

TRUST-BUILDING IN NUCLEAR WORLDS

Paper presented at an Oxford Research Group consultation on the implications of Trident replacement for regional and global security, Charney Manor, 13-15 March 2007. The material in this paper draws heavily from ideas in Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (forthcoming Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Research Question

Is it possible to build trust between states in a world of nuclear knowledge to such a degree that nuclear weapons – and the dangers they pose to international security – can be abolished. If not, what trust building mechanisms and techniques can be developed that will serve to progressively marginalise the role and legitimacy of nuclear weapons in world politics?.

1. The concept of trust is probably the weakest one developed in the whole IR literature, yet trust is so central to our lives.

Mutual trust is a key to those processes of cooperation and community building that can mitigate and transcend the dynamics of security competition. I have been struck over the last couple of days how many times we have invoked the language of trust. We 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 it is 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. 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. The realists are right; uncertainty cannot be eliminated because there is no escape from what philosophers call the other minds problem. But what can be transcended are the negative dynamics of security competition. Before saying a word about the properties of trust, let me make one other point related to the issue of current thinking on trust. The concept of trust has been neglected in the field of International Relations, but there is a rich literature on trust in other fields (notably Sociology, Psychology and Political Philosophy). However, this work has not explicitly focused on the possibilities of trust-building at the global level. The intellectual challenge for the discipline of International Relations is to carry forward preliminary theorising about trust into the relationships between the most powerful states, and this is what we seek to do in the *Trust-Building in Nuclear Worlds* project.

2. Properties of Trust

In Chapter Nine of *The Security Dilemma*, Ken Booth and I define trust as existing

When two actors, based on the mutual interpretation of each other's attitudes and behaviour, believe that the other (now and in the future) can be relied upon to desist from acting in ways that will be injurious to their interests and values. This minimalist conception of trust can be contrasted with a maximalist one where actors mutually attempt to promote each other's interests and values, including in circumstances that cannot be observed. Trusting relationships of either kind 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 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 (Booth and Wheeler 2007: Chapter Nine).

Leap in the dark/uncertainty

We heard yesterday about 'taking risks for trust' and 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. 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'. This 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. Given what we have been discussing these past two days, what kinds of 'leaps in the dark' would build trust? How would the region respond to a US President deciding to fly to Tehran, shake hands with the Iranian President, and publicly declare 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?

Empathy/bonding

Empathy is a potentially significant but under theorised concept in foreign policy analysis. It 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' (see Wispe 1968). Our speaker on the first evening talked about the failure of people to put themselves in the shoes of the other, and we have seen in a number of discussions, how policymakers 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 December 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, and the Trust-Building work at Aberystwyth aims to contribute to this at both the theoretical and policymaking levels.

Bonding occurs when actors translate a level of empathy and sympathy into a political relationship 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

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 decisionmakers require before they will initiate trust-building moves. In this regard, whilst Gorbachev represents a very good example of what Booth and I call *security dilemma sensibility*, it is worth remembering that the strategic nuclear balance ensured that none of the Soviet Union's conciliatory moves placed it in a position where it could be exploited militarily by the United States. But this does not diminish the significance of what he did, for others could have carried on with business as usual. 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 as Frank reminded us, all civilian nuclear programmes have military potential because of the dual-use character of the technology. What is more, risks continued to be accepted despite suspicions on the part of some elements in both governments that the other might be secretly developing weapons. The evidence suggests that the key figures in Argentina and Brazil were able to accept a degree of vulnerability through the mutual exercise of security dilemma sensibility. Such sophistication was reflected, for example, by the Argentinean Minister for Foreign Affairs, in his opening address to the 1995 NPT Conference. He said, 'it is in the regional context that senseless arms competition between neighbours feeds on itself'. These were the words of a diplomat who understood the dangers of a nuclear spiral. As increasing trust became the context in which Brazil and Argentina interacted, Julio C. Carasales, a former Argentinian Ambassador, and Chief Delegate to the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, was able to reflect in 1999 that their relationship 'did not call for reciprocal control measures, bilateral safeguards, or inspections in the two countries. Each was expected to place its trust in the other's good faith'. Here we have a model of historic regional rivals moving from potential nuclear confrontation to what Andrew Hurrell in the mid-1990s called a 'loosely knit security community. What characterises a security community is that the threat or use of force is unthinkable as an instrument of policy.

And positive relationships between leaders spilled over into the inter-societal level. The TBNW project plans to investigate this case in depth and explore whether there are any lessons for trust-building in Northeast Asia and the Middle East .

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 Strengths of this approach

- Key area of research where great scope for theoretical innovation and research capacity building.
- Applying the Oxford Research Group's 'process methodology' of dialogue and trust building to relations between the major powers in the nuclear field.
- Brings together academics, practitioners, and civil society NGOs
- Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary.