



# Risks, Chaos, Resilience: Facing Total Crises: Cassandra, The State and Its Double

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# **RISKS, CHAOS, RESILIENCE**

## **Facing Total Crises: Cassandra, The State and Its Double**

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### **ABSTRACT**

“Risks, chaos, resilience. Facing total crises: Cassandra, the State and its double” deals with the prevention and study of threats. Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed a mutation of threats and dangers, as they have been taken out of the usual framework of study. It is therefore necessary to renovate strategic thinking in the face of these threats. A new way of thinking is emerging, embodying this idea: the concept of global security. It is opposed to the inability of administrations to anticipate and their tendency to analyze exclusively in a retroactive manner. The current health crisis thus highlights this inability to anticipate, characterized by a lack of communication, giving way to the massive dissemination of fake news from all sides, and undermining the relationship of social trust between the state and the population. Reacting is already a setback. The Nation must be able to foresee and anticipate, to react and prevent.

**Keywords:** Total crises, Forecasting, Risk management, Strategic thinking, Global Security, Public Administration

## **Riesgos, caos, resiliencia: frente a las crisis totales: cassandra, el estado y su doble**

### **RESUMEN**

“Riesgos, caos, resiliencia. Frente a las crisis totales: Casandra, el Estado y su doble” trata de la prevención y el estudio de las amenazas. En efecto, desde el final de la Guerra Fría hemos asistido a una mutación de amenazas y peligros, a medida que han sido sa-

cados del marco habitual de estudio. Por ello, es necesario renovar el pensamiento estratégico frente a estas amenazas. Está surgiendo una nueva forma de pensar que encarna esta idea: el concepto de seguridad global. Se opone a la incapacidad de las administraciones a anticiparse y su tendencia a analizar exclusivamente de forma retroactiva. La actual crisis sanitaria pone de relieve así esta incapacidad de anticipación, caracterizada por la falta de comunicación, dando paso a la difusión masiva de noticias falsas por todos lados, y socavando la relación de confianza social entre el Estado y la población, reaccionar ya es un retroceso, la Nación debe saber prever y anticipar, reaccionar y prevenir.

**Palabras clave:** Crisis totales, Previsión, Gestión de riesgos, Pensamiento estratégico, Seguridad Global, Administración Pública

## 风险、混乱和复原力 面对全危机：预言者、国家以及对等国

### 摘要

《风险、混乱和复原力一面对全危机：预言者、国家以及对等国》一文分析了威胁的预防和研究。自冷战结束以来，我们确实目睹了威胁和危险的变化，正如通常的研究框架所分析的那样。因此，在面临这些威胁时革新战略思维是必要的。代表全球安全这一概念的新思维正在出现。其有别于行政部门，后者没有预测能力且往往仅以回溯的方式进行分析。当前的卫生危机因此强调了这一预测能力的缺失，其特征是缺乏沟通，无法控制巨大的假新闻传播，并削弱了国家与人民之间的社会信任关系。采取行动一事已遭遇困难。国家必须拥有预测能力并能响应和预防。

关键词：全危机（total crises），预测，风险管理，战略思维，全球安全，公共行政

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Forecasters and their errors, as well as “doomsayers,” are often mocked or even singled out when they fail to anticipate a dramatic event. Those who make a profession of retrospective analysis, which is far less dangerous for reputations, more or less deride the Cassandras and other *pythias*.

In Greek mythology, Cassandra is the daughter of the king of Troy, Priam, and Hecuba. She was given the gift of predicting the future by Apollo. She rejected him and the god decreed that no one would believe her predictions, even though they were correct.

After each disaster or tragedy, a commission of enquiry, whether public or less visible, analyzes the reasons for the incident. It usually begins its report by listing all the clues that should have aroused the interest of the states or those responsible for the sector concerned.

Although mistakes are not unavoidable, it is nevertheless up to researchers to continue developing mechanisms for anticipating crises and threats in order to try to prevent and avoid having to resolve them.

In an agitated and unpredictable world, the renovation of strategic thinking supported by a flexible early warning tool remains crucial. Since the end of the Cold War, terrorism and organized crime have mutated. They globalized and hybridized in ways that take these two increasingly interdependent actors far beyond the static and retrospective framework in which they were studied in the past.

A new strategic thinking, irrigated by the concept of “global security,” has integrated national defense, public security, corporate protection, and environmental security. The health dimension can undoubtedly be added to this list.

In 2010, the instrument for the renovation of French strategic thinking attempted to emerge in the form of a Conseil Supérieur de la Formation et de la Recherche Stratégiques. The main part of this structure is now hosted by the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, thanks to the proactive action of the Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale and the general administration of the CNAM.

In Europe, the United States, Russia, China, and India, the urgency of rebuilding strategic thinking has become even more pressing in the face of the need to modernize state security and defense structures and to clarify their content and missions.

The transition from the Cold War to a “hot” peace, characterized by a multiplication of destabilization operations, notably on social networks, but also in the form of threats, poisonings, kidnappings, or assassinations, is gradually forcing us to wake up from a strategic siesta marked by the illusions of the post-Berlin Wall era. After ten years of uncertainty, Russia has taken stock of an attempt to open up that was marked by a bloodletting, for which it blames the West. And China has understood that it is better to play aggressive in order to preserve its model. Empires have awakened, under the watchful but equally firm stare of the Turkish and Indian powers.

Most democratic states no longer have a structured and active strategic thinking to deal with these upheavals, despite their considerable potential.

Nonetheless, recent developments have shown that concepts cannot remain static in the face of evolving and interrelated threats. Ensuring States' security and defense requires perceiving and understanding dangers and risks.

Yet, as introduced, central or federal administrations are almost devoid of the necessary tools to understand, analyze and deal with what is currently referred to as "global security." Because of their tendency to analyze retroactively, these agencies are more able to react to the previous war than to anticipate the next one. One moves rather quickly from the Azincourt syndrome to the disaster of the Maginot Line.

A number of brilliant but isolated minds are corseted in a bureaucratic environment that slows down innovation at best and stalls it at worst.

The 2020/2021 crisis, which follows the 2010 H1N1 crisis by barely a decade and its 1918 genesis (the Kansas "Spanish" flu) by a century, has made it possible to perceive its outlines and issues.

*Krisis*, the Greek basis of the word crisis, does not only relate to health. Its etymology refers to distinguishing, choosing, separating, or deciding—in short, to judging. Latin transposes the term to the medical field. The word seems to have been invented to analyze the relationship between a pandemic and the state that was to combat it.

In France, the relationship between the State and the Nation is very special. While in most countries the Nation was the driving force behind the creation of the State, in France the opposite seems much more likely.

Our history is rich in great political leaders and their Palace Mayors, *Mis-si Dominici*, Imperial Commissioners, Prefects, who structured a powerful and dominant central state, wavering between the heaviness of its millennial past and the excitement of its young conquerors. Aware of the risk of disintegration of a diverse and multilingual country with many traditions and a wide range of religions, politically astute leaders and brilliant administrators joined forces. With patience and determination, they built a state that is now called "deep state."

Alas, this evil hidden ghost that would block any evolution or reform is no more. It is structurally buried in a bureaucratic and accounting gangue, which it has patiently helped to build and which has literally submerged it. Today, it seems to be on life support.

Until now, for each major crisis, a savior or an icon has miraculously emerged from the people or the elite: Charlemagne, Louis XI, Joan of Arc, Henri IV, Bonaparte . . . The deficiency of politics was saved by the genius of the military (De Gaulle), Sully, Colbert, or Pompidou taking care of economic, financial, or industrial aspects. Everyone will add to this list his favorite heroes or heroines.

The COVID crisis was a grim revelation of this situation. While doctors and

politicians were slowly shifting from skepticism to panic mode, exposing ten years of dismantling of the public hospital, the media, disoriented and overwhelmed by the magnitude of an event that is nevertheless recurrent in the history of the world, trapped in the moment, disturbed by the absence of consensus in the small world of media experts and TV sets' "experts of everything," contributed largely to the dissemination of the original sin of this crisis: the lie by ignorance or omission, much more than by manipulation

Political communication was ridiculed, both on the issue of masks and tests, and on the high-profile transfers between hospitals or the culpable ignorance of the capacities of the private hospital sector and especially of laboratories.

However, until 2016, France had a remarkable tool for pandemic prevention, the establishment for the preparation and response to health emergencies (EPRUS). The country also had a stockpile of life-saving masks it could have mobilized without closing the country's borders. Political leaders, e.g., parliamentarians, deputies and senators, experts and scientific actors, public administrators and government officials, from the President to the Ministers concerned, had done their job well in investigating, preparing, and informing the population on virus prevention.

Alas, others, curiously aided by the atony of the supervisory administrations, have since taken ten years to deconstruct with determination what could undoubtedly have prevented this major crisis. Other states have also decided on the "zero Covid" option rather than choosing to live with it.

It was the honor of the highest officers of the State to impose the sense of a necessary continuity on policies such as major industrial programs, the creation of national champions or building a sense of the future and its challenges and actors. For a long time, our leaders invested in a future called Ariane, Airbus, Renault-Nissan, Sanofi, Veolia, Total, etc.

The problem is that the industrial sector has been largely sacrificed to globalization, characterized by the relocation of commercial giants and the privatizations of the 1980s, but also by the lure of stock options, the often-incestuous relationships that have slowly but strongly developed with uprooted investment funds. These different dynamics changed the nature of patrimonial capitalism to transform it into a pure speculative tool in high frequency in the long term. The "Holy Alliance" between the State and the Capital, which had strengthened the country, was seriously handicapped by this competition of allegiances.

Worse still, many training structures, particularly academic ones, continued to form and train graduates that had succeeded in developing start-ups or headed companies that managed to develop effective vaccines in a short time outside France. This has not been the case for the French national champion.

The health crisis has thus revealed a clueless and immobilized State, paradoxically unable to restore confidence in communication, a tool that generally survives when all else seems lost.

In failing to take responsibility for their own redemption after their risky statements, which are the joy of retrospectives on social networks, politicians, but also permanent guests on 24-hour news channels, have created and spread a crisis of truth that initially only affected the political and media world. This phenomenon has also spread to the scientific sphere, posing a crucial problem of social trust between the population and these spheres.

In 1919, Jacques Bainville foresaw the coming crises by indicating what the effects of the signed peace agreements would be in “*Les conséquences politiques de la Paix*.” History proved him right. In 1946, posthumously, Marc Bloch’s “*L’étrange défaite*” (The Strange Defeat) was the autopsy of a methodically constructed disaster. Replacing “military” with “sanitary” would almost be enough to republish this work in 2022 to methodically analyze the erratic management of this COVID crisis.

Michel Rocard rightly explained that the State was not designed to produce, but to control. Misunderstanding or bypassing the instruction, the administration decided that it was to produce and that the rest would regulate itself naturally.

The State was unable to manage the crisis, but the Nation’s “System D” made it possible to survive it.

Still, civil servants, entrepreneurs, and elected officials capable to re-establish a democratic and solidarity-based state, with order and fraternity, are still present everywhere.

Unfortunately, the current situation remains worrying: lack of capacity for prospective analysis on the part of administrations, poorly-funded university research, *almost* non-existent relations between central administration operators, universities or even economic circles, deficient information sharing, few shared priorities and therefore few precise and lasting common objectives between private and public actors, scattered strategic information, lack of evaluation and synthesis of studies, reluctance to identify real security and defense sectors, etc. Admittedly, notable progress and salutary reactions have been made, but they are still too isolated. In adversity, the national genius is more often revealed through coercion and pressure than through preventive but unheard speeches.

Training in anti-terrorism, intelligence analysis and the reactive effect of attacks claimed or assumed by the Islamic State exist in France. The dimension of New Risks has been anticipated, that of industrial and food sovereignty, and the challenges of controlling R & D discoveries have been reactivated. One can say that sovereignty is back.

In a chaotic and fragmented world, reacting is already being late. A strategic nation must constantly be able to foresee, anticipate, avoid, and prevent. This new agility obligation requires that the nation, in all of its components (the State, the world of research, the economy), be warned *in time*.

Commercial and financial liberalization, technological innovation and the development of communications are creating interdependencies. These different dynamics constitute a new geography of real and virtual territories organized around *megacities*, *clusters*, and communities. At the same time, they are also creating excluded people for whom globalization increases dispossession and powerlessness.

These discrepancies in development are conducive to dangers such as riots, economic migration, political instability, local conflicts over the sharing of resources, identity or religious claims and, above all, the uncontrollable development of a real criminal economy. Thus, by interweaving interests at a distance and initially limiting tensions at the global level, globalization has been able to reinforce these threats at other levels.

The new geostrategic tensions, the effects of the post-Berlin Wall “thaw,” the appearance of new actors and the reappearance of old Empires, the revenge/vengeance of borders, nations, tribes, and religions, are sending us back to a decomposed past that we had wanted to forget as if it had never existed. Our amnesias seem to damage us much more than our blindness.

Crime itself has become a major player on the international scene, an economic and military operator, ultimately a danger to states and democracies. Crime operates on the model of the advanced liberal enterprise, for example through vertical and horizontal integration, the development of catchment areas, the introduction of new products, investment in R&D, and even the introduction of incentives for staff. Only the management of competition seems a little more definitive than elsewhere. Also, the use of the virtual world makes organized crime even more transnational, freeing it from the constraints of border crossing or ransom delivery.

The cyber virus has spread rapidly, combining purely financial operations with political manipulation. Indeed, among its aberrations we find the dissemination of alternative truths, “fake news” (while waiting for the much more dangerous Deep Fake), but also the “Trollisation” of the Internet space, marked by the creation of an immense outlet for hatred and anger, a sort of “Rageosphere”<sup>1</sup> unprecedented in its power. This space is defined by its cumulative capacity for action, the lack of control over impulses and the absence of accountability of the users.

In addition, and on a more worrying level, different elements could together or separately lead to major explosions. For example, an uncontrolled military escalation from a local conflict, the search for a diversion from internal tensions

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<sup>1</sup> Notion developed by the author that could be literally translated as “rage-sphere.”



in an external adventure, the exact or false perception of a decisive technological advantage, a cyber-attack under false pretenses, etc.

The reflection process is almost clinical: a shared diagnosis (the least successful stage to date), a discussed prognosis and an affirmed therapy.

This is indeed a real Cassandra's work. Analysts of the future will long be astonished by our difficulty in anticipating crises that have been written down, dramas that have been announced, and attacks that have been proclaimed.

Those who did not want to read *Mein Kampf*, those who did not translate the Declaration of War to America, those who did not want to read the terrorist propaganda, those who did not analyze the risk posed by cyberspace without its guidelines, can still be surprised by events. But there are few that could not be predicted.

As the master of criminologists, Sherlock Holmes, reminded us: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

This concludes the eleven meetings of the Professors of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers with ALLIANZ within the framework of the New Risks Chair created in 2019 and which continues its journey of enlightenment, exchanges, and dialogues.

The New Risks 2021 annual report will include most of the contributions in the fall of 2021.