**HISTORY, TIME AND FUTURES STUDIES**
**TENSIONS FROM GEOSTRATEGY ANTICIPATORY PRACTICES**

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**Abstract:**

Since seminal futures publications, geostrategy anticipatory practices have infused the futures field, as well as questioned the place of time and history in futures thinking. Exploring the temporal tensions of futures thinking, this paper discusses lessons from two geostrategy futures cases. Bridging history and futures studies, section 1 stresses the wicked nature of future history and discusses research directions to introduce time in futures thinking. Section 2 exhibits the context, the design and the methodological backgrounds of the two cases. Section 3 discusses the temporal tensions between factors, actors and events on the one hand and within action processes on the other hand and suggests developing a streaming approach of anticipation.

## 1. Bridging history and futures studies: tensions and directions

### 1.1. The wicked nature of future history

While history is viewed to supplement futures methods such as scenarios (Bradfield, Derbyshire and Wright, 2016), it first served as a cornerstone to shape anticipation practices either to stress the difference between futures thinking and history or to point out that futures thinking deals with a wicked future history. In seminal futures thinking, the sense of history differs from the purpose of futures practices designed as a support to decision-making that cannot be scientific, science being timeless (Berger 1957). Although "related to history", Flechtheim's futurology cannot elicit a "chronological sequence of detailed facts" but "avail itself of interpretation, generalization, and speculation to a considerably higher degree" (Flechtheim, 1966). However, Kahn's scenarios are about "future history" and "attempt to describe in more and less detail some hypothetical sequence of events" (Kahn, 1962). But the design of hypothetical "future history" is based on a gap with history, as the very nature of historical facts (*facta*) are not to be confused with future events (*futura*) that are nothing but subjective (Jouvenel, 1967).

### 1.2. Timing futures thinking

If futures studies are "futureless" (Sardar, 2010), futures practices are not timeless, and history remains a reference to futures studies. Within macro-history, "timing the future" is one of the pillars of futures thinking (Inayatullah, 2008). Developmental scenarios (van Notten, Rotmans, van Asselt and Rothman, 2003) and backcasting studies (Vergragt and Quist, 2011) introduce time-scales in scenario design while the concept of end-state (Burt, 2007) offers a time frame for scenarios. Stakeholder behavior (Cairns, Goodwin and Wright, 2016) and empowerment (Bourgeois, Penunia, Bisht, and Boruk, 2017), as well as leadership shifts (Marchais-Roubelat and Roubelat, 2016) question the timing of action in futures thinking, while governance issues point out the role of actors and stakeholders in change over time (Wangel, 2012). Whereas Kahn's scenarios explore decision processes like escalation (Kahn 1965) and examine "the branching points dependent of critical choices" (Kahn, 1962), "branching scenarios" (Cairns, Wright, Fairbrother and Philips, 2017) break lock-ins to incorporate new decision issues. Scenarios add the "what next" question to the "what if"

one (Saritas and Nugroho, 2012), as well as the one of emergence (Fuller, 2018). Addressing ever-changing changes and the related temporal gaps (Berger, 1957), futures thinking also stresses the tension between long-range slow transformations over time (Botta, 2016) and ephemeral futures (Roubelat, Brassett, MacAllum, Hoffmann and Kera, 2015).

## 2. Research context and methodological background

Within the context of futures studies applied to defense issues (Saritas and Burmaoglu, 2016, Nemeth, Dew and Augier, 2018), we discuss two geostrategy anticipatory practices from two cases commissioned by the French ministry of Defense.
The first case is based on the seminal archive report on security global governance frameworks to 2030 and on the book *2030, the end of globalization?* issued from the report (Coutau-Bégarie, 2008). The case is supplemented by the results of a research meeting organized with Paris war college research institute (Irsem) (Roubelat and de Lespinois, 2017).
The second case is based on full outcomes of an action research on strategic action scenarios to 2030 designed by the authors, which supplement the action-based scenarios methodology (Marchais-Roubelat and Roubelat, 2008, 2016).

## 3. From framing to streaming. Timing the tensions of geostrategy futures

### 3.1. Timing the tensions between factors, actors and events

*2030, the end of globalization?* offers an opportunity to discuss the tensions between factors, actors and events, within the two perspectives of Coutau-Bégarie works on "new history" and on strategy (Coutau-Bégarie, 1989, 2011). In Coutau-Bégarie's perspective, futures thinking may uncover only a part of the causal clues at work in history, as the interweaving of factors, actors and events reveals moving horizons as well as different temporalities. While the long-range evolution of factors may be discussed, actors and events can hardly be anticipated and future governance results from moving combinations of scenario archetypes that question the resilience of governance over time and the horizons of future global transformations. The role of individuals, which may be of importance in history, as well as the one of communities and of emerging actors, also appear as a tricky issue for the timing of futures thinking.

### 3.2. Timing the tensions from action processes

Strategic action scenarios offer a methodological framework to play factors, stakeholders and events in action processes from action rules. In such scenarios, stakeholders' acts and organizing processes move and change over time to challenge the action rules, or not. Through an iterative process, paradigm shifts, stalemates, oscillations and phase lags are explored to design new branching rules for scenarios moving over time. Such scenarios stress three tensions for stakeholders: the sustainability of their acts with the question of their reversibility over time, the transgressions from their acts with the issue of the conflicts between stakeholders, their capacity or incapacity to act with the problem of the transformations of stakeholders over time. These three issues suggest designing streaming futures, to be challenged over time from emerging moves from stakeholders.

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