

Peck's Postulates

by Edward L. Peck, retired U.S. diplomat; c. 2000

First, there are NO absolutes; perception is everything. It is not what we say or even what we do that matters. The only thing that matters is how the other party(ies) PERCEIVE what we're doing—because that is what controls how they react. Differing perceptions do not make one side wrong and the other right, but they do dictate what does or does not happen.

Second, there are only two things you can always depend upon sovereign nations doing.

1. They will always behave as if they perceive themselves to be sovereign nations. This means they can do whatever they wish, and if another nation does not like it, they can do whatever they wish to affect a change.
2. They will never, ever do anything that they perceive not to be in their best interests.

Third, every international problem can be put into one of just three categories, if grouped solely on the basis of who decides what to do about them.

1. Unilateral Issues, in which one country can make the decision all by itself. For example, the U.S. decides to break relations with Cuba.
2. Multilateral Issues, in which there is more than one participant and all must agree before a decision can be reached, e.g. the U.S. and Cuba decide to reestablish relations
3. Non-Lateral Issues, in which an outside party may have a great deal of interest, but is not directly involved in the decisions, e.g. the U.S. and the Arab-Israeli Issue.

Fourth, there is only one internationally recognized, universal explanation for every nation's foreign policies: "That's different." This explains why, for example, the U.S. can involve itself militarily in protecting the Kurds in Iraq, but only express mild concern over the harsher circumstances facing the Kurds in neighboring Turkey.