



**The Global Foundation**

*Together, we strive for the global common good*

## After the pandemic, what profound adjustments will be made to the mode of collaboration on pandemic and climate change?

*Steve Howard is Secretary General of the Global Foundation. This opinion piece has been written at the request of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, for publication in Chinese media.*

How does this all end?

For the moment, as I see it, not that well.

Yes, the world will temper and then eventually overcome the coronavirus. And the global economy will piece itself back together again over time, albeit unevenly, with enormous pain and suffering and lower standards of living for some time to come.

Yet, as critical and painful as these issues are, they are not my main concerns, right now. Our world is fast splintering, in a wild acceleration of the geo-political fracturing we were experiencing before the breakout of the virus.

We need to change direction before the world goes over the cliff. As the virus has so clearly shown and the slower-burning pandemic of climate change is revealing, we are all in this together, whether we like it or not!

Are we capable of rising above blame games and tit for tat responses, of avoiding a descent into hell, of a world divided into blocs, at each other's throats, or worse?

Are we capable of realising the better angels of our nature, of our shared destiny as the human race, of genuinely reaching for the global common good?

### ***The kindness of strangers***

Every day, I witness this positive side of the human spirit, the kindness of strangers, in my limited face to face contacts in locked-down Sydney. And it's the same at home, in the plethora of Zoom connections and online concerts. People have dropped their pretences and have become themselves. At a deeply personal level, we have faced fear and are responding well. We want to make the future better than the present, to hand on to the next generations.

It's as if the best of civics, as expressed in our respective societies, yearns for stronger co-operation and solidarity, which is local, yes, but at the same time, universal as well.

So why is it that, at the international level, between nation states, there are impulses pulling in the opposite direction? Geo-politics – as expressed by some – is headed the wrong way: fortress mentalities, walls, borders, fear and/or hatred of the other.

### ***Towards a new global human security***

Pope Francis has often spoken passionately about the need for stronger global human security, for greater global solidarity, based upon our common humanity. Our universal, global goal might be to achieve true human security through an aspiration for the global common good. This could underpin and trump all other so-called forms of security, such as military and economic, that have for so long dominated and fragmented international discourse.

The nation state is not the only actor in this. Here's an idea: how about a pathway to better global human security that originates not only from governments or other institutions, but from within ourselves, within our own hearts and within our communities? Call it a bottom-up approach, to intersect with top-down. What if we each realised that the changes that may be required to safely navigate a pathway to a secure human future at home and abroad might start within ourselves, with a renewed sense of humility rather than hubris?

It is evident that existing systems, whether of health, markets, technology, have not served society as well as they ought. A more fundamental re-evaluation may be required, about what matters and, in turn, how best that can be expressed and assembled, at community, national and global level. In other words, if a kind of revolution of thinking and organisation is required, it needs to begin within ourselves. I sense this amongst my own networks and I have a hunch that this is felt more widely. 'We can't simply go on like before'.

### ***The West learning from the East***

As I live in and am a product of Western civilisation, here's an example of my learning to look through the



**The Global Foundation**

*Together, we strive for the global common good*

eyes of 'the other', those who come from vastly different cultural backgrounds. It is said that the value systems of many societies in East Asia are largely based on Confucian thinking. In fact, it is said that, if added together, they would comprise the largest economic bloc in the world!

Broadly, it appears that the largely Confucian societies have been impacted less by the virus than counterparts in the West. A basic tenet of Confucian thinking is to value the rights of the community over the individual. Although these societies are governed across what we in the West would call a democratic-to-authoritarian spectrum, in the main they seem to have pulled together more quickly in their response to the virus and in steps to recovery than some more prominent Western nations.

Who then has the right to that say Western values and civilisation are superior, as we consider the kind of thinking and systems that might be needed for future global co-operation?

Because, make no mistake, as the coronavirus has starkly demonstrated, we are going to need far more effective global co-operation in the future than in the past.

### ***2020 is the right time to reshape global arrangements***

The international order that served us well for the 75 years since the Second World War, is broken and in need of re-construction, not just repair. Right now, the 2020 year, is a good place to start, ensuring that the voices in the room that are shaping the new global order are commensurate with their relative weight in this new Century.

This will not be easy. It will be fraught, and it may take a while. It requires the sharing and the shifting of power. However, if the biggest powers can't find the *modus operandi* to start the conversation together, which appears to be the case at present, then creative middle powers, from governments and societies - business, civil society, faiths - might have to find a way to get the ball rolling.

Otherwise, the WHO and global health co-operation will sputter until the next, more deadly virus emerges; world trade will further paralyse beyond its stasis

today; and global climate change action will remain a rhetorical whimsy. This would truly look like a new Dark Ages.

Heaven knows the even more dangerous consequences that would flow from atomised, fortress states, cut off from each other and the outside world. We've seen this movie before, of the cumulative impact of such reductive actions. It leads not only to a lesser quality of life, it ultimately leads to bloodshed.

### ***Coalitions of the willing, reborn***

Let's conclude on a positive note. There is much to do, between willing actors. Let's re-badge and positively re-use the term, 'coalitions of the willing'. Such alliances may be multiple, they may be messy and overlapping, all however will involve the need for borderless thinking. They should bloom in the spirit of '*co-operative globalisation*', that is, for an interconnected and interdependent world.

In 2013, China showed that it was ready to lead - with mixed support from the West, at first - in the formation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a successful model of international co-operation. Might it be timely that China, at both State level and also with its think tanks and businesses, could now choose to play a leading role in stimulating dialogues about improved models of global governance, bringing together a variety of international partners, from both East and West?

This 'dialogue between civilisations', as I like to call it, will require honesty, tolerance, mutual learning and understanding, a big ask. This, however, is a necessary prelude to the clear-eyed, hard-edged exchanges that should follow, about preferred pathways to international co-operation and human survival in the future.

Let's work together for a world which is transformative, fair, inclusive and prosperous, and which seeks above all else to deliver the best possible global human security on our planet.

Sydney, April 2020