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The Future of (non-)Global Governance

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1. Preliminary Words.

The title of this paper sounds preposterous, and indeed is. There are many reasons for this qualification and, pre-empting criticisms, I mention three main ones.

The first is that any exercise in futurology bears a touch of ridicule or naiveté. As my savvy econometrics teacher used to say in his forecasting lectures (a long time ago, in rainy London): in difficult and very visible situations, a good strategy is to stress the worst outcomes. In case they do not occur, everybody will be happy with the better results and not blame you too much. If they do take place, you will be considered a bold forecaster who did not hesitate to announce the bad prospects. I warn that, despite my conclusions cannot be considered optimistic, I do not have used this strategy here.

The second is that Global Governance (GG) has nowadays so many and oftentimes unsuspected forms of influence and control that statements on the future architecture of such a complex system – or rather, network – may easily lack credibility. My excuse in this case is that I outline basic trends, with one clear outcome. I, and probably anyone, am of course unable to predict what *Gestalt* will the couple COP – Conference of the Parties and its scientific arm, the IPCC - International Panel on Climate Change, assume twenty years from now, or how specific world economic managing and regulation institutions, or those dealing with other realms of international interaction, like air and maritime transportation, or legal regimes for the space, the electro-magnetic spectrum and the web galaxy will be, though, from my predicted global outcome, one could broadly speculate on their fate, when a significant number of them will be more regionalised or even fragmented.

Thirdly, in a world where not only events, but black swans and the crossing of tipping points are becoming monthly, or even weakly events, a given sequence of those may completely change environmental conditions and turn the most careful forecasting exercise into useless rhetoric. This is perhaps the most difficult point and I here resort to modellers' great logic excuse which is the *ceteris paribus* assumption.

However, in this complex, multi-interactive dynamics what exactly means the *ceteris paribus* assumption? I would venture that it implies no big turns in the great power(s), particularly the slow decline of the US hegemon, and no great change in the Chinese-project, specially in terms of no violence, be it internally or externally, the latter in terms of a moderately significant war. But one has to assume also, what may sound a little childish, no major scientific or technical breakthrough that would considerably change the present broad pattern of power in favour of a given nation or group of countries.

To avoid continuing a nearly unending list of sudden, disruptive changes, and conscious that my answer in this case is not precise, I shall sum up by saying that this exercise precludes any major unsuspected event that would profoundly disrupt the present dynamic status quo.

A final qualification must be added to the last statement above. I conduct here an analysis that – in an extreme standpoint – runs apparently orthogonal to social and political movements. My fault for sure, but this is also part of the last assumption, in the sense that the outcome I foresee is, in a first approximation, more, or less independent of evolutions in this area. Truly, forms of (domestic) government, or worldwide citizen's movements – ever more frequent nowadays – may have an impact on the processes I'm concerned with, but – *ceteris paribus* – I suppose their influence will not be remarkable.

Actually, this paper is nothing but an exercise on a possible future scenario, which is assumed to dominate other trends like the above ones and, then, condition their evolution.

With this fairly detailed proviso, I can inform the reader that my analysis is grounded in a realist view of the world scene, understood as akin to the world view professed by the realism school in international relations.

Though not being a true realist, I state upfront my belief that power, and power relations govern international conduct and, despite good intentions, the beneficial aspects of global institutions and the strife for values like peace, freedom or democracy¹, at the end of

¹ I have deliberately omitted the qualification of 'universal' for such values, as, especially in the case of democracy, I believe this has led to an overstretched use of them, for purposes not necessarily justifiable.

the day power and its germane concept, fear, have, most of the times, outright pre-eminence. It is never excessive to remind Thucydides's famous statement in his classical history of the Peloponnesian war: "The strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must"².

I outline in the next two sections, under the above perspective, a world *palco scenico* where my actors will evolve. Section 2 describes a more abstract setting, though with references to the present status quo, while Section 3 discusses two very important and concrete phenomena: capitalism and the scientific apparatus, both crucial for my argument.

Combination of both constructs leads to section 4, where I propose a characterisation of nowadays times as a transitional moment. This allows to discuss in section 5 the very goal of the text, what will happen to the present Global Governance (GG) order.

A final section complements the exposition by addressing supplementary points that provide a better picture of my proposal.

2. A Realist View of the World Drama (with apologies).

It is well-known that the basic structure and determinant vectors of the encompassing hierarchical network, rather than architecture, informally called the present GG order had its original outline at the end of World War II. This basic framework has been continuously updated and developed under the direct supervision and control of the US, the hegemonic power which -together with different allies, conditional on the circumstances- forged and supervises the existing order. It translated and established both the will and the power of the winners.

² This much cited statement in academic circles has gained new notoriety thanks to its frequent use by former Greek Financial Minister, Yanis Varoufakis, Varoufakis (2016).

After the Cold War years and the subsequent Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, it seemed for a brief interlude that the order clearly reflected, in an encompassing way, the power of the developed Western world, with the US remaining as the undisputable hegemon.

As any fully established hegemon, the US showed many instances of benign behaviour³, providing – not exactly for free – several international public goods that allowed, foremost, stable business environments around the Globe. Another notable role, in the eyes of specific groups of nations in certain regions, was that of a pacifier; highly evident in Europe until around 2008⁴.

At the end of the past century however, a generalised perception that a progressive shift to Asia was taking place - greatly due to the rise of China - was broadly accepted⁵. Notwithstanding, neither this, nor the novel increase in international terrorism, dramatically started with the September 11, 2001, World Trade Centre destruction in New York City, US, have substantially changed the background spirit and main characteristics of the GG network.

A simplified vision like this overlooks that important factors are continually shaping GG aspects. The dynamics of the institutions themselves; cultural and sociological traits that have always an, even if subdued, impact; and changing perceptions of risk, many times highly influenced by specific chance events, are some relevant ones.

Two other phenomena are worth of mention. The first is usually forgotten by analysts, historians (surprisingly) included sometimes. The unavoidably inherent existence of cycles in all human processes. From demography to technology and innovations, passing through social movements and financial crises, nearly everything shows a cyclical pattern;

³ The benign role of the hegemon has been emphasised by quite a few authors; including Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, as made popular by Cox (1983).

⁴ I follow John Mearsheimer in considering 2008 a turning point in this smooth pacifier period: the year when, among other things, there was a fierce debate at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, on President George Bush's proposal to accept Georgia and Ukraine as prospective members of the Organisation (and so able to engage in the normal accreditation process). Though the proposal failed, this fact – a further attitude contrary to the agreement settled in trust with Russia, during the negotiations for the German reunification of October 3, 1990 – considerably alarmed the Russians. I point out that the hasty big EU enlargement of 2004 – also under President Bush's pressure - was already another signal of the coming times, which ended up by destroying Russia's confidence in the EU and changing its behaviour towards the Union.

⁵ See, among others, and among many of his own works, Mahbubani (2008).

the combination of all them drawing different scenarios that, without any external disruptive event, may lead to different GG configurations.

The second, deeply analysed by Foucault⁶ in relation to the self and corporal/body relationships within a given society, tells us that power, however emanating from a central focus -like the hegemon, in our case-, inevitably distributes itself among other actors who, depending on the situation, may exert considerable influence or damage⁷.

All the above instances must be taken into account when performing a finer analysis of the issues discussed here. I shall not dwell on them, but resort to them occasionally in the next sections. Additionally, this serves as a warning that the blurred picture here described can be refined with the aide of considerations from the above categories: all are deemed important.

Why do nations need power?

Because, ultimately, acquiring enough power seems a way, or rather nearly a pre-requisite to guarantee a good, decent life to their citizens, free as much as possible from external dangers and menaces.

Behind the causal relationship stated in the above answer, by no means universally accepted, lies a very important concept: fear. Realism had the merit to bring back forward this unpleasant feature of the relationship among nations. Countries fear each other, for several reasons -including failing to fulfil their own desires for more power, in all spheres of international activity -, and want to ever increase their own power, not only in military terms, mostly for this sheer reason.

These tensions unavoidably lead to a ranking of nations, making for the appearance of the most powerful one, the hegemon. Given the size and complexity of the world, the

⁶ French philosopher Michel Foucault extensively studied the relationship between power and knowledge, producing original insights on their generation and distribution within a given society, and how different agents, beyond the hegemon (in our words), can capture instances of power. Though his analyses are more sociological and anthropological, some can be fruitfully applied in the international relations setting. Foucault (2001) is a collection of his works (in English) that shows they are not too far from the concerns in this section.

⁷ This point is a main departure from realism, that broadly asserts that nations outside the Great Powers do not count. As evident by the previous footnote, I do not fully endorse this simplifying view.

hegemon usually – at least at the start – bears a regional character. Being dominant in its own region, it can then roam around in other regions, progressively asserting its power. It is thus evident that a given regional hegemon does not like at all the existence of another hegemon in an outside region, which could then do the same inside his own realm, besides constraining his roaming capabilities. Conflict becomes then a strong possibility (for some, unavoidable).

Historical examples of this pattern are abundant, the Ottoman Empire and its continual struggle with the Europeans, who sat at one of the very borders of its “personal” region is a non-trivial illustration of this tension, lived through a complex combination of alliances, open wars, localised conflicts and interesting, ever-changing trade patterns.

The much debated and still not entirely clear impressive expeditions by Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433(?)), during the Early Ming dynasty, in XV Century China, may also be viewed as a probing by the then regional hegemon, to check the possible extension of its influence and the freedom of roaming it enjoyed. This irrespective of other purposes like showing off the power of the Empire of the Middle and collecting vows of vassalage.

The present hegemon, the US, starting in the last third of the nineteenth century, progressively built up its absolute predominance in the Western Hemisphere -its “home region”. Expansions elsewhere existed, but its planetary roaming capabilities were established after World War II, though blocked by Russia’s home region, the Soviet Bloc, during the Cold War. After 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, it experienced a golden period, with full roaming capabilities.

The already mentioned (re-)emergence of China became then a nuisance, compounded by other new events, in which additional sources of power, like, in nuclear terms, Russia, re-asserted their interests. The present rhetoric on the North Korean nuclear programme is another sign of the malaise the hegemon has been experiencing with these barriers to his unchallenged actions.

Moreover, the hegemon itself, from many perspectives, is undergoing a slow trend of decline which might lead to its eventual demise. At the same time, the very GG order it

carefully built is either falling into pieces or being eroded by a new reality to which it remains, in many aspects, completely alien.

These last statements, and the broad setting here outlined must be complemented by two key dimensions.

3. Two important concerns.

Capitalism

The capitalist mode of production dominates nowadays the largest majority of the world. Despite this “universal adoption” presents several nuances, distortions and imperfect implementations, and that different stages of capitalist development can be identified in a myriad of economies, one can roughly say that it is found everywhere. The global spread of fragmented production techniques and sophisticated value chains, together with diversified trade flows in goods and services has constrained nearly every economy in the planet to adhere, even if partially or indirectly, to this gigantic mesh of productive activities.

This is also despite original efforts by intellectuals and social thinkers on the real nature of a *market economy* and possible ways of making its functioning more human, or on alternative market structures. Among quite a few very enlightening endeavours, I mention Karl Polanyi’s efforts to show that an autonomous market is an artificial construct, with undesirable and dangerous consequences, and that different kinds of transactions can take place in a given market⁸. Endeavours of this kind received a new boost at the end of the past century, with several varieties of no- or zero-growth theories or more ecological and comprehensive production techniques, highly motivated by environmental and climate change concerns.

⁸ Polanyi’s ideas unavoidably bear the imprint of the convulsed times of his itself convulsed existence in Budapest, Vienna, London, the US and Canada, during (mostly) the first half of the past century. However, his thoughts - besides having opened the area of economic anthropology - still deserve attention. Polanyi (1944) and Polanyi et al. (1957) are his major works, the former being an undisputed classic.

The liberal capitalist mode, led by the hegemon and half a dozen of the so-called developed economies, thrives however on, turning all these contributions into interesting asides or irrelevant curiosities. With its amazing capacity to absorb, transform and re-sell, under another guise, many of its criticisms, it has found no match up to now. The elusive sustainable development concept, for instance, is oftentimes a clever way to introduce many of the latest green criticisms on growth into its productive logic.

Reasons for this overwhelming success, though varied, remain somewhat mysterious. Perhaps the complex human activity of consumption, materially fulfilled in its utmost mode by global capitalism, plays a larger role in the explanation. Indeed, ‘shopping’, a crucial and conspicuous feature of the nowadays system, can only be fully grasped through different perspectives, besides being a phenomenon that can be traced back (at least) to the early origins of modern capitalism⁹.

Nevertheless, structural problems plague the system.

Firstly, capitalism undergoes cycles, and during recession times trouble and strife may radiate to several societies and nations producing crises that may end up in disaster.

Secondly, this is nowadays compounded by the predominant role played by the financial sector in the world economy and a worrying situation of “fiscal uneasiness”¹⁰ experienced by quite a few developed economies, the hegemon first and foremost. The 2008-2009 financial crisis still bears important sequels, the G20, though having done something, is reaching the limit of its ability to curb excesses in the sector and the still strongest currency nowadays is supported by the strength of its country’s Army, not the monetary and fiscal status of its economy. Actually, international finance became nowadays a major instrument of power, running side by side with military clout as an essential tool for domination and control.

Thirdly, capitalism development generates inequality. This can be assessed both in sophisticated, long run perspectives, as in medium to short term examinations of the increase

⁹ For an enlightened and rather comprehensive view on this phenomenon see Trentmann (2016).

¹⁰ I borrow this subtle expression from Professor Paul Kennedy, from whom I heard it for the first time.

in concentration in the income distribution of either developed or developing economies¹¹. This fact - which had already been brilliantly induced by Aristotle¹² – is a source of internal social tensions magnified by comparative perceptions among nations in the globalised world¹³. It also bears two nasty derivations.

The first relates to those who are in the bottom of the income distribution, many times in a state of absolute poverty. This is a serious systemic failure with consequences not well grasped yet by the well-offs. The second is that, those outside absolute poverty but still in the lower bottom make fertile ground for all kinds of illegal activities and social unrest, nowadays usually with an international dimension. The most frightening example of the former are the international criminal circuits, based on the drugs business but also involving arms and people trafficking, and largely anchored in the poor communities or shanty towns in many South American and Southeast Asia countries, Mexico and the US as well.

Combination of all these factors produces the irresistible feeling that capitalism is moving towards its end, Wallenstein et al. (2013). Nobody knows however when and, more interestingly, what may come after it. It is, nevertheless, being destroyed from inside, its own bowels, thanks, ironically, to its encompassing success.

Science

A creation of the Enlightenment, in its modern form, Science and later Technology, its idiosyncratic daughter, have been a potent societal driver and a key dimension of power in the international context. Both have changed life in all its aspects and, consequently, manifold international interactions. It is, of course, not the purpose here to outline either their evolution - with all the “industrial revolutions” included – or their major accomplishments.

What matters to our scenario is that, beginning around the last two decades of the XX Century, there was a subtle turning point in scientific (and technical) development. This

¹¹ Piketty (2013) being the latest comprehensive support for the long run argument, but see also, for other time frames and perspectives, Facundo et al. (2013), for instance.

¹² Maybe the pioneer insight on the inequality generated by a market system; see, among other excellent translations, Aristotle (1984).

¹³ On this, particularly the now famous ‘elephant graph’ on the relative wealth improvements thanks to globalisation, according to different income classes of the world population, see Lakner and Milanovic (2013).

relates to a notable shift of emphasis and research efforts to the information sciences¹⁴. Advances, intertwined with telecommunications technology, miniaturisation techniques and extremely sophisticated software and artificial intelligence algorithms, have caused a thorough overhaul in most industrial and product realms, besides creating new and encompassing forms of social interaction.

This has had three major consequences:

i) citizens, victims of an overwhelming flow of information, became experimental subjects, oftentimes passive, of all kinds of innovations, systems or “apps”. The overflow of information, largely unchecked – and nowadays even generated by robots -, combined with encompassing data analytic techniques, operating in real time, fastly disrupts established social and economic patterns;

ii) people, and institutions in general, acquired a multiplicity of identities which ensued two opposing movements. From one hand, individuals are tempted to (experience Foucault-like power, and) take advantage of such multiplicity that, in principle (and many times in an illusory way), gives them the ability to act in different contexts under different guises; hackers are an extreme example of this. On the other hand, control mechanisms – aided by the same techniques – have enormously increased, trying to grab the same, unique person no matter how or where she acts in the web galaxy. From privacy to security issues, this tension opens up a plethora of trans-border problems whose solution is not clear yet. Cyberterrorism is a frightening development enmeshed in this situation;

iii) this highly technical and knowledge demanding development has been the source of a new inequality among nations. Those which are able to push forward with new software, algorithms and innovative applications – the Masters of Algorithms or Robot Designers and Owners – from those doomed to dependency on these very systems, obliged to purchase and use them, with an unavoidable time lapse. Valladão (2014), from whom I borrow one of the preceding qualifications, and Collins (in Wallerstein et al. (2013)) are among those who expand this idea further: the purchasers of algorithms and robots becoming producers of traditional goods, with ever decreasing value-added, while the Masters of Algorithms extract

¹⁴ The shift does not mean that developments everywhere else ceased; biological sciences, together with biochemistry and biotechnology, flourished accordingly.

world rents from their unrivalled technical prowess. Apple and Google are perhaps the most striking examples that come to one's mind.

Faithful to the capitalist logic, while giants like the information and social media companies present themselves as producers of public goods, freely available to all citizens of the global community, they actually are extremely profitable mechanisms of social control, generously paid, among others, by most international (and domestic) providers of goods and services.

They are also responsible for creating and providing powerful escapes from reality; the electronic-era amusements industry, essential to keep masses of people appeased and unquestioning. The shift to information science and technology has ultimately reinforced capitalism's widespread expansion, as well as its silent, pervasive domination.

Not only: this enormous development has significantly aided a deep change in the socio-economic fabric of communities and societies. Traditional channels for collective action in domestic democratic constituencies are progressively evolving into an impersonal, virtual democratic world community, as much as possible insulated from the economic process, eventually controlled by the very same Masters of Algorithms (see, among many, all with different nuances, Crouch (2004) and Willke (2014)).

4. A Transitional Moment.

The combination of the ideas in the previous two sections applied to the present-day reality adds support to the point that we are experiencing a transitional moment.

The major reason is perhaps the multiplicity of problems faced by the hegemon. A lazy, uncontrolled spender, surfing on a looming fiscal crisis, it has been struggling to cope with the new realities and the annoying rise of a very likely regional hegemon in Asia.

It remains the unchallenged Robot Designer and Master of the Algorithms, as well as the commander of the most powerful army in the world.

Notwithstanding, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has engaged itself in seven wars, most rather costly, with no or debatable results. In addition, cracks in the military complex, though rarely aired, seem to be progressing. Equipment fatigue, insufficient replacement and maintenance policies, poor logistics in significant areas and activities seem to be creeping inside this external display of might¹⁵. Funding of all this, and of the whole complex, is becoming each year a ticklish choice of the least quality downgrading option.

The recent accidents and co-ordination failures with the Pacific fleet are an indirect sign of the state of their equipment and related technical level of its personnel. The Afghanistan and Iraq adventures, for more that they have taught, are not very encouraging examples of a high fighting capacity. Looking at the annual military budget can be fairly misleading as an indicator of strength, as no reliable information is available either on the status of the existing apparatus or on the detailed allocations of the global sum.

Very likely, even discounting for the above shortcomings, the US Army will continue to be the most powerful in the world, but what matters here are trends and evidences of future weaknesses, not a frozen point in time.

This proto state of flux, at the mercy of the two key concerns discussed in the previous section, encourages the emergence of contestants and contenders alike.

The most worrying evolution in this line is the return of the nuclear option. I consider the North Korean case as emblematic, *signalling the beginning of a movement that will spread further.*

It is well known that Japan is able to, in a few months, produce a nuclear artefact. North Korea acts both as an excuse and an incentive for this. The diffident role of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, largely due to the ambiguous behaviour of the hegemon, has led many signatories not to embrace its Ratification. Double standards applied to countries like Israel,

¹⁵ I am aware that this, together with another one or two statements in this paper, needs a written reference, or the mention of an identifiable, reliable source. However, by its very nature, it is the kind of information that is neither voiced nor published, coming from indirect sources and people who do not want to be associated to it. I apologise, but I found them sufficiently important to mention, in order to compose my scenario. I'm still trying to find references I can disclose.

which probably already own their arsenal of nukes, and Iran in the other extreme, will eventually lead to a cascading proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, where Pakistan and further afield India are already armed.

Signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty may then accordingly change their minds; a possibility until recently remote but nowadays less so for a few South American countries and, in Europe, Germany.

The resulting picture is not necessarily that total nuclear war will mark the end of the planet, but rather that negotiations and roaming excursions by actual or potential hegemon, desirable of asserting their power, will become much more dangerous and delicate, a match carelessly lighted being able to trigger a colossal explosion.

Hegemons will be more constrained, alliances will shift more rapidly and become less predictable; Foucault-like micro powers will be sources of both great concern and danger. Great Power politics, so dear to realism, Mearsheimer (2001), which had been absent during the illusory unipolar “golden era” of 1989-2008, and resurfaced in the past ten years. will acquire a different character, *as many other actors, beforehand irrelevant, will have to be included in the strategic calculations of the powerful ones.*

Undoubtedly, such an increase in tensions may periodically reach unbearable levels that will forcibly be dissipated in local conflicts. The naïve 2 x 2 arithmetic of the Chinese-US bipolarity with flashpoints in Taiwan and in the forever disputed South China Sea rocky formations will explode to multiple flashpoints involving several different actors, the US lying outside in quite a few instances.

Though this may sound like a doomsday scenario it actually is not.

Moving from a world with nine nuclear states¹⁶ to one with around twelve to fifteen ones means moving to an immensely complicated world, but not necessarily a catastrophic one. The key point is that incentives for encompassing dialogues and co-ordination attempts will decrease.

¹⁶ I am including Israel and North Korea in the nine.

I deliberately stop here, as this global outline is enough for my purposes in this paper. I thus refrain from speculating about the fate of particular countries and their relative ranking in an absolute power scale, as well as the fate of selected regions.

Within this scenario, how does the future of GG look like?

5. The Future of (non-)Global Governance.

Any governance structure is the outcome of different purposes, objectives, desires, and pursuits of several actors who, in principle, know what they want. Not that all those nations actively involved in the debate have a clear idea, uncontested in their respective domestic arenas, of their goals; a state of confusion, and even sheer disagreement may easily take place.

After full seventy years of construing and living within this GG framework - which naturally evolved along this period - there is a generalised consensus that the system is outdated and in need of change. It did perform a major role in the globalisation of capitalism, but it is exactly at this present juncture point that the problems and confusion arise.

Different voices pledge for their own, most favourable solutions, while the boldest controllers of the existing network, the hegemon foremost, struggle to keep likely changes under control. Fatigue and noise, however, are reaching ever-increasing levels, while lack of leadership is blatant.

This somewhat chaotic situation gives way to different aggregations of the elements who fight for a new order, fear accordingly increasing among them.

Assuming, in the scenario of the previous section, that no major nuclear disaster will take place, how will the above debate take place?

I venture that scarce progress will be seen.

The most prominent institutions, like the WTO, the IMF, the climate pair or the European Union itself will become the theatre of either fierce or confusing dispute, or will partially sink to a discreet irrelevance, outside the main policy radars.

Those related to specific, technical issues, like air traffic control and regulation, space orbits allocation or control of the electromagnetic spectrum will in principle survive, though running the risk of splitting into two or three regional entities, with a few core different regulations while trying to keep a minimal global harmonisation. This may turn into an additional factor of tension, as these kinds of universal commons naturally require a unified approach.

Of course, good-willed efforts to find near-optimal solutions will always take place, coming from different groups of countries, but the absence of a clear leadership and the prevailing distribution of power, uncorrelated with other parameters that may count for the regulation at stake, may render negotiations harder if not extremely difficult.

The final outcome can vary from moderate world disorder, with sizeable regions of relative harmony and co-operation, to anarchy, what will further contribute to more disastrous events.

In synthesis, prospects for the improvement or positive transformations of the present decaying GG are very reduced, the foreseeable scenario being of further deterioration of governance bodies, with a great probability of the appearance of “islands” of better governance environments. Attempts at global solutions, given the fragmentation of power structures, may be easily blocked by a small group; the absence of a transforming collective will becoming utterly evident. The most optimistic outcomes may be -though not with widespread adoption- bottom up attempts like those proposed in, for instance, Flôres (2016) and Keohane and Victor (2015), for the climate riddle.

Interesting questions that may be raised comprise whether new, more flexible associations can gain more voice in this context.

The BRICS, independently of the many criticisms directed against them, may be a significant example of such a possibility. They make for a kind of union - sometimes very loose, other times rather focussed - that may provide a clue on how to aggregate countries

preferences without aiming at total, universal agreement. Moreover, three of their members sit in the nuclear club. Should we wait for a BRICS governance structure, with regional spill-overs?

The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation may stand as another potential regional governance format, as well as the discreet, much older, and not unfrequently lambasted ASEAN. Its much-criticised absence of powerful institutions and clout, in general, may be one of the secrets of its survival in a more hostile environment.

Two other points are important.

The first finds remedy in the disease. International business – faithful to its nature – will continue to thrive on, probably with a few more restrictions, but it is hard to think of a major reduction of its nowadays volume. Uncertainty will do bring a reduction, but far from extinction.

This may provide a cushion to more unpleasant developments and, more importantly, keep a minimum of compatibility, not homogeneity, in the system. Indeed, I do not claim that business, or rather trade, as oftentimes stated, avoids war¹⁷, but important communication channels may be preserved.

One may thus infer that a world recession will also be inevitable. The shrinkage in the “global economy” may however be compensated by the decrease in excessive rents and a less concentrated distribution of world income, thanks to more centres of power. In the new, dangerous environment, some economies, free from GG constraints, may find newer ways of development and collective association.

The second has to do with transnational social movements. Even if the cyberspace becomes compartmentalised, many global commons problems will continue to have a second life through social media and communications apps -though restricted to select areas-, that may again assure a minimum of compatibility and joint endeavours.

¹⁷ A more detailed argument can be found in Flôres (2013).

5. Coda.

In the hot period of nuclear rivalry between the US and Russia, during the Cold War, when strategies of restraint were vividly debated and tested, Thomas Schelling – while creatively combining irrational behaviour within games with rational goals – was one of the main voices that emphasised the importance of keeping the dialogue, even if minimal, alive¹⁸.

I shall thus not innovate when suggesting as a partial antidote to the gloomiest outcomes that the future here outlined may ensue, a generalised, even excessive practice of dialogue among all the actors. Even if, as mentioned before, it will become a much more arduous exercise.

In this perspective, the United Nations, one of the oldest institutions of the present order, comes round to the fore. If, instead of UN bashing, a serious effort is made to preserve its key institutions and its multilateral debate forum, not everything would have been lost. Undoubtedly, the Security Council will sooner or later suffer substantial changes.

Other factors may have a long run impact. Migration causes, in the medium to long run, significant changes, and a more dangerous world does not equate into a world with less migration. What this can bring forward is an unknown in the present model.

Finally, section 4 spoke of a transitional moment. Moments have a beginning and an end.

I ventured that the transition will undergo a more chaotic, dangerous and with poorer-governance period, when the key feature will be a proliferation of states either claiming for more voice or defying hegemonic intentions, all armed with nukes. This will lead to a state of flux in GG, beyond *dominating and conditioning* other transformations and processes, most importantly that of capitalism itself -or its forecasted end.

¹⁸ It is informally attributed to him the suggestion of creating the red hot line between Washington D.C. and Moscow.

If this does not lead to the end of the world, new forms of governance will eventually emerge from the hard times ahead. The transition will then end.

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