

RECENT INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CRISES - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS

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Abstract: *The international system possesses a series of interconnected characteristics (scale, dynamism, complexity, informatization, uncertainty, hybridization) shaped by developments such as the advancement of new technologies, globalization, geopolitical competition between actors, multilateralism, the diversification of actors on the international scene, economic instability, the hybridization of conflicts, exacerbation of social polarization and extremism, etc. These characteristics translate into both generating factors of international security crises and extensors of the typology of current international crises.*

International security crises do not have an unanimously accepted definition in the specialized literature. Therefore, the present paper aims to develop the knowledge of this concept by identifying their recent characteristics, which, in conjunction with generating factors found in the specialized literature, will be used to substantiate a definition of international security crises and to empirically identify a recent typology of security crises. Moreover, this research sustains the idea of many crises happening in the world at the same time, being triggered by a growing multitude of extinction-level generator factors, leading to a meta-crisis, a crisis of permanent crises, potentially leading to humanity's collapse.

This research supports the fundamental knowledge in the field of international security crisis, as well as the future development of concrete crisis management responses.

Keywords: *defining international security crisis; security system characteristics; recent security crises typology; polycrisis; overlapped crises.*

Introduction

The international system¹ is adapting to the continuous developments of the security environment. Thus, the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, pointed out about ten years ago that “The current international system is entering a new stage called the fourth industrial revolution, fundamentally changing the way we live, work and relate to each other, being different, in its *scale* and *complexity*, from anything humanity has experienced before” (Schwab 2016, 2). Obviously, other trends also contribute to the manifestation of the two characteristics of the international environment (multiplication of actors, diversification of threats caused by the emergence of non-traditional global security problems, crisis of norms and international institutions, etc.).

¹ A.N.: We consider the term “international system” in the vision of Ryūhei Hatsuse a concept to describe international relations among actors (Hatsuse n.d.)

Along with the characteristics generated by technological developments, mentioned above, and inevitably accompanied by the *informatization* of the security environment², as a result of the emergence of information technologies, other similar ones are also observed. Thus, the *dynamism* characteristic of the international system is also mainly due to globalization through the increasing degree of interconnection of goods and people with the help of transport and communication systems, and the *unpredictability* derives from a series of trends in the security environment such as multipolarity and accelerated competition between great powers, regional instability and asymmetric conflicts, social polarization and radicalization of some identity groups, etc.

These characteristics (scale, dynamism, complexity, informatization, uncertainty, and hybridization) of the international security system determine transformations of international security crises in at least two aspects: in terms of their generating factors and in their typology. Thus, by this research we provide a better understanding of these crises that become an increasingly frequent and destructive presence in the contemporary world.

The scope of the paper is to shape a definition of international security crisis and to configure a typology of this specific crises considering the transformative trends in the recent security environment to support the crisis management development in the field.

The used research methods are: deductive analysis to determine the characteristics of current international security crises resulting from the characteristics of the international security environment; theoretical content analysis of the concepts “crisis” and “international crisis” identified in the specialized literature in the fields of Political Science, International Relations and Security Studies presenting their generating factors; empirical analysis, against the background of exploiting the common knowledge base for specialists in the fields mentioned above, to identify a current typology of crises that would encompass its characteristics determined by the transformative developments in the security environment.

The research hypothesis supports that the permanent overlapping polycrises (built as meta-crisis) triggered by a growing multitude of extinction-level generator factors have the potential to lead to humanity’s collapse.

The limitations in this research are the narrow set of international security environment characteristics related to international security crises analyzed in this paper, and the use of author’s empirical lenses (observation and research experience) in defining international security crises and in configuring their typology, necessary to fill the research gap in the study of these specific aspects.

1. Projecting the International Security Environment’s Characteristics in Current Crises

Using an analysis that employs the method of deduction, we will demonstrate in the following how the characteristics of the current international environment (scale, dynamism, complexity, informatization, uncertainty, and hybridization) have been reflected in the characteristics of international security crises.

The scale and dynamism of the security environment, due primarily to the effects of the globalization phenomenon, have led both to interconnections between different economies and societies, and to facilitating the rapid spread of local or regional crises at a global level. (for example, in 2008-2009 “the interconnectedness of the economy and the financial sector facilitated the spread of the crisis from the United States to Europe” (European Parliamentary Research Service 2019, 1). Also, “once viewed as peripheral security threats, issues of health, environment, crime, migration, poverty, among others are increasingly central to international peace and security” (Rowan University 2025). At the same time, changes in the dynamics and scale of crises are given by the interdependence

² A.N.: NATO recognized cyberspace as a domain of operations in 2016 alongside the traditional domains of air, land and sea (North Atlantic Treaty Organization Factsheet 2021, 1).

of the security threats with the emergence of multidimensional crises as situations that simultaneously affect multiple security dimensions: military, economic, humanitarian, or political.

The complexity of the international environment determined by the increased trend of multipolarity and competition between the great powers, but also by the diversification of the actors involved on the international scene. Thus, the emergence of multipolar actors (China, USA, Russia, the European Union, etc.) leads to strategic competitions for regional and global influence, and economic and military rivalries increase international tensions. Also, the multitude of actors involved, states, international organizations (NATO, UN, EU, etc.), terrorist and extremist groups or other non-state actors, and the alliances and divergent interests can complicate the crisis management, due to its complexity. Another such example refers to the emergence of *polycrisis* that describe a multitude of crises occurring simultaneously as “the interplay between the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the energy, cost-of-living and climate crises (World Economic Forum 2023).

The uncertainty in the international security environment is the result of a series of trends such as: regional instability and asymmetric wars in the context in which conflicts in areas such as Ukraine, the Middle East or sub-Saharan Africa are fueled by ethnic, religious and economic factors and regional actors assert their power by destabilizing the existing order; the crisis of norms and international institutions marked by the erosion of trust in institutions such as the UN or NATO and the difficulty of establishing a consensus between states, the undermining of international norms by some great powers to advance their own interests; social polarization and radicalization that determine the increase in economic inequalities and ethnic or religious tensions, but also ideological radicalization (right-wing or Islamist extremism), which contributes to internal and international instability, etc.

All these characteristics of the international security environment translate into the difficulty of anticipating the evolution of the crisis situation, given that the escalation of tensions can occur unexpectedly, sometimes due to factors that seem minor at first glance, but which in depth derive from the trends mentioned above. Thus, current security crises acquire a striking feature of *unpredictability*.

The informatization of the security environment is driven by the rapid evolution of technology. In this context, progress in areas such as artificial intelligence, drones, hypersonic weapons and autonomous weapons is changing the nature of warfare, and cyberattacks have become a major threat to critical infrastructures, so crises also import this characteristic.

The hybridization of the international security environment is a result of the diversification of threats with the combined use of conventional and unconventional means, such as cyberattacks, disinformation, media manipulation or the use of mercenaries, by state actors, but also non-state actors (terrorist groups, hackers, criminal organizations) who have begun to play a significant role on the international stage. Also, security crises are no longer only of a military nature, but include economic, technological, health, environmental aspects, etc., which makes their current characteristic that of *overlap* and *permanentization of crisis*. For example, Romanian researchers in Security Studies claim that «Overlapping crises are already a constant that affects areas and fields of diverse nature and, implicitly, more and more people, whether we are talking about “open” or “frozen” conflicts, whether we are referring to political tensions, social unrest induced by a wide range of factors - ideological incompatibilities, the phenomenon of migration, organized crime, etc. or those in the energy or food fields, economic problems or the humanitarian crisis that can accompany any of the aforementioned» (Petrescu 2024, 5). Also, other specialists refers nowadays to a perma-crisis age (Gate Watcher 2025) as “a prolonged period of instability that requires leaders to respond to challenges faster than ever before” (Bodell 2025).

Among the already presented characteristics of international security environment and crises’ characteristics evolving of it, there is one particular that gains different field’s specialists - the metacrisis - see as “the crisis within and between all the world’s major crises, a root cause that is at once singular and plural, a multi-faceted delusion arising from the spiritual and material exhaustion

of modernity that permeates the world's interrelated challenges and manifests institutionally and culturally to the detriment of life on Earth" (Rowson 2023).

To summarize, the recent characteristics of crises determined by the developments of the security environment are their increase in scale, complexity, dynamics, unpredictability, informatization, hybridization, that transposed in the specialty literature in new terms and concepts featuring recent crises (multidimensional, poly-, permanent, overlapping and meta-).

2. Conceptualizing International Security Crises and Determining their Generating Factors

Michael Brecher, a political scientist, pointed out that a crisis is a "situation characterized by four necessary and sufficient conditions, as perceived by decision-makers at the highest level of the actors involved: a mutation in the external or internal environment; a threat to basic values; a high probability of involvement in hostilities of a predominantly military nature; a response to the threat to values" (Brecher 1978, 37).

From a systemic point of view, the crisis has been defined as "a moment of rupture within an organized system, which implies the obligation of decision-makers to define a position either in favour of conservation or for the transformation of the given system, in the perspective of its return to equilibrium" (Dufour 2002, 16). Some specialists in Political Sciences consider the crisis to be "a serious threat experimented by a group, organization or community to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions" (Rosenthal, Charles and Hart 1989, 10).

Crises can be characterized and classified in many ways. Most often they are interpreted in a general way, as being "crises of security, crises of interests or crises of conscience" (Moraru 2011, 176).

The significance of crises for the security environment is recognized, despite the lack of a common definition agreed upon in the scientific community. However, their main delimitation is made according to the level at which they affect, respectively nationally or internationally, being considered to be a matter of domestic or foreign policy.

From a national perspective, a crisis situation can be defined as "a complex phenomenon, consisting of an unforeseen situation, which may call into question the responsibility of an institution before public opinion, which may threaten the institution's ability to carry out its activity normally and which may damage the institution's public image through negative symbolic effects" (Ministerul Public 2021, 4). This can also be seen as "a complex phenomenon that can affect either the entire social ensemble or certain sectors of it, such as economic life, the political system, international relations, financial and banking systems, social structure, educational institutions, culture, etc." (Niculae, Gheorghiuță and Gheorghiuță 2006, 128).

The international crisis has been given a number of definitions, for example, "a situation that threatens significant harm to a country's population or basic values and compels a political response under time pressure and uncertainty" (Lipsy 2020). However, just as there is no universally accepted definition of a crisis, there is no universally accepted definition of an international crisis, but it typically involves "tensions between states or international actors and can lead to rapid escalation, including armed conflict" (Welch 2021), threatening international security. Thus, *an international crisis that threatens at least one dimension of security is an international security crisis*.

Richard Lebow points out three properties of an international security crisis: the perception by decision makers that the actions, ongoing or threatened, of an international actor affect concrete national interests, reputation as a peace negotiator, or one's own ability to remain in power; the perception by decision makers that, regardless of the action intended to face this threat (excluding surrender), the probability of the outbreak of armed conflict is amplified; the perception of acting under time pressure (Lebow 1981, 98). Therefore, the management of international crises often

requires diplomatic interventions, economic sanctions, multilateral negotiations, or even military deployments to prevent escalation and protect global security.

In general, imbalances in the international environment generate security crises of different natures, intensities and extent. In particular, the factors generating international crises, in relation to the security dimension affected, can be considered to be the following, integrated in the table below.

Table no. 1: Factors generating international crises, analysis related to security dimensions
(Atanasiu 2016, 57-58)

No.	Dimension	Generating factors
1	Political	- inadequate political decisions; extremist, radical movements; conventional wars; military conflicts; civil wars; secessionist or segregationist movements; the disintegration of some states; the existence of nations without state territory; the creation of groups hostile to the state; population unrest; the collapse of some states; totalitarian political regimes; the loss of the population's trust in governments; fragmentation; internal and external instability; power ambitions of some states; the permeability of borders, etc.
2	Diplomatic	- inter-state tensions; withdrawal of embassies; lack of political dialogue; violation of international law; external interventions; non-recognition of some states; neighbouring territorial disputes; co-sovereignty over some territories, etc.
3	Economic	- precarious living conditions; endemic poverty; economic sanctions and embargoes imposed on states that violate international law; widening gaps between rich and poor states; irrational use of resources; lack or limited access to vital resources - water, energy, food; monopolies over vital resources; money laundering and corruption, etc.
4	Societal	- differentiated and discriminatory policies for different categories of the population; intolerance; ethnic-religious tensions; violations of human and citizen rights; networks of trafficking in weapons, prohibited substances or people; illegal immigration; dissatisfaction among the population; organized crime; subordination of parties organized on ethnic criteria; society polarization; extremism and radicalization, etc.
5	Financial	- unemployment; lack of income/low income; severe budget deficits; overburdening taxes for population; widespread black market; poverty, etc.
6.	Military	- the use or the threat to use the armed force; the diversification of military means; the propagation of asymmetric actions; the allocation of large amounts to military budgets; the possession of nuclear weapons; the installation of anti-missile shields; armed terrorist acts; insurgencies; nuclear build-up; disparities in military potential between states; the increase in the degree of recrudescence of ongoing conflicts; the spiraling out of control of the trade in weapons and CBRN means, etc.
7.	Cybernetic	- vulnerabilities in CIS of complex systems; cyberattacks on critical infrastructures; social networks that collect personal data, etc.
8.	Information	- lack and/or scarcity of information provided to the public opinion; disinformation; propaganda; elections' manipulation; poor security of government communications tools; censorship; manipulation; fake news; deep fake, etc.
9.	Technological	- nuclear hazards; loss of control over artificial intelligence; development of dual-use technologies; possession of excessive quantities of conventional weapons; accumulation of sophisticated weapons based on disruptive and

No.	Dimension	Generating factors
		emergent technologies; nuclear facilities build-up; genetic engineering applied for hostile purposes, etc.
10.	Biological	- spread of epidemics, pandemics, degenerative and incurable diseases – AIDS, Ebola, tuberculosis, etc.; natural genetic mutations and genetically modified organisms as the basis for generating food for the population, etc.
11.	Psychological	- uncertainty; terror; insecurity; psychosis; stress; hatred - of gender, race, class, etc.
12.	Ecological	- Natural factors – heavy rains, cataclysms, storms and hurricanes, excessive snowfall, frosts, desertification, etc.; human factors (terrorism, weapons of mass destruction proliferation, excessive pollution, destruction of the ozone layer, etc.)

The table was drafted without claiming to be fully comprehensive. For example, other security dimensions could be taken into account wherein international crises may occur (human security, climate security, food security, energy security etc.). Also, for the already mentioned dimensions more generator factors can be identified to update the information included in the table (for example: for political dimension - frozen conflicts, cold wars; for social dimension - society polarization; extremism and radicalization; for the technological dimension of security - Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) used for military purpose).

In reality, the triggering of a security crisis, no matter internal or international, has more than one-dimensioned generator factor, for example the Syrian crisis started with internal popular unrest (political generator), owed to dissatisfaction concerning the totalitarian political regime of Bashar al-Assad (political generator), as well as precarious living conditions and endemic poverty (economic generators) and differentiated and discriminatory policies for different categories of the population (social generator). Also, the internal crises were complicated to international crises once with the external intervention of over states.

Considering the definitions and the panoply of generating factors identified in specialized literature, international security crises can be defined, briefly, *as situations that put at least two actors in opposition, of which at least one is a state, which are generated by certain contextual factors and affect at least one dimension of security, core values and the interests of several actors and an extended geographical area.* Notable in this regard is the fact that, at the international level, crises also have relevance and consequences in geopolitical and geostrategic terms, even when their causes are anchored in fields distinct from political and military ones. The health crisis generated by COVID-19 is the most recent example in this regard.

3. Recent Typology of Security Crises

In the following, we will configure a typology of security crises, using the empirical research method, selecting the criteria based on the information already obtained from their definition and characterization in the previous sections, corroborated with some already identified typologies as found in specialized literature. Therefore, the identified criteria for dividing the typologies are: the threatened security dimension; the types of involved actors; the geographical extent; the duration; the complexity; the origin of the generating factors.

By the threatened security dimension, as derived from Table no. 1:

- *Political crises* involve the collapse, or threat of collapse, of an incumbent government due to its inability to function or the lack of centralized governance in a statal entity. They are related to political destabilization, coups, popular uprisings or tensions between different regimes and usually characterize failed states and fragile states;

- *Diplomatic crises* concern the need to break off/establish/restore diplomatic relations with another actor in the context of political disagreement;
- *Economic crises* include embargoes, financial crises, economic sanctions or trade wars. They are usually related to precarious living conditions, endemic poverty, access to vital resources as well with crimes as money laundering and corruption;
- *Societal crises* are generated by the dissatisfaction among the population owed to discrimination, inequality, intolerance, human and citizens' rights violation that can lead to society polarization, extremism and radicalization;
- *Financial crises* are generated by poverty, unemployment rate, lack of income/low income for population, severe budget deficits, overburdening taxes for population, widespread black market and is identified in sudden loss of confidence in the currency or banking system, steep decline in value of asset prices, indebted businesses and consumers etc.;
- *Military crises* involve the use or threat of use of armed forces (e.g. armed conflicts, military invasions, nuclear build-up, air strikes, armed terrorism, and insurgencies). They presume actions aimed at destabilizing the security of a state or region;
- *Cyberneticcrises* that materialize through attacks on digital infrastructures, data theft, cyber sabotage that aim to critically harm the routine operations of a vital cyber asset in order to cause economic or reputation damage, and/or endanger human lives;
- *Information crises* are stemmed by the lack or insufficiency of communication from state authorities towards the population/public opinion, disinformation, propaganda, as well as the poor security of government communications, censorship, information manipulation, and deep fake. They usually are not crises *per se*, but they accompany all the other types of crisis, therefore crisis communication is an important aspect of risk management for any state or organization;
- *Technological crises* mainly occur as a result of IT system failures, damaged software, faulty hardware or malicious cyberattacks, and usually affect access to critical resources such as data or the ability of employees from different sectors to work effectively. Also, the signs that can trigger a security crisis among actors in the international environment are; possession of excessive quantities of conventional weapons and sophisticated weapons based on disruptive and emergent technologies, development of dual-use technologies; nuclear power accumulation, genetic engineering applied for hostile purposes, etc.;
- *Biological crises* are generated by the spread of epidemics, pandemics, degenerative and incurable diseases – COVID-19, AIDS, Ebola, tuberculosis, etc. as well as natural genetic mutations and genetically modified organisms able to be used for harmful purposes. These can be triggered accidentally but also as a means of war;
- *Psychological crises* able to affect mass population are triggered by severe uncertainty, terror, insecurity, psychosis, stress, hatred - of gender, race, class, etc. that can be induced by manipulators using means of communication, by certain chemical or biological agents or by certain mental illnesses;
- *Ecological crises* result from natural disasters or man-made catastrophes (e.g. nuclear, biological, chemical, radioactive accidents, excessive pollution).

By the type of involved actors:

- *Interstate*, represented by conflicts between two or more states (e.g., the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Iran-Israel, etc.);
- *Intra-state*, respectively internal crises of a state (e.g., civil wars, political uprisings, ethnic tensions);
- *Non-state*, in which organizations or groups without state status are involved (e.g., states-to-be, terrorist organizations, extremist groups, drug cartels, private militias, etc.);
- *Transnational*, involving actors from several states, often without clear borders (e.g., organized crime, cross-border terrorist networks, transnational companies, multinational companies, etc.).

By their geographical extent:

- *Local*, affecting a specific region or community (local territorial conflicts);
- *Regional*, affecting several countries within a region (e.g., the Balkan crisis, the Sahel crises, the Middle East crisis);
- *Global*, having international effects and requiring a global response (e.g., the climate crisis, the global financial crises).

By their time extent:

- *Short-term*, which are resolved quickly, usually through immediate interventions (e.g., one-off diplomatic crises, certain small-scale humanitarian crises);
- *Long-term* (several years) and which require complex resolution processes (e.g., the protracted conflicts in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, Syria or Afghanistan);
- *Permanent*, a crisis that ones identified continues to endure (i.e. climate crisis).

By their level of complexity:

- *Simple crises* which affect a single security dimension and “can be localized, contained within their own bounds, and thus, manageable” (Peborgh 2024);

- *Complex crises* that can be:

- *Multidimensional*, when one crisis affects simultaneously several dimensions of security in the same region/state (i.e. Ukrainian refugee crisis affecting political, economic, social security dimensions in Romania);

- *Compound crises* have to subsequent categories: *overlapping (multi-layered)* crises as more crises happening simultaneously in the same territory but not initially interconnected and triggered by different generator factors (i.e. The compound crisis - biological (sanitary), humanitarian and economic and financial - in the Arab region triggered by the simultaneous occurrence of COVID-19 and a significant drop in oil prices in 2020-2021) (United Nations Development Programme 2020) and *polycrisis*, “multiple and interconnected crises occurring simultaneously, where their interactions amplify the overall impact” (World Bank 2024);

- *Meta-crisis* designs an “intricate web of interrelated crises, where each polycrisis contributes to the overarching systemic breakdown. These interconnected crises amplify and compound each other, creating a complex and overwhelming global emergency” (Peborgh 2024).

By the origin of generator factors, as derived from Table no. 1:

- *Geopolitical crises* generated as a result of tensions over resources, territories or strategic alliances;

- *Societal crises* resulting from social inequalities, ethnic or religious tensions;

- *Technological crises* that are linked to technological advances or failures (e.g. nuclear accidents, loss of control over artificial intelligence);

- *Humanitarian crises* generated by human suffering no matter is physical, mental or economic.

These typologies are not exhaustive and most of the time, contemporary security crises are mixed, involving elements from several categories. For example, *humanitarian crises* result from conflicts, mass migrations, famines or severe natural disasters (Examples: Syrian refugee crisis, Rohingya crisis in Myanmar), having as causes civil wars, oppressive regimes and/or climate change. Also, the War in Ukraine (2022-present) is a military conflict that has as causes territorial claims, but has a pronounced humanitarian side, similar to international terrorism marked by attacks organized by extremist groups with the aim of spreading fear or influencing the policies of states (the attacks of September 11, 2001, the activities of ISIS or Al-Qaeda groups) having as causes political instability, ideological radicalization and economic inequalities.

Conclusions

There are no universally accepted definitions of the *crisis* concept. In a broad sense, a crisis can be understood as a national or international situation in the context of which a threat addresses the values, interests or priority objectives of the parties involved.

International crises are events characterized by low probability and significant consequences, which threaten a state or an organization in its deepest goals.

In the case of an international crisis, the security environment can be characterized by: distrust; polarization of social and political differences; use of conventional or unconventional weapons; carrying out provocative actions, sporadic, unorganized actions, with a low level of violence; perception of the interests of the parties as incompatible; intergroup hostility; repression, insurgency, systematic violation of human rights, etc.

New definitions of international security crises, as well as new typologies, can be configured by analyzing existing references in various specialized works in the fields of International Relations, Political Studies and Security Studies, as well as the identified characteristics of the international security environment in which crises are generated.

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