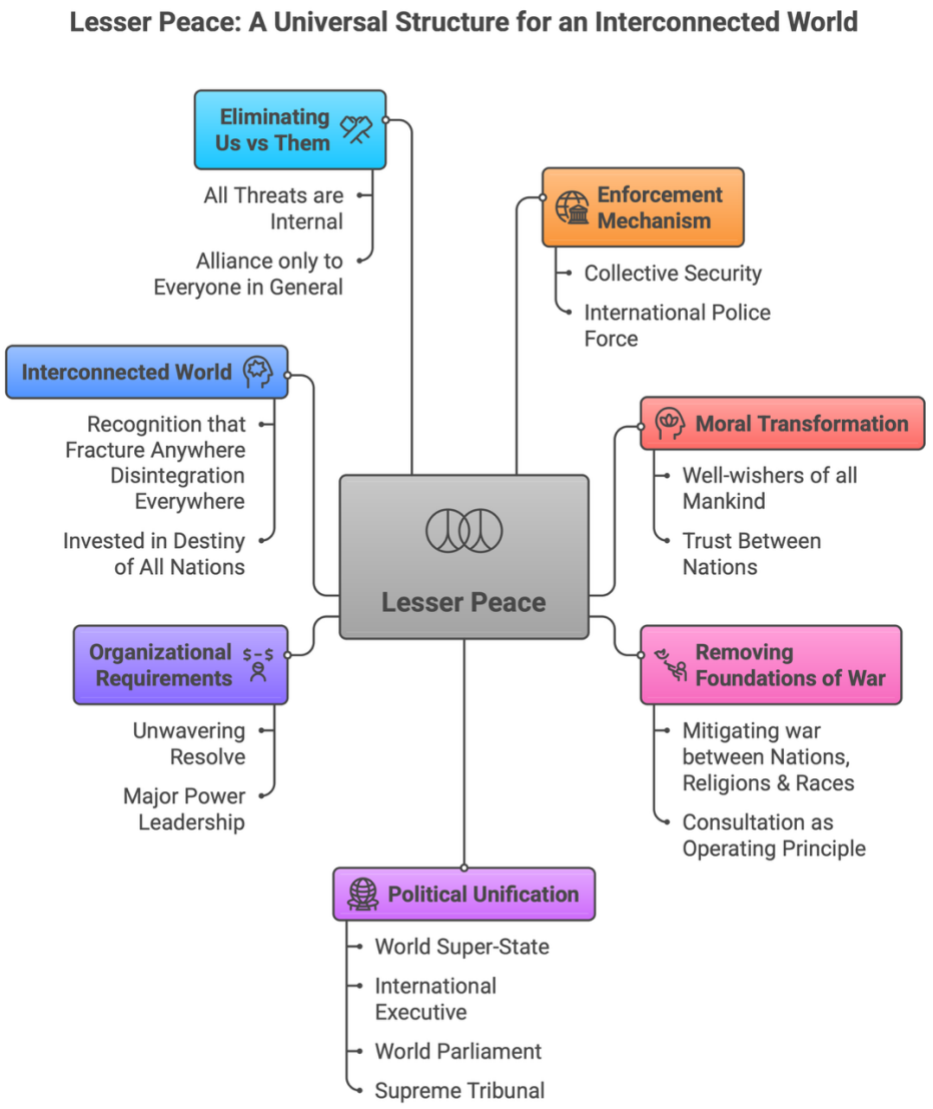
"Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favour all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgment will have a binding effect."

As Bahá'u'lláh makes clear in the following statement, the political structure of the Lesser Peace is concerned with more than the regulation of war between nation-states. It provides the institutional foundation for overcoming all conflicts that generate violence and division.

"Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age and the rehabilitation of its fortunes. Let them, after meditating on its needs, take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely-afflicted world the remedy it requireth."

Shoghi Effendi also makes clear, the Lesser Peace entails the elimination of conflict in all its forms.

"A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished."



This sequence carries an important implication for the relation among the various processes of unity. Political unification is not simply one process among others but the structural precondition that enables their further development. The institutional order of the Lesser Peace provides the authority needed to secure the laws and guarantees without which religious and racial unity cannot advance beyond aspiration. Overcoming fanaticism and animosity cannot rest on moral persuasion alone but requires a governing framework with sufficient reach and coercive capacity to hold those gains in place. Political unification comes first not because it is highest in value, but because without it the other unities remain vulnerable to the very forces they are meant to overcome.

Collective Security: The Institutional Mechanism for Achieving the Lesser Peace

Collective security is a term that conceals more than it reveals, serving as shorthand for what is more precisely understood as security for individual nations by collective means. It is the organized commitment of all member states to defend any one of their members against armed aggression, on the assumption that peace is indivisible and that an attack on one constitutes a threat to all.

In the literature on collective security, the concept is typically articulated as a system that: *"Purports to provide security for all states, by the actions of all states, against all states that might challenge the existing order by the arbitrary unleashing of their power,"* and *"upon the proposition that war can be prevented by the deterrent effect of overwhelming power upon states which are too rational to invite certain defeat."*

The concept of collective security was, in practice, introduced into the realm of politics by the unprecedented pressures of World War I. Woodrow Wilson made it the cornerstone of his Fourteen Points, calling for a world organization that would provide a system of collective security, a vision subsequently incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles and institutionalized as the League of Nations. What is less commonly recognized is that Bahá'u'lláh had already presented this concept to the rulers of the world decades earlier:

"Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents. O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful. Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice."

What sets Bahá'u'lláh's formulation apart from conventional theories of collective security is the explicit integration of armament limitation into the security arrangement itself. In traditional theory, armaments were treated as a separate issue rather than as part of the enforcement mechanism. By embedding their reduction within the framework of collective security, Bahá'u'lláh shifted the concept away from its

intermediate position between balance of power and world government to the establishment of a world authority. Once armament limitations become a necessary condition of the system, collective security can no longer be conceived as an agreement among sovereign states alone but points instead toward a higher governing authority, suggesting that its full realization depends on the institutional development of world government.

The Requirements of Collective Security

In International Relations theory, collective security is widely regarded as a system of exceptional complexity beneath its apparent simplicity. Its difficulties are not only institutional but psychological and structural, requiring transformation in both political organization and individual values. In this respect, it departs sharply from the logic of balance of power, which seeks stability through equilibrium among rival states, whereas collective security seeks order through a shared commitment to resist aggression wherever it occurs. Its requirements fall into two broad categories: psychological and moral conditions, concerning the beliefs and commitments of states and peoples, and structural conditions, concerning the distribution of power and the material setting in which such a system must operate.

BALANCE OF POWER VS COLLECTIVE SECURITY

Dimension	Balance of Power	Collective Security
PRIMARY CONCERN	The distribution of power among major states	Protection of the international order against aggression
PLACE OF SMALL NATIONS	Small nations are secondary to great-power equilibrium and may be traded, partitioned, or ignored	Small nations are entitled to protection; aggression against any state is an injury to the whole order
LOGIC OF ORDER	Stability through counterweight and rivalry	Peace through common resistance to aggression
ALLIANCE PATTERN	Selective and shifting; driven by national interest	Universal in principle; no predetermined friends or enemies
USE OF FORCE	Legitimate as a tool of adjustment and equilibrium	Legitimate chiefly as collective enforcement against aggression
POLITICAL ETHIC	Reason of state; national interest above all	Common obligation; security of each bound to security of all
ULTIMATE WEAKNESS	Can preserve order while tolerating insecurity and sacrifice at the margins	Requires unusually high consensus, trust, and willingness to act collectively
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The primary subjective requirement of collective security is acceptance of the indivisibility of peace: the conviction that a breach of peace anywhere threatens peace everywhere. Governments and peoples must treat aggression in distant regions as a matter of common concern rather than a remote quarrel beyond their responsibility. Bahá'u'lláh expressed this principle with striking clarity in his image of the "*world as a human body",* in which disorder in one part cannot be safely isolated from the rest. The analogy

captures the foundational intuition of collective security: injury to one member of the international order implicates the whole.

Beyond interdependence, collective security demands a deeper loyalty to the world community. States must identify their interests closely enough with the general interest of humanity that they willingly bear economic costs and military risks for the larger order, rejecting unilateral war as an instrument of national policy and accepting binding international judgment in matters of war and peace. This is precisely the transformation of orientation Bahá'u'lláh described when he wrote that *"true peace and tranquillity will only be realized when every soul will have become the well-wisher of all mankind."*

A further requirement is impartiality. A genuine system of collective security can have no fixed allies or permanent enemies. States must be prepared to act against any aggressor, including allies, because the governing principle is not attachment to particular states but fidelity to a universal rule: aggression must be opposed wherever it occurs. All of these demands converge on the most indispensable condition of all, confidence in the system itself. Without that confidence, states will hedge, defect, or return to self-help. Bahá'u'lláh's call to "*adhere firmly to the Lesser Peace*,"voiced in the face of increasingly destructive weapons, expresses precisely this need for steadfast commitment to a common order.

"Consider the civilization of the West, how it hath agitated and alarmed the peoples of the world. An infernal engine hath been devised, and hath proved so cruel a weapon of destruction that its like none hath ever witnessed or heard..Incline your ears unto the Call of this Wronged One and adhere firmly to the Lesser Peace."

Confidence is difficult to develop before success has been demonstrated, producing a circular problem at the core of collective security. States must behave as though the system is reliable before its reliability has been proven, which is why the system ultimately demands what has been described as a *"moral transformation of political man,"* one that challenges isolationism, neutralism, militarism, great-power privilege, and the instinct to preserve special friendships at the expense of universal obligation.

The objective requirements are no less demanding. The most favorable setting is one in which power is broadly diffused among states of roughly comparable strength, enabling the community to assemble overwhelming collective force against any aggressor. Near-universal membership is equally essential, since sanctions derive their effectiveness from broad application.

Material conditions matter as well. Collective security is not an ordinary coalition between nation-states but a form of international police action, retaining legitimacy only if it reduces rather than enlarges the risk of major war. That requires rapid mobilization and decisive superiority, since delay undermines credibility. Economic interdependence is equally essential, since non-military pressure can only be effective where states rely sufficiently on commercial exchanges and are vulnerable to its interruption.

A central criticism of collective security lies in its circular logic. States will commit to a common security order only when its risks appear manageable, yet those risks remain difficult to reduce so long as confidence is weak and mistrust persists. The difficulty is not solely institutional but arises from the reciprocal relationship between formal commitments and the conditions that make them credible. Collective security cannot demonstrate its reliability unless states trust it in moments of danger, but that trust is unlikely to develop before the system has shown that it can function.

Imagine a people on an island threatened by a nearby volcano, whose only path to safety is to build a bridge to a neighboring shore. They build in moments of danger and stop when calm returns, falling back into ease until the next eruption reminds them of what remains unfinished. This pattern mirrors the condition of the world: crisis awakens the will to secure peace; calm weakens it. The unfinished bridge stands as a metaphor for the Lesser Peace. Humanity may build it with foresight and determination, or wait until danger leaves no other choice.

The failure of collective security is therefore rarely a failure of the mechanism alone. More often, it reflects a deeper misalignment between formal structure and the moral, psychological, and political conditions required to sustain it. What the system ultimately demands, and what history has shown most difficult to produce, is a genuine conviction that the security of each is inseparable from the security of all, together with a willingness to let that conviction prevail over habits of rivalry and self-interest.

The Importance of the Twentieth Century in the Peace Process

The twentieth century did more than advance the institutional design of peace; it transformed the conditions that made durable and universal peace practically conceivable. Three developments mark this

shift: humanity's growing capacity for coordinated global action, the rise of consciousness of world citizenship, and the convergence of historical processes signaling a new stage in human development.

Twentieth Century: Building the Capacity for Action

"All of us know that international peace is good, that it is conducive to human welfare and the glory of man, but volition and action are necessary before it can be established. Action is essential. Inasmuch as this century is a century of light, capacity for action is assured to mankind."

The passage from 'Abdu'l-Bahá draws attention to a distinction that runs through the entire history of peace thinking: the gap between recognition and action. Earlier ages may have perceived the value of peace but lacked the institutional and communicative capacity to organize it on a universal scale. The designation of this as a *century of light* marks an age in which the conditions for collective action are now possible, making a durable and universal peace a practical possibility rather than a distant aspiration. The obstacle that remains is not capacity but the will to act.

A close reading of Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic texts reveals that his references to peace employ three terminologically distinct and hierarchical levels: Asghar (أصغر), the lesser or most limited form; Akbar (أكبر), the intermediate form; and A'ẓam (أعظم), the most supreme form. In his letters to the rulers of his time, when urging them to establish an international order, he employed the term Asghar, reflecting the limited capacity of that age. When referring to a more developed stage of international organization in the future, he used Akbar; when addressing the ultimate spiritual and physical unity of humankind, he employed the term A'ẓam.

This gradation was deliberate. Writing in the 1870s, Bahá'u'lláh calibrated his language to the actual possibilities of the time, reserving the higher terms for future stages. In this sense, the twentieth century may be seen as the threshold beyond which international peace programs can be called Akbar rather than Asghar, since humanity will have entered a new stage of capacity for collective action.

Term	Arabic	Meaning	Historical Period	Institutional Expression
Asghar	أصغر	The Lesser Peace before 20th century	Addressed to rulers in the 1870s; reflects the limited institutional capacity of that age	A political agreement among sovereign states to cease warfare, reduce armaments, and establish a rudimentary form of collective security
Akbar	اكبر	The Most Great Peace before 20th century	Akbar designated the spiritual peace that can be achieved at that age	A spiritually grounded peace among nations requiring the moral transformation of rulers and peoples but lacking the global institutional framework and world consciousness to fully sustain it.

⬇ TWENTIETH CENTURY: INFLECTION POINT ⬇

Twentieth century signalizes humanity's entry into a new stage of institutional capacity, global interdependence, and ability for collective action

Term	Arabic	Meaning	Character	Institutional Expression
Akbar	اكبر	The Lesser Peace after 20th century	After 20th century; humanity enters a new stage of institutional capacity	Advanced international organization: world legislature, international executive, and supreme tribunal, collective security with disarmament
Azam	اعظم	The Most Great Peace after 20th Century	Spiritual and physical unity of humankind; the consummation of all processes of unity under one universal order.	A world commonwealth animated by both institutional structure and transformed human consciousness, in which world citizenship is a lived reality for every inhabitant of the earth.

Twentieth Century: Establishing Consciousness of World Citizenship

In *The Seven Candles of Unity*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá links the establishment of the unity of nations to the twentieth century.

"The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland."

It is important to note the difference between a nation and a state. A state may exist as a political entity without embodying a common national consciousness, while a nation implies, in addition to having a political entity, a deeper sense of collective national identity. The former Yugoslavia illustrates the difference: it functioned as a political entity, not as a nation, and its breakup revealed that a unified national consciousness had not taken root among its constituent peoples.

Shoghi Effendi distinguished unity in the political realm from unity of nations in the following statement.

“With reference to your question concerning 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to 'unity in the political realm': this unity should be clearly distinguished from the 'unity of nations'. The first is a unity which politically independent and sovereign states achieve among themselves; while the second is one which is brought about between nations , the difference between a state and a nation being that the former, as you know, is a political entity without necessarily being homogeneous in race, whereas the second implies national as well as political homogeneity."

The image of the Earth from space stands as an emblem of one of the twentieth century's most consequential developments: the emergence of an awareness that humanity inhabits a single planet with a common terrestrial home. Yet the recognition of physical coexistence on one earth is not equivalent to the fuller consciousness in which narrower loyalties yield to a wider allegiance to humankind. With the rise of the internet at the close of the century, the material conditions for such consciousness expanded on an unprecedented scale. The twentieth century may therefore be understood as the period in which global consciousness was established, though not yet fully realized in social and political life.

Twentieth Century: Synchronization of World-Shaping Trends

Shoghi Effendi said the following about the synchronization process for the construction of buildings on Mount Carmel, the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and the evolution of the Bahá'í National and local institutions.

"This vast and irresistible process, unexampled in the spiritual history of mankind, and which will synchronize with two no less significant developments—the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions—the one outside and the other within the Bahá'í world—will attain its final consummation, in the Golden Age of the Faith."

A major phase of Arc was completed at the end of the twentieth century, and the Universal House of Justice said the following in Ridvan 2000.

"The perspective from these two frames of time prompts us to reflect on a vision of world-shaping trends that have synchronized, and to do so in the context of the insight so graphically projected by Shoghi Effendi."

One way to understand this is to view synchronization not as the synchronization of particular events but as the gradual convergence of broader historical processes. Distinct developments may proceed on separate tracks for a time, yet through sustained interaction, their major movements increasingly align. The analogy of two pendulums is instructive: their motions differ when swinging independently, but once connected through a shared base that allows feedback between them, they gradually move toward a common rhythm.

Applied here, the processes of the Lesser Peace, the construction of the edifices on Mount Carmel, and the development of Bahá'í institutions can be understood as entering precisely such a phase. The close of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a period in which these interconnected processes started to align more closely, not through isolated simultaneities but through an emerging pattern of mutual interaction and increasing synchronization that extends into the future.

Beyond Representation: Women as a Structural Precondition of International Peace

Among the defining achievements of the twentieth century was the emergence of women's emancipation as a global political reality. The conditions 'Abdu'l-Bahá identified as prerequisites for simultaneous disarmament and universal collective security are the same conditions that made women's full institutional participation possible for the first time in history. These developments are structurally related. A peace order capable of replacing armed sovereign competition with binding arbitration requires precisely the motivational foundations that the systematic exclusion of women from governance had historically suppressed.

The six-century tradition of peace proposals shares one consistent structural absence: women. From Pierre Dubois through Grotius, Kant, and the architects of the League of Nations, the design of international institutions was conducted within a framework that excluded women entirely. This is not merely a historical injustice. It is a design flaw of the first order, reflecting in the tradition's persistent failures a constitutive gap in its theory of human motivation, solidarity, and conflict resolution. The Bahá'í writings go considerably further than the contemporary IR literature, which tends to frame women's participation as a matter of equity rather than a structural precondition of the system's viability.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that

"As woman advances toward the degree of man in power and privilege, with the right of vote and control in human government, most assuredly war will cease,"

and identifies international arbitration specifically as the domain in which women's contributions will be most decisive, describing women as *"the greatest factors in establishing universal peace and international arbitration."* He further explains why no earlier era could have fully activated this resource: simultaneous disarmament requires a world sufficiently interconnected that no sovereign actor can defect without bearing the combined response of all others, the same condition that makes women's full institutional participation possible. Women's emancipation and the institutional architecture of the Lesser Peace are not parallel developments but mutually dependent ones.

Women in International Arbitration and Peace Settlement

Arbitration requires more than a legal forum. It depends on legitimacy, social trust, and the capacity to define the real content of injury beyond the narrow claims of armed elites. Women help supply precisely these conditions. Their participation increases the probability that a peace agreement will last at least two years by 20 percent and at least fifteen years by 35 percent, and it changes the process itself, broadening deliberation and ensuring settlements address displacement, accountability, and family livelihood, the issues on which implementation depends.

The historical record is instructive. In Guatemala, women's organizations ensured the 1996 agreement addressed Indigenous discrimination and gender equality. In Northern Ireland, women secured inclusion of victims' rights and integrated education in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Conversely, women's absence from the 1994 Angolan negotiations left displacement, sexual violence, and social services unaddressed, a gap that contributed directly to the agreement's failure and Angola's return to conflict. The Lesser Peace cannot be fully consolidated while half of humanity remains structurally underrepresented in the processes by which disputes are arbitrated and settled. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's identification of three non-forcible instruments of collective security, financial isolation, logistical

denial, and the requirement of transparent justification, further reflects a conception of collective security precisely suited to a governance system from which women are no longer excluded.

Women in Preventive Diplomacy and the Mitigation of Root Causes

Research consistently demonstrates that states with lower levels of gender inequality are less likely to resort to force, and that violence against women is a leading indicator of a society's broader disposition toward coercive resolution of disputes. Women's full participation is therefore not simply a remedy after conflict erupts but part of a wider restructuring of public life away from domination and toward reciprocity and accountability.

In preventive diplomacy specifically, women contribute in three distinct ways. They have a deeper local reach and can detect early warning signs before they appear in formal diplomatic channels. They work across community lines in education, health, and welfare, giving them access to bridge-building networks that can lower tensions before they escalate into militarized conflict. And their participation shifts preventive diplomacy from elite crisis bargaining toward social resilience, encompassing local mediation and community dispute resolution. Women do not merely join preventive diplomacy; they enlarge its field of vision.

Women, Education, and the Moral Foundations of Peace

The Bahá'í writings identify education as the deepest site of women's contribution to lasting peace. Mothers are the first educators of children, and the moral formation of the next generation passes primarily through their hands. Women educated in the principles of human oneness and the value of arbitration over violence transmit those principles into the fabric of society at its most formative level. The non-forcible instruments of collective security all depend on a moral environment in which refusal of unjust war is socially thinkable and publicly supported, an environment cultivated over generations

through education. A peace order that excludes women from education and public life deprives itself not only of their direct institutional contributions but of the generational moral formation on which the entire architecture of collective security ultimately depends. Peace becomes more durable when women are not peripheral to its institutions, but central to their design, legitimacy, and operation.

Conclusion

This article asked whether Bahá'u'lláh's peace program represents a refinement of the inherited tradition of peace proposals or a categorical departure from it. The analysis yields a clear answer: the departure is categorical, and it operates at several levels simultaneously.

Across six centuries, the inherited tradition displayed considerable institutional ingenuity, yet it repeatedly encountered the same structural weaknesses: an inadequate foundation of reciprocal obligation, weak enforcement, defection under crisis, persistent insecurity over armaments, and the absence of a universal moral basis for collective action. These were not merely failures of design or will. They arose from a system that sought to manage sovereign rivalry without transforming the conditions that sustained it. From Pierre Dubois to the League of Nations, the result was institutional refinement rather than structural change.

The Bahá'í Peace Program addresses this failure through three major departures. First, it offers a structural explanation for why solidarity repeatedly failed: earlier proposals rested on partial forms of belonging, race, nation, language, religion, and political affiliation, each binding a limited circle while excluding others. Such partial unities could not provide the universal basis peace requires. Second, it is developmental: it identifies the main processes of unity and places them within a single framework in which their maturation is interdependent and their convergence necessary for enduring peace. Third, it is architectural: the Lesser Peace establishes the institutional order of enforceable law, impartial arbitration, collective security, and disarmament within which these deeper unities can develop, while the Most Great Peace signifies their moral and spiritual consummation, a condition institutions can enable but cannot alone produce.

The twentieth century occupies a distinctive place in this framework, having produced the material, communicative, and institutional conditions that made the Lesser Peace practically conceivable for the first time, and that made women's full participation in the architecture of peace possible on a genuinely global scale. The obstacle that remains is not capacity but will. What the history of peace proposals ultimately reveals is that peace has failed less from a shortage of mechanisms than from a deficit of the conditions those mechanisms require to function. A peace built on partial loyalties will fracture under strain. Only a unity grounded in the oneness of humankind can sustain a durable world.

What distinguishes the Bahá'í Peace Program from all that preceded it is precisely this breadth: its engagement with the full spectrum of human identities, their deliberate arrangement within a unified whole, the provision of a universal institutional framework, and the explicit articulation of the moral and spiritual prerequisites peace demands. Bahá'u'lláh's own words offer the most direct expression of this:

"O ye that dwell on earth! The distinguishing feature that marketh the pre-eminent character of this Supreme Revelation consisteth in that We have, on the one hand, blotted out from the pages of God's holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and mischief amongst the children of men, and have, on the other, laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity."

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