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The International Order at the Beginning of the 21st Century:

Theoretical Considerations

PhD Thesis

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1. Introduction and Basic Deliberations

The past 15 years cover 2 sub-phases, which mark the transitional character:

- The post-cold war period (1989-2001)
- The post-post cold war period (from 2001 onwards).

The watershed event is '9/11'. It is the obvious landmark of events, which were characterized by numerous signals already in the mid-1990s. For the US, several terrorist attacks molded the road; for the EU two enlargement rounds coined those years. These different streams led to differences in the transatlantic relations, and, hence to dangerous tensions which had global-scale effects.

None of those events happened overnight or unexpectedly. Numerous signals heralded them. Even more of them were either not noticed at all or came too late to the attention of political decision-makers.

Old concepts such as cooperation and confrontation have become of limited use. Still, old containment rules dominate the stage. This is mainly due to lack of knowledge of the current international order. For reason, many activities bear a high inherent risk of failure, since they are not appropriate to tackle current challenges. Currently, neither science nor political and societal decision makers have candid and thorough knowledge on the "new rule set" in the transitional order – "Hybrid War" (as Iraq and the Israel-Hezbollah clashes were lately dubbed in the journal Defense News) is a very good, and at the same time very dangerous example of this assumption.

Science has several options to deal with the current situation: Either it could proceed on the containment path, or it could delve into complexity, dynamics, nonlinearity etc. and slowly, but steadily gain knowledge on the current international order. The latter choice has been mine in the past 15 years.

In my research work

1. Figured out the international order within the past 15 years (i. e. from 1989 onwards), thereby putting an emphasis on the post-post cold war period.
2. Tried to find out the role of change as such, whether early warning and early response on change is possible. Therefore, systemic perturbations are to be taken into account and tackled as part of the game.

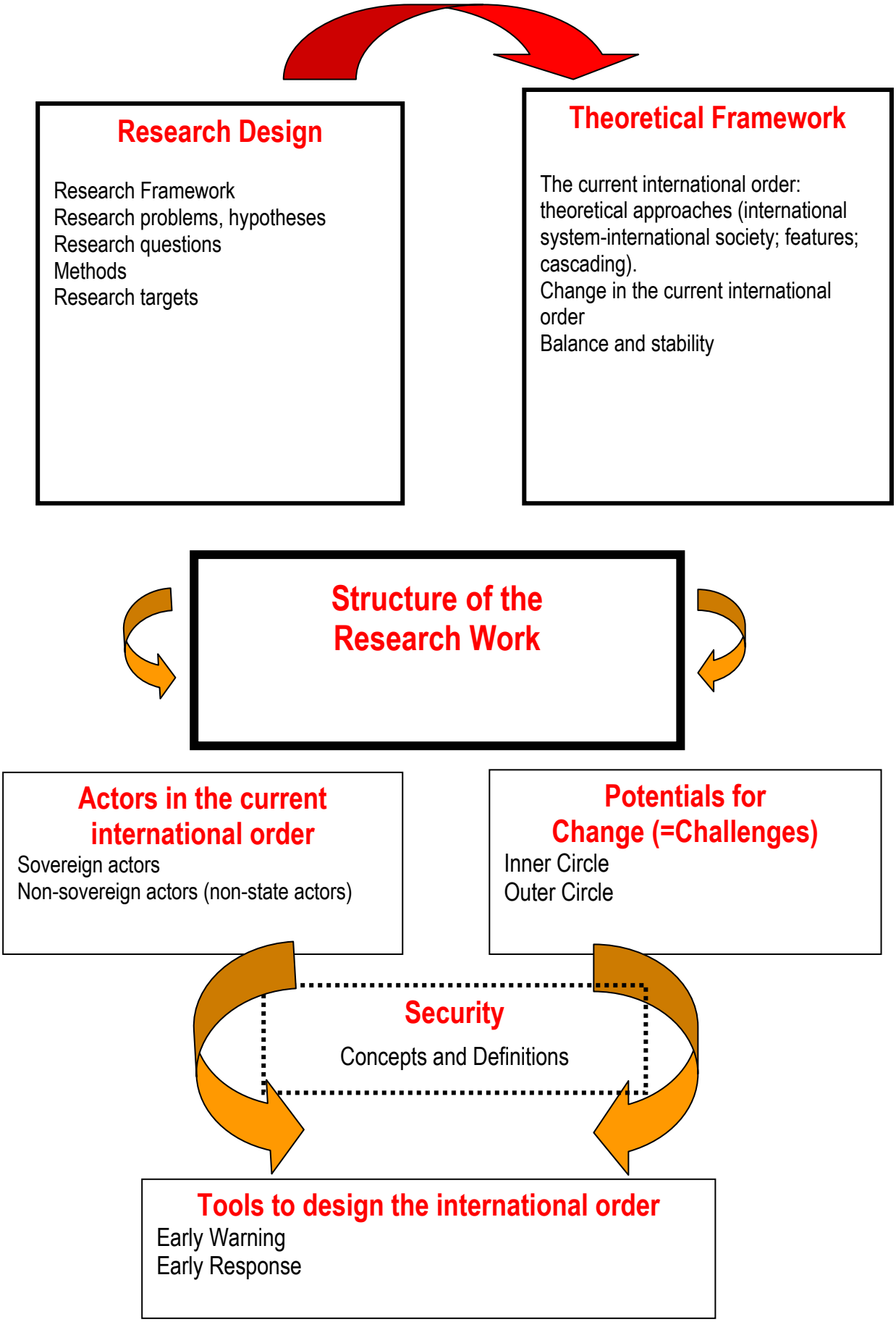

Figure 1: Structure of the Research Work

2. The Research Design

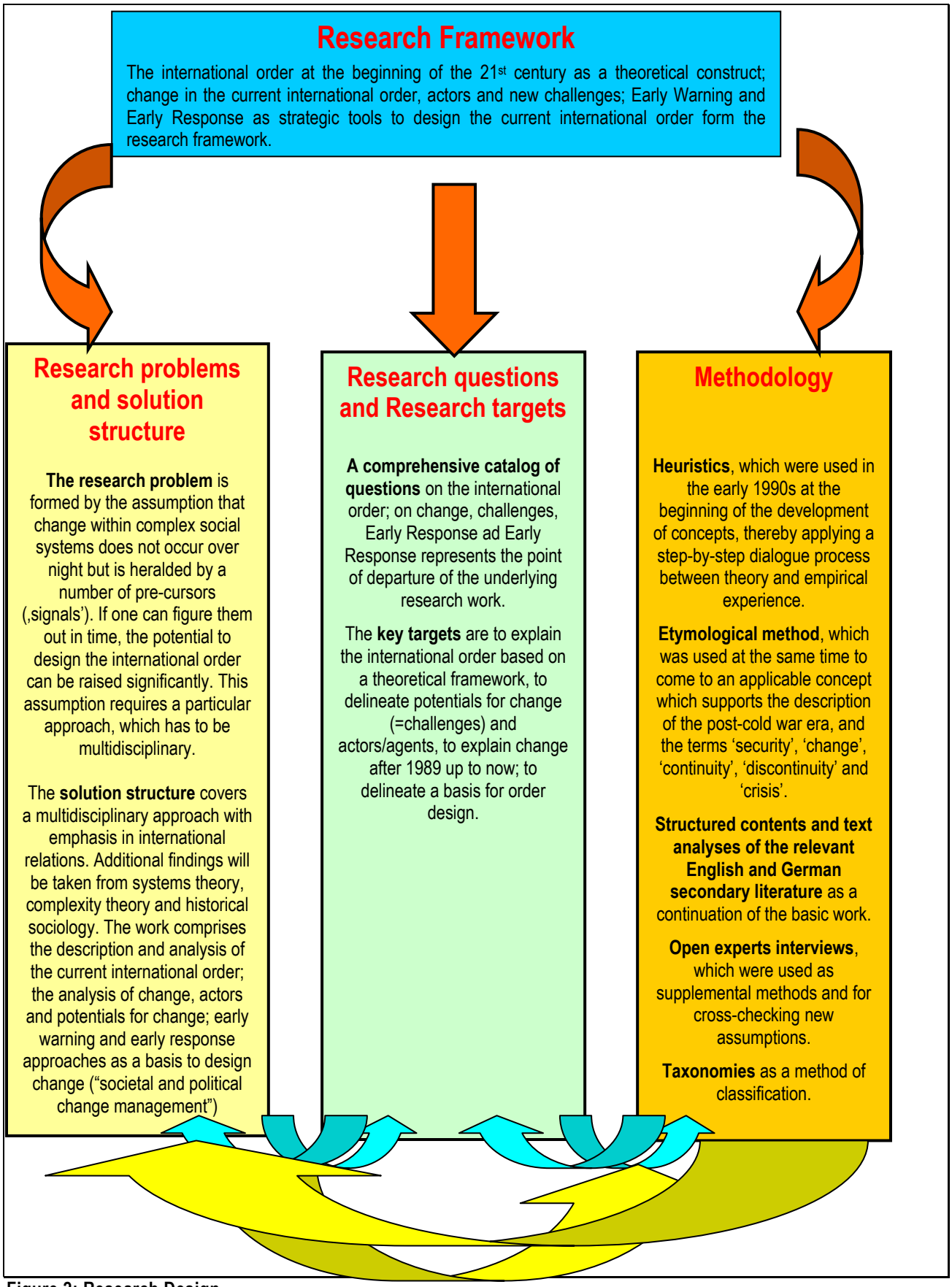

Figure 2: Research Design

3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses formed one of the key foundations of the underlying study:

1. A complex, dynamic, social system, thereby applying a multidisciplinary approach within the indicated ideational framework, best describes the current international order.
2. Change is not an 'overnight event' but is heralded by numerous signals. They perform different levels of intensity in terms of possible consequences and of recognition.
3. It will be possible to use signals to design and form the international order according one's own interests (be the agent a state, an alliance of states, non-sovereign agents or a loose alliance of non-sovereign agents), if those signals can be detected and recognized.
4. Methods and tools to design the current international order need to be much more flexible and situative in application.
5. For reason it is that important to have systematic, well-accorded and flexible strategic Early Warning-Early Response approach.

4. Research questions

The following questions served as guidelines for the research work:

Regarding the current international order:

What does an adequate concept applicable to the current international order look like?

Which features does this concept display?

How are such features interrelated?

Which are the implications for the understanding of stability and balance?

How can an appropriate understanding of security be designed?

How is the concept of 'existential challenge' linked to the understanding of security?

Regarding the agents/actors within the order:

Who are the relevant actors and how are they interrelated?

How could those actors be categorized (e.g. in a taxonomy)?

Regarding the challenges within the order:

What challenges need to be taken into account?

How are those challenges interrelated?

Is it possible to derive core challenges?

If yes, how could they be delineated in terms of their effects and possible capabilities/actors?

Regarding Early Warning-Early Response:

How have Early Warning and Early Response helped to understand developments in the current international order better during the past 15 years?

How have Early Warning and Early Response assisted experts?

What steps are necessary to keep Early Warning and Early Response applicable and useful?

Which are the implications and possible consequences for the academic community and for political decision-making?

5. Methodology

A multidisciplinary approach is best developed and based on a *multi-methods concept*. Qualitative methodology will form the core. This concept comprises

- heuristics, which were used in the early 1990s at the beginning of the development of concepts, using with a step-by-step dialogue process between theory and empirical experience;
- the etymological method, which was used during the same period to come to an applicable concept; this approach supports the description of the current international order and the terms 'security' and 'change';
- structured contents and text analyses of secondary literature as a continuation of the basic work;
- open experts interviews, which were used as supplemental methods and to cross-check new assumptions;
- taxonomies as a method of classification.

6. The Key Research Targets

The underlying research study intends to achieve the following key targets:

1. *The development of an approach, which provides a framework of the current international order:* This approach should enable decision-makers to understand and analyze, shove and shape the international order easier and faster. A discussion of notions such as change, stability and balance will serve as a basis to find out how much social reality has altered. Moreover, consequences for decision-making will be discussed (the presented approach is not intended to challenge and criticize existing approaches in the field of IR). It is an approach with a strong post-modernist emphasis.
2. *A critical discussion of the concept of security and possible consequences for decision-making:* The presented concept of security is a challenge to existing approaches and is a step away from the generally accepted concepts. It is not intended to be applied on a global level, but is valid for a certain time-area-power constellation. It is a more modest approach with a limited validity; however, it will be closer to social reality.
3. *Taxonomies of actors and potentials for change:* Both, actors and potentials for change, are usually presented as a linear, purely hierarchical list. One main target is drawing up taxonomies of actors and potentials for change in a two-step procedure. Firstly, by entering into a linear basis, which will be further developed in a second step into a network. Taxonomy is an explorative tool to achieve this target.
4. *The definition and discussion of the concepts of EW and ER as tools to support the strategic design of the international order:* EW and ER demonstrate that there is a direct linkage to change, stability, balance and the concept of security. The discussion about EW/ER will serve as a basis for an improved understanding of the role the may take within the decision-making process.

7. Disciplinary Framework

The answers to these questions are based on the following disciplines:

- **International Relations**: Findings of the 'English School of International Relations' served as basis to explain society, systems and, finally, to arrive at the international system and the international society. Additionally, findings from Early Warning and Early Response will be analyzed and applied.
- **Systems theories and Complexity Theory:** Particularly general systems theories and social system theories (including complexity theory) were used to explain different systems, change, stability, order, continuity, discontinuity, chaos and drivers for change; moreover, they provided a certain formal and meta-disciplinary framework.
- **Historical and historical-sociological approaches:** Especially historical-philosophical approaches, world systems and culture-historical approaches served as basis to explain society, systems and transformation were analyzed.
- **Formal science approaches***:* Findings rooted in chaos theory were applied as an innovative basis to cope with current phenomena and to understand the features of the past 15 years. They serve as basis of the mental topology for metaphors and analogies, particularly for the delineation of the basic concepts

8. Value Added of the Research Work

The underlying research work display the following new aspects:

1. The development and application of a multidisciplinary research approach to understand the current international order, thereby serving as theoretical underpinning and decision-making tool with an emphasis on IR findings.
2. Taxonomies of actors (sovereign and non-sovereign), their potentials for action, their impact on potentials for change and their interrelation will be discussed and presented.
3. Taxonomies of potentials for change within the current international order will be provided. Again, emphasis will be given to interrelations between those potential (and not to linear-addititive lists).
4. Core variables in terms of actors-potential for change connections will be extracted and interrelated. This new step, which will go beyond linearity and will be in coherence with the understanding of the current international order in the underlying context, will be a key basis to reduce complexity, which is considered the main challenge to decision-makers and advisers to them.
5. Reflections on the application of Early Warning and Early Response as strategic tools to the shove and shape the current international order. Particular emphasis will be put on the post-9/11 period and its actors and potentials for change.

9. The Research Structure

The following parts form the research work:

Part A provides an extensive coverage of the definition of tools to comprehend, understand, describe, analyze and assess the current international order. The starting points are the notions of 'international system' and 'international society'. Both offer a basis for further elaborations, and help to develop a modified concept. Additionally, this part will discuss the 'concept of change', including balance and stability. Particularly the notion of 'change' was one of the most frequently used one in the past decade. 'Change' has been a permanent process within the international society and the international system. It has been 'something constitutive' in the social world. This is due to intra-action and interaction, which are vital premises for the survival of social systems. What have definitely altered in the current international order are velocity, intensity and decreased distances of events and processes with the time-space calculus. It is not so much the separated analysis of speed, intensity and distances of time and space, but it is the combination of these three components, which have created a particular challenge. Additionally, the concept of power has changed, too.

Part B provides a first overview of agents/actors within the current international order. The differentiation within the two main groups of actors, the sovereign actors (stretching from weak to strong states to failing, failed and dysfunct states) and the non-sovereign actors (such as NGOs, individuals and the leaderless public) will be emphasized.

Part C is dedicated to an extended analysis of the concept of security. The concepts of 'existential challenges' and 'securitization' will be introduced to develop an adapted understanding of security. In the past fifteen years, the meaning of the notion of security has broadened considerably. It has become more challenging since it does not only cover the state as unitary actor and is related not only to pure military and political issues, but includes economic, demographic, environmental, technological, religious, cultural, and generally speaking, societal issues. Additional agents, new drivers and triggers, and their impact on the perception of security issues, require an adapted approach, which supports the comprehension of new challenges.

Part D is dedicated to a description and analysis of challenges (i.e. potentials for change) in the current international order. A new approach to categorize these challenges will be presented. Intra-action and interactions between the different challenges will be stressed. The key target is to achieve a matrix, which will display the intertwining of the different challenges and, finally, the actors.

Part E delineates and explains EW and ER, their options and their limitations. Due to the surprise that the collapse of the Soviet Union caused for many experts and decision-makers, EW/ER had its high time in the early 1990s. It was one of the most praised tools to forecast and predict systemic change and crises. EW/ER

was expected to be particularly important for the assessment of situations in semiperiphery states, because they were considered as 'trouble makers'. EW/ER was part of the 'attention package'. Wrong expectations led to disappointing reactions, particularly on the 'user-side'. This part will offer a critical analysis. I am convinced that EW/ER have become of non-debatable nature as recent events in Germany have clearly shown.

Part F covers a synopsis of the key arguments and the research results and the conclusions.

10. Key Findings

10.1. Regarding the current international order

Currently, a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach to describe and analyze the international order can be provided. The approach proved rather stable in terms of order features and flexible in terms of actors and challenges, and change. For reason, EW/ER have to be rather flexible, too.

The current international order is best described as a social, complex system, which emerges by action. Action takes place at different levels. Additionally, it performs different types of action. This combination leads to interdependences, which are different in terms of speed and intensity. The current international order can only survive if a minimum of common identity exists.

10.2. Regarding the agents/actors within the order

Actors split more in the category of non-sovereign actors. This category becomes more homogeneous (e.g. in comparison with a study executed in the 1990s by the author of the underlying work). A stringent theory to get hold of those actors is still lacking. The question, whether such theory is helpful for practical decision-making or would only serve academic purposes has not been discussed in length and depth.

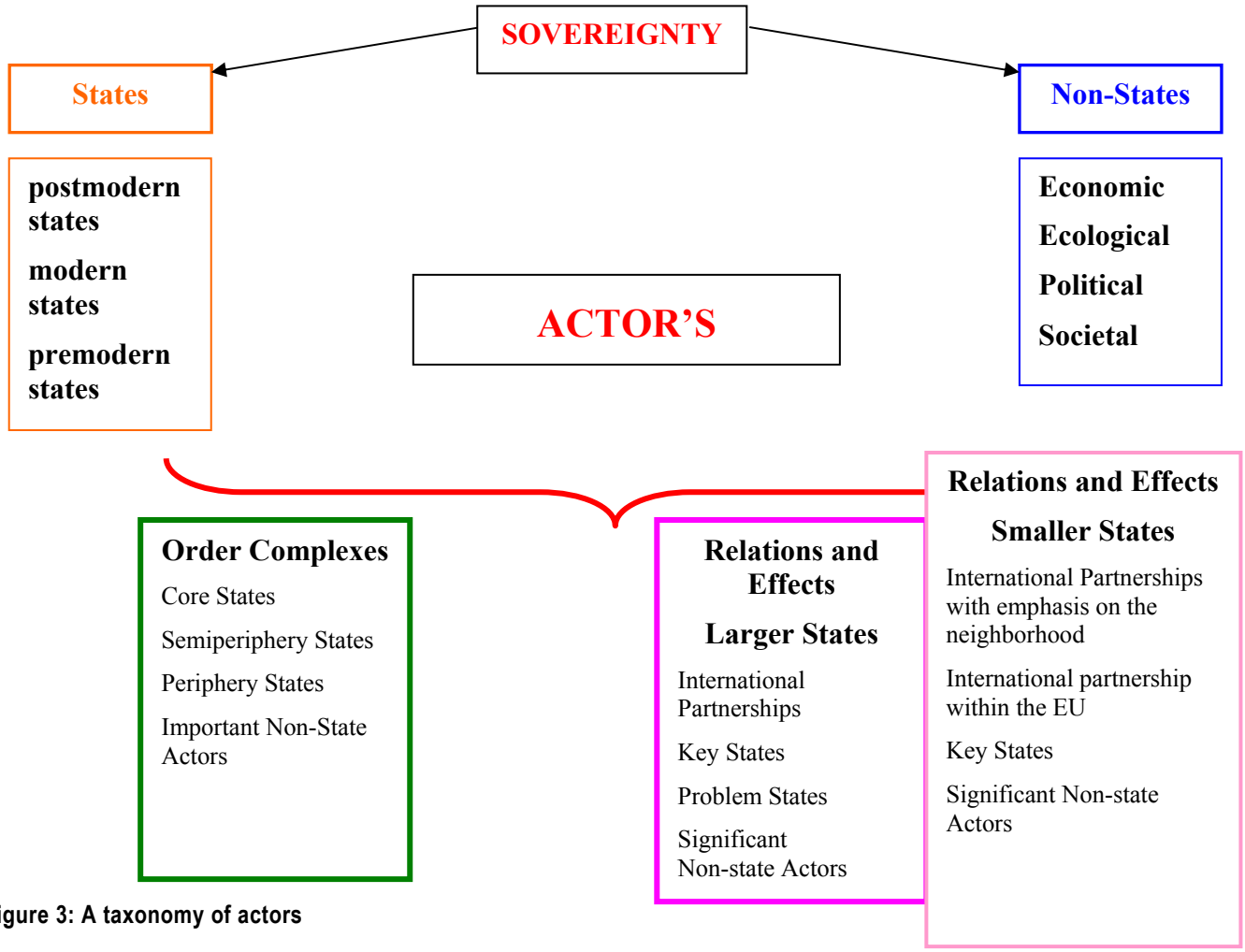

Figure 3: A taxonomy of actors

10.3. Regarding the challenges within the order

A network of new challenges could be worked out. Taxonomy provides a supportive tool to structure events and processes according to the speedy needs of decision-making. Additionally actors and challenges could be intertwined and presented in an easy to survey manner. This is a new aspect in considerations and supportive for theory and political practise.

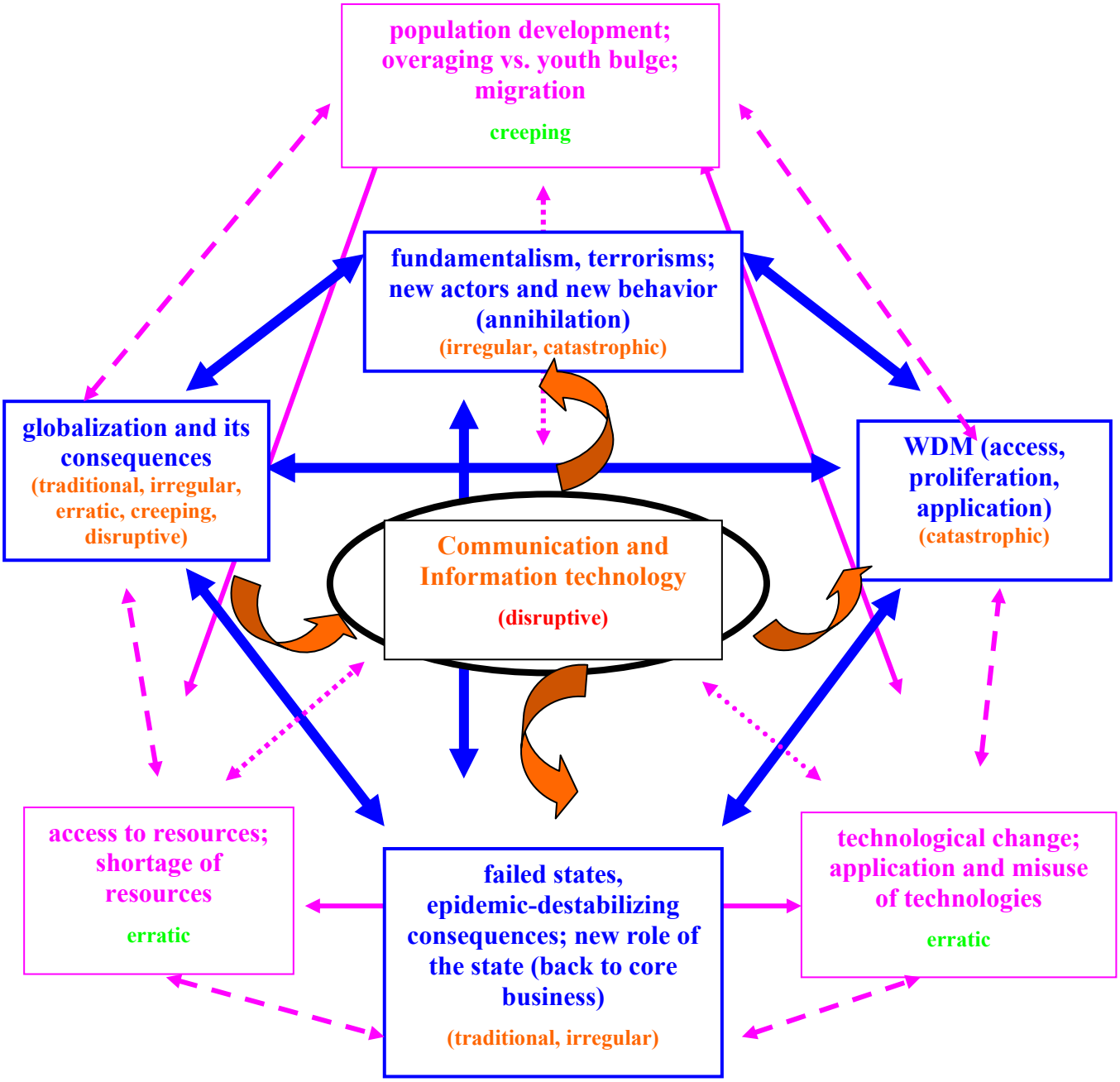

Figure 4: Taxonomy of Potentials for Change

The categories applied could be combined to an 'index of capability and effect and actors' ('Cap-Eff-Act-Index'). Categories are partially based on the US-strategies and partially based on research work executed in the past 15 years by the author of the underlying study.

Cap-Eff-Act-Index	Description
Traditional	Action and reaction are similar or the same as during Cold War. Usually, states and state-related institutions are involved; they employ recognized military capabilities in well-understood forms of military competition and conflict.
Irregular	Action and reaction are unconventional in terms of means and ends; traditional advantages are countered. Usually, non-state actors employ this way.
Catastrophic	Action and reaction usually involve the use of WMD or methods, which produce WMD-effects. Actor could be states and non-state actors.
Disruptive	Action and reaction are caused by interrupting larger networks of technologies.
Erratic	Action and reaction may change in terms of capability and effect widely. Advantage and disadvantage may gap considerably and change over the course of time. Actors and non-state actors are involved.
Creeping	Action and reaction occur in a slow, often under the surface manner. Usually, backloops are rather slow. Actors and non-state actors are involved.

Table 1: Cap-Eff-Act-Index

10.4. Regarding Early Warning-Early Response

The key finding was the inadequacy of the existing concepts and the lack of research on current phenomena. This section requires additional in-depth research. It should be based on the proposed approach to the current international order or on a similar concept. Both, scientific community and political decision makers need to approach each other much more and cooperate. Decision makers should make their needs clear. Researcher should offer options to cover those needs. Additionally, they should offer alternative options and peer in the medium and long-term future to provide adequate tools to design the current international order.

11. Outlook

There has hardly been a period of such turmoil and change since the years since 1989/90. The events of '9/11' added another spin to the current international order. Developments and trends, which can be traced back to the 1990s, received a sometimes vexed momentum. Exaggerations, thinking the unthinkable and hardly seen catastrophes, which have been broadcasted sometimes, even in real-time speed molded the past five years. Certainly, the international order is in a spiking transformation. The end is not conceivable. Science and reality have become strongly interwoven, but still cannot really cope with each other. The underlying research works provides insight into 'what we are acting and living in' – the international order. Still, a number of tasks are to be done. They go beyond this work.

The 'to-do-list' covers issues such as:

- Finding out the new rule set (particularly between actors).
- Integrating order, actors and the new rule set.
- Redefining interests (national, international, supranational) to enter into a dynamic, multilayered global balance.
- Finding a meta-concept, which should be provided by science in a dialog process with societal decision-makers as their guidance for action.