

# Lock Step - The eerily prescient pandemic scenario of the Rockefeller Foundation

[May 12, 2020 | Many people find Event 201 rather creepy, the role-play exercise around a novel-corona-virus pandemic, that the Gates-Foundation, Johns-Hopkins University and the World Economic Forum organized weeks before the Covid-19-pandemic started. Even more creepy and impressive, though, is the lesser known Lock Step scenario of the Rockefeller Foundation dating from the year 2010. It almost reads like the story book of the pandemic we are currently living through.](#)

Lock Step is one of four „[Scenarios for the future of technology and international development](#)“, which the Rockefeller Foundation and Global Business Network (GBN) came up with in 2010 after a year of work by a large team. GBN is described by its founder, the US-American futurist Peter Schwartz as a „high level networking and corporate research agency“. Schwartz has worked for the Pentagon and has ties to the World Economic Council. He sits on the the board of the (militaristic) Center for a New American Security (CNAS) and is a member of the 21st Century Council of the Berggruen Institute, which „develops ideas to shape political and social institutions“.

The Rockefeller Foundation features in numerous conspiracy theories as an important part of the underlying long-term power-structures in the US. Not least the memoirs of David Rockefeller lend an element of credibility to such theories. The Rockefeller Foundation [funded the establishment of the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health](#) in 1916, which, „was the first of its kind in the United States and became enormously influential in the field.“ It is also the institution which co-hosted Event 201 and has been the source of data on deaths and infections in the current pandemic for media outlets all over the world. Unrelated to the pandemic issue, but a [focus of my reporting](#) on this blog, the Rockefeller Foundation was instrumental in founding the Bellagio Group and its successor, the infamous Group of Thirty (G30).

The Rockefeller-report with the Lock-Step-scenario seems to be addressed to decision makers at large, powerful foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation itself or the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#). It explains the purpose of the exercise as (italics mine throughout):

Scenarios are designed to stretch our thinking about both the *opportunities and obstacles that the future might hold*. (They) are a medium through which *great change can be not just envisioned but also actualized*. The more closely you read them, the more likely it becomes that you will recognize their important but less obvious implications to you, your work, and your community. We strongly encourage you to share and discuss this report widely, use it as a *springboard for further creative thinking about how technology could shape development*, and test and adjust your strategies or personal actions accordingly.

Before getting to the most impressively far-sighted parts of Lock Step, let me briefly give you a list of the issues on which the scenario builders have made their choices:

- A virus pandemic with high contagion and high mortality
- Overwhelmed health systems of many nations.
- Who gets killed, (young or old)? (young in this case)
- Economies are devastated
- International mobility of people and goods severely impeded
- Tourism in suspended animation

- Global supply chains interrupted
- Retail establishments shut down
- Lack of containment protocols in developing countries
- Non-authoritarian response of US-government fails
- Authoritarian Chinese approach works much better
- Other nations emulate authoritarian, high surveillance Chinese approach
- Endurance of more authoritarian rule after pandemic
- Shocked populations welcoming more surveillance
- ... and authoritarian rule
- Biometric ID gets a boost
- More government control of industries vital to national interest
- IT-monopolists keeping innovations within national borders.
- A multipolar IT-world with US-dominance emerging
- Philanthropic foundations becoming part of US external and security policy
- „Oversized influence“ of large philanthropies

A few cross-references are instructive. They suggest that the Rockefeller Foundation has indeed been working on taking advantage of the "opportunities" of the Lock-Step-scenario:

The Rockefeller Foundation has provided the [seed funding in 2017 for ID2020](#), an initiative to get every world citizen a unified biometric identity by 2030. Partners are Microsoft, the immunization alliance GAVI and Accenture. Accenture recently featured on this blog as creator - for the World Economic Forum - of the total-control dystopia [The Known Traveller Digital Identity Project](#).

The bits about government control of strategic (AI) industries, a multipolar IT-world and IT-monopolists keeping their innovations within national borders chive well with the deliberations in the recent [interim report](#) of the National Security Council on Artificial intelligence (NSCAI) under the leadership of Google's's ex-CEO Eric Schmidt.

The part on China's more successful high surveillance approach brings to mind a [presentation of the NSCAI](#) from spring 2019, which recommended the Chinese model for emulation.

Obviously, Bill Gates dominating the global pandemic response via their influence on the WHO and the media testifies to the farsightedness of the „oversized influence of large philanthropies“ element of the scenario.

Let's have a look at the actual text:

### **LOCK STEP**

#### **A world of tighter top-down government control and more authoritarian leadership, with limited innovation and growing citizen pushback**

In 2012, the pandemic that the world had been anticipating for years finally hit. Unlike 2009's H1N1, this new influenza strain — originating from wild geese — was extremely virulent and deadly. Even the most pandemic-prepared nations were quickly overwhelmed when the virus streaked around the world, infecting nearly 20 percent of the global population and killing 8 million in just seven months, the majority of them healthy young adults. The pandemic also had a deadly effect on economies: international mobility of both people and goods screeched to a halt, debilitating industries like tourism and breaking global supply chains. Even locally, normally bustling shops and office buildings sat empty for months, devoid of both employees and customers.

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The text continues by describing that developing countries were particularly hard-hit, because they had no official containment protocols, and then goes back to developed nations and the US:

The United States's initial policy of "strongly discouraging" citizens from flying proved deadly in its leniency, accelerating the spread of the virus not just within the U.S. but across borders. However, a few countries did fare better — China in particular.

The Chinese government's quick imposition and enforcement of mandatory quarantine for all citizens, as well as its instant and near-hermetic sealing off of all borders, saved millions of lives, stopping the spread of the virus far earlier than in other countries and enabling a swifter post- pandemic recovery. China's government was not the only one that took extreme measures to protect its citizens from risk and exposure. During the pandemic, national leaders around the world flexed their authority and imposed airtight rules and restrictions, from the mandatory wearing of face masks to body-temperature checks at the entries to communal spaces like train stations and supermarkets.

While the scenario starts already in 2012 the scenario's time-line goes out much further, to about 2025, as the focus of the exercise is on long-term developments:

Even after the pandemic faded, this more authoritarian control and oversight of citizens and their activities stuck and even intensified. In order to protect themselves from the spread of increasingly global problems — from pandemics and transnational terrorism to environmental crises and rising poverty — leaders around the world took a firmer grip on power. At first, the notion of a more controlled world gained wide acceptance and approval. Citizens willingly gave up some of their sovereignty — and their privacy — to more paternalistic states in exchange for greater safety and stability. Citizens were more tolerant, and even eager, for top-down direction and oversight, and national leaders had more latitude to impose order in the ways they saw fit. In developed countries, this heightened oversight took many forms: biometric ID for all citizens, for example, and tighter regulation of key industries whose stability was deemed vital to national interests.

The text continues by describing the successes of newly authoritarian governments of developing countries in enabling their citizens to have a better life and contrasts those with failures of irresponsible elites in other countries.

In [developing] countries with strong and thoughtful leaders, citizens' overall economic status and quality of life increased. In India, for example, air quality drastically improved after 2016, when the government outlawed high- emitting vehicles. In Ghana, the introduction of ambitious government programs to improve basic infrastructure and ensure the availability of clean water for all her people led to a sharp decline in water-borne diseases. But more authoritarian leadership worked less well — and in some cases tragically — in countries run by irresponsible elites who used their increased power to pursue their own interests at the expense of their citizens.

US-IT-monopolists do well in this scenario, but have to commit to prevent governments and corporations of competing nations from gaining (early) access to their innovations.

Well-off countries and monopolistic companies with big research and development budgets still made significant advances, but the *IP behind their breakthroughs remained locked behind strict national or*

*corporate protection.* Russia and India imposed stringent domestic standards for supervising and certifying encryption-related products and their suppliers — a category that in reality meant all IT innovations. The U.S. and EU struck back with retaliatory national standards, throwing a wrench in the development and diffusion of technology globally.

## Philanthropies in Lock Step

There is a box of what this scenario would mean for the work of philanthropies, of which I would like to quote the first half:

Given the strong role of governments, doing philanthropy will require heightened diplomacy skills and the ability to operate effectively in extremely divergent environments. Philanthropy grantee and civil society relationships will be *strongly moderated by government, and some foundations might choose to align themselves more closely with national official development assistance (ODA) strategies and government objectives.* Larger philanthropies will retain an outsized share of influence.

## Technology in Lock Step

There is also a box on „Technology in Lock Step“

Technological innovation in “Lock Step” is largely driven by government and is focused on issues of national security and health and safety. Most technological improvements are created by and for developed countries, *shaped by governments’ dual desire to control and to monitor their citizens.*“

Examples of technologies that are expected to proliferate in this scenarios are those, which can detect abnormal behavior or „antisocial intent“ at airports and other public areas, inexpensive but sophisticated tools for online conferencing and a fractured „World Wide“ Web in which governments tend to police regional online traffic, mimicking the Chinese approach.

## Life in Lock Step

Finally a chapter on „Life in Lock Step“ features a very positive description of the life of the Indian Manisha, praising the successes of an authoritarian government in conquering the pandemic and cleaning up the Ganges river afterwards.

## The Context of the scenario

Lock Step is one of four scenarios, which fill the four quadrants of combinations of high and low government control and high and low adaptability. The ideal scenario is called **Clever Together** and features high control in a highly cooperative global environment and thus high adaptability. **Lock Step**, „a world of tighter top-down government control and more authoritarian leadership“ comes across as second best, described much more favourably than **Hack Attack**, „an economically unstable, shock-pron world, and **Smart Scramble**, „an economically depressed world with makeshift, localized survival strategies.

## Conclusions

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This report illustrates that important players have been thinking through the social control opportunities and challenges created by fear-inspiring pandemics for at least ten years. Looking back on the last 10 years, one could say that in the first five to seven of those years, a variant of **Clever Together**, as Silicon Valley technocrats would envisage it, seems to have been pursued, but has more recently fallen out of favor with major geopolitical players, notably the US. They seem to now go for the second best option of a more authoritarian and nationalistic approach, not dissimilar to the **Lock Step** scenario.

[German version](#)

**Change notice (May 13):** Eric Schmidt's former position was corrected to Google's CEO.