

What next for DFF? Shaping the future to remain in control of our destiny

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Dubai Future Forum (DFF) was a unique and important conference organized at the time when the world is focused on turbulent events in Ukraine. Most of us have already shared their impressions and comments on DFF on the Millennium Project WhatsApp group. But nearly a month after the Conference it may be worthwhile to think about the next year DFF's scope and direction. This year's conference was mainly sketching out a *preferred* pathway for our civilisational progress to avoid potential existential risks that lie ahead. Since it was the first such conference it was perhaps an essential initial step. But the next year's Conference should be more about action than analysis. Thus, *it should focus on how to **shape** the future* by being a catalyst in setting up concrete, ideally interconnected, long-term programmes, which would minimize existential risks.

One of the conclusions I would draw from this year's Conference is that to minimize existential threats, the world must *simultaneously* take urgent action in several areas, broadly corresponding to existential risks. There are about 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 progressive 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 this century
- **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 a **global migration** (draught-originated famine, poverty, and local wars). If 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. Therefore, the lack of understanding of the impact of the increased pace of change will make fighting future disasters much more difficult since the required resources and countermeasures may not be realized on time. So, perhaps these three areas should become the scope of the next year's DFF, dedicating most time to AI.

Losing control over AI is the gravest and imminent existential threat. Therefore, perhaps this should be the focus of the Conference, since there is hardly any meaningful action addressing that problem. Instead of serious discussions on the consequences of losing control over self-learning AI, conferences on AI prefer to focus on benefits, and are only concerned with relatively trivial aspects of AI control, like the erosion of privacy. However, when we lose control over AI, quite likely by about 2030, it will be the 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. I have covered it in the article '*How to manage AI development before it gets out of human control*': (<https://sustensis.co.uk/will-2030-be-a-tipping-point-for-artificial-intelligence-control/>).

The second stream of the Conference might be **Global warming but focusing on societal rather than scientific aspects**. COP26 conference in Glasgow confirmed that the tipping point of Global Warming will be reached by 2030 if the global temperature increases above 1.5C. 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. 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 may be the third stream of the next year's DFF. This progressive risk may lead to a catastrophic civilisational threat. Its tipping point is indirectly indicated by the UN' Sustainable Development Goals programme. It sets **2030 as the date by which 17 global sustainability goals must be achieved if we are to avoid an existential threat**. Although initially the threat may be concentrated in the developing countries, 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 the **Global Wealth Redistribution Fund (GWRF)**, fully described on the Sustensis website: <https://sustensis.co.uk/global-wealth-redistribution-fund/>. It would operate on the principles, similar to the EU's Cohesion Fund. Dubai could become an ideal place for operating GWRF.

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 (download the article here: <https://sustensis.co.uk/citizens-senate-2/>). The politics of the future may be a background theme of all DFF streams.

To fight global existential risks such as the emergence of a hostile Superintelligence, the next year's DFF should go beyond just presenting them. Ideally, it should become a co-ordinating place for starting concrete global long-term programmes, like the UN's Millennium project. Thus, it would help **shape the future**, rather than just identify 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 in the next year's DFF. The objective for such organizations should be to identify the programmes presented at the Conference, which they could deliver 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 we have done it before – the UN was created in two years, NATO in just one year because of civilisational threats. We live in such dire times now. Therefore, to maintain the control of our destiny in our hands we must deliver such initiatives very fast and in an entirely different way, if they are to have any effect.

About the Author

I am a futurist, a member of the Chatham House and the Managing Partner of Sustensis, London a Think Tank focused on Humanity's transition to coexistence with Superintelligence (www.sustensis.co.uk). Some of the ideas I have raised above, have been presented in his my books of the 'Posthumans' series: "Federate to Survive!", "Democracy for a Human Federation", and the latest one – "Becoming a Butterfly".