

Misjudgments as a matter of Life

A Global Conversation with Massimo Ambrosetti

On 19th October 2016, we had the privilege of welcoming an authoritative speaker to address a Global Conversation on “security challenges in times of transformational change”: Massimo Ambrosetti, Minister Plenipotentiary of Italian Foreign Service. Among his main activities it stands out his role in the Embassy of Italy in Beijing, and his role as the diplomatic permanent representative of Italy at NATO placed in Bruxelles.

The conversation focused on topics ranging from the global challenge in the cyber world to NATO security strategy and defense policy, with specific references to issues deriving from the Arab Spring and ISIS threat.

The World is facing a dramatic transformation, leading to a general shift of governments’ priorities in order to face the new challenges of the millennium. The currently perspective of any field of studies quickly evolves at a very big rate. Cities are impressively enlarging; everyday new engineering techs are being employed in infrastructures building or in cars production; agriculture is developing new farming methods in order to cope with the climate change; even the way we eat is changing as such as fast foods are becoming the world food sale leaders. Technology, climate, economics, religion and immigration were reshaped in the last half of the century becoming scenarios that we will face and cope with in a very restricted time. And for clear reasons, as all the things belonging to this planet, security is respectively changing in the same way.

Security challenges are in a sort of renovation phase, which leaves governments in a deadlock moment: we just don’t know yet how to deal with new possible attacks. Technological and cyber progression has brought many new threats to everyday life. For a reason or another we underestimated major cyber attacks as such. Hackers developed very big power and weight in the last few decades; and it’s important not to forget that a huge scale cyber attack would probably be more dangerous than any attack we already knew and faced.

The reason of the deadlock moment we are living in could be simply explained by a general governmental incapacity to cope with new claims and threats. However, if we looked at the problem from a wider perspective, we would focus more on the reasons why these governments hadn’t predicted such claims and threats. But let’s make an example to clear the matter up. Isis or Daesh or Isil are all different ways to name the so called Islamic State. We could write pages and pages about their “alternative” violent and primitive methods, but it wouldn’t really go to the point. Here the point is not how dangerous this group actually is, it is not how easily Isis scared the entire European countries. All is about how quick and why IS suddenly grew, as if it came from the middle of nowhere. Of course this threat is not the first one which ever existed or the last one to die, so why was Isis created? Experts would almost undoubtedly say that the Iraq war had its part in the matter. It seems as if we, instead of trying to solve issues, created them in advance.

Saying that all these issues were caused by several government misjudgments would not be enough. Didn’t they know what they were doing? I bet there are plenty of people who would answer with a very heart-felt “no”. (Eventually, if we carefully think about it, how is it possible that the most important and powerful countries of the world made such a stupid mistake as simple misjudgment? The correlation is not so strong, still since we haven’t enough evidences to provide another theory, we will consider misjudgment as the truth.)

The same happened during the Arab Spring (2010-2012): there was a positive message to be carried at the beginning, though at the end it came out that it was a complete failure again. Here, as in many occasions of the past, the idea of a possible democracy to be exported to countries that never had it before eventually resulted in a total collapse. Governments didn’t take into account the problems and the complexity of the areas involved in the civil war.

Still someone could say: where was Nato when the Iraq war started? Where was Nato during the Arab Spring and the invasion of Libia? Here too the issue is very wide and complicated. For in-

stance, In the case of Crimea war, Nato took the decision of non intervention even if Russia behaved aggressively against a state, without any consensus of the Security Council. However, it is also true that Nato approach towards Russia couldn't be similar to the one they had during the Cold war: that was a completely different world, politically and economically talking: looking at the past would surely have been the wrong method.

Nato policy radically changed in the past decades, trying to fit with the world of the globalization. Even though there still exist lots of controversial situations, we live in a world that is moving much faster than we thought. Governments, Nato, industries: they should all look at the future to be ready to face new challenges, attacks, economic crisis and potential wars, though they should not forget the past to learn from their mistakes. The world is changing, threats are evolving, security matters must develop, our approach must change.

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