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# Diplomatic, Geopolitical and Economic Consequences of an Impending Asteroid Threat (\*)



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## The Scenario: possible impact of 2023PDC, T - 12.5 yr (fictional case)

- The initial impact corridor spans the area between Mexico, the southern and eastern United States, the North Atlantic, the north-west coast of Africa, all the way down to South Africa.
- The impact corridor passes through several densely populated areas, including Washington, D.C.
- The economy in the impact corridor will be severely affected, as investments decrease, real estate values plummet, banks fail, and the population tries to leave the impact corridor.
- An impact near the Canary Islands will produce a tsunami of several hundred meters in height, affecting essentially the whole Atlantic basin.
- The fireball and the high surface winds will devastate the islands and the coastlines of northwest Africa.
- There will be a massive displacement problem, as large fractions of the population of the potentially affected regions will be motivated to leave.
- This decade of uncertainty will obviously see intense diplomatic and political activity



## The Main Considerations

1. Which is the right time for action? (Overreaction vs. Inaction)
2. Which is the role of schools, universities, social media, Internet and religion? (Awareness-Raising vs. Catastrophism)
3. How long do we need to wait until proper legal/policy and institutional mechanisms are in place? (Preventive Law vs. Reactive Law)
4. What we need – who can provide it first: Our neighbors? Our allies? An international fund? (Domestic Aid vs. External Assistance)
5. Which is the harm threshold for precautionary action? (A Right to Take Precautionary Measures vs. a Duty to Take Precautionary Measures)
6. Which are the evacuation priorities? (The Most Vulnerable vs. The Productive Sector)
7. Is there a duty to welcome other citizens in case of disaster? (Internal Displacement vs. Cross-Border Displacement)
8. In a ten-year period (or less), is it possible for a developing country to build its own space capacities to follow up the situation and eventually mitigate the effects? (Own Space Capabilities vs. External Reliance)
9. How would this impact on the national/regional/local political process? (State of Emergency vs. Business as Usual)
10. Will the Security Council act? Will it authorize the use of nuclear devices? (Non-nuclear vs. nuclear deflection)



## The Role of the UN Security Council

- “The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security”
- SMPAG will suggest a mitigation strategy- this will have to be agreed upon
- Ideally, the workload will be distributed among the international community
- Point of contention: the nuclear option
- Dual use technologies
- Mitigation will change the impact location. How to decide?
- How to handle dissent?



## Evacuation Issues

- Right to Life constitutes a fundamental right
- Most vulnerable: elderly, poor health, disabled
- The industrial sector
- Indigenous population
- Where to evacuate- evacuees who might not be able to return
- Cross border displacement: Immigrants? Migrants? Refugees?
- How to provide food and shelter in a deteriorating economy?
- Humanitarian assistance vs. sovereign rights of states
- International obligations



## The Local/National/Regional Political Process

- Affected states will declare a State of Emergency
- This will impact on the human rights of the population
- Lesson from COVID: not all the population will agree and cooperate
- Impact on the democratic process
- Role of the security forces- civil protection, police, military
- How to prevent predatory action by local, regional or global powers



## Awareness Raising vs. Catastrophism

- In order to motivate the population to collaborate and accept the mitigation measures it is necessary to implement a suitable information strategy
- The role of the educational system: schools, universities
- National and international learned societies
- Relevant for many regions: tradition and religion
- The role of the UN: COPUOS, IAWN, SMPAG
- Counteracting the at times misleading role of the media, formal and social
- Pre-event communication: by necessity incomplete, inviting speculation
- Post-impact: more factual, but suffering from destroyed infrastructure



## Conclusions

- An impact of an object like 2023PDC is a very low probability event, yet, if it were to happen it would be a severe challenge to the international community
- The PDC “Exercise” is useful, but not totally realistic: five days only, fully informed participants, with no ideological or superstitious opposition
- In 12.5 years, many more aspects will surface, including some which could be very harmful
- In such a period, the non-permanent members of the SC will change five times. Thus, decisions and resolutions might be far from consistent.
- The underlying assumption in this presentation is that the impact corridor threat does not cross areas in which there is military action between countries. What if it did?
- COPUOS might consider tasking SMPAG to analyze the geopolitical and socio-economic aspects of the asteroid threat mitigation.





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