



laetus in praesens

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Considering All the Strategic Options

Whilst ignoring alternatives and disclaiming cognitive protectionism

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Introduction

This exploration is inspired by the decision in March 2009 -- in anticipation of the [NATO Summit](#) in April 2009 -- that further military resources should be allocated to the Afghanistan/Pakistan arena as the prime source of "terror" on the planet, despite decades of experience by arrogantly, overconfident military experts. [Richard Holbrooke](#), the US president's special representative for that area, asserted on CNN ([Transcript: David Petraeus and Richard Holbrooke on CNN](#), 29 March 2009) that in concluding on this policy "all the options were considered" as a means of eliminating terror as the greatest national security threat for the USA:

And in these discussions... I can assure you, and through you everyone who's watching, that every single option was considered, its pros and cons.

The assertion that "all options have been considered" is made relatively frequently to justify questionably repetitive international actions, or the lack thereof. Bill Clinton, as president of the USA, had asserted that "no stone had been left unturned" in exploring options for resolution of the Middle East crisis (pun not intended). A similar unilateral strategic response may be expected in support of geoengineering -- despite disastrous initiatives justified by similar patterns in the past.

Such strategic decisions typically involve "more of the same". This implies that the situation had been inadequately evaluated on previous occasions -- despite recognition of fundamental "intelligence failures" and "lack of imagination". The pattern must therefore be set against the assessments of:

[Albert Einstein](#): To repeat the same thing over and over again, and yet to expect a different result, this is a form of insanity.

[George Santayana](#): Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,

This pattern is placed in a wider context here in relation to the emerging process of online solicitation of feedback from large numbers of people ("send in your comments", "join the dialogue", "make your views known", etc). These processes are typically misleading in that they seek to engender engagement but are obliged by simple logistics to restrict themselves to extremely selective consideration of what they receive and how they use it -- whatever their claims to the contrary.

Considering "all the options"

When it is stated so categorically, by Holbrooke or Clinton, that "all the options" have been considered, it is typically far from clear:

- what other options were considered
- where they are identified
- what were considered to be the "pros and cons"
- by whom "pros" or "cons" were identified with respect to particular options
- how such options were collected for consideration
- how "option" was defined for the purpose of this process

The obvious response to such questions is that these all touch on matters of "national security" and are therefore the subject of the highest confidentiality. In this light:

- the population at large is expected to have every confidence that the highest level of expertise has been brought to bear on these considerations
- no account is to be taken of the official recognition of the disastrously faulty "intelligence failure" and "lack of imagination" associated with the use of this expertise in relation to the "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq
- no account is to be taken of the complicity of official thinking and (in)action in processing intelligence in relation to the instabilities of the financial system -- despite the disaster to which these led
- the possibility of groupthink on the part of those involved in the process of considering "all the options" is not to be considered
- the possibility of deliberate duplicity on the part of the highest authorities is to be considered ridiculous, despite the prime example of this in the case made for the invasion of Iraq through solemn assertions made by [Colin Powell](#) to the UN Security Council in 2003 -- which might be held to be analogous to those made by Richard Holbrooke in the presence of David Petraeus

It is especially intriguing, following failure of a current strategic variant, when the exercise is repeated -- again asserting that "all the options have been considered". What was not considered on the previous occasion with equivalent expertise (?) that enables such an assertion then to be made so confidently? How many times can the situation in Afghanistan be reassessed -- thereby questioning the process of previous assessments -- without recognizing that there is some assumption in the pattern of assessment which is fundamentally flawed?

What is wrong with the associated learning process? A remarkable commentary on this is provided by Kerbel ****

"Listening to everyone" and considering "all the feedback"

Somewhat analogous to "considering all the options" in governance is the process whereby major media-based institutions claim to "listen" attentively to public opinion and to solicit feedback and comment. This is most evident in the case of proactive broadcasting services (BBC, CNN) and newspapers (*The Guardian*, etc) but is also evident on other scales in relation to the websites of interest groups or proactive search engines (Google, etc). The claim is then variously made that:

- such feedback is highly valued
- careful attention is paid to it
- the quantity of input is (unfortunately) such that individual communications cannot be individually processed so that only an automated response is possible
- communicants should be assured that their message is transferred to the appropriate department, person, etc for further careful consideration
- if appropriate this may then engender further communication
- a possible alternative, if the communicant so desires, is for the communication to be directly displayed on a blog, etc

To ensure the viability of the process, typically it may involve:

- registration of the communicant in order to be able to make the comment
- provision of an e-mail address, possibly with some indication of field of interest, etc
- automated acknowledgement to that e-mail address
 - whether to confirm identity or to enable non-abusive login
 - possibly to enable future promotional and publicity communications to the communicant, namely a means of building an address list for such puposes

Designing out options and feedback

Less consideration is given to the logistics of the feedback process, as perceived by the communicant:

- resemblances to the more irritating features of multiple choice voice-mail menu systems, ultimately to be expensively queued (especially in the case of long-distance calls), etc

- lack of transparency regarding explanations for delays (or failures) in confirmation processes
- use of feedback forms which do not provide the communicant with any record (or proof) of the communication process (unless a copy is deliberately made into some other document) whilst allowing the receiving service to maintain a complete trace of the communication from that e-mail address
- degree of use by the system of "blacklisting" communicants -- readily framed as abusive to speed the process and to avoid engaging in problematic communications,
- lack of facility for communication regarding any problems in registration and communication, notably any form of appeal processes
- developing sense that the communication is simply sent to a "blackhole" in cyberspace, possibly immediately trashed

Of particular interest are the criteria for any algorithm designed to filter or channel incoming communications. They may well be designed to label certain communications as inappropriate and to be trashed. This may be done, as with "nanny" programs, by the detection of problematic expressions or keywords. The content of such word lists is necessarily confidential. The receiving system may also use one or more blacklists to exclude communications from particular e-mail addresses, IP addresses or countries -- again without such information being available, or known to more than a very few. If one of the blacklists is maintained internally, the manner in which a communicant is placed on that list -- possibly automatically -- is also neither known nor the subject of any appeal. Given the increasing concern with security issues, any such blacklisting may be done on the basis of criteria supplied by security consultants.

Given that the priority for the service is to be able to claim to be "listening", any problematic issues can be framed as "marginal" and simply ignored as irrelevant irritants. The system is necessarily designed to solicit and cultivate interaction with a spectrum of "average" communicants and to avoid the costs associated with ["long tails"](#).

The service may publicly make unconfirmable claims that "hundreds" (if not "thousands" or more) have responded to any specific request for feedback. The implication is that from this process communications have been carefully clustered in such a way that the most representative comments can be further publicized -- due consideration having thereby been effectively given to all. Since, if done as claimed, this is potentially very labour intensive, there is every motivation to simply "pick out" a few messages and imply that some intelligent processing is done. This mechanism may be seen in its simplest form when participants in a meeting are invited to submit written messages to the "chair" -- a few being selected (or apparently so) to be addressed by the "panel" as judged convenient by the "chair".

A well-documented example of institutional abuse of such a process is the so-called [Blue Peter competition-rigging scandal](#) at the BBC in 2006. Phone-in feedback was solicited from listening children, at some cost to them, but the "responses" of such communicants were ignored in preference to fake responses fabricated as "more suitable" by the editorial service of the BBC programme in question. This is even more abusive when the purpose is to select correct answers to a phone-in quiz -- for which prizes are attributed.

More generally however, there is no mechanism to confirm that such logistically convenient abusive practices are not endemic and -- even when isolated cases are detected and corrected -- that the policy does not continue in some other form. Claims are made to the contrary and communicants are invited to have every confidence in a trustworthy institution -- such as the BBC or CNN. But there are no checks and balances as might be otherwise expected.

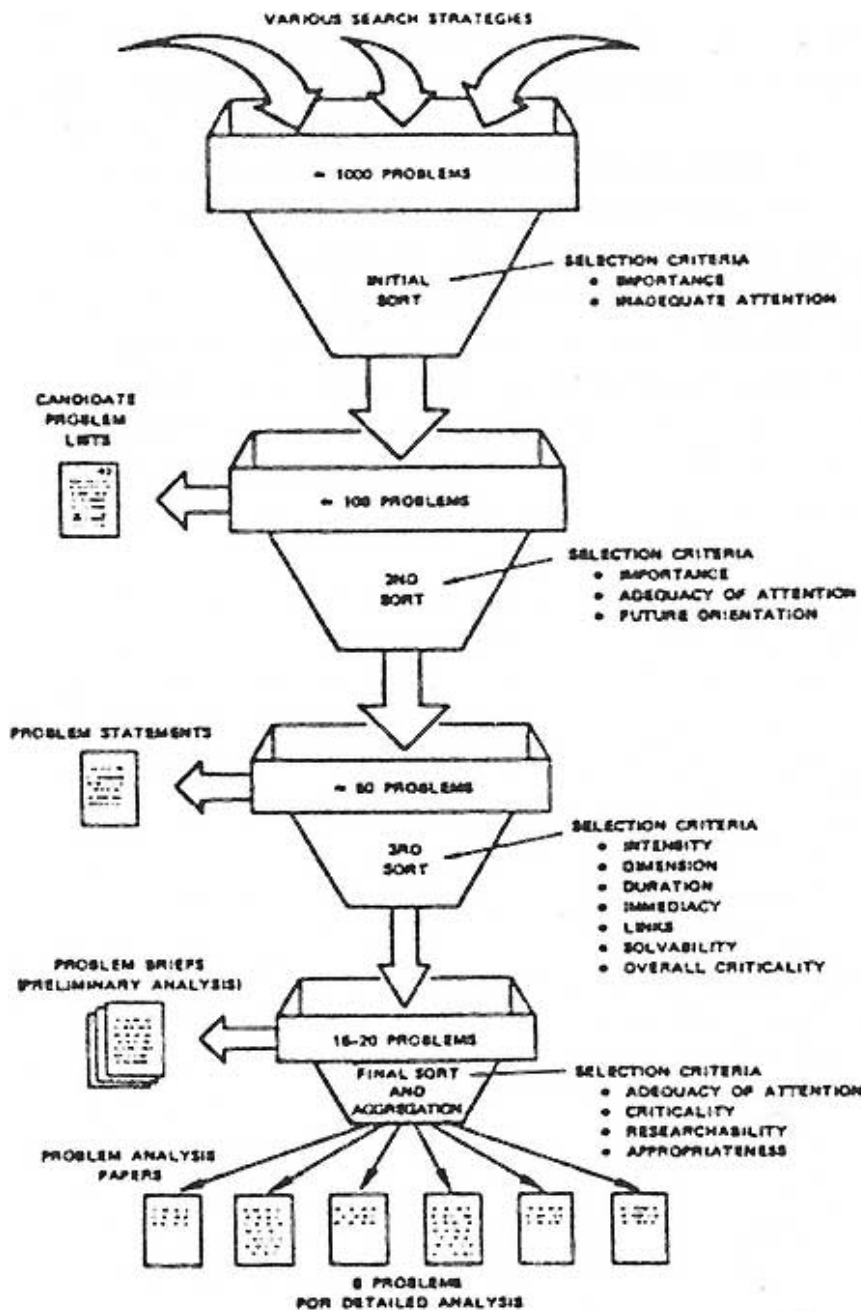
Whereas there is a more intensive degree of monitoring of "libellous" and discriminatory statements, "misleading advertising", and "fraudulent trading practices", there is no mechanism to verify the integrity of electronic feedback processes. These processes are effectively introduced and used as an extension of promotional and public relations processes. Claims made with respect to them can be legally legitimated as ["puffery"](#).

The issue is what kinds of anomalous communication the feedback service wants to handle and how to frame and design out other forms of communication. Of particular concern is the range of problematic communications:

- communicants with abusive messages in terms of content and argument
- communicants exploiting the process for ends other than intended by those offering the service (identity theft, spammers, etc)
- communicants with content offensive to "our sponsors" or the editorial ambitions of the service (whether explicit or not)
- communicants that have been placed on some form of "blacklist" for reasons not subject to justification or appeal (by analogy with the ["no fly list"](#) precluding some people from use of airlines in the USA), especially where it is quite unclear how people get listed in this way (possibly by analogy to the controversial retention of records in crime databases of those who have been innocent witnesses to crimes, or interviewed as potential suspects at some time, even in the distant past).

Of particular interest is the fact that there is no obligation to indicate how many communications have been received on a given topic as distinct from how many are used in some way. Some systems indicate, seemingly transparently, how many registered comments have been received -- but there is rarely any sense of how many have been "removed" because they infringed some unexplained editorial constraint or "objection" from others. Processing inconveniences are presented as appropriate editorial sensitivity in what are increasingly non-transparent systems -- purportedly emblematic of emergent democratic processes of the future.

Fig. 1: Illustration of option/feedback selectivity process from an authoritative perspective



Project methodology for the *Assessment of Future National and International Problems* (reproduced from a document of that title, published by the National Science Foundation Washington DC, 1977, NSF/STP76-02573)

This methodology was criticized in the [commentary](#) justifying the more open methodology used for processing the 56,564 problems profiled in the [Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential](#)

Although there is agreement that there are many problems and that many are serious, little concerted effort has been made to determine how many problems there are. Such efforts as have been made have generally been limited to identifying **major** or **critical** problems, usually guided either by political expediency or by the particular objective of a major agency.

For example, as illustrated by the diagram, one study for the President of the USA, resulting in 6 problems analyzed in detail, was based on a procedure whereby 1000 problems were deliberately filtered through a succession of phases down to 100, to 50, to 20 before the "final sort and aggregation". Only the final 6 were submitted to the President. No further mention is made of the 994, whatever their importance to particular constituencies. At that time UNESCO engaged in an exercise to identify the "major world problems" with which it was concerned and identified 12 (*Medium-Term Plan 1977-1982*. UNESCO, 19 C/4).

Related methodological issues were also discussed in [Representation, Comprehension and Communication of Sets: the Role of Number](#) (1978) where Fig.1 was reproduced.

Learnings from democratic voting and polling systems

Since such feedback mechanisms are increasingly presented as a characteristic of an open, responsive, transparent society, it is appropriate to note the challenges faced by the forms of feedback that preceded them -- and remain of vital importance:

- surveys** (opinion polling, etc): For these to be credible, typically some indication of the methodology and sample size is required -- consistent with published standards. Since these results can easily be simply claimed rather than factual, any confirmation can only be achieved through surveys made by others providing comparable data. The reputation of any institution discovered to be engaged in some degree of fraudulent polling would be severely damaged -- although proving such fraud may be difficult. Assertion to that effect are readily denied. Polling institutions are not regulated in any way, whatever the standards to which they purport to adhere. They are "self-regulating". As with the BBC [Blue Peter scandal](#), damage limitation would typically enable the institution to survive -- possibly with only token rectification of the deficiencies. A typical

problem for surveys conducted to test scientific hypotheses is the manner in which anomalous data points are "removed" from any results in order to "clean up the data" and "provide a good result". In the analysis of [scientific fraud](#), this may lead to such research being discovered to have been fraudulent.

- **voting systems:** The variety of abuses possible with democratic voting systems has resulted in the process being monitored by teams of "observers" in countries where the potential for abuse is purportedly higher. In the USA the process is typically monitored by teams of lawyers from the opposing parties -- given a history of abuse, notably with the introduction of electronic voting machines. Many of the issues to which they are sensitive take analogous form in electronic feedback systems.

Given the vulnerability to abuse in both cases, it is clear that the current approach to web feedback and voting is relatively naive -- if not extremely so -- and vulnerable to every form of abuse.

Misleading feedback solicitation: implications for democracy and consensual strategies

Some general conclusions may be drawn both with respect to policy consultation in which it is claimed that "all options are considered" and electronic feedback solicitation ("we want to hear your views"):

- a prime purpose may well be:
 - tokenism, namely creating the appearance of listening and consultation, possibly even as an exercise in procrastination
 - use of feedback mechanisms as a means of building up promotional mailing lists
 - use of feedback mechanisms as a means of building up lists of troublemakers for other purposes
- whether the view expressed by a particular communicant is taken into account in some way may be as likely as the expectation of winning in a lottery -- well-recognized as being for the "numerically challenged". In the lottery case, it is however impressive the degree of attention given to the drawing mechanism, even though the actual "winners" are unknown and not subject to confirmation
- there is every opportunity for
 - selecting supportive feedback and excluding critical feedback, with no obligation to take any account of inconvenient feedback
 - "sponsors" to pay for "placement questions" -- notably in the light of the ["cash for questions" scandal](#) in the UK, even involving members of parliament.
- procrastination, by claiming that a wider selection of views is being sought (through due process) to frame appropriate action, when one purpose is to waste the time of those solicited and to induce a sense of expectation in them

Binding contractual agreements are increasingly significant in determining constraints on public policy, as indicated by the unquestionable respect for the contractually binding exorbitant executive payouts to those responsible in some way for major corporate failures in 2008 -- leading to the financial crisis and considerable public anger. Curiously no such constraints are attached to the electoral or other commitments of politicians and policy-makers. Whereas legislation provides for commercial malpractice taking the form of "misleading advertising" or "fraudulent trading practices", no such provisions are envisaged for those involved in policy-making. They are free to make any claims (possibly to be excused as legitimate puffery) and are not required to substantiate them. Indeed failure to do so may be justified as being a matter of "national security". Furthermore they are typically well protected by forms of parliamentary immunity (or its diplomatic analogue) against being held legally to account for any abuse.

Implications for e-democracy and crowdsourcing

Technically there is considerable potential for widespread electronic consultation, leading to enthusiastic proposals for [e-democracy](#), [participatory democracy](#) and [crowdsourcing](#). As discussed in [Practicalities of Participatory Democracy with International Institutions: Attitudinal, Quantitative and Qualitative Challenges](#) (2003), the basic challenge involves use of the scarcest resource "attention time" of those charged with processing large quantities of input, notably elected representatives. It can be expressed mathematically and lends itself to simulation:

- a representative in a parliament has a constituency of N individual voters
- a small percentage of N endeavour to communicate with the representative, physically or electronically, frequently or infrequently
- what proportion of these communications can the representative process, with the best will in the world?
- assuming (possibly) the representative has a large staff that does that processing, with the best will in the world what proportion get acknowledged: minimally, substantively to the satisfaction of the constituent? And what not?
- what proportion of the information can the representative absorb, other than in a gross form, potentially unsatisfactory to the sender?
- what proportion can the representative form into some initiative to be presented through due process?
- what level of satisfaction can the ordinary constituent expect from such communication?
- what proportion of relevant documents, formally issued for consideration by the representative, can be appropriately processed?
- what proportion of representatives succumb (as has been done in the House of Commons) to the cash for questions temptation, or to some non-financial variant?

- what proportion of input, supposedly received by the representative, follows the pattern highlighted by the recent BBC *Blue Peter* phone-in scandal?
- what proportion of representatives take their role seriously rather than as a source of perks, as recently highlighted in the case of the European Parliament regarding representative absenteeism?
- where are such issues given due consideration through meaningful simulations?

Curiously no consideration is given to such challenges to assumptions about representative or participatory democracy. As with the absenteeism issue, they may even be subject to internal sanction on the person raising the issue. There is an unexamined assumption that the process of filtering input can be handled appropriately and transparently by some form of self-regulation whose constraints have not been explored, notably in simulations.

At the same time, it is clear that aspects of the process can give rise to satisfactory outcomes in some cases -- in the form of [open source](#) projects, including the development of software, hardware and databases. An unusual example is the (playful) collective design of dynamic mechanisms by the [Soda Constructor](#) community -- suggesting organizational and strategic analogues ([Animating the Representation of Europe: visualizing the coherence of international institutions using dynamic animal-like structures](#), 2004). The successful extension of such paradigms to community democracy has yet to be demonstrated -- if only as a test of assumptions about alternative social forms.

In terms of the challenge for representatives of managing [information overload](#), there is a vital need to simulate how this is handled, especially when some vital information is excluded from consideration by that process. It is indicative that one of the processes typical of MBA programmes is to give students more information than they can possibly process each evening in the expectation that they will develop techniques of selectivity that do not select out vital anomalies. The challenge also lends itself to analysis in terms of techniques of information clustering and the attention span with respect to clusters exceeding a certain size or requiring "drill down" beyond a certain level. These issues are discussed in [Representation, Comprehension and Communication of Sets: the Role of Number](#) (1978). The challenge calls for innovative use of [mnemotechnics](#) ([In Quest of Mnemonic Catalysts -- for comprehension of complex psychosocial dynamics](#), 2007).

Forms of cognitive protectionism in the light of trade protectionism

Another approach to framing the challenge that merits consideration is through the learnings to be derived from the extensively studied processes of [trade protectionism](#) -- especially the various subterfuges employed to disguise such protectionism. Generically it could be argued that the tangible features of the trade case offer a template through which the intangible features of the cognitive situation can be more clearly comprehended.

The argument is that any group, especially of those most closely associated with processes of governance, or other vested interests, frames a boundary -- a "circle of trust" -- within which it operates and which it seeks to protect from the disruptive effects of outsiders. This closure is increasingly replicated cognitively in "administrative complexes" and gated communities -- in both cases emblematic of forms of cognitive closure offering a requisite sense of belonging and identity ([Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society](#), 2004). It has been argued by Matt Frei ([Taming the cyber beast](#), *The Guardian*, 24 January 2009) that:

The Bush White House circled the wagons and lived in a bubble; it turned loyalty into a test of service and largely disdained the clutter of opinions from the world outside...

As is widely recognized, even within government administrations, or between the UN Specialized Agencies, information may be jealously guarded and not shared in ways that might be considered of value to the purpose for which the bodies were created. Information may then be selectively "traded" and any failure to do so may be subject to criticism -- justifying the exploration of the parallel with trade protectionism.

The degree of openness or closure to new insights or patterns may be expressed through a generalization of the notion of a "glass ceiling". It might take account of a set or sequence of conditions including (in no particular order):

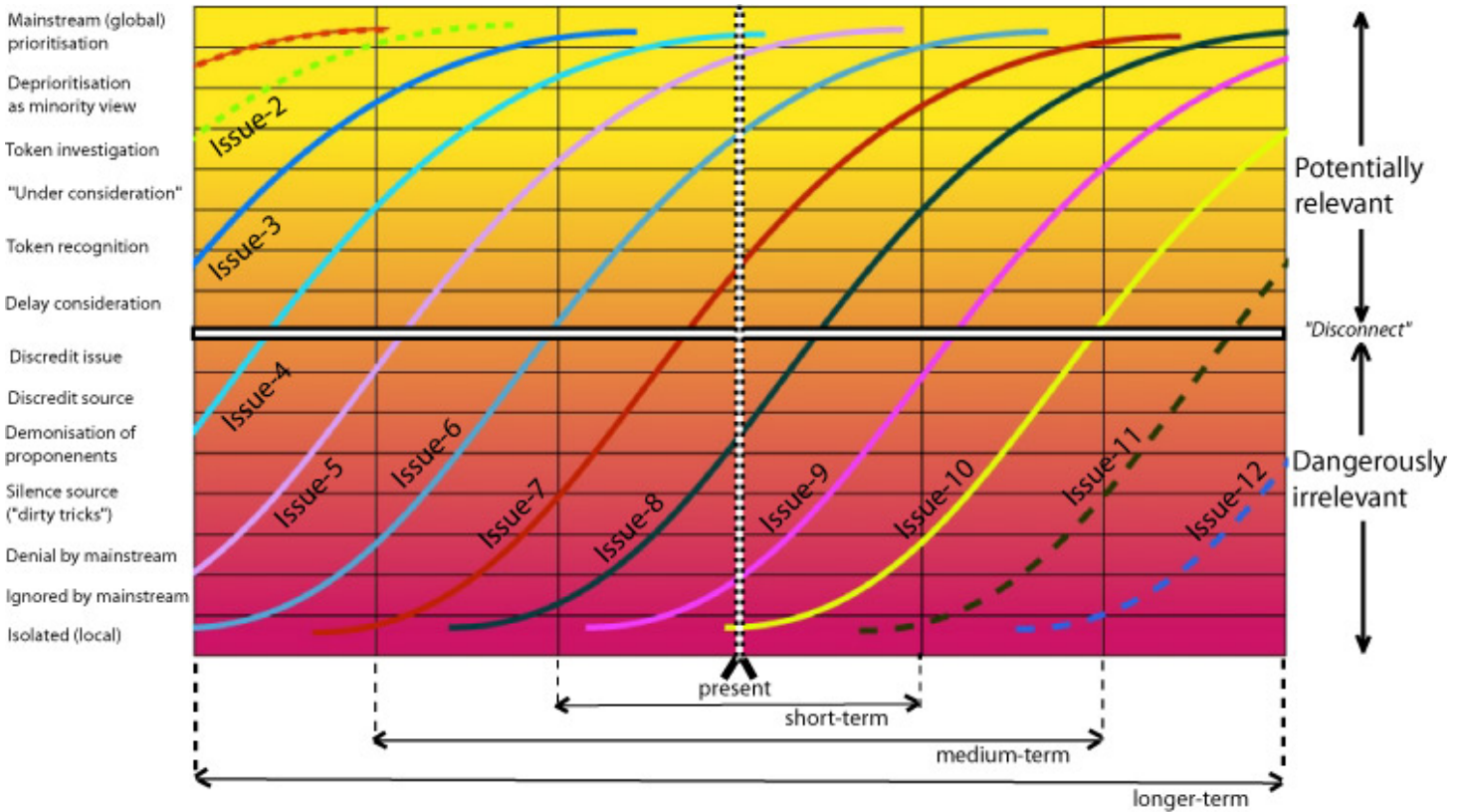
- avoidance of learning, namely focusing on "this problem", without considering whether it forms part of a series that should be considered as such
- transfer (cognitive) power base to an emergent problem, namely a form of "turncoat phase" in which there is denial of complicity in adherence to the framing now held to be outmoded
- tokenism and lip service, involving processes like:
 - rewarding the whistleblower as a substitute for action on the issue
 - patronising believers
- reframing the debate in order to cast blame
- penalising those committed to the emergent issue (loans, funding, etc)
- denial of the relevance of the issue

- demonising whistleblowers
- silencing protagonists ("dirty tricks", etc)
- ignoring indications as symptoms of inappropriate methodology and lack of credibility

Framework for exploring attentiveness to new information

A single diagram (Fig. 3) may be used for such a framework, of which the basic structure is presented in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2: General framework for representation of issue recognition and denial over time



Explanation (valid for Fig. 2 above and Fig. 3 below):

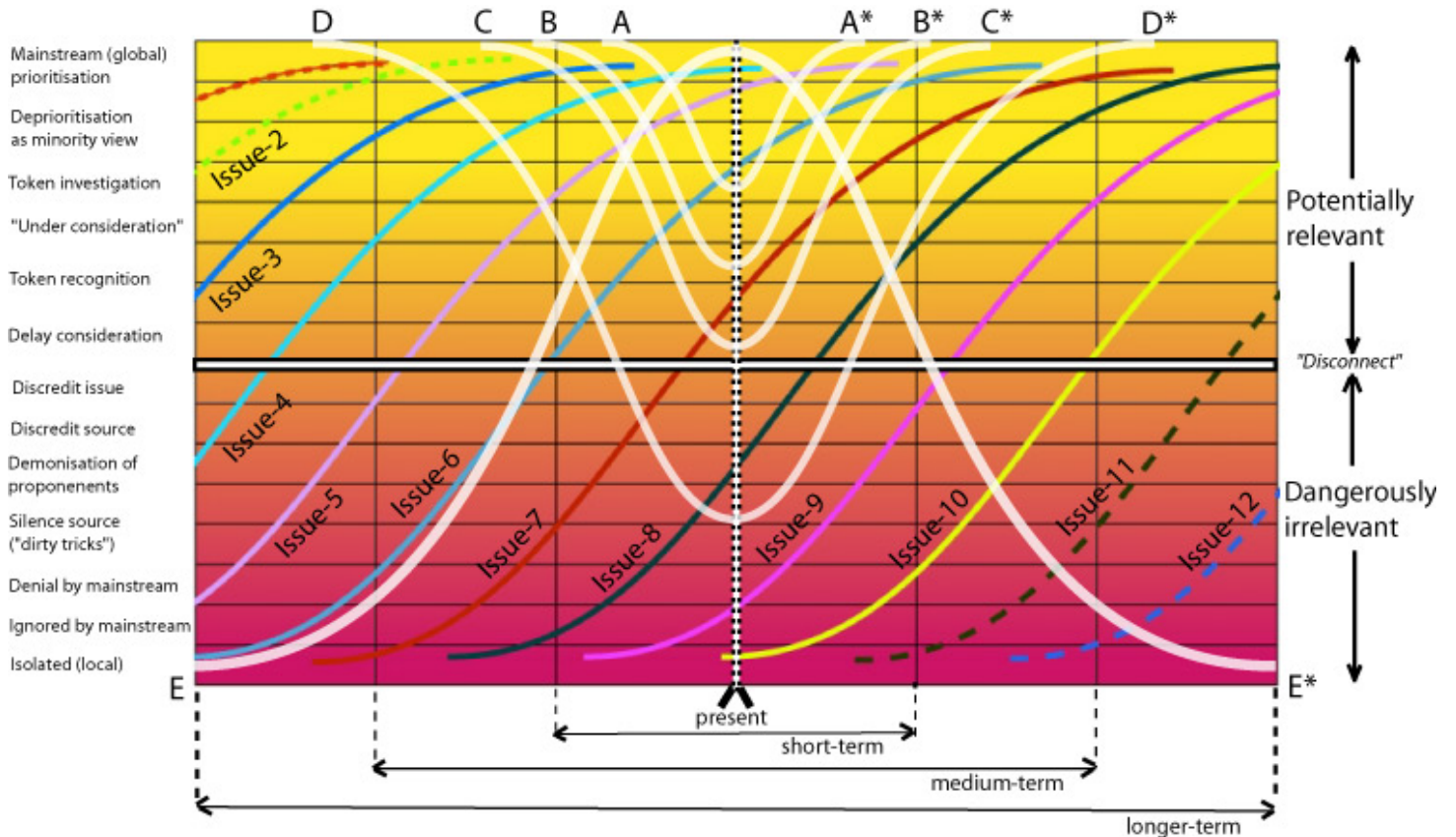
- **Rows:** succession of socio-political processes from isolated issue recognition (at the bottom) to mainstream recognition (at the top); the upper rows are those authoritatively considered as "relevant", with the bottom rows typically authoritatively framed as "irrelevant". The number of rows is purely indicative; they might even be spaced logarithmically. The gradation of colouring from the darker colour of the lower rows to the lighter colours of the upper rows is indicative of the decreasing constraints on communication -- with the lower rows typically associated with more "heated" controversy, especially in the light of the condemnation of its isolated "local" perspectives by the "enlightened" authoritative "global" perspectives now associated with the higher rows.
- **Columns:** periods of time from the past (left) to the future (right); the present being indicated in the centre, with indication of "short-term" recognition on each side of the present, as well as "medium-term" and "longer-term"
- **S-curves:** indicative of a succession of emergent Issues -- the left-most necessarily emerging first -- suggestive of how confirmation of each is first only accepted in isolated locations, progressing to the emergence of each over time into mainstream (global) recognition. Their different colours are only used here better to distinguish them -- although clearly they could be variously colour-coded. Their succession might include; human rights, poverty, development, environment, energy, climate change, terrorism, etc. -- "waves" of emergent crises. The time of their mainstream recognition might be marked by their institutionalization -- as in the UN Specialized Agencies -- in contrast with their earlier recognition by isolated civil society bodies or individuals associated with the much lower (and less-representative) rows. (A quantitative measure of the emergence of an issue might be a count of the words devoted to it in the media.)

An argument for the S-curve can be derived by comparison with that for the [diffusion of innovation](#) developed by [Everett M. Rogers](#) (*Diffusion of Innovations*, 1962). The S-curves here might be understood as a variant. Rogers proposes that adopters of any new innovation or idea can be categorized as innovators (2.5%), early adopters (13.5%), early majority (34%), late majority (34%) and laggards (16%), based on the mathematically-based Bell curve. His theory proposes that innovation

adoption is a process that occurs over time through five stages: Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation and Confirmation. However in Fig. 2, the "innovations" are problematic issues -- even "wicked problems" or crises -- to whose recognition various vested interests and authorities are resistant, even vigorously so. Relevant insights may also be gained from the [Technology Acceptance Model](#) (TAM) in information systems theory indicating how users come to accept and use a technology. From that perspective, Fig. 2 might be understood as an effort towards modelling the cognitive process of progressive relaxation of "issue rejection".

The Issues might also be understood as "strategies" rather than as "problems", then highlighting the progressive recognition of their viability, especially that of "alternatives". There is the possibility that the point of inflection in the S-curve at which it rises more rapidly to mainstream acceptance is triggered by globally mediated tragedy -- as with the homelessness and joblessness resulting from the financial crisis, or the deaths from earthquakes -- effectively option legitimisation by "human sacrifice".

Fig. 3: Superposition on Fig. 2 of curves indicative of the focus of authoritative attention and recognition



Explanation (valid only for those items in Fig. 3 not already mentioned in relation to Fig. 2):

- **White bell curve (E-E*):** Indicative of the scope of collective memory and attention span, whether of the few in isolation at the horizontal extremes (of which most are unaware), or as the shared focus in the present shared by most. The curve encompasses that which is authoritatively approved and accepted as well as that which is, notably at the grassroots level, partially accepted or considered marginal -- namely both upper and lower rows
- **White inverted curves (A-A*, B-B*, C-C*, D-D*):** Indicative of the focus of authoritative memory and attention, possibly to be interpreted successively as:
 - A-A*: Governance and security;
 - B-B*: Belief systems (science, religion, politics)
 - C-C*: Business
 - D-D*: Communications (media, surveillance)

Other possible curves of that form could be added, just as those identified could be split or modified in size. These curves are suggestive of the challenge to institutions and disciplines in sustaining a longer (and more open) attention span than can be encompassed by governance. Whether particular belief systems have a larger or narrower scope (in temporal terms) might be more fruitfully indicated with the aid of a much larger number of such curves -- some being more skewed to the futures or to the past. Functions such as those associated with curve D-D*, necessarily more sensitive to popular opinion, may descend more deeply into the lower rows -- especially given the increasingly invasive operation of the broadcast media and the surveillance services. Any such curve would also offer a sense of how (democratic) feedback systems function in selecting or excluding information considered to be relevant or exemplary.

The nesting of the functions centered on governance, and their number, could also be explored in the light of the priorities of the [need hierarchy](#) of [Abraham Maslow](#) (*A Theory of Human Motivation*, 1943) understood for a collectivity: basic needs (food, energy, etc), safety/security, social, esteem, self-actualization.

- **Core zone** (common to both A-A* and E-E*):
 - This suggests the scope of the zone associated with consideration of "**all options**" on the part of governance, necessarily constrained by the curve E-E* with which any legitimacy accorded by the political majority is associated.
 - The zone is necessarily limited to the highest rows and those Issues which have emerged by that period to that level, therefore excluding as irrelevant (or deprioritising) Issues that have not yet achieved that degree of recognition or are outside the short-term framework characteristic of strategic decision-making.
 - The focus of this core zone is encompassed and constrained by the zones defined by the curves B-B*, C-C* and D-D* representing progressively lesser degrees of pressure on governance -- but constituting authoritative sources of advice or legitimation, possibly articulated through powerful vested interest groups.
 - Encompassed as is this governance core by the curves associated with other authoritative worldviews, it may be understood as a cognitive community nestled within several concentric "circles" (cf [Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society](#), 2004)
- **Lower rows:** These rows are labelled as "potentially dangerous" in that preoccupation with them by the population is considered irrelevant to the focus which is authoritatively considered to be relevant. There is therefore a "disconnect" between popular, grassroots understanding of issues and that held to be significant (and deserving of grassroots taxpayer resources) in the processes of governance. The horizontal line marking that disconnect might of course be more appropriately placed higher or lower.

Figure 3 serves to indicate how there are issues to which some are sensitive even though their implications have negligible impact on the short-term priorities of governance -- whether or not there is any recognition in the processes of governance of their longer term implications.

It should be stressed that **it is the general form of Figure 3 that merits consideration** rather than:

- **specific labels added for illustrative purposes.** Thus the succession of avoidance and denial processes describing the rows could be articulated in more detail and with more precision, or presented logarithmically (as noted above).
- **the shape of the S-curves.** This is purely indicative of the emergence of issues, whether problems or strategies (as noted above). Rather than being parallel, as presented, the lines could be quite differently oriented, even crossing one another.
- **the location of the "present",** denoted here as the central vertical axis. This might be fruitfully understood as a "slider" displaced to the left or the right with respect to particular constituencies. Of major interest is how and when different Issues emerge in different cultures, especially in comparison with their emergence in the "western world" -- projected from that perspective as an unquestionable, universal norm. This should be seen in the light of western savagery in the 20th century, as well as its late according of rights to women and non-whites -- very late in some cases, with as yet unresolved challenges of discrimination.

Tentatively, and perhaps controversially, if the central axis represents a universal, normative "present", several such "sliders" could be used to denote the relative position of countries, cultures or regions that either do not yet fully accept such norms (relative years "behind"), or that have already endeavoured to move beyond their limitations (relative years "ahead"). Such a facility might also be used with respect to constituencies within a country or culture. Capital punishment provides a useful example for discussion in terms of which countries "get it" and which have yet to repudiate it -- especially when compared to the barbarity of flogging.

As a whole Figure 3 provides a framework in which the form and descriptors of the various curves could be adjusted for purposes of discussion about the **probability of tunnel vision, silo thinking and group think** -- and the nature of the disconnect with any grassroots sense of reality that has not been crafted or recognized by authority structures. Any such adjustment could best be done dynamically and interactively (with an applet) in support of reflection and discussion.

Cognitive corruption: deficiencies in feedback and processes for selection of strategic options

Assertions to the effect that due attention is given to feedback ("trust us") and that every strategic option has been considered ("trust us") merit testing for the validity of such claims -- just as careful attention is given to testing the deficiencies of security systems. In the latter case the test is for effective closure, here the required test is for effective openness to enable detection of unforeseen potentials and anomalies -- namely testing openness to feedback.

There is a case for an institution like [Transparency International](#), primarily known for its focus on corruption, to develop indicators for closure to options and feedback -- despite vigorous claims to the contrary. In effect there is a need to measure "cognitive corruption". Such matters are of interest in the detection of anomalies in reporting procedures, notably in the light of unforeseen disasters. What

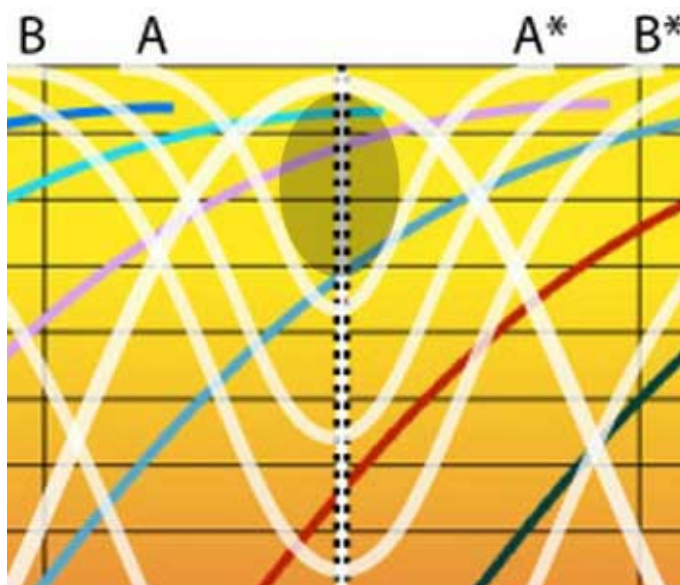
rating system would be appropriate, analogous to that developed for corruption?

A classic example, after the [tsunami disaster of December 2004](#), was the discovery that a detailed report documenting its probability had been provided in 1998 -- when the the head of the Thai meteorological office had been obliged to retire under a shadow for having warned that the coast was dangerously vulnerable to such effects. He was accused of scaremongering and jeopardising the tourist industry around the island of Phuket. Similarly an Italian seismologist had predicted the disastrous earthquake in Italy in April 2009 ([Seismologist predicted L'Aquila quake](#), *Euronews*, 6 April 2009). He had been reported to the authorities for spreading panic.

In such cases it is not a question of whether there are deficiencies but of who checks whether there are and whether this can be done systematically -- as is done by health and safety inspectors (whether or not their recommendations are implemented or "adapted for a consideration"). Electronic feedback system lend themselves to such testing -- possibly facilitated with intelligent "bots". Such agents are for example used by *Wikipedia* to mark up profiles for possible exclusion -- on the basis of unspecified criteria.

How might major solicitors of feedback, like broadcasting services and newspapers, fare under such testing? What processes do they have for complaints about the procedure or is such information excluded as an unwelcome anomaly?

Fig. 4: Detail of Fig. 3, highlighting constraints on claims to have considered "all the options"



In its manner of considering "all the options", governance is necessarily constrained to the central (darkened) zone as explained with respect to Fig. 3.

The detail indicates how only three of the Issues (the coloured curves) are selected into this arena, since those that have not yet emerged into the mainstream are necessarily excluded (coloured curves in the lower left part of the detail)

Although this is a purely indicative diagram, those Issues selected in (as at the G20 Summit) might be "economic meltdown", "terrorism" and "climate change". Within the central zone, clearly lower priority is necessarily given to "climate change", since its S-curve only reaches the mainstream row outside the short-term focus and the constraints of the various bell-curves. As an Issue, "overpopulation", indicated by one of the excluded S-curves (lower right), is rising outside consideration within the various authoritative (inverted) bell-curves -- and will only subsequently be recognized as a mainstream crisis.

Options for global governance

The challenge in determining how to process potentially available information is what might a viable option look like? And in whose eyes? How to be sure that a viable option is recognized? And what if two or more non-viable options trigger a creative response that enables a viable option to emerge?

A major lesson of the financial crisis of 2008-2009 is the totally unforeseen, and extremely rapid, transformation in the status of giants of the conventional economy -- General Motors and Chrysler -- from motors of the economy to beggars in need of a safety net. But the question is whether the range of management expertise on which those giants can draw enables them to envisage anything more than "business as usual" -- and whether government can encourage them appropriately to do otherwise.

Metaphor is much used in selling new approaches to management and policy-making. Thus a former editor of the *Harvard Business Review* authored a book entitled *When Giants Learn to Dance: the challenge of strategy, management and careers* ([Rosabeth Kanter](#), 1989). Another by Dudley Lynch and Paul Kordis is entitled *Strategy of the Dolphin; scoring a win in a chaotic world* (1988). Is General Motors capable of "learning to dance" to the sound of a "different drummer" in the words of [Henry David Thoreau](#), "however measured or far away". The phrase was echoed by [M. Scott Peck](#) (*The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, 1987) in contrast with his study of the "people of the lie" (*People of the Lie: The Hope For Healing Human Evil*, 1983).

Who are the GMs and Chryslers of the "option production process" -- that are considered "too big to fail"? Is that a reason for the repeated convergence on "more of the same", notably in Afghanistan? Those complicit in the process seemingly include:

- intelligence services
 - interrogation
- policy think tanks (paper)
- strategic think tanks
- policy groups (Bilderberg, Trilateral, etc)
- military
- eminent (emeritus) advisers
- retired security/military specialists

There would seem to be no process whereby large numbers of options are collected, held, refined and commented in a common database (a *WikiStrategies*) -- one that is open to a wide variety of creative input. This would be a complete contrast to that ensuring premature cognitive closure as illustrated by Fig. 1 above. Such a database could then be subject to data mining techniques (notably using intelligent agents) to identify viable new possibilities -- the "green shoots" of genuine strategic recovery.

Such an approach would go far to guard against the risks of dangerous groupthink and tunnel vision. It would also ensure that alternatives are juxtaposed with conventional proposals -- avoiding the accusation that alternatives are systematically ignored ([Framing the Global Future by Ignoring Alternatives: unfreezing categories as a vital necessity](#), 2009) .

This frames the challenge as one of "insight capture" rather than "insight exclusion" -- currently engendering "electronic middens" outside cyberdomains into which creative chat and listserv waste is dumped. Such middens may be fruitfully mined.

Any assertion by such as Richard Holbrooke, that all the strategic options have been considered, should perhaps be evaluated in terms of a "**Holbrooke Quotient of Option Selection**" -- namely an estimate of the percentage of extant or potential options that had been effectively open to consideration. The challenge for governance would be to ensure that the Quotient is increased from 0.6% (as in Fig. 1) to a healthy proportion -- perhaps 30-40%. As an example, when the [flaw in the mirror](#) of the [Hubble Space Telescope](#) was discovered in 1990 some 25 proposals were put on the table as possible strategies for remedial action. Creative responses to unforeseen crises is not facilitated by focusing on predetermined "more of the same".

e-democracy -- on Fig. 2?

organizational learning

Swarm behaviour

Rules

Dynamically gated

Tracking

Breautiful / Locusts of public opinion

desperate quest for affirmation and community -- online chats

One option presumably not considered, for example, is engagement through poetry ([Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity?](#) 2009) -- but then why should it be?.

assumptions Judd

Parade of Emerging Problems Past the Attention Stand

policy lag

[Sets and their Settings: from development to climate change... and beyond](#), 2009 -- waves

orchestration



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