A Triad of Principles for Today's Global State
An Attempt at Reasoning

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The world at the end of summer 2016 seems to be out of balance and in great trouble. Indeed, the trouble is so big that comparisons to two ancestor summers—1914 and 1939 (the "summers before the dark" of the great / and-or world wars, with the first one seemingly totally impossible)—seem not only unavoidable but, alas, instructive. As *T. S. Eliot* famously observed: "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." Eliot was right, of course. Yet, deep down, we all understand that we fail to bear reality at our peril. Unreality's oldest child is disaster, while the first casualty of any crisis or war is "truth."

Violent and politically unexpected, "unthinkables" or "absurdities" take place wherever imaginable, and it seems thus that the international atmosphere has changed: from a 50 person murder hate crime in Orlando, Florida, to northern France, where two young terrorists murdered an 84-year-old priest saying mass in a romantic village, a wild-cat killing paralyzing Munich in July, and a mass killing by a six-wheeler truck running into hundreds of tourists in a vacation place at the Cote' d'Azur on 14 July, the French National Holiday; from an attempted military coup in Turkey one day later to the ump-tenth attempt for cease fire with the offer for humanitarian aid and peace in Syria, where after 450,000 dead, millions of residents (the equivalent of the population of the Benelux countries) are either fleeing and/or deprived of water, food, and facing cluster bombs and napalm dropped on crowded hospitals, as well as starvation and dehydration used as a weapon, culminating in the outmost of cynicism and violence, and indeed war crimes including the bombing of the one major humanitarian relief convoy to Aleppo. All of this occurs as China is constructing and fortifying legally disputed islands in the South China Sea, and North Korea has detonated at least a 10kt nuclear device, in a world where citizens of Brussels and Paris face repeated terror attacks and Germany and Hungary see political violence fueled by anti-immigrant politics; at a time, when American e-infrastructure and emails seem to fall victim to foreign cyber interference, where the UK's exit, "Brexit," from the European Union was apparently supported by Russian Interests and where the attempt to interference in American election to the benefit of a certain candidate can be expected—in such a world we are. The problem is thus, that so much happens in so short a time and in so many places seemingly simultaneously – and we learn about it all instantaneously, whether we look for it or not... so for many this has simply become to be crises-overload.

This is also a year in which one of the strangest and most fateful presidential elections in recent U.S. history—with first female candidate at the top of a major party ticket—plays out in social media, in print, on the world wide web, and on TV through at times a war of reckless words,

shameless lies, and occasional truths that are further manipulated for commercial interests by powerful news outlets.

The need to separate the real from the unreal, the polemic from facts has never been greater. This is work we may not want to do. But when disinformation and deception have become integral parts of daily political discourse, it is work we must do.

After 40 years of following national and international news professionally—for research, teaching, as well as by working privately in diplomacy and negotiations with governments and organizations—I have formulated three broad principles about the nature of the contemporary international situation, a triad, at the beginning of the 21st century. This is framed by a conception of a "global actors system" which includes states and non-state actors, individual actors and corporations, rather than strictly by about an "international system" with mainly "states" and "nations" as the only key actors.

 This "triad" of issues is:

1. The old order does not seem to work any longer, but a *new order* is not yet established.

2. We live in a world where *nothing* is impossible.

3. We have to accept "*thinking the unthinkable*"—from outlandish political behavior to potential catastrophic terrorism / both immediately and extensively publicized.

This all however is not to make one even more depressed, but to suggest to "not to loose your head," don't turn away, rather "remain calm and collected" even in the face of a terrible worst disaster, do "carry on." Let us plan, develop, and implement anticipatory strategies, feasible and sustainable and—ideally—effective in stabilization, and dealing with the bad. After all it isn't all that bad, and one can and should learn from past experiences. Being rational is certainly more helpful than panicking emotionally.

Why doesn't the "old order" work anymore? Because, in the sphere of contemporary global relations, both the game and the players have changed radically. Two and a half generations after the great World Wars memories, for most of the US and EU public, especially the younger ones, of a hot war, death, and destruction has faded. Historic memory also can be manipulated. Unbelievable technological and scientific progress in the last decades, economic-technological challenges like the fourth industrial revolution, the apparent end of the traditional social-contract and concomitant uncertainty even also affects the religious cultural and spiritual aspects of many societies. On the other hand, today's world game has become far more complex than it once was, due to technological progress transaction time has dramatically decreased, while the numbers of persons and actors involved and/or concerned with, has exponentially increased. Together this all results in a transformational crisis nationally, continentally, and globally.

Traditionally, the system between global actors was the normative legal, economic, and communication context in which players, largely in the form of sovereign nation states, interacted. In the last decades, however, new kinds of players have appeared and new technologies changed the

scope. According to Robert Gilpin and IR Theory a system is considered stable, as long as the opportunity costs of change exceed the benefits. A system however becomes increasingly unstable if its actors (states or non-states alike) consider the benefits of change higher than the costs. Today this seems to be the case. The old international system, more or less bipolar, has given way to a multi polar system. The traditional system of the last 40 years both as a model for understanding political behavior and as a forum for conducting political business around the world seems hence to have come to its end. At least in the perception of many—and perceptions forms reality.

For example, today there are powerful and dangerous non-state actors like Da'esh or ISIS and other terrorist organizations, but also powerful positive actors such as Greenpeace or Amnesty international, to name just a few. While non-state and powerful "personal/individual" actors like super-rich individuals or corporations are not entirely new (in earlier eras, for example, churches, and church leaders, and princes played critical roles in international relations), today's actors seem more eminently powerful. This is largely thanks to new technologies and cyber offering instantaneous global communication and enabling to work with "internet packageable" goods and services – thus potentially reaching and influencing many at once, and globally. There are hence new abilities of power projection, commerce, alternative (and local) energy production, and increasingly full automatization—robotics … as the costs of digital transformation and many forms of digital activism and change are for most users zero, or near zero, the decision to act to upend the existing order is seen easy and painless as an impulse.

Obviously, established powers and the state fights back. *Status quo* actors resist change, but in a multi polar multi actor world new alliances are formed and old ones may falter, particularly if the one old, benign hegemon - the United States, becomes, at least in general perception weaker ... thus contributing to the realm for instability, conflict and change.

At the same time, the old order is being further challenged by determined autocratic leadership. Putin in Russia, Erdogan in Turkey, Sissi in Egypt, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines are obvious examples, as was Chavez in Venezuela, but even in Poland and in Hungary, new conservative leadership challenges democratic values and freedom by fostering nationalism and conservatism. The pendulum seems to swing back, from freedom over all to more control. Also, in times of frightening insecurity, fatigue of crises, perceived instability and change – plus an understood end of the social contract for many families—people tend to look for new avenues and to strong leaders or at least to those, who promise much in demagoguery and show. Facts alone don't count any longer – as seemingly as perception matters!

There are additional reasons the old order no longer works: rapidly changing beliefs, the end of the great world wars is more than two generations behind. Today humanity faces a most blatant disregard of the most basic human rights (think the war in Syria), mistrust in government and some democracy fatigue, radicalization, intensification, and distortion of certain religious beliefs, along with the resurgence of nationalism and geopolitics in an intensely interconnected global community. This means that some of the basic normative assumptions about the old order have passed their expiration dates.

Expanding and accelerating the growth in systemic complexity and thus challenging national and international security are such largely natural agents of change as pandemics and their fear (like AIDS and Zika) and environmental disasters (like fire and floods). At the same time, state and non-state actors have witnessed and struggled to accommodate such largely manmade agents of change as the proliferation of "new and improved" autonomous smart weapons/ drones, robots, and the menace of cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism while proliferation of weapons of mass destruction WMDs continues. It is not the question whether, but when there will be a use of WMD.

As for living in a world "where nothing is impossible," which refers to the moral as well as physical, criminal, and strategic reality and the concomitant never ending stream of real time information. A few recent headlines from the *New York Times* should suffice to rehabilitate people addicted to smoking sunshine, whether of the homegrown or media-hyped variety:

> "Scores Die in Nice, France, as Truck Plows into Bastille Day Crowd"
> "How the Arab World Came Apart"
> "The Putin-Trump Admiration Society."
> "Syrian Regime uses chemical weapons"

My first two "laws" beget the third: "We have to *think the unthinkable*." Consider "very worst case analysis**.**" In a global environment of relentlessly communicated emotions, opinions, behaviors, and beliefs, we have to prepare for *all* kinds of eventualities. "Crisis X" (state-supported terrorists get and use an atomic or other WMD) might not happen. Yet it *might*. Election Y in country A might be actively manipulated from within and from abroad. Really, and if it does?

Specific crises may be virtually impossible to predict—for example, when and where will a tsunami or a suicide bomber, or copycat criminal strike next? But other threats show evidence of deep connection. For example, when the United States and allies and P5 of UN SC stated there must be no use of chemical weapons in Syria and then did not act as the Assad regime gassed 1,000s of citizens in August 2013, the failure to act had predictable consequences. One consequence was a loss of American credibility and influence. Another consequence was continuing serious bloodshed and destruction, and continuing use of chemical WMDs.

Going forward, we will, of course, face many complex and dangerous challenges around the world. Some of these will be of specific state origin, whether obviously (like "annexing" territory) or not quite so obviously (like hacking other nation's databases). By being inventive and building and fortifying Islands/territories, or using violence against sovereign state, annexing territories, determined leaders have demonstrated their readiness to act with brutality in their own and the national interest in 2016; irrespective of wide scale civilian suffering and flagrant violation of the international legal order. And other actors with at least tacit support of "powers" have shown themselves willing to use old-fashioned starvation as a political weapon. After all, humanitarian crises often have palpably human (or inhuman) political causes.

What are we to do? Well, answering that question will take more than a couple of hundred additional words from me or any other single source. (By the way, there cannot be an "I alone" in legitimate politics) But here are seven recommendations:

1. We must remember that everything the U.S. and its leaders – current or future – do and say domestically will be minutely dissected and represented (or misrepresented) internationally. America is taking an endless "selfie." That selfie is being transmitted, critiqued, and interpreted all over the world.

2. America must not succumb to the illusion that we can seal our borders and thereby avoid painful interactions with the rest of the world. If we buy into isolationism, we will be forced to watch as our ability to influence international trends and events declines precipitously. Other actors—including some many will come to resent and regret—will take the place. And "America first" will come to mean "America *formerly* first." International power abhors a vacuum.

3. We must recognize that letting time pass and thereby avoiding direct involvement in critical conflicts *sometimes* pays off, but more often it allows problems to fester, intensify, and spread. When that happens, repair becomes much more expensive—or impossible. Non-action is as bad as over-reaction.

4. Nevertheless, one has to remain reasonable and operate with common sense, while examining global actors in a reasonable way with proven methods, beware of history and geography, prioritize and evaluate the situation with an open mind, consideration of one's resources, and plan for the future according to the relevant challenges of the situation, and beware of worst case. What will that mean for our children?

5. Importantly, though, as the amount of news and information (and mis-information) increases, one must evaluate "content" not according to its commercial or entertainment value but according to its social and political and serious impact. Beware of overwhelming information, misinformation, falsification, and "post-truth" media. Never before have media and journalists had more reach, relevance, and responsibility. Let us not judge by commercial criteria but by real impact both within one's territory and beyond. Let us find ways to calm, soften, and – if necessary – counteract uncontrolled blogs, bring media/journalists back to their responsibility; and accept the fact that being engaged and thinking about world may not always be pleasant, but is *always* essential.

6. We must act on the knowledge that the best hope for a more equitable, stable, and secure world lies with the next generation everywhere. So we must be much more serious about educating them in such critical areas as philosophy, cultures, history, geography, politics, economics, science, ethics, and the law. Remember the past, let's learn from its mistake let us not permit conflict to perturb our minds – rather implement the beauty of life.

7. "True wisdom," Confucius said, "is knowing what you don't know." And thus addressing it – perhaps more effectively with "doing by doing." Let's not be surprised or paralyzed in shock if or when something ("unthinkable") does happen—rather let us prepare for such instances as good as possible, develop and implement anticipatory strategies - at least to calm our minds and soul / the more rational, the easier and more efficient we can deal with disaster, and with its aftermath and develop instruments and policies to stabilize the system. Appropriate preparation beats all … and calms the nerves.