

ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND

• A Logic for the Future

International Relations in the Age of Turbulence

Stephen Heintz

President & CEO, Rockefeller Brothers Fund

■ Collaborative Sovereignty

■ Equitable Power

■ Regenerative Economy

RECOMMENDED BY GERD LEONHARD · FUTURISTGERD.COM

"Very much aligned with my own work on The Good Future and the 4Ps (People, Planet, Purpose and Prosperity)."

Why This Matters Now

Recommended by Futurist Gerd Leonhard

At a recent San Francisco event hosted by the Long Now Foundation, futurist Gerd Leonhard was re-introduced to Stephen Heintz's work. He describes the paper as a "**very powerful manifesto**" that is deeply aligned with his own vision of *The Good Future* and the 4Ps — **People, Planet, Purpose, and Prosperity**.

"Stephen Heintz has written the best explanation I've seen of the depth of the crisis the world faces and of why and how the United States must become the 'indispensable partner' in the reshaping of a more balanced global order." — Roger Cohen, New York Times Paris Bureau Chief

The Age of Turbulence: Key Crises

■ Climate Emergency

2024 was the first year temperatures exceeded the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C above preindustrial levels. Heat waves, wildfires, and floods are disrupting food supplies worldwide.

■ ■ Geopolitical Conflict

182 significant violent conflicts — the highest in over three decades — are destroying lives across the globe, while great power competition threatens wider confrontation.

■ Technological Disruption

Generative AI, neuro-technology, and bio-manufacturing technologies whose misuse 'could lead to catastrophe' are arriving faster than governance frameworks can adapt.

■ ■ Institutional Failure

Post-WWII institutions — the UN, WTO, IMF — are inefficient, ineffective, and in some cases simply obsolete when confronted with 21st century challenges.

The Core Argument

Peter Drucker wrote in *Managing in Turbulent Times* (1980) that the greatest danger in turbulent times is not the turbulence itself — it is "**acting with yesterday's logic.**" Heintz applies this insight to global governance: while we face multiple existential crises, we continue to respond with frameworks rooted in 17th-century European state theory.

"The challenge of designing a better international system is a difficult one, but choosing to ignore the necessity of reform is a far greater failure than striving and falling short." — Stephen Heintz

Part I - Logic Inventory

12 Core Concepts: Past Logic vs. Future Logic

Heintz identifies 12 core concepts that have guided international relations for centuries. For each, he asks: should it be retained, revised, retired — or replaced with something new?

#	Concept	LOGIC OF THE PAST	LOGIC OF THE FUTURE
01	Anthropocentrism	Humans apart from nature	Humans as part of nature — biodiversity conservation as a moral & material imperative
02	Sovereignty	Absolute national sovereignty	Collaborative / pooled sovereignty + human sovereignty for individual rights
03	National Interest	Primacy of national interest	National interest balanced with global commons & collective responsibility
04	Distribution of Power	Great power dominance (P5 veto)	Equitable power — 6.5 billion 'global majority' must have voice in governance
05	Internationalism	Rules-based order (often selectively applied)	Strengthened, inclusive, and democratically accountable international norms
06	Political Economy	Neoliberal extractive capitalism	Regenerative economies that serve global public goods and sustainability
07	Legitimacy	State-centric democratic accountability	Multi-level legitimacy: local, national, regional, and planetary governance
08	Rule of Law	International law (bypassed frequently)	Reformed international law with enforcement mechanisms and subsidiary courts
09	Security	Military deterrence & great power balance	Cooperative security + prevention over deterrence + non-military tools
10	Use of Force	Unilateral use of force by states	Collective security frameworks with democratic oversight and public debate
11	Justice	Retributive international justice (ICC)	Restorative justice + rights of nature + rights of future generations
12	Science & Technology	Technology as tool of national power	Technology governed in global public interest — AI, biotech, neurotech included

Part II - 10 Building Blocks

A New Global Framework for the 21st Century

Heintz proposes ten concrete building blocks to animate the new logic in practice — reforms, institutions, and mechanisms that together constitute a reimagined international system.

01

Co-create the International System of the Future

Inclusive, participatory design of new global frameworks — not imposed by the powerful but built by the 'global majority.' Move beyond the 1945 blueprint to a 21st-century architecture with broad democratic legitimacy.

02

Remake the United Nations

Reform the UN Security Council to reflect today's distribution of power. Reduce P5 veto authority. Strengthen the General Assembly. Create an Envoy for Future Generations. Update the Charter for the challenges of this century.

03

Supplement the United Nations

Build new multilateral institutions and coalitions of the willing to fill governance gaps the UN cannot. Regional bodies (EU, AU, ASEAN) should play expanded roles. Civil society, NGOs, and think-tanks serve as essential intermediaries.

04

Improve, Supersede, and Devolve the Nation-State

The nation-state is a 17th-century invention. While it remains relevant, power must flow both upward (to planetary bodies) and downward (to cities, regions, communities). Subsidiarity is the principle: governance at the level best suited to solve the problem.

05

Train a New Generation of Diplomats

Invest in curricula and institutions to develop diplomats skilled in multilateral cooperation, long-term thinking, and cross-cultural understanding. Track-two diplomacy — as shown by the Iran nuclear deal process — can open doors that governments cannot.

06

Trade and Investment for Global Public Goods

Reorient trade and investment frameworks from narrow national advantage toward the provision of global public goods: clean energy, food security, pandemic preparedness, and equitable technological access. Reform the WTO and multilateral development banks.

07

Strengthen Democracy

Democratic governance at all levels — local, national, and international — is the foundation of legitimacy and peaceful conflict resolution. Counter authoritarianism, protect civil society, expand citizens' assemblies and participatory mechanisms at scale.

08

Establish a U.S.–China Secretariat

The U.S.–China relationship is the most consequential of the 21st century. A permanent joint secretariat — located in a neutral venue such as Geneva or Singapore — where senior officials work together daily to prevent catastrophic miscalculation and build cooperation on climate, AI, and security.

09

Codify Rights of Nature & Future Generations

Enshrine in international law the rights of ecosystems, biodiversity, and unborn generations. Move from anthropocentric ethics to an ecocentric framework. Appoint a UN Envoy for Future Generations to represent those not yet born in global decision-making.

10

Transformed U.S. Global Leadership

The U.S. must shift from 'indispensable nation' to 'indispensable partner' — humble, honest, and multilateral. Back the International Court of Justice. Rejoin international agreements. Exercise leadership through partnership, not dominance or retreat.

Three Core Shifts

The Philosophical Pillars of a New Logic

From Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism

Human beings are part of nature — not apart from it. Our survival depends on the web of 8 million species we share this planet with. Biodiversity conservation is both a moral imperative and a material necessity.

From National to Collaborative Sovereignty

The nation-state is not the essential and final unit of governance. Power must flow both upward to planetary institutions and downward to cities and communities. The EU demonstrates that shared sovereignty creates more security, not less.

From Extractive to Regenerative Economics

Neoliberal capitalism generates inequality and environmental destruction as systemic features, not bugs. A new political economy must serve global public goods and regenerate the natural systems upon which all prosperity depends.

Conclusion

Heintz draws a powerful parallel to August 1941 — when Churchill and Roosevelt, with Hitler having swept across Europe, drafted the Atlantic Charter on a destroyer off Newfoundland. They could not be certain of winning the war, yet they imagined and articulated a bold, utopian vision for the postwar world. That vision became the foundation of the United Nations.

"Even in very dark moments, visionary leaders can pierce the darkness and imagine a brighter future... Moments of profound challenge offer opportunity to convert today's idealism into tomorrow's realism." — Stephen Heintz

Hannah Arendt's reminder resonates across the decades: *"We are free to change the world and start something new in it."* Heintz's logic for the future is offered in precisely that spirit — not as a blueprint for what *can* be, but as a vision of what *might* be, if human resilience, imagination, and cooperation are brought to bear on this hinge moment in history.

■ Primary Sources & Further Reading

• **Full Paper:** rbf.org/logic-for-future (Rockefeller Brothers Fund, 2024/2025) • **Long Now Talk:** longnow.org/talks/02025-heintz-robinson (with Kim Stanley Robinson) • **Long Now Essay:** longnow.org/ideas/a-logic-for-the-future-international-relations • **CFR Podcast:** cfr.org — "Foreign Policy for Turbulent Times" with Stephen Heintz • **Recommended by:** Gerd Leonhard, futuristgerd.com (March 2025)