

Shaping the future of AI to remain in control of our destiny

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The recent world's largest gathering of futurists – Dubai Future Forum (DFF) was a unique and important conference at the time when the world is focused on turbulent events taking place right now. The importance of that conference lies primarily in sketching out a *preferred* direction for our civilisational progress by indicating potential existential risks that lie ahead. That is an essential first step. The question is what should follow the rich output of the Conference at the next DFF planned for November 2023. In our view, *the following Conferences should primarily focus on how to **shape** the future* by presenting various, ideally interconnected, long-term programmes, which would minimize the existential risks. The main conclusion which might be drawn from this year's Conference is that to minimize existential threats, which humanity may have to face, we must *simultaneously* make fundamental reforms in several areas, broadly corresponding with existential risks.

There are at least 10 man-made existential threats, such as a global nuclear war or pandemic, which incidentally may materialize at any time. However, at least three of them are developing progressively and may coincidentally reach their tipping point together by about 2030, beyond which it may be impossible to control them. These are:

- **Artificial Intelligence** – its continuous self-improvement may be beyond human control leading to unleashing a potentially evil Superintelligence and the extinction of a human species in a few decades
- **Global warming** - exceeding 1.5C average temperature increase may be unstoppable, potentially ending most biological life by the end of the next century
- **Global Disorder** – set off by **global migration** (draught-originated famine, poverty and local wars). If it is combined with other risks, such as the fall of democratic systems, it may become an existential threat.

The probability of all these three threats materializing by 2030 has now increased significantly, because for the last few years the pace of change has become nearly exponential. Such pace of change is unnatural for humans and that's why it may be difficult to notice that what once took a decade, takes just a year now in many areas, such as medicine, communications, or culture. The difficulty of fighting existential risks is further increased if we consider that most politicians, governments, the media, and even scientists behave like the pace of change had been linear. That lack of understanding of the impact of the increase of pace of change will make fighting future disasters much more difficult since the required resources and countermeasures may not be realized on time.

The first, gravest and imminent existential threat, and where the change is fastest, is **Artificial Intelligence** (AI). But there is hardly any international action addressing that urgent problem. Instead of serious discussions on the consequences of losing control over self-learning AI, conferences on AI are concerned with relatively trivial aspects of AI control, such as the erosion of our privacy, and instead focus on AI benefits. When we lose control over AI, quite likely by about 2030, it will be AI's tipping point, impacting all countries in all areas. Thus, any long-term planning should take this into account. The only way to delay that moment is to implement a global control over AI. This subject is fully explored in the article [‘Taking control over AI before it starts controlling us’](#).

The second threat is **Global warming**. Most scientists agree, which was also confirmed by the COP26 Glasgow conference, that the tipping point of the global temperature increase of 1.5C may be reached by 2030, if by then sufficient measures have not been implemented. Failing to deal with climate change properly will determine to a large degree the quality of our lives. Directly we may initially only feel discomfort, but gradually the climate change will become life threatening. Indirectly, and much sooner, it may turn into a powerful trigger for other existential risks, such as massive migration, wars, or pandemic, all leading to a global destabilization of political, military, economic and social balance. It seems that it is already too late for the current actions, including an imaginative EU's climate change budget, to halt the temperature increase by 2030. The only feasible way might be to start an urgent geo-engineering reset of the planet's climate, using temporarily the least environmentally damaging measures (and there are over 100 of them). So, we still have some control over the climate change till the end of this decade. If we fail, the planet may become uninhabitable for humans by the end of this century.

Global Disorder is the third such a progressive risk, which may lead to a catastrophic civilisational threat. Its tipping point is indirectly indicated by the UN Millennium Project. It sets 2030 as the date by which 17 global sustainability goals must be achieved if we are to avoid an existential threat, primarily in the developing countries. Although initially the threat may be concentrated there, it is likely to spill over to developed countries through uncontrolled large-scale migration. People facing death from famine will be determined to cross borders, frequently using violent means, and creating a global chaos. Stopping massive migration by building a 7m wall between Mexico and the United States, which Donald Trump has initiated, will not resolve the long-term problem. Neither will an ad hoc humanitarian aid. In the long-term the increase of the global temperature and the disruption of global economics, e.g., because of change of trade with Russia and China, will make poor countries even poorer and more unstable than ever before.

The only solution is a rapid continuous transfer of wealth from richer to poor countries, to build the required infrastructure and economy in developing countries, especially affected by drought. To have a long-term effect, such help must be provided by supporting these countries' own economy, education, health care, infrastructure projects, and building more just and equal societies there. Currently, most significant material help is provided by the Official Development Assistance (ODA) managed by OECD. It distributes annually around \$170bn of financial help from about 30 OECD and about 20 non-OECD countries, based on UN-proposed 0.7% GDP contribution. The scale of that aid, although desperately needed, e.g., in health, is far inadequate to the needs. To make a real difference a new fund should be set up, perhaps such as I have proposed, the **Global Wealth Redistribution Fund (GWRP)**. It would operate on the principles, similar to the EU's Cohesion Fund. You can download a full proposal from Sustensis website: <https://sustensis.co.uk/global-wealth-redistribution-fund/>.

But to prevent a Global Disorder, we also need a deep reform of democracy, which should help create, if not a real, then a de facto World Government. We could not have better evidence of democracy being on its knees than the current political crisis in Britain and the US under Trump. Such a deviation from democratic roots was only possible because in a representational democracy voters control their representatives for just one day – the day of the elections. This is exacerbated by a system, in which MPs in many countries are being re-elected for the duration of their political career. It is most prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon countries with the First Past The Post electoral system. In such systems, the winner takes it all, and the rights of the minority are almost completely ignored, unlike in a proportional system with coalition governments.

Therefore, one of the key aspects of a new democratic system must be the merger of representational and direct democracy. That may be achieved by giving randomly selected citizens the power of controlling the elected representatives on the most important decisions throughout the whole term of the parliament by creating a semi-permanent Citizens' Senate. The article on this subject can be downloaded here: <https://sustensis.co.uk/citizens-senate-2/> .

To fight global existential risks such as the emergence of a hostile Superintelligence, conferences such as DFF should go beyond just presenting them. Ideally, they should help set up concrete global long-term programmes, like the UN's Millennium project, thus **shaping the future**, rather than just identifying the likely direction, in which current political or technological trends will unfold. Therefore, the participation of the representatives of major global organizations, such as the UN, EU, OECD, IMF or World Bank is essential. The objective for such organizations should be to identify the programmes presented at those conferences, which they believe they would be best suited to be delivered in the fastest and most effective way. At the same time, we should remember that we don't have a decade for such programmes to start. In the world of exponential pace of change it should take no more than just a year. It may sound unreal, but to maintain the control of our destiny in our hands we must start and operate such initiatives in an entirely different way, if they are to have any effect.

About the Authors

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