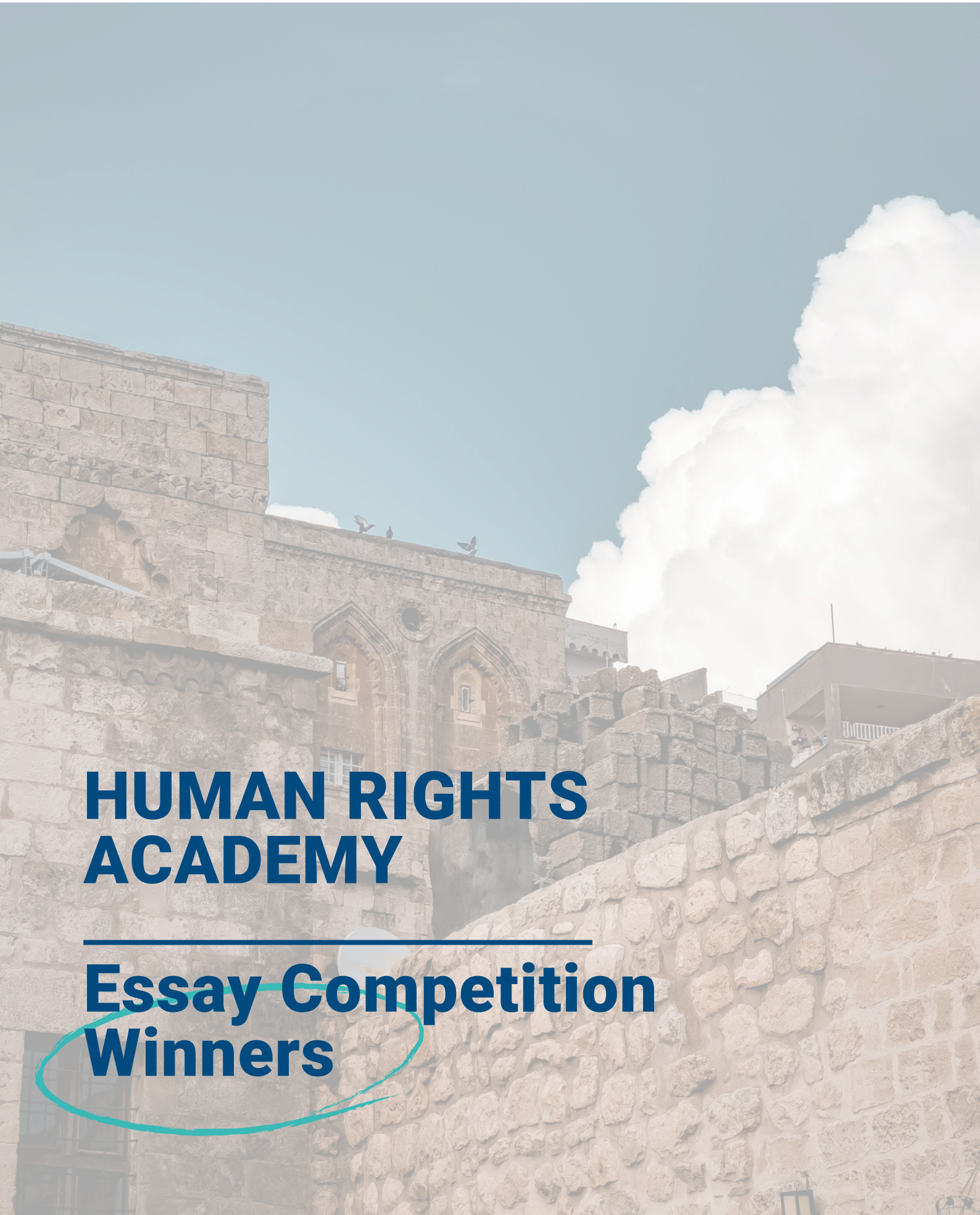
FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION For Freedom.
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HUMAN RIGHTS ACADEMY

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HUMAN RIGHTS ACADEMY

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Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)

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Authors

Kitti Modroczky

Sally Nasr

Ariadna Carchano

Seher Irmak Aydın

Fabian Grepper

Aliye Fettah

Giorgi Jokhadze

Editors

Elif Menderes, Human Rights Academy

Sudenaz Aydoğdu, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

Ayça Tabak, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

Ece Doğa Ayan, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

Boran Eroğul, Human Rights Academy

Yiğit Göktuğ Torun, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

Contact

turkey@freiheit.org

bilgi@insanhaklariakademisi.org

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THE BORDER WE NO LONGER SEE

BY KITTI MODROCZKY

One evening, after the day's programme had ended, a few of us went up to the rooftop terrace of the hotel where we were staying. Mardin was slowly settling into the evening, and from the terrace, the city gave way to an open landscape stretching all the way towards northern Syria. Someone pointed towards the horizon and said, almost casually, "The border is just over there."

I remember instinctively trying to find it. I knew it was there, but no matter how carefully I looked, I couldn't see it. There was no fence, no wall, no visible line separating one country from another, only the same dry landscape fading into the distance.
We stayed there for a while, talking about the lectures we had attended that day and watching the sun disappear over the plains before eventually heading back downstairs.

Throughout the Summer School, we had spent hours discussing security from different perspectives: NATO, climate change, migration, terrorism, artificial intelligence, economic resilience and human rights. At first, they had seemed like separate conversations. Looking back at that evening on the rooftop, I realised they all had something unexpected in common. None of the challenges we had been debating seemed particularly interested in the border we had been looking for.

Not because borders no longer matter; they clearly do. They remain essential to the international order we have built. Yet the forces that increasingly shape our world seem remarkably indifferent to where those borders begin and end. For a while, I told myself that this was simply because today's challenges are global. After all, that's how we usually describe them. Climate change is global. Cyberattacks are global. Migration is global.

But the more I reflected on the discussions in Mardin, the more I sensed that something was still missing. Crossing borders was only part of the story. During one of the workshops, the missing piece finally fell into place. Our group was asked to respond to a scenario involving severe water shortages in a conflict-affected country. At first, the exercise seemed straightforward. We discussed reservoirs, infrastructure, emergency planning, and how limited water supplies should be distributed among cities, agriculture, or industry. It felt like a familiar policy exercise: identify the problem, evaluate the options and choose the least harmful solution.

Somewhere along the way, however, the conversation changed.

I cannot point to the exact moment it happened, but gradually we stopped arguing about water. Instead, we found ourselves debating impossible political choices. Should drinking water always take precedence over agriculture? How much inequality would people tolerate before protests became inevitable? Could a technically rational decision still become politically disastrous? Every answer seemed to create a different kind of insecurity.

Without really noticing it, we had moved far beyond resource management. We had been told the exercise was about water scarcity. By the end, it felt much more like a discussion about politics itself.

Looking back, I think that workshop captured something much bigger than the scenario we had been asked to solve. The real challenge was never deciding who should receive water first. It was recognising how quickly a seemingly technical problem could become a question of governance, legitimacy and security. Only afterwards did I understand that the workshop had reframed everything we had discussed throughout the week.

That was when I realised the border I had been looking for in Mardin was never just geographical. The longer I reflected on that week, the more I realised that I had been carrying a distinction I had never really questioned. Somewhere along the way, I had come to think of security and human rights as different kinds of political questions. One belonged to strategic thinking, the other to legal and ethical debate. Mardin was the first time that distinction stopped making sense to me.

Every conversation about climate change eventually became a conversation about governance. Every discussion on democratic resilience raised questions about public trust. Artificial intelligence quickly moved beyond technology into ethics and political power. Even the workshop on water scarcity stopped being about water. Gradually, it became impossible to say where security ended, and human rights began. Only afterwards did I begin to wonder why that realisation had felt so natural in Mardin.

Mardin has always existed at the intersection of worlds. Throughout its history, different languages, religions and political authorities have coexisted within the same city. Standing only a short distance from one of the most politically sensitive borders in the world, it is difficult to think about security as an abstract concept. It shapes everyday life. Yet at the same time, so do questions of identity, coexistence, dignity and belonging. That combination gave the discussions a different quality. Security was never presented solely as military strategy, just as human rights were never reduced to legal principles. Every lecture seemed to reveal another connection between them.

Looking back, I increasingly feel that the greatest value of the Summer School was not that it provided answers. It was that it challenged the categories through which I had previously organised those questions. Once those categories began to dissolve, the question itself also changed. I no longer think the defining challenge facing future generations will be deciding which crisis deserves the most attention. Climate change, armed conflict, technological disruption and democratic backsliding are too often presented as competing priorities, each demanding its own response. My experience in Mardin suggested something different. Their defining characteristic is not their individuality, but their interdependence.

If that is true, it also changes how democracies must prepare for the future. Resilience cannot be reduced to military capability, emergency stockpiles or technological innovation, important as these remain. It also depends on whether institutions retain public confidence when they are forced to make unpopular decisions.

The water scarcity exercise illustrated this better than any lecture could have. Every policy option involved costs. Every decision created winners and losers. Yet what ultimately determined whether those decisions would be accepted was not simply their technical quality, but whether citizens perceived them as fair and legitimate.

I increasingly came to see democratic resilience not as a separate concept from security, but as one of its foundations. A society that trusts its institutions can withstand shocks that might destabilise another. Conversely, where trust has already eroded, even relatively manageable crises can escalate into political crises.

For a long time, our political institutions have operated on the assumption that public problems can be divided into separate policy areas, each with its own institutions, expertise and solutions. Yet the defining characteristic of the twenty-first century may be that our crises increasingly refuse to stay within those categories.

This does not mean that expertise has become less important. Quite the opposite. It means that expertise alone is no longer sufficient if it remains confined within disciplinary boundaries. Security experts cannot ignore climate science any more than climate policy can be separated from democratic legitimacy. Nor can human rights be treated as an ethical consideration added only after security decisions have already been made. Each has become part of the same political reality.

Fragmented thinking produces fragmented policies. Governments may successfully address one dimension of a crisis while unintentionally intensifying another. A climate policy that ignores social inequality may fuel political extremism. Security measures that undermine public trust may weaken the very resilience they are intended to strengthen. Likewise, artificial intelligence cannot be governed solely as a technological innovation. Decisions about AI increasingly shape democratic processes, labour markets, privacy, public discourse and even international security. More than ever, the effectiveness of public policy depends less on solving isolated problems than on recognising the connections between them. At its core, however, this is not merely an institutional challenge. This is why I believe that the greatest challenge facing future generations is not climate change, war or artificial intelligence in itself. It lies in how we understand them. It is, ultimately, an intellectual challenge.

Every political response begins with the way we define a problem. No institution can effectively govern a reality it has failed to understand. If we misunderstand the nature of a crisis, even the most sophisticated policies may ultimately fail to address it. In that sense, political judgment begins long before legislation is drafted or institutions respond. It starts with the categories through which we choose to see the world. As long as we continue to treat interconnected crises as though they were separate, our solutions will remain fragmented. Before our institutions can adapt to a changing world, our thinking must do the same

This places a particular responsibility on our generation. We have inherited institutions shaped by a world in which public problems appeared easier to separate into distinct policy areas. Our task is not to abandon expertise, but to connect it. We must become more comfortable working across disciplines, more willing to question inherited categories, and more careful before accepting political narratives that reduce complex crises to simple choices. Protecting peace, security and human rights will increasingly depend on our ability to see those connections before crises force them upon us.

But this demands more than expertise alone. It requires intellectual humility: the willingness to recognise that no single discipline, institution or profession can fully understand today's crises on its own. Our generation will not simply need to know more. We will need to connect knowledge, perspectives and institutions that have remained unnecessarily divided

Perhaps the real task for future generations will not be to decide whether security or human rights should come first whenever crises emerge. It will be to recognise that this is increasingly the wrong question. As the challenges we face become ever more interconnected, so too do the principles required to address them. Our responsibility is therefore not simply to defend peace, security and human rights, but to resist the habit of treating them as separate in the first place.

When I think back to Mardin now, I still remember standing on the rooftop, staring towards a border I could not see.

The Summer School did not teach me that security and human rights are connected. It taught me something more unsettling: that many of the boundaries through which we continue to understand politics no longer reflect the world we are trying to govern.

Perhaps that is the greatest challenge facing future generations: not simply solving more crises, but learning to see them differently.

So, in the end, I realised that the border had never belonged to the landscape at all. It had existed in the questions I was asking.

DEFENDING PEACE, SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS: THE DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF MY GENERATION

BY SALLY NASR

“How do you live there? Isn’t it dangerous? Why don’t you leave?”

These are the questions I hear most often from my international friends or while travelling abroad. Conversations rarely begin with questions about Lebanon beyond conflict. Instead, they often begin with the same concern: “What is everyday life like during the war?”

For a long time, I never knew how to answer. I wanted to show that we are ordinary people with jobs, studies, families, dreams, and responsibilities, even during war. So, I would reply, “We take life one day at a time. We are used to it. We adapt. We have no choice but to move forward, so we learn to forget; that is how we survive”. I would often end with the familiar saying that “Lebanese people are known for their resilience”.

Yet after repeating these words, I began to realise something unsettling. The most frightening part was no longer the war itself, but that war, political instability, and recurring crises had become ordinary. Violence had become routine. Survival had become a way of life. Resilience had become an expectation, not an exception.

My generation was born only a few years after a devastating fifteen-year civil war (1975–1990). We grew up after two prolonged foreign occupations: Syrian (1976–2005) and Israeli (1978–2000). We witnessed political assassinations, the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, the 2008 internal security crisis, the repercussions of the Syrian war, years of political paralysis and corruption, and the hope of the 2019 revolution dissolve into disappointment. We endured an economic collapse that ranks among the worst in modern history, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the catastrophic Beirut Port explosion in August 2020. More recently, we have lived through renewed conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, beginning in 2023 and escalating into full-scale wars in 2024 and 2026. For generations, peace in Lebanon has been little more than the brief interval between crises

The preamble of the Charter of the United Nations begins with a solemn promise: “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” These are not merely inspiring words but universal commitments. Yet for millions of people in the Middle East, they often remain promises on paper rather than daily realities. I grew up in a country where crisis became normal. My generation’s responsibility is not simply to survive what previous generations could not prevent, but to refuse the normalisation of crisis. We must ensure that those who come after us never mistake resilience for justice or adaptation for peace. Adaptation is not peace. While resilience is admirable, relying on it alone shifts the burden to the vulnerable instead of those responsible. Resilience should never become an excuse for accepting human rights violations or injustice.

To defend peace, security, and human rights for future generations, my generation must (1) confront the past and learn from it, (2) redefine peace through justice, and (3) actively participate in shaping Lebanon’s future.

Responsibility begins by confronting history

Defending peace, security, and human rights begins with understanding the past. We cannot solve problems we refuse to understand. History is therefore not simply an academic subject; it is a human rights issue. Every generation has the right to know its past, why conflicts emerged, and how they shape the present. Without this knowledge, societies remain vulnerable to manipulation, division, and repeating past mistakes.

Lebanon is a powerful example of this reality. More than three decades after the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the country still has no unified history curriculum covering the war. Lebanese official history textbooks stop at 1943, the year of independence from the French Mandate, leaving one of the most defining periods of our nation’s history untaught. The absence of a common curriculum reflects more than an educational gap; it is rooted in the continued political sensitivity surrounding the conflict. There is still no national consensus on how the war should be interpreted or even what it should be called. Many of the political and military leaders who shaped the war remained in power in post-war Lebanon and have repeatedly resisted curriculum reform, as it could reopen questions of responsibility and expose past violations. Instead of a shared national memory, each community has preserved its own narrative, often reflecting political or sectarian perspectives. As a result, many young Lebanese grow up learning different, sometimes contradictory, versions of the same events.

I studied History and International Relations because I believe the past should never be treated as taboo. History is not about reopening old wounds; it is about learning why societies fail so that they can choose a different future. Yet my generation inherited crises without understanding their roots. We were often taught to blame the same people and countries our parents blamed, without asking how conflicts began, how they were sustained, or who should be held accountable. There was always an external enemy, always "the other" to blame. When responsibility is endlessly shifted elsewhere, accountability disappears, and meaningful change becomes impossible.

Forgetting is sometimes presented as the price of reconciliation. In reality, selective memory postpones reconciliation rather than achieving it. A society that refuses to examine its past cannot build trust, because old grievances remain beneath the surface, ready to re-emerge in crisis. In Lebanon, the burden of unresolved conflicts continues to shape the present. During every major political or security crisis, public discourse often returns to fears of a new civil war, revealing that the wounds of the past have never truly been addressed. Silence has not healed divisions; it has left anxieties and unanswered questions for future generations.

History education is therefore not merely an educational policy; it is a peacebuilding strategy. Teaching young people to think critically, consider multiple perspectives, and connect the past with the present equips them to challenge hatred instead of inheriting it. If my generation is to defend peace, security, and human rights for those who come after us, our responsibility must begin with confronting history, because only a society that understands its past can build a more just and peaceful future.

Responsibility means redefining peace through justice

Peace is more than the absence of violence. A society is not secure simply because fighting has stopped. True peace exists when people trust that their rights will be protected, institutions will deliver justice, and those responsible for grave human rights violations will be held accountable. Otherwise, violence simply changes form; it survives through impunity, corruption and fear.

Growing up in Lebanon has taught my generation that agreements may end conflicts, but cannot alone build peace. The 1989 Taif Agreement, which ended the civil war, was followed by the 1991 Amnesty Law, which pardoned so-called “political” crimes committed during the conflict, reinforcing a culture of impunity and encouraging collective amnesia. The fate of approximately 17,000 people who were kidnapped or forcibly disappeared during the civil war remains unknown. Although Parliament adopted Law No. 105 of 2018, establishing the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Lebanon, thousands of families still await answers. This same culture of impunity resurfaced after the 2020 Beirut Port explosion, which killed more than 200 people, injured more than 7,000, and devastated large parts of the capital. Six years later, the full truth surrounding the explosion has yet to be revealed. No senior official has been held accountable, and justice remains, as the Association of the Families of the Victims of the Beirut Port Explosion stated, “suspended between obstruction and denial.” These tragedies demonstrate that unresolved injustice does not remain confined to the past; it continues to shape the present and threaten the future.

Defending peace means rejecting the idea that stability can be achieved through silence or by leaving past violations unresolved. My generation must embrace transitional justice not as an abstract legal concept, but as a strategy to transform an unjust peace into a lasting one. Rather than settling for what peace researcher Johan Galtung described as “negative peace”: the absence of direct violence alone, transitional justice seeks to build “positive peace”: a society that addresses and eliminates structural violence while promoting justice, inclusion and social cohesion. Guided by international human rights law and the United Nations’ Joint Principles against Impunity, transitional justice recognises that victims have four fundamental rights: the right to know the truth (truth commissions), the right to justice (criminal prosecutions), the right to reparations (material compensation and symbolic measures), and the right to guarantees of non-repetition (institutional reform). Together, these principles address past abuses, restore public trust, strengthen institutions, and prevent renewed violence.

For my generation, moving from a culture of impunity to one of accountability is not only a moral obligation to past victims; it is a responsibility to those who will come after us. By confronting injustice, we can break the cycle in which unresolved grievances are passed from one generation to the next and help build a peace founded on dignity, human rights, and the rule of law.

Responsibility requires active participation

If my generation has a duty toward future generations, it is not only to confront the past and demand justice, but also to participate in shaping Lebanon's future. Many Lebanese youth have lost faith in the possibility of change because of widespread corruption and decades of institutional paralysis. Yet democracy cannot survive if citizens withdraw from public life out of disappointment. Change depends on people who stay engaged, even when progress is slow.

After graduating, most of my classmates left Lebanon. Economic collapse, political instability, insecurity, and limited opportunities convinced many that they had no future here. Most left because they had little choice. Others stayed despite uncertainty. Neither decision determines one's commitment to peace. Some rebuild institutions from within; others advocate for Lebanon from abroad and share expertise gained overseas. With around 5 million people living in Lebanon and an estimated 15 million Lebanese and people of Lebanese origin worldwide, the Lebanese diaspora is not simply a consequence of emigration but a valuable source of knowledge, influence, and support. Geography does not define responsibility. Engagement does.

Active participation requires challenging the divisions that have weakened Lebanon for decades. Lebanon's confessional power-sharing system has often reinforced religious identities over national identity, making it difficult to build a shared sense of citizenship. Lasting peace cannot be achieved if citizens continue to define themselves primarily through religious or political affiliations rather than through a shared national identity. My generation must move beyond sectarian thinking and place Lebanon's interests above political or external affiliations. We must choose dialogue over polarisation and the common good over partisan interests.

Participation extends beyond voting. It means protecting the truth by rejecting misinformation, thinking critically, holding public officials accountable, defending democratic institutions, and engaging respectfully across differences. Peace is sustained not only through laws and institutions but through citizens willing to defend them.

In a country where leaving often seems like the only path forward, staying became my form of hope. Whether we serve our country from within its borders or from abroad, our responsibility remains the same: not to give up on Lebanon, but to remain engaged in building the future we want future generations to inherit.

Conclusion

People still ask me, “How do you live there?” But today, my answer is different. I live with the conviction that peace is not inherited; it is built when we learn from past mistakes rather than repeat them, when we transform injustice into accountability, and when we help build a country where human dignity and the rule of law prevail.

My generation has learned to normalise and survive crises. Our responsibility is to break this cycle, so that future generations know them only through history books and inherit a future built on lasting peace.

GOVERNING MULTIPLEXITY

BY ARIADNA CARCHANO

"The wider the area of non-interference, the wider my freedom." Isaiah Berlin (1958)

Interference has always been part of political life. Long before satellites, algorithms or digital architectures, a quieter instrument was already capable of shaping perception and drawing borders: language. Language is one of the oldest instruments of interference: like a Trojan horse, it enters without breaking anything, and once inside, it reorganises what a community perceives as real, dangerous or legitimate.

Berlin wrote about freedom in a world of ideological blocs, state propaganda and recognisable security apparatuses. His understanding of liberty as non-interference remains useful because it asks how to protect a minimum space of freedom against powers capable of invading human life. The contemporary world has not made that concern obsolete; it has made it more complex. Acharya's idea of a "multiplex" order is useful here: power is distributed across overlapping actors, institutions, markets, platforms and narratives, rather than concentrated in a few poles (Acharya, 2017). Interference is no longer only vertical or state-centred; it emerges through ecosystems.

Today, that old mechanism circulates through digital architectures able to multiply narratives, fragment attention and erode trust. Contemporary interference is cognitive, algorithmic, narrative and emotional. It does not prohibit thought; it weakens the conditions for thinking clearly. It does not censor speech; it dilutes conversation into noise competing for attention. It does not impose identities; it erodes the bonds that sustain a shared sense of "we".

This essay argues that, in a world shaped by multiplexity, freedom must be defended not only against direct coercion but also against the erosion of the cognitive and social conditions that make rights meaningful. Cognitive security and social cohesion should therefore be understood as democratic infrastructures: without attention, trust, belonging and judgement, human rights may remain legally recognised yet politically fragile, especially when fear persuades citizens to see the rights of others as threats to their own security. From this perspective, the duty of younger generations is not to retreat from digital life or to carry alone the burden of resilience, but to develop democratic agency over the systems that shape attention, judgement, recognition and participation.

I. Freedom under cognitive pressure

Democratic life depends on a fragile pact of attention and trust between those who narrate reality and those who receive, process and respond to it (Simón, 2025). When citizens are overwhelmed by informational density, permanent crisis and emotional exhaustion, the problem is not simply a lack of access to facts; it is that the conditions required to attend, interpret and trust are weakened.

This is where cognitive security becomes useful. Bıçakcı (2025) frames cognitive security, in the age of artificial intelligence, as a shift from defending information as content to defending cognition as process. The question is not only whether a claim is true, but whether citizens retain the autonomy and judgement to navigate manipulation. Interference need not impose a single narrative; it can multiply incompatible ones and erode confidence in the possibility of shared truth. If Berlin's non-interference protects a space in which individuals can act freely, cognitive security asks whether that space remains meaningful when the conditions of judgement are distorted (Berlin, 1958/2002).

The problem intensifies in a multiplex order, where power is distributed across overlapping actors, platforms and narratives rather than concentrated in a single centre (Acharya, 2017). A misleading narrative may be produced by one actor, amplified by a platform, reinforced by platform incentives and reinterpreted through existing social grievances, leaving accountability as fragmented as the interference itself. Precisely because no single actor can easily be held responsible, states may be tempted to respond not with targeted measures but with broad monitoring or automated control of “harmful” narratives.

This is where the liberal danger begins. Lahmann, Custers and Scott (2025) warn that AI-supported responses to “cognitive warfare” can themselves threaten fundamental rights, especially privacy and freedom of expression, if public authorities claim the power to decide which information is acceptable. Cognitive security can therefore be defended liberally only if it remains separate from censorship or a “state of truth”. It should protect the conditions for thinking freely: plural information, transparency, critical judgement and trust in legitimate processes. It should not decide what citizens must think. Nor is this only an individual competence. Judgement weakens when belonging breaks, which is why the defence of freedom must move from the individual mind to the social fabric that sustains it.

II. Social cohesion: when the social thread is strained

If cognitive security asks whether citizens can still judge clearly, social cohesion asks whether those judgements can still take place within a shared moral and political community. Judgement is embedded in relationships, inequalities, collective memory and public narratives; when those conditions weaken, some groups can begin to appear less worthy of trust, protection and rights.

Isaiah Berlin's pluralism helps to frame this problem, but not as a slogan. It is not relativism, nor a call to suppress conflict. It recognises that valuable human ends are multiple and sometimes in tension, which is why liberal politics needs toleration, compromise and legal safeguards to prevent value conflict from becoming coercion (Berlin, 1958/2002; Jiménez-Díaz, 2018). Social cohesion is what keeps disagreement political rather than dehumanising.

Narratives become persuasive when they attach to existing emotions and social fractures. Resentment or humiliation do not deterministically produce exclusionary politics; they interact with public narratives in ways that can make divisive interpretations more convincing. A sociological lens helps connect everyday experiences of belonging and exclusion with wider social processes.

I use migration as a situated example because it is the field I know best, while similar mechanisms also operate around gender, race, religion, class, territory and climate politics. In projects with migrant communities, including a focus group on online hate speech, I observed how exclusion accumulates as repetition: being repeatedly seen, and sometimes beginning to see oneself, as the Other. Across issues, the democratic risk is similar: when recognition erodes, the other stops being a rights-bearing person and becomes a problem to be managed.

This process is not exclusively digital. Hate speech and exclusionary identities have always circulated through social spaces; digital platforms do not invent grievance but intensify it through speed, repetition and emotional reinforcement. Brady et al. (2017) show that moral-emotional language increases diffusion online, helping harden the boundary between "us" and "them."

A social fracture that appears soft can harden into a security problem. This should not be read as a direct line from exclusion to violent extremism. UNDP treats radicalisation as shaped by multiple interacting drivers and contexts (UNDP, 2016). Fractured belonging does not automatically produce violence, but it can create vulnerabilities that extremist narratives exploit. This democratic risk also defines a civic obligation. Younger generations inherit not only rights, but also the responsibility to resist everyday practices that normalise dehumanisation. Social cohesion is therefore an infrastructure of rights and security. If recognition, belonging and shared judgement matter, then the systems that organise visibility, repetition and access to information are politically consequential.

III. Digital inheritance and democratic responsibility

If social cohesion depends on recognition, belonging and shared judgement, digital architectures matter because they increasingly organise what becomes visible, credible, repeatable and emotionally urgent. This is not only a technological issue. It is also a matter of peace, security and human rights: when the cognitive and social conditions that sustain rights erode, rights become politically fragile and can translate into collective insecurity. The Global Digital Compact frames the digital future as inclusive, open, safe, secure and anchored in human rights (United Nations, 2024). That horizon is useful because it recognises that digital spaces are not external to democratic life. They are part of the environment in which people access information, encounter difference, form opinions and participate in public life.

My generation inherited digital architectures we did not design. For many of us, these systems became the ordinary environment through which we access information, encounter differences, form opinions and participate in public life. They are not neutral channels. They are cognitive infrastructures: repositories, corpora, datasets, models and recommender systems that shape the sources, rankings and pathways through which citizens access knowledge. When these layers become narrow, privatised or opaque, the problem is not only that individuals may encounter false claims. The deeper problem is that the diversity, traceability and reliability required for public judgement are weakened.

This is the multiplex character of contemporary digital interference. A polarising narrative may be produced politically, ranked algorithmically, repeated by users, absorbed by communities, trained into models, and later answered by the state as a security problem. A biased classification may begin in a dataset, be operationalised by developers, deployed by a platform or public authority, and experienced by individuals as exclusion. Responsibility is distributed across developers, corporations, platforms, regulators, states, researchers, cultural institutions, communities and users. For this reason, governance cannot depend only on the state, nor on opaque private norms imposed by platforms. It requires independent, transparent and multistakeholder mechanisms able to assign responsibilities without turning public authorities into arbiters of truth.

This changes the meaning of generational responsibility. The duty of my generation is not simply to become more resilient users, but to develop democratic agency over the systems that shape attention, judgement, recognition and participation. That agency cannot be designed abstractly. Young people do not experience digital life in the same way across regions, class, gender, migration status, connectivity, political context or exposure to discrimination. A universal model of “responsible digital citizenship” would miss these differences.

Four routes follow from this. First, participatory evidence: youth consultations, digital diaries, focus groups, context-sensitive studies and independent access to platform data are needed to understand how digital environments shape young people’s judgement, recognition of others’ rights, sense of belonging and perceptions of security. This is also a cognitive-security task: before societies can protect judgement, they must understand where and how judgement is being weakened. Policy should be grounded in situated evidence, not universal prescriptions imposed from above. Second, rights-based governance: algorithmic transparency, independent audits, controlled research access to data, public registers of political advertising, human rights impact assessments and safeguards for vulnerable groups can make responsibility traceable while protecting freedom of expression. Third, democratic friction: short pauses before sharing, clearer explanations of recommendations, labels for manipulated or AI-generated media, and limits on automatic amplification during crises can protect time for judgement without criminalising disagreement. Fourth, education for agency: beyond verifying sources, education should teach how emotional frames operate, how platforms shape attention, how narratives transform difference into threat, and how to practise self-critical reflection about one’s own reactions, assumptions and forms of participation.

In Berlin's terms, pluralism requires institutional safeguards that preserve a space of non-interference. Today those safeguards must extend to the architectures that shape attention and public judgement. The obligation of my generation is therefore not to retreat from digital life, nor to accept individual resilience as the only answer. It is to promote participatory research, independent regulation, cultural custodianship of knowledge and civic habits that protect the collective conditions of freedom, rights and security. Governing multiplexity means protecting the conditions that allow people to judge, trust, disagree and live together without turning one another into enemies.

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THE PARADOX OF THE POLYCRISIS: REJECTING THE TRADE-OFF BETWEEN "FREEDOM" AND "SECURITY" FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

BY SEHER IRMAK AYDIN

Undoubtedly, our generation, Generation Z, is the one with unprecedented access to information, the most intense exposure to human rights discourse and the highest level of global awareness. However, due to the economic crises, political polarisation, rapid technological development and wars we were born into, our perception of freedom and security has been shaped differently than anticipated. Studies show that, contrary to expectations, our generation is failing to unconditionally embrace liberal values such as peace, human rights, or freedom; instead, it is increasingly drawn to populist, authoritarian leaders and policies (Lorente & Jiménez-Bravo, 2025). In many countries, young people prioritise stability, security, and "strong" leadership over democratic participation and individual freedoms. Herein lies a great paradox: we, who are tasked with building the future and advancing humanity and human rights, are becoming targets of authoritarianism in the climate of anxiety created by all these consecutive crises. Therefore, our responsibility to defend liberal values for future generations begins with confronting this authoritarian tendency within ourselves and overcoming this historical test.

Looking at the European context, we see more concrete examples: far-right parties are rising to power in countries like Italy and Hungary, while the AfD in Germany is also gaining significant support. Similarly, the same was seen in Donald Trump's victory in the recent United States election. The 2024 European Parliament elections also showed an increase in support for far-right parties, with this increase being most pronounced among Generation Z voters (Gresnigt, 2025).

While we are generally more sensitive than previous generations to issues such as racial and ethnic justice, climate change, and gender equality, a growing number of us are also becoming more receptive to extreme populist rhetoric and policies (Lorente & Jiménez-Bravo, 2025). This shift toward more radical ideologies is directly proportional to declining trust in democratic institutions. There may be several reasons for this:

Institutional Alienation: First of all, our generation, having been born into this era, is more weakly tied to traditional parties. Therefore, it is not surprising that we are more inclined to support alternative, newly emerging radical political parties. The decreasing trust in political institutions makes it more difficult for us to align with them (Nkansah & Bartha, 2023). It is quite possible that Generation Z, feeling underrepresented, will be drawn to populist movements and ideologies promising radical change, leading to a lack of participation in politics (Grassi et al., 2024).

Lack of Economic Security: In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, the prolonged uncertainty and instability of the job market increased the susceptibility of Gen Z individuals as they came of age to populist and extremist ideologies (Gresnigt, 2025). Similarly, the Covid-19 crisis and accompanying lockdowns, which we have experienced more closely, emerging during a period of declining global democracy, have amplified economic uncertainty, making the future even more unpredictable.

Polycrisis and the Search for Security: The advancement of technology has made it easier for us to access information about all wars, border conflicts, and migration waves around the world in real time. While the preamble to the United Nations Charter states that the parties of the UN are prepared to protect future generations from the calamities of war, this has not been very practical in reality (UN, 1945). We grew up witnessing geopolitical upheavals like the Ukraine-Russia war, the conflict in Gaza, the civil war in Syria, and global security crises on our screens, or we were directly involved in these crises. Furthermore, when combined with economic crises, migration, and the climate crisis, we are essentially experiencing a polycrisis.

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees everyone the right to life, liberty, and security of person. However, growing up amidst wars, terrorism, economic crises, and political polarisation, we have inevitably come to prioritise our security over human rights and freedoms. For this reason, even in Western countries considered the cradle of freedom and human rights, authoritarian regimes are gaining legitimacy among Generation Z. In a time when human rights and freedoms are so desperately needed, the search for stability due to security concerns and uncertain situations leads societies, especially young people like us, to seek "strong" leaders (Lopes, 2025). This, in turn, brings with it the restriction of human rights "for security," intolerance towards freedom of expression "for security," and the weakening of democratic institutions "for security."

But the real problem is that, in the polycrisis environment we were born into, we have become so accustomed to crises that we are ready to trade our freedom for security.

So what is the solution at this point? It can be addressed at three basic levels:

Individual Level: Building a Culture of Democracy

Our first and most important obligation towards future generations is to revive the culture of democracy within ourselves. Combating disinformation, which is one of the main causes of political polarisation, increasing media literacy, developing tolerance for different viewpoints and trusting in strong democratic institutions instead of authoritarian leaders are the biggest steps in this process. Instead of being swept away by populist leaders seen as saviours, we must spread democratic awareness within our generation.

At this point, the concept of digital citizenship gains importance. This concept means behaving within ethical and responsible boundaries when using technology. It is crucial that our generation becomes more aware of digital ethics, law, rights and responsibilities in the face of populist and authoritarian leaders. Therefore, rebuilding a culture of democracy for future generations is possible through an educational model that will enable us to be responsible young people in the digital universe (Öztürk, 2021).

National Level: Political Participation

Instead of waiting for states to formally include us in politics, we must enforce and expand participation in decision-making mechanisms through legitimate means. It is one of our important responsibilities to pass on to future generations that democracy is not just about elections, but also about active participation. At the same time, we must engage in civil and political advocacy to ensure the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary without compromise. Reminding the state that individual rights and freedoms can be protected without being sacrificed for the sake of security concerns, and passing this on to future generations, will be the legacy of legal security we leave them.

International Level: Global Institutions

As mentioned earlier, the sentence in the UN Charter, "...is prepared to protect future generations from the calamities of war," has largely lost its validity in today's conditions and crisis situations. One of the important tasks our generation can undertake in international institutions is to create international pressure, through international youth networks and diplomatic participation, to make these institutions more functional and fair, instead of being passive observers of the cumbersome structures of the UN system.

Global human rights mechanisms should be strengthened through collaboration; young people from all over the world should be brought together around the same table, and it should be demanded that such institutions not only intervene during a crisis but also function as preventive legal mechanisms before a crisis. Rebuilding trust in global institutions can only be achieved through pressure exerted by young people on these institutions.

Generation Z possesses all the intellectual and legal foundations necessary to be the most liberal generation in human history, but the crises and geopolitical upheavals into which we were born have brought our generation to the brink of sacrificing freedom for security. In the face of this, our generation's greatest obligation to future generations is to unequivocally reject the trade-off between freedom and security that populist leaders are attempting to forcibly impose. Our true mission is to maintain the democratic system by balancing these two concepts in a related manner, and by uncompromisingly protecting democratic institutions, rules, and norms. The greatest danger for future generations is not only wars, but also the price paid for security in the name of liberal values like freedom.

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POPPER, DAHRENDORF, AND THE GENERATIONAL DUTY TO DEFEND PEACE AND THE OPEN SOCIETY

BY FABIAN GREPPER

The United Nations was founded on a promise addressed not to its own signatories but to people not yet born: to save succeeding generations from the scourge and horror of war. Just about eighty years later, that promise is being tested more severely than at almost any point since it was made in 1945. States annex territory by force and call it a settled fact. Non-state armed groups negotiate as equals with governments.
Private military companies fight wars that no parliament declared, or sometimes even explicitly non-declared. Men in power speak openly of "spheres of influence," a term that belongs in my opinion to the nineteenth century at the latest, but definitely not the twenty-first. But all of this, all of what is emerging, is not simply disorder; it is the reappearance of a very old logic, in which right follows might, loyalty is personal rather than institutional, and the rules that bind the weak do not bind the strong. It is not too dramatic to call this a drift toward a new feudalism. Welcome back to the Middle Ages.

Confronting this drift requires more than nostalgia for the rules-based order of the past. We need to create new ideas to recall a new Renaissance. It requires a theory of what makes a society worth defending in the first place, and of how such a society renews itself without either freezing into stagnation or collapsing into violence. Something that has happened before to all great societies and empires in the memory of mankind. In order to achieve this goal of a new first-ever eternally stable society, two twentieth-century liberal thinkers remain indispensable: Karl Popper and Ralf Dahrendorf. Obviously neither offers a blueprint for utopia. But they give us some tools with which we can work towards such a goal.

Both insist, instead, that free societies are defined by their capacity to correct their own errors, and that this capacity depends on keeping conflict alive rather than suppressing it. Their ideas, read together, describe both the disease now afflicting the international order and the duty that falls to the generation now coming of age within it.

Popper's central argument in The Open Society and Its Enemies is not primarily a defence of any particular institution but of a method: Critical rationalism. No ruler, no party, no civilisation possesses final knowledge of the good society. What distinguishes an open society from a closed one is not that it has found the truth, but that it has built institutions that allow error to be discovered and corrected without bloodshed. Popper's own definition of democracy is telling: not the sovereignty of the people, but the ability to remove a bad government without violence. Closed societies, by contrast, are organised around unchanging custom, tribal loyalty, and rulers who claim a destiny exempting them from ordinary accountability. Seen through this lens, the emerging global disorder is not merely a breakdown of rules but kinda a reversion to the closed type.
Personalist and dynastic rule, warlordism, and the carving of the world into spheres controlled by whoever is currently strongest are all expressions of the same underlying idea: that power justifies itself, rather than answering to independent, revisable judgment. The historicist temptation Popper diagnosed in the twentieth century's totalitarian movements, the claim to ride a special destiny that places a leader or a people above criticism, has not disappeared. It has simply found new vocabularies.

Popper also left a warning that fits this moment precisely: the paradox of tolerance. An open society that extends unlimited good faith to actors actively working to dismantle it will eventually be dismantled by them.

And we see this very process in different states around the world, live and in colour. States and armed groups that treat international law as optional, that sign agreements only to break them at convenience, are exploiting exactly this good faith. The lesson is not that open societies should abandon the rule of law and meet force with the same disregard for rules, which would simply confirm that might makes right. It is that open societies must be willing to defend the conditions of openness itself, through law, deterrence, and coordinated pressure, rather than assuming that patience alone will be reciprocated. Because an order that cannot distinguish between disagreement to be tolerated and rule-breaking to be resisted will not survive long enough to keep correcting its own errors.

Ralf Dahrendorf supplies the piece Popper's framework needs to become a working theory of social change: an account of conflict. Where consensus-based sociology treated social harmony as the normal state of affairs and conflict as pathology, Dahrendorf argued the reverse. Wherever there is liberty, there is unequal distribution of power and life chances, and therefore conflict of interest is the normal condition of any free society, not a symptom of its failure.

What separates a healthy open society from a fragile (or broken) one is not the absence of conflict but the presence of institutions, courts, parliaments, a free press, trade unions, regular elections, capable of channelling conflict into argument and negotiation rather than into either suppression or violence. Liberty, on this account, is not a settled possession but a permanent, managed contest of many actors involved.

This is precisely the mechanism now failing at the global level. The Security Council is bypassed when it is inconvenient aka useless. Dispute-settlement bodies are starved of the authority to enforce their own rulings. Domestic institutions in many states are hollowed out from within while retaining their formal names. When legitimate conflicts of interest, over territory, resources, recognition or survival find no functioning institutional channel, they do not vanish. They are displaced into the two forms Dahrendorf's theory predicts: frozen stagnation, in which grievance accumulates without outlet, or open violence, in which it is resolved by force. The erosion of the rules-based order is, in this sense, less a collapse of goodwill than a collapse of channels.

Climate change intensifies this dynamic in ways that make the stakes concrete rather than abstract. Water scarcity, failed harvests, and rising seas are already generating exactly the material conflicts Dahrendorf described, over arable land, drinking water, and habitable territory, while displacing populations across borders on a scale that existing migration and asylum frameworks were never designed to absorb and deal with. Hunger and displacement, in turn, feed the very great-power competition and armed opportunism discussed above, as fragile states become arenas in which outside actors compete for resources and influence. This is also, unmistakably, a problem of critical rationalism under irreversible stakes: because the consequences of climate inaction compound across decades and cannot be undone once triggered, no single generation, and certainly no single leader's term in office, has the standing to gamble with outcomes it will not have to live with. Yet the institutions with the greatest capacity to act, national governments, central banks, international bodies, remain overwhelmingly staffed and led by a narrow cohort whose political horizon rarely extends beyond the next election cycle.

This representational failure has a demographic face that is easy to verify simply by watching the news: the same small set of leaders, in country after country, has occupied the same positions of power for twenty years or more. This is not a coincidence but a structural symptom. When the circulation of political elites slows to a near halt, a society is drifting, in Popper's terms, back toward the closed type, where access to power depends on fixed position rather than open, contestable competition. In Dahrendorf's terms, one of liberal society's essential regulative mechanisms, the periodic, peaceful transfer of authority to new interests and new generations, is failing to perform its function.

Dahrendorf distinguished between the options a society offers its members and the ligatures, the bonds of trust and belonging, that give those options meaning. Today's younger generation arguably has more options than any before it: unprecedented mobility, information, and exposure to how other societies live. What it lacks is ligature: a genuine stake extended by those currently holding power, a credible sense that institutions will bend to include new interests rather than simply outlast them. Options without ligature do not produce loyalty to the system; they produce exit, disengagement, or, eventually, revolt against it. That failure does not make conflict disappear; it merely ensures that unmet demand for change either curdles into apathy or is expressed outside institutional channels altogether, in populism, extremism, or disengagement. Meanwhile, the generation now excluded from these institutions is, on any honest accounting, unusually well positioned to judge the stakes: more mobile, more globally networked, and more directly exposed, through migration, travel, and information, to the human costs of both war and climate breakdown than any prior cohort was at the same age.

What, then, does this generation actually owe to those who will come after it? Popper's warning applies here with full force, including against ourselves: the duty is not to install a new certainty, a generational blueprint claiming moral superiority over what came before, since that would simply repeat the historicist error in a younger idiom. The duty, instead, is to defend and reopen the error-correcting machinery itself: independent courts, a free press, education that teaches people to reason and to doubt, and a willingness, including our own, someday, to be voted out. From Dahrendorf comes the complementary and more active obligation: not withdrawal into moral protest or cynicism, but organised engagement through the very institutions currently failing to renew themselves, parties, civil society, courts, elections, so that blocked conflict can once again become productive argument rather than either paralysis or violence. Concretely, this means pressing for genuine generational turnover in political leadership rather than symbolic gestures; supporting institutional mechanisms for future-generations representation. It also means resisting two opposite and equally tempting errors: nostalgia for strongman order dressed up as stability, and the fantasy that any single ideology, however well-intentioned, could permanently settle what must remain a live and ongoing contest.

The Charter's founders did not leave future generations a finished peace; they left a task to be taken up again by each generation through the same critical rationalism, self-correcting, and irreducibly conflictual method that built it. Feudalism's return is not a lapse into some distant past but a permanent temptation whenever the institutions of accountability weaken and the circulation of power stalls. There is no shortcut past this, no consensus so complete that argument becomes unnecessary, and no leadership so wise that it should escape being challenged. What defending peace, security, and human rights for future generations actually requires of my generation is not the discovery of final answers but the harder, unglamorous work of keeping the questions open: arguing, organising, contesting elections, rebuilding institutions capable of channelling disagreement rather than suppressing it, and refusing, always, to let power become permanent simply because it is currently strong. If we manage to do this, we will see our very own Renaissance of a world order that fosters progress and optimism for future generations.

DEFENDING PEACE, SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS: THE DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF OUR GENERATION

BY ALIYE FETTAH

Introduction

In an era of polycrisis, defending human rights and peace is possible, but not through the post-1945 order of institutions and methods. New ways, norms, and understandings should be adapted to the new era. This generation owes the future generation security and the protection of human rights, without leaving anyone behind. This essay will argue that this current generation must take an active role in the political and social arena. First, it will examine two challenges - the declining enforcement capacity of international organisations and the global erosion of democracy- and, for each, propose rights-based solutions.

The Declining Role of International Organisations in Conflict

In the latest conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran, the states prioritised their national security and their own interests over international law, norms, and human rights. Large-scale attacks by the US and Israel have targeted Iranian military assets, civilian infrastructure, and the leadership cadre. On the other hand, Iran retaliated by striking American military facilities across the Gulf states, violating their national sovereignty. The UN Security Council only convened an emergency session in response to the conflict. No draft resolution or formal statement was made. Most member states avoided criticising the operation or did so subtly. This revealed the Security Council's reluctance to constrain a permanent member and its ally (1). UN Secretary-General António Guterres only condemned the military escalation in a public statement, calling it a violation of the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force, but this carried no binding enforcement mechanism(2).

International organisations are losing their power to deter and enforce; thus, their responses should not be limited to conferences and reports. The responses should be structured to rebuild their legitimacy.

Solution 1: Rebuilding Enforcement Through Youth-Integrated Accountability

Three concrete shifts could be implemented to reverse the decline.

First of all, the UN's existing Youth, Peace and Security agenda should move from a consultative framework to a proactive, decision-making mechanism. Currently, the youth delegation can speak at UN forums but rarely sits at the table where binding decisions are made. Expanding formal youth seats on relevant advisory bodies to IOs would mean the relevant generation will have a say in shaping the future and the responses.

Secondly, the IOs should establish a connection between the local youth networks and international monitoring mechanisms. The Security Council's failure to respond to the 2026 USA-Iran-Israel escalation was also due to insufficient information. IOs are often slow to verify what is happening on the ground and deliver what is needed in the conflict zones. Youth-led, NGO-supported local networks could monitor and report on reality while narrowing the gap between reality and what is being discussed in formal channels.

Thirdly, transparency should be effective and efficient at every step. Diplomats in the IOs should be required to justify to the public and to their states why their states did or did not support a given resolution or statement. This will shift the quiet, unaccountable dynamic into the public domain. This alone won't compel the Council to act, but it raises the political cost of inaction. None of these measures restores the binding enforcement that the UN had planned in 1945. However, do they address the actual failure of today's crises? The states are aware of what is happening. Still, there is no proper mechanism that connects awareness to accountability, and no generation with a structural stake pushes to close the gap.

Democratic Backsliding

The crisis that the International Organisations are facing is inseparable from a second, deeper crisis: the democratic backsliding in the states that were meant to uphold it. According to the V-Dem Democracy Report 2026, the level of democracy worldwide is not improving; in fact, it is declining. The improvement following the third wave of democratisation, which began in 1974, has largely been erased. The autocratization in the USA has affected Western European countries; the level of democracy is the lowest. 74% of the world population lives in autocracies and %26 lives in liberal democracies (3). These ratios are alarming because freedom of expression, freedom of the media and academia, and liberal values are in danger.

The mechanism of democratic backsliding is different from that of the previous coups and revolutions of the 20th century. Unlike in the past, elections often remain effective even as institutions, freedom of expression, media freedom, and checks and balances are weakened internally. These are not sudden or dramatic changes; they slowly weaken, which is why it is harder to stop and prevent them until the damage is done.

In one year, the USA's score on the V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index declined by 24%, and its ranking among 179 nations dropped to 51st place. The USA is in the way of democratic backsliding under the presidency of Trump. The most common erosion practice is that the president is established as the supreme leader within the executive branch (4). Also, the administration has been undercutting checks and balances, politicising civil service and oversight bodies, and intimidating the judiciary alongside attacks on the press, academia, and civil liberties (5).

The Iran conflict illustrates how this domestic democratic erosion translates into real-world human rights consequences. When Trump launched large-scale strikes on Iran in February 2026, there was no congressional debate and no authorisation (6). The Constitution explicitly grants Congress the power to declare war, not the executive. Yet President Trump told reporters he considered seeking congressional authorisation "unconstitutional" and claimed, falsely, that other presidents had never done so (7).

Even when both chambers pushed back — a bipartisan majority in the Republican-led House voted 215 to 208 to direct the president to end hostilities with Iran under the 1973 War Powers Act — a White House official dismissed the Senate vote as having "no significance" and said it would have no force of law (8).

This case showcases the human rights cost of democratic erosion. The president launched and sustained a war without legislative accountability; the civilians paid the price of the war, and there is no democratic mechanism to stop it. Also, Trump's act may influence other leaders in democratically backsliding countries. The example presented above reveals that democratic backsliding does not occur overnight; it slowly proceeds as checks and balances are quietly dismantled, freedom of expression is steadily eroded, and executive power expands and replaces institutions.

Solution 2: Democratic Renewal Through Youth-Led Civic Engagement

As the V-Dem Democracy Report 2026 warns, acting early is critical because once democratic institutions have been damaged, reversing autocratization becomes significantly harder (9). This is exactly where the current generation holds a distinct and urgent responsibility: not merely to inherit the current democratic order, but to defend it before the damage becomes irreversible.

The first thing to do is to take education beyond the classroom and into society at large. The uninformed and disengaged public participates in democratic backsliding. When citizens do not understand the institutions designed to protect their rights, they are less likely to recognise the erosion. Young people, both as receivers and transmitters of knowledge, can be positioned to close this gap. Through community forums, workshops, networking events and digital platforms, the youth can bring democratic values and awareness of rights into places that academia and policy circles rarely reach. Most importantly, the electorate must always be included in the conversation. An informed society is the baseline of a democratic society, and no institutional reform is sustainable without it.

The second solution is to translate this civic engagement into formal influence over decision-making- at every level from local government to international forums. Attending events and workshops is important, but it must lead to meaningful participation in shaping policies. Young people should actively seek out, and the IOs should formally create a space and a mechanism through which youth voices inform decisions rather than only observing them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the central argument of this essay is that defending peace, security, and human rights for future generations is possible and obligatory. Yet, it requires a fundamentally different approach from the one that has defined the post-1945 international order. The two crises examined, the declining power and capacity of international organisations and the democratic blocklisting, are not isolated. They showcase the symptoms of a deeper problem: a rule-based order belonging to a different era, enforced by institutions unable to constrain the states they were built to govern.

The proposed solutions reflect the scale of the challenges. Strengthening IO enforcement mechanisms, formalising youth representation in decision-making bodies, building direct pipelines between local civil society networks and international accountability mechanisms, and investing in sustained civic education are structural interventions designed to rebuild legitimacy from the bottom up. The significance of these proposals lies not only in their immediate effects, but in what they signal: the defence of human rights cannot be outsourced to institutions alone, and the generation that will live longest with the consequences of today's decisions must have a structural role in shaping them. Policymakers and young people are not two separate audiences for this argument — they must become partners within it.

Also, it is important to acknowledge that this essay has addressed only two challenges reshaping the scope of peace, security, and human rights. Several critical factors that require attention include the growing role of AI in warfare, which raises questions about accountability, proportionality, and the future of international humanitarian law that existing IO frameworks are ill-equipped to address. Equally important, the intertwining of global finance, technology, and political power means that economic inequality and corporate influence over democratic processes cannot be separated from the question of who holds power and in whose interest it is exercised.

What this generation owes the next is not a perfect world - it is a set of institutions, norms, and civic habits strong enough to keep working toward one. The process is neither simple nor certain. But it is attainable, and it begins with the choice to act.

Notes

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DETHE FRAGILE BALANCE: SECURITY, POWER AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AGE OF POLYCRISIS

BY GIORGI JOKHADZE

It would probably be impossible to find a more complex and dynamic era in modern world history than the one we live in today. The contemporary world is developing rapidly, and all of this is happening in the blink of an eye. Today, we live in a post-industrial era. In the second half of the 20th century, the process of globalisation accelerated significantly, making state and non-state actors in international relations, as well as individuals, increasingly interdependent. The process of globalisation and the accompanying technological progress have made human life easier in many ways; however, alongside the benefits, they have brought many new challenges and problems.

Today, we live in the era of polycrisis, meaning that if in the past humanity usually had to deal with one major crisis at a time, today it must deal with several significant crises simultaneously. We live in an era where wars, economic problems, global pandemics, and climate change coexist, and humans must address not each of these challenges separately, but all of them together. In this regard, technological progress is particularly problematic because, *on the one hand, it helps state and non-state actors effectively address the aforementioned crises, while on the other hand, it increases the risk of restricting basic human freedoms and fundamental rights if those in power abuse authority.*

In the era of polycrisis, the balance of power in international security is also changing dynamically. After the end of the Cold War, the dominant view in Western political and academic circles was that “history had ended” and that “liberal democracy” had prevailed. However, it soon became clear that the West was sinking into wishful thinking and that neither history had ended nor had liberal democracy won.

It soon became apparent that Fukuyama’s “End of History” was a myopic interpretation of ongoing developments by the West and that the stability of the 1990s was only a temporary phenomenon. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, appeared to awaken the West, but only temporarily. Throughout this period, the West devoted the majority of its resources to fighting asymmetric threats and clearly underestimated the geopolitical ambitions of revisionist regimes (State Actors).

Russia's attack on my homeland, Georgia, in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the war in Eastern Ukraine (2014–2022) did not receive an adequate response from the West, which ultimately encouraged the Russian Federation to invade Ukraine in 2022 and attempt to subdue the entire country.

The deepening of the polycrisis was also intensified by the global economic crisis of the late 2000s, which disproportionately affected the United States. This was further compounded by the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, which significantly weakened the global military, political, and economic influence of the United States.

Furthermore, according to the theory of "hegemonic stability," declining global influence of the hegemonic state – in this case, the United States - negatively affects the international order and makes it even more anarchic. When the relative power of the world's only superpower declines, it no longer has the ability, or the willingness, to play the role of the "world's policeman" and protect the liberal international order.

As a result of the USA's declining power, authoritarian regimes are on the offensive, the number of democracies is declining, and the foreign policies of states are becoming increasingly dependent on hard power and "realpolitik," while relying less and less on the principles and norms of international law.

Today, the world faces at least five major global threats:

1. Increasing numbers of wars and armed conflicts - The narrow window of "peace" that followed the end of the Cold War turned out to be a complete illusion. Today, the number of wars and conflicts has increased significantly compared to the 1990s and early 2000s. A clear example of this argument is Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

2. The strengthening of authoritarian regimes – besides the strengthening of realpolitik principles in international relations, the number of states for which international law and its principles/norms represent the foundation of international relations is decreasing. As a result, democracies are weakening, while authoritarian regimes are becoming ever stronger.

3. The weakening of the liberal international order - The erosion of hegemonic stability has also weakened the liberal international order, as a result of which the United States can no longer, or no longer wishes to, play the role of the "world's policeman" as effectively as it did 20 or 30 years ago.

4. Migration — One of the main challenges of the last two decades has been uncontrolled migration. The migration crisis has contributed to the rise of populist and nationalist parties/political leaders (especially in Europe), which has significantly weakened the role of the European Union as a "norm-setting" actor.

5. Climate change — This is a universal threat that, in theory, should unite all rational states, because the Earth is the common home of all humanity, and protecting it is the responsibility of each and every one of us.

Global warming, the expansion of the ozone hole, excessive carbon dioxide emissions, deforestation, and other climate-related problems are already threatening every inhabitant of the planet. If world leaders continue to act selfishly and focus only on their own interests, humanity may soon become extinct.

The main dilemma created by the era of polycrisis is Security versus Human Rights.

The growth of international security challenges (both symmetrical and asymmetrical threats), combined with technological progress and the development of artificial intelligence, has provided governments with the opportunity to use every crisis as a means of achieving their own political objectives.

Almost every state constitution regulates the introduction of a "state of emergency." During a state of emergency, some kind of social contract is established between the government and society: the source of power - the people - temporarily gives additional authority to those in power to address the most pressing challenges.

This practice originates from ancient times. For example, in Ancient Rome, during periods of crisis, republican governance was temporarily suspended, and power was transferred to a dictator who was responsible for overcoming the crisis and then returning authority to the Senate (the representative institution). Sometimes, after the crisis ended, the Senate regained power; however, in other cases, the temporary ruler used the state of emergency to strengthen his own authority and eventually became the dictator.

Modern leaders often face the same temptation. As the saying goes, “Power corrupts, and absolute power absolutely corrupts”. The best example of the use of emergency powers in modern politics is the 16-year rule of former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Orbán first declared a state of emergency in 2016, when the migration crisis began in the European Union. The second wave of emergency measures was connected to the COVID-19 crisis, while the third wave followed Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Orbán used these crises to strengthen his own political influence and weaken the opposition, the judiciary, the media, and non-governmental organisations. Almost every governing elite in the world faces a similar temptation.

This situation is also not strange for Georgia. As a Georgian citizen who has been actively participating in all political and civic processes of the country, I can confidently say that Georgia is one of the best examples of how a government uses an often artificially created and illusory security challenge to silence critical voices.

Similar to Hungary’s “Sovereignty Protection Act” adopted by Viktor Orbán’s government in 2023, the Georgian government also adopted the so-called “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence.” According to this law, any civil society organisation receiving at least 20% of its funding from abroad would be granted the status of a “foreign agent.”

The purpose of this law was to label patriotic citizens as “agents,” suppress critical voices in the country, cement authoritarianism, and oust the West from Georgia. The implementation of the law was followed by a courageous protest by mainly young people in March 2023, which forced the government to temporarily withdraw the legislation.

In April 2024, precisely one year later, the government readopted the same law. This time, despite two months of continuous and determined protests, the authorities still passed the legislation, which resulted in the European Union suspending its relations with Georgia.

During the protests, police forces physically assaulted peaceful demonstrators. During one of the protests on April 16, 2024, the police and special forces assaulted my 18-year-old brother and me and later detained us in a temporary detention facility simply because we were peacefully protesting a law that was unacceptable to the majority of the population.

Following the 2024 elections, which were significantly falsified according to international assessments, the human rights situation deteriorated even further. On November 28, 2024, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced that Georgia was suspending its relations with the European Union until 2028.

This announcement triggered one of the largest protest movements in the history of independent Georgia, with more than 100,000 people gathered in the streets of Tbilisi for one week. Every day, police forces brutally beat and dispersed peaceful citizens.

During this one-week period, police and special forces attacked more than 500 people, while over 700 individuals were detained. More than 150 of them were prosecuted under criminal charges. Today, Georgia has more political prisoners per capita than Russia and Belarus. Judge for yourselves.

Over time, the government, acting under the pretext of “protecting security and sovereignty,” adopted numerous new repressive laws. Today, demonstrators standing on Rustaveli Avenue — the central street of Tbilisi — can be detained for simply holding a blank banner or even merely standing in front of the Parliament building.

This is the recent history of my country. This is an example of how a government restricts the fundamental rights of patriotic citizens of Georgia, under the pretext of addressing an illusory security challenge.

However, one undeniably positive development that has emerged in recent years is that Georgia’s youth are strongly pro-European and are ready to fight to the very end for its European, secure, and prosperous future.

It was precisely the youth who stood behind the protests of 2023–2024. It is precisely the youth who have been standing on Rustaveli Avenue for 600 days already, defending their future and protesting the government's violations of fundamental human rights.

As a representative of this generation, I fully understand my individual and collective responsibility as a citizen of Georgia toward my own future and the future of my nation - a small country that, through its perseverance and determination to fight, has preserved its statehood until today.

I believe that, in terms of protecting security and human rights, young people today face two major challenges, not only in Georgia but everywhere around the world:

1. We must demonstrate sufficient political will, actively participate in political processes, and be prepared to defend our voices at any cost. We have a responsibility to force governments to consider our perspectives and include us in the process of governing the state.

2. We must develop a new style of politics that is not focused on Machiavellian calculations and cynical strategies, but rather on respect for our state and citizens. We must become the generation that respects the opinion of every individual and is ready to involve every citizen in the process of building the state.

Unlike previous generations, our main goal should not be gaining political and financial benefits, but rather creating public goods and improving the quality of life for every person.

To achieve this, future generations will have to work tirelessly. We will have to fight against all odds to protect democracy and human rights.

To succeed, we need only three things:

1. Political will;
2. Relevant competence;
3. The determination and fighting spirit of young people for democracy and a better future.

WHO ARE WE?

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Türkiye Office:

Established in 1958, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom promotes liberal values through political education in Germany and abroad. Since 1991, FNF has been working in Türkiye with partners from civil society, academia, business, and politics. Given Türkiye's historical and strategic importance to Germany, Europe, and the transatlantic region, FNF supports liberal-minded individuals and organisations to help foster a more liberal, democratic, and prosperous society. The Foundation's office moved from Ankara to Istanbul in 2002, continuing its mission of promoting liberal values across Türkiye.

Human Rights Academy:

The Human Rights Academy was founded in 2020 to institutionalise human rights courses and build a regular structure through cooperation between civil society and academia. A consultative committee of experts has been established. The Academy aims to fill gaps in undergraduate and graduate human rights education through various activities, advance and disseminate human rights knowledge in Türkiye, and provide human rights education to individuals across fields who need this training.

FNF Global Security Hub:

Since 2017, the Global Security Hub has been the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom's central point of contact for all security and defence-related activities. Together with the Liberal Defence Expert Network, it brings together a broad network of policy advisors and think tank experts from across Europe and beyond.



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