

ATTITUDES — PATHWAYS TO INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL STABILITY

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Abstract: Future international social stability cannot be built on “imposed balance.” Addressing the problem of the commons is a key to stability. This requires individuals and groups to study the future. Unyielding ethnic, philosophical, or religious group assertiveness is destabilizing. Inter-group competition in a finite space will create imbalance between short-term and long-term stability and obviate a sustainable trajectory for human survival.

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Pre-conditions for future International social stability have no precedent in past stability regimes:

1. There is no longer a frontier. No region can accept a large new influx of people without ensuing instability. Limitations include: space, infrastructure, and stressed ecosystems.
2. In the past, a balance of power regime sometimes offered temporary stability, based on a balance of military and economic power. In the 21st century many emerging factors preclude construction of a balance of power regime. Social and economic change occurs at differential rates. Technology and income advance rapidly in regions with highly developed educational systems and large amounts of capital. In other regions, population is growing too rapidly for investment in education, technology, and infrastructure to keep pace. Competing ethnic, social and religious ideologies foster unwillingness to stabilize the larger system. Instead, advancing the agenda of ethnic, social or religious groups supplants efforts to stabilize the whole.

realistic in an era of high technology and wireless communication.

2. CONSTITUENTS OF A NEW STABILITY

2.1 *Future Stability Requires a New Paradigm*

As noted above, three historical preconditions for international stability no longer prevail:

1. There are no remaining “new lands” reduce population pressure.
2. Social and economic conditions are too transient to support a balance of power regime.
3. It is not possible to maintain a large, closed society such as the former Soviet Union.

To achieve stability In this new social environment a new stability paradigm must be developed.

A workable paradigm for stability will recognize that differing value fields shape attitudes and behaviors of individual societies. A value field is a set of interrelated values characterizing an individual, group, or society. Stability discussions are productive

to the extent that negotiators understand their own value fields and the value fields of other parties (Kile, 1984). Some national, ethnic, or religious groups claim inherent superiority due to claims based on history, scientific advances, cultural norms or divine revelation. If these groups attempt to impose their will beyond their own group, international stability may not be achievable.

Attempts to assert power over other groups, whether through technology, economic influence, patterns of consumption, proselyting, cultural dominance, or even through radically differing rates of population growth driven by high birth rates are experienced by adversely affected groups as power plays. Attempts to minimize the last of these forms of perceived power plays through highly disproportionate birth rates, are likely to evoke outrage because some groups claim an absolute right to unlimited births, whatever the destabilizing effects on neighbors or the environment.

In a finite environment, every form of group infringement on other groups is potentially destabilizing.

2.2 New and Potentially Destabilizing Forces

The story of the tragedy of the commons (Lloyd, 1833, as cited in Hardin, 1964) illustrates that seemingly innocent behaviors erode the value of shared property and shared understanding, destabilizing the larger system.

Doomsday scenarios have circulated for centuries. In the 21st century it is possible to envision several different destabilizing scenarios on the basis of emerging data and of documented environmental and social changes.

Among candidates for destabilizing forces:

1. Accelerating migration from less stable, overpopulated or underdeveloped areas to relatively stable areas. Many presently less stable areas were marginally stable for centuries due to high death rates. This unfortunate type of stability was maintained because population loading on the environment was held in check by a balance between birth and death rates. Disease or starvation reduced population as much as births increased population.

Introduction of advanced medical techniques and hybrid grains enabled populations to outgrow

the regional environmental capacity to support the larger population. Huge migrations to urban centers followed. Many urban complexes currently exceed 10 million inhabitants with several reaching 20 million and projections for others to reach 30 million in the early part of the 21st century. Increasingly, some of the people suffering from the deprivation of intense crowding are emigrating to other areas. Areas currently experiencing rapid inflows of population had formerly achieved some stability through falling birth rates, which are now at record low levels. These areas can support small inflows of new population, but as migration increases, crowding, environmental degradation and inability to build infrastructure will destabilize these formerly stable areas.

Differential population growth and migration, though a single reality, are perceived differently in areas with relative balance between birth and death rates than in areas where birth rates are much higher than death rates.

2. Technological levels have grown most rapidly in regions with concentrations of highly educated people. Though efforts are underway to reduce the technology gap between technologically advanced regions and other regions, the pace of development appears to favor a widening technology gap. This is particularly evident in the occasionally discontinuous behavior of technological development following scientific breakthroughs. The widening gap is further amplified by the availability of capital in developed areas. This capital fosters rapid adoption of new and promising technologies. As less developed areas begin to reach apparent parity with more developed areas, new generations of technology emerge so rapidly that gains made by the less developed areas are rapidly eroded by the new technologies. This is perceived by less developed populations as intentional technological dominance. In contrast, it is perceived by more advanced areas simply as natural progress. Different perspectives regarding analyses of a single reality result in different conclusions regarding motives.
3. Economic influence follows a pattern analogous to technological development. Nations which control capital have mechanisms which tend to

apply capital where economic gains result. Nations with less experience in managing capital are less able to apply inflows of capital appropriately. When capital is improperly applied or simply misappropriated, outside efforts at aid fail. Money has been wasted or misused in many developing areas, so aid has been re-directed in the form of loans under the assumption that loans would result in accountability. Accountability has not improved significantly in many regions and many well-intended loans have become unsustainable debt burdens for loan recipients. There have been demands for debt forgiveness. If debts are forgiven, will the former debtors be able to institute financial accountability?

Improper management of incoming funds will not necessarily be replaced by improved practices. In regions where practices are improved, results from future inflows of capital should improve. Indebtedness, even if due to debtors' lack of proper controls, is considered by debtors to be a form of bondage to capital. The same situation is perceived by creditors to follow naturally from poor financial management. Again, differing analyses of a single reality result in opposing conclusions.

4. Modern communications permit wide dissemination of content of all types. For example, when people around the world choose entertainment from other areas, these choices can be perceived by some as "foreign from efforts to impose cultural dominance." Groups whose forms of entertainment are imported by other groups contend that people are simply exercising a right to choose how they use their time and means of communication. Critics from areas where people import entertainment from other areas contend that there is something sinister about the originators of the entertainment. As with technological, economic, and population change, a single reality is evaluated differently by different groups.
5. Ideological proselyting creates tension among various groups. Political recruitment, religious outreach, economic dogma, philosophical beliefs, scientific arrogance, and other aspects of social interaction are means by which one group expands its influence or power. Each of these

approaches has engendered conflict and wars. Examples include:

- 2.2.5.1. Activities of the Comintern, which was directed from Moscow for several decades. Those activities were designed to spread communism and communist influence.
 - 2.2.5.2. Missionary activity of religious groups, primarily through sending of religious teachers to areas in which a particular religion has little or no influence. This activity is experienced by target regions as intrusiveness, especially when missionaries are funded by outside groups. Resultant tensions are amplified by historical memories attached to wars which occasionally imposed religious conformance via conquest. There are few significant religious groups which have not acquired adherents through war or other coercive means.
 - 2.2.5.3. Economic dogma is often propagated through aid projects. Successes of these projects are attributed to the superiority of the contributing system. The region which exports its economic dogma disguises subsidies and other interventions to create an illusion of unusual success. The recipient region may evaluate successes differently. Again, a single reality can elicit differing conclusions based on who seems to gain and who seems to lose.
6. Another destabilizing factor is the assumption that an ability to consume something grants a right to consume. For example, people in regions which vary from the poorest in the world to the most affluent assume that they can choose any mode of transport which they can afford, regardless of how their choice affects their regional economy or their environment. Similar conclusions influence personal, economic, and political decisions almost everywhere. In general, people or groups assign a negative evaluation (wasteful) to those who consume more goods and resources than they themselves consume. Conversely, people tend to assign a negative evaluation (lazy, unambitious) to those who consume less than they consume. Differences in perception may vary more widely than actual differences.

2.3 Shaping a new stability paradigm

A new paradigm for stability will emerge as individuals and groups agree that behaviors cited in paragraphs 1. through 6. above tend to destabilize the larger society.

As noted above, three factors are especially destabilizing:

1. Unrestrained consumption loads the natural environment beyond its carrying capacity.
2. Unrestrained population growth and resultant crowding or migration creates social tension as well as further overloading the natural environment.
3. Proselyting in the name of dogmas or beliefs ignites tensions (see 2.2.5.1. and 2.2.5.2.), triggering instability.

2.4 A Role for IFAC

IFAC engineers:

1. Understand how to control complex systems.
2. Have developed special types of logic to refine earlier control systems.
3. Understand tradeoffs involved in stabilizing a complex system.
4. Are able to incorporate value fields in models of international stability.

These IFAC-related insights and abilities can be used to support stabilizing actions.

2.5 Examining Limits to Social Stability

In recent decades, social stability has been limited in several ways:

1. Human activity has breached environmental stability limits in some areas
 - Radiation release has made some areas uninhabitable.
 - Overgrazing has reduced food production in some regions, causing outmigration.
 - Mismanagement of water resources has reduced environmental capacity and harmed the population. Note population loss near the shrinking Aral Sea.
2. Unyielding political/religious positions have destabilized relationships and caused conflict.

2.6 Preconditions for future Social Stability

There are at least two limits to international behavior:

1. War. In the 21st century any war could escalate beyond intended bounds and cause mass destruction and huge loss of human life. War can no longer be justified — if war ever was justifiable.
2. Serious environmental degradation. When environmental factors become hostile, individuals and groups seek new niches. They move or change behaviors, postponing the effects of environmental degradation. The price of degradation cannot be postponed indefinitely. Groups eventually adapt to a weakened environment.

2.7 Adapting to a Weakened Environment

Society does not solve social problems by overloading the environment. Example: Overfishing of North Atlantic cod brought cheap food for a long time, until the cod were threatened with extinction. Restrictions on fishing helped replenish the cod population. The lesson from oversfishing of cod could lead to wiser policies elsewhere, but that is uncertain. Depletion of the cod population caused serious economic dislocation in the Canadian Maritime provinces. Clearly, environmental integrity is integral to economic stability. Since economic stability is a foundation of political and social stability, environmental stability is a necessary condition for international stability.

2.8 Developing a Stability Paradigm

Historically, humanity has unintentionally limited its own growth and freedom through wars and stress on the environment. Both war and environmental stress are major constraints on society.

War and environmental stress have not been well controlled by agreements. Political compromises have not brought society beyond temporary stability because of shifting political exigencies. Finally, environmental “compromise” is not a meaningful concept because the environment has no voice with which to assert its needs.

Long term international stability cannot be built on reduction of tension through war or through offloading problems on the environment.

2.9 The Idea of a Future - New Attitudes

Long term future stability will include voluntary self-limiting behavior. The concept of self-limiting behavior is based on understanding that each society's value field includes an idea of a future. As a negotiator integrates his/her own idea of a future with the ideas of a future brought to the discussion by other parties, negotiators will recognize that finding common ground is the only basis on which to assume a future.

In light of absolutist claims made by certain ideological and religious groups, it will be necessary for each party to look within its own tradition for evidence of "live and let live" attitudes. If a major tradition lacks internal evidence from its own history to promote cooperative behavior, the outlook could be grim. However, a study of history suggests that all enduring movements and belief systems have at one time or another adopted attitudes of mutual toleration or coexistence. Thus, it is important for negotiators to look within the traditions of other interlocutors to as well as within their own traditions to nurture motivations for working toward mutual survival.

There is little evidence that past stability regimes can be reinstated. Most/all of those stability regimes were based on circumstances no longer present. In a few instances, transient stability regimes followed exhaustion from destructive wars and are not relevant to future stability.

If past behaviors patterns are repeated, the likelihood of long-term stability is low. Most past stability patterns within the international sphere resembled the "tooth and fang" law of the jungle, a behavioral model too dangerous to function as a path to international stability in the circumstances of the 21st century.

Stability depends on tacit or explicit agreements, which are actually implemented. Stability also depends on directing behaviors toward long-term stability, whether or not it is possible to provide written descriptions of these behaviors. The environmental resiliency of the shared ecosystem has been reduced to levels which leave no room for posturing while doing nothing constructive.

As noted above, environmental stress has reduced the self-healing capacity of the environment. Once a minimum threshold of environmental resilience is

crossed, decline in the environment's capacity to support human activity may be irreversible. Should this threshold be crossed, major wars with staggering loss of human life and of social organization will be unavoidable. It is possible under these circumstances that all human life could disappear. It is not likely, as some analysts suggest, that all forms of life on the planet would cease.

Also, as noted above, three behaviors pose the greatest potential for chaotic and irremediable instability:

1. Unabated population growth, particularly differential growth among mutually-hostile groups competing within a fixed geographic region or competing for the same pool of resources.
2. Continued increase in consumption of any sort which leaves un-recycled residue.
3. Absolutist religious or philosophical demands which assert superiority over other groups. These assertions may not be destabilizing if they simply point to a future intervention of God and are not intended for implementation in the present international domain.

When the public demands self-limiting behavior by its leaders - political, religious, philosophical, the public will establish a thought framework for social and international stability. Political, religious and philosophical leaders will act when pressure for action from masses of people raises the political cost of not acting.

The public can demand voluntary self-limiting behavior by its leaders only when the public demonstrates that it can limit its own behavior in the interest of a future.

2.10 Negative Sum Actions

It was once fashionable to speak of the futility of "zero-sum games." When groups clash, the result may be worse than a zero-sum outcome. A negative sum result can easily result. If antagonists compete for politico-military advantage and direct efforts toward producing weapons, and often wars, the final outcome is a negative sum result.

Negative sum results also follow from pushing the environment beyond its capacity to recover.

3. MOVING INTO A STABLE FUTURE

3.1 *Limits to Negative Sum Actions*

Two questions help to focus issues: Is there any evidence from the history of war and peace that a strong stability paradigm has been found? Is the natural environment stable in its ability to support human activity?

The answer to both questions appears to be, “No.”

To have a future is to change. In the present era, to have a future requires that all parties re-examine their own ideas and change them if they are not consistent with a peaceful future. Continuation of present behaviors could easily foreclose the idea of a future for the larger society.

Attempts to win a “victory” in a competitive international situation could possibly create a gain for one group. That gain, if any, is won at the expense of a greater loss by the losing group (a negative sum outcome). Most conflicts also damage the environment and harm third parties.

Groups overlook likely costs of “negative-sum actions” because each party tends to think, “This situation is unlike anything which ever occurred before.”

The previously noted “Problem of the Commons” describes how seemingly innocent actions, taken to provide “something extra” for one party, create negative sum results.

Negative sum actions cannot be sustained in a finite environment.

3.2 *Learning from the Future*

Hegel suggested that people do not learn from history. Assuming that Hegel was correct, future international stability will depend on our learning from the future. A credible vision of what might occur can demonstrate that cooperation is imperative for future survival.

3.3 *Education and Dialog - Steps toward Stability*

No one can be certain that education about future costs of present actions will stabilize group actions over long time periods. However, education can

influence leaders and pressure groups to modify courses of action leading to negative-sum results.

Dialog among parties competing for space and scarce aspects of the environment is essential to minimizing negative-sum actions.

Education can be offered in a spirit captured in the statement, “We will do what we need to do in the short term to reduce the likelihood of disaster in the longer term.” This approach will build stability in situations where even temporary instability might create chaos with little hope of re-establishing stability.

Pride is a major obstacle in the quest for future stability. Unrestrained national, ethnic, religious, or individual pride is a form of “death wish” which will result in an unsuccessful competition for “victory.”

Stability is not ultimately guaranteed, since rational arguments against irrational behaviors do not foreclose irrational behavior.

3.4 *Maintaining a Stable Trajectory*

Given the obstacles to long-term stability and given the reluctance of social groups to modify their goals and behaviors, a sensible path to long-term stability may be characterized by a continuing regime of short term actions designed to keep the larger system within the bounds of a stability trajectory.

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