

WHY FORESIGHT?

Doru Pogoreanu

PhD, (retired) colonel
dorupogoreanu@yahoo.com

Human being is eminently an anticipatory being.

Mircea Malița

Abstract. *The future is not predictable, but that does not mean we should not plan for it. The concept of strategic foresight helps to think, in the long term, about the core issues in order to find good answers and to have realistic goals using the resources efficiently.*

Keywords: *security, defense, strategic analyze, prognosis, prospective (foresight)*

1. INTRODUCTION

The future is the domain of uncertain, and that was, and still is, rather frightening. Fear is worse than real risks. The great problem is what will happen? The answer was never satisfactory for the individuals, peoples or deciders. Future is the continually unsolved problem, answers are being sought again and again. Mankind tries to solve it through a lot of ways, from the shamans, the Delphi oracle, astrologists, to modern methods of prognosis or foresight.

“Why” started the way to understanding, the way to seeking answers, a way to thinking the future deeply and longer than we usually think.

“Why foresight?”

“Why” is the question that deals with the unknown, its goal is to understand the subject whom the question is addressed to. “Why” can generate a complex, deep and comprehensive process of research. The need to understand the future, the need to anticipate is greater than ever, in this unpredictable, dynamic and accelerated world.

Foresight can help to avoid strategic surprise, in politics, state security and defence, economic, financial or social domains, it can also help to discover the main drivers, tendencies, to build paths and indicate the good directions, to act on long-term, on a large strategic scale.

Foresight cannot predict, foresight is the domain of analysis and reflection, foresight is not a science, but using scientific methodology.

“Why foresight?”

This question is not new, it is an obsolete question for a lot of foresight classical authors/schools, and it was a starting question for fundamental researches. Authors like Hugues de Jouvenel, Richard A Slaughter or Scott Yorkowitch started analyses with this question. One article by Ciprian Turtureanu has the same question as title [16].

For example, Slaughter said in 1997: “Strategic foresight is needed for a number of reasons. At the broadest, or „macro” level, strategic foresight provides a number of ways of coming to grips with what I have called the „civilisational challenge”. That is, the exhaustion of aspects of the Western worldview and the industrial ideology that went with it.

Though essentially superseded, this ideology remains strong. It is comprised of elements such as: the denial of limits, the single-minded pursuit of material (economic) growth, the commodification of human needs, the reduction of natural entities to the status of mere „resources”, exploitive trade practices and future-discounting. Such elements have contributed to what has been termed the industrial „flatland” which in essence, is an overly empirical, hence „thin” and eventually self-defeating, view of the world.” [17]

In fact, all the questions with foresight are important for the definition of the domain, the goals and objectives and also for the methods, and many studies are built around essential questions as why, how, etc.

In this one accelerated world it is difficult to understand the future in the long term, the decision-makers are confronted with the pressing, immediate problems and they act and think in the short-term, they have no time to reflect and to think on long-term. The tyranny of the present puts a very hard pressure on decisions. Political cycles, economic cycles, social cycles, even life cycles are against the thoughts in the long term.

Every domain claims the necessity to have strategies and this is the paradox of our times, on the one hand, to solve the usual problems, and on the other hand, the necessity of long-term strategies.

To understand this question, “why foresight”, it is necessary to understand the balance between the present and the future at short-term (three-four years – domain of prognosis) and the future at long-term (ten, twenty, thirty, fifty years and beyond).

The most difficult is to think in the long term at the strategic level, try to respond to the question whether the preparation of the future is possible using the methods of strategic prospective (or foresight).

2. ABOUT THE FUTURE

The term future does not exist in some archaic societies and languages, according to Mircea Eliade. That concept is not present in their minds. Only the past is, designed as an infinite come-back to life of a god or hero who founded that society. The same is also in our mind: the past is often present in our life, more developed. Humans have the need of the past, for his emotional stability. The past is secure, the future is not clear, misty or dark. But we need to know what will be. We can see easily in all languages grammars a lot of past tense verbs comparative with the future tense of verbs. The conflict is between our needs and desires and the empty space behind us.

Rituals, oracles, sacrifices for the gods to be merciful, is a long story of the humanity to obtain the desired future. In fact, everyone knows the end of life – death. But the moment

is unknown, and the future can come with the end. It is an ancestral fear. The monotheist religions solved this by the other life, after death, but the fear remains with a strong desire to survive, which is written in our DNA.

For society and states, the mechanism is the same. The risk of disappearing, the need to survive. A prayer said: Oh, God, protect us from the invasion of other peoples and from the hate and struggle between us, from the seen and unseen enemies. A short definition of risks and threats, above all security and defence strategies.

How to protect the state from the outside and inside risks? The answer is known, by good economy and finances, laws, a defense system, which are more and more complex. A strong army, intelligence services, an active diplomacy, and alliances. But is it enough? One can always find a weakness, an Achilles' heel, even with the strongest state.

What kind of guns, how many soldiers, airplanes, or tanks, for what, how long, and against who? One must adapt all the system to the most probable enemy, for the most dangerous risk or threat. The need to know is the greatest pressure for the deciders. Where is it necessary to start? From the past? From the present moment, or from the future?

"The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus making many calculations leads to victory, and few calculations to defeat: and all the more so no calculation at all! It is with respect to this point that I can foresee who is likely to win or lose." [2]

Sun Tzu combined calculations with strategy from the beginnings! Not only in the mathematic sense, but also in the logic one. And nowadays all domains need strategies. The victory, or the achievement of goals at the strategic level is more closely to the thinker than the field hero. Make calculations, then!

3. THE FORESIGHT APPROACH

After the Second World War, in both sides of the Iron curtain the planned economies aris vigorously. The "Comissariat Général du Plan" in France, "Development and Planning Ministers" in Romania, or "The Planning Agency" in Japan, the economies are all the same philosophy – planning. For few decades it worked, and this was easy to translate for defense systems. And prognosis methods started to rule.

Meanwhile, the studies about the future go to the needs of the economy or the Cold War demands.

A strategy needs a good analysis first. Michel Godet said that there are four attitudes to the future: passive – no interrogations for the future, reactive – fireman action style action without anticipation, preactive – preparing for the changes, and proactive – action to provoke the changes, and in that frame the analysis can be started or not.

This effort needs specific methods and foresight have that in plenty. The domain of foresight is not a science because foresight sweeps the future where theoretically everything is possible, unlike in experimental science where more experiments give the same result.

Foresight deals with multiple futures, it is a domain of multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary even if it is an very young domain.

The military domain is in fact the main root of the strategic foresight.

Used for military purposes in the beginning, the foresight methods are spread quickly to all domains (economic, financial, technological) in fact today when we speak about progress many people think about technological progress, but that it is only a branch.

US Rand Corporation, the independent and respected non-profit institution that helps to improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis, personalities as Hermann Kahn and George Friedmann or Kaplan, the popular Alvin Toffler, the Club of Rome activity, Johann Galtung and many others opened the way for future studies.

Foresight has some phases, first, in the sixties we can speak about fundaments of this domain by the works inside Rand project and Rand Corporation, the French school and nordic school as some cores of gravity. Secondly, the foresight entered the core institutions of the states, until the oil shock in the seventies. After that foresight spread and had a free evolution, it is used in state institutions and also had a private way.

In France the term "Prospective" is defined by the philosopher Gaston Berger - "See far, see large, see deep, take risks and centered to the human being" and is used for the studies of the future by Bertrand de Jouvenel, Pierre Masse, Michel Godet and others. "Futuribles" (Futur+possibles) is the key concept of the multiple futures launched by Bertrand de Jouvenel.

Prospective, foresight, futurology, futures research, forecasting – the mix of terms, the difficulty to translate the terms and the domains of these terms can often cause confusions. There are numerous differences, but essentially "foresight lacks of pro-activity, an integral aspect of prospective" [5].

Despite the apparent paradox of "Strategic foresight" linked with the fact that a strategic decision forces one to an irreversible decision, and an foresight approach deals with the uncertain, with multiple futures, the term is used to understand how the future shapes the main decisions.

In the seventh decade Bucharest was on the map of the prospective studies, where the Third Congress of Sciences of the Future was organized, and the idea appeared of a "World Federation of Future Science" was born here. The elite of thinkers was also here: Herman Kahn, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Johann Galtung or Alvin Toffler, Mircea Malița, Solomon Marcus, Mihai Botez, Pavel Apostol, Sergiu Tamas and others had great contributions to development of prospective and of futures studies in Romania.

Currently, classifications (taxonomies) are different on prospective/foresight methods, one of the earliest classifications was proposed by Erich Jantsch, who grouped them into the subsequent classes:

-intuitive methods are focused on expert knowledge and experience, techniques such as "brainstorming" or Delphi, which is the most popular.

-explorative methods are used to detect included virtuosities in reality (technical, social-political, economic, cultural). It allows open a large scale of "possible future": contextual representation, extrapolations, morphological research, scenario method, the method of probabilistic analysis

(Bayesian statistics, Monte-Carlo method), methods of economic analysis, game theory.

-normative methods pave the road to go for achieving an objective. Unlike the explorative methods, which go forward to a future of increasingly uncertain path, the normative methods regress tracing the path from the possible future to present. In this class we meet operational research methods (linear or dynamic programming) theory of decision method, analysis system.

-cybernetic-system methods-mechanism models can be developed feed-back, which is allowing subsequent simulation operations of behavior in time.

“After a explosive stage now witnessing on a process of implosion which is manifested in merging or combining different research predict methods.”[10]

It is possible to unify the various methods of prospective analysis, from the analysis of the past with the present conditions and normative type methods that starts form future to present. This approach is possible because of the informational society explosion in this analysis specialists and experts around the world can be engaged on specialized sites such as <http://www.shapingtomorrow.com>.

Such a new theory as the theory of complexity, the web theory or neutropsyche change the paradigms of the analysis.

The growth of non-state actors, of web-like structures is the real challenge of the moment, especially because the governments are not yet prepared to have an adequate reaction. The almost instant financial transactions, data exchanges and information leakage represent a progress factor and a tremendous risk. It is said that a cybernetic attack that targets the electric grid of a city, causing a blackout is more dangerous and causes more damage than an aerial bombardment of the same city.

The strategic surprise from the future can come. Also known as strategic break, the strategic surprise can be considered as a threat that cannot be foreseen, as the one on 9/11 in US. One CIA analyst asked about Strategic Warning: If Surprise is Inevitable, What Role for Analysis? ”Strategic warning analysis, is a branch of “alternative analysis,” in that its tradecraft places emphasis on disciplined and value-added assessments of threats that, for the most part, are seen as unlikely or indeterminate. Related forms of alternative analysis-including High Impact-Low Probability Analysis, What-If Analysis, Gaps in Information Analysis, and Devil’s Advocacy – share the requirement with warning analysis to marshal all-source information, expert insight, and specialized tradecraft to illuminate developments that analysts judge to be potentially damaging but unlikely.” [9]

There are ways of analyzing “weak signals”, leading to a possible alarm of phenomena that right now is either embryonary phase or insignificant. The experts talk about the so-called strategic surprise, which is actually leaves negligible traces, usually unnoticed by decision factors. In an over-saturated world of information, such signals are usually drowned in chatter.

Data-mining and Information Fusion techniques which use mathematical theories like the Dezert-Smarandache one, are particular useful in detecting cybernetic strikes and analyzing intelligence.

In 2008-2009, among the NATO countries there was a project called ”Multiple Futures” taking place, a project that

brought together military and civil specialists with a view to probing the future and finding the most adequate answers.

”The multiple futures are only the means, nor the end, of this project. They tell a story about plausible worlds in 2030. The future is not predictable, but that does not mean we should not plan for it. From that perspective, the four futures provide common ground for structured discussion and debate regarding the risks and vulnerabilities that endanger the populations of the Alliance. Constructed from a series of relevant drivers, each of the futures provides a backdrop for conceptual analysis – a canvas on which to assess the potential risks, threats, strategic surprises, implications, and, of course, opportunities. The study yields a comprehensive set of risk conditions from which security and military implications can be deduced. From implications, we gain strategic insight and better understanding of the potential choices the Alliance faces as it addresses the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades.” [8]

4. THE STRATEGIC SURPRISE CAN BE AVOIDED?

The tendencies are unpredictable, the future is misty, it is a complicated thing to understand this accelerated type society (even if the trend was described by Toffler in 1970), the speed of social, economical and social life cannot be followed by analysts or experts – is one of theories often used to describe the international environment. The amount of information available cannot be managed. But under those “boiling” movements, almost “Brownian”, there are the great trends, like the oceanic currents. For example seeing the presentations of Hans Rosling, on his website <http://www.gapminder.org/> the main conclusion is one convergent world which incline to same directions of development.

To prepare the future by foresight is not to make prophesies, that is religion, and, even a prophet was not often believed! To prepare the future for states means to have several ways of evolutions at strategic levels, avoid strategic surprise, have a foresight approach, and pro-active actions. The future can be provoked, for keeping the initiative.

It needs long-term analysis to use the foresight methods. It is necessary for the decision-makers to understand that the good immediate measures can often be wrong on long-term range, and develop making decision process having solutions for this conflict.

“In sum, I don’t believe that the free market, regulation, political leadership, or public education will solve the climate problem in time. Capitalism is unable to handle this long term challenge, and democratic society is unwilling to modify the market. In my point of view, we need something stronger, something that can counter the root problem: Man’s short-term nature. His tendency to disregard the long term consequences of current action.”[6]

5. CONCLUSIONS

The question ”Why foresight?” is new for us because paradoxically this domain is almost unknown in Romania, even if a good start was in the seventy. Terms like foresight or prospective are not in use. In a very respectable sociological review, which devotes a whole number to the

topic of future, in more of nearly two hundred pages, the authors never mention the word prospective or foresight.

Buddha said: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become."

The future is the domain of uncertainty. The need to have answers beyond the line of present is in the nature of humanity. The decisions are taken under the pressure of the short-term vision, but long-term vision is necessary, and this conflict in the decision making process at strategic levels can be solved by an foresight approach: "See far, see large, see deep". A large variety of methods can be used, the trend is to combine several of them, and that can be an art.

The concept of strategic foresight helps to think, in the long term, about the core issues of states and people, to find good answers and to have realistic goals using the resources efficiently.

Slaughter said: "The forward view is not an abstraction. Rather, it tells us that there are a number of very real dangers to avoid and an equally impressive number of opportunities to be taken up and developed. This pattern of dangers and opportunities is highly relevant to everything that an organisation attempts to do – even in the short-term present. Organisations that attempt to move into this turbulent, challenging future without strategic foresight will find themselves overwhelmed by forces that were indeed visible for some time, but which were overlooked. On the other hand, while no futures method can imitate history and foresee all eventualities, organisations that routinely employ strategic foresight will find that they are better equipped to negotiate the turbulent conditions ahead. They will prosper and develop because they have understood the structure of the near-future context. In essence, a well-crafted forward view reduces uncertainty and reveals the ground of otherwise-unavailable strategic options."

The future shock can be tamed.

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