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Is the World Slouching Toward a Grave Systemic Crisis?

History is punctuated by catalytic episodes—events that can become guideposts toward a more open and civilized world.



East German border policemen refusing to shake hands with a Berliner over the border fence in November, 1989

Lutz Schmidt / Associated Press

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On August 5, Philip Zelikow delivered the following keynote address at the annual meeting of the Aspen Strategy Group, a discussion forum for experts and government practitioners. Zelikow, who is currently the White Burkett Miller Professor of History at

the University of Virginia, has served at all levels of American government, and for administrations of both parties—including roles at the White House, State Department, and Pentagon. He was also the executive director of the 9/11 Commission. In this speech he reflects on the much-discussed concept of “world order,” interrogates the claim that a “more open” world is really better for Americans, and issues a warning about America’s world leadership. The full text is below.

I start with a Tale of Two Prophets. This tale comes from that terrible and glorious decade, the 1940s. The two prophets predicted the future of freedom.

My first prophet was a man named James Burnham. In 1941 Burnham was 35 years old. From a wealthy family—railroad money—he was a star student at Princeton, then on to Balliol College, Oxford. Burnham was an avowed Communist. He joined with Trotsky during the 1930s.

By 1941, Burnham had moved on, as he published his first great book of prophecy, called *The Managerial Revolution*. The book made him a celebrity. It was widely discussed on both sides of the Atlantic.

Burnham’s vision of the future is one where the old ideologies, like socialism, have been left behind. The rulers are really beyond all that. They are the managerial elite, the technocrats, the scientists, and the bureaucrats who manage the all-powerful enterprises and agencies.

You know this vision. You have seen it so often at the movies. It is the vision in all those science fiction dystopias. You know, with the gilded masterminds ruling all from their swank towers and conference rooms.

It’s a quite contemporary vision. For instance, it is not far at all from the way I think the rulers of China imagine themselves and their future.

In this and other writings, Burnham held up Stalin’s Soviet Union and Hitler’s Germany as the pure exemplars of these emerging managerial states. They were

showing the way to the future. By comparison, FDR's New Deal was a primitive version. And he thought it would lose.

Burnham's views were not so unusual among the leading thinkers of the 1940s, like Joseph Schumpeter or Karl Polanyi. All were pessimistic about the future of free societies, including Friedrich Hayek, who really believed that once-free countries were on the "road to serfdom." But Burnham took the logic further.

Just after the second world war ended, my other prophet decided to answer Burnham. You know him as George Orwell.

Eric Blair, who used George Orwell as his pen name, was about Burnham's age. Their backgrounds were very different. Orwell was English. Poor. Orwell's lungs were pretty rotten and he would not live long. Orwell was a democratic socialist who came to loathe Soviet communism. He had volunteered to fight in Spain, was shot through the throat. Didn't stop his writing.

Orwell was profoundly disturbed by Burnham's vision of the emerging "managerial state." All too convincing. Yet he also noticed how, when Burnham described the new superstates and their demigod rulers, Burnham exhibited "a sort of fascinated admiration."

Orwell *wrote*: For Burnham, "Communism may be wicked, but at any rate it is *big*: it is a terrible, all-devouring monster which one fights against but which one cannot help admiring." To Orwell, Burnham's mystical picture of "terrifying, irresistible power" amounted to "an act of homage, and even of self-abasement."

"Power worship blurs political judgment because it leads, almost unavoidably, to the belief that present trends will continue."

Burnham had predicted Nazi victory. Later, Burnham had predicted the Soviet conquest of all Eurasia. By 1947 Burnham was calling for the U.S. to launch a preventive nuclear war against the Soviet Union to head off the coming disaster.

Orwell saw a pattern. Such views seemed symptoms of “a major mental disease, and its roots,” he argued, which, “lie partly in cowardice and partly in the worship of power, which is not fully separable from cowardice.”

Orwell thought that “power worship blurs political judgment because it leads, almost unavoidably, to the belief that present trends will continue. Whoever is winning at the moment will always seem to be invincible.”

Orwell had another critique. He deplored the fact that, “The tendency of writers like Burnham, whose key concept is ‘realism,’ is to overrate the part played in human affairs by sheer force.” Orwell went on. “I do not say that he is wrong all the time. ... But somehow his picture of the world is always slightly distorted.”

Finally, Orwell thought Burnham overestimated the resilience of the managerial state model and underestimated the qualities of open and civilized societies. Burnham’s vision **did not allow enough play** for “the fact that certain rules of conduct have to be observed if human society is to hold together at all.”

Having written these critical essays, Orwell then tried to make his case against Burnham in another way. This anti-Burnham argument became a novel—the novel called *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

That book came out in 1949. Orwell died the next year.

By that time, Burnham had become a consultant to the CIA, advising its new office for covert action. That was the capacity in which Burnham met the young William F. Buckley. Burnham mentored Buckley. It was with Buckley that Burnham became one of the original editors of the *National Review* and a major conservative commentator. In 1983, President Reagan awarded Burnham the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Not that Burnham’s core vision had changed. In 1964, he published another book of prophecy. This was entitled *Suicide of the West: An Essay on the Meaning and Destiny of Liberalism*. The Soviet Union and its allies had the will to power.

Liberalism and its defenders did not. “The primary issue before Western civilization today, and before its member nations, is survival.” (Sound familiar?)

And it was liberalism, Burnham argued, with its self-criticism and lack of commitment, that would pull our civilization down from within. Suicide.

So was Burnham wrong? Was Orwell right? This is a first-class historical question. Burnham’s ideal of the “managerial state” is so alive today.

State the questions another way: Do open societies really work better than closed ones? Is a more open and civilized world really safer and better for Americans? If we think yes, then what is the best way to prove that point?

My answer comes in three parts. The first is about how to express our core values.

American leaders tend to describe their global aims as the promotion of the right values. Notice that these are values in how other countries are governed.

President Obama’s [call](#) for an “international order of laws and institutions,” had the objective of winning a clash of *domestic* governance models around the world. This clash he called: “authoritarianism versus liberalism.”

Yet look at how many values [he felt](#) “liberalism” had to include. For Obama the “road of true democracy,” included a commitment to “liberty, equality, justice, and fairness” and curbing the “excesses of capitalism.”

What about our current president? [Last month](#) he urged his listeners to be ready to fight to the death for the “values” of the West. He named two: “individual freedom and sovereignty.”

A week later, two of his chief aides, Gary Cohn and H.R. McMaster, [doubled down](#) on the theme that America was promoting, with its friends, the values that “drive progress throughout the world.” They too had a laundry list. They omitted “sovereignty.” But then, narrowing the list only to the “most important,” they listed: “[T]he dignity of every person ... equality of women ... innovation ... freedom of speech and of religion ... and free and fair markets.”

By contrast, the anti-liberal core values seem simple. The anti-liberals are *for* authority ... and *against* anarchy and disorder. And they are *for* community ... and *against* the subversive, disruptive outsider.

There are of course many ways to define a “community”—including tribal, religious, political, or professional. It is a source of identity, of common norms of behavior, of shared ways of life.

Much of the divide between anti-liberals or liberals is cultural. Little has to do with “policy” preferences.

Devotees of freedom and liberalism do not dwell as much on “community.” Except to urge that everybody be included, and treated fairly.

But beliefs about “community” have always been vital to human societies. In many ways, the last 200 years have been battles about how local communities try to adapt or fight back against growing global pressures—especially economic and cultural, but often political and even military.

So much of the divide between anti-liberals or liberals is cultural. Little has to do with “policy” preferences. Mass politics are defined around magnetic poles of cultural attraction.

If Americans engage this culture war on a global scale, I plead for modesty and simplicity. As few words as possible, as fundamental as possible.

Certainly our history counsels modesty. Americans and the American government have a very mixed and confusing record in the way we have, in practice, related values in foreign governance to what *our* government does.

Also, until the late 19th century, “democracy” was never at the core of liberal thinking. Liberal thinkers were very interested in the design of republics. But classical liberal thinkers, including many of the American founders, always had a troubled relationship with democracy. There were always two issues.

First, liberals were devoted, above all, to liberty of thought and reason. *Pace* Tom Paine, the people were often regarded as intolerant, ill-informed, and superstitious—unreliable judges of scientific truth, historical facts, moral duty, and legal disputes.

The other problem is that democracy used to be considered a synonym for mob rule. Elections can be a supreme check on tyranny. But sometimes the people have exalted their dictators and have not cared overmuch about the rule of law.

It therefore still puzzles me: Why is there so much debate about which people are “ready for democracy”? Few of the old theorists thought *any* people were ready for such a thing.

It was thought, though, that any civilized people might be persuaded to reject tyranny. Any civilized community might prefer a suitably designed and confining constitution, limiting powers and working at a reliable rule of law.

By the way, that “rule of law” was a value that Mr. Cohn and General McMaster left off of their “most important” list—yet is anything more essential to our way of life?

Aside from the relation with democracy, the other great ideal that any liberal order finds necessary, yet troubling, is the one about community: nationalism.

Consider the case of Poland. For 250 years, Poland has been a great symbol to the rest of Europe. For much of Polish and European history, nationalism was an ally of liberalism. Versus Czarist tyranny, versus aristocratic oligarchs.

But sometimes not. Today, Poland’s governing Law and Justice party is all about being anti-Russian, anti-Communist, and pro-Catholic. They are all about “authority” and “community.” At the expense of...? Poland’s president has just had to [intervene](#) when the rule of law itself seemed to be at stake.

We Americans and our friends should define what we stand for. Define it in a way that builds a really big tent.

In 1989, working for the elder President Bush, I was able to get the phrase, “commonwealth of free nations,” into a couple of the president’s speeches. It didn’t stick.

Nearly 20 years later, in 2008, the late Harvard historian Ernest May and I came up with a better formulation. We thought that through human history the most adaptable and successful societies had turned out to be the ones that were “open and civilized.”

Rather than the word, “liberal,” the word “open” seems more useful. It is the essence of liberty. Indian prime minister Narendra Modi uses it in his speeches; Karl Popper [puts it](#) at the core of his philosophy; Anne-Marie Slaughter makes it a [touchstone](#) in her latest book. That’s a big tent right there.

Also the ideal of being “civilized.” Not such an old-fashioned ideal. It gestures to the yearning for community. Not only a rule of law, also community norms, the norms that reassure society and regulate rulers—whether in a constitution or in holy scripture.

Chinese leaders extol the value of being civilized—naturally, they commingle it with Sinification. Muslims take pride in a heritage that embraces norms of appropriate conduct by rulers. And, of course, in an open society, community norms can be contested and do evolve.

Where can we do the most to tilt the balance toward an open and civilized world? What states or regions or issues are pivotal?

The retired Indian statesman, Shyam Saran, [recently lectured](#) on, “Is a China-centric world inevitable?” To Saran, “A stable world order needs a careful balance ... between power and legitimacy. Legitimacy is upheld when states, no matter how powerful, observe ... norms of state behavior.” India, Saran said, had the “civilizational attributes.”

So that is my first suggestion—to simplify, yet balance, our expressions of core values.

My second suggestion is to think strategically about where or how the U.S. can promote such a world.

Strategically, we could ask: Where can we do the most to tilt the balance toward an open and civilized world? What states or regions or issues are pivotal? Where can U.S. actions have catalytic impact?

Especially since 9/11, the danger of catastrophic terrorism has turned America's global strategic priorities upside-down. Terrorists tend to flourish in the broken 'wilderness' areas of the world. These are just the places that therefore are *least* likely to change the course of world history in any positive way.

These places draw huge amounts of our attention, resources, and energy. From the perspective of global strategy, not only is this all playing defense, it is actually anti-strategic—the *most* important power in the world concentrating on the *least* important places.

I get that the defensive effort is important. My well-documented track record working on terrorism issues goes back more than 20 years. Ash Carter, John Deutch, and I first published on a new threat we called "Catastrophic Terrorism" back in 1997, and you know of my work with the [9/11 Commission](#). But the U.S. government's leaders should never forget that, from the perspective of global strategy, this part of its work is fundamentally reactive and fearful.

You can't win if you don't put points on the board. And reactive defense does not put points on the board. It does not advance aspirations to build an open and civilized world.

This is one more way that the narrative discourse about "liberal world order" becomes a policeman's sort of narrative. A rather weary and overburdened policeman at that, and handling a complicated home life.

And the narrative is a bit imperial too—not in a way to envy. More like the British Colonial Secretary who [commented](#) in 1902 about feeling like “the Weary Titan.”

Indeed, anyone reading the papers assembled for this conference might feel rather like the British diplomat who, in 1907, [noted](#) to his colleagues that, “It has sometimes seemed to me that to a foreigner reading our press the British Empire must appear in the light of some huge giant sprawling over the globe, with gouty fingers and toes stretching in every direction, which cannot be approached without eliciting a scream.”

To think about this more strategically, try out a different mindset, one that turns that “policeman of the world order” image inside-out. Or maybe I should say, outside-in.

Start out there, with whatever foreign country or region one might think is troubled and important. Start in whatever area you deem crucial, like Brazil, or Mexico, or Egypt, or Turkey, or Pakistan, or Indonesia. Then, from the perspective of that country, look at what issues actually dominate much of their daily lives.

The so-called “world order” is really the accumulation of local problem-solving.

Then ask yourself, which foreign countries matter the most to solving these problems? After doing that, try to size up just where or how America can fit in.

The so-called “world order” is really the accumulation of such local problem-solving.

In this construct, power and persuasion comes mainly by example. Because people see what works—or what fails. Inspired or alarmed, they make their local choices, which accumulate.

How might an American statesman think this way? Consider the example of George Marshall. He thought this way. Here is a Tale of Two Marshall Plans.

The second half of 1947 was a busy time. Supposedly, the Truman administration had just announced a Grand Strategy of Containment.

The most direct threat to that grand strategy was in Asia. There, the most populous country on earth, China, was gravely threatened by Soviet-supported Communists. China mattered. In 1941, American concern for China had been a major reason for the war with Japan. America had just promoted China to lead world power status, insisting that it be one of the five permanent members of the new UN Security Council. And here it was, under direct armed attack, with the issue still very much in doubt.

Next, on the other side of the world, there was the threat of economic collapse and communist domestic subversion in Western Europe, even as Eastern Europe was practically being written off.

In the second half of 1947, plans were put together for both of these problems—China and Western Europe. Both plans called for massive, conditional assistance.

The China plan was much less expensive, but it included a significant military advisory effort. It had been put together by a mission led by General Albert Wedemeyer, a man Marshall knew well and had picked for the job. The Wedemeyer report was supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Europe plan had been suggested in a Marshall speech at Harvard. But, as summer rolled on, there was no plan there. A European committee on economic cooperation was trying to put something together. It didn't seem to be going well, but they kept trying.

In the autumn of 1947 Marshall made his decision. Just to give a sense of some of the other things on his plate, during the same weeks, the U.S. also decided not to help establish a peacekeeping force for the partition of Palestine, and gave up on trying to prevent the impending war there.

Marshall analyzed the plans for Europe and China. He knew both regions really well, especially China. He decided to lower expectations for the China plan and put

all his chips on the one for Western Europe.

Now, one might think there would be some problems with a Containment strategy that starts off by allowing Communist conquest of the world's most populous country. But Marshall and his colleagues made—explicitly—some very tough and controversial choices about what mattered most, what they thought the local governments could and could not do, and how U.S. action was most likely to make a difference in those local stories.

Marshall had explained his mindset. In a [nationally broadcast radio address](#) he said that, “Problems which bear directly on the future of our civilization,” “cannot be disposed of by general talk or vague formulae—by what Lincoln called ‘pernicious abstractions.’ They require concrete solutions for definite and extremely complicated questions.”

Analyzing those questions, Marshall chose. They chose Western Europe as their preferred testing ground. Doing so, Marshall and his country regained the strategic initiative. They promoted the idealism of “what works.”

Today, the U.S. must make strategic choices about what places or issues will advance our narrative.

Now I come to my third answer as to how to prove the possibilities for an open and civilized world. I want to talk about the disproportionate role in history played by what I call, “catalytic episodes.” The postwar recovery of Western Europe was one.

Wars, even cold wars, are not just lost. They have to be won.

Much of history is punctuated by catalytic episodes. After they happen, people interpret them to construct narratives about past and future.

Such episodes are usually quite complex and contingent. Few outsiders, and even most insiders, do not understand what really happened.

They will nevertheless be dramatically simplified into catchphrases and axioms. In this way, intricate, half-understood policy moves, good or ill, can mold mass culture.

All world orders are an accumulation of the ways people and their institutions try to solve their era's problems. A deep system-wide crisis occurs when people, people all over the world, no longer think the old order, the old examples, work. Catalytic episodes usually emerge from sort of systemic crisis.

When such a crisis comes in the modern world, there can be upheavals—often violent—all over the world. For example, as the world became more deeply interconnected during the 19th century, probably the largest and most violent systemic crisis occurred between 1854 and 1871.

You all know about the American civil war, though its global causes and connections may not be as familiar. And you probably know about some of the wars in Europe throughout this period. But the largest civil war of that age was in China. Another huge struggle wracked the Indian subcontinent. Another transformed Japan. The Mexicans shot their foreign emperor and created a republic. And there was more.

This systemic crisis had catalytic episodes that seemed to show the world “what works” and “what doesn't.” The American Union. German unification. By 1871, the world believed that the constitutional nation-state was the “new thing.” So, for instance, right after the Japanese civil war had ended, the winning side modeled Japan's system of government on the German one.

Again, after World War I and World War II, people everywhere argued about whether the total state, or the managerial state, was the new wave of the future. An alternative was social democracy, pioneered during the 1930s by much-discussed examples in the United States and Sweden.

In such times of crisis there are global “elections.” Just as American elections have “swing states,” global elections have swing regions, or swing “issues.”

For instance, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, capitalism was in an obvious global crisis. “[Can Capitalism Survive?](#)” cried a *Time* magazine cover from 1975. “Is Capitalism Working?” asked another cover in 1980.

So let’s recall a couple of catalytic episodes that changed the global narrative.

In East Asia: Mao died in 1976. China was divided among competing visions. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping and his allies started a pivotal turn. They rejected the Soviet model. Why? Looking around, they were influenced less by the example of the United States and more by examples nearby: Japan, South Korea, and (whisper it) Taiwan. U.S. policy did do a lot to set the background conditions for their achievements. Isn’t it ironic that, in the very years these U.S. policies produced world-historical results, those very policies were being trashed in America itself?

In the Atlantic world: During the 1970s, social democracy was sputtering on both sides of the ocean. The Bretton Woods system had put national economic autonomy ahead of the free movement of global capital. That system had collapsed. Galloping inflation joined with high unemployment. Labor strife was endemic. Protests and terrorism wracked western Europe. There were also the twin energy shocks.

Every one of America’s major adversaries now has the strategic initiative.

But capitalism rebooted during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Led from Europe at least as much as from the United States, leaders threw their weight behind a new and freer economic orthodoxy of hard money and open capital markets. National economic “sovereignty” declined, but global investment and commerce took off.

Here too, Americans played a vital part. Yet it was the Europeans who were in the swing states. Socialism was contesting the future, not only of France, but also of Italy and Spain. As 1982 began, Margaret Thatcher carried the torch but barely survived in office. West Germany became an anchor, finding common cause with

French technocrats like Jacques Delors, who preferred the Single European Act to the path of independent socialism.

This too was a battle of ideas—the victory of what the Germans called the *Tendenzwende* (“change of course”). A colossal political fight over NATO deployment of U.S. nuclear missiles, an initiative pioneered by a German chancellor, became a central, symbolic battle.

In 1982 and 1983 the swing states of Europe made their choices, as the Chinese were making theirs. These choices turned the tide in a global election.

Orwell had not foreseen this. In 1947, he thought the world would divide into the spheres of two or three Burnhamesque superstates. These would have “a semi-divine caste at the top and outright slavery at the bottom, and the crushing out of liberty would exceed anything that the world has yet seen.” Orwell held out only a small, wistful hope that perhaps Europe might develop an alternative, “to present ... the *spectacle* of a community where people are relatively free and happy and where the main motive in life is not the pursuit of money or power.”

One can make a fair argument that the Cold War ended precisely because this happened, because such promising alternatives were, in fact, created. It is too easy just to concentrate on communism’s failings, the weakness of its managerial states. Wars, even cold wars, are not just lost. They have to be won.

Such were the positive alternatives consolidated in another catalytic episode, the whirlwind of diplomacy in 1989 and 1990, with the coda of the decisive defeat of aggression in the Gulf war of 1991. Some of us here played a part. And the world stepped forward into another era.

Let me offer another personal example of this kind of positive, catalytic policymaking. Many of you are familiar with the huge, controversial move in 2005, the civil nuclear deal with India. This episode became catalytic, transforming our relations with India and India’s place in the world. I worked on this at the State Department.

Take a moment to consider that genesis, the creation of the India move. The move became public in July 2005. But the genesis occurred between February and April of that year. Note: At that time there was no big “India threat.” The move was a bit reactive, but only in an incidental sense, in that our thinking was spurred by a problem of how to present or offset a forthcoming transfer of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan. That spur, though, just opened up broader thinking about how a positive strategic opportunity might change the whole conversation, with wide rippling effects over space and time.

Condi Rice does not discuss this genesis phase in her memoir. But it was one of her finest episodes as Secretary of State, precisely because she embraced a kind of strategic thinking that was so very different from the reactive, defensive playbook.

Apply this idea of “catalytic construction” to the world today.

The world has entered a new major era in its history. The 1990s were a transitional time, with the new era taking form early in this century. The political side of that story is obvious enough. But the socio-economic dimension is even more important.

The fundamental shift is the digital revolution and the rise of a networked world. This really started to take off during the decade of the 2000s. It is still in its early stages. It is a bit akin to the period of the 1880s and 1890s during the takeoff of the second industrial revolution. As with that revolution, this digital revolution is beginning to transform the structure and organization of society and communities in deep ways.

The challenges and opportunities are not the same as they were in the 1970s and 1980s. Our governing systems are not nearly keeping pace.

The United States can take the lead here in America. Our own institutions are decaying, but little is being done to renew them. Meanwhile drug overdoses, many due to opioids coming from China, much coming from China, are the **leading cause of death** of Americans under 50.

Looking around other countries or regions around the world, probably all of us share some sense that the world is slouching toward another cycle of grave systemic crisis. The last three years have been disheartening.

Everyone here can reflect on unease in global capitalism, global environment, mass migrations, cyberspace, advances in biological engineering, trends in mass media and culture, the implosion of the Arab and Muslim world, and other problems in Eurasia, East Asia, Latin America, or Africa.

It is hard for me to see how American efforts in the world are being purposefully directed in any meaningful way.

Also, as a government, the U.S. is not well informed or well equipped for strategic works of catalytic construction. Here we are in this information age, with our more than **\$70 billion** intelligence enterprise, and as a government and as a country, I feel we are *less* able to reconstruct the policymaking world in the really crucial, swing countries than we were in Marshall's time 70 years ago. And U.S. capacities for working with foreigners to solve their problems were also smarter and more functional 70 years ago than they are now.

That does not mean Washington is not busy. A poorly functioning government is not inert. Instead, it lives the life of a pinball. The life of a pinball can feel quite busy. So many bright lights, so noisy, so bounced about.

Maybe any more constructive moves will just have to wait a few years. Yet it does seem to me that the world is drifting toward a truly massive general crisis.

Every one of America's major adversaries now has the strategic initiative. They—Russia, Iran, China—are currently better positioned to set the time, place, and manner of engagement, including political engagement. On every vector, we react.

Blustery declarations, backed by unsustainable commitments, do not regain the strategic initiative. Instead, they invite exemplary humiliation, this American generation's version of Britain's "Suez" moment, that some of our adversaries will eagerly try to arrange.

Suppose, instead of just reacting episodically, the United States and its friends wanted to go on the offense, so to speak, and seize the strategic initiative. My little reading of history suggests a checklist of three strategic questions:

1. **Set priorities.** What battleground issues or states are most likely to influence this generation's global election about prospects for an open and civilized world? (Including the pivotal battlegrounds for the future of governance here in America.)
2. **Think outside-in.** Out in those states, out in the world of those issues, are there catalytic possibilities? How do *they* see their situation? What (and who) are the critical variables in *their* choices?
3. **U.S. efficacy.** In that context, where or how can the U.S. really make a strategic difference?

These are exactly the kind of questions Marshall and his colleagues analyzed in 1947. They are also just the kind of questions the Bush administration analyzed during 1989 and 1990.

Here are a few candidate focal points for catalytic initiatives:

Which developed countries may model ways to adapt successfully to the digital revolution? Fareed Zakaria [just noted](#) that Canada has been immune to “populism” not because the Canadian people are immune from our culture war, but “rather because for the last 20 years, they have pursued good public policy.”

If, as Fareed says, “we now live in a post-American West,” how do we size up the prospects and variables in the efforts of Macron and his partners to reboot Europe's political and economic model? I see no evidence of a real Atlantic agenda.

China's future course is not set. So what are the crucial and foreseeable waypoints ahead? On which can the U.S. make a difference? Ditto for India.

In the Arab and Muslim world? Is there any state that could develop in a way that inspires wide hope across the Arab and Muslim world? The giant Saudi domestic experiment? I don't know. And the U.S. now seems overweighted on the Gulf,

underweighted in the pivotal potential of Baghdad and Cairo. No one should underestimate what Iraqis have accomplished in the last two terrible years. And what about Widodo in Indonesia? Couldn't that be exemplary?

In Latin America, again, perhaps defense can turn to offense. As Mexico descends into another abyss of violence and faces a crucial election, what about instead playing offense toward a North American vision? Brazil's crisis might be an opportunity. The Pacific Alliance countries—Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Chile—also offer inspiration.

To boil my argument down to two sentences: If you don't like Burnham's vision, then you better build and spotlight Orwell's alternatives. Outsiders will only understand the results, the vivid results.

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