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Is Germany Capable of Strategic Planning? Anticipatory Governance as the Foundation for Future-Proof Decisions

Strategic foresight for an opaque future

Huntington's world

The dissolution of the Sykes-Picot order in the Middle East and the annexation of the Crimea are a pointed reminder that geopolitics will remain as strong an influence in the 21st century as in the centuries before. A ring of instability is gradually forming around Europe that is not only threatening the stability and prosperity of the Old Continent but also challenging the European project.

Yet after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the West set out to cash in its “peace dividend” and invest it in promoting democracy. Successes, such as the expansion eastwards of NATO and the EU, seemed to be keeping pace with setbacks, for example in the Western Balkans, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. The overall course was not in question. On the contrary – a deaf ear was turned to Samuel Huntington's warning that the end of the leaden, bipolar world order would see a resurgence of conflicts delineated by cultural and religious identity.

A quarter-century on, Huntington's forebodings appear to be justified. And cynical observers might even claim that Francis Fukuyama's prediction of the “end of history” also seems to be coming true – but in a complete reversal of expectations. We are seeing the decline of a world order that was built between 1917/1919 and 1943/45 upon the principles of western values and institutions – an order that defined not only the contours of the political world map but also international law and by extension virtually all the rules governing international relations. In effect, this so-called post-war order was an affirmation of the 300-year-old Westphalian System – but this time with global aspirations and under western hegemony.

As yet, there are few signs of any new principles emerging for a future world order. That is why transitional phases like this are so highly charged – even more so, when they involve the rise and fall of great powers. Nevertheless, there are

trends, factors and actors that we can reasonably assume will play a role in shaping any new order(s).¹

It is therefore imperative that we do not wait too long to engage critically with the direction, form, structure and timeframe of such evolutionary processes and their complex and dynamic causal effects. The outcome of these processes will influence the quality of life and the prospects of hundreds of millions of Europeans for decades to come.

Navigation aids for terra incognita

But are we really in a position to anticipate the broad sweep of the future if we did not even see the crises of our own times brewing – the Arab Spring, the formation of the “Islamic State”, or the Ukraine crisis? If we find it difficult to judge whether we are dealing merely with a series of one-off events, or with the “long lines” referred to by Huntington – or perhaps with fundamental, system-changing developments?

And how good were our anticipatory skills when it came to identifying other epochal events? Did we see the global economic crisis coming, and in its aftermath the Euro crisis? Or the fracking revolution with its far-reaching implications for climate change, or the so-called “rare earths crisis” of 2010/2011, which laid bare the fragility of the German economy due to its dependence on raw materials? And last but by no means least, the Fukushima nuclear disaster? We neither anticipated these events and developments, nor were able to make adequate sense of their consequences.

At first sight, it appears naive to call for better predictive abilities – particularly in politics. After all, the prevailing characteristic of the future is its unpredictability. But herein lies a fundamental misunderstanding regarding forward-looking policy planning. The diplomatic service will not be including clairvoyance in its training schemes now or in the future, and policy impact assessments will not require the use of crystal balls. In fact, only a minority of phenomena are “black swans” – unexpected, unheralded or highly improbable events causing disruption.²

Forward-looking policy planning is not about predicting future developments but about improving analytical capabilities as the basis for strategic policy

1 While demographic change and climate change are long-term trends that elude short-term policy-making, the melting ice in the Arctic caused by climate change is an influencing factor that will change the rules of operation within the geopolitical architecture. And it is a well-worn platitude that international developments are no longer influenced by state actors alone.

2 See Taleb, N. N. (2007). *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. New York: Random House.

planning. Leon S. Fuerth, national security adviser to Vice President Al Gore from 1993 to 2000, coined the term “anticipatory governance” for this.³

Anticipatory governance draws upon a host of proven foresight methods and scenario planning instruments. They provide aids to navigation in the terra incognita of the unpredictable. They can be used when quantitative methods and the extrapolation of past experiences are not sufficient to allow robust, forward-looking decision-making. Qualitative, structured analysis techniques deliver robust results, whether in crisis early warning systems or when looking for hitherto unexplored development paths and overlooked policy options.⁴

For the future is opaque – full of opportunities and risks. We should regard it as a repository of potential policy options. With limited resources at our disposal, the challenge for strategic planning is to survey this reservoir of potential futures so as to best utilise the opportunities arising, prepare adequately for risks, and build resilience where possible. However, neither governments nor international companies have so far been ready to take this challenge on.

“It’s the bureaucracy, stupid!”

Thinking strategically: an everyday necessity⁵

To what extent, then, is Germany able to exercise strategic foresight and anticipatory governance? This is a country in which security, social peace and prosperity are particularly dependent on external events and developments – one that is profiting more than most from globalisation, and is therefore also more vulnerable.

If we are prepared to go along with the provocative view put forward by Joachim Raschke and Ralf Tils some years ago, then the treatment of strategic issues in policymaking can in the best case be described as “tinkering”. Everyone works on their own little patch, without an instruction manual and without

3 Fuerth, L. S. with Faber, E. M. H. (2012). *Anticipatory Governance – Practical Upgrades. Equipping the Executive Branch to Cope with Increasing Speed and Complexity of Major Challenges*. Washington DC: Project on Forward Engagement/Elliott School of International Affairs – The George Washington University, p. 3.

4 For a comprehensive overview see Heuer, R.J. and Pherson, R.H. (2015). *Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: CQ Press. See also Beebee, S.M. and Pherson, R.H. (2015). *Structured Analytic Techniques in Action*. Los Angeles/London: SAGE; Tetlock, P.E. and Gardner, D. (2015). *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*. London: Cornerstone.

5 See Raschke, J. and Tils, R. (2008). *Politische Strategie*. *Forschungsjournal NSB* 21 (1), pp. 11–24.

consulting anyone else.⁶ If that is really how things are, then what has caused this shortfall in strategic thinking? It is a state of affairs that forces policy-makers into reactive crisis management, erodes public compliance and thus undermines legitimacy. To put the question differently: If policy-makers were to increase their strategic capacities, to what extent would this open up new scope for initiative and action?

First, we need to clarify our definitions. The concept of strategy is amorphous and is used with at least as much profligacy as the concept of sustainability. Traditionally, a distinction is made between operational tactics and strategy – the latter addressing fundamental, long-term issues. Less formally, we could say that “Do the right things!” is a strategic challenge, while “Do things right!” is tactical. If we broaden our definition to cover both aspects (this is intended as a plea!), almost all political actions can be accorded strategic significance. Strategic thinking then becomes a basic requirement of any political administration. And this is necessary, because the role and function of the political apparatus has changed fundamentally in the past two-and-a-half decades – away from an emphasis on sovereign duties towards the management of networking structures (governance as opposed to government). The challenge is to see things both ways; the German diplomat Thomas Bagger has coined the term “network politics” for this.⁷

New obscurity

We live in a world of increasing volatility, uncertainty, dynamism, complexity and ambiguity. In this “VUDCA” world, states must contend with the demands of around 100,000 multinational enterprises, more than 50,000 globally active non-governmental organisations, countless cash-rich foundations and private investors, as well as mercenary armies, organised criminals, and terrorists – the latter with a destructive potential hitherto vested solely in states.

An example from the underworld of organised crime: In 2014, states invested around USD 1.2 trillion globally in defence – chiefly in building up and maintaining their military arsenals. The income of organised crime networks in the

⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ See Bagger, T. (2013). Netzwerkpolitik. *Internationale Politik (IP)*, January/February 2013, pp. 44–50; Bagger, T. and von Heynitz, W. (2012). Der vernetzte Diplomat. *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, October 2012, Supplement 1, pp. 49–61. See also Straßheim H. (2011). Netzwerkpolitik. Governance und Wissen im administrativen Austausch. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

same period was almost twice this amount.⁸ Whereas military hardware is only effective across an extremely narrow spectrum, financial assets can be channelled flexibly into every conceivable public or private sphere.

The rapid pace of globalisation is reinforcing this “new obscurity”⁹. Statistics on the movement of goods and people underline this: In 2014, the daily number of flights worldwide was around 200,000; each day, around 9 million people and more than 115,000 tonnes of goods were transported to their destinations. That adds up to around 3 billion people and over 42 million tonnes of goods per year. In contrast, container shipping fleets transport more than 9.5 billion tonnes of goods and raw materials across the world’s oceans annually – all but unnoticed. That is 226 times the amount of air freight. And the trend is emphatically upwards.

However, in its knock-on impacts, globalisation itself is outdone by one of its own side-effects: the paradox of increasing interdependency on the one hand and growing global fragmentation on the other. While mutual economic dependency is increasing – due to globally interlinked value chains, for example – the dissolution of historical interdependencies is leading to a decline in influence and control based on centralised structures.¹⁰

This phenomenon is taking hold at a time of fundamental change in international power structures. The “unilateral moment” of American dominance following the end of the Cold War has given way to a phase of multipolarity – likely to be long-lasting, lacking an obvious hegemon and therefore characterised by clashes of interests, shifting alliances and latent conflict.

“Everybody is ignorant – only on different subjects”

All this reveals the limited scope and influence of a policy-making structure that aligned itself with the processes and demands of the emerging national economies (and military/industrial complexes) at the end of the 19th century. Its operating principles have remained essentially unchanged to the present day:

⁸ See Glenn, J.C. and Florescu, E. (The Millennium Project) (2016). 2015–16 State of the Future. Washington D.C.: The Millennium Project, p. 145; 176.

⁹ The term “new obscurity” (“*die neue Unübersichtlichkeit*”, sometimes also translated as “new complexity”) was coined by Jürgen Habermas and has become a fixed term of reference for Germany’s then Federal Foreign Minister, Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier. See Habermas, J. (1985). *Die Neue Unübersichtlichkeit. Die Krise des Wohlfahrtsstaates und die Erschöpfung utopischer Energien. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, (29), pp. 1–14.

¹⁰ Still of seminal importance today: Friedman, T.L. (1945). *The World is Flat: The Globalized World in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. A highly recommended monograph on globalisation: Iriye, A. and Osterhammel, J. (2013). *Geschichte der Welt. 1945 bis Heute: Die globalisierte Welt*. Munich: C.H. Beck.

compartmentalised to a high degree according to jurisdiction, strictly hierarchical and thus vertically structured, mechanical in its procedures and sluggish in generating coherence.¹¹

A political apparatus which organises its forward planning chiefly along the lines of departments and responsibilities is inclined to ignore weak signals of change that do not comply with its organisational logic. To describe this as a structural inability to perceive and adequately evaluate emerging trends would be an exaggeration. However, without substantive cross-departmental and social interlinkages, political administrations tend to find change management problematical. As a result, they struggle to reach any deeper understanding of the dynamic, complex interactions between impacts and actors. Political administrations organised by department therefore incline towards a world view that is often over-simplified, always fragmented, and sometimes deterministic and linear. And because urgency frequently takes precedence over importance, short-term pressure to act dominates routine administration. There is often simply too little time for longer-term thinking or strategic planning. For all these reasons, the response of political administrations to uncertainty and change is, almost without exception, reactive not proactive. The American columnist Will Rogers summed up this phenomenon as long ago as the 1930s with the ironic observation that “everybody is ignorant – only on different subjects”.

But in the “VUDCA” world, ignorance and indifference can have far-reaching long-term consequences. The sustained disregard of global warming is a good example. The challenges of this new world leave us in increasing need of orientation in what is unfamiliar terrain. Climate change, causes of conflict, the fluctuating global economy, epidemics such as Ebola, cyber security – these are so-called “wicked problems” that pose a growing threat to the stability of the social and political order; they are highly complex and defy linear solutions. Chameleon-like, they change their appearance depending on the context and the angle they are seen from. Addressing them demands lateral, not linear, thinking. Complex systems require navigators, not reductionists, with an instinct for emergence and not, for example, logical rigour. Government on auto-pilot will no longer do.

What we need is the ability to perpetually question and modify past strategic decisions, as well as one other crucial quality: patience in strategy-making. If decisions are to be fully effective, ongoing management of the constantly changing systems is needed, from within and without. Monitoring and fine-tuning are thus indispensable for successful strategy implementation. As Winston S. Churchill put it: “However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.”

¹¹ See Fuerth, L.S., *Anticipatory Governance*, p. 3.

This demands a fundamental review of the roles that government and the political administration are expected to play. “The state” is no longer an omnipresent, omniscient, infallible Leviathan. To reinstate the state in the “VUDCA” world as an effective instrument for forming opinion and consensus in society as a whole, societies and their institutions need to see themselves as learning, co-creative systems. This is a prerequisite if they are to develop strategic ability and proactively plan a future according to their own designs. Conversely, inertia, fear of change and lack of courage result in risks being identified too late and opportunities squandered.

Germany’s unspoken consensus to forgo strategy

German power and German inaction

The key question is therefore: Is Germany capable of strategic planning? The sobering answer is that its capacities appear to be limited. On the contrary, there seems to be an unspoken social consensus to get by without any strategy at all. To operate strategically, it is necessary to cultivate not only an aspirational vision that has broad social acceptance (e.g. seeing Germany as a country of immigration, or the European Union as an “ever closer union”) but also, most importantly, an idea of how visions of the future will play out in practical, every-day situations. In short: Societies will only let go of present achievements and embrace the future if they are offered compelling, plausible imagery.

The Euro crisis demonstrated how societies, if caught unprepared, react when their normative visions of the future collapse unexpectedly. The ensuing mix of muddling through, whistling in the dark, and pronouncements that “there is no alternative” prompted the admonition from abroad that German power is now less a cause for fear than German inactivity. The remarkable thing about this particular phrase is not so much its content as its author: Radosław Sikorski, Poland’s Foreign Minister at the height of the Euro crisis in 2011. According to Sikorski, structural reform in Europe could only be led by Germany, the “indispensable nation” (!) – criticism of Berlin’s crisis management notwithstanding, and despite concerns about German dominance in Europe.

Although it went almost unnoticed, he called into question the decades-old general consensus that determined the role of pre-unification Germany: that Germany would only lead – if it led at all – from behind. That it would favour consensus, never race ahead, and always be a good advocate of the collective interests of its allies.

The reasons for Germany’s disavowal of strategy are obvious: The original foundation of the German nation state was a geostrategic provocation in itself. It

led to the First World War, which ended with a flawed peace that already bore the germ of a second global conflagration. The Second World War was conducted in the name of a German people that approved the physical annihilation of dissenters in order to secure what it felt was its rightful position in Europe and the world.

“Auschwitz: Never again!” – a substitute for strategy?

Since then, we Germans have based our role in the world on two principles, justified in equal measure on moral and historical grounds: “No more war!” and “Auschwitz: Never again!” Every generation since the war has drawn the same instinctive conclusion: Because “Germany is too big for Europe, but too small for the world” (Henry Kissinger), we have outsourced all strategy processes to supranational institutions.

This worked well as long as collective interests coincided with individual interests and roles were clearly allocated. Strategies were formed, and security guaranteed, in Washington, while in Europe political stability was secured through economic integration – and security was made use of. Notable French and German ventures questioning or even reversing this division of labour included Charles de Gaulle’s “empty chair” policy in NATO and the establishment of France as a nuclear power, as well as Willy Brandt’s “Ostpolitik” and Helmut Schmidt’s insistence on the NATO double-track decision.

We have long been aware that this simple formula is no longer effective – that 20th century responses have lost relevance in our world. Yet still we look on from the wings, helplessly watching the disintegration of order, stability and security – foundations we cannot do without if we wish to uphold our way of life and our social and political order in the long term. Like Alice in Wonderland, we stumble from one crisis to the next, with just one goal in our sights: defending the status quo as far as we possibly can. But in the words of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, “If we want things to stay as they are, everything will have to change.”

Our efforts to come to terms with our recent past may have been exemplary, but one thing is missing: the long overdue debate on Germany’s vital interests – and on the resources, skills and collective determination we must summon to assert them. Clarification of this will also require German society to conduct a broad-based discussion of when and why Germany would be prepared to go to war. Since the armed conflicts in the Western Balkans, Iraq and Libya, if not before, we have known for certain that “even the wars you don’t wage can change you”.¹²

12 Ulrich B. (2011). *Wofür Deutschland Krieg führen darf. Und muss. Eine Streitschrift*. Reinbek

The Maidan in Kiev as a turning point

Let us turn back the clock to late January 2014. Germany's Federal President, Joachim Gauck, has just opened the 50th Munich Security Conference. His speech on Germany's role and responsibilities in the world attracted considerable attention. Gauck observed that Germany is changing perceptibly from "a beneficiary to a guarantor of international security and order". In the face of limited American capacity to deliver, he said, Germany is in any case increasingly responsible for its own security and that of its partners. These striking words deflected attention from the more gentle aspects of Gauck's speech. Indeed, the ensuing media storm drowned out one of the key passages completely: "We would be deceiving ourselves," said Gauck, "if we were to believe that Germany was an island and thus protected from the vicissitudes of our age." Few other countries have such close links with the rest of the world as Germany does, he added, making it particularly vulnerable to any "disruptions to the system". For this reason, "the consequences of inaction can be just as serious, if not worse than the consequences of taking action".

The relevance of this statement became clear a short time later. Three weeks after Gauck's speech in Munich, the barricades on the Maidan in Kiev were in flames, and four weeks after that Russia annexed the Crimea. And in June 2015, the Levant became the front line between the Orient and the Occident when the "Islamic State" declared its caliphate.

Yet despite all these developments, the impression remains that Germany is still bound by its self-imposed disavowal of strategy, for fear that anything else would relativise an essential part of its *raison d'état* – the credo "No more war!".

Group mentality and other cognitive pitfalls

When the solution becomes the problem

But it is not just bureaucratic hurdles and collective attitudes that we need to overcome on the road to better strategic planning abilities. Much weightier – because we are unaware of it – is the fact that our cognitive structures present a massive obstacle to forward-looking strategic thinking.

Graham T. Allison's ground-breaking analysis of the decision-making process during the 1962 Cuban crisis gave us a better understanding of such phenomena as undifferentiated "groupthink" – the truncation of decision-making processes due to pressure to conform, or the unspoken assumption that future develop-

bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, p. 13.

ments are ultimately little more than a linear continuation of the past and are evidenced by incremental, not disruptive change.¹³

We owe a particular debt to the work of two behavioural economists, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, who have made us (more) conscious of many these of unconscious cognitive biases. But we are still a very long way from incorporating this knowledge into political and strategical decision-making processes. Decision-making on future policies is frequently dominated by opinions, collective mindsets, shared experiences of socialisation and semi-official truths – instead of broad-based, structured analytical methods.¹⁴

The Ukraine crisis: historical analogies and political fallacies

To illustrate how knee-jerk cognitive reactions still influence global politics today, let us take two random examples: interpretations of the Ukraine conflict and perceptions of the “Arab Spring”.

First, a look at how the analogy of the Cold War is being applied to the Ukraine conflict. Admittedly, it does indeed appear that one of the objectives of Russia’s current “neighbourhood policy” is the creation of a *cordon sanitaire* around Russian territory in the form of buffer zones and spheres of influence similar to those typical of the Cold War. However, the present dispute between “the West” and Russia does not match the historical blueprint as it lacks not only an overarching ideological, teleological framework but also the direct mutual threat of military action between the main protagonists. The requisite political alliances are also missing. For one of the key provisos for the functioning of the Cold War was a bipolar world order and the ability this gave the superpowers to project their interests and power globally, through proxies if necessary. Our multipolar, inter-dependent world fulfils none of these conditions. Historians therefore favour another historical analogy: the so-called “long” 19th century. From American independence and the French Revolution in 1776 and 1789 to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, this era saw sweeping international realignment. It was marked not only by the rise and fall of great powers but also by extremely rapid social and economic change – and therefore also by a high potential for international and social conflict.

But amidst all these efforts to seek guidance based on historical interpretation, no-one is asking the crucial question: What for? What is the point or the purpose of such comparisons? In reality, the marginal benefit is practically non-existent. In contrast, an approach based on strategic foresight and anticipatory governance is free of all overloaded empirical assumptions and in the best case makes

13 See Allison, G.T. and Zelikow, P. (1999). *The Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, pp. 13–75; 143–196; 379–407.

14 See Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. (1947). Judgement under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. *Science* 185 (4157), pp. 1124–1131; Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

use of weak, haphazard signals, first indications and initial, tentative interpretations. Daniel Kahneman suggests that “hindsight bias” – the tendency to see everything retrospectively as logical and inevitable – is actually one of the greatest threats to forward-looking policy formulation. Attempting to derive patterns or even axioms for future action from historical case studies ultimately produces a truncated world view marked in the worst case by ideology – a world view that is intolerant, indifferent and insensible to developments that do not conform to its own prejudices. No-one has summed up these cognitive pitfalls more trenchantly than the Austrian philosopher Paul Watzlawick: “If your only tool is a hammer every problem looks like a nail.”

A world view directed towards the future would possibly come to quite different conclusions about Putin’s intentions and potential next steps. This kind of strategic foresight would probably focus instead on new areas of conflict and little-exposed aspects such as:

1. the Arctic, which will soon be free of ice in the summer due to global warming and as a result become a region of global geostrategic significance,
2. Iran, which will play a key role in any kind of political order in the Greater Middle East,
3. the People’s Republic of China, without which Moscow will scarcely be able to carry out its plans to create a Eurasian Economic Union in Central Asia,
4. the danger of a “cold” cyber-war that paralyses western infrastructure (such as electricity and internet grids) with minimal effort, causing immense economic harm.

All these – and many other – plausibilities barely register in the sights of strategic planners if they cling to old patterns that cloud their view and their perception.

Arab Spring: turning a blind eye

A further example of the power of cognitive pitfalls is the “Arab Spring”. How could regimes topple within just a few weeks right across the Mashreq without intelligence agencies, think-tanks or exile groups being prepared for it? Why were no precautions taken? Wasn’t a change of regime the all-consuming goal of American policy in the Near and Middle East? A plausible answer is that the collective mindset simply excluded this possibility.

Since the end of the Second World War, the dominant leitmotif of western policy in the Middle East has been stability. In fact, there is no region in the world where geopolitics and the vital interests of the West have dovetailed so closely: access to the abundant oil fields of the Arab world and the Persian Gulf, the freedom of the seas and straits and Israel’s integrity and security. Besides Israel,

other reliable agents of this US-dominated geopolitical approach included Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The fact that the Arab states exhibited massive deficits in democracy was tacitly accepted in view of the clear prioritisation of security over the desire for democratisation. The inevitable consequence was that the West became all but blind, deaf and dumb towards any social transformation processes beneath the lethargic top layer of the elites.

Nothing changed until 17 December 2010, the day on which Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian, set fire to himself – news of which spread through the country like wildfire and led to open revolt against the regime of Zine el-Abine Ben Ali. The West reacted with astonishing passivity to these developments. This was partly because American policy in the Middle East was undergoing realignment under Barack Obama, but also because the vehemence of this movement led by young activists caused complete disorientation; within just a few weeks, it changed the political balance in North Africa fundamentally. And last but not least, the western world was preoccupied with its own far-reaching economic crisis.

Yet the signs of increasing destabilisation, in Egypt in particular, could hardly be overlooked. A key factor here was a massive deterioration in the availability of basic food supplies in 2007 and 2008. The reason for this was a sudden shortage of grain and milk products on the world markets, which led to social and political unrest in more than 60 countries. In Cairo, too, there were hunger demonstrations and, even at that early stage, calls for the Mubarak government to resign: “Get lost Mubarak! We’re risking our lives queuing for bread,” proclaimed a handbill on 6 April 2008. The regime had thousands of people arrested for illegal trading in flour and foodstuffs as well as looting.

This scenario repeated itself just two years later, largely unnoticed by the international public. As the world’s largest importer of wheat, Egypt is extremely vulnerable to external influences; the country imports a third of its wheat from Russia. When southern Russia suffered a severe drought in the summer of 2010, prices on the world markets for a tonne of wheat rose from USD 157 in June to USD 246 in August. By February 2011, the price had risen to USD 350 – an increase of 80 per cent within one year alone. Even with the disastrous year of 2008 as a baseline, food prices rose a further 70 per cent on average. Egyptians now had to spend up to 40 per cent of their monthly income on food. In January 2011, escalating food prices and out-of-control youth unemployment in combination with the sustained crisis of legitimation affecting the country’s political system since 2005 finally led to open rebellion in Cairo, further encouraged by the Tunisian “Jasmine Revolution”. It took just three weeks to sweep away Hosni Mubarak’s stable regime of three decades.¹⁵ And it is not improbable that this

15 See Litovsky, A. (Earth Security Group) (2014). The Earth Security Index 2014. A dashboard

scenario could recur in the near future as a result of the water shortages and increasing salinisation of the Nile Delta caused by climate change. More than 80 per cent of Egyptians live in the delta.¹⁶

A direct correlation can therefore be drawn between the availability of natural resources, the stability of political systems and regional security – a nexus that has attracted scant attention to date in security policy scenarios. For good reason: The staff of defence ministries is made up mainly of military personnel, with a few scientists and at most a handful of climate experts. Ethnologists, cultural scientists or experts with in-depth regional knowledge or personal experience of migration are conspicuously absent.

Yet without this heterogeneous expertise, we lack the antennae to detect the innumerable influences that can affect the stability and security of today's highly networked societies with all their mutual dependencies.

Five proposals for improving anticipatory governance

If we intend to get to grips with the “wicked problems” of the “VUDCA” world, a good starting point would be to fine-tune how governmental departments collaborate (the whole-of-government approach), draw clearer distinctions between short, medium and long term planning horizons, and create new patterns for interaction between governmental and non-governmental actors. But more is needed.

What is required is a rethinking of the structure and quality of strategy formulation and implementation. Based on Leon Fuerth's experience as national security advisor to Vice President Al Gore, a combination of the following measures could significantly improve anticipatory governance and early warning of crises:

1. inter-departmental integration of strategic forward engagement methods in the policy planning process (e.g. in preparing and processing white papers),
2. introduction of horizontal budget lines, i.e. budgets geared to inter-departmental, long-term future objectives rather than to departmental concerns (which would in turn require permanent coordination and harmonisation of departmental policies),
3. an intra-governmental network for orchestrating and implementing holistic governance approaches (e.g. by reforming the German Federal Security Committee),

for the transition to a resource secure future. pp. 14–15, [online]. Available at: www.earth-security.org [Accessed 28 Feb. 2017].

¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 32–37.

4. systematic, comprehensive impact assessment of policy based on a range of time horizons and policy alternatives (ex ante, ad interim, ex post; municipal, national, international),
5. a monitoring and feedback system that continuously questions requirements, expectations and political performance (similar to the German Government's climate and sustainability strategies), creating a self-learning system.¹⁷

In this way, anticipatory governance can not only improve political performance but also consolidate the legitimacy of elected leadership structures and public institutions. For if these can no longer shield their citizens from crises, manage change or utilise future potential, the floodgates are thrown open to populism, extremism and fear-driven debate.

Conversely, without a credible future narrative, politics remains mired in the administration of present concerns and past achievements. Pressure for change is then equated with destabilisation of what is perceived to be a secure status quo. Instead, policymakers must aim to explore every conceivable future scenario, notwithstanding the complexity or obscurity of the current situation. In our increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and contradictory world, it would be wise to build up a stock of effective options for shaping a secure future where life is worth living – in other words, to build resilience. After all, the future is opaque – and it's plural.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Fuerth, *Anticipatory Governance*, p. 4.

¹⁸ "The future is plural", see Schwartz, P. (1991): *The Art of the Long View. Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World*. New York: Crown Business.