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Strategic Planning in an Age of Turmoil

Pandemic, climate change, political instability around the world, global cyberwarfare, and then a real shooting war in Europe. It would be pardonable if most people simply ran in circles, screamed, and shouted. Or sat on the floor and did nothing for a long time. Pardonable, but not very functional.

Stability

Since 1946, and even more so after the fall of the Soviet Union and the Four Modernizations of Deng Xiaoping in China, the political economy of the world has been *stable*. Stability is often overrated, but we seriously miss it when it is gone. Yes, there were brush wars, even large engagements like Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan (twice!), but those took place in areas where the population was marginal to the greater economic engines of the world. Only in Vietnam, since the triumph of the Communist North, has there been a substantial economic recovery and revitalization.

Even the rogue regimes, like the Taliban and Al Qaeda or ISIS, or the drug cartels of Mexico and Latin America, require the rest of the world to be stable and functional, or they wouldn't be able to sell their only significant products—drugs like opium/heroin and cannabis and cocaine. These regimes acted like sharks swimming in an ocean of salmon—but they needed a stable ocean in which to swim.

In 2016, all of this started to come apart with the election of Donald Trump under questionable circumstances, even though his opponent refused to challenge the win. By 2017, the military industrial complex of Western Europe (NATO) was in disarray, and Trump appeared far closer to Russian dictator Vladimir Putin than to the United States' traditional allies.

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Pandemic

By 2019, it was clear that the entire world was entering the throes of the most virulent pandemic in a century.

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Estimates of global fatalities run as high as 6 million. Even though the pandemic appears to be mostly under control, now in 2022, it is still causing severe disruption in China, India, and South America, because of low vaccination counts. The economic disruption caused by the pandemic is going to be a significant issue for strategic planners going forward.

Climate Change

Many of the most far-reaching dislocations have been caused, or exacerbated, by climate change. Refugees in Africa have been fleeing from climate disasters since the 1990s, as have migrants from Latin America and other places. Climate change has caused shortages in foods from basics like wheat and corn to wine grapes in France and California. We have not yet seen large migrations such as those blamed for destroying the western Roman Empire, and initiating the Dark Ages, but it is not impossible for them to occur.

Economic growth is tied very tightly to social and political stability.

There is considerable evidence that, beyond his insane desire to resurrect the Soviet Union, Vladimir Putin attacked Ukraine so he could seize Ukraine's economic wealth—manufacturing assets and food growing regions. This has become necessary because the Russian economy is so backward and so dependent on oil and gas revenue.

Putin may just be the first of the new robber barons...literally. There may be more.

Political Instability

Economic growth is tied very tightly to social and political stability. Countries with revolutions, *coups d'état*, and failures of democracy don't do well promoting economic growth. People don't want to invest in unstable social or political climates. As we have seen, they'll leave if they can, and migrate to more stable countries.

The economic miracle of the West (the EU, Britain, the United States, Canada, and other countries) has been made possible by continuous investment in infrastructure, which can only occur in a stable economic climate. Coming out of more than 600 years of nearly continuous war, the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Marshall Plan made it possible for companies in Germany, France, Italy, and the other Western nations in Europe to set up a multi-country polity, a multi-country economy, a multi-country currency, and grow peacefully

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for almost 75 years. This had been the longest period between wars in Europe since the Middle Ages, or perhaps before—to the height of the Roman Empire.

Even before the election of Trump in 2016, political instability has been growing in even the most unlikely places around the globe. Authoritarian regimes, some barely under the cover of democracy (Hungary, Poland, Venezuela, Myanmar, India, Thailand, and others) have been growing and the world economic order is increasingly divided along partisan lines. Some countries have barely escaped being taken over by authoritarian parties (France, the United States, and others). Adding to this the significant and increasing economic disparity in the industrialized countries and the outsized effects of investment by billionaires in political issues, we are close to producing the conditions under which democracies as we have known them cannot exist.

This has become the first great dislocation migration in Europe since 1946.

Now as all of those conditions continue to roil and bubble in the social consciousness of the industrialized world, Vladimir Putin unleashes a war in Europe by invading Ukraine. Echoing the authoritarian exhortations of *both* Stalin and Hitler, Putin's avowed intention is to destroy a large, modern (far more modern than Russia), and west-leaning nation whose capital was

one of the leading cities in Europe for hundreds of years before Moscow was built, eliminate the Ukrainian elite, and re-educate the masses of Ukrainians—and keep the spoils. This has begun the first great dislocation migration in Europe since 1946. More than 4 million people with entirely disrupted lives have fled Ukraine, giving up their assets and their employment in the face of total destruction.

Cyberwar

For over 20 years, people like myself, Joe Weiss, the late Robert Adamski, and many others, have warned that cyberwarfare is not only a given, but has actually been going on for decades, ever since the Internet was founded. It is very hard for a commercial enterprise to continue to operate in the face of disruption caused by nation-state cyber warriors like Russia, China, and North Korea, to name a few of the most flagrant offenders. Some destruction of physical infrastructure in both Russia and Ukraine, for example, has been tied to the actions of cyber operatives on both sides. If nation states, not just criminals, are going to disrupt the global economy, unless you have the resources of an IBM or Microsoft, you are David, fighting a global cyber-Goliath.

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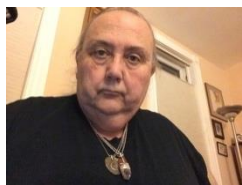
With all this disruption, disease, and disaster going on, how do you effectuate real, accurate strategic planning?

With the lack of stability throughout the world, on many axes, it is likely that only short-term planning is going to be practical. Planning on more than a two- or three-year event horizon is to invite huge disparities between the world two- or three-years hence and the world you planned for.

Stability is critical to the proper functioning of commercial enterprises, whether financial, service, food, pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, and other manufacturing. It is fundamental to planning and providing infrastructure for those enterprises to use to get goods and services to their customers. Anything we do to reduce the stability of the world will hurt us all economically.

We will look more at the axes of stability in future issues. What do you think?

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