Scientists show how to make peace

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Can science predict peace? Can scientific modeling help to end crises in today's war-torn regions? New research from the New England Complex Systems Institute (NECSI) says yes.

A new paper published by NECSI, "Good Fences: The Importance of Setting Boundaries for Peaceful Coexistence," carries important implications for policy makers in understanding the fragile present and immediate future in the world today.

In short, fences are due for a re-think.

Oftentimes peace depends on boundaries—well chosen, not arbitrarily set—topographical and political boundaries that separate groups. This is an important turnaround to a frequently held notion that boundaries are negative barriers to harmony. Science, says NECSI, proves otherwise. Where boundaries are properly chosen, peace prevails. As world leaders struggle to understand the conditions triggering ethnic conflict and civil war, quantitative studies of geographical and other boundaries yield important answers.

"Trying to get people to ignore cultural, religious and ethinc differences is often counterproductive. There is an alternative that allows an active role for diversity," said Professor Yaneer Bar-Yam, who heads NECSI and is a co-author of the paper. "Boundaries that give groups some amount of autonomy can serve to mitigate conflict where people naturally seek to live near others of their own group."

"We've seen that the ways borders and boundaries between groups are arranged really can prevent violence. When I think of the suffering and the lives lost, and I see those results, the findings just can't be ignored," said Andreas Gros another author.

NECSI modeled administrative and topological boundaries and their role in violence prevention. Scientists tested the model using data with varied kinds of boundaries and no boundaries whatsoever. Take away the topographical boundaries and propensity toward violence increases. The model's predictions were in line with real-world violent incidences.

"Conflicts rooted in ethnic strife are tearing countries apart today," said Bar-Yam. "Scientists who focus on predictive models cannot help but raise the question: 'What, if any, conditions are identifiable for peaceful coexistence among multiple groups with linguistic and religious differences?'"

More information: The manuscript will be published on the Arxiv. It is attached and available at the link necsi.edu/research/social/scienceofpeace.pdf

Provided by New England Complex Systems Institute

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