

The Time of security

From preventive to pre-emptive security economies

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Increasingly, today, the horizon of security is *time*.

We have left far behind us the Kantian notion of time and space as the two more or less equal foundations of experience. Time has become the central axis of our experience.

In many ways this is nothing new. Time has always played a role in strategic thinking, closely linked with the technologies of war. The Clausewitzian logic of war places time at the center of strategic thinking.

Classically, security technologies are a *present* response to *future* threat realities. They are conceived and developed to prevent known security threats from materializing. They are instruments of the future only to the degree that respond to a known future.

Today, we expression an extraordinary compression of events. It is becoming less and less viable for decision-makers to adopt technological approaches to what *would* happen. They are increasingly forced to respond to what *could* happen.

As Heidegger points out, the essence of technology is not technological. In our time, the essence of security technology lies in a value-driven, politically and socially shaped, experience of an unknown future.

The force of the unknown

As Nassim Taleb has pointed out, the difference between the known and the unknown is *asymmetrical*. The unknown, in addition to being empirically unknown, is, in contrast to the known, accompanied by a certain aesthetic, the moral, cultural *effect* of being unknown.

The unknown has for this reason a force of its own, even beyond what hazard it should imply.

The unknown threat is in this sense is more dangerous than the known threat.

The unknown security threat is always already threatening us, even before it ever becomes actualized. It is already applying its social force, here and now, mobilizing politics, engaging financial, forming policy.

The attack is already happening.

This reflexion also complicates the otherwise self-evident virtues of transparency and democracy, and obliges us to revisit these principles, to clarify and nuance them.

The precautionary principle

The increasingly mainstream response to this situation is the application of the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle expresses the imperative to take action in the absence of, or in advance of scientific knowledge of the kind necessary to adequately make an informed decision. Furthermore, the precautionary principle presumes that such a decision must be taken, and consequentially actions taken, on the grounds that **not** taking action will have greater negative consequences than taking action.

But even precaution, and the precautionary principle is under pressure, running out time, if we set our watches to security-time.

It is not simply a question of speed. Reaction time is not the issue. Even the opposition between before and after the security event is weakened by the present state of things. Indeed the entire classic security cycle (preparedness, prevention, recovery) is less and less meaningful for the present, increasingly lived out in the future: We prepare to prepare, we prepare to prevent, and we prepare to recover).

Security-time

Security happens in the future. Security in the present is impossible. The modern fascination with speed can never erase the political force of what could possibly happen in the more distant future.

We are constantly reminded by our leaders that we live in a Europe of insecurity. In security-time security is available, but not for now, only for the future. A hand of security reaches to us from the future. Security comes to us from the future. It reaches its hand to us in the future perfect: You will have been secure.

Security economics

This structure of security is carried out through the powers and logics of security industrialization. Industry today is *already* caring for the insecurity of tomorrow. But *not* according to a simple logic of progress, planning for the future, investment, preparation, etc.

The security industry is taking action on our behalf against the security threat of the future that not only we don't know that we face, but that the security industry itself does not know that we face.

In Europe as in elsewhere, the security challenges and security solutions are increasingly being produced before citizens are even aware of them. The scale of investment needed to sustain the present level of security coverage puts the industries of security in deep dependency on the insecurity of citizens. Like a late capitalist Marxist model of consumption, where demand for goods is created by ever growing supply of goods, European insecurity is created and sustained by and ever-growing supply of security.

Pre-emptive economics

The emergent approach to security-time is to accelerate technological and scientific development through new forms of interface between industry, science and government. Increasingly in the future security needs will provoke a new kind of *pre-emptive* investment.

We recall the categories of the medieval just war theory. In our time these have already been adopted into a new doctrine of humanitarian pre-emptive status under the name of the *Responsibility to Protect*.

Today we are moving from *preventive* security investment to *pre-emptive* security investment.

Today security investments are made to address identified future security threats. In the future, security investments will be made based on likely security threats, threats that are only real in the speculations of security analysts.

Precautionary investment

In this way the *precautionary principle*, currently understood as a regulatory mechanism, will be integrated into economic sciences in the form of pre-emptive security investment. The reality of security will pass from the precautionary principle of uncertainty (*obligation* to act because of the potential but unknown negative consequences) to the *obligation* to invest because of potential unknown technological security needs.

The last—nightmare—phase of the process, one we would do well to avoid, is where technological momentum actually create and sustain threat.