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Prediction in Security Theory and Policy

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(Abstract)

Expressed in religious writings, non-religious prophecies, legends, stories and more or less rational considerations, the desire to know the future and eventually to possess capabilities to influence the future course of events has been always one of fundamental human needs resulting from the survival imperative.

Undertaking any kind of actions the humans face a dramatic dichotomy. On the one hand, each action always has to be planned, at least to some extent, thus necessity of having some ideas about the future is essential. On the other, the future by definition remains unknown and the only way to predict what will happen is to better understand the limits of prediction.

History of science is the history of human efforts to learn from the past and to test whether that knowledge could help in making more plausible expectations towards the future. This approach is especially important in any action-oriented social science – economics, management and particularly, due to the stakes involved, in any security-oriented considerations.

It may be even asserted that in all considerations on security, be it international or internal, even in the recently dominating “securitization” approach two elements are crucial - prediction of threats (risk, dangers, disturbances) and designing of actions necessary to respond to those threats.

Focusing attention of widened and deepened understanding concept of security associated with international relations, it could be observed that in the recent years, after a kind of “prediction failure” experienced after an unexpected and unpredicted collapse of the Soviet empire, less attention has been paid to “technical”, policy oriented considerations on security, including prediction of threats. Instead, stress has been put on more doctrinal considerations like, security for whom, how and according to which norms. The fundamental question: “**What security is about?**” seemed to be somehow lost from the sight. However, it must be also acknowledged that newly emerging security challenges in the “complex world”, including environmental security and threats of terrorism, have again forced scholars and policy makers to pay attention to prediction, sometimes with the use of sophisticated methods, like, for example, computer modelling of cognitive and decision-making processes by would-be-terrorists.

The aim of the paper, which is a part of broader research and book projects undertaken within AFES-PRESS research programme, is to provide a survey of most important challenges associated with prediction and risk in contemporary security theory and policy. Due to the deepening and widening of security, the survey also refers to the

fundamental problems of prediction taken from mathematics and physics as well as from economics and other social sciences. An attempt is also made to provide an answer to the question if contemporary security theory can provide better instruments of prediction in a “complex world”, or on contrary, in spite of development of new methods and lessons taken from the past, capabilities of prediction of modern security theory have decreased. That would mean that security policy in a contemporary, multi-polar, or specifically uni-polar world is facing greater challenges than in the period of bipolarity.

In addition to prediction, special attention is given a thorough analysis of the meaning of such terms as predictability, unpredictability, predictive power, certainty and uncertainty since in many instances the definitions of those notions are neglected and they are applied without deeper reflection on their meaning, almost like a kind of “buzzwords”. Such an approach unacceptable in rigorous research could be even counterproductive in policy making and in the process of societal communication.

OUTLINE

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