

TRUST-BUILDING BETWEEN ENEMIES IN THE NUCLEAR AGE
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1. The concept of trust is probably the weakest one developed in the whole IR literature, yet trust is so central to our lives.

I should begin by saying that the ideas in this paper draw heavily on the arguments in the forthcoming book that Ken Booth and I have written called *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*.

Mutual trust is key to those processes of cooperation and community building that can mitigate and transcend the dynamics of security competition between states. I am struck following the news how often state leaders and diplomats invoke the language of trust. We all think we know what it is, but when one tries to unpack it, it reveals itself as being very elusive. So it is a most important idea but at the same time it is one of the most problematic (and ignored) of all concepts in the academic study of International Relations.

It has been ignored for a simple reason: the domination of the realist view that, in John Mearsheimer's words, there is 'little room for trust among states' (2001). This view argues that trust is in short supply in world politics, but perhaps more tellingly, that to trust can actually be dangerous. If you trust too readily, they argue, you risk being taken advantage of through exposing yourself to betrayal. The outcome may be disastrous, such as that brought about by Chamberlain by risking some trust in the untrustworthy Hitler.

Realists argue that because we can never have 100% certainty about the intentions of others, we have to assume the worst. This is what philosophers call the 'other minds problem'. We are always faced with dilemmas of interpretation about the motives and intentions of others, and this existential condition of uncertainty under which we all live our lives, is most difficult at the international level where we have no one above the state to protect us – the UN is not a World Government, though it might be one in waiting.

And even if we are confident about the current motives and intentions of a government, what assurances can we have that this will continue in the future. It is these kinds of issues that lie at the heart of China's and Russia's suspicion of US plans to build a missile shield.

Even if Beijing and Moscow can accept the Bush Administration's protestations of defensive intent, what guarantee can they have that future US leaders might act differently. It may be a shield, but as we all know, shields combined with swords can be very effective weapons. The problem here is what Ken Booth and I call 'ambiguous symbolism'; there is a fundamental ambiguity about all weapon systems as to whether they are to be used for offensive or defensive purposes. This was well-summed up by the Spanish Ambassador, Salvador de Madariaga, when he said at the League of Nations World Disarmament Conference, 'A weapon system is either offensive or defensive according to which end of it you are looking at.'

The psychological dynamics generated as a consequence of uncertainty about the motives and intentions of others were never put better than by the British Historian Herbert Butterfield.

Writing in 1951, he wrote that diplomats 'may vividly feel the terrible fear that [they] have of the other party, but [they] cannot enter into the [others] counter-fear, or even understand why [they] should be particularly nervous'. He went on to say that it is 'never possible for you to realise or remember properly that since he cannot see the inside of your mind, he can never have the same assurance of your intentions that you have'.

The fundamental problem, then, is that governments find it very difficult to realise that what they see as defensive, others might reasonably perceive as offensive. Benign self-images are extremely dangerous in world politics, and overcoming them is critical to building trust.

The realists are right that uncertainty cannot be eliminated because there is no escape from the other minds problem. But they are fundamentally wrong to think that this means we cannot have trust. If we had certainty about the motives and intentions of others, we would not need trust. We need trust because our condition is one of existential uncertainty, and what is more, trust is potentially out there – and if we can achieve this, we can transcend the negative dynamics of security competition.

2. PROPERTIES OF TRUST

In Chapter Nine of *The Security Dilemma*, Ken Booth and I argue that '*Trusting relationships...are made possible by the following linked pairs of properties: a leap in the dark/uncertainty, empathy/bonding, dependence/vulnerability, and integrity/reliability. For trust to become*

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embedded between political units, it is necessary for positive relationships between leaderships to be replicated at the inter-societal level, and vice-versa, through a mutual learning process.

Leap in the dark/uncertainty

Trust begins in a risky shift of position by a person or group, the first act seeking to express and bring about a relationship of trust. I was struck reading the interviews with Jo and Patrick how much their own journey of trust and reconciliation began with such a 'leap in the dark'.

Orthodox thinking about statecraft traditionally honours playing it 'safe', yet international history furnishes us with a set of significant cases in which leaders chose (with positive outcomes) to take a political 'leap in the dark'. The actual phrase comes from Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister, in relation to the launching of the ECSC, the first major act of European integration.

What kinds of 'leaps in the dark' would build trust today between nuclear enemies? How would the region respond to a US President deciding to fly to Tehran, shaking hands with the Iranian President, and publicly declaring an end to enmity between the two countries? Unthinkable? Almost

Yet are such possibilities any more unthinkable than a suggestion in 1983 that a viscerally anti-communist US President, who had labelled the Soviet Union 'the evil empire' and had pushed up US defence spending to record levels would, within a few years, have become a trusting partner with his Soviet counterpart in starting to dismantle the superpower military confrontation and ending the Cold War?

Leap sometimes backfire and we should not underestimate the risks involved here. Think of Sadat – he went to Jerusalem and ended up being assassinated. Or, Rabin with Oslo.

Empathy/bonding

Empathy was defined by Lauren G. Wispe in 1968 as the 'self-conscious effort to share and accurately comprehend the presumed consciousness of another person, including his thoughts, feelings...[and] perceptions...as well as their causes'.

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I talked earlier about the failure of people to put themselves in the shoes of the other, and we have seen in a number of discussions recently, how policy-makers often fail to appreciate the fears and insecurities of others, and crucially the role that their own actions play in creating that fear.

A capacity to enter into the counter-fear of others, whilst remembering that fear does not always do all the work and that ambition is sometimes in play, should be part of the training of all of us, but especially diplomats.

This is what Gorbachev and his advisors were able to do. The most dramatic example of this was the announcement in Dec 1988 that the Soviet Union would cut those conventional forces which most worried NATO. Here, Gorbachev appreciated that others do not always see you as you see yourself, and he made a dramatic move to signal reassurance and not provocation.

The challenge, then, is for policymakers in today's nuclear confrontations to show a similar intention and capacity to enter into the counter-fear of others.

The security dilemma that faces governments with peaceful intent is whether to risk a trust-building move in a world where there can be no guarantees about the current and future intentions of others.

Trust is easier when there is a *margin of safety*, but trust only exists in conditions of uncertainty. Even if actors can enter into the counter-fear of others, they might be so fearful that acting on this will place them in a vulnerable position should their trust prove misplaced, that they feel unable to take such risky leaps of trust.

Even if actors can show empathy, the challenge is to turn this into *bonding*. The latter occurs when a political relationship is characterised by positive feelings, and the forging of a new collective identity. Such bonding is invariably a difficult and lengthy process, especially if there is an enmity between the political units involved going back generations.

Dependence/vulnerability

The moral philosopher Annette Baier has commented, 'Trust is acceptance of vulnerability to harm that others could inflict, but which we judge that they will not in fact inflict'. The big question that arises from the vulnerability issue for students of International Relations relates to the '*margin of safety*' that decision-makers require before they will initiate trust-building moves.

To trust to any degree, then, is always to risk betrayal. Presidents Alfonsín and Sarney of Argentina and Brazil, respectively, would have been unusually trusting for state leaders had they not borne this consideration in mind when they met in 1985 to pledge that their nuclear programmes were solely for peaceful purposes.

Nonetheless, they pressed on without guarantees that the other party was not feigning trustworthiness as a cover to pursue a weapons programme. Had each sought 100% certainty about the intentions of the other, this fascinating episode in nuclear trust-building would have faltered, since it has to be remembered that all civilian nuclear programmes have military potential because of the dual-use character of the technology.

This is what lies at the heart of the crisis over Iran's nuclear ambitions. The key players shaping policy in Washington are determined that Iran should not master the technology of uranium enrichment, because they are not persuaded that the IAEA will be able to monitor Iran's nuclear activities to provide a guarantee that it is not developing nuclear weapons. But no verification system can do that, and what is at stake here is the question of whether Tehran can be trusted with full control over the nuclear fuel-cycle.

On the one hand, Mohamed El-Baradei, the Director of the IAEA, claims that the existing safeguards system is up to the task of verifying that Iran is acting in compliance with its IAEA obligations, but on the other hand, the Bush Administration is applying to Tehran what Ole Holsti called an 'inherent bad faith model' based on the White House's ideological fundamentalism. According to the latter, the internal nature of the Islamic Republic determines that Tehran poses a fundamental threat to Western interests that can only be met by resolve, and ultimately force.

Ultimately, breaking down enemy images between states is no different to dissolving them between individuals and groups. And it requires what Gorbachev called 'the human factor' when reflecting on how he and Reagan had escaped the Cold War mindsets that guided their predecessors.

Again, I would like to draw on Jo and Patrick's amazing emotional journey, because both emphasise how important it was for them to get beyond the 'enemy image' by realising that the other was human. Jo talked about putting 'a human face on the conflict' and seeing 'the humanity in my enemy'. This is the 'human factor' at work in trust-building.

Integrity/reliability

While trust can never escape uncertainty, it nevertheless requires confidence in the attitudes and behaviour of another party such that betrayal is seen as improbable. This is related to the property of integrity, which implies that partners have confidence that the other will do what is right. This is what Reagan and Gorbachev established through their meetings in the mid-late 1980s, and it emphasises the importance of what Gorbachev later called ‘the human factor’. Trust will remain elusive if we fail to grasp its emotional basis.

3 Conclusion and Strengths of this approach

Diplomats and policy-makers need to understand how their adversary might be acting out of fear (remembering that ambition is sometimes in play), including crucially, the role that their own actions may play in provoking that fear. This was the challenge thrown down by Butterfield, and it is what guides the DDMI’s new project on ‘**Trust-Building in Nuclear Worlds**’.

Our workshop last May in Aber was the first in a series aimed at exploring with practitioners the possibilities of exercising empathy of this kind, and it remains to be seen whether key decision-makers are prepared in the future to make ‘leaps in the dark’. These might be furnished with a safety net like Gorbachev’s, but the real challenge is taking such leaps when the *margin of safety* is limited, and here there is a need for creative thinking. But when we consider the risks and costs of taking leaps of trust which might prove misplaced, we need to remember that so-called ‘playing it safe’ – worst-case thinking etc – brings with it its own set of risks and dangers. There is no escape from risk and uncertainty in our world, and whilst this is so, a concept like trust will remain both elusive in conception, but also critical to our global future.