

Horizon 2030: Will Emerging Risks Unravel Our Global Systems?

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ABSTRACT

Various scholars and institutions regard global social instability as the greatest threat facing this decade. The catalyst has been postulated to be a Second Great Depression which, in turn, will have profound implications for global security and national integrity. This paper, written from a broad systems perspective, illustrates how emerging risks are getting more complex and intertwined; blurring boundaries between the economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal and technological taxonomy used by the World Economic Forum for its annual global risk forecasts. Tight couplings in our global systems have also enabled risks accrued in one area to snowball into a full-blown crisis elsewhere. The COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic fallouts exemplify this systemic chain-reaction. Once-inexorable forces of globalization are rupturing as the current global system can no longer be sustained due to poor governance and runaway wealth fractionation. The coronavirus pandemic is also enabling Big Tech to expropriate the levers of governments and mass communications worldwide. This paper concludes by highlighting how this development poses a dilemma for security professionals.

Key Words: Global Systems, Emergence, VUCA, COVID-9, Social Instability, Big Tech, Great Reset

INTRODUCTION

The new decade is witnessing rising volatility across global systems. Pick any random “system” today and chart out its trajectory: Are our education systems becoming more robust and affordable? What about food security? Are our healthcare systems improving? Are our pension systems sound? Wherever one looks, there are dark clouds gathering on a global horizon marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA).

But what exactly is a global system? Our planet itself is an autonomous and self-sustaining mega-system, marked by periodic cycles and elemental vagaries. Human activities within however are not system isolates as our banking, utility, farming, healthcare and retail sectors etc. are increasingly entwined. Risks accrued in one system may cascade into an unforeseen crisis within and/or without (Choo, Smith & McCusker, 2007). Scholars call this phenomenon “emergence”; one where the behaviour of intersecting systems is determined by complex and largely invisible interactions at the substratum (Goldstein, 1999; Holland, 1998).

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point. While experts remain divided over the source and morphology of the virus, the contagion has ramified into a global health crisis and supply chain nightmare. It is also tilting the geopolitical balance. China is the largest exporter of intermediate products, and had generated nearly 20% of global imports in 2015 alone (Cousin, 2020). The pharmaceutical sector is particularly vulnerable. Nearly “85% of medicines in the U.S. strategic national stockpile” sources components from China (Owens, 2020).

An initial run on respiratory masks has now been eclipsed by rowdy queues at supermarkets and the bankruptcy of small businesses. The entire global population – save for major pockets such as Sweden, Belarus, Taiwan and Japan – have been subjected to cyclical

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lockdowns and quarantines. Never before in history have humans faced such a systemic, borderless calamity.

COVID-19 represents a classic emergent crisis that necessitates real-time response and adaptivity in a real-time world, particularly since the global Just-in-Time (JIT) production and delivery system serves as both an enabler and vector for transboundary risks. From a systems thinking perspective, emerging risk management should therefore address a whole spectrum of activity across the economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal and technological (EEGST) taxonomy. Every emerging threat can be slotted into this taxonomy – a reason why it is used by the World Economic Forum (WEF) for its annual global risk exercises (Maavak, 2019a).

As traditional forces of globalization unravel, security professionals should take cognizance of emerging threats through a systems thinking approach.

METHODOLOGY

An EEGST sectional breakdown was adopted to illustrate a sampling of extreme risks facing the world for the 2020-2030 decade. The transcendental quality of emerging risks, as outlined on Figure 1, below, was primarily informed by the following pillars of systems thinking (Rickards, 2020):

- Diminishing diversity (or increasing homogeneity) of actors in the global system (Boli & Thomas, 1997; Meyer, 2000; Young et al, 2006);
- Interconnections in the global system (Homer-Dixon et al, 2015; Lee & Preston, 2012);
- Interactions of actors, events and components in the global system (Buldyrev et al, 2010; Bashan et al, 2013; Homer-Dixon et al, 2015); and
- Adaptive qualities in particular systems (Bodin & Norberg, 2005; Scheffer et al, 2012)

Since scholastic material on this topic remains somewhat inchoate, this paper buttresses many of its contentions through secondary (i.e. news/institutional) sources.

ECONOMY

According to Professor Stanislaw Drozd (2018) of the Polish Academy of Sciences, “a global financial crash of a previously unprecedented scale is highly probable” by the mid-2020s. This will lead to a trickle-down meltdown, impacting all areas of human activity.

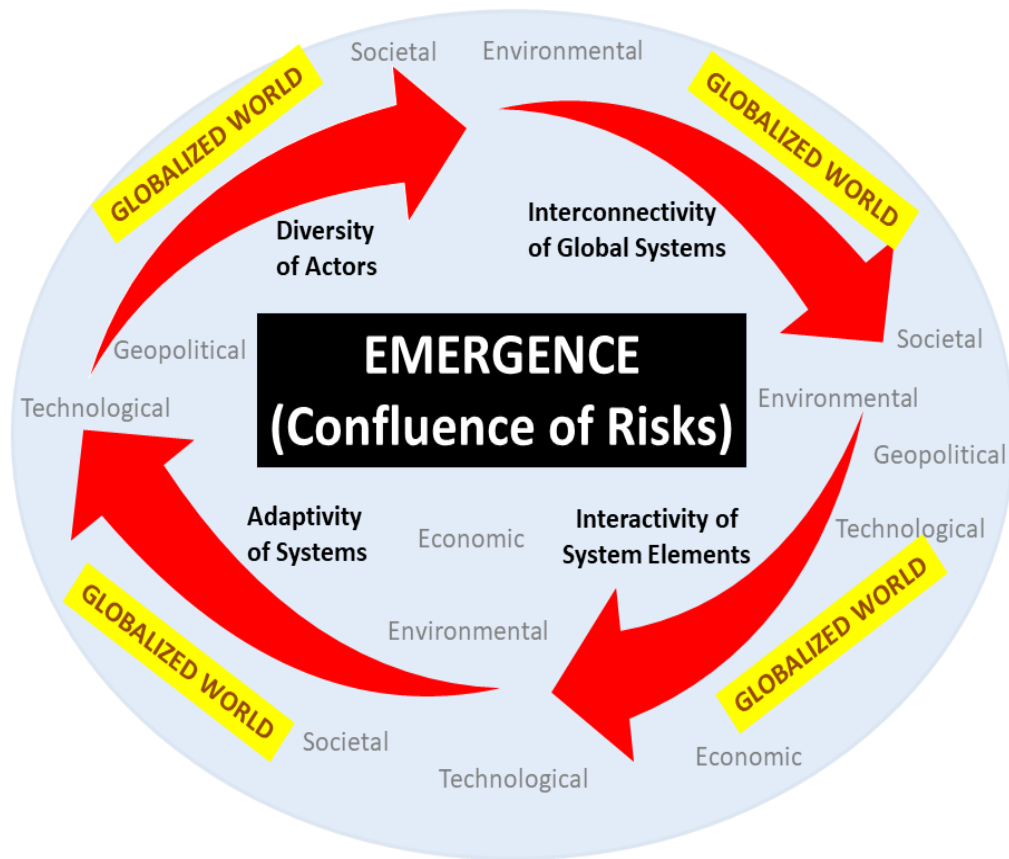


Figure 1: Systemic Emergence of Global Risks

The economist John Mauldin (2018) similarly warns that the “2020s might be the worst decade in US history” and may lead to a Second Great Depression. Other forecasts are equally alarming. According to the International Institute of Finance, global debt may have surpassed \$255 trillion by 2020 (IIF, 2019). Yet another study revealed that global debts and liabilities amounted to a staggering \$2.5 quadrillion (Ausman, 2018). The reader should note that these figures were tabulated *before* the COVID-19 outbreak.

The IMF singles out widening income inequality as the trigger for the next Great Depression (Georgieva, 2020). The wealthiest 1% now own more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people (Coffey et al, 2020) and this chasm is widening with each passing month. COVID-19 had, in fact, boosted global billionaire wealth to an unprecedented \$10.2 trillion by July 2020 (UBS-PWC, 2020). Global GDP, worth \$88 trillion in 2019, may have contracted by 5.2% in 2020 (World Bank, 2020).

As the Greek historian Plutarch warned in the 1st century AD: “*An imbalance between rich and poor is the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics*” (Mauldin, 2014). The stability of a society, as Aristotle argued even earlier, depends on a robust middle element or middle class. At the rate the global middle class is facing catastrophic debt and unemployment levels, widespread social disaffection may morph into outright anarchy (Maavak, 2012; DCDC, 2007).

Economic stressors, in transcendent VUCA fashion, may also induce radical geopolitical realignments. Bullions now carry more weight than NATO’s security guarantees

in Eastern Europe. After Poland repatriated 100 tons of gold from the Bank of England in 2019, Slovakia, Serbia and Hungary quickly followed suit.

According to former Slovak Premier Robert Fico, this erosion in regional trust was based on historical precedents – in particular the 1938 Munich Agreement which ceded Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland to Nazi Germany. As Fico reiterated (Dudik & Tomek, 2019):

“You can hardly trust even the closest allies after the Munich Agreement... I guarantee that if something happens, we won’t see a single gram of this (offshore-held) gold. Let’s do it (repatriation) as quickly as possible.”
(Parenthesis added by author).

President Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia (a non-NATO nation) justified his central bank’s gold-repatriation program by hinting at economic headwinds ahead: “We see in which direction the crisis in the world is moving” (Dudik & Tomek, 2019). Indeed, with two global *Titanics* – the United States and China – set on a collision course with a quadrillions-denominated iceberg in the middle, and a viral outbreak on its tip, the seismic ripples will be felt far, wide and for a considerable period.

A reality check is nonetheless needed here: Can additional bullions realistically circumvallate the economies of 80 million plus peoples in these Eastern European nations, worth a collective \$1.8 trillion by purchasing power parity? Gold however is a potent psychological symbol as it represents national sovereignty and economic reassurance in a potentially hyperinflationary world. The portents are clear: The current global economic system will be weakened by rising nationalism and autarkic demands. Much uncertainty remains ahead. Mauldin (2018) proposes the introduction of Old Testament-style debt jubilees to facilitate gradual national recoveries. The World Economic Forum, on the other hand, has long proposed a “Great Reset” by 2030; a socialist utopia where “you’ll own nothing and you’ll be happy” (WEF, 2016).

In the final analysis, COVID-19 is not the root cause of the current global economic turmoil; it is merely an accelerant to a burning house of cards that was left smouldering since the 2008 Great Recession (Maavak, 2020a). We also see how the four main pillars of systems thinking (diversity, interconnectivity, interactivity and “adaptivity”) form the *mise en scene* in a VUCA decade.

ENVIRONMENTAL

What happens to the environment when our economies implode? Think of a debt-laden workforce at sensitive nuclear and chemical plants, along with a concomitant surge in industrial accidents? Economic stressors, workforce demoralization and rampant profiteering – rather than manmade climate change – arguably pose the biggest threats to the environment. In a WEF report, Buehler et al (2017) made the following pre-COVID-19 observation:

The ILO estimates that the annual cost to the global economy from accidents and work-related diseases alone is a staggering \$3 trillion. Moreover, a recent report suggests the world’s 3.2 billion workers are increasingly unwell, with the vast majority facing significant economic insecurity: 77% work in part-time, temporary, “vulnerable” or unpaid jobs.

Shouldn’t this phenomenon be better categorized as a societal or economic risk rather than an environmental one? In line with the systems thinking approach, however, global risks can no longer be boxed into a taxonomical silo. Frazzled workforces may precipitate another

Bhopal (1984), Chernobyl (1986), Deepwater Horizon (2010) or Flint water crisis (2014). These disasters were notably not the result of manmade climate change. Neither was the Fukushima nuclear disaster (2011) nor the Indian Ocean tsunami (2004). Indeed, the combustion of a long-overlooked cargo of 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate had nearly levelled the city of Beirut, Lebanon, on Aug 4 2020. The explosion left 204 dead; 7,500 injured; US\$15 billion in property damages; and an estimated 300,000 people homeless (Urbina, 2020). The environmental costs have yet to be adequately tabulated.

Environmental disasters are more attributable to Black Swan events, systems breakdowns and corporate greed rather than to mundane human activity.

Our JIT world aggravates the cascading potential of risks (Korowicz, 2012). Production and delivery delays, caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, will eventually require industrial overcompensation. This will further stress senior executives, workers, machines and a variety of computerized systems. The trickle-down effects will likely include substandard products, contaminated food and a general lowering in health and safety standards (Maavak, 2019a). Unpaid or demoralized sanitation workers may also resort to indiscriminate waste dumping. Many cities across the United States (and elsewhere in the world) are no longer recycling wastes due to prohibitive costs in the global corona-economy (Liacko, 2021).

Even in good times, strict protocols on waste disposals were routinely ignored. While Sweden championed the global climate change narrative, its clothing flagship H&M was busy covering up toxic effluences disgorged by vendors along the Citarum River in Java, Indonesia. As a result, countless children among 14 million Indonesians straddling the “world’s most polluted river” began to suffer from dermatitis, intestinal problems, developmental disorders, renal failure, chronic bronchitis and cancer (DW, 2020). It is also in cauldrons like the Citarum River where pathogens may mutate with emergent ramifications.

On an equally alarming note, depressed economic conditions have traditionally provided a waste disposal boon for organized crime elements. Throughout 1980s, the Calabria-based ‘Ndrangheta mafia – in collusion with governments in Europe and North America – began to dump radioactive wastes along the coast of Somalia. Reeling from pollution and revenue loss, Somali fisherman eventually resorted to mass piracy (Knaup, 2008).

The coast of Somalia is now a maritime hotspot, and exemplifies an entwined form of economic-environmental-geopolitical-societal emergence. In a VUCA world, indiscriminate waste dumping can unexpectedly morph into a *Black Hawk Down* incident. The laws of unintended consequences are governed by actors, interconnections, interactions and adaptations in a system under study – as outlined in the methodology section.

Environmentally-devastating industrial sabotages – whether by disgruntled workers, industrial competitors, ideological maniacs or terrorist groups – cannot be discounted in a VUCA world. Immiserated societies, in stark defiance of climate change diktats, may resort to dirty coal plants and wood stoves for survival. Interlinked ecosystems, particularly water resources, may be hijacked by nationalist sentiments. The environmental fallouts of critical infrastructure (CI) breakdowns loom like a Sword of Damocles over this decade.

GEOPOLITICAL

The primary catalyst behind WWII was the Great Depression. Since history often repeats itself, expect familiar bogeymen to reappear in societies roiling with impoverishment and ideological clefts. Anti-Semitism – a societal risk on its own – may reach alarming

proportions in the West (Reuters, 2019), possibly forcing Israel to undertake reprisal operations inside allied nations. If that happens, how will affected nations react? Will security resources be reallocated to protect certain minorities (or the Top 1%) while larger segments of society are exposed to restive forces? Balloon effects like these present a classic VUCA problematic.

Contemporary geopolitical risks include a possible Iran-Israel war; US-China military confrontation over Taiwan or the South China Sea; North Korean proliferation of nuclear and missile technologies; an India-Pakistan nuclear war; an Iranian closure of the Straits of Hormuz; fundamentalist-driven implosion in the Islamic world; or a nuclear confrontation between NATO and Russia. Fears that the Jan 3 2020 assassination of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani might lead to WWIII were grossly overblown. From a systems perspective, the killing of Soleimani did not fundamentally change the actor-interconnection-interaction-adaptivity equation in the Middle East. Soleimani was simply a cog who got replaced.

Geopolitics will still be dictated by major powers. However, how will the vast majority of nations fare during this VUCA decade? Many “emerging nations” have produced neither the intelligentsia nor industries required to be future-resilient. Raw materials and cheap labour cannot sustain anaemic societies in a volatile world. Advances in material sciences and robotic automation as well as technological “ephemeralization” (Fuller, 1938; Heylighen, 2002) may shift manufacturing back to the Developed World.

In an attempt to mask the looming redundancy of these nations, untold billions have been wasted on vanity studies, conferences and technological initiatives drawn up by an army of neoliberal experts and native proxies. Risks were rarely part of the planning calculus. National and regional blueprints ranging from Malaysia’s Vision 2020, Saudi Vision 2030, ASEAN 2025 to Africa 2030, amongst others, will fail just as their innumerable precursors did.

The author defines a redundant nation as *one which persistently lacks a comprehensive brain bank and an adaptive governance structure in order to be future-resilient*. Redundant nations are preludes to failed states. They will lack native ideations and coherent policies that are critically needed in a VUCA decade. While policies intended to “promote growth in developing countries” had traditionally acted “as agents for conflict prevention” (Humphreys, 2003), the trade-off was often bureaucratic overgrowth, corruption, ethnoreligious discrimination and resource wastages.

Attempts to re-use these nations as geopolitical proxies *a la* the Cold War may prove too costly for potential sponsors. The Fat Leonard scandal (Whitlock, 2016) in Southeast Asia – which entrapped senior US naval officers in a web of sleaze – may be a harbinger of similar breaches on friendly territory, particularly as China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) challenges US geopolitical hegemony worldwide. The BRI however snakes through many potentially-redundant nations and may expose China to a “death by a thousand cuts” via geo-economic extortion. Beijing’s recent attempts to portray itself as a humanitarian superpower has somewhat backfired after numerous defects were discovered in its “medical aid” exports (Kern, 2020).

Ultimately, one should not underestimate the possibility, however remote, of national boundaries being redrawn before the Great Reset period is over. The global map was different only 100 years back. The once-mighty Soviet Union no longer exists while its former nemesis, the United States, faces social clefts of ominous proportions. Alarming parallels are now being drawn between the inauguration of President Abraham Lincoln on March 4, 1861 – which led to the US civil war – and the swearing in of Joe Biden as 46th President of United States on Jan

20 2021 (Waxman, 2021). How will a weakened United States affect NATO and the larger Western-led global alliance?

SOCIETAL

The WEF (2017) had pencilled “global social instability” as the biggest threat facing our collective future. A similar outcome was gamed out in a 2007 study by the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre at the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (DCDC, 2007).

According to Peter Turchin (2016), a professor of Evolutionary Biology at the University of Connecticut, the United States may experience “a period of heightened social and political instability during the 2020s” – marked by governmental dysfunction, societal gridlock and rampant political polarization. To blame this phenomenon on the presidency of Donald J. Trump is to wilfully ignore the gradual build-up of various fissiparous forces over decades.

The social media plays a force multiplier role here. While risks metastasize at the bedrock levels of society, policymakers are constantly distracted from the task of governance by a daily barrage of recriminations, fake news and social media agitprops. As a result, long-term policy imperatives are routinely sacrificed for immediate political gains. The importunate presidential impeachment sagas and electoral fraud accusations in the United States are reflective of wider social fissures, state fragilities and policy paralyse worldwide.

There is nothing new in this *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses) phenomenon. Juvenal had noted a similar trend during Rome’s imperial decline circa 100 A.D. Recently, despite clear signals that the world was facing an economic catastrophe, the United Nations seemed more focused on the discovery of gender bias in virtual assistant software like Siri and Alexa (UNESCO, 2019). How will this revelation benefit the bottom 99% of humanity in dire economic conditions; one where the victims will be preponderantly women and children?

Just like in Imperial Rome, bread and circuses are symptomatic of an economic system that relentlessly benefits the elite. The mountain is ignored and the molehill is prioritized through controlled public narratives. The issue of “stolen childhoods”, for example, is now couched in terms of climate change rather than on sexual exploitation. Few take note that nearly “100,000 children – girls and boys – are bought and sold for sex in the U.S. every year, with as many as 300,000 children in danger of being trafficked each year.” Child rape, as John Whitehead (2020) further notes, has become “Big Business in America.” Not surprisingly, human trafficking has emerged as a \$150 billion global industry (Niethammer, 2020).

Such shocking human rights failures do not figure prominently in the calculus of various “social justice” movements. The Top 1% needs their “useful idiots” – a phrase misattributed to Lenin – to generate a constant supply of distractions. Activist-billionaire George Soros, for example, is pumping \$1 billion into a global university network to “fight climate change” and “dictators” which curiously include elected leaders such as former US President Donald J. Trump and India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These “academically excellent but politically endangered scholars” (Open Society, 2020), as Soros calls them, may turn out to be the very disruptors who will “undermine scientific progress” in the West – just as Turchin (2016) predicted in his seminal study. Soros’ pledge was coincidentally made when COVID-19 began to decimate the global economy and healthcare systems.

Elite philanthropy is now an avenue for global subversion. An assortment of scholars, government officials and NGOs are already channelling the agendas of their well-pocketed patrons, backed by Big Tech’s control of the mainstream and social media (Maavak, 2020c).

Their narratives are reminiscent of giddy sophistries which fuelled a variety of communist and anarchist movements during the build-up to WWII.

Under these circumstances, some nations may eventually seal their borders and initiate authoritarian measures in order to maintain internal stability. This is no longer an unthinkable proposition as dissatisfaction with democracy has peaked worldwide (Foa et al, 2020). Measures perfected by COVID-19 lockdowns may have inadvertently served as a test run in this regard.

TECHNOLOGICAL

Job displacements caused by automation, robotics and Artificial Intelligence will be a fait accompli. The foundations of our global Technopia are alarmingly propped by neo-slavery and coding worth \$9 per hour, leading to disasters such as the recent Boeing 737 Max fiasco (Maavak, 2019b).

While technological ephemeralization exacerbates Black Swan-type risks (Maavak, 2019b); the Internet of Things (IoT) doubles up as a playground for cyber-savvy malcontents. Consider the following cyber-facilitated crime sequence: vehicles are sent on a collision course to freeze traffic while a truck rams into a sensitive entry point at a bank. A drone-borne electromagnetic pulse (EMP) device disables all nearby surveillance systems even as communications systems are compromised to send police in the wrong direction. That is just an illustration of the tech-enabled crime of the future. Malware can now be stored inside a strand of DNA. Biohackers can unleash a CRISPR-engineered COVID-XX from the comfort of their homes. Attempts at creating a gene-engineered super society, like the one China is attempting, may backfire horribly but not before other nations jump into the fray (Greenberg, 2017; Regalado, 2016; Maavak, 2020b).

In the pre-coronavirus era, the fortunes of Big Tech were significantly generated by “surveillance capitalism”; one where private data from billions of individuals were indiscriminately harvested, repackaged and sold off as invaluable “business insights” (Zuboff, 2019). This is the basis for what is now called Big Data Analytics (BDA). COVID-19 has legitimized this racket through a panoply of “contact tracing” tools that have shoddy levels of security. Recently, four-terabytes of sensitive data belonging to 1.2 billion people was discovered on an unsecured Google Cloud server (Newman, 2019). The identity of the owner remains a mystery.

When another Great Depression does occur, there will be fewer businesses, products and advertisements to sustain Big Tech’s free email and social media platforms. Will the provision of such services be left to governments or will Big Tech be bailed out in their trillions? COVID-19 has transposed this radical hypothesis into a rapidly emerging reality. How will society function without the basic means of communications that were largely gratis till now (Maavak, 2019b)? One could argue that the bailout is already occurring as governments increasingly cede control of the public narrative, means of communications and COVID-19 response measures to Big Tech.

Mass interconnectivity is also creating complex vulnerabilities in our infrastructure systems. As Choo, Smith & McCusker (2007, p.2) warned:

Tight couplings between different areas of critical infrastructure (CI) – information technology and communications, banking and finance, water, energy and utilities, transportation, mass gatherings, food, and emergency

services – may result in rapid escalation of seemingly modest disruptions from within one sector to others. If insecure sectors are compromised, they can then be used as launching pads to attack other CI sectors.

Cyber-couplings are becoming tighter and more complex with each passing year. We may reach a point where cybersecurity is subsumed into a larger panoptic complex in a VUCA world. Access to a variety of services and products, including the Internet itself, may be contingent on real-time biometric validation (Maavak, 2019b). Such measures may be introduced as a desperate, real-time response to contain successive waves of COVID-19. It may thereafter acquire several levels of function creep until privacy is reduced to a bygone vestigial ideal.

Alternately, the Internet may undergo radical fragmentation in some parts of the world. As China perfects its Great Firewall and social credit systems, the Wuhan outbreak has demonstrated its ability to electronically lock down hundreds of millions of people. Russia, in the meantime, is creating an entirely new national Intranet system from scratch. The Runet, as it is called, has the potential to operate independently of the World Wide Web in order to buffer the state against a variety of Western sanctions and exogenous cyberattacks (Maavak, 2019b).

CONCLUSION

Complex risks require complex adaptive responses. Due to its transcendental qualities, global risks cannot be tackled through a Cartesian or siloed approach.

It is also a damning indictment of this era that hardly any faculty, graduate or post-doctoral program exist on the study of trans-sectoral global risks. The WEF, which specializes in this area, appears incapacitated by the portents ahead. The 2020 Davos session, themed an insipid “Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World” (WEF, 2020), was ironically held against the backdrop of the COVID-19 outbreak.

COVID-19 has also exposed an institutional lack of “multiple motors of adaptation” (Eisenhardt & Piezunka, 2011) among governments – leading to the 21st century paradox where the greater the local volatility; the louder the call for global governance by elitist institutions that are perennially detached from native realities.

Table 1, below, exemplifies this detachment. The Global Health Security Index, published in October 2019 as “*the first comprehensive assessment of global health security capabilities in 195 countries*” (GHS Index, 2019, p.5) was grossly flawed in light of the coronavirus pandemic outbreak two months later.

The index was developed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and the Nuclear Threat Initiative, in collaboration with The Economist Intelligence Unit. Its major funders were the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Open Philanthropy Project and the Robertson Foundation. How could a welter of experts and prestigious institutions, who set detailed metrics and parameters in their study, get it so wrong? With the exception of Thailand and Sweden, the 15 “most prepared nations” are the ones now reeling from COVID-19. China, once the global epicentre for COVID-19, was the only nation to register an actual GDP growth for the year 2020 (Bloomberg, 2021). Singapore, another success story, was also notably missing from the list.

Rank	Country	Index Score (1-100)	Region	Population	Income
1	United States	83.5	Northern America	100m+	High income
2	United Kingdom	77.9	Europe	50-100m	High income
3	Netherlands	75.6	Europe	10-50m	High income
4	Australia	75.5	Oceania	10-50m	High income
5	Canada	75.3	Northern America	10-50m	High income
6	Thailand	73.2	Southeastern Asia	50-100m	High income
7	Sweden	72.1	Europe	1-10m	Upper middle income
8	Denmark	70.4	Europe	1-10m	High income
9	South Korea	70.2	Eastern Asia	50-100m	High income
10	Finland	68.7	Europe	1-10m	High income
11	France	68.2	Europe	50-100m	High income
12	Slovenia	67.2	Europe	1-10m	High income
13	Switzerland	67.0	Europe	1-10m	High income
14	Germany	66.0	Europe	50-100m	High income
15	Spain	65.9	Europe	10-50m	High income

Source: <https://www.ghsindex.org/>

Table 1: 2019 Global Health Security Index: Pandemic Preparedness Level

According to Philip Tetlock (2005), the forecasts of experts are often scarcely better than those of laymen. Part of the problem lies with elite philanthropies which deliberately groom “next-generation rubber-stampers for the privileged 0.1%” (Maavak, 2018). These experts “follow the money” and are incapable of providing ideas outside the commissioned elitist agenda.

As a result, the current global order will likely unravel before the decade is over. The primary drivers will be economic, acting primarily through technological agencies. Primary outcomes will be felt in the societal, environmental and geopolitical areas. Only cohesive societies, with extant crisis management ecosystems, will emerge stronger. These are societies that have been historically adept at social mobilization in the face of an existential threat e.g. WWII. Prime examples include Russia, Finland and Israel.

A surge in nationalism (societal) and militarization (geopolitical) should be anticipated during this decade. Trade pacts may eventually be forged outside the WTO framework (economic) and commerce may be contingent on geopolitical non-interference and civilizational affinity. National cyber-defences and electronic interactions (technological) may co-exist with Intranets and panoptic controls. Climate change programs (environmental) may take a backseat to the *crises du jour* during this decade.

Cautionary Notes for Security Professionals

With risks snowballing throughout the interstices of global systems, the intelligence community needs to take stock of multitudinous threats in real-time. Establishing a robust “whole systems” risk detection and mitigation mechanism – specific to national needs and organizational peculiarities – will however take time, as the author discovered during his doctoral research. The basic structure, functions and modus operandi of such a mechanism deserves a separate study altogether.

For the time being, security professionals should boost their situational awareness through Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) methods. This task is however getting more difficult as Big Tech censors information that is otherwise invaluable to security professionals. By censoring the digital commons, Big Tech is also effectively neutering the OSINT capabilities of the intelligence community. As the methodology section revealed, “diminishing diversity of actors” (or information) naturally leads to a build-up of risks in a system as traditional checks and balances are removed.

Wherever possible, it is vital to identify the *generators of actionable data* at the open source level. In Tetlock’s (2005) study, these individuals were described as nimble “foxes” as opposed to the scholastically-rigid hedgehogs – a juxtaposition inspired by the ancient Greek poet Archilocus (c. 680 – c. 645 BC). Despite the Big Data hype, the success or failure of Collective Intelligence (CI) in high-octane crisis situations is more dependent on the quality of analyses and analysts rather than on machine-generated insights (Maavak, 2019a). Identifying and co-opting risk-sentient individuals into institutional risk studies is a viable way forward but this may require political support.

It is also worth asking whether a Big Tech-led global oligarchy will even tolerate the existence of various “deep states” in the long run. “Initially, both groupings may cooperate to their mutual benefit but their respective *raison d’être* are too contradictory to be reconciled. One thrives on an “open society” run by obedient hirelings who will administer a global Ministry of Truth while the other depends on secrecy and a degree of national sovereignty to justify its existence...Surveillance technologies ushered in by the ongoing ‘coronapsychosis’ may end up being the deciding factor” (Maavak, 2020c).

It is high time for security professionals and the intelligence community to wake up to the new reality. If Big Tech can systematically censor and impugn the President of the United States – routinely dubbed as the “most powerful man on earth” – think of the repercussions to both the common and covert domains?

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