

Remarks of Bruce McConnell
Distinguished Fellow and Board Member, the Stimson Center
-- Prospects for International Security Cooperation --
at the symposium on
“Earth Security from the Perspective of International Security”
University of International Relations - Beijing, July 6, 2022

Introduction

Thank you. It is a great honor to be here at this important conference addressing the most urgent international security issue of our time – the threat to human existence from climate change – or, as you have stated here – Earth Security. Thank you especially to my dear friend and colleague Li Shuisheng for inviting me. My only regret is not to be able to be with you in person.



My topic today is prospects for international security cooperation. I will compare the quality of cooperation among states on three global security challenges: cyberspace security, the Covid-19 pandemic, and climate change. I will conclude with recommendations to the global community.

For historical perspective, I thought to begin with this woodblock print by the Meiji era artist Tatsuta Nitta.¹ The title of the work is “Patrol at the Edge of Camp.” I use this image because, although it is beautiful, I do not believe any of us want to go back to living like this—patrolling our villages on horseback in the snow.

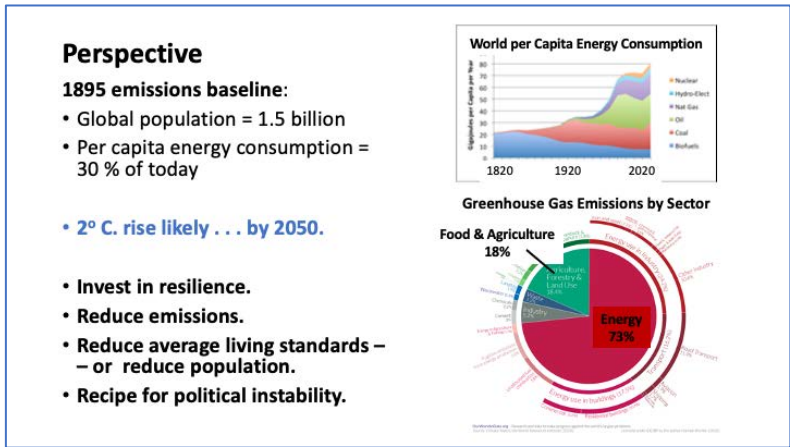
Perspective

At the time that image was created, about 1895, the world population was about 1.5 billion people, or about one-fifth of today’s. Per capita energy consumption was 30 percent of



¹ Patrol At The Edge Of Camp, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, <https://asia.si.edu/object/S2003.8.2504/> (accessed 29 June 2022).

today's level.² This is also the period from which we measure temperature rise when we talk about climate change. Climate change is an existential problem for the human species, and for many other life forms on the planet. I expect that everyone on this seminar is already deeply aware that we will, almost certainly, exceed 2 degrees centigrade temperature rise when compared with pre-industrial levels. Given the accelerating feedback loops we continue to discover, such as greater terrestrial heat retention after temperature-induced snowmelts, we are likely to reach 2.0 by 2050. None of us can comprehend the dislocations this will cause, in terms



of food security, human migration, water availability, and political instability. We must prepare for those events in a cooperative manner, so as to mitigate suffering and long-term damage to the planet. This will require major cooperation and investments to increase the resilience of people and infrastructure.

For the future, we must also dramatically reduce our carbon consumption and production of greenhouse gasses—including burning less fossil fuel and consuming less meat. Moreover, and more difficult, we must recognize, that, no matter how well we succeed at those reductions, it is extremely unlikely that the planet can support a population of 8 billion people on a sustainable basis at the standard of living currently enjoyed today by a small fraction of the world's people—the very people who are in power in governments and corporations worldwide. This divide, in itself, is the classic recipe for revolution. Both my country and China were founded on revolutions, and you remember better that we do both the necessities that drove change, and the suffering such changes caused. Today, we no longer have time for wars. We must focus our efforts on this existential threat to our common future for all mankind.

The Quality of Cooperation

I have told you that I will compare the quality of past and present cooperation among states on three global security challenges. In order to do so, I must define the quality of cooperation.

To begin, I suggest that it is important to measure the quality of cooperation by looking at the quality of the results.

² Gail Tverberg, "World Energy Consumption Since 1820 in Charts," <https://ourfiniteworld.com/2012/03/12/world-energy-consumption-since-1820-in-charts/> (accessed 29 June 2022).

Therefore, one must ask at least three questions when thinking about international security cooperation:

1. How relevant and meaningful are the results of the cooperation? For example, how much of a difference does a decision to replace oil burning cars with electric cars make to the overall carbon reductions needed, and in what time frame?
2. How realistic are the results of the cooperation? For example, to what extent does agreement on a norm about responsible state use of cyber weapons affect the actual practices of states and non-state actors using those weapons?
3. How widespread are the results of the cooperation? For example, to what extent does scientific cooperation on vaccine development technologies produce better vaccines for everyone or only for some countries? This also raises the elements of fairness, equity, and justice.

Control of Cyber Weapons

Turning first to cyber, as many of you know, the United Nations has conducted a series of expert group meetings over more than 20 years designed to put in place some rules around the use of cyber weapons. These discussions have produced a set of non-binding norms of responsible behavior for states in cyberspace—primarily during peacetime. For example, the norms say that states should not attack each other’s critical infrastructure—power grids, communications facilities, hospitals, etc.—using cyber means. Another norm is that if a state identifies malicious network activity originating from another state, and notifies the offending state about the activity, then the offending state has responsibility to turn off the malicious activity. This applies to activity initiated by both state and non-state actors.

The UN General Assembly has adopted these norms and the experts are working on detailed interpretations of what they mean in practice.

The results of this cooperation do address an important part of the cyber problem from an international security perspective. Therefore, we can say the cooperation promises a meaningful and relevant contribution to improving international security in cyberspace. However, from a realism standpoint, there is little evidence that states are moderating their behavior in these areas. States

Cyberspace Cooperation

- UN Expert Groups working for 20+ years.
- UNGA agreement on voluntary Norms of Responsible State Behavior during peacetime.
 - Do not attack Critical Infrastructure
 - Mitigate malicious activity coming from your territory

	Relevance	Realism	Spread
Control of Cyber Weapons	Agreements address a major problem in state-on-state cyber relations.	Limited practical effect on state activities.	Do not address concerns of developing economies.

continue to use cyber tools to steal intellectual property and to undermine the security of critical infrastructure. Some states condone or even support non-state actors who are attacking

geopolitical adversaries. In other words, the results remain rather theoretical. Finally, from an equity and distribution perspective, the biggest problems in cyberspace security on a global basis are financially motivated cybercrime and disinformation. Worldwide, most countries, economies, businesses, and people are significantly more affected by cybercrime and disinformation than by state-on-state cyber conflict. Therefore, the results of this cooperation are, for the moment, not particularly widespread.

The Global Covid-19 Pandemic

So, what about the pandemic? The international cooperation problems facing the world during Covid-19 differed from those in cyberspace in two significant respects. First, unlike in cyberspace where there is no international organization charged with addressing security, the World Health Organization is an official United Nations agency with the responsibility to direct global cooperation on pandemics. In addition to the WHO, the G20 and the United Nations Security Council took up the problem of cooperation. In brief, and as well-documented in a recent report by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences,³ the overall picture is one of missed opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic demanded intergovernmental coordination to ensure an adequate supply of health care and testing equipment; share disease spread patterns and treatment results; and address the economic effects of the crisis. In March 2020, a ministerial meeting of the Group of Seven (G7) failed to promote cooperation, instead revealing deep divisions among the parties. Later that month, the Group of Twenty (G20), which represent 80 percent of global economic output and two-thirds of the world's population, pledged to coordinate public health and financial actions and to support the work of the WHO—through shared research and development, and action to address blockages and shortages of vital medical supplies. They also promised to put \$5 trillion into the global economy to cushion the impact of COVID-19 and support the WHO fund for poorer countries. However, despite the pledge to facilitate trade, G20 countries failed to end the export bans on drugs and medical supplies which exacerbated scarcities already created by the disease and quarantines.

In 2021, the May Global Health Summit of the G20 ignored a series of recommendations promulgated by the WHO, only setting out “guiding principles” and emphasizing the “voluntary orientation” of state commitments. No specific targets, actions, or time frames were agreed. In mid-June, G7 leaders pledged to “vaccinate the world,” but the pledge of 870 million doses over the next year fell short of the eleven billion doses needed to vaccinate 70 percent of the world's population by the end of 2022.

³ Jennifer M. Welsh, *International Cooperation Failures in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Learning from Past Efforts to Address Common Threats* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2022) <https://www.amacad.org/publication/international-cooperation-failures-covid-19-pandemic> (accessed 30 June 2022)

Indeed, for the most part, rather than cooperate, states took nationalistic perspectives, driven by domestic politics and priorities. From the earliest months of the pandemic, states with the resources to produce or buy successful vaccines did so for themselves. Rather than take on the problem the way the UN did with Ebola in 2014—declaring a global health threat and sending thousands of workers to affected regions—states practiced, “vaccine diplomacy,” using the need for vaccines in developing countries to promote national geopolitical goals.

Pandemic Cooperation

- WHO made timely recommendations, but States did not uniformly implement them.
- G20 issued general principles, made pledges they did not fulfill.
- States focused on internal political concerns, and used “vaccine diplomacy” to further national geopolitical goals.

	Relevance	Realism	Spread
Covid-19 Crisis	Some issues were covered in agreements, but commitments were vague. ●	Limited practical effect on state activities. ●	Did not address concerns of developing economies. ●

When we analyze the results of global cooperation to address this global public health issue, we find that, in general, the results had limited relevance to the major challenges, were unrealistic in terms of implementation, and weak in widespread effect. One hopes that reforming and strengthening the WHO will improve results the next time.

Climate Change

Finally, climate. Fifty years ago, in 1972, the UN held the first Earth Summit. The declaration warned governments to evaluate the likelihood and magnitude of the climate effects of their activities. In 1988, after limited action focused on protecting the ozone layer, the UN established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In 1990, ministers agreed that “climate change was a global problem of unique character for which a global response was required.”

In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was agreed, with the goal of reducing industrialized countries' emissions of greenhouse gases by at least 5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2012.⁴ The treaty did not compel developing countries to take action. The 2015 Paris Agreement required all countries to set voluntary emissions-reduction targets intended to keep global average temperature rise below 2°C, and to make efforts to keep it below 1.5°C. In addition to UN activities, in 2021 the G20 countries pledged to stop financing new coal-fired power plants abroad, and dozens of countries pledged to reduce emissions of methane by 30 percent and to halt deforestation and land degradation by 2030.⁵ However, according to the IPCC, the world's average temperature

⁴ Peter Jackson, “From Stockholm to Kyoto: A Brief History of Climate Change.”

<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/stockholm-kyoto-brief-history-climate-change> (accessed 30 June 2022)

⁵ Lindsay Maizland, “Global Climate Agreements: Successes and Failures.” Council of Foreign Relations, 2021.


<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/paris-global-climate-change-agreements> (accessed 30 June 2022)

will still rise 2.1°C (3.8°F) by 2100 even if countries fully implement their Paris pledges for 2030 and beyond.⁶

It is too early to evaluate the final results of international cooperation on climate change. However, the overall pledges and commitments are highly relevant and meaningful. That is, if fully adopted, they would make a substantial difference. To date, however, the national pledges have proven to be highly unrealistic. Finally, their potential impact is increasingly widespread, now that all major countries are participating meaningfully in the process.

Climate Cooperation

- UN awareness for 50 years.
- IPCC created in 1988.
- Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Paris Agreement (2015) set meaningful targets.
- G20 and other groups set more targets.
- Implementation remains consistently below targets.

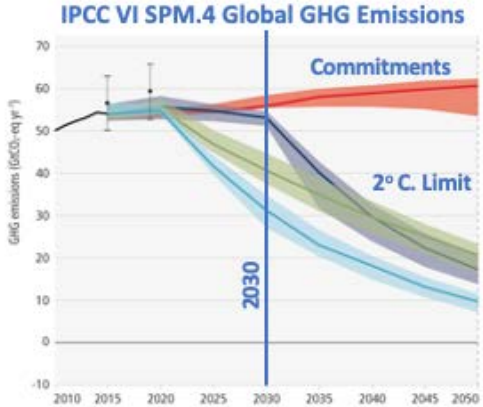


	Relevance	Realism	Spread
Meeting 2° C. Target	Goals are relevant and meaningful. ●	Most states are unable to meet their commitments. ●	Goals have widespread potential but implementation is weak. ●

Conclusions and Recommendations

In my view it is clear that current mechanisms of international cooperation are unlikely to produce the actions that are needed to ensure “Earth Security.” As the chart shows, without

Conclusions and Recommendations



IPCC VI SPM.4 Global GHG Emissions

GHG emissions (GtCO₂-eq yr⁻¹)

2010 2015 2020 2025 2030 2035 2040 2045 2050

Earth Security Cooperation

- Commitments are Unrealistic and Likely to be Insufficient
- Necessary Actions Would Create a Shock or Crisis
- Geo-Political Mechanisms Are Unlikely to Produce Meaningful Results in Time
- New, Multi-stakeholder Mechanisms Are Needed

	Relevance	Realism	Spread
Cyber			
Covid			
Climate			

⁶ IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, *Mitigation of Climate Change*, Figure SPM.4 “Projected global GHG emissions” <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/figures/summary-for-policymakers/figure-spm-4/> (accessed 30 June 2022)

dramatic action, unsustainable greenhouse gas emissions will continue. Even the current level of commitments is proving to be unrealistic. And the kinds of actions that are necessary are unlikely to be taken via political decisions. They would be too unpopular, and too disruptive of the future expectations of citizens who are alive today.

Accordingly, something new is needed—something I refer to here as multi-stakeholder mechanisms. Multi-stakeholder means engaging all elements of society directly in decision-making on global problems. There is some experience of this in the cyber area, where many decisions are made by semi-formal agreements among states, companies, civil society, and academia. For example, internet routing and addressing is managed by an international multi-stakeholder entity. And, in many countries, cyber incident response teams are composed of government, business, and academic representatives.

The multi-stakeholder approach differs from the traditional method by which all viewpoints are channeled; through formal mechanisms representing state interests—such as the United Nations. I do not have time today to lay out a detailed methodology. Rather, I hope to ignite the curiosity of the esteemed experts here today for a possible future discussion on this topic.

In conclusion, it seems clear to me that, for global “problems without passports,” we can no longer rely primarily on narrow national interests to produce the best outcomes. We are all together on this, our island home, our Grandmother Earth, and we must begin to respect her and the many life forms that live here with us—not least to ensure our own survival.

Thank you.

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