

BUILDING UP A PROSPECTIVE STUDY FOR THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

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Prospective studies, avoiding strategic surprise and anticipating the evolutions, are the aspiration of a number of methodologies. Our article aims to make a reason and find the main factors that would influence the reassessment of the World Order of tomorrow based on a Romanian methodology of prospective studies. The level of ambition is to separate the continuity versus the dramatic change and to find the critical indicators that are drawing the scenarios of the future, be they those of continuity, of discontinuity and black swan cases. Relative certainties are helping us draft the black swan scenarios of highly improbable but also enormous impact. The results and conclusions are bringing to the forefront both technology and malaises of democracy, together with a militaristic epoch where the chance is to avoid kinetic wars through mitigations and coping with the rivalries and power shifts in geopolitical capacity.

Keywords: prospective studies; critical uncertainties; relative certainties; continuity; change;

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

In order to avoid exposing the most important institutions and decision makers to the consequences of strategic surprise (Cancian, 2018), we have introduced the Romanian methodology of prospective studies in 2012 (Chifu-2, 2015; 2016, pp. 75-113). This phenomenon means that an institution is not able to anticipate, to prevent, and to react properly to a crisis of the amplitude to produce the disruption of the activity of an institution, a government, or a state. The level of resilience proves to be very low in such conditions. Moreover, to cope with such a crisis, the decision-making system has to react on an ad-hoc basis, without preparation or proper instruments and anticipation, including in communication in due time and proper manner to its own public, with major consequences for citizens' security and their lives, and exposing the decision-maker to public opprobrium (Chifu-5, 2023).

We have developed the prospective studies methodology based on a technique used by the Dutch intelligence services – PLATO (Schinkel, 2013; Chifu-2) – *plausible tomorrows*, that we have completed, experimented and used in several cases to identify alternative scenarios for a critical evolution in international relations and security studies. We have developed as well several times the methodology related to Ukraine (Chifu-1, 2014; Chifu, Nantoi, Getmanchuk, 2015; Chifu-3, 2015), the Black Sea Region (Chifu, Bălăşoiu, 2018) and the evolution of international relations (Chifu-5).

Our study has several steps to be accomplished, each and every one inseparable from the final outcome. The first is an assessment of the situation at the moment we begin the analysis, updated at the end of the process. The second goes into identifying the evolutions that are affecting our explored evolution of the situation of the world. The third is extracted from the brainstorming part of the different influences on a short, medium, and long term, the critical indicators, in a complete and non-contradictorily system. The fourth is identifying relative certainties and critical uncertainties linked to the required process and is aimed at identifying the New World Order reassessment. The fifth is creating the scenarios by combining the different possible values of the independent indicators identified in each system for the time frame analysed. And the sixth deals with playing the selected scenarios.

We have developed the assessment considering four domains of concerns:

ACTORS

We have focussed on Russia, Ukraine, the EU, the USA, NATO, and China, even though we have assessed that, in the new technological world, each country that possesses new technology or resources of any kind linked with such a technology could play a bigger role than that recommended by its economy, research, military, political, and international relevance (Chifu-5). But this is for the future. The initial assessment is focusing on existing big actors, relevant actors, capable of disruption in the world order, or having a say in remodelling this order (Rogers, 2019).

RELATIONS

We have focused on the most important bilateral relations linking the big relevant players: EU-USA, Russia-China, USA-Russia (discussing also some convergent visions of Putin and Trump), EU-Russia, EU-China, USA-China. Once again, other actors or relations could influence the evolution and enter the relevant stage, in the future, but at the initial moment of analysis, the assessment focuses on the existent ones (Oxford Analytica, 2013).

WARS, CONFLICTS, CONFRONTATIONS

The conflicts, wars, and confrontations are indispensable to the original assessment and to the evolution of the World Order (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, 2011). We have focused on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, on the Israel/USA confrontation with Iran, on the conflict in the Middle East and its possible outcomes, on the USA-China economic and possible military rivalry falling into a possible conflict on Taiwan or in the Indo-Pacific region, as well on the Russia-Europe/NATO(USA?) possible rivalry or confrontation (Walpole, 2012).

DRAMATIC CHANGES

There are signals of developments that can affect the international World Order through dramatic changes and ruptures in the continuity of today's life (Gowing, Langdon, 2018). We have identified here the technology as an agent of dramatic changes, its impact, and the independent evolution of the human society, a disruptive global crisis/civil emergency like the pandemic, and the war (full scale-war, quasi-global war).

During our study, we organised nine brainstorming sessions with different groups of some 50 experts of different ages and master degree students to absorb fresh ideas. The subjects are the result of the analysis on the dynamics of the international world order and what could prompt dramatic changes issued via

the trends developed in areas with high impact. We explored in those brainstorming sessions:

- The impact of the war in Ukraine on the regional and global security architecture.
- The EU-Europe relationship and review of the strategic commitments.
- Hybrid threats, disinformation and cyber security impact on the world of tomorrow.
- China's raise and the consequences on the global geopolitical environment.
- NATO's provocations and opportunities.
- Perspectives of European's strategic autonomy.
- Energy security, dependency of external resources, and its impact on the elections and reassessment of the World Order of tomorrow.
- The future of defence policies – options and scenarios.
- The information-cognitive warfare and its level of impact on the evolution of the world tomorrow.

RELATIVE CERTAINTIES, CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES

Relative certainties are the facts that 100% of the experts would claim as true. We used the relative certainties in order to identify and to play *black swan* (Taleb, 2010) scenarios, with low probability and high impact. We identified ten relative certainties, with the time frame coming from short (s), medium (m), and long (l) term, or all meaning for all time frames considered (all):

- s+m – Putin maintains the power, in spite of the natural age, health problems and rivalries inside the system;
- all – Russia will avoid using a nuclear bomb. The consequences are already established and could come with high costs and loss of partners and support;
- s+m – Russia will maintain maximalist requests in the war with Ukraine due to the revisionist posture and the veto demand for the security in Europe;
- all – Russia wants to revive its posture of superpower recognised at the global level;
- all – the war in Ukraine will not create precedents for a new world order, meaning specifically that Ukraine will not accept a trade, territories versus peace. In this case, Ukraine, a conventional power, can prove that it can resist a nuclear actor, Russia, in a conventional war, creating a precedent. Ukraine, a smaller actor, but more flexible, adaptable and inventive, resists or even can win the war with Russia when it is about avoiding to meet

the level of ambition of Putin's Russia, meaning occupying Ukraine, changing the legitimate government elected, and depriving it of its armed forces and capacities to defend itself, questioning the very identity and right to exist as a state;

- s+m – Europe will fight for the rules-based order and defend them. In such a way, we are considering a continuity, with the EU and its member states being status quo powers;
- all – China will challenge US global power;
- all – China with its allies will challenge the World Order rules and introduce revisionist demands altering rules-based order.
- s+m – The world is sliding towards authoritarianism. Democracy indexes fall in the interest of the world, a fact already proved by the last situation evaluated for freedom of expression, media freedom, exercise of human rights at a global level, with indexes on the fall;
- s – Russia will continue the war or a war at any costs and will require a veto on security of Europe.

Critical uncertainties – the same way as in the case of relative certainties, the critical uncertainties are related to the facts and evolutions that are game changers, dramatically changing the evolution of the world tomorrow (Cortney, Kirklnad, Viguerie, 1997). In those cases, we also used the brainstorming sessions and the expert sessions determined the following critical uncertainties for short, medium and long terms:

- m+l – Russia will continue the war at all costs and request for veto on security of Europe or, on the contrary, will stop the war in some clear conditions. Even though it is a relative certainty in the short run, in the medium and long term, it becomes a critical uncertainty coming from the economy and Putin's own relations with the public and instruments of power in the Kremlin;
- m+l – here the stakes are coming from the forces involved in splitting Europe versus the ones that create a higher convergence because of the new common enemy, Russia. In that case, the EU can affirm itself as a global relevant actor;
- s+m – enemy within the gates: nationalism/sovereign-ism, MAGA export of system in Europe and the world are changing dramatically the political landscape, challenging the rules and relations. Alternatively, this anti-system,

populist rhetoric becomes an extinguished fashion with the opposition of Europeans or when Trump changes its position or leaves office without a MAGA successor in place;

- all – the militaristic age: we are moving towards a global war, at least in the form of a full-spectrum warfare with some kinetic regional wars, or, on the contrary, people cope and mitigate wars and conflicts, maintaining them in a clear, limited framework, without harsh consequences;
- all – three evolutions are related to Europe/the EU: first, Europe and the USA continue to form a strong democratic alliance, limiting their differences; second, the USA and Russia, together with the nationalist-sovereign-ist supported movements, are dismantling Europe/the EU in nation states; and third, the USA and China will fight, through excessive charm and constrains instruments, for the EU/Europe's support in their own program and design of the world order;
- m+l – technological dramatic impact: the first choice is technology destroying or leading to the meltdown of the human society (just individuals, not believing anything), in a world dominated by machines and algorithms; the second would be the survival and adaptation of the human race to technology, with a substantial number of people left behind; and third choice, a complete techno-human new integrated world, with the dominance and control of the human on the technologies that they invented.

Critical indicators

Based on the critical uncertainties identified (Trung Anh, 2002), we have established the system of critical indicator for the short, medium and long term, as follows:

Short-term (6-12 month) indicators:

1. Enemy within democratic states: nationalism/sovereign-ism, MAGA export of system in Europe and the world would alter the democratic system in Europe itself. Or, alternatively, the fashion of those populism/nationalism approaches will be extinguished, will pass.

2. Militaristic age: the world enters into a militaristic age, prone to conflicts, a global war/full spectrum warfare as a rule, with Russian episodes of kinetic wars, full-scale, high-intensity, long-term wars of attrition. Or the steam will cease and the confrontation will be extinguished due to the lack of means, money, people, will, or due to the increase of vigilance, preparedness, and resilience from the people.

3. The US role in Europe: the EU/Europe-USA democratic alliance or USA-Russia plus nationalist movements dismantling Europe-EU in nation states or USA-China will fight for EU-Europe's support in their own programs.

4. Ukraine will resist/Ukraine will fail (through a domino effect after a breach in the first line).

5. EU will support Ukraine in the long run/stop financing Ukraine, block support.

So, for the short term, we have identified, through different combinations of the value of the critical indicators, **48 scenarios** (2x2x3x2x2 values for indicators). We add to that the **ten "black swan" scenarios**.

Medium-term (3-5 years)

1. Russia in the war: Russia will continue the war at all costs and require a veto on the security of Europe or Russia will stop the war due to economic shortages, discontent of the society with taking social and development resources for feeding the war.

2. The EU global actor: We will have a split EU or the convergence of the member states even further due to a common enemy, making the EU a global actor, relevant in the new World Order dynamics.

3. The world enters into a **militaristic age**, prone to conflicts, a global war/full-spectrum warfare as a rule, with Russian episodes of kinetic wars, full-scale, high-intensity, long-term wars of attrition. Or the steam will cease and the **confrontation will be extinguished** due to the lack of means, money, people, will. Or increase of vigilance and resilience from the people.

4. The EU will support Ukraine in the long run, EU-Ukraine will mark a convergence in security and defence with Europe becoming a global geopolitical actor, **or the EU will stop financing Ukraine, block support.**

Here we have **16 scenarios (2x2x2x2 values for indicators)** and just **nine "black swan" scenarios**.

Long-term (10-15 years)

1. The EU global actor: We will have a split EU or the convergence of the member states even further due to a common enemy, making the EU a global actor, relevant in the new World Order dynamics.

2. The world enters into a **militaristic age**, prone to conflicts, a global war/full-spectrum warfare as a rule, with Russian episodes of kinetic wars, full-scale,

high-intensity, long-term wars of attrition. Or the steam will cease and the **confrontation will be extinguished** due to the lack of means, money, people, will. Or increase of vigilance and resilience from the people.

3. Technological impact: The first choice is technology destroying or leading to the meltdown of the human society (just individuals, not believing anything), in a world dominated by machines and algorithms; the second would be the survival and adaptation of the human race to technology, with a substantial number of people left behind; and the third choice, a complete techno-human new integrated world, with the dominance and control of the human on the technologies that they invented (Chifu, Savu, 2020; Chifu-4, 2021, pp. 13-22).

4. USA-China rivalry: confrontation or cohabitation. Globalization or split into globalised blocks.

Here we have **24 scenarios (2x2x3x2 values for indicators)** and **five “black swan” scenarios to play.**

SCENARIOS TO BE PLAYED:

Based on the critical indicators, we have established the scenarios to be played in the study, and we stick to the best case, worse case and most probable case (Manning, 2012) for each of the three time-frames – short, medium and long term. We added a special case of debate on the technological impact, meaning the scenarios that put technology as a dramatic game changer¹, which is leading the evolution of the World Order, and we are not talking here about supply chains (Grabo, 2002), but about the impact on humankind and human society (Chifu, Savu, ib.), as well as the relevance in dominance of the world. We added to that the ten “black swan” scenarios, as follows:

Short-term (6-12 month):

- *best case (continuity):* enemy within will fall, Ukraine succeeds, the EU supports Ukraine, US constructive/supportive role in the EU, responsible transfer of defence attributions from the USA to Europe (Europe meaning European NATO leg, EU or the coalition of the willing), and managing global rivalries without kinetic full-scale war;

¹ See Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Trends Programme, Global Strategic Trends out to 2040*, fourth edition, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), UK, 2010; NIC, *Global Trends 2030*.

- *worst case (dramatic change)*: enemy within will prevail in a number of states, that will change the European Union in an intergovernmental weak union, the USA will retreat without considering lack of capabilities of the EU, the EU will drop the support for Ukraine which will implode/domino reaction, militarism will grow towards a war confrontation;
- *most probable case (transformation)*: changes in some states, but maintaining the course for the EU, support for Ukraine, Ukraine resisting, US responsible transfer to the EU and support (diminished), difficult managing USA-China, USA-EU, trade and rare earth issues, USA-Russia, EU-Russia relations, war sends signals in Europe/NATO engaging those states, new confrontations emerged or accentuate in the Middle East, Indo-Pacific. No war, no peace.

Medium-term (3-5 years):

- *best case (continuity)*: Russia will stop the war, costs and economic problems, a way out. The EU global actor, reinforced, and solidarity between states. Conflicts will be kept out of explosion in kinetic wars. The EU will support Ukraine;
- *worst case (dramatic change)*: Russia will continue the war. The EU will review its functioning into a more intergovernmental body, challenged in the European Council by a growing number of states, including France/Germany with populist extreme right inputs. Emergence of militaristic war-prone world. The EU will stop supporting Ukraine, and Ukraine will resist only due to a few states/coalition of the willing;
- *most probable case (transformation)*: Russia will continue the war. The EU will navigate its way between blockages from several states and the need to reinforce its global stance. The EU will continue supporting Ukraine, but diminishing its footprint. The EU will consolidate its position at a global level. War-prone world, militaristic approach, without a real explosion of new conflicts and efforts to keep the existing ones under control.

Long-term (10-15 years):

- *best case (continuity)*: the EU global actor, with a rising relevance at the global level, building a military might and strong deterrent. The USA-China rivalry is manageable, without huge frictions, managing existing and emerging conflicts at the global level. Reassessment of the international

World Order in a stable, convened way. Integration man-machine/algorithms and absorption of technological evolution;

- *worst case (dramatic change)*: the EU is irrelevant, formal, losing its presence and influence at the international level. Militaristic approach and a long range of conflicts that involve the West, including Russia-NATO on article 5 basis. The USA-China rivalry moving to war in Indo-Pacific/Taiwan and nuclear sabre-rattling in the public space. Splits inside the society, technology playing an important and individual self-conscious role in security, defence and day-by-day evolutions;
- *most probable case (transformation)*: The EU aims to become a global actor, has added military might, but is still kept away by countries with Eurosceptic leadership blocking the functionality and the Qualified majority decisions. The USA-China rivalry has episodes and ups and down, including clashes in the Indo-Pacific and split of globalization into two parties, with a number of exceptions and communication still on, dollarization continuing to be the reference for the exchanges between the blocks. Militarism and using wars to solve disputes is more present, even though not between the Big Power actors, that tend to manage the kinetic confrontation and nuclear rivalries. Humans will survive, adapt, and some part of the people will be left behind by the accelerated technological changes.

plus **technological case debate**:

- Scenario where technology takes over the core of the debate and becomes the most important factor of the world in the long run.

Ten “black swan” scenarios

The ten “*black swan*” scenarios, with high impact and low probability, are made by challenging the relative certainties:

- s+m – Putin maintains power, in spite of the natural age, health problems and rivalries inside the system;
- all – Russia will avoid using a nuclear bomb. The consequences are already established and could come with high costs and lost of partners and support;
- s+m – Russia will maintain maximalist requests in the war with Ukraine due to the revisionist posture and the veto demand for the security in Europe;
- all – Russia wants to revive its posture of superpower recognised at the global level;

- all – the war in Ukraine will not create precedents for a new world order, meaning specifically that Ukraine will not accept a trade, territories versus peace. In this case, Ukraine, a conventional power, can prove that it can resist a nuclear actor, Russia, in a conventional war, creating a precedent. Ukraine, a smaller actor, but more flexible, adaptable and inventive, resists or even can win the war with Russia when it is about avoiding to meet the level of ambition of Putin's Russia, meaning occupying Ukraine, changing the legitimate government elected and depriving it of its armed forces and capacities to defend itself, questioning the very identity and right to exist as a state;
- s+m – Europe will fight for the rules-based order and defend them. In such a way, we are considering a continuity, with the EU and its member states being status quo powers;
- all – China will challenge US global power;
- all – China with its allies will challenge the World Order rules and introduce revisionist demands altering rules-based order;
- s+m – the world is sliding towards authoritarianism. Democracy indexes fall in the interest of the world, a fact already proved by the last situation evaluated for freedom of expression, media freedom, exercise of human rights at a global level, with indexes on the fall;
- s – Russia will continue the war or a war at any costs and will require a veto on security of Europe.

In total we had 20 scenarios played from a total of 112 possible – 88 scenarios from indicators and 24 “black swan” scenarios.

CONCLUSIONS

After playing all the scenarios, we have realised that a number of conclusions are imposing themselves and are going to be definitory for the future of the World Order, that of the EU/Europe as a global actor and the future of humanity.

First, technology is going to play a more important role, even critical in some cases, for the future of the World Order, provided that the humanity can begin to adapt to this future right now, in the short and medium terms, as soon as possible, for avoiding the negative possible trends completely splitting the humanity and society into individuals included in cognitive tribes or letting a big part of the humanity behind, into a level of illiteracy for the new technology that is preventing the integration with machines and algorithms.

Second, the so-called **enemy within the democratic societies, that are derailing the rules and channelling them towards autocratic forms of governance** where power, physical and technological, plays the most important role, is going to define the world of tomorrow and the role of the EU/Europe as a global actor or the inclination to isolate communities inside nation-states, prone to disinformation warfare that shape free choices, tastes and way of life, altering liberty and human rights.

Third, historians are telling us that **any change of high tectonicity between the substance and form of the World Order is coming after a war**, a kinetic confrontation at the global level. It depends on the humankind and its leadership if that could stay in the full spectrum warfare without kinetic full-scale war or we will repeat the history of the past, destroying parts of our heritage, buildings, humans and diversity.

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