

A friend asked Chat GTP to make a summary of my book *The Culture of Peace - Utopia or an Alternative Security Policy?* (Orkana, 2023, 415 pages) - see hereunder. The book is currently available only in Norwegian. I hope that it will soon be published in English too. In the meantime, enjoy reading the summary and consider spreading the word, if you are in agreement.

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English summary of *The Culture of Peace: Utopia or an Alternative Security Policy?*

In *Fredskultur – Utopi eller sikkerhetspolitisk alternativ?* (2023), Norwegian peace activist and former UNESCO director Ingeborg Breines asks a fundamental question: **Is a culture of peace merely an idealistic utopia, or can it provide a genuine alternative to military-based security policy?**

Her answer is essentially that a culture of peace is both **possible and necessary**, but that achieving it requires a profound change in how societies understand security. Instead of defining security primarily through military strength, deterrence and alliances, Breines argues for **human security**, international cooperation, justice, sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, education and non-violent conflict resolution.

The central argument

Breines starts from the observation that most people want peace, yet governments continue to devote enormous resources to preparing for war. She challenges the traditional assumption that accumulating weapons makes societies safer. In her view, many of the most serious threats facing humanity—climate change, environmental destruction, inequality, hunger, pandemics and nuclear weapons—cannot be solved by military means.

Her alternative is a **culture of peace**, a concept developed within UNESCO and subsequently adopted by the United Nations. It involves replacing a culture based on violence, confrontation and enemy images with one based on dialogue, cooperation, non-violence and respect for human dignity.

The book is strongly informed by Breines's own career in UNESCO and the international peace movement. She explicitly presents it not as a conventional academic study but as a mixture of personal experience, political reflection, historical material and proposals for action.

Part I — How the culture-of-peace idea developed

The first part traces the intellectual and institutional history of the idea of peace, from utopian thinking and early attempts at international cooperation through the League of Nations, the UN and especially UNESCO.

Breines gives particular importance to the period following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The end of the Cold War appeared to offer a historic opportunity: military expenditure declined, the confrontation between East and West diminished, and a "peace dividend" seemed possible. Resources previously devoted to military competition might instead be directed toward human welfare and development.

UNESCO developed the concept of a **Culture of Peace**, culminating in the UN's International Year for the Culture of Peace in 2000 and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001–2010. More than 75 million people signed UNESCO's Manifesto for a Culture of Peace.

Breines sees **9/11 as a major historical turning point**. The attacks and the subsequent "War on Terror" shifted international politics away from the emerging culture-of-peace agenda and back toward militarisation, confrontation and military intervention.

Part II — What actually threatens peace and security?

The second part asks what constitutes a genuine security threat in the modern world.

Breines discusses militarisation, war, terrorism, sanctions, hybrid warfare, NATO, relations with Russia and the United States, nuclear weapons, inequality and structural violence, as well as the environmental and climate crises.

A major theme is her rejection of the assumption that **military defence equals security**.

She is sharply critical of NATO and of Norway's close alignment with US and NATO security policy. She argues that military alliances and deterrence can themselves generate insecurity by creating enemy images, arms races and reciprocal fear.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 therefore poses an especially difficult challenge to her thesis. Breines unequivocally describes the war as horrifying, but argues that the response should not simply be more armament. She asks whether the experience of Ukraine should instead reinforce the conclusion that war itself must ultimately be delegitimised as a means of resolving political conflicts.

This is one of the book's most controversial arguments. Breines believes that diplomacy and dialogue—not deterrence—should ultimately constitute humanity's "life insurance." Her position is explicitly pacifist and highly sceptical of the proposition that peace can be created through superior military power.

Nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons occupy an important place in her critique. She examines nuclear deterrence, first-use doctrines, arms-control agreements, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, Norway's participation in NATO nuclear strategy, depleted uranium and the environmental and health effects associated with nuclear weapons.

For Breines, nuclear deterrence demonstrates the fundamental contradiction in conventional security thinking: humanity seeks security by maintaining weapons capable of destroying humanity.

Part III — What would an alternative actually look like?

The third and largest part moves from criticism to proposed alternatives. Breines structures much of it around the **eight areas of action of the UN Culture of Peace programme**:

1. **Promote a culture of peace through education.** Education should teach peaceful conflict resolution, global citizenship, non-violence and respect for others rather than reproducing militarised ways of thinking.
2. **Promote sustainable economic and social development.** Peace requires economic justice, ecological sustainability, food security and reduced inequality. Breines discusses ecological economics, basic income, progressive taxation and even conversion of military industries toward socially useful production.
3. **Promote respect for human rights.** International law, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and the UN system should replace force as the principal means of regulating international relations.
4. **Ensure equality between women and men.** Feminism is central to Breines's conception of peace. She connects patriarchy, militarism and traditional ideas of masculinity and argues for women's greater participation in peace and security policy.
5. **Foster democratic participation.** Strong democracy, local participation and political accountability are regarded as essential foundations for peaceful societies.
6. **Promote understanding, tolerance and solidarity.** Racism, humiliation, religious intolerance and enemy images contribute to conflict; empathy and intercultural understanding counteract them.
7. **Promote the free flow of information and knowledge.** Breines discusses propaganda, misinformation, freedom of expression, peace journalism and, importantly, the distinction between the **language of war and the language of peace**.
8. **Promote international peace and security through peaceful means.** This final area brings the argument together through disarmament, preventive diplomacy, strengthening the UN, common security, non-violence, pacifism, conscientious objection, peace research and the international peace movement.

A different definition of security

Perhaps the book's most important conceptual move is to ask:

What actually makes people secure?

Breines argues that security should not primarily mean defending national territory against another state. It should mean protecting people from the threats that actually endanger their lives.

She therefore advocates a more holistic **human-security paradigm** based on the interconnected UN principles of **peace, development and human rights**. She argues that there can be no sustainable peace without development, no development without peace, and neither without respect for human rights.

This also connects peace policy to environmental policy. Climate change, ecological degradation, inequality and military expenditure are not separate subjects in Breines's analysis: they are parts of the same security problem.

The book's underlying political philosophy

At a deeper level, the book is an argument for a **paradigm shift from a culture of war to a culture of peace**.

Breines does not simply propose better diplomacy while retaining the existing military system. She questions the foundations of that system itself. Her reasoning can be reduced to a chain:

fear → enemy images → militarisation → arms races → greater insecurity

She proposes replacing it with:

understanding → dialogue → cooperation → justice → common security → peace

That requires changes not only in foreign policy but also in education, economics, gender relations, environmental policy, democracy, journalism and individual attitudes.

Her approach is consciously idealistic. She acknowledges the tension between "**the world as it is**" and "**the world as we would like it to be**", but argues that precisely in periods of crisis it is essential not to abandon the vision of the desired future.

In one paragraph

Breines's central thesis is that humanity has confused military strength with security. Modern threats such as climate change, inequality, pandemics and nuclear annihilation cannot be defeated militarily, while arms races and enemy images may themselves increase insecurity. Drawing heavily on her experience at UNESCO, she proposes the UN's Culture of Peace as an alternative framework: education for peace, sustainable and equitable development, human rights, gender equality, democracy, tolerance, free information, diplomacy, international law, non-violence and disarmament. The book is therefore not merely an argument against war; it is an attempt to redefine security itself—from protecting states through military power to protecting human beings and the planet through cooperation.

The book's own structure reinforces this progression: **Part I explains where the culture-of-peace project came from; Part II diagnoses what Breines considers the real threats to contemporary security; Part III asks how a non-militarised alternative could actually be put into practice.**

This interpretation is also consistent with Breines's own English-language description of the book, in which she explicitly asks whether UNESCO's Culture of Peace programme can serve as a blueprint for a feminist, non-violent security policy.