

New Dynamics in International Relations

It is the Best of Times, It is the Worst of Times

Dr. Frank Owarish

Executive Director International Institute Strategic Research and Training,
New York City, USA

Dr. Donald K. Hsu

Doctoral Faculty, University of Phoenix; Associate Professor, Dominican
College & CEO Chinese American Scholars Association, New York City,
USA

Note: Due credit is given to Sam Owarish, Jack Radifera and Vasso Videlingum

Introduction

As we watch the news, we have the feeling that the world is getting more complex day by day with the problems becoming harder to deal with (e.g. wars, vagaries of the weather, culture clashes and religious conflicts, refugees and displaced populations). There are bad news and good news but often we get consumed by the bad news with a feeling of pessimism. However there are good news as well (e.g. better ways of producing and preserving food, better medicine, transportation systems, travel opportunities). We do not quite know whether the glass is half empty or half full; it may depend upon where you are standing. We seem to be more reactive than proactive. Is there also a lack of good will; have we given up trying? This research paper will take stock of what is going on in the world today capturing the 'best of times and the worst of times'. e-Leadership has emerged as a powerful tool fueling countries' advancement (e.g. South Korea, Singapore) as well as companies' transformation (e.g. Apple, Amazon). Is there a transformation problematic albeit a failure in our search for specific improvement methodologies? While the private sector seems to be energized by innovation, the public sector is not staying behind either and moving ahead as well, at times overshadowed by political rhetoric and posturing. Technology is a crucial factor. When we look at countries, we see that the 'power shift' paradigm of Alvin Toffler has maintained its relevance. While many countries have made the quantum leap forward (e.g. India, South Korea), several are struggling and falling behind beset by many adverse actors. We hear of an area impacted by water shortage. Could we not be proactive rather than reactive? Desalination technology has been around and is being successfully used in many locations; look at the marvel of Israel transforming deserts into fertile

farms. Have we lost our abilities to make peace as in several circumstances there seems to be endless wars. Is militarism overshadowing diplomacy? Should not we be strengthening the United Nations and making it better? Should not we be preventing and resolving wars, avoiding major refugee problems as well as large displacement of populations? According to the World Bank we are making progress in dealing with poverty in the world; there is much more that needs to be done. In addition, we do find pockets of poverty in advance countries with a deepening of the divide between the haves and the have-nots. Special interest groups often use their power to influence the definition of common good. Globalism catapulted the world forward after World War 2 and free trade was seen as the way forward. Now it seems as if we want to go back to protectionism. We do have the means of resolving trade disputes. Trade agreements can be reviewed and improved. Let us go forward with a spirit of constructiveness.

Mixed picture

When we look at the world, either through the news or through academic analyses, the picture is mixed with positives and negatives. The question is often asked: is the glass half full or half empty? To capture a comprehensive picture, we have to capture the dynamics of what is going on. There are existing problems which have become thornier and there are new problems as well.

Dynamics

We tend to look at the negatives often taking for granted positive developments. Also to be considered is our ability to deal with new problems and existing ones which have gotten harder. There is the tendency to be reactive. It is often difficult of being proactive, hampered by our inability to predict. How is our state of preparedness? Is it possible to have early warning system.

Politics is an important factor in what problems and issues we deal with and how and what is simply left on the back bench. Recently on trade issues between US and China, a Chinese government representative asked the Trump Administration to be less political and more logical and rational. Pressure groups play an important role in the political equation; very often, the ones with the stronger voice win the games. Another important consideration is what is dealt with on a short term basis compared to the long term, at times making short term gains to the detriment of long term benefits.

Tribute to Stephen Hawking

We need human genius like him to give us a sense of direction. We are thankful for his predictions some of which can be said to be 'dire', namely that the world as it is going is heading for disaster. He mentioned the positive value of 'talking', reflecting a diplomatic stance. Perhaps talking, backed by appropriate constructive actions is the way to go.

Survey by World Economic Forum (WEF)

WEF conducted a world survey of millennials recently (2018) and the following are the key findings in increasing order of importance:

10. lack of opportunity and unemployment (12.1%)

9. safety/security; wellbeing (14.1%)
8. lack of education (15.9%)
7. food and water security (18.2%)
6. government accountability and transparency; corruption (22.7%)
5. religious conflicts (23.9%)
4. poverty (29.2%)
3. inequality in income; discrimination (30.8%)
2. large scale conflicts and wars (38.9%)
1. climate change; destruction of nature (48.8%)

Observation

Governmental and non-governmental authorities in different countries may have different priorities; they also have differing amount of resources to allocate to these problems, also differing capabilities.

Is not prevention better than cure?

In the case of the conflict between North Korea and US, an unprecedented escalation took effect a few months ago, with war of words which could have led to a nuclear war started by either side. To such an important problem, there is no 'quick fix', not even nuclear strike. Ideological differences were a factor in the situation along with nuclear weapon competition as to who has the bigger 'button'.

The Winter Olympics in South Korea came just in time and provide an opportunity for North Korea and South Korea to cooperate, such as walking together at the beginning of the games and athletes from the two countries participating in the same team. It is obvious that some important diplomatic footwork must have been going on in the back channel. There is the thought that China may have used the so-called quiet diplomacy. Since then the leaders of the US and North Korea have agreed to meet. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea has undertaken several trips to Europe giving the impression that preparation for a world summit may be underway.

Great international news: diplomacy seems to be at work; the leaders of North and South Korea met in a summit in April 2018.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/07/politics/north-korea-us-talks/index.html>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/korea-divided-history-war-torn-12272371>

Wars

There are wars in the world which have been going on for years giving the impression that they appear to be never ending, namely Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan.

Afghanistan:

<https://unama.unmissions.org/>

<http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=152207E6DL212.213&profile=bib&uri=full=3100001~!1164221~!5&ri=1&aspect=subtab124&menu=search&source=~!horizon>

Iraq:

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=50>

Syria:

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=146>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>

ISIS

<https://www.cnn.com/2014/08/08/world/isis-fast-facts/index.html>

Refugees; displaced populations

The most important question is whether we could have taken action to prevent and possibly resolve the underlying conflicts?

Do we have the capacity and will to resolve the conflicts?

Look at the big mess and the imperfect ways of dealing with it

The root causes are complex. Review of the 'Science of muddle through'

Israel-Palestine question

Review of history

Status report:

<http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=152207E6DL212.213&profile=bib&uri=full=3100001~!1144984~!100&ri=1&aspect=subtab124&menu=search&source=~!horizon>

What is a possible solution? Who wants what?

Ethnic conflicts

Plight of the Kurds

The Rohingya: is that a case of ethnic cleansing

Saudi Arabia and Yemen

Saudi Arabia and Iran

Kashmir

'Pushing the can down the road'

Extremism

Why is it a problem?

Multifaceted aspects

Extremism - Personal thoughts (Prof. Vasso Vydelingum).

We need to go beyond dictionary definitions of extremism and explore what has been happening to the world in the last two decades and note how people lives have changed. Extremism refers to people or people within organisations holding beliefs that most other people think unreasonable and unacceptable. Extremism also refers to person(s) who favours or resorts to immoderate, uncompromising or fanatical methods or behaviour in getting their aims achieved. Extremism can be viewed or studied or observed from different perspectives, namely:

1. Religious Extremism, which can be innocent and peaceful but can also be expressed in violent extremism. Examples are Al Qaeda - Twin Towers, Taliban- anti education of girls and Mallala Yusuf, Boko Haram- anti education of girls and kidnapping of young girls and leading to cruelty and rape, many more examples are there. The sufi/sunni conflicts are also worth considering. Look at the numerous examples of attacks on innocent civilians in Paris, Barcelona, London, Germany etc.

2 Political Extremism - These can be expressed in extreme right or extreme left. The Trump campaign - Making America Great again as a euphemism for making America White Again. America First leading to protectionist measures- banning this Muslims, Mexicans, increasing taxes on foreign goods etc. In the UK, the hate and fear of immigrants leading to a wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric lead to the creation of a new party UKIP which push to a referendum leading to Brexit. Political extremism can be disguised as nationalist extremism.

3. Nationalist Extremism - The latest UN report on what is happening in Myanmar. Ethnic cleansing being carried while the world and the UN are incapable to intervene. This can be viewed also in other forms, such as racist/racial extremism.

4. Racist/Racial Extremism. Such extremism is expressed in the form of irrational hatred of another group purely based on what is referred to as 'race'. Take the case of the KKK and the hate of black people and extremism expressed in violence and killing of black people purely based on race.

5. Changes in society -as a result of extremism. Security at airports, vigilante groups, CCTV. The role and duty of all responsible leaders or e-leaders in society, including the UN, are about challenging extremism in any form to protect the vulnerable.

Clash of civilizations

Sam Huntington paradigm revisited

Should not we be devoting energy to proving Huntington wrong?

Or is it 'good rationalization'?

The global environment

Efforts made over decades: significant but not enough

Political and economic interests: short term gains hampered serious efforts

Paris Conference: a huge success

US position under the Trump Administration; the States, local entities, businesses taking their own positions

Green business

Sustainable development

<https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter>

UN; UN system

Two different but interrelated entities
Has the UN outlived its usefulness?
Often blamed for being 'bureaucratic'
What causes the UN inability to do more?
The quiet accomplishments

UN and conflict resolution

The modalities: negotiation is at the heart of everything; diplomacy as per Kissinger; peace making; peace keeping

UN and conflict prevention

The modalities: early warning system, detailed studies, negotiation, quiet diplomacy, the 'back channel', peace building

International trade and investments

Globalization which took place at the end of World War 2 has been good for the world barring few disadvantaged; some that were disadvantaged came all the way to the front
Bilateral agreements, regional agreements, global (multilateral) agreements
Time for rethinking; new globalism as the world changes: are trade wars necessary vs giving a chance to renegotiating

Technology

This is a field which is constantly evolving with effects which are mostly beneficial; computer-communication technologies come to mind but there are others as well such as automotive technologies, medical technologies, agricultural and so on.
Alvin Toffler's prediction in Power Shift: the fasts and the slows
Is the paradigm still relevant today?

Technology downside

Hacking issues: what it is; why does it happen? Can we deal with it?

Technology: leading edge

Robotics; automation in general
AI, ML, DL
AR, MR, VR

Poverty in the world

World Bank status report
Poverty is the US as an example: the divide between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'; at times, the 'have nots' resort to desperate actions; is there a lack of social safety net?

Water situation; the case for conservation; desalination

What it is
Why is it not used more?

Humanism

Humanism: the philosophy
There may be too much to do and those involved in helping can be overwhelmed
Shortfalls in humanitarian assistance; donor fatigue

The key is perhaps helping people help themselves; Chinese proverb

The state of human rights in the world

Standard setting

Status of implementation

New dynamics in international relations

Revisiting well known theories: realism, constructivism (Kissinger), power politics, Machiavellianism, militarism, hegemony

State actors; non-state actors

Is there a need for new theories?

The UN Charter: it is all there; need for re-dedication

Conclusion1: better world

Making the world better vs preventing from getting worse; what it takes?

Efforts, working together as the UN intended

Zero sum games vs win-win games

New leadership albeit eLeadership

Is the glass half empty or half full

Conclusion2: better world

The worst of times and the best of times: what some new writers are saying:

Enlightenment now: the case for reason, science, humanism and progress (Steven Pinker)

It's better than it looks: reasons for optimism in an age of fear (Gregg Easterbrook)

We can make the world better by working to do so

UN World Happiness Report

<http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/03/20/520859626/global-ranking-of-happiness-has-happy-news-for-norway-and-nicaragua>

https://www.un.org/sg/en/annual_report