

# The Changes in International Politics Since 9/11

## Re-conceptualization of states' role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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*Published: James W. Peterson; Lee M. Allen; Nolan J. Argyle eds, The Changes in International Politics since 9/11: Reconceptualization of States' Role in the Twenty-First Century Atlanta (GA): Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2012. pp. 381-398.*

### Introduction

The international politics is obviously more complex than two decades ago. The simultaneous terrorist attacks, however, marked a cornerstone in the international relations, they did not change the foundations. On the other hand, 9/11 also designated a qualitatively new context. The attacks reminded us very bitterly on processes and their consequences which began with the erosion of the bipolar world. By and large, it is true that the September of 2001 changed international politics, but it was rather a change of system regarding our perceptions. The real change happened on 11/9 when the Berlin Wall fell down.

Consequently, it is a common sense today that the actors of international relations have had to face a qualitatively new context after the end of Cold War. The events of the last 20 years have revealed the fact that the security architecture – which is characterized by the institutions that were built up according to the political realities of the Cold War – is out-of-date. Simultaneously, the state-centered Westphalian system lost its credit, since new non-state actors emerged on the scene of international relations. Thus, we could ask provocatively whether the international system is in crisis or only the Western style of statehood. If we analyze the history we discover the otherwise not surprising fact that the exception is rather the “Western state” than the failed one.

Due to the ideological antagonism, the Cold War hindered deeper understanding of causes and consequences of changes in international politics, such as the emergence of non-state actors, the melting border between domestic and foreign policy and the failure of states in performing a sufficient role in international or domestic politics. If we would like to identify the ultimate challenge of the 21st century we will be not able to name a single phenomenon, actor or threat. The media covers only the spectacular events from the international politics, thus we can easily think that terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or international criminal activities are isolated events or phenomena. However, we have to admit that the root of all challenges lies in the changed conditions for development. The states are prone to fail and state failure is a development trap from which the country cannot escape from itself. Consequently, the ultimate challenge of the 21st

century is the complex constellation of state failure which gives floor to negative spillover of new threats.

At the same time, we also have to admit that any reaction of the international community presupposes a political decision. The decision makers, however, need clear advice. For instance, today, almost ten years in Afghanistan or eight years in Iraq we can feel some apathy on the level of decision makers, especially in Europe. It is reasonable but definitely wrong attitude. It is understandable that a politician sees the problem of state failure and statebuilding as a too complex puzzle which cannot be solved. Id est, it makes no sense to sacrifice time, money or the lives of the people involved in the reconstruction process. On the other hand, a politician may feel a moral duty to help people living under inhuman conditions, or may understand the security threat of untreated state failure. In conclusion, we need a new understanding of the complex changes in international politics of our century.

### **The world today and failure of the states**

The large scale system changes at the end of the Cold War in Central and Eastern Europe strengthened the hope for the final victory of democracy and free market. General thoughts on unstoppable and worldwide spread of liberal democracy were fed by several favorable factors: broke up of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the socialist block; changed world order from a bipolar to a unipolar world. Popular theories<sup>1</sup> were born on prospects of future and on explanation of the international politics' transformation process. The "third wave of democratization" spilled over to the former socialist block and liberal democracy had no real opposing ideological alternative. Later on, during the 1990s the "end of history"<sup>2</sup> and the "third wave of democratization"<sup>3</sup> met in the process of globalization. On the other hand, several problems of the "third wave" revealed after the first flames of "democratic euphoria" in the 1990s. Let alone the fact, that "the end of history" has been questioned by the fundamental ideology of Islam radicalism, everyday problems of emerging democracies gave new fuel to academic debates on the characteristics of democratic transition of international politics.

Despite of several narratives, such as Robert Kaplan's theory on "The coming anarchy"<sup>4</sup>, today's international order is still based on states. However, it has become obvious in 2001 that this international order is anachronistic and cannot manage the new challenges of the 21st century. The supremacy of states is also supported by the fact that the international law recognizes only a state as the subject of the international politics. This is in line with the general realist view, namely, that states, which strive to maximize their security and power, are the most important players of the anarchic international order. Consequently, the natural

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance the debated theories of Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington. Fukuyama, Francis, 1993. *The End of History and the Last Man*. London: Harper Perennial; Huntington, Samuel P., 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster

<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama, Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Huntington, Samuel P., 1993. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press

<sup>4</sup> Kaplan, Robert D., 1994. The Coming Anarchy. *The Atlantic Online*, February. URL: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/4670/> (Accessed: March 12, 2011)

outcome of the international system is the permanent ambiguity and conflict because all the states aim at strengthening their own security which in turn decreases the perception about security of other states.

However, it is beyond doubt that the new challenges called attention to the necessity to review the role of states, they are still the central category of international politics. Only the states are able to provide security and prosperity for the people living on the respective designated. States still possess the political, economic and societal functions which cannot be taken over by any of the other agents of the international system.

The state in general is the “goodwill reality” behind the institutions that maintain the frame for governance. The state is simultaneously a power structure, as Max Weber<sup>5</sup> defined, and the rule of law that maintains order through monopolizing the legitimate use of force. The state has several functions since the birth of monarchical powers, such as maintaining defense, leading foreign affairs, law enforcement, legislation, judiciary, taxation and coinage, and improving infrastructure. In the modern era, the state functions and duties expanded to cover health care, education, urbanization, traffic, economic development and social policies, furthermore the preparation for the post-modern challenges, such as environmental protection.<sup>6</sup>

Statehood has undergone dramatic changes in the last two decades. The traditional system of nation states rooted in the Peace of Westphalia and the international make up after the Second World War has been based on the sovereignty and legal equality of the states. The failing of the nation-state is manifested in countries that proved to be unable to be member of the international community. This phenomenon is connected with another: “anarchy rules”, to say anarchy penetrated from the international level to the internal segment of the state. The new international environment called for different explanations. However, describing and explaining the new role of states in the frame of the new environment left space for new theories, too. In 2003 Robert Cooper in its book “Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the 21st Century”<sup>7</sup> convincingly illustrated the different worlds of states. Instead of using the phrase failed states, he introduced the expression premodern states to illustrate the problem of weak state performances. The premodern world is also integral part of the global structure of power. However, he assumes that the different worlds, premodern, modern and postmodern, represent different stages of development, which inherently refers to linear development. That is premodern states are only at a lower stage of development and they will move towards modernity in the future. Disorder and internal anarchy that is typical to premodern states stem from the inability of these states to maintain the monopoly of legal violence on the territory of the state. Cooper’s categorization resembles to the work of another distinguished European political scientist. Georg Sorensen<sup>8</sup> elaborated a typology that differentiates between the good and the bad performers. He labeled those states that are not able to execute some or all of their tasks, post-colonial states. Sorensen, however, does not speak about linear development.

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<sup>5</sup> The famous social scientist characterized the functioning of the state and the bureaucracy in more publications and monographs. See for instance: Weber, Max, 2006. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Paderborn: Voltmedia

<sup>6</sup> Kende, Péter, 2003. Politikai kultúra, civil társadalom, elit. In: Gyurgyák, János (ed.) *Mi a politika? Bevezetés a politika világába*. Budapest: Osiris

<sup>7</sup> Cooper, Robert, 2003. *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press

<sup>8</sup> Sorensen, Georg, 2001. *Changes in Statehood*. New York: Palgrave

Premodern states developed differently from the modern European nation-states. The common characteristic of post-colonial states is that they have heterogeneous society in terms of nationalities, ethnicities, religions or culture, and the population lives under the conditions of permanent insecurity caused by repression of patron-client network of the governing elite and/or by the groups that fight against it. The government in these states has no capacity or authority to make citizens follow the rules only by violent repression because of low legitimacy. The lost monopoly of violence adds to the “captured autonomy” of the government that goes hand in hand with weak administrative and institutional structures. “Captured autonomy” means in this sense that several destructive groups, exploiting the weak state capacities, appear on the territory but not under the jurisdiction of the state. The unfavorable conditions never allowed the emergence of cohesion inside of the society, and the predominance of local communities, like tribes, clans or families make the accommodation of societal conflicts even more difficult. The economy of such state, if it exists at all, is characterized by asymmetric dependence on the world market. Moreover, the structural heterogeneity of the economy has a negative effect on the prospects of future development. In our world, states face numerous challenges that question the existence of them, these challenges are the growing global network and influence of international organizations, internationally active civil society and transnational companies, the global economy and rules of the market. However, another commonly mentioned fact that the states are unable to prevent ethnic conflicts is rather the pro argument for the state, as the inability stems not from the state but from its absence or the lack of capacities. Robert Gilpin<sup>9</sup> points out that the existence of the state is in reality not in danger, because the consequences of globalization are exaggerated and we still live in a “state dominated world”. The globalization is limited in geographic scope and is different in certain areas of the economy. The real globalized world is limited to Europe, North America and Pacific Asia. Moreover, this world is globalized only in the sense that these states lost more sovereignty here, but mainly in the financial processes, as the cost of labor differs, so do the prices of goods, as well. However, the state loses its sovereignty in certain areas but gains new importance in others.

A new dilemma is whether the effects of globalization undermine the role of the state? It is a fact that on several domains the power of the state is shrinking, but it is growing significantly on other, such as organizing and enhancing research and development or increasing human capital. Despite of the fact that the globalization is more powerful process that a state could control, there is no evidence, as Stephen Krasner<sup>10</sup> pointed out that the role of the state is less important in development, and as such in addressing the challenges of the international politics. At the same time, globalization mean that the effects of failed state function, that is the lost of internal sovereignty, the entire world can suffer because of the consequences.

In a certain point of view, state failure even rooted in the bipolar opposition, which gave way to the paradox of decolonization. The anti-colonization policy of the United States, and on the other hand the forced spread of communist ideology by the Soviet Union in the

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<sup>9</sup> Gilpin, Robert, 2001. *Understanding Global Political Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

<sup>10</sup> Krasner, Stephen D., 2009. *Who Gets a State, and Why? The Relative Rules of Sovereignty*. URL: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64872/stephen-d-krasner/who-gets-a-state-and-why> (Accessed: May 21, 2009)

newly independent countries did not let too much space for managing weak statehood in the developing world. In general, after the end of the Cold War the Third World lost its strategic importance and the weak performing states lost their allies that had pumped untied money in the rotten systems. Soon, more or less stable dictatorships gave place for domestic anarchy in many parts of the world. The Hobbesian vision came true inside of the weak states. The consequences of neglected problems are widely known today State failure as a part of new researches with academic exigent is to be connected with the study of Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner<sup>11</sup> on the pages of *Foreign Policy* in January 1993, and with the volume edited by William Zartman in 1995<sup>12</sup>. The shift from the humanitarian towards a more foreign policy oriented approach was forced by September 11 that shocked the world, and more importantly woke up the world's alone superpower from its strategic slumber. The events finally called the attention of the foreign policy makers and researchers to the external consequences of state failure.

### **Are states able to address the challenges of the 21st century?**

Problems of internal and external problems became inextricably intertwined in the 21st century. Authority of a state refers to the framework and means of the state which secure stable and reliable life prospects for the population. The problem is when it fails to fulfill this role, and the internationally recognized government loses the control over its internationally recognized territory. In this case the state fails its primary function: sovereignty. "Cooperative sovereignty" according to Peter Marton's explanation<sup>13</sup> means that each state is responsible for the control over its sovereign portion of world's territory. In our recent world the security of a state is deeply interconnected with the security of another, no matter how big is the difference between the two in terms of population, political and economic power. The state fails in this dimension when it is not able to satisfy the basic needs of the people on the territory of the state, and fails to control that territory letting way to the spillover of negative consequences of the failure. The world territory is a common good of the world's population, that is the states are only agent for controlling certain parts of it.

### **The "6 dimensions" model of risks and challenges in the 21st century**

In the 21st century, it is a naïve expectation that the challenges and risks can be separated from each other. The processes in the domestic and foreign sphere of the state are fundamentally interconnected and they influence each other. The last twenty years witnessed several attempts for summarizing the risks and challenges but the biggest obstacle has been the very nature of those in front of elaborating a coherent model. The risks and challenges which are facing a country in the 21st century can be divided in six categories. The analogy which is used in the alternative model is the solution methodology of the Rubik's cube. The

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<sup>11</sup> Helman, Gerald B. and Steven R. Ratner, 1993. Saving Failed States. *Foreign Policy*, issue 89, pp 3-18

<sup>12</sup> Zartman, I. William, 1995. Posing the Problem of the Failed States. *In: Zartman, I. William, ed., Collapsed State*. London: Lynne Rienner. pp 1-14

<sup>13</sup> Marton, Péter, 2008. Global Governance vs. State Failure. *Perspectives*, 16(1), pp 85-108

similarity is striking because the cube has been an exceptional tool for reconstructing the 3 dimensional reality by modeling how interconnected moves can be independent and how the later still influence other moves directly or indirectly. The six categories in the alternative model are the six faces of the cube. Consequently, the six categories seem to be independent, however any change in one face obviously determine the opportunity of the state in other categories managing the risks.

The first dimension in which we can characterize the changes of the international politics may seem the only important sector if we analyze the changes since 9/11. Nevertheless, the other dimensions all interact with this sector and we have to take all of them into account. The most important change of the last two decades of international politics is the fact that we are aware that processes on the international level are influenced by domestic issues, by the performance of the states, by economic processes, by the will of the globally and politically active society. The international conditions and the place of the state in the interdependent international system<sup>14</sup> penetrate in every aspect of international politics and the role of the states in it. The most important characteristics of the “new world” are that none of the states is able to manage the risks alone. The states are neither black boxes nor billiard balls which only interact on the state level. Interconnectedness refers to the situation in which the supra-state and sub-state processes are also present. None of the states are able to control all these processes and consequently the goal of the states should not be the total control of the external influences. The main aim of a state in the 21st century should be a more balanced development. In other words, interdependency is not malign and the end is not to alleviate the interdependent relations of the states. The development rather lays in the capacity of the state to decrease the negative asymmetry in the foreign relations. Obviously, there will be always states which are more vulnerable for foreign pressures and more sensible for changes in the international environment, as the global financial crisis of 2008 showed. However, external conditions create a narrower frame for the development of the state which always has to take into consideration them; apart from the negative spillover effects the dynamics of the international developments means simultaneous positive spillovers, as well.

However, the new technologies and the “googleized” societies are good soil for democratic changes we had to realize that the world has not become more democratic. New authoritarianism<sup>15</sup> represents a set of sophisticated illiberal policies that are contesting democracy in practical terms. The economic success of for instance China, Russia or Brazil and their complex integration in the world economy challenge the traditional assumptions on the nexus of democracy and economic development and the inevitability of fundamental political change. The new authoritarians can easily reshape the understanding of democracy in general terms by using the label “Western” in a negative tone. The more and more followers of such ideas especially in Latin America and Africa are receptive the new idea of “sovereign democracy”. The win-win trade and aid relations between the two groups, especially between China and Sub-Saharan countries, the no-strings-attached development aid, the popular principle of non-interference can create a new set of countries in the developing world which

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<sup>14</sup> Those who are interested more in the topic should see the seminal work of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. Keohane, Robert O., Nye, Joseph S., 2001. *Power and Interdependence*. London: Longman

<sup>15</sup> On the characteristics of the new authoritarian regimes see for instance the recent article of Ivo Krastev. Krastev, Ivo, 2011. Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), pp 5-16

are skeptic about the international efforts of complex statebuilding and democratic development. The new phenomenon is undercutting the democracy and human rights promotion efforts of the United Nations, the European Union or the United States.

The security concerns of a state and the traditional “high politics” represent the second dimension of the “cube”. Even if we accept the primacy of the security concerns we have to see clearly that the 21st century poses more complex challenges than a country could solve only in this sector. However, any deficiencies in this category are more visible and clearly directly influence other processes in the short term. Freedom from fear (i.e. security) is a basic human right<sup>16</sup> that guarantees the life without violence. Only the countries are able to survive and develop in the globalized world, which possess the techniques and facilities for the production of internationally competitive goods. Today this is really connected with the capital attracting capacity of the state. Hence that is an obvious fact that capital owners will usually not invest in an unstable environment. The monopoly of legitimate use of force and building secure environment for the future development is the most important factor and ability of a state to manage the risk which are facing it, because that both the local stakeholders and the foreign players need predictability. It presumes the functioning state and the trust of the people in the state institutions. The domestic situation and the security challenges change rapidly due to the interconnected dimensions, therefore states have to be dynamic and flexible in order to respond the challenges. Nevertheless, in the 21st century states are not able to exist in themselves and the picture is even more complex if we include the role that the international organizations in the analysis, mainly because of the institutional bureaucratic processes and the frequent disagreement among the members, are too rigid to react flexibly to the changing situations thus several requirements towards the member-states put those inside of a very narrow framework.

Being the third dimension, institutional questions significantly influence the ability of a state in addressing and managing the risks of the 21st century. All the authority, legitimacy and capacity lay clearly on the institutional architecture of the state and the institutions give the way how states are able to answer challenges, how vulnerable and sensible they are towards the side effects of globalization or how much they are able to exploit the given opportunities of the new, quicker and more interconnected world. The institutions that enjoy legitimacy among the people are the inevitable frame for the smooth and sustainable development of economy and society.

Similarly to the security concerns, the institutional risks and factors root rather in the characteristics and capacities of the states than in the role of other states. Corrupt elites, illegitimate state institutions, not transparent state-bureaucracy and the disappearance of state functions are threatening risks in themselves. However, it is true that the vacuum created by the incapacity of the states attracts other players, such as neighboring states, non-state actors, to fill this vacuum.

As the fourth dimension, economic factors and concerns represent a group of questions for the states which are significant how it can address the risks. The economy of the

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<sup>16</sup> There are many followers of the discourse which emphasizes the importance of rebuilding security and stability as the most important task in securing international relations. In our opinion, the famous work of Amitai Etzioni is the most comprehensive publication in this topic. Etzioni, Amitai, 2007. *Security First*. New Haven: Yale University Press

state is the sector where the necessary material and financial resources manifest. The sector has crucial significance on the capacity of the state and also influences its authority and legitimacy.

The economy has to serve the final goal of the state, namely creating and maintaining political stability, economic and social security and sustainable environment. Not the existence of a perfect national economy is the indicator, rather capacity to eliminate the existing burdens of long term economic development. The limit of development is not always the lack of necessary resources, rather the fact that the state is too weak to use these resources and reinvest into the development. In many cases the state does not even practice control over these resources letting the opportunity for alternative governance structures to have their own revenue sources. The absence of the state in this sector means that it is unable to alleviate the symptoms of chronic poverty which ends in even worse poverty and less opportunities for the future. Greed and grievance exist in functioning societies, as well. The main difference is that weak states do not have the institutionalized mechanisms for managing them by peaceful means. The experiences show clearly that the internal quality of the states and the status of economy in the international structures are interconnected. Interdependent international economic relations mean if a country closes the external borders of economy – such as Zimbabwe – it is harmful for either the given state or the sound functioning of the international economy. Nevertheless, it is true that the interdependency is not as vulnerable for the developed countries, but the solution is not de-linking, as has been suggested by the radical, neo-Marxist and new leftist streams of development economics, rather mitigation of the asymmetry. Asymmetric interdependence appears in almost every economic relation: international trade; relations in international capital ownership; international financial connections, especially in the debtor and donor relations; technology transfer; specialization and division of labor.

The society as the fifth dimension is the sector which mainly influences the legitimacy of the state. None of the states is able to manage the complex risks of the 21st century which cannot build a sound and healthy relationship with the society. One of the most significant risks in the changed international politics in the last decade is the mounting demographic pressure that states have to face with in most parts of the world.<sup>17</sup> None of the states can remain intact in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Developed countries have to deal with the aging population which will push the envelope of the economic tenability. On the other hand the developing world faces rather the quick tempo of overpopulation. Overpopulation also strengthens the antagonism of the societal cleavages and increases greed and grievance inside of the society.

The last dimension of the imagined cube is the domestic conditions inside a state. The domestic opportunities stem from the institutional, economic and social reality that is why the domestic dimension is more directly related to economy, society and the structure and effectiveness of the institutions. The most significant risk for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the domestic dimension is the survival of dictatorial rule. Even though we witnessed the “Arab spring” we still has to be critical with statements that the world is on a path of

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<sup>17</sup> The demographic pressure on the states and the international systems is one of the key factors of recent and more prominently future instability. The joint project of the Fund for Peace and the Foreign Policy magazine has summarized the problems related the states in the international politics each year since 2005. The Failed States Index 2010. *Foreign Policy*, URL: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/failedstates> (Accessed: March 12, 2011)



democratization. The attractiveness of the above mentioned “new authoritarianism” lays not only its real success in development policies, but in the complex features of the recipient states. The absence of horizontal and vertical accountability of the government or in general the state institutions, the repressive governmental policies, rampant corruption, that is weak statehood in general is a better soil for the less complex system of authoritarianism than democracy. However, weak statehood is a determinant factor of final failure even if the surface shows quick development in economic terms. The lack of built-in corrective mechanisms, such as free and fair competitive elections, rule of law, independent civil society, puts Damocles’ sword over the sustainability of any achievements and risks the smooth functionality of the international politics.

## **Conclusion**

International politics changed fundamentally after the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, furthermore, the simultaneous terrorist attacks on September 11 changed our perceptions how we have to interpret the interconnectedness of security threats. The last two decades can be also characterized by a dual process in the international politics. The Westphalian system based on the primacy of the nation-states is outdated and the globalization called the attention to new challenges. Despite of the fact that states cannot address the new challenges alone, the state is still the ultimate structure of politics and the relations among the states are the engine of international relations. Having in mind that, the analysis of the role of the states and their capacities in a multidimensional context can reveal a new side of the “new international context” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

According to mainstream examinations of the changes in international politics, we have to emphasize at least three conclusions. First, the society is more active politically than ever before, and global problems easier reach the threshold of action in the eyes of the people. Second, even though the new technologies gave birth to global processes on which the influence of states is limited, the states are still the frames of politics. Third, the border between the international and domestic conditions for political development is invisible. As a consequence of these developments, the analysis of six interconnected dimensions interprets the international politics in a different way. A change in one dimension definitely will lead to changes in other dimensions as well. We only have to look at North-Africa, as a recent example. The relative change in economic conditions created societal tensions which led to uprisings due to lack of strong domestic institutions. The uprising quickly influenced the whole neighborhood and also altered the course of the democratization and development programs of the European Union and the United States.

It is ever true that the world’s territory is the common good of humanity and the states are the final sources for maintaining that public good and in case there is a deficiency in any dimension which influence that capacity of the state, the entire international community will feel the consequences. The new security threats cannot be addressed by the use of the tools which are provided by the present security institutions and which are available for the states for managing risk and addressing challenges of the 21st century, namely because they were funded and set up after the Second World War in order to prevent inter-state conflicts.

“Today’s enemy” is not an easily definable state actor, after the Cold War the frames of using force, the causes of armed conflicts, the characteristics of wars, and consequently the matter of security and the sources of risks have changed significantly. The “new world order” is filled with ambiguity and none of the states can prevent or manage those risks. The reality is too complex to address the problems with single policy instruments and the different dimensions are only separable in theory. Success or on the other hand any deterioration in one of the dimensions undermine the achievements in any other dimension.

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