***Who 'is' We?***

**Thinking about identity, technology, security and development over 30 years**

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Thinking ahead 30 years as to what might drive events and shape our choices and lives is an inherently fraught process.

Yet it is possible to discern trends, whether these be technological, economic, social or political, by looking backwards thirty years to 1982.

For 1982 looks in part remarkably familiar. Yes, computers and mobile phones have got smaller and more powerful, but that was then on the cards. After all, Moore's Law, around since 1965, held that computers would double their power every two years. Even though their precision has improved, many military technologies, too, resemble at least outwardly those used in the Falklands campaign.

Some political changes have been predictable – the development of a closer European Union for example – others more dramatic. In the midst of the social turmoil as Thatcher took on the trade unions in Britain, as Ronald Reagan set about rearming and re-establishing American power in the face of a seemingly impervious Soviet Union, few would have predicted the collapse of the latter within a decade. But other things also look familiar. In February 1982, for example, the regime of the then Syrian president Hafez al-Assad crushed a rebellion in Hama with shellfire and tanks, temporarily ending a rebellion by Sunnis against Assad's ruling Alawite sect with civilian casualties estimated between 5,000 and 40,000.

Looking back to 1982 then provides perspective for the next 30 years. It shows how, sometimes, despite our worst fears, the more things change, the more they remain the same.

It is not impossible to imagine a situation where the enduring economic power of America sits comfortably alongside a dynamic China as the engines of global growth; or, by contrast, where tension between an 'Asia-phere' and West rises to a point where broad political understanding and economic co-operation gives way to rivalry and competition. Nor is it impossible to think of a world where the extension of even basic, contemporary agriculture techniques and energy technologies can change lifestyles positively over generations; just as it is possible to envision a world increasingly divided between 'have' and 'have-nots', the employed and unemployed, where the stressed middle-classes respond by demanding radical political and social change, where the Arab Spring becomes the Global Spring.

Identifying and understanding the drivers shaping these future examples is the critical part of any scenario-building process.

As we consider the next thirty years, six issues stand out – Demographics, Natural Resources, Climate, Technology, Governance, and Identity. None of these issues is especially new, but the way in which they impact on the state and its relationship with people could be.

The absolute number of people relative to the availability of resources, their age cohort, where they live and what they might do if their expectations are not met, are all important inter-related drivers. Africa is at the epicentre of this particular challenge. By 2050, at current rates, Africa's estimated population then of two billion will have overtaken both India (projected to be1.6 billion) and China (1.4 billion). As a result of this growth, not only will one person in five in the world then be African, but one in four workers. Already sub-Saharan Africa's median age is just under 19 years, compared to the 29.2 years in Asia, 36.8 years in the United States, and 40.1 years in Europe.[1] Areas of relative depopulation may be equally important in determining political and other events. For example, Russia today has fewer citizens (35 million) east of the Urals than China has in each of its provinces bordering on its western neighbour.

Also whether natural resources can be discovered and exploited at a pace and price that meets these aspirations is also important, as is the discovery and application of substitute technologies. Indeed, the tendency to see change and challenges as a threat should be guarded against. Just as Malthusian predictions have the world unable to cope with burgeoning populations and declining resources, it is not impossible to imagine a future where demographic changes offer a potential growth dividend in the right enabling conditions, and where the world enjoys relatively cheaper energy and food costs on account of new discoveries and improved efficiencies.

The regulation of the 'global commons' – from Antarctica through the high-seas to cyberspace – similarly offers an opportunity for co-operation and mutual benefit as easily as it could be a spark for conflagration. Finding the means and method of managing a wide range of areas from the environment to mining and transportation is not going to be easy, not least since potentially great if narrow national interests are at stake.

We also know today also that climate change will produce winners and losers, though where and how depends in part at least on whether its causes are fully understood and thus can be mitigated. Some of these impacts can be imagined. Will, for example, water become not only contested, but a traded commodity with a global market price, and who might own and 'sell' it?

In terms of technology, the last 100 years has seen a broad shift from steam to oil and then to ICT. Will the next stage be solar- or knowledge-based, and what will the implication of this be?

Here the impacts can be divided into a number of sectors, notably: energy (including the prospect of carbon capture and the emergence of alternate fuels), the impact on the human condition (with longevity becoming the norm, many diseases being eradicated or managed, and the technology/human interface becoming blurred from prosthetics to implants), and its overall pervasiveness.

How technology will change employment prospects, the relative exclusion of the poor from this world, and the extent to which individuals are willing to continue to accept the intrusion of communication in their lives, will all shape its impact. It could also shape loyalties, given that the provision of assistance from medical to security in this world may be beyond societies and governments but rather hinge on corporations.

However technology might empower states, such as through transaction-based taxation, though it has, over the past thirty years, served to dramatically increase the power overall of the individual in the

state-system from the widespread use of mobile telephony to social, citizen-led media. Diasporas have in the process become more potent economic forces. The use of distance education through technology, the prevalence of mobile banking (for example Kenya's M-Pesa network alone has brought 14 million new users into the banking sector, moving by 2012 an estimated $7 billion annually, or 20 percent of the country's GDP), and the prospects of e-voting could not only change the relationship between local communities and populations, but transform linkages with global interest groups. Technology might be an expeditor of change of both the politics of identity from the local to the global, and of politics to from questions of identity to issues.

And technology will of course shape the role and utility of military power. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq already indicate that the utility of such power as an agent of change is diminishing given it is apparently easier to defend against than to employ, though it still retains deterrent value. Militaries will be expected to shift between the ridiculously high-tech needs of cyber and space warfare (an increasing feature) to low-tech 'boots on the ground' situations. In one the human-machine interface is critical; in the other, the age-old basics of fitness and grit are critical. In both the harnessing of the social media – winning the battle of identity and sympathy – is likely imperative, as is the need for maintaining strategic interests by building the capacity of allies through training and enabling. The continuous search for cheaper systems and efficiencies through outsourcing and the employment of civilian technologies is set to continue.

This is another area where government-corporate relationships likely require refinement. Already, today, Microsoft has 650 million users and hosts 1.3 billion e-mail accounts, a key asset – and key target – in a cyber-battle.

In assessing the range of impacts of new technologies and emergent trends, perhaps the most interesting question of all is how human interests might be governed 30 years hence.

Rather than an overarching national identity, the advent of globalisation has emphasised the role of multiple and sometimes competing identities, in which country, culture, race, ethnicity, religion, setting (urban or rural), age, and gender all play a part, as before, but this time facilitated across borders by media and personal communication.

The impact of such drivers depends on the adaptability of societies, and how their effects are managed both between and within states. Contemporary experience is not especially heartening in this respect.

While they are powerful agents in conferring legitimacy, global governance institutions are weak. Their dysfunctionality has negatively affected their prestige and influence. Even so, some regimes are paradoxically more critical to the health of an effective global system, including the aforementioned management of the global commons, along with the free movement of capital and trade. While the proliferation of new bodies and blocs – including the BRICs – challenges prevailing norms, and is a response also to the inappropriateness of current multilateral structures (such as the UN Security Council permanent membership), it is uncertain both what new, state-centred institutions and the reform of the old can deliver against the reality of complex problems and stubborn national interests.

The contemporary experience of the European Union suggests that regionalism might have reached its zenith. Thirty years ago Europe was in the midst of a process of integration, aiming at not only trade but political and monetary union. The latter two aspects have consistently run foul of national interests and politico-cultural habits, just as has been the case consistently with the United Nations. There is a nascent Euro-scepticism, which may strengthen the role of great powers which have historically been undermined by regionalism.

Yet if the last three decades teach us anything, it is that, contrary to the notion that globalisation has reduced sovereign powers it may in fact have increased them, especially for smaller countries. They are no longer simply objects of great power influence, but have a fresh range of options and opportunities. At the same time, the ability of the great powers to coerce or force other state to do things has eroded.

The influence of national governments and pervasiveness of national identities will depend of course on how states themselves respond to the changing milieu. Their task will be made more difficult in a world without economic growth, or where growth is much slower than the previous century, since the presence of an 'underclass' or extreme levels of inequality could undermine notions of 'belonging' and responsibility to national societies. It is possible to imagine a perfect political and social storm ripe for revolution: The emergence of global elites apparently above national laws and tax regimes (so-called 'offshore aristocracies'), widespread perceptions of practices of corruption and patronage, an economically disenfranchised and stressed middle-class, the spread of technologies which further reduce employment prospects while improving longevity and living conditions for the privileged 'haves', and diminishing and increasingly expensive natural resources. How these differences manifest and perceptions of inequality and unfairness are managed depends, too, on questions of identity – around which beliefs, values, systems and groups coalesce.

Indeed, determining courses of action in this world in favour of new orders or old depends on where one sits and with whom one identifies – put differently, who 'is' we.

*Dr Mills attended a discussion in the UK recently identifying Global Strategic Trends.*

[1] See J Peter Pham,' Africa Emergent: Five Trends Driving the Continent's Buoyant Economic Prospects', *Diplomatic Courier*, July/August 2012.