

***#COVINTELL* – CORONAVIRUS
AND THE INTELLIGENCE SECTOR –
HOW PANDEMICS SHAPE THE SECURITY
STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS WORLDWIDE**

HEALTH CRISIS – BEYOND UNCERTAINTY AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization - China Country Office was informed about pneumonia cases of unknown aetiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China (WHO, 2020). That was the beginning of a new health crisis, with subsequent global effects.

This crisis exceeds the analytical capacity of health experts and finds society completely unprepared to put in place interdisciplinary teams capable of making complex analyses or epidemiological models with successful prognosis, applicable to concrete realities. At the same time, significant changes are expected, but many pieces of the puzzle are missing, which is why, it is difficult to map out projections outside of subjective assertions, generalities or wish list elements.

In a time of great uncertainty, following the underlined aspects, which would be the most appropriate reaction of the analysis and prediction community? Which are the changes generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and which are the challenges that humanity will have to adapt to? How predictable are these changes and how durable will they be?

Keywords: *Health Crisis, Uncertainty, Risk, Scenario Analysis, New World Order.*

Introduction

The uncertain dynamics of 2020 indicated so far that the main effects of the pandemic have been to deepen and to accelerate the erosion of the global geopolitical balance and to disturb some defining aspects of the world order. Unlike its precursors SARS and MERS (WHO, 2015), SARS-CoV-2 (WHO, 2020) is more contagious than the viruses that cause seasonal flu and it can be spread much faster by the people

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who have no symptoms (asymptomatic), even from the initial stages of incubation. SARS-CoV-2 can also last from two (2) hours, up to nine (9) days on almost any surface or material, as well as in the air, on particles or suspensions (Kampf, 2020).

After the COVID-19 outbreak, the first response of the states was to set up unilateral bans, lockdowns and to strengthen national borders (Dunford, Dale, 2020). At the same time, under the influence of the pandemic, nationalist attitudes, questionable measures launched by the states and various accusations regarding the responsibility for the pandemic, supported by extensive disinformation campaigns, came into light.

Furthermore, criticism of the United Nations or the World Health Organization, led to the erosion of confidence in the international institutional framework (European Commission, 2020). Moreover, military activities in North Africa, the Middle East, the Black Sea area or the South China Sea demonstrated that the pandemic has not reduced conflicts, tensions or projections of military force.

This reality, forced the analysts tasked with making forecasts and estimates for national security risks, to substantially change the way they defined uncertainty. In this context, the analysts need to accept the climate of uncertainty and then must identify, under the condition of *coherence and objectivity*, the known and unknown elements of the equation. Hence, in order to provide some coherent, relevant and comprehensive intelligence products that reflect as clearly as possible the new realities, analysts should be able to separate reliable evidence from doubtful one, their mixture being unproductive.

The methodology used to draw up the findings of this article, follows specifically the descriptive side of predictive activities in the field of intelligence analysis. Hence, in order to clarify the subject, this research used the logical method, which represents the application of analysis and synthesis procedures, deductive and inductive argumentation, as well as the identification of causal links that make possible the explanations of the situation in terms of cause and effect.

This approach made it possible to highlight the most distinctive characteristics of the evolutions, noticed in this worrying pandemic situation generated by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and then the related conclusions could be drawn.

Uncertainty Followed by the Crisis

First of all, the coronavirus pandemic started unexpectedly and spread virulently worldwide, but the experts must admit that this health crisis is not a *Black Swan*, but a *Game Changer* (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 22) and more than that, experts must recognize that, there have been a number of indicators and other important data from past epidemics, which have been knowingly ignored.

Why this potential hazard has not been taken seriously into consideration in the risk estimates?

According to practical procedures, in most mathematical matrices used in risk analysis (Bizadea & Andrei, 2015, p. 63), as well as in *National Security risk estimates*, the threat called epidemic (or pandemic) was passed in the area that is always given the least attention and, implicitly, the lowest resources: the one that brings together, threats with low probability of manifestation and relatively low impact.

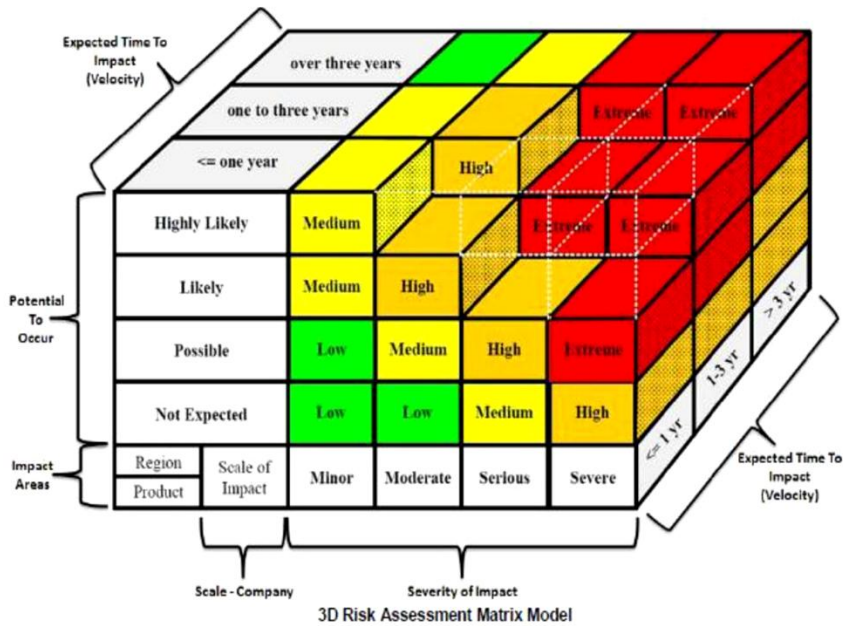


Figure1: 3D Risk Assessment Matrix Model

(Source: Bizadea & Andrei, 2015, p. 63)

The decision-making process on security matters always focuses on high probability threats, with high impact, rather than on those with a low probability and high impact. In this context, it is impossible to predict the occurrence of a pandemic in a time-space relationship, or to estimate its duration and effects, especially since humanity has not faced many epidemics or pandemics in the recent past, so that they could be taken seriously at the present time. Following these clarifications, *the risk analysis* fundamentally places the issue of *predictability* in fragile territory located between certainty and uncertainty.

On the one hand, in stable contexts it is relatively easy to predict what is going to happen and especially what is not going to happen, so relatively slow changes or evolutions are easy to predict and understand. Hence, understanding a change and the ability to predict it are, in fact, a function of understanding the generative causes, in a cause-effect equation. *In conditions of relative stability when only a few things are changing, a moving element is relatively easy to be perceived and extrapolated.*

On the other hand, this is exactly what is not happening in a crisis. By definition, a crisis is unforeseen, with disproportionate effects and unintelligible causes. In crisis situations, too many things are moving, evolving and changing, so the effects of all these changes are much more difficult to understand.

In this context, it is time for policymakers to support and consolidate the culture of strategic intelligence which should be promoted under the famous expression of Peter Schwartz in *The Art of the Long View*: "What has not been imagined, will not be foreseen (...) in time." (Schwartz, 2012)

Uncertainty integrated into Early Warning Systems

In Strategic Intelligence (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 398), uncertainty can be used as a methodological principle. Thus, the territories of uncertainty can be linked with those areas where clear data, regularities and intelligence can be identified. For example, in the Scenario Analysis Methodology, integrating different types of reasoning elements can bring cognitive pluses and applied conclusions.

Scenario theory assumes the existence of at least two alternatives that must be created. Thus, the distinction between scenarios and predictions appears, the latter being a linear development of a known, present situation.

According to the following experts, predictions are in fact an option, which is given the highest degree of probability chosen by the analyst from a multitude of scenarios, or, as Liza Krizan states, predictions are those hypotheses that have been "accepted" as the *most probable among several competing hypotheses*, based on the available data (Krizan, 1999).

However, Charles Doran explains that predictions, unlike scenarios, *"fail in the end because they do not develop any technique to anticipate an event when nonlinearity manifests itself"* (Doran, 1999). Therefore, *Scenario Analysis* is not just a theoretical exercise, but a complex simulation that can lead to better decisions in the long term.

I. Nitu, a well-known expert and local educator in the field of intelligence, claims that: *"In Scenario Analysis Methodology, when setting up scenarios, there must exist flexibility and openness to new atypical approaches, because when you fight against unpredictable enemies you cannot manage the situation using traditional methods.*

To meet these challenges, intelligence analysts must constantly change their approach in order to regard reality from multiple angles and also future generations of analysts must be prepared to cope better with future risks. It is necessary that Scenario Analysis Methodology and simulations be introduced as standard procedures in the practical activity of intelligence analysts. The future belongs to the futurists as long as they will be integrated into analysis teams ... the future belongs to both science fiction authors and directors, as well to screenwriters, who should be regularly consulted by analysts." (Nitu, 2018, p. 226)

Hence, *Scenario Analysis* can be a suitable method by which a coherent intelligence product can be achieved, by integrating data, analysing information and increasing the area of knowledge. More than that, scenario theory states that if scenarios are correctly identified, based on measurable indicators, enabling factors or inhibitors, then intervention can be made in advance, in order to maximize the likelihood that favourable scenarios will occur.

With regards to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation, it must be acknowledged that many elements of this crisis (social, economic or geostrategic) are only revealed now, but they originate from pre-pandemic developments. This is one of the reasons why intelligence analysts need to identify ways to integrate the uncertainties of the present into a normal evolutionary framework. When there are conditions of uncertainty, one of the great virtues of the scenario analysis is that practical modelling can be done for different periods of time.

Scenario Analysis is among the only few possibilities to exploit the future marked by uncertainty. Therefore, this practice offers the possibility to map out mutually exclusive scenarios in the short, medium and long term. The debate on current uncertainties leads to different scenarios for the future; thus, accepting uncertainty means being aware that there is no certainty about future developments. More than that, Scenario Analysis allows several divergent points of view to be integrated coherently; in this way the diversity of perspectives becomes an obvious plus, which enables the revelation of some important elements and structures of the future.

Finally, after the narratives are introduced in the decision plan, all the indicators underlying those scenarios must be identified and their evolution must be monitored.

Basic steps in Scenario Analysis Methodology

Scenarios Analysis is a useful technique for exploring the many ways a situation might evolve, anticipating surprise developments, and generating field requirements when dealing with little concrete information and a highly ambiguous or uncertain threat.

Scenarios Analysis is a systematic method for brainstorming multiple explanations of how a situation may develop when considerable uncertainty and several underlying key drivers are present.

The basic steps are:

1. *"Identify the focal issue either from intelligence requirements or by interviewing experts and officials who are most knowledgeable about the topic.*

2. Generate a list of forces or factors that will influence how the situation is most likely to evolve. From these, identify several key driving forces. It is useful to have several experts participate in the creation of these key drivers.

3. Define the two ends of the spectrum for each driver.

4. Pair the drivers in a series of 2 x 2 matrices.

5. Develop a "story" or two for each cell of each 2 x 2 matrix.

6. Select from all the generated scenarios those most deserving of attention because they illustrate compelling and challenging futures not now being considered.

7. Refine the list of key drivers.

8. Develop indicators that could be tracked to determine whether the selected scenario is or is not developing." (Pherson, 2018)

The technique can be illustrated using the question: "What is the future of (...)?"

The new world order, challenges and social resilience

The reality is that this health crisis generated various changes, which imposed a new state of normalcy. Thus, this new situation requires a comprehensive identification of risk developments with high probabilities of materialization, which can be assessed in a timely manner by analysts in a scenario analysis.

Currently, many changes that emerged from the pandemic phenomenon can be noticed without too much effort, but others can be only vaguely intuited. Moreover, the magnitude of these changes (psychosocial, economic, geopolitical, and not only) will be directly proportional to the duration and intensity of the pandemic (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 498). As a result, the signals of these changes can become favourable conditions for any actions that could increase the resilience of human society.

So, if we agree to define resilience as the ability of an individual, group or society to develop effectively and continue to project itself into the future, despite all the destabilizing events or difficult living conditions, sometimes even severe traumas, then, there are many encouraging elements in this conceptual equation.

*A very important aspect is that **if** it is assumed that social resilience has three properties, **the first** being **resistance** which represents the efforts of a social entity to withstand a disturbance and its consequences, **the second** being **recovery** represented by the time required for an entity to recover and **the third** being **creativity** represented by the capacity to adapt to new circumstances and the ability to learn from the unfortunate experience of a disturbance, **then** we must accept and prepare to meet the random nature of major crises and we must also understand that the illusion of complete foresight is dangerous!*

Even though humanity is not yet ready to manage the uncertainty in social systems, this crisis provides an opportunity to change many of the habits that have become entrenched over the time. Among the changes already visible are those that come from the medical/sanitary and emergency management systems, which are obviously designed for peace and stability.

In future wars, perhaps with even more dangerous viruses, the international community must be prepared to identify from early time the viruses or strains of lethal viruses. This could effectively control the situation in advance, and reduce the outbreaks of infection. Antidotes and treatments could also be produced more quickly, and modular or temporary hospital units could be set up faster than usually.

More than that, adequate preparation could considerably improve the capacity of production for sanitary equipment and medical materials. Additionally, an anticipatory preparation would allow the early construction of reserves and stocks.

It is necessary for doctors, virologists, epidemiologists and biologists to become an integral part in the state decision-making process and for the civil society, through information and awareness, to acquire minimum knowledge and skills related to epidemiological protection and prevention. More effective awareness campaigns could also be launched and run in a timely manner, in order to limit the spread of the unwanted side effects. Health diplomacy must become an inherent component of classical diplomacy and defence ministries must set up departments to deal not only with biological or nuclear weapons, but also with epidemics and/or pandemics.

To meet all these challenges, intelligence organizations should develop MEDINT (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 22) (Medical Intelligence) capabilities alongside the classic OSINT, HUMINT and SIGINT, in order to ensure their early-warning function, to know in advance and to anticipate the occurrence of such potential health crises.

The confrontations in the sphere of informational and psychological warfare did not stop under this health crisis and the context generated by this phenomenon has represented a fertile ground from which conspiracy theories, fake news and misinformation campaigns have emerged and have been highlighted with unprecedented intensity for the last thirty (30) years. Beyond the inherent temptation of the people to believe more easily such stories in times of crisis, uncertainty and anxiety, it should be noted that some false narratives have been deliberately created or amplified by state and non-state entities.

Also, one of the main challenges generated by this health crisis is the growing trend towards de-globalization in favour of nationalist and protectionist approaches. During this crisis and in the following period, the anti-globalist, populist and nationalist tendencies are expected to intensify.

Most likely, such attitudes will continue to expand and, through more nationalism and more bilateral than multilateral negotiations, the public policies characteristic of each country will determine the way in which the international system will be reformulated (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 88).

In the midst of this health crisis, the possibility of political authoritarianism in excess must be taken into account. This pandemic provided acceptable pretexts for authoritarian leaders to eliminate their opposition as well as to close borders, or reject accusations and accusers from the public debate, based on health principles and other urgent issues. In this category, messages and attitudes of extremist and xenophobic type have emerged already, which blame entire ethnic, professional, or social categories. As a result, it is likely that the polarization of society and the widening of the gaps between different socio-demographic, ethnic and professional categories will be an important challenge for the coming periods.

Reconciliation through broad support and solidarity projects is necessary to avoid political currents that lead to civil disobedience, violation of the law, violence, anarchy and collapse. Against the background of eroding the internal economic and social balances in democratic countries, challenges to political and economic values are also expected.

Moreover, several tendencies can be noticed in the socio-political sphere. Massive disruptions that occur in supply chain flows, in the long-term, could lead to the decline of globalization and a decrease in international cooperation. The relocation of some important industries in different national regions or enclosed to national territory and the imperative to reduce the length of supply chains will lead to an increased intensification of intra-regional trade, compared to global trade.

This phenomenon will also reduce transport distances on the trade routes for the commercial goods, an aspect that will most likely affect, as a consequence, the revenues obtained from the global transport activity. The first important geopolitical questions are: (1) how supply chains will be rebuilt and (2) how commercial traffic nodes will look like in the medium and long term.

By answering these questions, it will be possible to identify how the interdependent relations between the economies of different states will change (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 56). National protectionism could lead to an era of more isolationism and stronger feelings of sovereignty.

There is a high probability that the stringent need to follow and monitor the virus and the host carriers will lead to widespread public acceptance of mass surveillance by governmental agencies. Similarly, it is likely that centralizing efforts to counter the virus will inoculate in the civil society the feeling of accepting authoritarian and powerful leaders much more easily.

Externally, it is likely that migration pressure will increase in Europe and other developed areas, including the United States, due to the fact that populations will flee from underdeveloped countries, less able to withstand the disease and its consequences, including food shortages.

Internally, it is likely that the gap between disposable incomes will widen and richer citizens will be able to afford the best medical care that can be bought, while the less affluent working class will be left to cope as best as it can, with minimal resources.

The erosion of the world order is also foreseen amid the recalibration of economic and military power balance globally. American leadership will lose its influence and tendencies to abandon or challenge the international institutional framework will increase. The exaltation of geo-technological competition between the US and China will accelerate the evolution towards a technological bipolarity globally (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 36). This aspect will be determined by the promotion and dissemination of technological standards (5G, quantum processing, and biotechnologies) of associated products and regulations on their use for the benefit of the citizens and the authorities.

This phenomenon will manifest itself even by imposing conditions in political relations with other states or by assuming a certain set of standards and technologies, respectively by excluding from the market the competitor's technologies. The subsequent effects will materialize in the form of a competition for markets and for influencing major decisions on technological standards in developing countries. The decline in long-term imports, due to the American recession, translates into a recession for the two economic powers, China and the USA.

This would accelerate in both states the ongoing social and political reforming processes. The trade war remains a matter of high importance and perhaps more intense than before the pandemic. Likewise, the way in which China will deal with the economic problems that will follow due to declining exports, will determine its future.

Furthermore, due to the fall in oil prices below the positive level, taking into account the country's budgetary dependence on oil production and sales, Russia is expected to fall into recession sooner than other states, even if the health crisis started late there, according to the local media. This aspect would cause a socio-economic destabilization not only in Russia, but also in the states whose economies are dependent on it, the Central Asian and Caucasian

periphery, respectively. As a result, we will probably witness situations of socio-economic instability in both regions. In the most aggressive scenario, social instability can turn into military instability, which would attract the involvement of other states as well.

Competition and not cooperation has intensified amid this pandemic. Firstly, the race for endowments with sanitary equipment was highlighted in which each nation seemed to act on its own. In the same context, signs of cooperation were rarely observed and, most often, with more bilateral than multilateral values.

At Community level, the main criticisms of the EU have been related to the late activity and the limited effects of solidarity mechanisms. The EU has also been accused of sluggish financial support and lack of proper conditions for the implementation of measures to reduce the economic crisis that will follow in the coming years.

After BREXIT, this was probably the real test for the EU, as the free movement of the population (the Schengen Agreement) was *de facto* cancelled by national decisions, which did not come from the European Community. This is why the European architecture will enter into an extensive strategic reflection process, in order to respond more efficiently, both to the safety and health needs, as well as to the social and economic ones of its members.

In addition, the race of technological endowments with innovative effects and radical implications over international security enforce the need for fast, stringent and exhaustive adjustment of the non-proliferation and arms control regime. More than that, the new dynamics of technological developments will have a remarkable impact in the military field, where the fast progress and increased use of remotely controlled military platforms, so-called aerial, ground, marine or submarine drones, is no longer a novelty. Additionally, the accelerated evolution of autonomous combat systems is enhanced by *Artificial Intelligence*.

Automatic combat systems are becoming a reality and the United States, Russia, and China are making no secret of the fact that they are engaged in the development of hypersonic missiles that will travel with speeds that can exceed ten times the speed of sound and cannot be

intercepted by present missile defence systems (Todorean, Celac, & Scutaru, 2020, p. 122).

Besides, the rise of "new space" technologies simultaneously with their cost reduction and the increase of their availability are evolutions of the "new space" concept and will be accelerated by this pandemic experience.

The high-speed evolutions of space technologies are currently supported especially by the private sector and reflect insight into important sources of profit that lead to a new chase for "gold", respectively a new space race. The main objectives of aerospace industry development aims to support various terrestrial activities and make them more efficient, through space capabilities, as well as through ambitions to exploit outer space for scientific and economic purposes.

This space competition also generates a series of dilemmas and concerns, as follows:

- ✓ *On the one hand*, it focuses on security and sustainability aspects and targets the number of satellites and their exponential growth.
- ✓ *On the other hand*, it pursues the militarization and arming trend of cosmic space.

Therefore, following the trends highlighted above, a stringent need of efforts emerges to establish new rules of conduct, mandatory regulations under an effective regime, in order to ensure the sustainability, stability and security of Outer Space. (3SoS-Security, Stability and Sustainability in Outer Space initiatives, launched last autumn by the EU Special Representative for Outer Space). (Delegation of the European Union to Costa Rica, 2019)

In other words, growing concerns regarding the spread of anti-satellite technologies, cyberspace and outer space, are no longer a secret and are already recognized and addressed as military operational areas. That being said, the international regime of arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation, require a significant and constant effort to adjust its conceptual delimitations.

In psychosocial terms, the pandemic crisis has forced even sceptics and traditionalists to work in a digital/virtual environment,

which has facilitated the risk of mental overload, as the boundary between work and private life is much more blurred and volatile.

At the same time, the feeling of stress can occur against the background of a compulsive-depressive state of mind, especially in situations that do not involve a simultaneity or precisely structured time schedule. Additionally, the stress feelings are amplified when the team and the work pattern in an organizational framework are missing (these elements are generators of belonging feelings as part of identity).

Moreover, another identified risk arises from fast digitization of educational and economic activities and is represented by a unique increase of cyber-attacks. In addition to data theft, espionage and other dangers, to which all users of smart devices will be exposed, the effects of these cyber-attacks will generate heightened feelings of anxiety and insecurity. So, it must be assumed that a reoriented economy, especially online, will lead to a more vulnerable society to cybercrime, terrorism and mass surveillance.

Following this health crisis, a growing concern can be seen regarding the potential abuse of new technologies, starting from personal monitoring, with smart applications, to many other technologies that can have hidden effects over the human condition, freedom, security and, last but not least, human dignity.

Given these issues, it becomes a top priority to build up a set of procedures, to analyse and report the impact of new technologies on the safety and security of the citizens, as well as to monitor the effects over the system of ethical and moral values and over the rights and freedoms of the citizens. Following new technological developments in the digital field, existing legal framework cannot fully cover the development area.

Although discussions about regulation exists, they are still in the early stages and the questions that arise belong more to philosophy and less to civil and commercial law.

So, these questions will seek to provide an answer to how innovation could be regulated and how new networks and relationships can be built from now on? Moreover, the answers are a matter of greatest importance, especially in the context in which a significant part of the medical system (through telemedicine) and an important part of

the education system (through various e-learning platforms), will be converted and will pass progressively, to the digital area.

In the same digital context, the gap between those who already use modern technology and vulnerable people, who do not have access to it, will grow even more. In addition, given the fact that human resources are essential for maintaining a competitive advantage all over the world, it is very likely that the countries where access to education is restricted for economic reasons will face disadvantages globally, on several different levels.

Similarly, without proper rebuilding and strategic improvement of the economy and civil society, it is probable that the lockdown state, imposed for crisis management, will lead to differences between the rural and urban environment.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that humanity will survive the effects of this pandemic, just as it survived the black plague of the Middle Ages or the Spanish flu which erupted in 1918, but this health crisis will continue to have dramatic effects on human life, as well as significant economic costs.

In the future, it is certain that humanity will face many other epidemics; the only uncertainty is *not whether they will occur, but when they will occur, how long they will last and what effects they will cause*. The results of globalization and growing interdependence have highlighted increased vulnerabilities to such sanitary phenomena. However, scientific advances in medicine and communication place humanity in a more acceptable position than before.

It would also be a gain for humanity if the intelligence analysis community will be able to provide early warning indicators regarding the next health crises that may occur. Moreover, intelligence organizations must adapt their parameters to the new challenges generated by the Coronavirus crisis and to support policy makers with comprehensive and efficient products meant to cover the deficits of transparency, coordination, coherence and sometimes competence. This health crisis has highlighted the structural limitations and

functional failures of the public system, with their potential for multiplication.

At the same time, the crisis underlined the issues of global and national economic and financial resilience and those matters arising from the capacity and resilience of the medical system, as well as the technical mechanisms of crisis management.

The crisis can be seen as a springboard for highlighting and accelerating some pre-existing trends, phenomena, or political relations and thus, in the future, *health security, efficient time management and access to food for the population* will be key variables, which must be seriously taken into account in geopolitical dynamics.

In the end, it is necessary to ask the following questions as topics for reflection:

What is the probability that the next pandemic crisis will occur accidentally (by transfer from animals or due to deteriorating environmental conditions) vs. the likelihood that a future pandemic crisis will be intentionally provoked through biological arsenals in the possession of irresponsible state actors or malicious non-state actors?

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a practical demonstration for any malevolent actor about how much destruction a virus can cause.

What public health and security policies should be adopted to protect humanity?

Will humanity have to give up its freedoms for more security?

Will Privacy + Liberty vs. Security be the next conceptual dilemma?

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