

Global Futures Forum and People's Pact for the Future

Peace and Security theme

Promoting Peace through International Relations

[On Line](#)

Gray Southon

Proposal: Nations advance their peace, security and prosperity agendas through enhancing international relations.

Background: Nations form a complex network of relationships, positive and negative, which fundamentally affect the way that they look out onto the world, and the political forces, which influence how they act in relations to threats and how they engage with global initiatives and institutions, especially the UN. International cooperation is fundamental to resolving our multitude of common security threats.

Currently our international legal system and multilateral institutions are under stress because many nations and peoples feel threatened by other nations. There is reducing sense of common interest, and an increasing belief that the best security is through military power. Under these circumstances, Initiatives that threaten their sense of security will be strongly resisted. At the same time a dangerous, selective sense of collective security is arising, which is directed against other nations, or groups of nations. This poses the threat of armed alliances in mutual fear and antagonism, arms races, and loss of many constructive relationships.

That is not the whole story. There is still a rich and complex network of relations between countries, involving not only government, but also traders, academics, a wide range of NGOs, international corporations, travellers and shared communities of many different types, that link nations, provide many of the essential services that we enjoy, and contribute to mutual understanding and the ability to cooperate. It is these relationships that offer the framework for building trust and the ability to build and engage effectively with multilateral systems, and institutions.

Now these relationships can change, often quite rapidly. For instance, Western Europe after WWII, saw a major change in attitudes leading to the creation of the EU in which centuries old enemies became partners in a massive collective endeavour. Alternatively, relationships can degrade by invoking a sense of fear in the unknown, and exploiting the political advantages of having an enemy to invoke social cohesion and allegiance.

The benefits of broad-based quality international relations in addressing our common security issues, and creating wealth: economic, cultural and environmentally, is so great, that our greatest threat is in the loss of these relationships.

Proposal: We promote a better understanding of the importance of international relationships, their current status, where there are major concerns. We also promote techniques of enhancing relationships by promoting trust, understanding and diversity of relationships. We also recognise the importance of networks of relationships and the interactions between them. Effective relationships need to be considered as the basis of common security and multilateralism.

Action: Principles of enhancing international relations be incorporated into all Common Security and national foreign affairs programs.

[More detail can be found here](#)

Elaboration

This focus on international relationships relates directly to the definition of peace, and engages peaceful relations at all levels, particularly across nations.

Peace relates to the non-violent resolution of conflicts and the maintenance of harmonious relationships at inter-personal, community, national and international levels.

And Common Security definition:

Common security: *Prevention of war and maintenance of peaceful relations between countries through the use of conflict resolution mechanisms and international law. Based on the notion that one's national security cannot be sustainably maintained by undermining the security of other nations (including ones adversaries) but only by ensuring that all nations are secure.*
(But why does one have adversaries if everyone is working cooperatively?)

The nature of International Relations as such, more specifically, how nations relate to each other, has an enormous impact on international affairs. It is the foundation for cooperation, but involves much broader concepts. While politicians and diplomats play important roles, so do business, academics, many varieties of NGOs, travellers and migrant communities.

Some nations are naturally close to each other, perhaps with a common culture, language, a history of working together, shared communities and exchanges through trade, education, academia, civil society and many other activities. These countries work together well and would never dream of attacking each other. Cooperation can come easily. Other relationships tend to be more antagonistic, perhaps for many reasons, often out of ignorance. If things get difficult, such countries may be more likely to put up defences, militarily if necessary.

Now these relationships can change, sometimes quite rapidly. For instance, Western Europe, after WWII, saw a major change in attitudes from the long history of animosities, leading to the creation of the EU in which centuries old enemies became partners in a massive collective endeavour. Much was gained from this, despite its problems. This achievement was created through many trust-building sharing, and cooperative activities from which we could learn much. There are many other instances of enemies becoming friends.

Things can go the other way as well. Having an enemy can be advantageous for politicians or military who want to strengthen their positions, and the threat can bring communities together more cohesively. Militarisation is often used to symbolise strength and security. Unfortunately it often results in reactive rearmament, arms races, mutual fear and alienation. The costs, of course, are enormous, bringing the threat of conflict closer and makes meaningful cooperation very difficult.

So how nations relate to each other is very important. One could say that if you want a peaceful world you need to be able to work constructively with all the nations in it – as they are, not as you would like them to be. That can be challenging, as nations can have very different values, and may, for instance, be abusing their people and threatening other nations. It is common with such countries to “call them out”, or impose sanctions which may be morally satisfying, but does it help? Could building relationships and gaining better understanding not be a better approach to having influence? A difficult challenge, but an alienated nation is a security challenge on many counts. An in-depth understanding of a country is a far better basis for making contributions.

Take my country, New Zealand. We have prided ourselves in not having any enemies. However, we do have very close relations with a country which is the most militaristic, aggressive and invasive country in the world, it has some very bad social conditions and its government structure is close to crisis. It is called the United States of America. We also have good relations with China, based on a long mutual experience, but which has other challenges. We used to have relations with North Korea (DPRK), but withdrew some time ago and now concentrate on sanctions. That was a tragedy. Marginalised nations can be very dangerous. Was that the problem with Russia? Could we use all

our diverse relationships to get alongside these difficult countries, and develop the type of understanding and connections that can enable us to make a constructive contribution?

What do such relationships mean? Our indigenous New Zealanders contribute to our understanding through a number of values such as:

- ***manaaki*** – kindness or the reciprocity of goodwill;
- ***whanaunga*** – our connectedness or shared sense of humanity;
- ***mahi tahi and kotahitanga*** – collective benefits and shared aspiration; and,
- ***kaitiaki*** – protectors and stewards of our intergenerational wellbeing.

So international cooperation and common security is the way to the future, and we need to ensure that we build the network of constructive relations on which such activity can thrive. We also need to act decisively (and constructively) against those who promote international animosities. We have quite enough common challenges to address without having to contend with military aggression.