

KISHORE MAHBUBANI

Can Asians Think?

fourth edition

"... a collection of absolutely first-rate essays,
elegantly written and intellectually provocative."

Samuel P. Huntington

KISHORE MAHBUBANI

Can
Asians
Think?



Marshall Cavendish
Editions

The views expressed in this book are the personal views of Kishore Mahbubani and do not in any way represent the views of the Singapore government.

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IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER,
JANKI MAHBUBANI

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PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

More than a decade has passed since this book was first published in mid-1998. The publisher's decision to release a new and revised edition in 2009 confirms that this volume of essays continues to strike responsive chords, both in the Asian and Western imaginations.

Many reasons could explain the enduring interest in these essays. But one explanation may trump the rest. The world is increasingly aware that we are about to enter a new historical era when Asian societies will resume the centre stage which they occupied for millennia. One reason why this is happening now is that Asian minds have re-awakened. And they are asking many new questions. If you would like a glimpse of the new questions surfacing in Asia, please read these essays.

A careful reader will discover that this volume of essays rests on a different world view from the still globally dominant Western *Weltanschauung*. The biggest conceit that enveloped the minds of many Western intellectuals was the belief that as other societies modernised, they would inevitably become intellectual and moral clones of the West. It is evident this will not happen. Indeed, I have written two other books, *Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust between America and the World* and *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, which document how the gap is widening between the West and Asia.

These two books were also written as sharply as some of the essays in this volume. Many of my writings have stirred some controversy. As a writer I have discovered that while a book full of patient explanations can put forward an alternative point of view, a short and sharply written essay can provoke and shock more effectively. It can also lead to new thinking. This is why there is an enduring interest in a volume of essays like this.

In this new and revised volume, I have decided to add an essay or two to each section. The first section broadly discusses Asia's past, present and future. Here I have added an essay which I wrote for *TIME Magazine* on "The Making of Modern Asia" in August 2005. It generated considerable interest and comment when it appeared.

For the second section, which I have now re-titled as "The West and the Rest", I have added two essays on Europe. Europe used to dominate world history in the 18th and 19th centuries and for much of the 20th century. But it has lost its way geopolitically and is adrift as the 21st century unfolds. These two new essays try to provide Europe with a valuable wake-up call.

While Europe has been drifting, China has been rising. Earlier editions of this volume had no single essay dedicated to China. In this volume I have tried to fill this lacuna with an essay I published in *The American Interest* in March/April 2008 on "Smart Power, Chinese Style".

Finally, together with the rise of Asia, a new global order is being born. Hence, in the final section on "Global Concerns", I have added a short essay on the need to develop new forms of global governance. Its time has come. We must prepare for it.

I hope that this new and revised edition will also remain in print for another decade. We can expect many great changes in the coming years but several of them were anticipated in these essays. Hence, I hope that the reader will find the new edition to be useful and relevant as he or she tries to understand Asia better.

Singapore, July 2009

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

When this volume was first published in mid-1998, neither the publisher nor I expected it to fly far. To our surprise, this volume has since been republished in both Canada and the United States of America. A Spanish edition appeared in Mexico in early 2003 while an Indian edition will be published by Penguin India in 2004.

Ideas have wings, they say. I am therefore pleased that the ideas contained in this volume have travelled far and wide. I wonder why. Perhaps it is because many of the thoughts expressed here, which were heretical in the mid-1990s, continue to remain heretical in the first decade of the 21st century.

The 21st century may have actually begun on 11 September 2001. These terrorist attacks, which have continued, demonstrate vividly that we are moving into a dangerous century. Many structural contradictions are emerging globally. Globalisation is putting all of us on the same boat. Yet our prevailing governance structures lead us to take care only of our own cabins on the boat. Hence, global challenges are ignored. At the same time, globalisation is also throwing different cultures and civilisations into closer proximity. This inevitably creates some friction, giving some resonance to Samuel Huntington's famous thesis of "The Clash of Civilizations".

The real danger that the 21st century faces is that we will sail into it with 19th-century mental maps. To prepare for the new world, we will have to discard conventional wisdom, break up old thought

patterns and begin thinking along new mental corridors. This volume of essays does not attempt to provide the answers. Instead it forces readers to challenge old assumptions. Perhaps this is why new editions continue to appear, both in Singapore and elsewhere.

New York, January 2004

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

One Sunday morning in August 2000, I was very excited to read a news report in the *New York Times* stating that Dr Richard Nisbett, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, had discovered through laboratory studies that the Asians in the study “tended to be more ‘holistic’, showing greater attention to context, a tolerance for contradiction and less dependence on logic. Westerners were more ‘analytic’, avoiding contradiction, focusing on objects removed from their context, and more reliant on logic.”¹

I have not seen Dr Nisbett’s study, and it may be too early to jump to any definite conclusions. But these findings do seem to confirm an intuition I have had from my life experience: Asians and Westerners do think differently on some issues. Mathematical truths cannot be varied in cultures; moral truths can. So too some values.

Looking back at my life after having completed half a century, I realise that I have had the good fortune of travelling through many different cultures and times. As a child, I was part of a Hindu Indian (“Sindhi”) immigrant family in Singapore. My neighbours were Muslim Malay families. The society was predominantly Chinese. I was born a British subject, became a Malaysian citizen, and two years later, in 1965, assumed a Singaporean identity. My education was always in English. Hence, all through my life I have travelled simultaneously through the East and West. It is this life experience which informs the thoughts expressed in these essays.

The title chosen for this volume of essays—“Can Asians

Think?”—is not accidental. It represents essentially two questions folded into one. The first, addressed to my fellow Asians, reads as “Can you think? If you can, why have Asian societies lost a thousand years and slipped far behind the European societies that they were far ahead of at the turn of the last millennium?” This is the harsh question that the first two essays try to answer.

The second question, addressed primarily to my friends in the West, is “Can Asians think for themselves?” We live in an essentially unbalanced world. The flow of ideas, reflecting 500 years of Western domination of the globe, remains a one-way street—from the West to the East. Most Westerners cannot see that they have arrogated to themselves the moral high ground from which they lecture the world. The rest of the world can see this.

Similarly, Western intellectuals are convinced that their minds and cultures are open, self-critical and—in contrast to ossified Asian minds and cultures—have no “sacred cows”. The most shocking discovery of my adult life was the realisation that “sacred cows” also exist in the Western mind. During the period of Western triumphalism that followed the end of the Cold War, a huge bubble of moral pretentiousness enveloped the Western intellectual universe.

Even though some of the contents of these essays (especially the statistics) may appear a little dated, the arguments remain, I believe, valid. They provide one of the few antidotes to the sweet, syrupy sense of self-congratulation that flows through Western writing on contemporary issues. Several American professors have told me that these essays fill a void and provide a counter-balance to prevailing assumptions.

If my intuition is proven right, we will begin to see, for the first time in 500 years, a two-way flow in the passage of ideas between the East and the West early this century. The world will be a much richer place when Western minds stop assuming that Western civilisation represents the only universal civilisation. The only way that the Western mind can break out of its mental box is to first conceive of this possibility that the Western mind may also be limited in its own way.

In this second edition, I have added three new essays: “Asia’s Lost Millennium”, “The Rest of the West?” and “UN: Sunrise or Sunset Organisation in the 21st Century?” I have also taken out three essays: “The End of an Epoch”, “An Asia-Pacific Consensus” and “The ASEAN ‘Magic’”. In addition, I have written a brief introductory note for each of the older essays in an effort to relate them to recent developments. After some reflection, I decided not to revise these essays to update them. They have to retain their contextual consistency. It is the arguments, not the statistics, that have to stand the test of time.

Finally, I wish to emphasise that the views contained in this volume are my personal views. By no means should they be taken as a reflection of the Singapore government’s views.

New York, 2002

1. “Tomayto, Tomahto, Potayto ...”, “This Week in Review”, *New York Times*, 13 August 2000, p. 2.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Can Asians think? Judging from the record of Asian societies over the past few centuries, the answer should be “no”—or, at best, not very well. Several centuries after Portugal burst out of its tiny seams to create colonies all around the world, from Brazil to Angola, from Mozambique to Goa, from Malacca to Macau, Asian societies continued to remain in stupor or stagnation, unaware that European civilisations—which had developed more or less on a par with Asian civilisations until the 15th century or so—had made a great leap forward. Societies that take centuries to wake up cannot be said to think very well. It would be foolish for any Asian to deny this painful historical fact.

By the end of the 20th century (500 years after Portugal made its great leap outwards), it appeared that a few other East Asian societies would follow Japan’s lead and become as developed as contemporary Western societies. Then, in a painful repetition of Asian history, they stumbled once again. In early 1998 (when this preface is being written) it is a little too early to tell how serious this stumble is. But having stumbled so often in their efforts to catch up with the West, Asians have an obligation to think—and think very deeply—about their prospects in the coming century and the new millennium. One key purpose of these essays is to stimulate Asian minds to address questions about their future. The lead essay, from which this volume takes its title, is intended for Asian minds. Its key message to Asians is simple: do not think that you have arrived.

The rapid economic advances enjoyed by several East Asian societies may, in retrospect, have been the easy part. Retooling the social, political and philosophical dimensions of their societies will be a tougher challenge. This challenge has arrived.

The other essays in this volume are intended for a larger audience. Almost immediately after the end of the Cold War, a mood of triumphalism engulfed Western capitals. Communism had failed. The West had won. Mankind had realised “the end of history”. Henceforth, all societies all around the globe, whatever their stage of social and economic development, would become replicas of liberal democratic societies found in the West. The export of democracy from the West to the Rest was seen as an unmitigated good. However, as Robert Kaplan noted in *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 1997), the results of this global export of democracy have been less than ideal:

The demise of the Soviet Union was no reason for us to pressure Rwanda and other countries to form political parties—though that is what our post-Cold War foreign policy has been largely about, even in parts of the world that the Cold War barely touched. The Eastern European countries liberated in 1989 already had, in varying degrees, the historical and social preconditions for both democracy and advanced industrial life: bourgeois traditions, exposure to the Western Enlightenment, high literacy rates, low birth rates, and so on. The post-Cold War effort to bring democracy to those countries has been reasonable. What is less reasonable is to put a gun to the head of the peoples of the developing world and say, in effect, “Behave as if you had experienced the Western Enlightenment to the degree that Poland and the Czech Republic did. Behave as if 95 percent of your population were literate. Behave as if you had no bloody ethnic or regional disputes.”

By late 1997 (eight years after the end of the Cold War), when the hubris arising from the triumph over the Soviet Union had died out, it became possible for some brave souls, such as Robert Kaplan and Fareed Zakaria,¹ to question the value and outcome of the immediate post-Cold War effort to export democracy. In the early

1990s, however, when some of these essays were written, there was no space in the Western intellectual firmament for fundamental questions to be raised about the export of democracy.

I can make this point with some conviction because of several personal encounters I had with Western intellectuals in that period, from Williamsburg to Brussels, from Harvard to Ditchley. In many of these encounters, I was put in the difficult position of being the sole dissenting voice to challenge the conventional wisdom of Western liberals in their moment of triumph. My experience was not unique. Several of my Asian friends confirmed similar experiences. The paradox here was that Western liberal orthodoxy claimed that it celebrated dissenting voices. My personal experience suggested that such tolerance of dissent did not easily extend to challenges of the key intellectual assumptions of this liberal orthodoxy.

These personal encounters convinced me that there was a need to articulate an alternative point of view. My first printed response to the post-Cold War Western hubris was published in *The National Interest* in summer 1992 in an essay entitled “The West and the Rest” (and here I must record my indebtedness to the magazine’s editor, Owen Harries, for suggesting this catchy title).

This essay was followed by “Go East, Young Man”, published in *The Washington Quarterly* in spring 1994. It gained equal notoriety as “The West and the Rest”. “Go East, Young Man” was adapted from a paper entitled “Perspectives on Political Development and the Nature of the Democratic Process: Human Rights and Freedom of the Press”, which I delivered at the Asia Society’s conference on “Asian and American Perspectives on Capitalism and Democracy” in January 1993.² This paper probably contains my sharpest critique of liberal orthodoxy. I have, therefore, decided to republish the full version here.

“Go East, Young Man” was followed by “Pol Pot: The Paradox of Moral Correctness” and “The Dangers of Decadence: What the Rest Can Teach the West”, which was a response to the famous essay “The Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel Huntington. It was my good fortune that Huntington decided to publish his essay in summer 1993. My responses to his essay seemed to travel almost as widely

as his original essay. In the world of writing and publishing, it helps to be read and noticed.

These essays that I published in the early 1990s, together with essays in a similar vein published by other Asians, helped to open a small new chapter in intellectual history. This chapter became known in popular parlance as the “Asian values debate”.

The term in itself showed a major misperception in Western minds of the message that Asian voices were putting across in the early 1990s. Many in the West assumed that those who challenged the then contemporary Western ideas in social and political theory were advocating the superiority of Asian values. Actually, the only point that most Asians were trying to make was that Asian values were not inferior. They were trying to say that there was a need for a level playing field in the new intellectual debate of the 1990s. With the advantage of historical hindsight, we can now look at those years and see that Asians were not marching out in that period to proselytise to the West. They were only reacting to Western proselytisation.

One of the key flaws of the campaign to export Western values at the end of the Cold War was the assumption that the good intentions of the West in doing so would lead to good results. This is why in my essay on Pol Pot, I quoted Max Weber as saying: “it is *not* true that good can only follow from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who says this is, indeed, a political infant.”³ The moral complexity of transporting values from one society or civilisation to another had been lost in the moral certitudes of Western intellectuals at the end of the Cold War. But this moral complexity had been recognised by earlier generations of Western intellectuals. As Reinhold Niebuhr said:

The same strength which has extended our power beyond a continent has also ... brought us into a vast web of history in which other wills, running in oblique or contrasting directions to our own, inevitably hinder or contradict what we most fervently desire. We cannot simply have our way, not even when we believe our way to have the “happiness of mankind” as its promise.

As we approach the end of the 1990s, it is clear that the Asian values debate has subsided. Both sides have retreated from the debate with a sense of embarrassment that each side may have overstated its case. On the Asian side, after the spectacular stumble of several hitherto dynamic East Asian economies, there is a genuine hint of regret at having spoken so confidently of the rise of Asia. Hence, I was not surprised that many of my close friends tried to discourage me from republishing this collection of essays at this unfortunate juncture. The timing did not seem particularly propitious.

But these essays are not intended for any short-term ends. It is only a matter of time (i.e., when, not *if*) until Asian civilisations reach the same level of development as Western civilisations. The major new reality in East Asia is the genuine conviction and confidence among new Asian minds that their day is coming, even if they have to stumble once or twice more before they make it. Many Asian minds have now been exposed to the highest levels of Western civilisation, in the fields of science and technology, business and administration, arts and literature. Most have clearly thrived at these levels. The Asian mind, having been awakened, cannot be put to sleep in the near future. A new discourse will begin between East and West when Asian societies start to successfully develop again.

When this discourse begins, they will look back at the Asian values debate of the 1990s as only the initial round of a discourse that will last for several centuries. At various points in the history of the past few centuries, when the West experienced its many ascendant moments—either during the peak of the colonial era or in the post-Cold War period—there developed a conceit that eventually all of mankind would be absorbed into the fabric of Western civilisation. V.S. Naipaul, an Asian child of the West, captured this spirit forcefully when he spoke of Western civilisation as being the only universal civilisation. Indeed, for most of the past few centuries, any other prospect seemed literally inconceivable. The main historical contribution of the ineptly named Asian values debate may have been to call attention to the possibility that other civilisations may yet make equal contributions as Western civilisation to the development and growth of mankind.

This is one key reason why this volume of essays is being printed. To ensure an accurate historical record, all the essays are reprinted in full. Thus, the reader may encounter repetitions of certain key arguments.

Having been born a British subject in Singapore and having saluted the British flag as a child, I have had the good fortune of personally experiencing a flow of history that clearly demonstrated that all nations have their ebb and flow. History never stops (or ends). In this shrinking globe of ours, as East and West come closer together, many ancient civilisations will rub together in a direct fashion never seen before in the history of man.

It would be foolish to forecast the outcome of this close rubbing of civilisations. Huntington's vision of a clash of civilisations, frightening though it sounds, needs to be taken seriously. But again, as someone who has had the good fortune to experience the rise of the Asia-Pacific era, I remain absolutely convinced that the future lies in the fusion of civilisations. This is the vision I tried to portray in a lecture I delivered at the IISS (International Institute of Strategic Studies) annual meeting in Vancouver in September 1994. *Survival*, the IISS journal, printed an edited version of this lecture in an article entitled "The Pacific Impulse", which is republished here.

Over the course of the past few years, I have also published essays on various other topics. Some of these are republished in this volume. Given my conviction that the centre of gravity of the world's economy will rest firmly in the Asia-Pacific region, I have written several essays on various aspects of the region. Hence, I am also reprinting "Japan Adrift" (written in Harvard), "An Asia-Pacific Consensus" and "Seven Paradoxes on Asia-Pacific Security".

I published my first essay in *Foreign Affairs* 15 years ago on the Cambodian question. I am not republishing it here as that particular chapter of Cambodian history has closed. In the course of the decade-long debate on Cambodia, which became a modern metaphor for tragedy during Pol Pot's rule, I encountered another unusual strand in the Western mind: the desire to believe that there were black and white solutions for complex moral issues. It was

in response to this that I wrote the essay “Pol Pot: The Paradox of Moral Correctness”.

I have also been a student of Southeast Asia. It has been a miracle of history that this region (which has greater diversity of race, language, religion, culture, etc., than the Balkans of Europe) has emerged as one of the most peaceful and prosperous corners of the world. This modern miracle is little understood. To explain it to the Japanese audience, I wrote an essay entitled “The ASEAN ‘Magic’”, which was published in the official journal of Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Since I am a Singaporean, this volume would be incomplete if I did not include an essay on my own country. I have had the good fortune of being a citizen of one of the most successful developing countries of the world. Despite Singapore’s success, it has had the occasional misfortune of suffering bad press that gives no due recognition to the very special achievements the country has had in economic and social development. Hence, when the UNDP asked me to write a short essay on Singapore’s developmental experience, I was happy to do so.

Finally, in keeping with the spirit of many of these essays, I have decided to end on a provocative note by republishing “The Ten Commandments for Developing Countries in the Nineties”. These 10 commandments were written for a UNDP conference on development, but they were reprinted and republished in English, French and German. Brevity, I have learnt, is universally appreciated. Hence, I will end my preface here and let the essays tell the rest of the story.

Singapore, August 1998

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1. Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997.
 2. James Fallows was my fellow panelist at this seminar and, judging from his response, it would be fair to say that he was shocked by this essay.
 3. Max Weber, *Politics As a Vocation*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1965, p. 49.

PART 1

THE RETURN OF ASIA

CAN ASIANS THINK?

The National Interest. No. 52, Summer 1998

The 7th International Conference on Thinking was held in Singapore in June 1997. It needed some Asian voices. When I was asked to speak, one question immediately popped into my mind: “Can Asians think as well as others?” The issue, I discovered, was a complex one. This lecture represents my first stab at answering the question. Its key aim is to launch a debate among Asian minds. But people from other continents may wish to ask similar questions, such as “Can Europeans think?” or “Can Americans think?”. This is an updated version of this lecture, published in the form of an essay in *The National Interest* in summer 1998.

My main disappointment with this essay is that it has not yet triggered a discussion among Asians on how and why their societies and civilisations fell several centuries behind European civilisations. There are many possible explanations. My own belief is that the time for this has not yet come. Most Asian societies (with the exception of Japan and the “Four Tigers”) have not reached comfortable levels of development. When they do, this question will inevitably surface.

I am surprised, however, by the negative Western reactions to the title. Perhaps this is because the question is politically incorrect. But could it not also be a result of the fact that some in the West would prefer Asians not to ask fundamental questions about

themselves or their future? For if they did so, it is conceivable that some Asian societies might eventually become as successful as those in the West.

Any suggestion that some in the West would prefer Asian societies to remain backward would be dismissed as ludicrous by most Western intellectuals. But it would not be dismissed by Asian intellectuals. This East-West difference suggests that there is still a deep intellectual division in the world that remains to be bridged.

.....

CAN ASIANS THINK? This is obviously a sensitive question. In this age of political correctness that we live in, just imagine the uproar that could be caused if I went to Europe or Africa and posed the question “Can Europeans think?” or “Can Africans think?”. You have to be Asian to ask the question “Can Asians think?”

Given its sensitivity, let me explain both the reasons why and the context in which I am posing the question. First, if you had to ask one single, key question that could determine the future of the globe, it may well be “Can Asians think?”. In 1996 Asians already made up 3.5 billion out of a global population of over 5 billion (or about 70 per cent of the world population). By conservative projections, the Asian portion of the world population will increase to 5.7 billion in 2050 out of a global population of 9.87 billion, while the populations of North America and Europe will remain relatively constant at 374 million and 721 million respectively. Clearly, in the past few centuries Europe and, more recently, North America have carried the larger share of the global burden in advancing human civilisation. By 2050, when Europeans and North Americans make up one-tenth instead of one-sixth of the world’s population, would it be fair for the remaining 90 per cent of mankind to expect this 10 per cent to continue to bear this burden? Realistically, can the rest of the world continue to rest on the shoulders of the West? If Asians double in population in the next 50 years, will they be able to carry their fair share of this burden?

Second, I am not asking this question about individual Asians in terms of limited thinking abilities. Clearly, Asians can master alphabets, add two plus two to make four, and play chess. However, throughout history, there have been examples of societies that have produced brilliant individuals yet experienced a lot of grief collectively. The classic example of this is the Jewish society. Per capita, Jews have contributed more brilliant minds, from Einstein to Wittgenstein, from Disraeli to Kissinger, than any other society. Yet, as a society they have suffered greatly, especially in the past century or so. Let me stress that I am not speaking about the travails of Israel in modern times. I am speaking of the period from AD 135, when the Jews were forced to leave Palestine, to 1948, when Israel was born.

Will a similar fate befall Asian societies, or will Asians be able to think well and ensure a better future for themselves?

Third, the time scale in which I am posing this question is not in terms of days, weeks, months, years or even decades. I am looking at the question from the time scale of centuries, especially since we stand two years away from the new millennium. Arguably, the future course of world history in the next few centuries, as I will explain later, will depend on how Asian societies think and perform.

Back to the question “Can Asians think?”. In a multiple-choice examination format, there would be three possible answers to the question: “Yes”, “No” or “Maybe”. Before we decide which choice to tick, let me make a case for each answer.

NO, THEY CANNOT THINK

I will start with the reasons for the “No” answer, if only to refute any critics who may suggest that the question itself is manifestly absurd. If one looks at the record of the past thousand years, one can make a very persuasive case that Asians, Asian societies that is, cannot think.

Let us look at where Asian societies were a thousand years ago, say in the year 997. Then, the Chinese and the Arabs (i.e., Confucian and Islamic civilisations) led the way in science and technology, medicine and astronomy. The Arabs adopted both the decimal system and the numbers 0 to 9 from India, and they learnt how to make paper from the Chinese. The world's first university was founded just over a thousand years ago, in the year 971, in Cairo. By contrast, Europe was then still in what has been described as the “Dark Ages”, which had begun when the Roman Empire collapsed in the 5th century. As Will Durant puts it in *The Age of Faith*:

Western Europe in the sixth century was a chaos of conquest, disintegration, and rebarbarization. Much of the classic culture survived, for the most part silent and hidden in a few monasteries and families. But the physical and psychological foundations of social order had been so disturbed that centuries would be needed to restore them. Love of letters, devotion to art, the unity

and continuity of culture, the cross-fertilization of communicating minds, fell before the convulsions of war, the perils of transport, the economies of poverty, the rise of vernaculars, the disappearance of Latin from the East and of Greek from the West.¹

Against this backdrop, it would have been sheer folly to predict at the time that in the second millennium Chinese, Indian and Islamic civilisations would slip into the backwaters of history while Europe would rise to be the first civilisation ever to dominate the entire globe. But that, of course, is precisely what happened.

It did not come about suddenly. Until about the 16th century, the more advanced societies of Asia, while they had lost their primacy, were still on a par with those of Europe and there was no definite indication that Europe would leap far ahead. At that time, Europe's relative weaknesses were more apparent than its strengths. It was not the most fertile area of the world, nor was it particularly populous—important criteria by the measure of the day, when the soil was the source of most wealth, and human and animal muscle of most power. Europe exhibited no pronounced advantages in the fields of culture, mathematics, or engineering, navigation or other technologies. It was also a deeply fragmented continent, consisting of a hodgepodge of petty kingdoms, principalities and city-states. Further, at the end of the 15th century, Europe was in the throes of a bloody conflict with the mighty Ottoman Empire, which was pushing its way, inexorably it seemed, towards the gates of Vienna. So perduring was this threat that German princes hundreds of kilometres from the front lines had got into the custom of sending tribute—*Turkenverehrung*—to the Sublime Porte in Istanbul.

Asian cultures, on the other hand, appeared to be thriving in the 15th century. China, for example, had a highly developed and vibrant culture. Its unified, hierarchic administration was run by well-educated Confucian bureaucrats who had given a coherence and sophistication to Chinese society that was unparalleled. China's technological prowess was also formidable. Printing by movable type had already appeared in the 11th century. Paper money had expedited the flow of commerce and growth of markets. China's

gargantuan iron industry, coupled with the invention of gunpowder, gave it immense military strength.

However, almost amazingly, it was Europe that leapt ahead. Something almost magical happened to European minds, and this was followed by wave after wave of progress and advance of civilisations, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, from the scientific revolution to the industrial revolution. While Asian societies degenerated into backwardness and ossification, European societies, propelled forward by new forms of economic organisation, military-technical dynamism, political pluralism within the continent as a whole (if not within all individual countries), and the uneven beginnings of intellectual liberty, notably in Italy, Britain and Holland, produced what would have been called at the time the “European miracle”—had there been an observing, superior civilisation to mark the event. Because that mix of critical ingredients did not exist in any of the Asian societies, they appeared to stand still while Europe advanced to the centre of the world stage. Colonisation, which began in the 16th century, and the industrial revolution in the 19th century, augmented and entrenched Europe’s dominant position.

To me, coming from Singapore, with a population of 3 million, it is a source of great wonder that a small state like Portugal, also with a population of a few million, could carve out territories like Goa, Macau and Malacca from larger and more ancient civilisations. It was an amazing feat. But what is more amazing is that it was done in the 1500s. The Portuguese colonisers were followed by the Spanish, the Dutch, the French, then the British. Throughout this period, for almost three centuries or more, Asian societies lay prostrate and allowed themselves to be surpassed and colonised by far smaller societies.

The most painful thing that happened to Asia was not the physical but the mental colonisation. Many Asians (including, I fear, many of my ancestors from South Asia) began to believe that Asians were inferior beings to the Europeans. Only this could explain how a few thousand British could control a few hundred million people in South Asia. If I am allowed to make a controversial point here, I would add that this mental colonisation has not been completely

eradicated in Asia, and many Asian societies are still struggling to break free.

It is truly astonishing that even today, as we stand on the eve of the 21st century, 500 years after the arrival of the first Portuguese colonisers in Asia, only one—I repeat, one—Asian society has reached, in a comprehensive sense, the level of development that prevails generally in Europe and North America today. The Japanese mind was the first to be awakened in Asia, beginning with the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s. Japan was first considered developed and more or less accepted as an equal by 1902, when it signed the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

If Asian minds can think, why is there today only one Asian society able to catch up with the West? I rest my case for the negative answer to our question. Those of you who want to tick “No” to the question “Can Asians think?” can proceed to do so.

YES, THEY CAN

Let me now try to draw out the arguments why we might answer “Yes” to the question “Can Asians think?”.

The first, and the most obvious one, is the incredible economic performance of East Asian societies in the past few decades. Japan’s success, while it has not been fully replicated in the rest of Asia, has set off ripples that now (current problems notwithstanding) have the potential to become tidal waves. Japan’s economic success was first followed by the emergence of the “Four Tigers”—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. But the success of these four tigers convinced other Southeast Asian countries, especially Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, that they could do the same. Lately they have been followed by China, which now has the potential to overtake the United States and become the world’s largest economy by 2020. What is amazing is the pace of economic development. It took the British 58 years (from 1780), America 47 years (from 1839) and Japan 33 years (from the 1880s) to double their economic output. On the other hand, it took Indonesia 17 years, South Korea 11 years and China 10 years to do the same. As a whole, the East Asian miracle economies grew more rapidly and more consistently

than any other group of economies in the world from 1960 to 1990. They averaged 5.5 per cent annual per capita real income growth, outperforming every economy in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa and even the OECD economies, which averaged only 2.5 per cent growth in that period.

You cannot get good grades in an examination by luck. It requires intelligence and hard work. Similarly, you cannot get good economic performance, especially of the scale seen in Asia, simply by luck. It reflects both intelligence and hard work. And it is vital to stress here that the pace and scale of the economic explosion seen in Asia is unprecedented in the history of man. The chief economist of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, captured this reality well in his article in *The Asian Wall Street Journal*:

The East Asian 'miracle' was real. Its economic transformation of East Asia has been one of the most remarkable accomplishments in history. The dramatic surge in gross domestic product which it brought about is reflected in higher standards of living for hundreds of millions of Asians, including longer life expectancy, better health and education, and millions of others have rescued themselves from poverty, and now lead more hopeful lives. These achievements are real, and will be far more permanent than the present turmoil.²

The confidence of East Asians has been further boosted by the numerous studies that demonstrate the impressive academic performance of East Asians, both in leading Western universities and at home. Today many of the top students produced by American universities are of Asian origin. Educational excellence is an essential prerequisite for cultural confidence. To put it baldly, many Asians are pleased to wake up to the new realisation that their minds are not inferior. Most Westerners cannot appreciate the change because they can never directly feel the sense of inferiority many Asians experienced until recently.

The second reason why we might answer "Yes" to the question "Can Asians think?" is that a vital switch is taking place in many Asian minds. For centuries, Asians believed that the only way to

progress was through emulation of the West. Yukichi Fukuzawa, a leading Meiji reformer, epitomised this attitude when he said in the late 19th century that for Japan to progress, it had to learn from the West. The other leading modernisers in Asia, whether they be Sun Yat-sen or Jawaharlal Nehru, shared this fundamental attitude. The mental switch that is taking place in Asian minds today is that they no longer believe that the only way to progress is through copying; they now believe they can work out their own solutions.

This switch in Asian minds has taken place slowly and imperceptibly. Until a few decades ago, Western societies beckoned as beacons on the hill: living models of the most successful form of human societies—economically prosperous, politically stable, socially just and harmonious, ethically clean, and, all in all, providing environments that had the best possible conditions for their citizens to grow and thrive as individuals. These societies were not perfect, but they were clearly superior, in all senses of the word, to any society outside. Until recently it would have been folly, and indeed inconceivable, for any Asian intellectual to suggest, “This may not be the path we want to take”. Today this is what many Asians are thinking, privately if not publicly.

However, overall, there is no question that Western societies remain more successful than their East Asian counterparts. And they retain fields of excellence in areas that no other society comes close to, in their universities, think tanks, and certainly in cultural realms. No Asian orchestra comes close in performance to the leading Western orchestras, even though the musical world in the West has been enriched by many brilliant Asian musicians. But Asians are shocked by the scale and depth of social and economic problems that have afflicted many Western societies. In North America, societies are troubled by the relative breakdown of the family as an institution, the plague of drug addiction and its attendant problems, including crime, the persistence of ghettos and the perception that there has been a decline in ethical standards. This is exemplified by statistics provided by the US government that reflect social trends for the period 1960–90. During that 30-year period, the rate of violent crime quadrupled, single-parent families

almost tripled, and the number of US state and federal prisoners tripled. Asians are also troubled by the addiction of Europeans to their social security nets despite the clear evidence that these nets now hold down their societies and have created a sense of gloom about long-term economic prospects. In previous decades, when East Asians visited North America and Western Europe, they envied the high standards of living and better quality of life in those societies. Today, though the high standards of living remain in the West, Asians no longer consider these societies as their role models. They are beginning to believe that they can attempt something different.

A simple metaphor may explain what Western minds would see if they could peer into Asian minds. Until recently, most of those minds shared the general assumption that the developmental path of all societies culminated in the plateau on which most Western societies now rest. Hence, all societies, with minor variations, would end up creating liberal, democratic societies, giving emphasis to individual freedoms, as they moved up the socio-economic ladder. Today Asians can still see the plateau of contentment that most Western societies rest on, but they can also see, beyond the plateau, alternative peaks to which they can take their societies. Instead of seeing the plateau as the natural end destination, they now have a desire to bypass it (for they do not wish to be afflicted by some of the social and cultural ills that afflict Western societies) and to search for alternative peaks beyond. This kind of mental horizon never existed in Asian minds until recently. It reveals the new confidence of Asians in themselves.

The third reason why we might answer “Yes” to the question “Can Asians think?” is that today is not the only period when Asian minds have begun to stir. As more and more Asians lift their lives from levels of survival, they have the economic freedom to think, reflect, and rediscover their cultural heritage. There is a growing consciousness that their societies, like those in the West, have a rich social, cultural and philosophical legacy that they can resuscitate and use to evolve their own modern and advanced societies. The richness and depth of Indian and Chinese civilisations, to name just

two, have been acknowledged by Western scholars. Indeed, for the past few centuries, it was Western scholarship and endeavour that preserved the fruits of Asian civilisation, just as the Arabs preserved and passed on the Greek and Roman civilisations in the darkest days of Europe. For example, while Asian cultures deteriorated, museums and universities in the West preserved and even cherished the best that Asian art and culture had produced. As Asians delve deeper into their own cultural heritage, they find their minds nourished. For the first time in centuries, an Asian renaissance is under way. Visitors to Asian cities—from Teheran to Calcutta, from Bombay to Shanghai, from Singapore to Hong Kong—now see both a newfound confidence as well as an interest in traditional language and culture. As their economies grow and as they have more disposable income, Asians spend it increasingly on reviving traditional dance or theatre. What we are witnessing today are only the bare beginnings of a major cultural rediscovery. The pride that Asians are taking in their culture is clear and palpable.

In short, Asians who would like to rush and answer “Yes” to the question have more than ample justification for doing so. But before they do so, I would advise them to pause and reflect on the reasons for the “Maybe” answer before arriving at a final judgement.

THE “MAYBE” RESPONSE

Despite the travails sparked by the financial crisis in late 1997, most Asians continue to be optimistic about their future. Such optimism is healthy. Yet it may be useful for Asians to learn a small lesson in history from the experience of Europeans exactly a century ago, when Europe was full of optimism. In his book *Out of Control*, Zbigniew Brzezinski describes how the world looked then:

The twentieth century was born in hope. It dawned in a relatively benign setting. The principal powers of the world had enjoyed, broadly speaking, a relatively prolonged spell of peace ... The dominant mood in the major capitals as of January 1, 1900, was generally one of optimism. The structure of global power seemed stable. Existing empires appeared to be increasingly enlightened as well as secure.³

Despite this great hope, the 20th century became, in Brzezinski's words:

... mankind's most bloody and hateful century, a century of hallucinating politics and of monstrous killings. Cruelty was institutionalized to an unprecedented degree, lethality was organized on a mass production basis. The contrast between the scientific potential for good and the political evil that was actually unleashed is shocking. Never before in history was killing so globally pervasive, never before did it consume so many lives, never before was human annihilation pursued with such concentration of sustained effort on behalf of such arrogantly irrational goals.⁴

One of the most important questions that an Asian has to ask himself today is a simple one: How many Asian societies, with the exception of Japan (which is an accepted member of the Western club), can be absolutely confident that they can succeed and do as well in a comprehensive sense as contemporary advanced societies in North America and Western Europe? If the answer is none, or even a few, then the case for the "Maybe" response becomes stronger.

There are still many great challenges that Asian societies have to overcome before they can reach the comprehensive level of achievement enjoyed by Western societies. The first challenge in the development of any society is economic. Until the middle of 1997, most East Asian societies believed that they had mastered the basic rules of modern economics. They liberalised their economies, encouraged foreign investment flows and practised thrifty fiscal policies. The high level of domestic savings gave them a comfortable economic buffer. After enjoying continuous economic growth rates of 7 per cent or more per annum for decades, it was natural for societies like South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia to assume that they had discovered the magical elixir of economic development.

The events following the devaluation of the Thai baht on 2 July 1997 demonstrated that they had not. The remarkable thing about this financial crisis was that no economist anticipated its depth or scale. Economists and analysts are still divided on its fundamental

causes. As the crisis is still unfolding as this essay is being written, it is too early to provide definitive judgements on the fundamental causes. But a few suggestions are worth making.

On the economic front, many mistakes were made. In Thailand, for example, the decision to sustain fixed exchange rates between the baht and the dollar, despite the disparity in interest rates, allowed Thai businessmen to borrow cheap in US dollars and earn high interest rates in Thai baht. This also led to overinvestments in Thailand, in the property and share markets. All this was clearly unsustainable. The IMF provided some discreet warnings. However, the relatively weak coalition governments then prevailing in Thailand were unable to administer the bitter medicine required to remedy the situation because some of it had to be administered to their financial backers. Domestically, it was a combination of economic and political factors that precipitated and prolonged the financial crisis.

There was also a huge new factor that complicated the story: the force of globalisation. The key lesson that all East Asian economic managers have learnt from the 1997–98 crisis is that they are accountable not only to domestic actors but to the international financial markets and their key players. The East Asians should not have been surprised. It was a logical consequence of liberalisation and integration with the global economy. Integration has brought both benefits (in terms of significant increases in standard of living) and costs (such as loss of autonomy in economic management). But there was a clear reluctance to acknowledge and accept the loss of autonomy. This was demonstrated by the state of denial that characterised the initial East Asian response to this crisis. The denial clearly showed the psychological time lag in East Asian minds in facing up to new realities.

Significantly, the two East Asian economies that have (after the initial bouts of denial) swallowed most fully the bitter medicine administered by the IMF have been the two societies that have progressed fastest in developing middle classes that have integrated themselves into the world view of the new interconnected global universe of modern economics. South Korea and Thailand, although they continue to face serious economic challenges at the time of

writing, have clearly demonstrated that their elites are now well plugged in to the new financial networks. The new finance minister of Thailand, Tarrin Nimmanhaeminda, walks and talks with ease in any key financial capital. His performance is one indicator of the new globalised Asian mind that is emerging.

The 1997–98 financial crisis also demonstrated the wisdom of the Chinese in translating the English word “crisis” as a combination of two Chinese characters, “danger” and “opportunity”. Clearly, East Asian societies have experienced many dangerous moments. But if they emerge from the 1997–98 financial crisis with restructured and reinvigorated economic and administrative systems of management, they may yet be among the first societies in the world to develop strong immune systems to handle present and future challenges springing from globalisation. It is too early to tell whether this is true. And this in turn reinforces the point that on the economic front, one should perhaps give the “Maybe” answer to the question “Can Asians think?”.

Second, on the political front, most Asian societies, including East Asian societies, have a long way to go before they can reach Western levels of political stability and harmony. There is little danger of a coup d'état or real civil war in most contemporary Western societies (with the possible exception, still, of Northern Ireland). Western societies have adopted political variations of the liberal democratic model, even though the presidential systems of the United States and France differ significantly from the Westminster models of the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. These political forms are not perfect. They contain many features that inhibit social progress, from vested interest lobby groups to pork-barrel politics. Indeed, it would be fair to say that political development in most Western societies has atrophied. But it has atrophied at comfortable levels. Most of their citizens live in domestic security, fear no oppression, and are content with their political frameworks. How many Asian societies can claim to share this benign state of affairs? The answer is clearly very few. And if it is equally clear that they are *not* going to enjoy this in the very near future, then this again militates in favour of the “Maybe” answer.

Third, in the security realm, the one great advantage Western societies have over the rest of the world is that war among them has become a thing of the past. The reason for this is complex. It includes an awareness of ethnic affinity among Western tribes who feel outnumbered by the rest of the world's population and also a sense of belonging to a common civilisation. It may also reflect the exhaustion of having fought too many wars in the past. Nevertheless, it is truly remarkable, when we count the number of wars—and truly big wars—that the English, French and Germans have fought with each other (including two in this century), that there is today almost a zero chance of war between the United Kingdom, France and Germany. This is a remarkably civilised thing to have achieved, reflecting a considerable step forward in the history of human civilisation. When will India and Pakistan, or North and South Korea, achieve this same zero prospect of war? And if the answer is not in the near future, is it reasonable to suggest that perhaps Asian minds (or the minds of Asian societies) have not reached the same level as the West?

Fourth, Asians face serious challenges in the social realm. While it is true that it took the social dislocations caused by the industrial revolution to eradicate the feudal traces of European cultures (social freedom followed economic freedom), it is still unclear whether similar economic revolutions in East Asia will have the same liberating social effects on Asian societies. Unfortunately, many feudal traces, especially those of clannishness and nepotism, continue to prevent Asian societies from becoming truly meritocratic ones, where individual citizens are able to grow and thrive on the basis of their abilities and not on the basis of their birth or connections or ethnic background.

Fifth and finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the key question remains whether Asian minds will be able to develop the right blend of values that will both preserve some of the traditional strengths of Asian values (e.g., attachment to the family as an institution, deference to societal interests, thrift, conservatism in social mores, respect for authority) as well as absorb the strengths of Western values (the emphasis on individual achievement, political

and economic freedom, respect for the rule of law as well as for key national institutions). This will be a complex challenge.

One of the early (and perhaps inevitable) reactions by some Western commentators to the 1997–98 financial crisis was to suggest that it fundamentally reflected the failure of Asian values. If nothing else, this quick reaction suggested that the “Asian values debate” of the early 1990s had touched some sensitive nerves in the Western mind and soul. The desire to bury Asian values revealed the real pain that had been inflicted during that debate.

The true test of the viability and validity of values is shown not in theory but in practice. Those who try to draw a direct link of causality between adherence to Asian values and financial disaster have a tough empirical case to make because of the varied reactions of East Asian societies to the financial crisis. South Korea and Thailand, two of the three countries that were most deeply affected by the crisis (i.e., those who had to turn to the IMF for assistance), had been given the highest marks in Western minds for their moves towards democratisation. The three open economies that were least affected by the financial crisis were Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, and the three had very different political systems. In short, there was no clear correlation between political systems and financial vulnerability.

The only correlation that is clear so far is that between good governance and resilience in the financial crisis. Good governance is not associated with any single political system or ideology. It is associated with the willingness and ability of the government to develop economic, social and administrative systems that are resilient enough to handle the challenges brought about in the new economic era we are moving into. China provides a good living example of this. Its leaders are not looking for the perfect political system in theory. They are searching daily for pragmatic solutions to keep their society moving forward. The population support this pragmatism, for they too feel that it is time for China to catch up. Traditionally, the Chinese have looked for good government, not minimal government. They can recognise good governance when they experience it. The fact that Japan—which is in Western eyes

the most liberal and democratic East Asian society—has had great difficulties adapting to the new economic environment demonstrates that political openness is not the key variable to look at.

It is vital for Western minds to understand that the efforts by Asians to rediscover Asian values are not only, or even primarily, a search for political values. Instead, they represent a complex set of motives and aspirations in Asian minds: a desire to reconnect with their historical past after this connection had been ruptured both by colonial rule and by the subsequent domination of the globe by a Western *Weltanschauung*; an effort to find the right balance in bringing up their young so that they are open to the new technologically interconnected global universe and yet rooted in and conscious of the cultures of their ancestors; an effort to define their own personal, social and national identities in a way that enhances their sense of self-esteem in a world where their immediate ancestors had subconsciously accepted that they were lesser beings in a Western universe. In short, the reassertion of Asian values in the 1990s represents a complex process of regeneration and rediscovery that is an inevitable aspect of the rebirth of societies.

Here again, it is far too early to tell whether Asian societies can successfully both integrate themselves into the modern world and reconnect with their past. Both are mammoth challenges. Western minds have a clear advantage over Asian minds, as they are convinced that their successful leap into modernity was to a large extent a result of the compatibility of their value systems with the modern universe. Indeed, many Western minds believe (either consciously or subconsciously) that without Western value systems no society can truly enter the modern universe.

Only time will tell whether Asian societies can enter the modern universe as Asian societies rather than Western replicas. Since it is far too early to pass judgement on whether they will succeed in this effort, it is perhaps fair to suggest that this too is another argument in favour of the “Maybe” answer to the question “Can Asians think?”.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the 21st century and the next millennium will prove to be very challenging for Asian societies. For most of the past 500 years, they have fallen behind European societies in many different ways. There is a strong desire to catch up. The real answer to the question “Can Asians think?” will be provided if they do so. Until then, Asians will do themselves a big favour by constantly reminding themselves why this question remains a valid one for them to pose to themselves. And only they can answer it. No one else can.

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1. Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1950, p. 450.
 2. Joseph Stiglitz, *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 2 February 1998.
 3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993, p. 3.
 4. *Ibid*, p. 4–5.

ASIA'S LOST MILLENNIUM

Asiaweek. Special Millennium Edition 2000

The Millennium is a European event. It marks a significant turn in European, not Asian, calendars. At the last turn of the millennium, in the year 999, European societies were languishing in the Dark Ages, with little promise of shooting ahead. But shoot ahead they did, carrying human civilisation to new heights of scientific and technological advancement as well as economic, social and political development. If Europe had not shot ahead, most of mankind, including Asia, would still have been languishing in the feudal era. The millennium that has just ended should be called the European Millennium. And Europeans have every reason to celebrate this historic moment.

For Asians, this should be a moment of reflection. A thousand years ago, things had looked more promising for Asian societies. China was enjoying the glories of the Song Dynasty. One of the largest and busiest cities in the world was emerging in Southeast Asia, in Angkor Wat. Despite these promising environments, Asian societies slipped. They lost an entire millennium. Even now, only one Asian society—Japan—has fully caught up with Europe.

One of the key goals of my writings is to alert Asians that they have had no better historical moment than the current one to develop their true potential and, at the same time, prod them to be bolder in their ambitions and aspirations. If they get their act

together, Asian societies could once again out-perform other societies.

But it will not be easy to walk out of a thousand years of stupor. Asians need to ask themselves hard questions. One of the key purposes of this essay is to look at some questions that Asians should ask themselves at this turn of the millennium. How did they come to lose a millennium? Will they lose the next one too? What challenges do they have to overcome to succeed in this new millennium? This essay, written for the special millennium edition of *Asiaweek*, attempts to spell out at least three key challenges that Asian societies face.

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At this historic moment—when the ascendancy of Europe is so rapidly coming to an end, when Asia is swelling with resurrected life, and the theme of the 20th century seems destined to be an all-embracing conflict between the East and the West—... the future faces into the Pacific, and understanding must follow it there.¹

ASIAN TRIUMPHALISM, circa 1995? No. For US historian Will Durant in 1935, Asia had clearly been a land of promise. Yet it lost most of the 20th century—even much of the second millennium, while Europe and later America shot ahead in human achievements, colonised the globe and took control of the world economy. The picture had looked very different at the turn of the last millennium. China was reaching towards new heights under the Song Dynasty. One of the busiest cities of the world was emerging in Southeast Asia, in Angkor Wat. Indian and Arab societies were ahead of Europe in learning. And Asia's advance continued for several centuries. Then, for most of the past 500 years, Asians stopped learning.

To avoid losing the next century, Asians must resume the learning process they had aborted for centuries. They have to ruthlessly analyse their past. They have to understand, for example, why so many Asians allowed themselves to be colonised by so few Europeans. What went wrong? They must further determine what went right in the West. Many would want to credit Europe's success to purely material factors: its domination of science and technology in the past five centuries. Superior European weapons subdued large Asian masses. But to look at the "hardware" alone, while ignoring the "software" advantages of European societies, would be a mistake. Distilling the wrong lessons may be even worse for Asia than distilling no lessons at all. And learning the right lessons is becoming more crucial as history fast-forwards into the next millennium. The velocity of change is accelerating. Societies with the right competitive advantages will leap ahead even faster. Those without will fall further behind.

Finding the right software should be easy. Successful societies exist. Best practices are visible. Why not copy? After all, Asia has

copied and even improved hardware. But even successful societies may not understand the real software fuelling their success. The advice they give to developing countries, often with good intentions, has been simple. The key ingredients for success are democracy and free markets. Yet, some societies, including major nations, that tried instant transformations to democracy have come to grief. So too those societies that tried free market economies without the right institutional frameworks in place. Deeper principles explain the success of the developed societies. A short essay like this cannot provide all the answers. But let me suggest three key principles that may be found in the software of success.

The first is “meritocracy”. When capitalism destroyed feudalism in Europe in the 19th century, it moved away from aristocracy towards meritocracy. Capitalism, with its essential ingredient of “creative destruction”, generated new elites. Democracy provided another institutional process for flushing out old elites and churning out new ones. Both capitalism and democracy were therefore not purely ends in themselves (even though they are ideologically worshipped in many Western minds). They were also functional instruments that enabled—most times—new talent to emerge while simultaneously preventing the encrustation of old elites (which has been one key reason for Asia's failure). If each Asian society allows its best minds to emerge, flourish and provide leadership, Asia could well take off. But conservative social and political forces resist change. And a great deal of Asian talent is wasted.

Globalisation may succeed where domestic forces have failed. New economic forces are plowing through Asia, turning up talent. More than half of the 500,000 foreign students in the United States come from Asia. The American university system is the most meritocratic educational system anywhere. Asian successes there demonstrate that Asia has potentially the largest pool of talent to share with the world. Ostensibly this is a loss for Asia. Most will not return immediately. But many eventually do. Taiwan's economic miracle was helped by returning students. India's explosive growth in the computer software industry has also been helped by its returning “brain drain”.

Multinational businesses—from banks and consulting firms to the dynamic new companies in information technology—are also tapping and training Asian talent. They could well be the yeast to revive long moribund Asian societies.

The second principle is “peace”. Peace, of course, was in short supply during much of Europe’s growth. It took two debilitating world wars, where many of the best European minds were lost in mindless battles, for that continent to give up centuries of antagonism. One simple explanation for these two wars could be the time lag between changes in mental and physical environments. In the first half of the 20th century, vestiges of a feudal mindset—which saw war as a legitimate instrument for expanding power—persisted in Europe, even though the instruments of war had increased dramatically in their power of destruction. Nuclear weapons, paradoxically, may have finally removed this time lag.

Some Asian minds, including those of key policymakers, still linger in the feudal era. They see international relations as a zero-sum game. They have yet to learn from the lesson Japan and Germany absorbed after World War II: power and prosperity can be acquired peacefully. The political dynamic of West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia would become more comfortable if their leaders realised that peace is an essential condition for growth and prosperity in the modern world. Wars drive out investment dollars and kill (literally) talent. Peace does the opposite. Just one major war in Asia—between any two major Asian powers—could propel Asia back into the 19th century. Asians should learn from the wisdom of Deng Xiaoping when he said that future generations should be asked to solve today’s territorial problems.

The third principle is “honesty”. This sounds trite, but it is a polite way of drawing attention to one of Asia’s most shameful aspects: corruption. Successful societies have functional elites. They add more value to their societies than they take from it. Unsuccessful societies have corrupt elites. As a result of feudal attitudes, they become easily entrenched, even though they survive as parasites. Corruption exists in both the democratic and non-democratic societies of Asia (and indeed in other parts of the world).

To successfully root it out, the rule of law has to be more firmly embedded in Asian societies. Corruption is a particularly pernicious problem because it is so difficult to document, except in the most egregious cases such as that of Ferdinand Marcos. It thrives at all levels. And the costs are not purely economic. They are also social and spiritual. They breed cynicism and disenchantment, sustaining a vicious cycle that has held Asian societies down: When there is no hope for change, why try?

And this points to the most dreadful truth that Asians have to come to terms with. Asian societies have not been held back due to colonialism. Nor have they been held back by inequitable international economic forces. The external causes are all peripheral (and often benign). The real reason that Asian societies have fallen behind European societies in the past 500 years is a simple one: Asians have held Asia back.

But I do not want to end on a pessimistic note. There is hope for change. Globalisation will generate new elites in Asia. So too will the increasing velocity of change. Huge numbers of Asians are being educated, at home and abroad. New global flows of information are opening the eyes of Asians. The “veil of ignorance” is being lifted. A new process of learning has begun. All these forces will generate new opportunities for Asian societies. But the first lesson that Asian societies must learn is how to develop, implement and maintain the right software: meritocracy, peace and honesty (MPH—perhaps a good acronym to remember in times of rapid change).

1. Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1935.

THE MAKING OF MODERN ASIA

TIME Magazine. 7 August 2005

When I published my latest book, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, the former Treasury Secretary and current Director of the US National Economic Council, Larry Summers gave me a wonderful blurb which said, inter alia, “the rise of Asia and all that follows it will be the dominant story in history books written 300 years from now with the Cold War and rise of Islam as secondary stories.”

Today there is virtually no doubt that the 21st century will be the Asian century. The reason why this is inevitable is because we are returning to the historical norm. From the year 1 to the year 1820, China and India were consistently the two world's largest economies. Goldman Sachs has predicted that we will return to this norm by 2050 with the four largest economies being China, India, USA and Japan (and in this respective order).

Yet, even though many accept the reality of the rise of Asia, there is still very little consensus on how and why this is happening now. Hence, when *TIME Magazine* invited me to write an essay explaining the rise of Asia in 2005, I was happy to do so. This short discussion should be seen as a delightful appetiser for those interested in beginning their journey on the understanding of the new Asia.

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THE 21ST CENTURY has opened and will close with two puzzles about the rise of Asia. Today, the puzzle is why Asian societies, long in the doldrums, are now successful. At the century's close, by contrast, historians will want to know why Asian societies succeeded so late, taking centuries to catch up with a Europe that they had outperformed for millennia. Neither puzzle is—or will be—easy to solve.

As a child of a poor Indian immigrant family growing up in the 1950s in the British colony of Singapore, neither I nor my classmates could have even conceived the notion that an Asian century would begin in our lifetimes. We believed that London was the centre of the universe; one friend used to tell me that the streets there were paved with gold. Both India and China seemed doomed to eternal poverty. Today, it is clear that the Asian century has begun.

What remains unclear, however, are the factors that caused this enormous change. There was, for example, the exhaustion of the European colonial powers after two destructive World Wars, and the consolidation of nationalist sentiments, forged in the anti-colonial struggles. There was the rise of the US as the most benign power in human history, creating a new world order that allowed potential rivals to emerge. There were the pressures of Cold War competition, which forced the US to encourage the economic success of its allies, especially Japan and the four Asian tigers. Then there were accidents with profound, if unanticipated, consequences, like the Sino-Soviet split, which drove China into the US camp and facilitated Deng Xiaoping's fateful decision to explain why China needed the "Four Modernisations", and financial accidents, like the Plaza Accord of 1985, which caused a rush of Japanese investments into East Asia. There was the cultural attraction of the US, which lured hundreds of thousands of young Asians to study there; when they returned home, these Asians provided the yeast for a new cultural confidence in their own societies. Finally, there was globalisation, which provided a tremendous boost to Asian economies, especially to China's and India's.

All of these forces for change can be thought of as benign. Yet in paradoxical ways, tragedies, too, contributed to Asia's rise. The

Korean War was painful and destructive. But it led to a strategic American decision to encourage the rebuilding of Japan's economy and society—although this sadly swept under the carpet the dreadful record of Japan's actions in World War II. Japan's economic success in turn inspired the four tigers. The Vietnam War was equally painful. But the US decision to hold the line in Indochina allowed Southeast Asian countries to become dynamos, rather than dominoes. The historical verdict on US involvement in Vietnam is unfair: despite the ignominious retreat by the US from Saigon, Vietnam ultimately applied to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Vietnamese decision to invade Cambodia in December 1978 also triggered some happy, if unintended, consequences. Apart from ending the genocide of Pol Pot, it solidified the Sino-American relationship and gave ASEAN new political resolve. One of the least appreciated contributions to the rise of Asia has been the magic provided by ASEAN in delivering political stability and harmony to Southeast Asia. Despite having greater ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity than Southeast Europe, the region remained an oasis of peace in the 1990s while the Balkans erupted into a frenzy of ethnic and religious killings. ASEAN saved Southeast Asia, especially during the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which could have led to political havoc in the region. And it is at the heart of the alphabet soup of regional processes that have provided the foundations for even wider regional cooperation. The first-ever Asia-wide summit will be held in Kuala Lumpur in December this year, bringing together the 10 ASEAN leaders with those of China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia. It will be a truly historic meeting. ASEAN made it possible.

Of course, other regions in the world benefited from propitious external developments. The US supported allies in other areas of the developing world; for example, Egypt received as much aid as South Korea. But nowhere else has seen the scale of success in Asia. Why is that? Here, the missing piece of the puzzle has to be the cultural fabric of Asian societies.

Cultural confidence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for

development. Centuries of European colonial rule had progressively reduced Asian self-confidence. Future generations of Indian citizens will be wondering how 300 million Indians—including my own ancestors—allowed themselves to be passively ruled by fewer than 100,000 Britons. Those as yet unborn will not understand how deeply the myth of European cultural superiority had been embedded into the Indian psyche. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister, once said the defeat of Russia in 1905 by Japan first triggered the idea of independence for India in his mind. That was a remarkable admission; it implied that intelligent Indians could not conceive of governing themselves before Japan, an Asian power, defeated a European one.

Japan's record in World War II was disastrous. But if Japan had not succeeded early in the 20th century, Asia's development would have come much later. Japan inspired the rise of Asia. Even South Korea, which suffered from brutal Japanese colonial rule, could not have taken off so fast without having Japan as a role model. Asia needs to send Japan a big thank-you note. The tragedy, of course, is that such words of gratitude will not be delivered while Japan remains ambivalent about its own identity, torn between Asia and the West.

Even the Chinese should thank Japan. Tokyo's continuous denials of its army's atrocities in World War II will always complicate relations with Beijing. But China would not be where it is today if Deng had not made that fateful decision to move from communist central planning to a free-market system. Deng took this incredibly bold leap because he had seen how well the Overseas Chinese in Taiwan, Hong Kong and even Singapore had done. Those three tigers—and the fourth, South Korea—were inspired by Japan. The stone that Japan threw into Asia-Pacific waters created ripples that eventually benefited China, too.

What makes Asia's rise so irreversible is the simultaneous success of both China and India. Their political paths could not be more different: India is a democracy, while China retains Communist Party rule. The acceptance of free-market disciplines, however, provides a common economic platform. China and India

today are united in their cultural confidence, especially among their youth. Both countries have the most optimistic generation of young people they have seen in centuries. Nothing can hold back the dynamism and vigour they will bring to their societies, and to the whole world.

The West got the first whiff of this cultural confidence at the end of the Cold War. Basking in ideological triumph, the West prescribed that all societies should immediately become replicas of Western liberal democracies. Many happily followed this prescription. Few succeeded. Some came to grief. The Asian states, especially China, resisted copying the West. This is how the famous “Asian values debate” was sparked. In refusing Western prescriptions, Asians were perceived to be promoting the superiority of their own values. In fact, they were merely arguing that they should be free to choose their own political paths. Lest there be any misunderstanding, Asian intellectuals—including those from China—agree that the ultimate political destination of all societies is democracy. The destination is not in question, only the route and the timing are.

September 11, 2001, removed all traces of political smugness in Western minds and all claims to Western ideological superiority. It made the West aware that the new ideological challenge from Islam was far bigger than the communist one, which future historians will see as a passing shower. Islam has been around for over 1,300 years, penetrating deeply into the souls of 1.2 billion people. Most Islamic societies have yet to find the right balance between modernisation and their religious roots. The success of East Asia, especially its Muslim societies, could eventually trigger the modernisation of the Islamic world.

Yet questions remain about the sustainability of Asia’s success. Asian countries will continue to stumble from time to time. They cannot rely solely on favourable external developments or on Western ideas, though it is these, not Asian ones, that have driven Asia’s growth. The economic principles of Asia’s rise come from a Scot, Adam Smith. The political ideologies come from Western thinkers, from John Locke to Karl Marx. The international multilateral grid that has served Asia well—including the UN, WTO,

IMF and World Bank—is essentially a Western creation. Asians have benefited enormously from being passengers on the Western globalisation bus. Soon, they will help drive it. Asians cannot be free riders forever.

Yet few Asians have given thought to how they will reshape the world order. The world is keen to learn what new responsibilities Asia will take on. So far, the region has remained silent. On the cultural front, too, Asian passivity is surprising. Bollywood, the sole major exception, is growing in strength. But in virtually every other field, Asians have been consumers of Western cultural products, especially American ones. The Asian economies now produce almost 40 per cent of global GDP, but they have only a minority stake in the world's cultural industries, from film to TV, from books to print media. No Asian TV channel currently can match CNN or the BBC. This distorts global perspectives. The world sees Asia through Western eyes. Asians have yet to explain themselves in their own terms to the rest of the world.

But history teaches us that economic growth eventually generates a cultural renaissance. It would be strange for Asian societies, from Iran to South Korea, from China to India, not to rediscover their rich cultural heritage. The high price paid for Asian antiques in Western auction houses is, perhaps, a first hint of this new cultural pride. But a cultural renaissance cannot just rediscover old glories. It has to provide directions for the future. Just as Asian economies have succeeded by drawing on the best practices of East and West, the Asian cultural renaissance (or renaissances) will also see a fusion of Eastern and Western civilisations, allowing the West to feel included in, not excluded from, Asia's rise.

When Asia's growth achieves a certain momentum by the end of the 21st century, Asian minds will inevitably come up with new conundrums. Why did their ancestors take so long to succeed and modernise? Why did Europe and not Asia trigger the Industrial Revolution? How could a few key capitals in Europe and America make decisions that determined Asian destinies? How could London ever have been more important than Bombay, or Paris more important than Beijing? These questions too will come.

PART 2

THE WEST AND THE REST

THE WEST AND THE REST

The National Interest. No. 28, Summer 1992

My year at Harvard, from September 1991 to June 1992, opened my eyes in many ways. One key insight I gained was that those who live and think in the West are not aware of how much impact they have on the rest of the world, or what the Rest thinks of the West. The Western mind believes that it understands all worlds, since it is open to all ideas and closed to none. The paradoxical result of this deep-seated assumption is that the Western mind is actually unaware of the limits of its understanding and comprehension. This essay was an attempt to open new windows in the Western mind.

Of all the essays that I have published, two have gained the greatest notoriety. The first was this essay. The second was my response to Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations"; see "The Dangers of Decadence: What the Rest Can Teach the West" on pages 97 to 104 in this same section.

Reading this essay a decade later, I am astonished how quickly some of my long-term predictions have materialised. In the essay I said, "In the eyes of the North African population, the Mediterranean, which once divided civilisations, has become a mere pond. What human being would not cross a pond if thereby he could improve his livelihood?"

When I wrote this, the illegal immigration across the Mediterranean was a trickle. Now in the new millennium, it is a river. European newspapers report

these crossings with great alarm. But how could they not see it coming? The deaths of 19 Chinese trying to smuggle into England in mid-2000 in a container box provided more eloquent proof of the arguments of this essay than my words ever could.

Today, the conclusions I drew remain valid. The image I used, of the defenders of Singapore in World War II with their guns pointing the wrong way, is still apt: there remains a strong impulse in the West to draw up the ramparts. But a huge contradiction is developing between the unilateralist impulses of Western political power and the interdependent and interconnected world spun by Western technology. When this huge contradiction explodes, I hope some will recall the points in this essay.

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THE WEST WON the Cold War, conventional wisdom holds, not because of its military superiority but because of the strength of its social, economic and political institutions. Hence, it is not surprising that a new consensus has quickly developed that the West merely has to hold a steady course in the post-Cold War era. Francis Fukuyama, with his celebration of the triumph of Western values, captured the spirit of the moment. The rest of the world, if it is to free itself from the “mire” of history, will have to adjust and accommodate to the ways of the West. Having already got things basically right and facing no imminent threat, the West has no need to make major adjustments of its own.

This essay will challenge these widely held assumptions. It will argue that “steady as she goes” is not a viable option for the West; that while it may not face any immediate military threat, the West faces serious and growing dangers of other kinds; that it cannot afford to turn its back on the Third World because the Cold War is over; that in a shrinking and increasingly overcrowded world, in which the population of the West constitutes an ever smaller percentage, a comprehensive new strategy is needed; and that an aggressive effort to export Western values to the non-West does not constitute such a strategy, but will only serve to aggravate already serious problems.

Arriving at a sound strategy, a difficult enough task in the best of circumstances, will be harder because of the deeply ingrained habits acquired during the long years of the Cold War. There is a real danger that problems will be wrongly identified and defined, and that consequently the West’s strategic sights will be pointed the wrong way. For someone of my background, this danger recalls the famous British guns of Singapore in December 1941. The guns of that supposedly impregnable fortress were confidently pointed seaward, as the Japanese came quietly over land on bicycles and on foot to conquer the island with embarrassing ease. This analogy is particularly apt because one of the most serious challenges that will confront the West in the new era will also arrive on bicycles and on foot, or their equivalents: the challenge posed by mass immigration from Third World countries. Superior Western military

technology will be useless against these invading armies because they will arrive as poor and defenceless individuals and families, moving without commanders or orders, and seeping slowly through porous borders.

If and when this happens, it will be only one dimension of a multiple crisis, a crisis resulting from the combination of a fundamentally changed Western attitude towards the Third World, and some well-known but inadequately understood secular trends.

THE RETREAT OF THE WEST

For the four decades of the Cold War, both sides attached great importance to the Third World. Seeing themselves as engaged in a global struggle for the highest stakes, neither felt able to treat any country, however small, poor or distant, as unimportant. Everything counted; nothing was irrelevant. Even as the West shed its colonial empires, the Third World successor states became more rather than less strategically relevant, especially for the United States. Because everyone else was already committed to one camp or the other, these countries constituted the main arena of competition, the contested hearts and minds and territories of the Cold War.

Although most Third World countries belonged at least nominally to the Non-Aligned Movement, that organisation was incapable of providing them with effective security. For that, most felt they had only two effective choices: to identify, to a greater or lesser degree, with either the Western or Soviet camp. Thus a ramifying system of patrons and clients, one with an elaborate if mostly tacit set of rules, spread over the globe. Third World states were by no means always the passive objects of superpower manipulation in these arrangements, and many became very skilful at exploiting the Cold War for their own ends. But it was a dangerous game, requiring precise calculation. Those playing it observed carefully what happened to countries like Cambodia and Ethiopia—two vivid symbols of 20th-century tragedy—when they got things wrong. They also noticed that if the Soviets kept Mengistu in power in Ethiopia, the West kept Mobutu in Zaire. This was a time when strategic imperatives did not allow for exquisite moral scrupulousness.

With the end of the Cold War, this state of affairs no longer pertains. Following the disappearance of the Soviet Union, Soviet proxies have either already fallen (like Mengistu) or been left exposed, without protection or subsidies, at the end of a long limb. The West, too, has reordered its priorities. No longer is there the same compulsion to prop up unsavoury allies in the name of national security. More stringent tests of human rights and democratic rectitude can be applied, and the inability of such allies to transform themselves at short notice to comply with these higher standards has been used as justification for abandoning some of them without feeling much in the way of guilt.

Whatever the ethical merits of thus using and then ditching allies, this sudden joint Soviet and Western abandonment of their erstwhile Third World friends has sent a powerful message through most of the Third World. The rules of the game have changed; indeed, the game itself has changed. Third World regimes have begun to realise that their previous “usefulness” has ended and the West now sees little value in taking any real interest in their fate. The results of this are not all bad. The end of superpower competition has created the conditions for the ending of many conflicts that were kept well-stoked by the Cold War, ranging from El Salvador through Namibia and Afghanistan to Cambodia. Many dictatorial regimes have disappeared. This is to be welcomed. But the removal of Cold War pressures also means that forces that have been bottled up in these societies can now erupt.

To understand the epochal significance of this new Western tendency to withdraw and leave most Third World societies alone (observe, for example, how many Western embassies are closing down in Africa; the British have in recent years closed their missions in Burundi, Congo, Gabon, Liberia and Somalia), consider that these societies have been subjected to heavy Western involvement in their affairs since the colonial era started in the 16th century. The current Western tendency to disentangle itself from the Third World should therefore be seen as the end not merely of a four-decade-old involvement, but of one that is four centuries old. All the indigenous processes that were smothered and subdued for

centuries, either because of metropolitan pressures or because global forces were raging above them, can finally surface. To hold these historically pent-up forces in place, the Western world has left behind in the Third World a thin veneer of Western concepts of national sovereignty, the nation-state, sometimes Western parliamentary institutions, and some principles of international law.

True, these forces were not totally bottled up during the Cold War. But the end of that intense struggle has already seen an acceleration and intensification of such phenomena that amount to a qualitative change. Tribal warfare in Africa, ethnic strife in Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim strife in India, Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria—all can surface now with greater strength. The disintegration in 1991 of Somalia (one of the more ethnically homogeneous states in Africa) would not have been viewed with indifference—would not have been allowed to happen—10 years ago. It is also noteworthy that during the Cold War, the main political fault lines in South Asia were *between* India and Pakistan, fault lines accentuated by their superpower patrons. Today, the main fault lines are inside India and Pakistan.

THE SHRINKING GLOBE

In short, the reversal of centuries-old Western processes of intervention in the Third World is probably going to lead to the emergence of a cauldron of instability in most of the Third World. In previous centuries geographic distance would have insulated the West from this cauldron. Ironically, it was during the Cold War that Western technology shrank the world into a global village, destroying the insulation provided by distance and time.

Global communication networks that give the West a ringside seat when a Tiananmen explodes or a Gulf War breaks out have an equally spectacular reverse effect. Increasingly, once-remote villages in China, Central Asia and the heart of Africa now have clear pictures of the comfortable and affluent lives of ordinary citizens in the West. Clausewitz observed that “once barriers—which in a sense consist only in man’s ignorance of the possible—are torn down, they are not easily set up again.” It is a remark worth bearing in mind in this context.

The simple practical effect of all this is that a single mental universe and a single global society are in the process of being created. All through the early and middle decades of the 20th century, Western societies had to struggle hard to remove from themselves the gross inequalities resulting from the early years of industrialisation. This they essentially did. Now they are faced with a much, much larger proletariat on their doorsteps—one drawn irresistibly by awareness of Western affluence and opportunity.

Western Europeans are beginning to understand this. If something goes wrong in, say, Algeria or Tunisia, the problems will impact on France. In the eyes of the North African population, the Mediterranean, which once divided civilisations, has become a mere pond. What human being would not cross a pond if thereby he could improve his livelihood? Through all previous centuries, men and women have crossed oceans and mountains to seek a better life, often suffering terrible hardship in the process. Indeed, it is this drive that explains the wide geographic span of “Western” societies outside their origins in continental Europe, stretching from North America through South Africa to Australia and New Zealand. Today, many more people feel that they can make similar journeys. So far, Western Europeans have only seen the beginnings of such mass movements, and already they are deeply troubled.

In 1990, the ratio of Europe’s population to that of Africa was 498 million to 642 million; according to UN projections, by 2050, based on medium fertility extension, the ratio will be 486 million (a decrease, be it noted) to 2.265 billion—that is, a ratio akin to the white-black ratio in today’s South Africa. Two nations, currently of the same population size, demonstrate the meaning of this trend. In the past few years, despite net immigration, Italy’s population has been declining. Egypt’s is growing by a million every eight months. Italy reacted very harshly to the Albanian boat people. How much more harshly would it react if the boat people were not fellow Europeans? Or consider this: in 1960, the combined population of Morocco and Algeria amounted to half that of France; today it is about equal; in another 30 years it will be double that of France.

To put it simply, within a few decades, when Western Europe

will be confronted with teeming impoverished masses on its borders and when increasing numbers will be slipping in to join the millions already there, Europeans will find themselves in essentially the same strategic plight as the affluent but vastly outnumbered white population of South Africa today.

Even the United States, separated from the fast-growing population centres of Asia and Africa by two mighty oceans, is not immune. As Ivan Head observes, "North America is home to one of the fastest growing of all national populations. The population of Mexico in 1950 was 25 million. Before this decade concludes, it will be 100 million." Despite the magnetic power of US popular culture (which once made even the French feel threatened), some of the southwestern states of the United States are effectively becoming bilingual societies, reflecting the great influx from the south. At what point will the nature of US society and culture change irreversibly?

The term "population explosion" is disarmingly familiar, a cliché. But like many clichés it expresses a vital truth. From 1750 to 1950, the populations of the five main continents grew at about the same rate. After 1950, there was a dramatic surge of population growth in the Third World, largely resulting from the spread of Western methods of hygiene and basic health care. The population balance between Europe and North America and the rest of the world has been irretrievably altered. In the year 2000 (a mere eight years away), out of a projected global population of 6.25 billion, 5 billion will live in the Third World. Ninety-seven per cent of the world's population increase will take place in the Third World.

Population numbers matter. When there are extreme differences, they create the sort of security dilemmas that, in their different ways, nations such as Israel, Mongolia, Nepal and white South Africa face. Even in the absence of such conventional security threats, this population imbalance, aggravated by the enormous disparity in living standards, will be the fundamental underlying cause of the new sorts of threats facing the Western world, ranging from migrations of the poor and dispossessed to environmental damage, drugs, disease and terrorism.

THE IMPACT OF EAST ASIA

The stark picture of an affluent West and a poor Third World is complicated and confused by the increasing importance of the East Asians, the only non-Westerners already in, or poised to enter, the world of developed nations. Though their economic success, especially that of Japan, is seen as a serious problem by some in the West, in the larger context of relations between the West and the Rest it should surely be seen as part of the solution. For Japan and the other East Asian success stories are setting off ripples of development in the Third World in a way that no Western society has ever succeeded in doing.

Consider this great historical oddity: Why is it that decades of proximity to, and contact with, North America and Western Europe did not inspire any of the neighbouring societies in Latin America, the Middle East or Africa to plunge into the free-market universe, despite the obvious economic benefits of doing so? Why is Japan the only developed nation to stimulate such emulation?

The answer will inevitably be complex, but one critical factor, largely overlooked, has been the psychological. In 1905, when Japan, an Asian nation, defeated Russia, a white power, it unintentionally provided a tremendous psychological boost to anti-colonialism. If not the vast majority, then at least the emerging educated elites of non-European countries could, for the first time, conceive of the possibility that colonial subjugation was not necessarily a permanent condition, a state of nature. The generation of Jawaharlal Nehru, a boy of 14 at the time of the war, was greatly stirred.

Today, Japan's economic success is having a similar psychological impact on developing societies all over the world, gradually convincing them that they too can make it into the developed universe. This psychological leap is crucial. Until recently, most Third World nations believed subconsciously that developed status was out of their reach. Today, after looking at Japan and its neighbours, many believe otherwise.

Japan did not intend this. Global benevolence has not yet infused the character of the Japanese. But its success convinced its neighbours, ranging from Korea to Taiwan to Singapore, that

they too could do it. Their success has, in turn, had a significant effect on China. The economic take-off of China's coastal provinces has reduced the ability of Beijing to reverse course from economic liberalisation, and has also helped convince Indonesia, the world's fifth most populous nation, to deregulate even faster, suggesting that a new economic synergy is developing in East Asia.

But the effect is not restricted to the region. Largely unnoticed, pilgrims from all other parts of the world have been coming to East Asia to observe and learn. Turks and Mexicans, Iranians and Chileans are fascinated by East Asia's success. If the East Asians can do it, why not they? So far no Islamic nation has successfully modernised. But if Malaysia and Indonesia, two Muslim countries far from the birthplace of Islam, can be swept along by the rising Asia-Pacific economic tide—and the process is well under way—the winds in the Islamic world will no longer move from West to East Asia but in the reverse direction, a major historic change. Over time, countries like Algeria and Tunisia may also be drawn into this process.

Looked at in this way, Europe and North America, which are increasingly feeling threatened by Japan's economic advance, may indeed have a vested interest in its progress. If the belief and expectation of economic development can be planted in the minds of billions of people, massive migrations may be averted. Those Western Europeans who are already fearful of such migrations from North Africa should do some fundamental strategic rethinking and begin viewing the challenge from East Asia in a different light. A short-term challenge could bring long-term strategic redemption.

ECONOMIC HORSES, DEMOCRATIC CARTS

As the numbers mount and the prospect of ever-worsening poverty and massive immigration looms, most of those Westerners who have not become entirely indifferent to the Third World seem to be determined that first priority must be given to the promotion of human rights and democracy. For the first time since decolonisation, many countries have been told that development aid, even from multilateral institutions like the UN Development Program, will be conditioned upon moves towards democratisation. This campaign

for democracy and human rights in the Third World could backfire badly and undermine Western security in the post-Cold War era.

The collapse of communism in the face of challenges from democracies has given a powerful new burst of confidence in democratic values. These values strengthen the social and political fabric of Western societies because they involve all citizens in national affairs and hence develop in the citizens a commitment to their society. In addition, democratic systems lead to constant circulation within the ruling elites, thereby ensuring the infusion of new blood and new ideas into critical councils. As well as the moral strength of these values, their functional strengths will enhance the global trend towards democratisation and increasing respect for human rights. Those that fail to adapt to this trend are likely to suffer in the long-term Darwinian contest between societies. Japan, for example, could remain far ahead of China for centuries if China fails to create a system that will enable it to extract and use its human talent as effectively as Japan.

The question remains, however: How does one successfully transplant democracies into societies that historically have had very different social and political systems? The conventional wisdom in some American political and intellectual circles today is that any society, including China, can make this transition virtually immediately. Yet most Western societies (including the most recent cases, like Spain and Portugal) did not make the leap overnight from traditional or semi-feudal systems. Economic development came first, creating both working and middle classes that had a vested interest in stability and would therefore not be pulled apart by demagogic democratic politicians trying to capitalise on ethnic and other sectional differences. That has also been the path taken by those who have made the successful transition to democracy in East Asia.

Today, the West is encouraging, and sometimes demanding, the opposite approach in the Third World. It is promoting democracy *before* economic development. It assumes that democracy can be successfully transplanted into societies that are at low levels of economic development and that are deeply divided socially

across many lines—tribal, ethnic and religious, among others. In a developed and industrialised society, a democratic system draws in the established middle class that has a vested interest in stability. In many Asian and African cases, without such middle classes the national polity breaks down into ethnic and tribal loyalties. If this in turn leads to internecine warfare, can one argue that democracy will always bring beneficial consequences?

As far back as 1861, John Stuart Mill said that democracy is “next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities.” Even earlier, John Jay, writing in the *Federalist*, stressed that Americans were “descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs”. He added that they were surely “a band of brethren” and “should never be split into a number of unsocial, jealous and alien sovereignties”. Earlier theorists of democracy would be surprised by the 20th-century conceit that democracy can be applied to any society, regardless of its stage of development or its internal social divisions.

To avoid misunderstanding, let me stress that I am not arguing that democratic systems are necessarily antithetical to development in contemporary Third World societies. Theoretically, it is possible to have both. In some cases, it may even work. But a calm and dispassionate look at Third World conditions suggests that a period of strong and firm government, one that is committed to radical reform, may be necessary to break out of the vicious circle of poverty sustained by social structures that contain vested interests opposed to any real changes. Japan was able to go into high growth after World War II in part because of the wide-ranging socio-economic reforms that General MacArthur imposed. No democratically elected Japanese government could have done what he did. By contrast, the failure of the United States to carry out similar socio-economic reforms in the Philippines is one reason why the economy of that country has not developed well in the post-war years.

Of course, the Filipino case demonstrates that authoritarian governments can be antithetical to development. However, it is

equally true that some authoritarian governments have been good for development, as is shown by the dramatic economic growth of South Korea and Taiwan in the early years. The point here is simple: the crucial variable in determining whether a Third World society will progress is not whether its government is democratic but whether, to put it simply, it has “good government”.

“Good government” is hard to define, especially in the American context, where the term is almost an oxymoron. In the United States, good government often means the least government. In Third World societies burdened with huge development demands, the common characteristics found in the successful East Asian societies may help to provide a useful definition of “good government”. These would include: (1) political stability, (2) sound bureaucracies based on meritocracy, (3) economic growth with equity, (4) fiscal prudence and (5) relative lack of corruption. With these criteria in mind, it should be possible for multilateral institutions like the World Bank to work out an operational definition that would determine eligibility for foreign aid.

The effect of such a reorientation of Western policies towards the Third World would be that less attention would be paid to the process by which Third World governments come into being and more attention would be paid to their performance. If their performance leads to serious and consistent improvement in the living conditions of the population, both the humanitarian and pragmatic considerations that underlie Western policies would be satisfied: the humanitarian because there would be less starvation and suffering, and the pragmatic because improving conditions would mean less migration to the West.

While human rights campaigns are often portrayed as an absolute moral good to be implemented without any qualifications, in practice Western governments are prudent and selective. For example, given their powerful vested interest in secure and stable oil supplies from Saudi Arabia, Western governments have not tried to export their standards of human rights or democracy to that country, for they know that any alternative to the stable rule of the Saudi government would very likely be bad for the West.

The recent Algerian experience introduces another complication for Western advocates of immediate democratisation. Democracies work all too well in bringing out the true social and cultural face of a society. In Algeria the centuries-old Islamic heritage had been suppressed by the secular and modern values introduced by the post-colonial elite. That Islamic heritage is now surfacing, and it will probably surface in other Islamic societies that hold democratic elections. If these governments elected by popular mandate impose strict Islamic laws that restrict some human rights (as Iran has), should we respect their right to decide their own values and practices? There are no easy answers.

The reaction of the West to the military coup in Algeria illustrates the moral and political ambiguities. Nominally, most Western governments have condemned the coup. However, in reaction to the questions posed by the citizens of France, Italy and Spain as to whether democracy in Algeria is good for their own countries, most Western governments have quietly welcomed the coup, a sensible pragmatic decision based on Western interests. In the eyes of many Third World observers this pragmatic application of moral values leads to a cynical belief that the West will only advance democracy when it suits its own interests. The same cynicism can develop—is almost certain to develop—over human rights campaigns. Would the West be as tough on the Chinese regime in Beijing if China were located where either Turkey or Mexico is today? Would the West then be as sanguine about the prospect of millions of boat people emerging from China if the regime broke down and chaos prevailed?

Take the case of Peru. In Peru, as in Algeria, there was a spectacular reversal in the trend towards democratisation. However, Peru was punished with sanctions, while Algeria was not. The Europeans wisely calculated that sanctions on Algeria would further destabilise the volatile socio-economic situation and exacerbate the flow of Algerian refugees. Hence, nothing was done. Peru was further away from any Western society. So even though sanctions would be equally destabilising in an equally volatile socio-economic environment, they were imposed.

Westerners should surely have asked: What kind of authoritarian government was Fujimori imposing? Was he going to become a Marcos and enrich his personal coffers, or was he desperately trying to reverse course for a society on the verge of serious breakdown? Do such questions matter? Curiously, few have noticed that if *current* Western policies had been in force in the 1950s and 1960s, the spectacular economic growth of Taiwan and South Korea could have been cut off at its very inception by the demand that the governments then in place be dismantled.

In Peru, one additional cause for concern is that if the sanctions succeed in their purpose of unseating the Fujimori government, the possible alternatives of chaos or a Latin American version of Pol Pot-ism could be much worse for the Peruvian people. Those who firmly advocate sanctions on Peru should be prepared to accept moral responsibility for the consequences of those sanctions, good or bad. If they do so, the world may avoid a repetition of the Cambodian experience, where all those who advocated the removal of the Lon Nol regime refused to accept moral responsibility for the genocide that followed. If the West chooses to be prudent in targeting human rights abuses where its own interests are involved, does it not have an obligation to exercise the same prudence when others may be affected by these campaigns?

In the face of these moral and political complexities, Western governments may find it in their interest to explain to their citizens that prudence may have to be a crucial consideration in the promotion of human rights and democracy. Unfortunately, while Western governments are prudent in practice, they find it almost impossible to speak honestly to their own citizens on the subject. Philosophically, it is difficult to discuss prudence in promoting democratisation; it is not an uplifting, inspirational virtue. Yet both honesty and self-interest suggest that Western governments should do so.

No Western government has publicly confessed that in determining its particular human rights and democracy policies, it weighs them against other vital national interests. Yet every government does so: the Germans take a strong stand on Kurdish rights, the United States does not; the United States and the United

Kingdom come down hard on Qaddafi, Italy does not. This pattern of inconsistencies in turn undervalues the merit of these human rights policies in the eyes of the ostensible beneficiaries, the Third World societies, because instead of being impressed by the moral courage of Western governments, they notice the pragmatic and calculated application of moral principles.

The human rights campaigns launched by Western governments and non-governmental organisations have done much good. They have, for example, created a new global consensus that militates against the return of gross and egregious violators of human rights like Pol Pot, Idi Amin and Boukassa. The victims of such regimes can breathe a sigh of relief. Similarly, the strong global consensus against the gross forms of torture that prevailed in many parts of the world is a great advance in human history.

But from the viewpoint of many Third World citizens, human rights campaigns often have a bizarre quality. For many of them it looks something like this: They are like hungry and diseased passengers on a leaky, overcrowded boat that is about to drift into treacherous waters, in which many of them will perish. The captain of the boat is often harsh, sometimes fairly and sometimes not. On the river banks stand a group of affluent, well-fed and well-intentioned onlookers. As soon as those onlookers witness a passenger being flogged or imprisoned or even deprived of his right to speak, they board the ship to intervene, protecting the passengers from the captain. But those passengers remain hungry and diseased. As soon as they try to swim to the banks into the arms of their benefactors, they are firmly returned to the boat, their primary sufferings unabated. This is no abstract analogy. It is exactly how the Haitians feel.

In the long run, it may be wiser for the West to encourage a more viable process of transition in developing societies, one that puts the horse before the cart—promoting economic development through good government before promoting democracy. This is not to argue that the international community should tolerate vicious dictators like Pol Pot or Idi Amin as long as they promote economic development. Rather, Third World governments should be treated with the same degree of pragmatic realism as is already applied

to the governments of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia by European governments.

Implementing this apparently simple reversal would be very difficult for most Western governments. Promoting democracy in most cases involves little in the way of costs or sacrifices. But promoting economic development has significant costs, direct or indirect. What may be good for the Third World in the long run (promoting economic development first) could prove painful for Western societies in the short run. The EC would, for example, need to abandon its massive subsidies to inefficient European farmers. If the West persists in taking the easy road in the short run, promoting democracy first, it will ultimately prove painful and costly because the effects of massive Third World poverty and instability will appear on its doorstep. Unfortunately, when there is a conflict between the short-term and the long-term in democratic politics, it is usually safer to bet that short-term considerations will prevail.

WESTERN DEMOCRACY VS. WESTERN INTERESTS

The record of Western democracies in overcoming the various challenges they have faced is impressive. Unlike Athens, they have so far triumphed in both peace and war. The resilience of these societies should never be underestimated. Yet it is dangerous to assume that they have no institutional defects.

In the absence of a clear and imminent threat, most Western governments find it difficult to convince their populations that given the seriousness of the post-Cold War challenges, they must be prepared to accept some painful changes and make some sacrifices. The problem is not lack of leadership in these societies, but institutional arrangements.

The global effects of these institutional defects of democracy can be demonstrated with two examples, both of which have harmed the non-Western world a great deal: the US budget deficit and the EC Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Despite a wide consensus in the United States that budget deficits have to be stopped, the budget has effectively become a monster that no government institution can effectively tame. Gramm-Rudman

failed miserably. The problem arises out of institutional defects in the democratic system. The interlocking network of votes by the various lobbies means that they have a stranglehold on the budget process, thereby guaranteeing the perpetuation of the enormous deficits.

Private lobbies distort the economic competitiveness of the United States in other ways, with ramifications that spill outside US borders. For example, as far back as the early 1980s, the US auto industry asked for and, through the intervention of the US government, received respite from Japanese competition in the form of voluntary restraints. In the decade that followed, the industry, instead of trying to learn from Japan and investing in competitiveness, continued to pay both its shareholders and management rich dividends. No effort was made to check whether this public intervention was being used for public or private good. The Japanese government's intervention in the Japanese economy is done with the clear understanding that long-term Japanese national interests lie in enhancing, not undermining, the international competitiveness of Japanese industries. Not so in the United States, where government institutions respond to ad hoc pressures from private interests.

The CAP is another monster that has been created out of the institutional defects of Western democracies. In private, virtually no EC leader can defend the CAP. In public, no French or Spanish or Italian leader would criticise it for fear of not being elected.

By absorbing over two-thirds of the EC budget, the CAP draws funding away from industries that could enhance the EC's competitiveness. It has also crippled the GATT discussions because the non-EC nations see no reason why they should accept painful changes when the affluent EC nations will not do so. Why, for example, should Indonesia, Brazil and Zaire—three nations that could form an "oxygen cartel"—curb their lucrative deforestation activities when the affluent EC societies will not accept any sacrifices? Only the lack of awareness of such problems can explain why the crippling of the Uruguay Round of GATT talks in December 1990 was allowed to happen by the West. This

crippling seriously aggravated the new threats that the West faces in the post-Cold War era.

To prevent massive migrations from the poor to the affluent societies, a significant burst of economic development would be needed around the globe. One crucial global instrument that is needed to trigger such widespread economic development is GATT. If all societies abide by its rules, it creates a single and massive global marketplace that all societies, rich and poor, can plug into. GATT has already demonstrated its power by carrying a significant portion of mankind—those living in the West—to the highest levels of comfort and affluence enjoyed in the history of man. It does this quite simply by creating a “level playing field” in which each society can exploit its comparative economic advantage. The impact on global productivity has been enormous.

There were few protests when the Uruguay Round was crippled in December 1990. Perhaps it was seen as merely a “trade” issue. The Brussels meeting failed because the European Community wanted to protect certain industries from global competition. This will eventually prove futile because capitalism is fundamentally a dynamic process. In trying to protect their industries from new competition, the West is trying to freeze an unfreezable process.

Given the historical impact it has already had and its relevance to the central problems of the immediate future, it is puzzling that more strategic thinkers have not focused on the GATT. It is a mistake not to do so. By denying the vast masses an opportunity to improve their livelihood, a retreat from the GATT to protectionism will force them to pound on the doors of the West.

Reorienting Western strategy in the post-Cold War era is a major task, requiring the sort of leadership that the United States so handsomely provided after World War II. Unfortunately, at the end of the Cold War, the leadership of the West has fractured between the United States, Europe and Japan at the very moment when the need for leadership in the Western world has never been greater. Unfortunately, too, Western societies are under strong pressure to turn inwards when they should be looking outwards. Having created a technology that has brought the world, with all of its attendant

problems and promises, to its very doorstep, the West now has a strong impulse to shut the doors, a futile impulse. Futile because it has created a universe in which “interconnectedness” will be the order of the day.

The real danger is that the West will realise too late that—like the defenders of Singapore—it has been preoccupied with old challenges while new ones have been assuming massive proportions.

AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Seminar on “Asian and American Perspectives
on Capitalism and Democracy”. Singapore, 1993

In January 1993 the Asia Society of New York and three Singapore institutions—the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, the Singapore International Foundation and the Institute of Policy Studies—organised a seminar on “Asian and American Perspectives on Capitalism and Democracy” in Singapore. I was asked to give the Asian perspective on human rights and freedom of the press. James Fallows, my fellow panellist, was shocked and disturbed by my paper. I spelled out 10 heresies, which I believed the West had either ignored or suppressed, and added five principles that could lead to a dialogue of equals between Asia and America. Since I touched on so many sacred cows, I assumed that Western journals, which loved controversy, would want to publish it. However, none were interested until *The Washington Quarterly* bravely published a shorter version entitled “Go East, Young Man”. The longer version that follows is also being published in a collection of essays entitled *Debating Human Rights*, edited by Peter Van Ness.

Clearly, this is the angriest essay I have ever written. If I were writing it today I would not use the same tone. I made other mistakes: I quoted a Swiss economist who asserted that the US government debt problem was beyond repair. In the intervening period,

it has been repaired. Contrary to all expectations, the US economy has flourished in the 1990s and the Asian economies have stumbled. In many ways, the world has changed.

But some hard realities have not changed. Most critically the heresies I described in 1993 remain heresies today. The absolute power of the Western journalist in the Third World remains unchecked. Indeed, given the overwhelming power of the US at the end of the century, the might of the American media has increased, not diminished. Within the US, there are informal checks and balances on this media power. Outside the US, nothing restrains the American journalist.

If I may make an outrageous point, I would like to add that all this has led to huge distortions in Western perceptions of Asia. The only voices the Western media want to listen to are the voices of other Western journalists. Many write of Asia and Asians in a tone of condescension that speaks volumes about the need in the West to preserve certain caricatures of Asia. No level playing field yet exists in the journalistic world. That is why I believe that young Western students should read this essay.

.....

I WOULD LIKE to begin with an analogy, but I apologise to those who may have heard me recount it before:

... from the viewpoint of many Third World citizens, human rights campaigns often have a bizarre quality. For many of them it looks something like this: They are like hungry and diseased passengers on a leaky, overcrowded boat that is about to drift into treacherous waters, in which many of them will perish. The captain of the boat is often harsh, sometimes fairly and sometimes not. On the river banks stand a group of affluent, well-fed and well-intentioned onlookers. As soon as those onlookers witness a passenger being flogged or imprisoned or even deprived of his right to speak, they board the ship to intervene, protecting the passengers from the captain. But those passengers remain hungry and diseased. As soon as they try to swim to the banks into the arms of their benefactors, they are firmly returned to the boat, their primary sufferings unabated. This is no abstract analogy. It is exactly how the Haitians feel.¹

This is just one of the many absurd aspects of the aggressive Western promotion of human rights at the end of the Cold War. There are many others. Yet, when I tried in seminars at Harvard University to challenge the universal applicability of democracy, human rights or freedom of the press, I discovered that these values have become virtual “sacred cows”. No one could challenge their intrinsic worth. Worse still, when I persisted, I was greeted with sniggers, smug looks and general derision. The general assumption there was that any Asian, especially a Singaporean, who challenged these concepts was doing so only in an attempt to cover up the sins of his government.

I am as convinced now as I was then that the aggressive Western promotion of democracy, human rights and freedom of the press to the Third World at the end of the Cold War was, and is, a colossal mistake. This campaign is unlikely to benefit the 4.3 billion people who live outside the developed world, and perhaps not even the 700 million people who live inside it. This campaign could aggravate, rather than ameliorate, the difficult conditions under which the vast majority of the world’s population live.

But to get this central point into Western minds, one must first remove the barriers that have made these topics into untouchable sacred cows in Western discourse. A Westerner must first acknowledge that when he discusses these topics with a non-Westerner, he is, consciously or unconsciously, standing behind a pulpit. If it is any consolation, let me hasten to add that this attitude is not new. As the following passage from the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* indicates, it goes back centuries:

The concept of despotism began as a distinctively European perception of Asian governments and practices: Europeans as such were considered to be free by nature, in contrast to the servile nature of the Orientals. Concepts of despotism have frequently been linked to justifications, explanations, or arraignment of slavery, conquest, and colonial or imperial domination. The attribution of despotism to an enemy may be employed to mobilise the members of a political unit, or those of a regional area. Thus the Greeks stigmatised the Persians as despotic in much the same way that Christian writers were to treat the Turks. By an irony not always perceived either by the purported champions of liberty against despotism, or by their historians, such arguments often became the rationale, as in Aristotle, for the domination by those with a tradition of liberty over others who had never enjoyed that happy condition.²

On the eve of the 21st century this European attitude to Asians has to come to an end. The assumption of moral superiority must be abandoned. A level playing field needs to be created for meaningful discussions between Asians and Americans. That will be my first goal in this paper. In the second half, I will put across the view of one Asian on human rights and freedom of the press.

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

It is never a pleasant experience to be lowered from a pedestal. I apologise for any psychological discomfort that my remarks may cause. Yet, to achieve this objective in one paper, I will have to be ruthless if I am to be brief. To remove the “sacred cow” dimension surrounding the subjects of human rights and freedom of the press, I propose to list 10 heresies that the West, including the United

States, has either ignored, suppressed or pretended to be irrelevant or inconsequential in its discussions on these subjects. If these heresies have any validity at all, I hope that this will lead Western writers to accept that they do not have a monopoly of wisdom or virtue on these subjects and that they should try to exercise a little more humility when they discourse on these to a non-Western audience.

Heresy No. 1: American journalists do not believe in the Christian rule “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you”.

From Gary Hart to Bill Clinton, there has developed an honourable journalistic tradition that the infidelities of a politician are public property, to be exposed in every detail. But those who participate in this tradition do not feel themselves bound by Jesus Christ’s statement, “Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone.”

To the best of my limited knowledge, based on my short stay in Washington, DC, the level of infidelities seemed about the same in all sectors of society, whether in Congress or in the press corps. Power proves to be a great aphrodisiac. Both politicians and journalists have equal difficulty resisting the temptations that flow their way. Yet, the actions of one group are deemed immoral and subject to public scrutiny, while those of the other are deemed private matters. But in the informal pecking order worked out in Washington, DC, (as in any other tribal society), many a senior journalist enjoys far more effective power than a congressman. But they are subject to different levels of scrutiny.

The same disparity applies to personal finances. All aspiring politicians, even the few unfortunate ones who may have entered politics to do a service to the nation, have to declare every penny of their financial worth. Yet none of the Washington, DC, journalists, many of whom enjoy far greater incomes, feel any moral obligation to declare all their financial worth; nor do they feel any need to declare how their own financial worth would be enhanced by discussing the financial worth of an aspiring politician. A full disclosure of income and wealth on the part of those who make, and those who influence, public policy decisions (including lobbyists and journalists) will probably indicate the great mismatch in financial muscle between the

actual policymakers and those who seek to influence them. It may also help to illuminate why, despite so many rational discussions, so many irrational public policy choices are made.

Heresy No. 2: Power corrupts. The absolute power of the Western journalist in the Third World corrupts absolutely.

The greatest myth that a journalist cherishes is that he is an underdog: the lone ranger who works against monstrous bureaucracies to uncover the real truth, often at great personal risk. I never understood this myth when I was in Washington, DC. Cabinet secretaries, senators and congressmen, ambassadors and generals promptly returned the phone calls of, and assiduously cultivated, the journalists in Washington, DC. Not all these powerful office-holders were as good as Kissinger or Jim Baker in seducing American journalists, but none would dare tell an American journalist of a major paper to go to hell. It was as inconceivable as trying to exercise dissent in the court of Attila the Hun.

The cruellest results of this myth are experienced in the developing world. On arriving in a Third World capital, no American journalist would shake out from his unconsciousness the deeply embedded myth that he was once again arriving as a lone ranger battling an evil and corrupt Third World government. Never would he admit that he had arrived in a Third World capital with as much power as a colonial proconsul in the 19th century. In both cases the host government ignored these emissaries at its own peril. The average correspondent from an influential Western journal who arrived in a Third World capital would, of course, ask to see the president, prime minister and perhaps foreign minister. If, heaven forbid, any of these leaders should refuse, this would be a typical response: "Given that Kings and Presidents throughout the world regularly grant interviews to *The Guardian* (please note our recent exclusive interview with the King of Jordan) and, indeed, sometimes write in *The Guardian* (as with former President Gorbachev), I do wonder by what token *The Guardian* is not considered worthy of such a request. We are, after all, the second highest selling quality national daily in the UK." (Note: this is an extract from an actual letter.)

A Western journalist would be thoroughly puzzled by a request for reciprocity from, say, a journalist from *The Times of India* in Washington, DC. Pressed for a justification for this imbalance, he would dismiss the case for reciprocity on the grounds that *The New York Times* (NYT), for example, is a better paper than *The Times of India*. Never would he admit to himself that the prime minister, even of India, would hesitate to turn down an NYT request knowing that the NYT controlled the gateways to key minds in Washington, DC. What is sweet about this exercise of power by an NYT correspondent is that he would never have to admit that he was savouring the delicious fruits of power, since they come with no obvious trappings of office.

Heresy No. 3: A free press can serve as the opium of society.

This statement is not quite as outrageous as Marx's dictum that religion can serve as the opium of the people, but it will probably be dismissed as quickly as Marx's statement was when he first uttered it. The American media prides itself on the ability of its investigative journalism to uncover the real truth behind the stories put out by government, big business and other major institutions. It could never stomach the proposition that it could serve as the opium of American society. But it has.

In the last 20 years there have been two parallel developments. First, American journalism has become much more aggressive than it ever was. Kennedy was the last US president to be treated with kid gloves; his sexual excesses were well known but not publicised. Since then no US president has been considered off-limits for total coverage, giving the impression that the US government is under total and close scrutiny.

The parallel trend is this. The last 20 years have also seen increasingly bad government. Lyndon Johnson felt that he could fight a war and create a good society without raising taxes. This began the process of fiscal indiscipline. Richard Nixon's flaws are well known, as are Jimmy Carter's. In the last 12 years, under two Republican administrations, the United States has gone from being the world's largest creditor country to being the world's largest debtor country. A Swiss investment consultant, Jean Antoine Cramer, noted recently,

“It took 150 years for the US government to create a debt of \$1000bn, and only 10 years to quadruple this debt. With a GNP of \$5600bn, the situation is beyond repair. American consumers owe \$7000bn, corporations \$5000bn and the government \$5000bn.” No American politician, in the land of the free press, dares to utter any hard truths on the sacrifices needed to stop this rot. The consequence has been irresponsible government on a mind-boggling and historically unparalleled scale. Equally striking are the parallel troubles of some of the largest US corporations, including previous blue-chip names, such as Citicorp, GM and IBM, all of whom have also been under close scrutiny by the press.

It would be impossible for me, even if I had the whole day, to prove that there is a causal connection between a more aggressive free press and increasingly bad government. It may have been purely a coincidence. After all, the US press has been second to none in exposing the follies of the US government. But have all their exposures served as opiates, creating the illusion that something is being done when really nothing is being done?

There may be an even more cruel example of the free press serving as an opiate. One of the post-World War II achievements that the United States is very proud of is the political emancipation of African-Americans. The press played a key role in this. But did this emancipation in turn foster the illusion that the fundamental problems of the African-Americans had been solved? The impression given was that equality had finally been given to the African-Americans. The doors had been opened. All they had to do was to walk through.

Thirty years after the famous Civil Rights marches, if one were to ask an average African-American family, “Are you better off than you were 30 years ago?”, how many would say yes and how many would say no? What did the large-scale rioting after the Rodney King episode demonstrate? That perhaps 30 years of discussion of African-Americans’ problems have served as a substitute for 30 years of action, creating an illusion of movement when there has been little or none. Is it enough for the US media to say, “We did the best we can”? Or should it begin to ask, “Did we contribute to this failure in any way?”

Can the minds generated by the freest press in the world conceive of such questions?

Heresy No. 4: A free press need not lead to a well-ordered society.

A key assumption in the West is that a good society needs a free press to keep abuse of power in check. That freedom of information checks bad government. That its absence leads to greater abuses and bad government.

This may well be true. A free press can lead to good government. But this is not necessarily a true proposition. A free press can also lead to bad government.

In Southeast Asia we have seen an unfortunate demonstration of this. By far, the one country in Southeast Asia that has enjoyed the freest press for the longest period of time (except for the Marcos martial law interregnum) is the Philippines. But the Philippines is also the ASEAN society that is having the greatest difficulty in modernisation and economic progress, suggesting that a free press is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for development and progress.

India and China provide two massive social laboratories to judge what prescriptions would help a society develop and prosper. Between them, they hold about two-fifths of the world's population—two out of every five human beings on the planet. Each has taken a very different political road. The West approves the freedom of the press in India, frowns on the lack of it in China. Yet which society is developing faster today, and which society is likely to modernise first?

The recent Ayodhya incident demonstrated one important new dimension for societies all around the globe. The Indian media tried to control emotional reactions by restricting the broadcasting and distribution of video scenes of the destruction of the mosque. But now many Indian homes can see video clips (transmitted through satellites and tapes) from foreign news agencies, which felt no reason to exercise social, political or moral restraint. Those who happily transmitted the video clips never had to bear the consequences themselves. They were sitting comfortably in Atlanta, Georgia, or Hong Kong, while the riots that followed in India as a result of their TV transmissions never reached their homes. Unfortunately, these

media personnel did not stop to consider whether they could have saved other human lives, not their own, by exercising restraint.

Heresy No. 5: Western journalists, in covering non-Western events, are conditioned by both Western prejudices and Western interests.

The claim of “objective” reporting is a major falsehood.

Let me cite three major examples. First, the coverage of Islam. Edward W. Said, in his book *Covering Islam*, states:

The hardest thing to get most academic experts on Islam to admit is that what they say and do as scholars is set in a profoundly and in some ways an offensively political context. Everything about the study of Islam in the contemporary West is saturated with political importance, but hardly any writers on Islam, whether expert or general, admit the fact in what they say. Objectivity is assumed to inhere in learned discourse about other societies, despite the long history of political, moral, and religious concern felt in all societies, Western or Islamic, about the alien, the strange and different. In Europe, for example, the Orientalist has traditionally been affiliated directly with colonial offices: what we have just begun to learn about the extent of close cooperation between scholarship and direct military colonial conquest (as in the case of revered Dutch Orientalist C. Snouck Hurgronje, who used the confidence he had won from Muslims to plan and execute the brutal Dutch war against the Atjehnese people of Sumatra) is both edifying and depressing. Yet books and articles continue to pour forth extolling the nonpolitical nature of Western scholarship, the fruits of Orientalist learning, and the value of “objective” expertise. At the very same time there is scarcely an expert on “Islam” who has not been a consultant or even an employee of the government, the various corporations, the media. My point is that the cooperation must be admitted and taken into account, not just for moral reasons, but for intellectual reasons as well.³

Second, the US media coverage of the Vietnam War, a major event, some say a glorious chapter, in the history of US journalism. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as American bodies were brought back from Vietnam, American public sentiment turned against the war. The United States had to get out. The US media helped to

manufacture a justification: that the United States was supporting the “bad guys” (the crooked and wicked Saigon and Phnom Penh regimes) against the “good guys” (the dedicated incorruptible revolutionaries in North Vietnam or the Cambodian jungles). Books like *Fire in the Lake*, a glorification of the Vietnamese revolution, became the bible of American reporters. When the last American soldier left Vietnam, most American journalists felt satisfied and vindicated.

The subsequent communist victories in Cambodia and Vietnam exposed the true nature of the revolutionaries. The story of the Cambodian genocide is well known, as is the story of the thousands of boat people who perished in the South China Sea. The level of human misery increased, not decreased, after the revolution. Yet virtually no American journalist came forth to admit that perhaps he had been wrong in quoting from *Fire in the Lake* or in calling for the abandonment of the Saigon and Phnom Penh regimes. As long as American journalists had fulfilled vital US interests by saving American lives, they did not feel there was any need for them to weigh the moral consequences of their actions on non-Americans—the Vietnamese or the Cambodians.

Third, the coverage of the Tiananmen Square incident, a Chinese event that became a global media event. The essential Western media story is that it was a revolution by Chinese democrats against Chinese autocrats. The constant portrayal of the replica of the Statue of Liberty provided the pictorial image for this. Yet for all its massive coverage of Tiananmen, the Western media failed to explain how this event was seen through Chinese eyes. Few Chinese intellectuals believe that China is ready for democracy. Most are as afraid of chaos and anarchy (a persistent Chinese disease) as they are of a return to Maoist totalitarianism. It was a battle between soft authoritarians and hard authoritarians. The Western media vividly reported the apparent victory of the “hardliners”, but it has failed to tell the world the true aftermath: the soft authoritarians have come back to power.

During Tiananmen, several Western journalists were blatantly dishonest. They would lunch with a student on a “hunger strike” before reporting on his “hunger”. They were not all bystanders reporting on

an event; several advised the students how to behave. None stayed to deal with the consequences that the students had to face.

The biggest indication of how American journalists are affected by US interests in their portrayal of China is to compare their reporting of China in the early 1970s and the early 1990s. When Nixon landed in China in 1972, the US media had a virtual love-fest with a regime that had just killed millions in the cultural revolution. Yet, in the 1990s a much more benign regime that has liberated millions from poverty and indignity and promises to launch them on the road to development is treated as a pariah regime.

Heresy No. 6: Western governments work with genocidal rulers when it serves their interests to do so.

It was August 1942, a dark moment in World War II. Churchill had flown secretly to Moscow to bring some bad news personally to Stalin: the Allies were not ready for a second front in Europe. Stalin reacted angrily. Nancy Caldwell Sorel, who describes that meeting, writes:

Discord continued, but on the last evening, when Churchill went to say goodbye, Stalin softened ... the hour that Churchill had planned for extended to seven. Talk and wine flowed freely, and in a moment of rare intimacy, Stalin admitted that even the stresses of war did not compare to the terrible struggle to force the collective farm policy on the peasantry. Millions of Kulaks had been, well, eliminated. The historian Churchill thought of Burke's dictum "If I cannot have reform without justice, I will not have reform," but the politician Churchill concluded that with the war requiring unity, it was best not to moralise aloud.⁴

The story elicits a chuckle. What a shrewd old devil Churchill was. How cunning of him not to displease Stalin with mere moralising. Neither then nor now has Churchill's reputation been sullied by his association with a genocidal ruler. Now change the cast of characters to an identical set: Margaret Thatcher and Pol Pot. Historically, they could have met, but of course they never did. Now try to describe a possible meeting and try to get a chuckle out of it. Impossible? Why?

Think about it. Think hard, for in doing so you will discover to your surprise that it is possible for thoughtful and well-informed people to have double standards. If the rule that prevents any possible meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Pol Pot is “thou shalt not have any discourse with a genocidal ruler”, then the same rule also forbids any meeting between Stalin and Churchill. Moral rules, as the English philosopher R.M. Hare has stressed, are inherently universalisable. If we do want to allow a meeting between Churchill and Stalin (since, until the last few weeks, no historian has ever condemned Churchill, that must be the prevailing sentiment), then the rule has to be modified to “thou shalt not have any discourse with a genocidal ruler, unless there are mitigating circumstances”.

This is not a mere change of nuance. We have made a fundamental leap, a leap best understood with an analogy contained in the following tale. A man meets a woman and asks her whether she would spend the night with him for a million dollars. She replies, “For a million dollars, sure.”

He says, “How about five dollars?”

She replies indignantly, “What do you think I am?”

He replies, “We have already established what you are. We are only negotiating the price.”

All those who condone Churchill’s meeting with Stalin but would readily condemn any meeting with Pol Pot belong in the woman’s shoes (logically speaking).

In Stalin’s case, as England’s survival was at stake, all was excused. In Pol Pot’s case, as no conceivable vital Western interest could be served in any meeting with him, no mitigating excuse could possibly exist. Hence the total and absolute Western condemnation of any contact with Pol Pot or his minions in the Khmer Rouge. The tragedy for the Cambodian people is that the West, in applying this absolute moral rule only because its own vital interests were not involved, did not stop to ask whether the sufferings of the Cambodians could have been mitigated if the West had been as flexible in its dealings with the Khmer Rouge as Churchill had been with Stalin.

Throughout the 1980s, when several Asian governments were trying to achieve a viable Cambodian peace settlement (which would

invariably have to include the Khmer Rouge), they were vilified for their direct contacts with the Khmer Rouge. American diplomats were instructed never to shake hands with Khmer Rouge representatives.

In the last 12 months, the atrocities committed by Radovan Karadzic and his Serbian followers (in full view of the US media) should be sufficient justification to put them in the same league as Pol Pot or Idi Amin. Yet, no Western diplomat has hesitated to shake the hands of these Serbian representatives. Is there one standard for Westerners and another for Asians?

Heresy No. 7: Western governments will happily sacrifice the human rights of Third World societies when it suits Western interests to do so. The regime in Myanmar overturned the results of the democratic elections in 1990 and brutally suppressed the popular demonstrations that followed. Myanmar was punished with Western sanctions. Asian governments were criticised for not enthusiastically following suit.

The regime in Algeria overturned the results of the democratic elections in 1992 and brutally suppressed the popular demonstrations that followed. Algeria was not punished with Western sanctions. The Asian governments have never been provided with an explanation for this obvious double standard.

But the reasons are obvious. The fear of Western sanctions triggering off greater political instability, leading to thousands of boat people crossing the tiny Mediterranean Sea into Europe, made the EC governments prudent and cautious. Despite this, they had no hesitation in criticising Asian governments for exercising the same prudence for the same reasons when it came to applying sanctions against Myanmar or China. Double standards, by any moral criteria, are obviously immoral. How many Western papers have highlighted this?

Heresy No. 8: The West has used the pretext of human rights abuses to abandon Third World allies that no longer serve Western interests. The “sins” of Mohd. Siad Barre (Somalia), Mobutu (Zaire) and Daniel Arap Moi (Kenya) were as well known during the Cold War as they are now. They did not convert from virtue to vice the day the Cold

War ended. Yet, behaviour that was deemed worthy of Western support during the Cold War was deemed unacceptable when the Cold War ended.

It is remarkable how much satisfaction the Western governments, media and public have taken over their ability finally to pursue “moral” policies after the end of the Cold War. Yet, this has not come with any admission that the West was (logically speaking) pursuing “immoral” policies during the Cold War. Nor has anyone addressed the question of whether it is “honourable” to use and abandon allies.

Heresy No. 9: The West cannot acknowledge that the pursuit of “moral” human rights policies can have immoral consequences.

At the end of the Paris International Conference on Cambodia (ICC) in August 1989, the then Vietnamese foreign minister, Nguyen Co Thach, insisted that the conference declaration should call for a non-return of the genocidal policies and practices of the Khmer Rouge. All present there knew that Nguyen Co Thach was not really that concerned about Pol Pot’s record. (Indeed, Thach once made the mistake of privately confessing to congressman Stephen Solarz that Vietnam did not invade Cambodia to save the Cambodian people from Pol Pot, even though this was the official Vietnamese propaganda line.) However, Thach knew that the Khmer Rouge, a party to the Paris conference, would not accept such a reference. Hence, the conference would fail, a failure that the Vietnamese wanted because they were not ready then to relinquish control of Cambodia. Western officials did not dare to challenge him for fear that Nguyen Co Thach would expose them to their own media. At the same time, despite having scuttled a conference that could have brought peace to Cambodia, Nguyen Co Thach came out smelling good in the eyes of the Western media because he had taken a strong stand against the Khmer Rouge. Yet, in practical terms, from the viewpoint of the ordinary Cambodian, the strong Western consensus against the Khmer Rouge had backfired against the Cambodians because it prevented the Western delegations from exposing Nguyen Co Thach’s blatant scuttling of the peace conference. Out of good (the

Western media condemnation of Pol Pot) came evil (the destruction of a peace conference). This was not the first time it had happened in history. As Max Weber said in his famous essay “Politics As a Vocation”, “... it is *not* true that good can only follow from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who says this is, indeed, a political infant.”⁵

The morally courageous thing for a Western delegate to have done at that Paris conference would have been to stand up in front of the Western media and explain why the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge was necessary if one wanted a peace agreement to end the Cambodians’ sufferings. No Western leader even dreamt of doing so, so strong was the sentiment against the Khmer Rouge. This produced a curious contradiction for moral philosophers: the ostensibly morally correct position (i.e., of excluding the Khmer Rouge) produced immoral consequences—prolonging the Cambodians’ agony.

This was not by any means the first of such moral dilemmas confronted by Western officials. Max Weber asserts, “No ethics in the world can dodge the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of ‘good’ ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones”⁶ Unfortunately, there is no living Western statesman who has the courage to make such a statement, for in the era of “political correctness” that we live in, the Western media would excoriate any such brave soul. Out of moral correctness, we have produced moral cowardice.

Heresy No. 10: An imperfect government that commits some human rights violations is better than no government, in many societies.

At least two nation-states have broken apart since the end of the Cold War: Somalia and Yugoslavia. Both shared a common characteristic of being useful to the West in the Cold War. The sins of their governments were forgiven then. When these ruling regimes were abandoned (each in a different way), the net result was an increase in human misery. A utilitarian moral philosopher would have no difficulty arguing that the previous situation of imperfect government was a better moral choice because it caused less misery.

The inability of the West to accept this can lead to a repetition of Yugoslavia's and Somalia's experiences. Take Peru, for example. It was drifting towards chaos and anarchy. President Fujimori imposed emergency rule to halt the slide. He should have been praised for his courage in taking decisive action to prevent anarchy. However, because the form of his action, a temporary retreat from parliamentary rule, was deemed unacceptable by the West, the beneficial consequences of his action for the Peruvian people were ignored by the West. In trying to maintain its form of ideological purity, the West was prepared to sacrifice the interests of the Peruvian people.

If current Western policies of punishing authoritarian governments had been in force in the 1960s and 1970s, the spectacular economic growth of Taiwan and South Korea would have been cut off at its very inception by Western demands that the governments then in power be replaced by less authoritarian regimes. Instead, by allowing the authoritarian governments, which were fully committed to economic development, to run the full course, the West has brought about the very economic and social changes that have paved the way for the more open and participative societies that Taiwan and South Korea have become. The lessons from East Asia are clear. There are no short cuts. It is necessary for a developing society to first succeed in economic development before it can attain the social and political freedoms found in the developed societies.

There is no unified Asian view on human rights and freedom of the press. These are Western concepts. Asians are obliged to react to them. Predictably, there is a whole range of reactions, ranging from those who subscribe to these concepts in toto to those who reject them completely. An understanding of the Asian reactions is clouded by the fact that many Asians feel obliged to pay at least lip service to their values. For example, many Japanese intellectuals, who remain children of the Meiji Restoration in their belief that Japan should become more Western than Asian, proclaim their adherence to Western values on human rights, although they have a curious inability to discuss Japan's record in World War II in the same breath. From New Delhi to Manila, to name just two cities,

there are many strong believers in these values. But in most Asian societies there is little awareness, let alone understanding, of these concepts. The truth is that the vast continent of Asia, preoccupied with more immediate challenges, has not had the time or energy to address these issues squarely.

I shall, therefore, make no pretence of speaking on behalf of Asia, although I am reasonably confident that my views will not be dismissed as eccentric by most Asians. My hope today is to find some credible middle ground where both Asians and Americans can have a dialogue as equals and with equally legitimate points of view. I will be so bold as to venture five principles that should guide such a discourse.

Principle No. 1: Mutual respect

The first principle that I want to stress is that all discussions between Asians and Americans on the subject of human rights and freedom of the press should be based on mutual respect. I have visited the offices of four great American newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. In any one of the four offices, if you ventured out at night and strayed a few hundred yards off course, you would be putting your life in jeopardy. Yet, despite this, none of the editorial desks or writers would argue in favour of the reduction of the civil liberties of habitual criminals. Danger from habitual crime is considered an acceptable price to pay for no reduction in liberty. This is one social choice.

In Singapore, you can wander out at night in any direction from *The Straits Times* office and not put your life in jeopardy. One reason for this is that habitual criminals and drug addicts are locked up, often for long spells, until they have clearly reformed. The interest of the majority in having safe city streets is put ahead of considerations of rigorous due process, although safeguards are put in place to ensure that innocent individuals are not locked up. This is another kind of social choice. Let me suggest that none is intrinsically superior. Let those who make the choice live with the consequences of their choice. Similarly, if this statement can be received without the usual Western sniggers, let me add that a city

that bans the sale of chewing gum has as much moral right to do so as a city that effectively allows the sale of crack on its streets. Let us try to avoid the knee-jerk smug response that one choice is more moral than the other.

I do not want to belabour this point, but it will be psychologically difficult for the West to accept the notion that alternative social and political choices can deserve equal respect. For 500 years, the West has been dominant in one form or another. After World War II most of Asia, like much of the Third World, was politically emancipated. But the process of mental emancipation, on the parts of both the colonised and the colonisers, is taking much longer. This explains why Chris Patten can march into Hong Kong, five years before its date of return to China, and suggest a form of government that is completely unacceptable to China. The British would be shocked if a Chinese governor were to arrive in Northern Ireland and dictate terms for its liberation from the United Kingdom. But they see nothing absurd in what they are doing in Hong Kong. The British, like many in the West, feel that they have a right to dictate terms to Asians.

Eventually, as East Asia becomes more affluent, the discussions will take place from a position of equality. But forums like ours can anticipate this by trying to create a form of discourse in which we approach each other with mutual respect.

Principle No. 2: Economic development

The fundamental concern of Western proponents of human rights is to remove egregious abuses and improve the living conditions of the 4.3 billion people who live outside the developed world. Let me suggest that the current Western campaign (even if it is rigorously carried out, which it is unlikely to be) will make barely a dent on the lives of the 4.3 billion people, although there will be symbolic victories like the Aquino revolution and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi.

There is only one force that has the power to “liberate” the Third World. Economic development is probably the most subversive force created in history. It shakes up old social arrangements and paves the

way for the participation of a greater percentage of society in social and political decisions. The Chinese Communist Party can no longer regain the tight totalitarian control it enjoyed in Mao Zedong's time. Deng Xiaoping's reforms have killed that possibility. Hence, if the West wants to bury forever Mao's totalitarian arrangements, it should support Deng's reforms to the hilt, even if he has to occasionally crack down to retain political control. The fundamental trend is clear. It is, therefore, not surprising that three and a half years after Tiananmen, it is the "soft" and not the "hard" authoritarians who are in charge in Beijing. Clearly, if the Clinton administration wants to fulfil its goal of moving China towards a greater respect for human rights, it should do all in its power to accelerate China's economic development, not retard it.

Unfortunately, the promotion of economic development (unlike the promotion of democracy and human rights) is difficult. It has significant costs, direct and indirect, for developed societies. What may be good for the Third World (promoting economic development) would prove painful for Western societies in the short run. The EC, the United States and Japan, for example, would have to abandon their massive agricultural subsidies. Unfortunately (and paradoxically), the very nature of Western democratic societies (which inhibits politicians from speaking about sacrifices) may well be one of the biggest barriers to the effective spread of democracy and human rights in the Third World, including Asia.

Principle No. 3: Working with existing governments

Westerners should not even dream of overthrowing most of the existing governments in Asia. I say this because I was present at a lynching in Harvard University, the lynching of the Indonesian government. This was at a forum organised at the Kennedy School of Government to discuss the unfortunate killings in Dili in November 1991. Two of the American journalists who had had a close shave in the incident were there to present vivid firsthand accounts and whip up the crowd to a frenzy, with the help of a few leftist critics of the Indonesian government. This left a hapless State Department official to explain why the United States should continue working with the Suharto government. If the

people in that room had had the power to depose the Indonesian government, they would have done it instantly, without paying a thought to the horrendous consequences that might follow. This is the attitude of many human rights activists: get rid of the imperfect governments we know—do not worry about the consequences that may follow. On their own, such activists will probably cause little trouble. But when they get into positions of influence, their ability to cause real damage increases by leaps and bounds.

In dealing with Asia, I am calling on the United States to take the long view. These are societies that have been around hundreds, if not thousands, of years. They cannot be changed overnight, even if, for example, Fang Lizhi is elected president of China. The experience of President Aquino should provide a vivid lesson to those who believe that one change at the top can reform everything.

What Asia needs at its present stage of development are governments that are committed to rapid economic development. Fortunately, these are quite a few, ranging across a wide political spectrum, from the communist societies of China and Vietnam, the military-dominated societies of Thailand and Indonesia to the democratic societies of South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia. All are experiencing rapid economic growth. They should be rewarded and encouraged (if only to act as models for others). Sporadic instances of political crackdowns should be criticised, but these governments should not be penalised as long as their people's lives are improving. Only societies like North Korea and Myanmar, which have let their people stagnate for decades, deserve such disapproval.

Principle No. 4: Establishing minimal codes of civilised conduct

To a Western human rights activist, the suggestion that he should be a little moderate in making human rights demands on non-Western societies seems almost as absurd as the notion that a woman can be partially pregnant. In psychological attitudes, such an activist is no different from a religious crusader of a previous era. He demands total conversion and nothing else. Such activists can do a lot of damage with their zealotry. Unfortunately, since they occupy the high moral ground in Western societies, no government or media

representative dares to challenge them openly. But some of the demands of these human rights activists would be unacceptable under any conditions. Most Asian societies would be shocked by the sight of gay rights activists on their streets. And, in most of them, if popular referendums were held, they would vote overwhelmingly in favour of the death penalty as well as censorship of pornography.

However, both Asians and Americans are human beings. They can agree on minimal standards of civilised behaviour that both would like to live by. For example, there should be no torture, no slavery, no arbitrary killings, no disappearances in the middle of the night, no shooting down of innocent demonstrators, no imprisonment without careful review. These rights should be upheld not only for moral reasons. There are sound functional reasons. Any society that is at odds with its best and brightest and shoots them down when they demonstrate peacefully, as Myanmar did, is headed for trouble. Most Asian societies do not want to be in the position that Myanmar is in today, a nation at odds with itself.

Principle No. 5: Letting the free press fly on its own wings

Finally, on the difficult issue of the freedom of the press, let me suggest that neither the West in general nor the United States in particular should take on the self-appointed role of guardian of free press in societies around the globe. Let each society decide for itself whether it would help or hinder its development if it decided to have a free press.

I have yet to meet an American who has any doubts about the virtues of having a free press. Even those who despise most journalists as the scum of the earth would not have it any other way. The value of the freedom of the press is absolute and unchallenged. The paradox here is that while they believe the virtues of a free press to be self-evident, they show no hesitation in ramming this concept down the throats of societies that are not enamoured by it.

Over time, a Darwinian process will establish whether societies with a free press will outperform those without one. So far, the record of the 20th century shows that societies that have free newspapers, such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, have

outperformed societies with the *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. This winning streak may well continue. And if it does, more and more societies will naturally gravitate to social and political systems that can handle a totally free press, in the belief and hope that they will join the league of winners in the Darwinian contest between societies.

But let these decisions be made autonomously by these societies. There need be no fear that they will remain ignorant of the virtues of the US media. The globe is shrinking. With the proliferation of satellite dishes in villages in India and Indonesia, the sky is shrinking too. CNN and BBC are available worldwide. The *International Herald Tribune* and the *Wall Street Journal* can be obtained practically anywhere around the globe. Let the merits of these papers speak for themselves. The US media should not resort to the strong arm of the US executive branch or the Congress to sell their virtues for them.

In short, live and let live. If the United States is convinced that its systems of human rights and freedom of the press are the best possible systems for any society around the globe, let the virtues of these systems speak for themselves. As in the world of ideas, if a social system has merits, it will fly on its own wings. If it does not, it will not. Most Asians now know enough of these systems to make their own choices. Let them do so in peace.

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1. Kishore Mahbubani, "The West and the Rest", *The National Interest*, No. 28, Summer 1992, p. 10.
 2. Melvin Richter, "Despotism", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, edited by Philip P. Wiener, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973, p. 1.
 3. Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1981, p. xvii.
 4. Nancy Caldwell Sorel, "First Encounters: Josef Stalin and Winston Churchill", *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1991, p. 141.
 5. Max Weber, *Politics As a Vocation*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1965, p. 49.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

THE DANGERS OF DECADENCE: WHAT THE REST CAN TEACH THE WEST

Foreign Affairs. Vol. 72, No. 4, September/October 1993

In the summer of 1993, Samuel P. Huntington published “The Clash of Civilizations” in *Foreign Affairs*. A contradiction developed in the Western response to this essay: the intellectual establishment, by and large, denounced it, but the attention and debate it sparked suggested that Huntington had struck a resonant chord in Western minds.

When *Foreign Affairs* asked me to contribute one of their published responses, I thought it was worth explaining again that even though the West was now beginning to feel threatened by the Rest, in reality it was the Rest that had more reason to feel threatened by the West.

If I had to rewrite the essay today, I would, with hindsight, remove some of its sharper edges. It was written in 1993, when the US economy was not thriving. The East Asian economies were thriving. This context explains the underlying tone of confidence shown in the essay.

Seven years later, the East Asian economies are slowly recovering from the great Asian financial crisis of 1997, and the euro has hit the doldrums. The US economy, by contrast, continues to break all records. It’s a world I did not envision in 1993.

But does all this change the long-term issues I raised in this essay? Has the West, for example, developed an ability “to come to terms with the shifts

in the relative weights of civilisations that Huntington well documents”?

The underlying message of my essay is a simple one: it would serve Western interests—more than the interests of others—to develop a viable long-term strategy to handle power shifts. From time to time some good decisions are made (e.g., the US agreement with China on its entry into the WTO). But fundamentally, no major Western strategic thinker has tried to map out a global strategy to handle a shift into a different world order. This remains a major flaw in Western strategic thinking. And this essay, in pointing out that a different world view exists, has served its purpose.

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IN KEY WESTERN capitals there is a deep sense of unease about the future. The confidence that the West would remain a dominant force in the 21st century, as it has for the past four or five centuries, is giving way to a sense of foreboding that forces like the emergence of fundamentalist Islam, the rise of East Asia and the collapse of Russia and Eastern Europe could pose real threats to the West. A siege mentality is developing. Within these troubled walls, Samuel P. Huntington's essay "The Clash of Civilizations" is bound to resonate. It will, therefore, come as a great surprise to many Westerners to learn that the rest of the world fears the West even more than the West fears it, especially the threat posed by a wounded West.

Huntington is right: power is shifting among civilisations. But when the tectonic plates of world history move in a dramatic fashion, as they do now, perceptions of these changes depend on where one stands. The key purpose of this essay is to sensitise Western audiences to the perceptions of the rest of the world.

The retreat of the West is not universally welcomed. There is still no substitute for Western leadership, especially American leadership. Sudden withdrawals of American support from Middle Eastern or Pacific allies, albeit unlikely, could trigger massive changes that no one would relish. Western retreat could be as damaging as Western domination.

By any historical standard, the recent epoch of Western domination, especially under American leadership, has been remarkably benign. One dreads to think what the world would have looked like if either Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia had triumphed in what have been called the "Western civil wars" of the 20th century. Paradoxically, the benign nature of Western domination may be the source of many problems. Today most Western policymakers, who are children of this era, cannot conceive of the possibility that their own words and deeds could lead to evil, not good. The Western media aggravate this genuine blindness. Most Western journalists travel overseas with Western assumptions. They cannot understand how the West could be seen as anything but benevolent. CNN is not the solution. The same visual images transmitted simultaneously

into living rooms across the globe can trigger opposing perceptions. Western living rooms applaud when cruise missiles strike Baghdad. Most living outside see that the West will deliver swift retribution to non-white Iraqis or Somalis but not to white Serbians, a dangerous signal by any standard.

THE ASIAN HORDES

Huntington discusses the challenge posed by Islamic and Confucian civilisations. Since the bombing of the World Trade Center, Americans have begun to absorb European paranoia about Islam, perceived as a force of darkness hovering over a virtuous Christian civilisation. It is ironic that the West should increasingly fear Islam when daily the Muslims are reminded of their own weakness. "Islam has bloody borders," Huntington says. But in all conflicts between Muslims and pro-Western forces, the Muslims are losing, and losing badly, whether they be Azeris, Palestinians, Iraqis, Iranians or Bosnian Muslims. With so much disunity, the Islamic world is not about to coalesce into a single force.

Oddly, for all this paranoia, the West seems to be almost deliberately pursuing a course designed to aggravate the Islamic world. The West protests the reversal of democracy in Myanmar, Peru or Nigeria, but not in Algeria. These double standards hurt. Bosnia has wreaked incalculable damage. The dramatic passivity of powerful European nations as genocide is committed on their doorstep has torn away the thin veil of moral authority that the West had spun around itself as a legacy of its recent benign era. Few can believe that the West would have remained equally passive if Muslim artillery shells had been raining down on Christian populations in Sarajevo or Srebrenica.

Western behaviour towards China has been equally puzzling. In the 1970s, the West developed a love affair with a China ruled by a regime that had committed gross atrocities during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. But when Mao Zedong's disastrous rule was followed by a far more benign Deng Xiaoping era, the West punished China for what, by its historical standards, was a minor crackdown: the Tiananmen incident.

Unfortunately, Tiananmen has become a contemporary Western legend, created by live telecasts of the crackdown. Beijing erred badly in its excessive use of firearms, but it did not err in its decision to crack down. Failure to quash the student rebellion could have led to political disintegration and chaos, a perennial Chinese nightmare. Western policymakers concede this in private. They are also aware of the dishonesty of some Western journalists: dining with student dissidents and even egging them on before reporting on their purported “hunger strike”. No major Western journal has exposed such dishonesty or developed the political courage to say that China had virtually no choice in Tiananmen. Instead, sanctions were imposed, threatening China’s modernisation. Asians see that Western public opinion—deified in Western democracy—can produce irrational consequences. They watch with trepidation as Western policies on China lurch to and fro, threatening the otherwise smooth progress of East Asia.

Few in the West are aware that the West is responsible for aggravating turbulence among the more than 2 billion people living in Islamic and Chinese civilisations. Instead, conjuring up images of the two Asian hordes that Western minds fear most—two forces that invaded Europe, the Muslims and the Mongols—Huntington posits a Confucian-Islamic connection against the West. American arms sales to Saudi Arabia do not suggest a natural Christian-Islamic connection. Neither should Chinese arms sales to Iran. Both are opportunistic moves, based not on natural empathy or civilisational alliances. The real tragedy of suggesting a Confucian-Islamic connection is that it obscures the fundamentally different nature of the challenge posed by these forces. The Islamic world will have great difficulty modernising. Until then its turbulence will spill over into the West. East Asia, including China, is poised to achieve parity with the West. The simple truth is that East and Southeast Asia feel more comfortable with the West.

This failure to develop a viable strategy to deal with Islam or China reveals a fatal flaw in the West: an inability to come to terms with the shifts in the relative weights of civilisations that Huntington well documents. Two key sentences in Huntington’s essay, when

put side by side, illustrate the nature of the problem: first, "In the politics of civilizations, the peoples and governments of non-Western civilization no longer remain the objects of history as targets of Western colonization but join the West as movers and shapers of history," and second, "The West in effect is using international institutions, military power and economic resources to run the world in ways that will maintain Western predominance, protect Western interests and promote Western political and economic values."¹ This combination is a prescription for disaster.

Simple arithmetic demonstrates Western folly. The West has 800 million people; the rest make up almost 4.7 billion. In the national arena, no Western society would accept a situation where 15 per cent of its population legislated for the remaining 85 per cent. But this is what the West is trying to do globally.

Tragically, the West is turning its back on the Third World just when it can finally help the West out of its economic doldrums. The developing world's dollar output increased in 1992 more than that of North America, the European Community and Japan put together. Two-thirds of the increase in US exports has gone to the developing world. Instead of encouraging this global momentum by completing the Uruguay Round, the West is doing the opposite. It is trying to create barriers, not remove them. French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur tried to justify this move by saying bluntly in Washington that the "question now is how to organize to protect ourselves from countries whose different values enable them to undercut us".

THE WEST'S OWN UNDOING

Huntington fails to ask one obvious question: If other civilisations have been around for centuries, why are they posing a challenge only now? A sincere attempt to answer this question reveals a fatal flaw that has recently developed in the Western mind: an inability to conceive that the West may have developed structural weaknesses in its core value systems and institutions. This flaw explains, in part, the recent rush to embrace the assumption that history has ended with the triumph of the Western ideal: individual freedom

and democracy would always guarantee that Western civilisation would stay ahead of the pack.

Only hubris can explain why so many Western societies are trying to defy the economic laws of gravity. Budgetary discipline is disappearing. Expensive social programmes and pork-barrel projects multiply with little heed to costs. The West's low savings and investment rates lead to declining competitiveness vis-à-vis East Asia. The work ethic is eroding, while politicians delude workers into believing that they can retain high wages despite becoming internationally uncompetitive. Leadership is lacking. Any politician who states hard truths is immediately voted out. Americans freely admit that many of their economic problems arise from the inherent gridlock of American democracy. While the rest of the world is puzzled by these fiscal follies, American politicians and journalists travel around the world preaching the virtues of democracy. It makes for a curious sight.

The same hero-worship is given to the idea of individual freedom. Much good has come from this idea. Slavery ended. Universal franchise followed. But freedom does not only solve problems; it can also cause them. The United States has undertaken a massive social experiment, tearing down social institution after social institution that restrained the individual. The results have been disastrous. Since 1960 the US population has increased 41 per cent while violent crime has risen by 560 per cent, single-mother births by 419 per cent, divorce rates by 300 per cent, and the percentage of children living in single-parent homes by 300 per cent. This is massive social decay. Many a society shudders at the prospect of this happening on its shores. But instead of travelling overseas with humility, Americans confidently preach the virtues of unfettered individual freedom, blithely ignoring the visible social consequences.

The West is still the repository of the greatest assets and achievements of human civilisation. Many Western values explain the spectacular advance of mankind: the belief in scientific inquiry, the search for rational solutions, and the willingness to challenge assumptions. But a belief that a society is practising these values

can lead to a unique blindness: the inability to realise that some of the values that come with this package may be harmful. Western values do not form a seamless web. Some are good. Some are bad. But one has to stand outside the West to see this clearly and to see how the West is bringing about its relative decline by its own hand. Huntington, too, is blind to this.

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1. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993.

THE REST OF THE WEST?

BBC World Lectures. 2000

In the summer of 2000, I was invited by BBC World Radio and the Royal Society of Arts to deliver one of the four BBC World Lectures for the year in London. I felt flattered. BBC World Radio has a global audience of millions. I hoped my lecture would reach most of them. Fortunately, the BBC was wiser. Lectures don't travel well over radio. Instead, the BBC interviewed me. This lecture was posted on the website and reprinted here for the first time.

One key point is worth stressing in this introductory note. In an effort to create a level playing field for the contest of ideas between Eastern and Western civilisations. I have had to naturally speak more critically of the West because at present the field—in the media, academia and publishing universes—is badly skewed against non-Western perspectives. But I have never been anti-Western. Indeed, as one of my Western friends recently reminded me, my essay “The West and the Rest” actually provided sterling praise of the qualities that lifted Western societies to new heights.

The conclusion of this essay may therefore surprise those readers who may have believed that I had an anti-Western bias. Western domination may end but Western civilisation will continue to remain a vibrant and dynamic force for centuries to come. But as it does so, it will not remain the same. The West too will be inevitably transformed in a way that my friends in the West should view as an optimistic conclusion.

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LET ME BEGIN with two Arab proverbs. One says, “The man who speaks about the future lies even when he tells the truth.” Another says, “For every glance behind us, we have to look twice to the future.” These two Arab proverbs capture well that challenge I face in this lecture. I am going to address the future, not the past, and all discussions of the future are inherently perilous.

My thesis is relatively simple: that the 21st century will be fundamentally different from the 19th and 20th centuries. By the end of the century, we will return—in terms of the balance of civilisations—to the world we saw somewhere between AD 1000 and AD 1500. I don’t know exactly when these great changes will manifest themselves clearly. I hope that they will emerge clearly in the next 25 years, while I have a chance to be around to witness them. But even if they do not happen in the next decade or so, I remain confident that great change will occur this century. I feel this deeply in my bones.

My underlying premise is that the West has played an unusually dominant role in world history for the past two centuries or more. Many history books have made this point. One such classic is *The Rise of the West*, by William H. McNeill.¹ Another historian, J.M. Roberts, has this to say in his *Triumph of the West*:

It seems reasonable to expect agreement that the course of “modern” history ... has been increasingly dominated by first the Europeans and then the Western civilization which was its successor. By “dominated” I mean two things were going on. One was that the history of the rest of the globe was changed forever and irreversibly by the actions of the men of the West. The other was that it changed in a particular direction; it was overwhelmingly a matter of other cultures taking up Western ideas, goals and values, not the reverse.²

So, to summarise world history crudely, for most of the past 200 years, Western populations have been subjects of world history while the rest of the world have been objects.

As a consequence of dominating the world for two centuries or more, the West has spun several layers of influence around the globe, which in one way or another perpetuate that domination.

Curiously, most Western minds cannot see the layers of Western influence because they have spent most of their lives above these layers. Those who live under them know how extensive and deep they are—and those who, like me, have travelled from beneath the layers to climb over them can perhaps see both sides of the picture. And only this transition that I have made in my life has emboldened me to make the outrageous claims that I will make here.

A small personal anecdote may help explain what life was like under the layers. Forty-six years ago, when I went to school for the first time in Singapore, then a British colony, I once asked my classmate, Morgan, where he wanted to be when he grew up. He replied, “London, of course.” I asked why. He replied, “Because in London the streets are paved with gold.” This was how mighty and strong London appeared to be in our young minds. British colonial rule has long gone, but that removed only one layer of Western influence. Other layers remain.

The main conclusion I wish to draw is that some time in the 21st century, we will see what I will call the “Rest of the West”. There is a deliberate double entendre in my use of the word “Rest”: to connote both passivity and remainder.

Having said that my subject will be the rest of the West, let me quickly add that I do not belong to the Western school of declinists. I do not foresee the decline and fall of Western civilisation for a long time more. But what is likely to end is its domination of the world. I see this as neither happy nor a sad conclusion. I have argued many times previously that for the past few centuries, the West has borne the primary burden of advancing human civilisation. The huge leaps in science and technology have resulted in huge increases in the standard and quality of life for much of mankind, as well as the significant new ideas in social and political philosophy that have generated revolutionary ideas of freedom and equality for all men, have all emerged from Western societies. Mankind today would have been in a sorry state if the West had not transformed itself into the most dynamic civilisation on earth. But since it has carried the burden of advancing mankind's fortunes for several centuries, perhaps it is time that we gave the West a rest.

At the same time, I would like to send a message of hope to the five-sixths of the world's population who live outside the West. If my thesis is proven correct, then the two centuries during which they have essentially been passengers on the bus will end. In this coming century, if they learn the lessons of history well, they may finally get the opportunity to be co-drivers of the global bus. And, to be honest, my reason for choosing this topic was precisely to send out this message of hope. Most living in the West do not appreciate or understand the feelings among many in the Third World that they are essentially second-class citizens of our globe. They need to believe that they too can become first-class citizens.

One key lesson of history is that change has never been easy or smooth. Often it has been difficult or turbulent. To capture some of the difficulties of the process of change, I am going to borrow the Hegelian/Marxist dialectical concept of change—that change takes place in a process of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. My thesis will be that even today the world continues to be dominated by the West. My anti-thesis will be about the forces bringing about the end of Western domination and my synthesis will be about the Rest of the West. The image I mentioned, of a world still covered by layers of Western influence, will describe my thesis. My anti-thesis will describe how these layers will retreat from the globe and my synthesis will, I hope, give a glimpse of the world to come when these layers retreat.

THE THESIS

In the post-colonial era, any thesis of continual Western domination does appear to be counter-intuitive. With the advent of the UN Charter, all nation-states can claim to enjoy sovereign equality. This is the theory. In reality, nation-states—like human beings in any society—do not enjoy equal power. What is remarkable today, in many significant ways, is that the architecture of power relationships in the beginning of the 21st century still resembles those of the 19th century.

Let me add a quick qualification. The means of using or exercising this power has changed significantly. With the disappearance of the

colonial era, and especially after the end of World War II, we have not often seen the brutal use of military force to invade and occupy neighbouring countries, with rare exceptions like the invasions of Afghanistan and Cambodia a decade or so ago. But real power can be exercised in many different forms. And if one looks beneath the surface it is remarkable how little things have changed since the 19th century.

This brief essay does not allow me to provide an encyclopaedic portrayal of power relationships around the world. But a few examples may help illustrate my thesis. I will move from examples of “hard” power to examples of “soft” power (to borrow the phrases created by Joseph Nye of Harvard University) and illustrate the continuing inequalities in the world.

First, let us look at the military dimensions. In the 19th century, Western military power could not be challenged. Today, this continues to be so. NATO remains the single most powerful military. Four out of five (including Russia) official nuclear powers are Western. Only the US has the ability to project its military power anywhere in the world. No non-Western power can dream of doing this. It is true that such military power is rarely used today. But, if required, it can be used. The citizens of Belgrade and Baghdad understand this well.

In the economic sphere, one could also argue that there have been no fundamental changes in the architecture of economic power. The relative share of the global GNP of US and Western (and now Eastern) Europe remain about the same in the 19th century. Accurate statistics are hard to come by. But it is clear that today the G7 countries (which include Japan, both Asian and a “Western” power) dominate global economic decisions. Most of the world’s research and development is still being done in the countries of the OECD (which remains essentially a Western club). Equally important, the most important multilateral economic agencies—the IMF, the World Bank, the BIS, the WTO, the Financial Stability Forum—are dominated by the Western states. No non-Western citizen, not even a Japanese, has a realistic prospect of heading the IMF or the World Bank.

As we move into the political sphere, we move from the realm of “hard” power to “soft” power, partly because the exercise of political power has become more subtle. In the 19th century, during the colonial era, most of the countries of the world were mere pawns on a chessboard, while the players were European. In the 21st century, all the countries of the United Nations are nominally equal. This nominal equality should not be dismissed. It has enhanced the sense of self-worth and dignity of many people around the world. But when it comes to making hard decisions on how and when the world’s resources will be deployed, we should be under no illusion that all capitals are equal. Just as in the 19th century, a handful of capitals make the big decisions. Today, the key capitals are Washington, DC, Berlin, Paris, Moscow, London (and gradually Tokyo and Beijing). The 19th-century list may not have been very different. And where the decisions are made makes a huge difference in the deployment of real resources. The minister of state for foreign affairs of Uganda, Amama Mbabazi, captured this reality vividly with his statement: “When it is Kosovo, you are there in one minute and spend billions. When it’s East Timor you are there. When it is Africa, you have all sorts of excuses.”³ This statement accurately captures the consequences of unequal political power.

As I speak of the continuation of old forms of power, I know that some of you must be puzzled. Hasn’t the world changed dramatically since the 19th century? Yes, it has. But the counter-intuitive point I want to make is this: despite these important changes, the underlying architecture of power relationships has not changed significantly either in the hard military and economic dimensions or the new soft dimensions of cultural and intellectual power.

Look, for example, at the fields of information and information technology—two key dimensions of our world today. Those who control the flow of information determine what content enters into billions of minds who have access to radios, TV and the Internet. Today, all the sources of information with global reach—whether it be CNN or BBC, *The Wall Street Journal* or *Financial Times*, *TIME Magazine* or *The Economist*—are all Western-controlled. And it is Western minds who determine what news is significant and worth

airing globally and what is not. This makes a crucial difference. To cite a simple example: if an Asian or African or Latin American princess were to pass away tomorrow, it would hardly be mentioned in the news. But when Princess Diana died it became a global event, because those who control global information flows decided that this was a global event. Let me stress that I am not passing judgement whether this is right or wrong. I am only trying to analyse realities dispassionately.

The West also dominates in many other areas: in universities, in research and development, in Nobel prizes for science, in release of new technology. Virtually all the cutting-edge work in any field of science, perhaps even in social sciences, is done in the West. Equally important, in discussions of philosophy and human values, the greatest outpouring of writing and books is generated in the West. Hence, while we are not surprised that the United States should be passing moral judgement on the implementation of human rights instruments by China, a visitor from Mars might be surprised that a young 200-year-old society of the world is passing judgement on a 5000-year-old society. In short, we take for granted a certain imbalance of power relations as a normal and perhaps eternal feature of the human landscape. And this brings me to the second part of my argument: what we take to be normal and eternal may no longer be the same. The anti-thesis is surfacing. The world is changing dramatically.

THE ANTI-THESIS

One of the key insights Marx left with us is that economic change drives the world. And if he were alive today, he would be amazed by the scope and speed of economic change we are witnessing. He would also be puzzled by the conventional wisdom that these rapid economic changes will not lead to historic shifts in the political, ideological or cultural landscapes of the world. When I showed a draft of this essay to my friends, they challenged my assertion that conventional wisdom in the West today states that nothing fundamental will change. So, to prove my point, let me cite two examples. In May 2000, the *Financial Times* carried a column by Michael Prowse in which he wrote, "I see the 21st century as

belonging in Europe.”⁴ Another well-known writer, Robert Kaplan, used even more vivid imagery to describe the continuing Western domination. He compared the world in the 21st century as described by Tad Homer-Dixon as “stretch limo in the potholed streets of New York City, where homeless beggars live”.⁵ Inside the limo “are the airconditioned post-industrial regions of North America, Europe, the emerging Pacific Rim” (yes, this is a concession to a few outside the West). Outside the limo is “the rest of mankind, going in completely different direction”. My vision of the future is sharply different from the perspectives of these two Western writers.

The main engine of change in the 21st century will be the forces of globalisation. We are all aware that there is a raging debate going on about the virtue and vices of globalisation. The demonstrators at the Seattle WTO and the Washington IMF meetings were trying to generate a consensus that globalisation is bad. A column in *The New York Times* by Joseph Kahn in May 2000 seems to support this view with the observation that “among both mainstream economists and their left-leaning critics, it has become axiomatic that globalisation leaves too many poor people behind”.⁶ Personally, I agree with the view that the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, recently expressed: “The cure does not lie in protesting against globalisation itself. I believe the poor are poor not because of too much globalisation, but because of too little—because they are excluded.”⁷

Fortunately for us this debate is irrelevant. Globalisation is an irreversible force. It has been unleashed by rapid technological change. We cannot turn the clock back. As a result of rapid technological change in many dimensions, the earth has shrunk. We have gone from being Planet Earth to Spaceship Earth. All of mankind has begun to be spun together in a complex web of interdependence. The consequences for our future are enormous.

The first consequence of interdependence is that we have a common stake in each other's economic well-being. The Asian financial crisis demonstrated this vividly. When the Thai baht collapsed on 2 July 1997, the major economic capitals paid little attention. The big global economic decision-makers of that time decided that this little crisis on the other side of the globe could be ignored.

But the crisis spread to other countries in Southeast Asia. From there it shook Korea. This in turn affected Russia. From Russia, it leapt to Brazil and then, in an important leap, it began to rattle American markets. This episode demonstrates vividly how interdependent the world has become. The flow of currency around the world—US\$1.5 trillion a day—has become so large that no one can control it. With the global integration of all economies into one system, the strong economies now have to worry about the weaker economies because, as Claude Smadje has observed: “In an increasingly integrated world, the resilience of the global economy is only as strong as the weakest of its components.”⁸ Another vivid example of global interdependence was demonstrated by the rapid spread of the “I Love You” virus in a matter of days from a single computer in the Philippines to the whole world.

The positive effects of globalisation should not be ignored. It provides a new economic tide, which has already integrated millions in the Third World into the modern world, especially in the two most populous nations, India and China. Although there remain huge numbers of poor people in India and China, globalisation has already had spectacular effects in the social and economic landscapes of both countries. The economic successes of China are well known. Few are aware that India too is experiencing explosive economic growth. The recent UN Millennium Summit report predicted that by 2008, the Indian computer industry would reach \$85 billion, a spectacular sum by any standard. Since the mid-1980s, when the economic success of Japan and the four tigers (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) became evident, it was clear that their success would soon spread to other Asian societies. The Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 was a major hiccup but it has not altered the upward economic trend. In the economic sphere, Western domination will gradually decrease and a more level playing field will emerge.

The interdependence I have spoken about in the economic field is also becoming apparent in the environmental field. Chernobyl taught us a valuable lesson: environmental disasters don’t respect borders. Neither do new infectious diseases, which can be transported from one corner of the world to the other overnight. All Western

populations, like the rest of the world, have an economic stake in the level of emissions that China and India produce as they industrialise and progress. I am not an expert in this field but if their per capita emissions reach half of the American level, the global environment will be seriously destabilised.

So far, I have only illustrated interdependence in the economic and environmental fields. But it will logically and inevitably spread. And as interdependence grows, a crucial change will take place in the relationship between the West and the Rest: they will have to cooperate if they are to live together harmoniously on a shrinking planet. Interdependence reduces the capacity of one to dominate the other and creates a more level playing field between the two. For this reason, if for no other, the Third World should welcome the acceleration of globalisation.

But growing interdependence and changing economic realities will not be the only forces reducing Western domination. Changing demographic relationships will have an equally profound effect. In previous centuries, Western populations appeared to increase at the same pace as the rest of the world. For example, in the 19th century, when Britain dominated the world in many ways, its population almost quadrupled, from about 10 million in 1801 to 37 million in 1901. In the 20th century, it did not quite double, rising only to about 60 million. In the 21st century, the population of the United Kingdom, like that of most other European nations, is likely to remain stagnant.

This has created spectacular demographic disparities. The developed world's share of the global population will shrink from 24 per cent in 1950 to 10 per cent in 2050. In 1950, six of the twelve most populous nations in the world were Western. By 2050, there will be one—the United States. In 1950, Africa's population was less than half of Europe's (including Russia's). Today, it is roughly the same. By 2050, Africa's population will be three times larger.⁹ It is hard to believe that such huge demographic shifts will have no serious social and political consequences.

Partly as a result of these demographic changes, partly as a result of economic and technological needs for new brainpower,

partly as a result of TV images now informing the world's poor that a better life is attainable, there have been increasing flows of non-Western immigrants into Western societies. The most spectacular and successful example of this is in Silicon Valley; one reason for the Valley's success is said to be the IC factor. "IC" refers not to "Integrated Circuits" but to Indian and Chinese. Huge numbers of Indians and Chinese have provided the brainpower needed for new software and hardware developments. Incidentally, I should mention here that while the economic benefits from their brainpower may flow mainly into California, their spectacular performance significantly increases the cultural confidence as well as self-esteem of their native countries.

The United States, however, is accustomed to receiving new flows of immigrants. Europe is not. But in the 21st century, this will change. *The Economist* (6–12 May 2000) carried a lengthy article on immigration into Europe. Because their populations are both aging and declining, most European nations will need more immigrants. Let me again quote *The Economist*: "To keep the ratio of workers to pensioners steady, the flow would need to swell to 3.6 million a year in Germany, 1.8 million a year in France and a staggering 13.5 million a year in the EU as a whole."¹⁰

THE MEANING OF THIS ANTI-THESIS

At this stage, the emphasis I am putting on demographic trends may be puzzling. But let me remind you of my initial image, of the globe surrounded by Western layers of influence. Let us consider how these layers began. First, what did the world look like at the beginning of the 19th century? Here I will again quote William H. McNeill from *The Rise of the West*:

At the outbreak of French Revolution in 1789, the geographical boundaries of Western civilization could still be defined with reasonable precision (i.e. within Europe)... (But) within a few decades settlers of European origin or descent were able to occupy central and western North America, the pampas and adjacent regions of South America, and substantial parts of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.¹¹

These population movements have had an enormous impact on the nature and character of civilisations. In *The Triumph of the West*, J.M. Roberts notes that for most of the last 5000 years, there have been several distinct civilisations living side by side, in the same world—but apart. He also adds:

Even when in direct geographical contact, or locked in open conflict, they seem always to have been separated by invisible membranes which, though permeable enough to permit some cross fertilization, have proved immensely tough and enduring. Civilizations have co-existed for centuries, even sharing land frontiers, but still passing little to one another which led to any essential change in either. Their own unique natures remained intact.¹²

At this point, imagine the world preceding Western expansion to be one where different civilisations survived unaffected by other civilisations, like distinct and intact billiard balls. J.M. Roberts opens his book with this world as his starting point and then describes in great detail how all the civilisations of the world have been changed, transformed, affected by the explosion of Western civilisations over the past two centuries.

The process of change that he describes was a one-way street: the impact of the West upon the Rest (these are my words, not his). Indeed, in his concluding chapter, entitled “A post-Western World”, he speculates on how the world will turn out with the end of the Western expansionary phase. But he remains confident that Western civilisation will provide the standard by which all other civilisations or societies will measure themselves. As he states:

Here lies the deepest irony of post-Western history: it is so often in the name of Western values that the West is rejected and it is always with its skills and tools that its grasp is shaken off. Western values and assumptions have been internalised to a remarkable degree in almost every other major culture.¹³

Indeed, his implicit assumption that Western civilisation represents the apex of human civilisation is a deeply held belief in Western minds. And this belief has also entered non-Western

minds. V.S. Naipaul demonstrated this with his claim that Western civilisation represents the only universal civilisation.

THE SYNTHESIS

My conclusion is a remarkably simple one. Historians such as William McNeill and J.M. Roberts are correct in describing the central flow of history for the past 200 years as a one-way street. McNeill writes:

But the West's expansion helped to precipitate a decisive break-through of older styles of civilised life in Asia about the middle of the nineteenth century. For a full hundred years thereafter, the non-Western world struggled to adjust to local cultural inheritances in all their variety and richness to ideas and techniques originating in the European nineteenth century.¹⁴

I agree that this is how world history has flowed for the past two centuries. It has been a one-way street.

My prediction for the 21st century is an equally simple one: for the first time in centuries, we will have a two-way street in the flow of ideas, values and people. This notion of a two-way street of ideas is something very difficult for many Western intellectuals to conceive, because many believe that they have created the world in their own image. Please allow me to quote J.M Roberts one more time:

"Paradoxically, we may now be entering the era of its greatest triumph, not over state structures and economic relationships, but over the minds and hearts of all men. Perhaps they are Westerners now."¹⁵

The simple reality that J.M. Roberts did not grasp—and I must stress that in his book Roberts comes across as a wise and modest man, not as arrogant or close-minded—is that while Western ideas and best practices have found their way into the minds of all men, the hearts and souls of other civilisations remain intact. There are deep reservoirs of spiritual and cultural strength which have not been affected by the Western veneer that has been spread over many other societies. I began by referring to the layers that the West has

spun around the globe. As we move into the 21st century, the retreat of these layers will reveal rich new human landscapes.

Only someone who has lived outside the West, as I have, can see both how powerful the impact of the West has been upon the rest of the world and at the same time how limited its impact has been on the souls of other peoples. The real paradox, contrary to J.M. Roberts, is not that Western culture has taken over the hearts and minds of all men—the real paradox is that Western ideas and technology will over time enable other societies to accumulate enough affluence and luxury to rediscover their own cultural roots.

Initially, when Asian populations acquired TV sets they watched Western dramas out of Hollywood. Many still do. But just as many Americans found the programme, *Roots*, riveting, as it described a past they were only vaguely aware of, other non-Western societies have returned to their own roots, from which they had been effectively cut off for centuries. So in Asia, for example, each Asian society is beginning to reconnect with its past. Many in the West have heard in passing about the Hindu epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. These epics have been absorbed heart and soul by young Indians with their mothers' milk. But most of the time it has been handed down orally or in print. When these epics were finally converted into TV dramas, hundreds of millions of Indians stopped whatever they were doing to watch the recreation of their cultural legacy through Western TV boxes. The same is happening or will happen in other Asian societies. All this will, to put it simply again, generate a renaissance of Asian cultures not seen in centuries.

I know that I am providing only a few examples of a changed world. Colleagues have complained to me that they can't imagine fully the world I was trying to predict. Neither can I. But let me suggest one area where we can look for leading indicators of the new world to come: the Internet universe. Today, I am told, 90 per cent of the websites are in English. But the content of the Internet is driven not just by the producers but also by the consumers. If my predictions are right, the proportion of English websites will fall steadily and be replaced by a huge variety of languages. Let me add that there is one key structural reason why I have chosen the Internet

as a leading indicator. Unlike Hollywood films, Western TV dramas, or CNN and BBC reportage of the world, all of which enter the eyes and minds of the rest of the world in a one-way flow, the Internet is unique in generating a two-way flow. And if my thesis of a coming two-way street of ideas and values is correct, the first evidence of this may also surface in the Internet universe.

All these great changes do not mean that all the Western layers that now envelop the world will disappear. J.M. Roberts is correct in saying that many Western ideas have proven to be utilitarian for both Western and non-Western societies. Good technology is race-blind and colour-blind. It works for all men. Medical advances in the West have benefited all mankind. So too will many Western social and political concepts. For example, if the rule of law (rather than rule by law) becomes entrenched in Asian societies, it may well be the crucial variable that enables them to lift themselves from their feudal practices. If meritocracy, rather than nepotism, became the norm of Asian societies, it would mean a tremendous unleashing of the brainpower found there. The real challenge non-Western societies will face in the 21st century will be in deciding which Western layers to retain and which to peel away.

The end of the era of Western domination will therefore not be a smooth or easy one for non-Western societies. If they reject all the Western legacy left in their societies, they may throw the baby out with the bath water. Each non-Western society, whether it be China, India, Indonesia or Iran, will have to decide carefully which aspects of Western systems and culture can be retained and absorbed in their societies and which cannot. There is a monumental struggle going on within the souls of many Asians to decide what kind of identity they want for their future. They are trying to find the best from their own cultural roots and the best from the West. This struggle is another reason why the next chapter of history is going to be an exciting one for the world.

At the same time, the success of Silicon Valley shows that there is a natural “fit” between the brain food (now generated in the West) and the deep wealth of Asian brain power (which remains untapped). Economic forces—unless interrupted by political or

military disasters—will draw Western technology, capital and exports closer to Asian workers and markets. If trade flows across the Pacific begin to grow faster than transatlantic flows, the US links with Asia will deepen once more.

All this could lead to another significant new development in world history. Geography, some say, is destiny. Hitherto, the common historical and cultural roots of the United States and Europe have kept them close together despite the vast Atlantic Ocean that separates them. But over time, their geographic, economic and political needs could pull them in different directions. It is conceivable that the United States and Europe will march to a different drumbeat in the next century. So far, all the trade and economic disputes between the United States and Europe have been resolved harmoniously in the end. But if strains emerge, we should not be surprised.

All this brings me to my final paradoxical conclusion. Writers such as William McNeill and J.M. Roberts, who have documented the brilliant and magnificent contributions of the West for the past centuries, share a deep conviction that the West will remain dynamic and vibrant. But as part of this continuing dynamism, the West will increasingly absorb good minds from other cultures. And, as it does so, the West itself will undergo a transformation; it will become, within itself, a microcosm of the new interdependent world, containing many thriving cultures and ideas. The West may finally live up to its highest ideals and become a truly cosmopolitan society.

Again, when I speak about such cosmopolitan destiny for the West, my friends frown and state that they cannot visualise it. Fortunately for me, the June 2000 issue of *National Geographic* has a wonderful article on London. London, it says, may well have become the most cosmopolitan city in the world. As the article said:

The whole world lives in London. Walk down Oxford Street and you will see Indians and Colombians, Bangladeshis and Ethiopians, Pakistanis and Russians, Melanesians and Malaysians. Fifty nationalities with communities of more than 5,000 make their home in the city, and on any given day 300 languages are spoken. It is estimated that by 2010 the population will be almost 30 per cent ethnic minorities, the majority born in the U.K.¹⁶

I began this article by describing the central role London played in the former phase of Western history, when its streets appeared to be paved with gold. The transformation of London into a truly cosmopolitan city may indeed be a harbinger of things to come, not only for the UK but perhaps for most of the Western world.

The Rest of the West may therefore see the creation of a new civilisation, which will truly integrate the best from all streams of mankind. I hope that my friends in the West will see this as an optimistic conclusion.

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 3. "The World: The U.S. and Africa: Extending a Trembling, Hesitant Hand", *The New York Times*, "This Week in Review", 7 May 2000, p. 3.
 4. *Financial Times Weekend*, 13/14 May 2000, p. xxvii.
 5. Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy", *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994.
 6. *The New York Times*, 7 May 2000, section 3, p. 4.
 7. Speech by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to Millennium Forum on 22 May 2000 in New York.
 8. Claude Smadje, "The End of Complacency", *Foreign Policy*, winter 1998–99, p. 67.
 9. Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn*, Random House, 1999, p. 52–55.
 10. "Europe's Immigrants," *The Economist*, 6–12 May 2000, p. 25.
 11. William H. McNeill, p. 730–31.
 12. J.M. Roberts, p. 14.
 13. *Ibid*, p. 278.
 14. William H. McNeill, p. 730.
 15. J.M. Roberts, p. 289.
 16. Simon Worral, "London on a Roll", *National Geographic*, June 2000, p. 10.

EUROPE'S DESTINY

It is easy to stand in awe of Europe and its many achievements. Indeed, I admire European civilisation greatly. It has made an enormous contribution to improving the human condition and to modernising the world. It is equally remarkable how this relatively small continent came to dominate the world and world history for so many centuries. At one point, Europe had virtually colonised the whole world.

Given these enormous triumphs, I understand why it is difficult for European thinkers to contemplate the possibility that their societies have gone from being geopolitically competent to becoming geopolitically incompetent. History teaches us that geopolitically incompetent societies can come to grief.

When I point out the dangers that Europe may face as a result of its incompetence, I am doing so as a friend of Europe. I would like European societies to continue to thrive and do well as their success could bring hope and provide lessons for the rest of the world. The regional cooperation within Europe continues to set the gold standard for the world. No other region of the world can match Europe in abolishing any prospect of war between any two EU states.

However, the most successful continent in the world has also become one of the most pessimistic continents in the world. Few young Europeans believe that their future will be better than that of their parents' generation. This pessimism about the

future needs to be addressed. My goal is to provide Europe with advice that would make it an optimistic continent again. Hence the two following essays suggest how Europe should both welcome and adapt to the rise of Asia. The Asian century could create a safer world for Europe in the longer run, if Europe reaches out to Asia.

BE QUICK EUROPE, OR MISS OUT ON THE ASIAN CENTURY

Europe's World. Spring 2009

AN ENORMOUS strategic opportunity has opened up for Europe to shape the Asian century, and help ensure it will be a peaceful and happy one. Among the many experiences that Europe could share with Asia is its great achievement of putting an end to war between any two EU member states. It could also share its experience of generating a high level of international cooperation and eliminating virtually all borders within the EU. In short, Europe has a lot of knowledge to impart at a time when Asia is keen to learn.

Sadly, this is not likely to happen. For centuries, European nations demonstrated their geopolitical competence by collectively dominating the world. Today, the region has reached the other extreme of geopolitical incompetence. The aim of this article is to encourage Europe's strategic thinkers to focus once more on long-term geopolitical challenges. There are several steps they will have to take to achieve these goals.

The first step is that they need to understand and accept the reality of the Asian century. Several influential Europeans continue to raise doubts about Asia's rise, and indeed European intellectuals and strategic thinkers generally have little interest in Asia. But there are two critical facts of which European intellectuals and leaders need to take note. The first is that until 1820, China and India were consistently the two largest economies of the world, according to the distinguished economic historian Angus Maddison. So if by 2050 the four largest economies in the world are China, India, the US and Japan, as Goldman Sachs has forecast, we will be witnessing a return to the historical norm rather than a deviation.

The second statistic of note was summed up by Larry Summers, the former US Treasury Secretary who now heads Barack Obama's National Economic Council. He has compared the rise of Asia with the rise of Western societies, saying: "They called it the Industrial Revolution because there were noticeable changes in standards of living in a human life span—changes of perhaps 50 per cent. At current rates of growth in Asia, standards of living may rise 100 fold, 10,000 per cent within a human life span. The rise of Asia and all that follows it will be the dominant story in history books written 300 years from now with the Cold War and the rise of Islam as secondary stories". In short, the Asian nations are set to modernise their economies faster than the Europeans ever did.

The second step that must be taken by European thinkers is to understand the remarkable and still rising level of geopolitical competence in Asia. According to European theory and practice, which has been distilled from 19th-century European history when several new European powers emerged, there should always be rivalries and zero-sum competition among rising powers. As all the major rising powers of the world are located in Asia, the Asian geopolitical theatre should now be seething with such rivalries. But what is truly remarkable is that suspicion between Asian nations is diminishing rather than rising, seen especially through the more open relations between China and Japan, and China and India.

Much of this is due to China's extraordinary ability in the geopolitical sphere. The Chinese leaders are aware that their country's rise in power could provoke discomfort both in Washington, DC, and among its own neighbours. Hence, in a pre-emptive strike against any potential American policy to contain it, China has decided to share its growing prosperity with all of its neighbours. Until recently, the largest trading partner for Japan, South Korea and several of the states grouped in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was naturally the US. But a dramatic shift has taken place in recent years, and today China is the largest trading partner of both Japan and South Korea.

A useful way of measuring geopolitical competence is to

compare Europe's developmental record with that of Africa, China and ASEAN. It should go without saying that Europe is more prosperous than North Africa, as the average per capita yearly income in the EU is almost \$31,000 and in the Maghreb countries it is just over \$6,000. A tiny pond called the Mediterranean Sea separates Europe from North Africa, while Europe's population is ageing and that of North Africa is youthful. Simple geopolitical common sense would dictate that Europe should share its prosperity with North Africa to prevent a flood of illegal migrants. Sadly, there is no such common sense in the EU's geopolitical thinking.

China has taken a different approach, wisely deciding to share its prosperity with the ASEAN nations. Back in November 2001, when Chinese leader Zhu Rongji proposed a free trade area to ASEAN, that came as a surprise. He also offered unilateral concessions to ASEAN countries in the form of an "early harvest" of tariff reductions on ASEAN exports to China. When this FTA comes fully into force in 2015 it will be the world's largest. The ASEAN-China free trade area has also motivated Japan and India to propose similar trade deals to ASEAN that have now been completed. In short, a large part of Asia stretching from India to Japan with almost 3 billion people will be involved in a web of mutually beneficial FTAs.

By contrast, the EU has failed to share its prosperity beyond the 495 million people inside its borders. The region's strategic thinkers must now reflect on why this is. How has Europe gone from being geopolitically competent to geopolitically incompetent?

Several factors could have contributed to this situation. At a meeting of EU and ASEAN foreign ministers in the early 1990s, the then Belgian foreign minister Willy Claes said that with the end of the Cold War, there were only two superpowers left in the world: the US and the EU. Such hubris has turned out to be short-sighted.

Another reason is the fractured decision-making process in Brussels. Since all 27 EU countries have to be brought on board, decision-making is often driven down to the lowest common denominator. Instead of taking bold strategic steps to deal with a completely different world, the EU crawls forward at the pace of its

slowest member. Witness the way one small member, Ireland, could bring the Lisbon treaty project to an abrupt halt. Henry Kissinger was absolutely right in highlighting the EU's biggest geopolitical handicap: there is still no single phone number to call.

Another example of the EU's flawed strategic thinking towards Asia is shown in the ASEAN-EU relationship. If Europe's policies towards Asia were influenced by long-term strategic thinking rather than short-term political posturing, the EU would by now have worked out a long-term policy of cooperation with the other of the two most successful organisations of regional cooperation in the world. ASEAN is in the driver's seat in many of the diplomatic initiatives shaping the new Asian regional architecture. The sooner Europe engages with ASEAN the better positioned it will be to help shape this new architecture in a way that will also advance its own interests. If it doesn't, the architecture will be established without Europe's active participation. Europe will be forced to accept prices instead of setting them.

So rather than taking a long-term view towards Asia, short-term political posturing in Europe has trumped long-term strategic thinking. The EU has put the media-friendly Myanmar issue at the centre of the ASEAN-EU relationship. The entire relationship has been distorted by this one issue because EU politicians wanted to look good in front of their domestic audience by taking a strong stance on Myanmar.

The EU picks on Myanmar because it is an easy target, with no political costs to itself. But in contrast to its willingness to condemn the regime in Myanmar, the EU bends over backwards to accommodate other more repressive countries with worse human rights records, such as North Korea. The EU maintains this double standard because it needs North Korean cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation and also because its policies are subservient to American policies on North Korea. In another important example, the EU failed to officially condemn America for its human rights violations in the Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prisons. Thus the EU showed that it demands high standards of human rights from weak and vulnerable countries, but not from strong and powerful ones.

Just as important, the EU has failed to see how the success of ASEAN could directly help it cope with its biggest long-term strategic challenge: its relationship with the Islamic world, at home and abroad. The first lesson the EU could learn from ASEAN is how to handle cultural diversity. The EU essentially remains a Christian club, failing so far with the spectacular example of Turkey to bring in a single non-Christian member. Conversely, no regional organisation can match ASEAN's diversity in effortlessly including Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Communist, Islamic, Hindu and other cultures within its fabric.

The second critical lesson the EU should learn from ASEAN is how to handle the modernisation of Islamic countries. If the Islamic societies that lie at its doorstep, such as Algeria and Morocco, successfully modernise and develop they will enhance the long-term security of Europe. So far, with the possible exception of Turkey, three of the most successful Islamic societies are ASEAN members, namely Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia, all three of which could serve as models of development for other Islamic societies, including those at Europe's door.

The saddest part of Europe's very limited strategic thinking is that not a single European leader has been able to articulate a long-term vision of how Europe and Asia can work together to enhance each other's security. To make matters worse, Europe's strategic thinking has become subservient to that of America. For all its so-called strength and power, Europe is unable to come up with an independent policy towards Asia.

The Asian century is just beginning, and now is the time to act. If Europe makes the right strategic investments at this stage, it could reap rich dividends. If it does not it will miss many golden opportunities and, worse still, damage its own long-term security. Both regions will benefit from a closer partnership. Asia is ready to look towards Europe. But the big question we face in the 21st century is whether Europe is ready to look east.

EUROPE IS A GEOPOLITICAL DWARF

Financial Times. 21 May 2008

THE PARADOX about the European Union's position in the world is that it is both a giant and a dwarf. It stands tall as a giant because it has reached one of the peaks of human civilisation—the achievement of zero prospect of war among European states—and also because of its enormously successful regional cooperation. The world can and does learn lessons from Europe's success after the Second World War.

Yet, even though it has an economy comparable with America's, it stands as a political dwarf in responding to the rapidly changing geopolitical environment. The combination of slavishly following the US lead (with the possible exception of the invasion of Iraq), its reluctance to contemplate badly needed strategic initiatives (as in the Middle East) or provide real political leadership to complete the Doha round of global trade talks and other such failures have led to the steady shrinking of Europe's footprint on the world stage.

Another paradox about the EU is how the citizens live in a bubble of security while feeling each day a rising level of psychological insecurity about their future. Millions try to enter the EU, legally and illegally, because they want to partake of the good life that the EU has created for its citizens. If John Rawls, the philosopher, were alive today, he would probably classify several European societies as the most just societies under the criteria spelt out in his famous *The Theory of Justice*. The world sees the EU as a haven of peace and prosperity. Yes, as I told Gideon Rachman, the *Financial Times* columnist, life is sweet in Europe.

But the rising tide of insecurity in European hearts and minds also means that Europe cannot continue to be a giant Switzerland,

which Mr Rachman suggested in his column this week it has become. The Swiss can feel secure because they are surrounded by Europe. The Europeans can only feel insecure because they are surrounded by an arc of instability, from North Africa to the Middle East, from the Balkans to the Caucasus. To make matters worse, the age-old Christian obsession with the threat of Islam has become far more acute, with Islamophobia rising to new heights in European cultures.

Given Europe's ability to dominate the world for almost 500 years, it is remarkable how poorly it is responding to new geopolitical challenges. The paucity of European strategic thinking is stunning. Most European geopolitical gurus believe that the EU can survive well as a free-rider on US power, counting on it to keep the world safe while Europe tends to its internal gardens. Mr Rachman is right when he says that most Europeans want to keep their heads down. However, he is wrong when he says that Europe's passivity may be neither illogical nor immoral.

One simple unpalatable truth that many Europeans refuse to confront is that, in the short run, free-riding on US power can significantly diminish European security. The one-sided US policy on the Israel-Palestine issue, coupled with the botched invasion and occupation of Iraq, has angered 1.2 billion Muslims. But while America is protected by the vast Atlantic Ocean, Europe feels this Islamic anger directly because of its geographical proximity to the Middle East and its large domestic Islamic populations. Pure common sense would suggest that Europe should reconsider the strategic costs of only playing Tonto to the American Lone Ranger.

Does the EU have other strategic options? Of course it does. Asia provided one when it offered the union an Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM), which could have created a stable triangular balance of power between the US, EU and East Asia. If all three legs of ASEM were equally strong, each power could use the triangle for geopolitical leverage. The missing Asia-Europe link gives the US obvious bargaining leverage.

Initially, the EU reacted enthusiastically to ASEM in the mid-1990s. I know. I was there. However, when the Asian financial crisis

came along, the EU abandoned Asia in its hour of need, leaving behind a bitter residue of distrust, and demonstrated that it was a fair-weather friend. Given Asia's quick rebound and the abundant evidence that this will be Asia's century, this European decision will go down as one of its stupidest strategic decisions.

To make matters worse, Europe has forgotten the lessons of Machiavelli (a child of the Italian Renaissance) and is only pursuing ostensibly "moral" policies in Asia. It tries to impose human rights conditions before agreeing to cooperate with the world's largest democracy, India, thereby incurring Indian umbrage. Its relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the crucial diplomatic forum in Asia, is distorted by the single lens of Myanmar, ignoring the 450 million Southeast Asians living outside the country. Most recently Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, and Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, once again demonstrated Europe's tendency to shoot itself strategically in the foot by signalling that they may boycott the Beijing Olympics. In short, whenever the EU gets a chance, it slaps Asia in the face.

The real irony here is that Asia is doing much more to enhance long-term European security than America is. The Asian march to modernity, which began in Japan and is now sweeping through China and India, is poised to enter the Islamic world in West Asia. When this march enters the Islamic world, Europe will be surrounded by modern, middle-class Muslim states.

Hence, Europe should encourage Muslims to look at China, India and ASEAN as their new development models. The success of the Beijing Olympics could help to ignite new dreams of modernisation among disaffected Islamic youth, who will ask why their societies cannot prosper like China. In short, if Mrs Merkel and Mr Sarkozy could think strategically and long-term, they should enthusiastically participate in and cheer the success of the Olympics. When the Islamic world is finally modernised, Europe can go back to being a giant Switzerland again.

PART 3

THE ASIA-PACIFIC AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

JAPAN ADRIFT

Foreign Policy. No. 88, Autumn 1992

When I took a sabbatical at the Center for International Affairs in Harvard University in 1991–92, I was required to write a thesis on any subject of my choice. I chose to write on Japan, a country that had always fascinated me. In the fall of 1992, I wrote this essay for *Foreign Policy* magazine, as an extension of my research at the Center.

Japan must surely be unique in the world. It was the first non-Western society to modernise, and the first to be admitted into exclusive Western clubs like the G7 and OECD. It has also been one of the most admired countries in Asia for its enormous economic achievements as well as for its social and spiritual stability.

Yet it may also be one of the loneliest countries in the world. When the Cold War ended and the Berlin Wall fell, James Baker, then US Secretary of State, announced that a new Western community would be created “from Vancouver to Vladivostok”. The only major country left out of this magic circle was Japan, even though it has had to find a new role and identity for itself in the post-Cold War era. The search goes on. Japan has still not found any natural resting place for itself. And yet, it has had difficulties joining any East Asian community as shown in the discomfort it experienced with Dr Mahathir’s idea of an East Asian Economic Grouping.

This paradox of being a member and at the same time a non-member of key groupings is uniquely Japanese. Personally, I remain a great admirer of Japanese society. But the more I study it, the less I feel that I know it. Looking back, I am amazed by my audacity in publishing an essay on Japan when I am obviously no expert. Yet the central insight of the essay that Japan has yet to find a natural resting place in the community of nations continues to be valid. And there may not be a solution to this Japanese condition in the near future. Japan may be adrift for a while.

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A JAPANESE FOLK TALE tells of a young boy who lives in a coastal rice-farming village. One autumn morning, walking alone to work in the fields, he sees, to his horror, an approaching tsunami, which he knows will destroy the village. Knowing that he has no time to run down the hill to warn the villagers, he sets the rice fields on fire, sure that the desire to save their crops will draw all the villagers up the hill. The precious rice fields are sacrificed, but the villagers are saved from the tsunami. In what follows, some of the precious rice fields of strategic discourse in East Asia might burn, but in the process I hope to alert readers to the wave of change that approaches the region.

Most believe that Japan emerged from the Cold War a winner. As former Senator Paul Tsongas put it during his presidential campaign: "The Cold War is over and the Japanese won." The burst of the Japanese financial bubble in mid-1992 has somewhat undercut the power of that claim, but no one suggests that the Cold War's end has hurt Japan. Yet, in reality, Japan leaves the Cold War era more troubled than satisfied, more threatened than secure.

Japanese strategic planners can point to many gains at the end of the Cold War. The Soviet threat has all but disappeared. The chances of a major war either close to or involving Japan seem extremely low. China, which once overshadowed Japan, has since diminished in stature, especially after the June 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square. The East Asian region, Japan's economic backyard, continues to prosper, boosted now by the economic takeoff of China's coastal provinces. Japan has emerged as the world's second largest economic power, with the prospect of overtaking the first, the United States, in a decade or two. Even in absolute terms, Japan already invests more for the future than does the larger United States.

Despite those significant gains, Japan now faces its most difficult, if not precarious, strategic environment since World War II. The Soviet threat that drew Japan comfortably into the Western camp and provided the glue for the US-Japanese security relationship is now gone. Neither the United States nor Japan, each for its own reasons, is yet prepared to abandon the Mutual Security Treaty (MST). But the strategic pillars upon which the MST rested have

eroded, leaving the Japanese to wonder whether—and under what circumstances—the United States will be willing to come to Japan's defence in the future.

The notion of a strategically insecure economic superpower is hard to swallow. Consider this: during the Cold War, Japanese security planners did not even consider the possibility of a rupture in the US-Japanese security relationship. Now they do. If that tie breaks, Japan could find itself strategically vulnerable in the face of at least three potentially unfriendly, if not adversarial, neighbours: China, Korea and Russia. To be sure, no military conflicts are imminent between Japan and any one of them. No war planning is required. But whereas Japan and its neighbours did not worry about each other during the Cold War, now they do. A *Beijing Review* article in February 1992 warned: "Japan has become more active and independent in conducting its foreign policy in an attempt to fill the vacancy in the Asia-Pacific region left by the withdrawal of US and Russian influences." And South Korean planners say that even after reunification, US forces should stay in Korea to protect Korea from Japan.

The root cause of Japan's problems in the post-Cold War era is the troubled US-Japanese relationship. The key security interests, especially the containment of the Soviet Union, that held the two countries together have diminished or disappeared. It is astonishing how that simple point is either missed or ignored in the analysis of Japanese foreign policy. Consider, for example, how much US and Japanese interests have diverged over Russia. While the United States is trying to rescue Russia, Japan is not convinced that its national interests include helping Russia.

That divergence is significant. In the wake of World War II, and with the coming of the Korean War, the United States and Japan struck a bargain, albeit an implicit one. The United States forgave all that Japan had done in World War II, and in return Japan became a loyal and dependable ally against the communist bloc.

Although the new relationship was not forced upon Japan, it was a manifestly unequal one. In practical day-to-day terms, it functioned like the Lone Ranger-Tonto relationship. Many Japanese may be

offended by the comparison, but the evidence is overwhelming. The roots of inequality go back to the very origins of the US-Japanese relationship, when Commodore Matthew Perry demanded that Japan open up to the world. That “demander-demandee” pattern has persisted for more than a century. The Japanese remember well President Franklin Roosevelt’s implicit demand that Japan withdraw from China and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’s demand that Premier Yoshida Shigeru cease his efforts to normalise ties with China, both of which made President Richard Nixon’s *shokku* decision to normalise ties with China—without consulting Japan—even more galling. Except on trade and economic issues, Japan has almost never said “no” to any significant US demand since World War II, especially in the area of international security. Japan has also served as a vital banker for US foreign policy goals, shaping its official development assistance policies to meet both US and Japanese needs. Its long history of submitting to US demands explains the appeal to the Japanese of Shintaro Ishihara’s book *The Japan That Can Say No*, as well as the emergence of the new term *kenbei*, meaning “dislike of the United States”.

In recent times, Japan has hesitated only once in responding to an important US military demand, namely, that it contribute significantly to the Persian Gulf war. That hesitation was rooted in an expectation that Japan’s oil supplies would not be affected by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, in a sense of surprise that the West could abandon Saddam Hussein so quickly after building him up as a Western asset, and in the Japanese public’s aversion to direct participation in military conflict. That hesitation cost the Japanese dearly. Their reputation suffered badly in the United States. As a consequence, even Japan’s payment of \$13 billion, the largest single contribution from any non-Arab coalition member, did not alleviate the feeling that Japan had once again tried to be a free rider on the United States.

The decision of the US government to use the US media to pressure Japan publicly to supply some of the money, if not the men, to help in the Gulf War was a dangerous move on two counts. First, many Americans already feel threatened by Japan’s growing economic

power. As Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington has put it, Americans are obsessed with Japan because they see it “as a major threat” to US primacy in a crucial arena of power—economics. Many Americans, therefore, ask a common-sense question: Why should the United States spend money to defend a “free-riding” economic competitor? The media attention, then, further eroded US support for the US-Japanese relationship. It also reinforced the growing Japanese consensus that Americans are making Japan the scapegoat for their own domestic economic troubles. Objective analysis supports the Japanese contention that the root causes of the United States’ economic problems lie in the failure of the US government, in both the executive and legislative branches, to solve problems of its own creation: budget deficits, heavy internal and external borrowing, and the lack of sufficient long-term investment in either industry or the labour force, to cite just a few obvious points.

The admiration that the Japanese have genuinely felt for the United States, in part because it was unusually generous as an occupying power, is steadily diminishing. Japan is no longer prepared to be the “Tonto”. In fact, the Japanese increasingly perceive themselves to be superior to the “Lone Ranger”. Thus, a structural change—from one-way condescension to mutual condescension—is taking place in the psychological relationship between Japan and the United States.

To prevent a breakdown in US-Japanese relations, the Japanese establishment has consciously woven a thick web of economic interdependence between the two countries. However, even without a serious US-Japanese rift, Japan could find itself abandoned. Fuelled by perceptions of economic rivalry, US relations with Japan could become friendly but merely normal—like, for instance, US relations with Switzerland. The United States may then no longer feel obliged to defend Japan or maintain forces in East Asia to protect Japan’s sea lanes. Alternatively, close relations could fall victim to a resurgence of US isolationism: “What we are concerned with is an America turning inward, politically and economically,” said Takakazu Kuriyama, the Japanese ambassador to the United States. The Japanese fear that continued US economic troubles—exacerbated by the US

government's inability to deal with them—would make Americans unwilling and unable to pay for a continued US military overseas.

DIFFICULT NEIGHBOURS

Deprived of the US nuclear umbrella, Japan, the only country in the world to have experienced a nuclear attack, will feel threatened by its nuclear-equipped neighbours. What should the Japanese Self-Defence Forces do if China implements its new law on the disputed Senkaku Islands and places troops there? Could a Chinese force be removed as easily as the symbolic Taiwanese presence was a few years ago? With its powerful economy, Japan currently towers over China, Korea and Russia, but each raises unique security concerns. A hostile alliance of any two of those would be a strategic nightmare for a solitary Japan. With the new sense of uncertainty about the future viability of the US-Japanese defence relationship, Japan has to take a fresh look at its relations with those three neighbours.

Of the three relationships, the Russo-Japanese one appears to be the most troubled at present. The unresolved issue of the Kuril Islands continues to bedevil relations, but the troubled history of relations between Japan and Russia—including the brutal Soviet treatment of Japanese POWs and the USSR's last-minute entry into World War II against Japan in violation of the treaty both had signed—aggravates Japanese distrust of the Russians. Even if the Kuril dispute is resolved, Japan has to ask itself whether long-term Japanese interests would be served by helping Russia become strong again.

Given the economic, social and political mess that it finds itself in, Russia is not likely to threaten Japan in the near future; but a continuing cool Japanese attitude towards Russia could lead to problems with Japan's Western allies. In May 1992 German Chancellor Helmut Kohl publicly criticised Japan for not doing more to help Russia. The triumphant visit of Russian President Boris Yeltsin to Washington in June 1992 indicated that the United States is moving even closer to Russia. How long can Japan, a nominal member of the Western camp, buck that trend?

Traditionally, the Japanese have viewed Korea as a "dagger pointed at the heart of Japan". In the past, they have not hesitated

to intervene in or invade Korea, leaving behind a rich residue of Korean distrust of Japan. Remarkably, 47 years after World War II, the Japanese have not even begun to reduce that distrust.

During the Cold War, Japan did not have to worry about Korea. The two large Korean armies threatened each other, not Japan. But if Korea reunifies, the succeeding Korean state, like united Germany, would inherit a formidable military capability, and it would be situated within striking distance of Japan. In 1992 the prospects of an early reunification do not look good—at least not until North Korean leader Kim Il Sung dies. But the outlines of the likely solution to the Korean problem are becoming clear. South Korea is likely to emerge as the successor state of the two Koreas, as West Germany did in reunified Germany.

The two powers that have guaranteed North Korean independence now show less interest in the continued division of Korea. Russia, as demonstrated by Mikhail Gorbachev's behaviour, now even has a vested interest in a unified Korea, under South Korea, because that could enable Russia to play the "Korea card" against Japan. China's interests are not so clear-cut. The regime in Beijing is probably not keen to see the disappearance of another ideological ally (although visitors to Beijing and Pyongyang can testify that those two cities seem to be in different ideological universes). However, the Chinese are remarkably pragmatic in their foreign policy. The Chinese concept of "flexible power" (*quan bian*) predates Machiavelli by centuries. If China's long-term interests favour a unified Korean peninsula, China will not hesitate to abandon an ideological ally. Japan should, therefore, assume that a unified Korea—with all the potential dangers that could bring—is in the making, even though the South Koreans, having watched West Germany's difficulties, favour a slower process of reunification.

Currently, the Japanese are obsessed, and correctly so, with the threat that North Korea will develop nuclear weapons. They would not feel any less alarmed if South Korea inherited a nuclear capability. Given the traditional Japanese-Korean antipathies, several Japanese officials have confidentially said that while Japan can live with a nuclear-armed Russia and China, a nuclear-armed Korea would be

unacceptable. Almost certainly, Japan would build its own nuclear weapons in response.

The North Korean nuclear issue illustrates the complexity of the Northeast Asian security environment. The campaign against North Korea's nuclear development is publicly led by the United States and Japan. Yet China probably realises that a North Korean nuclear capability could trigger the nuclearisation of Japan. China knows that it cannot stop Japan from going nuclear on its own, and, more crucially, it knows that only the United States can. Hence, even though China in principle opposes the US military presence in the region, there is nothing that it dreads more than a US military withdrawal that could induce Japan to acquire its own nuclear weapons.

Of the three, the most difficult relationship for Japan to work out ultimately in the post-Cold War era will be that with China. Unlike Russia, China cannot be treated purely as an adversary. Yet, with the disappearance of the Soviet threat and the perception that the United States may be turning inwards, both China and Japan are beginning to wonder whether they may not be left as the only two giant wrestlers in the ring. Both have already begun to circle each other warily, each trying to ascertain the other's intentions.

For China, the emergence of Japan has probably come as an unpleasant surprise. After Japan's surrender in World War II, its adoption of the peace constitution and its servile dedication to US foreign policy, China did not perceive Japan either as a threat or as an equal. With its nuclear capability, its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and the assiduous courtship it enjoyed from the United States and other Western countries during the Cold War, China clearly felt itself to be superior to Japan. It blithely ignored Japan's growing economic strength. Neither during Mao's lifetime nor after did China try to work out a long-term *modus vivendi* with Japan. Instead, its policies towards Japan have been offshoots of China's other concerns, using Japan to escape international isolation in the 1950s and again in the wake of Tiananmen.

Japan does not relish the idea of coming to terms with China on a one-to-one basis. For most of the Cold War, Japan looked up to

China. Both Japan's surrender in World War II, and the traditional relationship, in which Japan was a cultural and political satellite of China, made it easy for the Japanese to accept an unequal position. Today, however, they no longer revere China, perhaps not even culturally. Japanese leaders and officials have to disguise their disdain for China. They are especially contemptuous of the fact that more than 100 years after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when Japan began to institute reforms to meet the challenge of a technologically superior Western civilisation, China still has not come to terms with the modern world.

In the short run, Japan is primarily concerned that instability in China could bring a mass of refugees to Japan, the beginnings of which the Japanese have already experienced with the arrival of small Chinese fishing vessels. In the long run, it fears that a successful China could once again overshadow Japan. Although at present the prospects for that do not look good, the Japanese recognise with awe the creativity and dynamism of Chinese scientists and entrepreneurs outside China. They see the birth of a new economic synergy linking Hong Kong and Taiwan to China. They realise that a well-organised China could leave Japan trailing, as the Tang dynasty did.

China holds the key to the solution of many of the region's pressing problems, such as those in Korea, Indochina and Taiwan. Yet, despite some common interests, Japan will probably find it unwise to raise those issues—except perhaps for Korea—with China. China would reject any discussion on Taiwan, which it considers to be an internal issue. The Chinese leadership would be deeply alarmed if a reduced US presence in Asia brought closer political relations between Japan and Taiwan. So far, however, Japan has behaved with exquisite political correctness on the issue of Taiwan.

The Indochina issue illustrates the difficulty of working out a new Sino-Japanese *modus vivendi*. The Soviet collapse paved the way for the symbolic recapitulation of Vietnam to China. China felt that it had reasserted its historical influence over the Indochinese peninsula. China, however, is in no position to help Vietnam extricate itself from its economic mess. Japan could help, but China would be deeply

troubled by the prospect that Vietnam (or any Southeast Asian state) might be transformed into an economic satellite of Japan.

The potential for Sino-Japanese misunderstanding is great. As long as Beijing remains relatively isolated, it will probably not do anything to provoke Japan. However, that relatively calm state of affairs may not last forever. China could emerge out of the cloud of Tiananmen. Japan's economic influence in the region could become even more pronounced. In the hope of "containing" that influence on China's periphery, some Chinese planners have already begun to think of a "small triangle"—composed of the United States, Japan and China—to replace the "big triangle", which consisted of the United States, the USSR and China. A new power structure is thus in the making. Despite the clear evidence that Japan will face new challenges in its relations with the United States and its neighbours, it will be psychologically difficult for the Japanese to admit that they face a problematic new strategic environment. They feel no immediate pain at the end of the Cold War. Instead, Japan appears to have been catapulted to a position of global eminence. Few greater gatherings of luminaries have been seen in recent times than at Emperor Hirohito's funeral.

THE FORCES OF DRIFT

Even if the Japanese were to recognise the new challenges before them, five powerful forces will encourage continued drift.

First, restructuring the US-Japanese relationship will be difficult. There is a great mismatch of needs, attitudes, perceptions and power relations. Japan needs the United States for its security; the United States does not need Japan. Since Commodore Perry's time, the United States has been used to making demands on Japan. Japan has never reciprocated. The Japanese see theirs as a tiny country overshadowed by a giant United States. But the American public also increasingly sees the Japanese as larger than life, providing the only real threat to continued US economic predominance. Racial differences aggravate that sense of threat. The power imbalance can be demonstrated with an analogy. Washington sees the US-Japanese relationship as a friendly game of chess. But where Washington sees

it as a one-to-one game, Tokyo sees three other players on the same chessboard: China, Korea and Russia. Any Japanese move against the United States affects its ties with the other three. In Japanese eyes, there is no “level playing field” in the game.

Superficially, there would appear to be no trouble in the security sphere. The United States has never expressed any doubts about its commitment to the MST, notwithstanding the ongoing question of the cost of keeping US troops in Japan. There is no American public debate on the treaty. “Why risk change?” is the attitude of Japanese policymakers. To restructure the relationship, Japan will have to persuade the United States to continue to protect Japan and at the same time demand that the United States treat Japan as an equal partner. Asking for protection and parity in the same breath is never easy. It will be equally difficult for both sides to admit that while the form of the defence relationship will remain the same (meaning the MST will not be changed), the substance will be different. Instead of protecting Japan from the vanished Soviet threat, the treaty will restrain the nuclearisation and militarisation of Japan, consequently reassuring Japan’s neighbours that it will remain peaceful. In short, the main purpose of the US-Japanese MST will be to contain Japan’s growth as a military power. The key problem will be, of course, arriving at such an understanding clearly and publicly, so that the American body politic understands and supports the MST, but without offending the Japanese people.

Second, if the Japanese admit to themselves that they face a new strategic environment with the long-term US defence commitment in doubt, they fear that the only obvious alternative to the MST is an independent Japanese military—and nuclear—capability. Japan is by no means a military midget. Its current defensive military capability is respected. However, without a nuclear umbrella and strong offensive capabilities, Japan cannot contemplate military confrontation with its nuclear-equipped neighbours. Some Japanese desire an independent nuclear capability, but they know that would set off global alarm bells. Many in the West have already developed an inferiority complex with regard to the Japanese and would be deeply troubled to see Japan extend its economic superiority into

the military field. The West is not ready to accept the possibility that the pre-eminent power in all fields could be a non-Western country like Japan, even though Japan is nominally a member of the “Western” group.

Third, if Japan tries to shift course and move closer to its neighbours, it would have to abandon a century-old policy of believing that Japan’s destiny lies with the West. Yukichi Fukuzawa, the great Meiji-era reformer, said that Japan should “escape from Asia, and enter into Europe”. If it now reverses course and “enters” into Asia, some tensions could also develop with its Western partners. For example, at the end of the Cold War, the promotion of democracy and human rights has been elevated in the Western scheme of priorities. Japan has gone along, by and large, though more out of convenience than conviction. However, as the West applies those new policies pragmatically on strategically important countries (Algeria, for example), and less pragmatically on less vital countries, the difference in geographical interests between Japan and the West will surface. Knowing well that a policy strongly based on the promotion of human rights would only invite several Asian countries to drag out Japan’s record up to the end of World War II, Japan is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea in trying to balance its interests as a “Western” and as an Asian country. Hence one more reason for drifting along.

Fourth, in order to review and reform its relations with its three neighbours, Japan will have to confront ghosts from the past that it has consciously ignored since World War II. To reshape its relations with both China and Korea, Japan must be able to look them squarely in the eye and acknowledge that it was responsible for some of the most painful chapters in their histories. Without such an acknowledgement, it is hard to imagine how new bonds of trust can be forged. The Japanese have so far carefully and circumspectly expressed “regret” and “contrition”, but unlike the Germans, they have not yet brought themselves to apologise directly to those peoples.

As long as Emperor Hirohito was living, many Japanese felt constrained in discussing the issue of war crimes because they

wanted to avoid embarrassing him. The US decision to ignore the atrocities committed by the Japanese during World War II in order to gain a strong ally in the Korean War aggravated the natural tendency to avoid facing a painful topic. Many Japanese also feel that what Japan did in Korea and China was no different from what Western colonisers did elsewhere, that the rape of Nanking was no different from the British massacre of Indian protesters at Amritsar. Why, they ask, should Japan atone for its colonial sins when the West never did so? But the Japanese ability to win the trust of their neighbours is linked to their own ability to acknowledge what happened. Many Japanese see a conspiracy to blacken Japan's name in the renewed discussion of World War II. They do not realise that it is an inevitable consequence of Japanese success. If Japan had remained like Bangladesh, few would be interested in discussing its past. With its growing influence, however, it is natural that Japan's neighbours need reassurances that its newfound power will be exercised benignly.

Fifth, in attempting to chart a new course, Japan would also have to face its built-in cultural and political limitations. The Japanese have created a fairly harmonious society, but it is ethnocentric and exclusive. A foreigner has virtually no hope of being accepted as an equal member, no matter how "Japanese" he or she may become in behaviour. The inability (or unwillingness) of the Japanese to absorb the several hundred thousand Koreans who have lived in Japan for generations is a powerful statement of the exclusivity of Japanese society. Ethnic exclusivity, as demonstrated by South Africa, does not foster good neighbourliness.

Those cultural obstacles are compounded by Japan's weak, divided and scandal-ridden political leadership. The frequent changes of prime ministers, the appointment of weak individuals to senior political positions, and the absence of visionary leaders for the new times have all compounded the country's inertia. Japanese behaviour at Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council meetings illustrates the problem. Unlike all the others, the Japanese delegation arrives with two heads, one from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and one from the Foreign Ministry. While it is not unusual for international

delegations to include multiple agencies, it is unusual for one national delegation to speak with two voices. As a result, Japanese policy is often deadlocked, and the signals it sends are often mixed and confusing.

A NEW REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Despite these five reasons why Japan is likely to drift along, there are equally strong pressures upon Japan to set a bold new course in its foreign policy. The creation of a plethora of new committees, in both the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the Parliament, demonstrates a new effervescence in Japanese thinking.

Japan's position as an "economic giant" but a "political dwarf" is no longer viable. Japan's economy is already larger than all the other East Asian economies combined, and the Japanese gross national product (GNP) makes up 70 per cent of the total for all of Asia, not counting the former Soviet republics. No European country enjoys such a position in its neighbourhood. Only the United States comes close, in the size of its GNP compared to the Latin American economies. Yet, Japan has relatively little political influence in East Asia—much less than the United States has in Latin America. To understand the anomalous position of Japan in East Asia, imagine the United States having less political influence in Latin America than either Brazil or the countries of the Andean Pact do. That is Japan's current position in East Asia in relation to China or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). That situation cannot endure.

Japan's problem is that it must create a new political architecture for the region—from scratch. History does not help. The only traditional precolonial political architecture of the region rested on the concept of the "Middle Kingdom", whereby East and Southeast Asia paid tribute to Beijing. Japan cannot recreate such an arrangement. Nor can China, given its current weakness. In forging a new architecture, Japan will find that it must construct at least five pillars.

The first pillar must be a reaffirmation of Japan's non-nuclear status. Japanese leaders may privately consider it unfair that Japan is still not trusted with nuclear weapons, yet they know that

Japan's decision to acquire nuclear weapons would destabilise all of its gains since World War II. Japan would find itself isolated not just from its three neighbours but also from the West. That would be nothing short of a strategic nightmare. A strong (rather than grudging) reaffirmation of the non-nuclear option would enhance its neighbours' confidence that Japan's intentions are peaceful. In this light, the continuing rejection of militarism by the Japanese public should also be seen as a strength rather than a weakness because it assuages the fears of Japan's neighbours.

The second pillar of the new architecture must be a restructured US-Japanese relationship. Fundamentally, Japan has to ask itself whether allowing the US-Japanese relationship to drift on its present course will naturally lead to stronger and closer bonds between the two countries or whether the continuation of the present pattern—in which the Japanese public feels constantly bullied by the United States and the American public sees Japan as a “free rider” growing wealthy at the United States' expense—will bring a progressive deterioration.

So far, Japan has concentrated its efforts on enhancing the economic interdependence between the two countries, acting as a banker for US foreign policy, accepting US vetoes of Japanese foreign policy initiatives, and making it affordable for the Pentagon to station military forces in Japan by paying half the cost. In private, the Japanese often see the United States as a temperamental bull that has to be appeased from time to time. But since the US government has expressed no desire to change the relationship, Japanese planners might wonder, why risk change? Yet, the Japanese need to be aware of the profoundly democratic nature of American society. The commitment of the US government to defend Japan is real only if it has the support of the American people. Japan cannot afford to make the same mistake the South Vietnamese generals did in 1975, when they accepted at face value Washington's commitment to defend Saigon without paying attention to American public opinion.

Today, Japan has to convince both the US government and the American people that the US-Japanese security relationship is in the interest of both countries; that Japan is no free rider; and that

its commitment to a non-nuclear strategy serves the interests of the United States, the West and the region. After all, if the United States abandons the MST, US defence planners will have many new concerns. If Japan goes nuclear, the United States will have to plan a defence against a nuclear power that, unlike the USSR, could be technologically more advanced than the United States. Japan could also pose new competition for American arms exporters, an area Japan has not ventured into so far.

The economic tensions between the two countries must also be addressed squarely. The United States has to publicly admit that Japan is being made the scapegoat for the former's inability to get its own economic house in order. For its part, Japan needs to make a major pronouncement that a strong United States is in the interest of Japan and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole and that it will work with its neighbours in formulating economic policies to enhance both US competitiveness and US economic interests in the region. Such a bold announcement, followed by concrete actions, may help lay to rest a growing sentiment in the United States that Japan is weakening the US economy.

There is a seeming contradiction between Japan's need for continued US protection and its desire to stand up for itself. But that contradiction arises out of the peculiar nature of the US-Japanese relationship, in which a giant economic power is not allowed to have nuclear weapons. If Japan could become a nuclear power, it could behave like France or the United Kingdom towards the United States; but because that is not an option, the United States should allow Japan to spread its influence in other spheres and not remain a satellite of US foreign policy.

The third pillar of Japan's new architecture must be the development of "good neighbour" policies with China, Korea and Russia. Recent history in Western Europe has demonstrated that long-held animosities need not endure. While Britain, France and Germany first joined together under pressure of the common Soviet threat, they are now held together by the immensely intricate networks forged between their societies. Japan can replicate such networks with its neighbours. Trade and investment flows are

leading the way; in their wake the Japanese should seek to foster greater cross-cultural understanding. Southeast Asia has long been described as the Balkans of Asia. The many races, languages, cultures and religions approximate the Balkans in their variety; they have helped form a history that is equally complex and sad. Despite those obstacles, the ASEAN countries have managed to forge the most successful regional cooperation of the Third World. Tokyo can do no less if it undertakes bold initiatives such as resolving the islands dispute with Russia and apologising to the Korean and Chinese peoples for the horrors of the past. The Japanese have great psychological difficulties in accepting the need for an apology, but they should realise that just as they will never be able to trust the Russians until Moscow apologises for the brutal treatment of Japanese POWs after World War II, so their neighbours feel the same way about Tokyo.

The fourth pillar must be to build some sense of a common Asian home. Europe was able to escape the legacy of centuries of rivalries and animosities by creating a feeling of a common European home long before Gorbachev uttered that phrase, with a common Greco-Roman heritage serving as a foundation. The ultimate challenge faced by the Japanese is to try to achieve a similar sense in East Asia. Only a common perception that all are riding in the same boat will prevent the region from dissolving into bitter and dangerous conflict. Perhaps the decision of the Chinese, Japanese, Korean and other East Asian communities in Los Angeles to forget their differences and work together after the recent riots could have a demonstrative effect on their parent countries.

Creating such a sense of a common Asian home will be another difficult psychological shift for the Japanese. Ever since the Meiji Restoration, they have equated success with Western acceptance. Clearly, though, to earn the long-term trust of its Asian neighbours—especially giants like China, India and Indonesia—Japan has to demonstrate that it respects them as fellow Asian countries. It must not treat them with the condescension they sometimes encounter in the West. Japanese aid policies, for example, cannot be simple extensions of Western aid policies, if only because Japan has different

geographical interests. In dealing with Asia, Japan has so far bent almost reflexively to US or Western interests, although neither the United States nor Japan will admit to any coercion. For example, when Malaysia suggested an East Asian economic grouping, Japan acquiesced to US opposition before considering whether the region would benefit from such an organisation. Similarly, following the Cambodian peace agreement, Japan wanted to lift its investment embargo on Vietnam and end the Asian Development Bank moratorium on loans to Vietnam. But here, too, it gave in to the US position.

The United States does not hesitate in making such demands on Japan, asserting its rights as a protector. Yet, wiser counsel should prevail in Washington. The United States should stop asking Japan to fashion its policies primarily to defend US interests; that will not work in the long run. US opposition to new multilateral links in the Asia-Pacific region clearly illustrates the short-sightedness of US policies. With the explosive growth in trade and investment among the East Asian societies, there is a great need for strengthened multilateral links to lubricate those contacts and provide venues for resolving common problems among the East Asian countries.

Any serious consideration of a common Asian home evokes great disquiet in the United States and in the West generally, mostly for fear that another exclusive racial club is being formed. That reflects Western ignorance of the enormous racial and cultural divisions within Asia. The main function of a common Asian home (to include Australia and New Zealand), like the common European home, would be to reduce or dissolve racial identities, not to enhance them.

Finally, the fifth pillar requires Japan to become a good global citizen. Japan's efforts to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council reflect that desire. However, its method of trying to gain that seat is a classic case of putting the cart before the horse. Without an established track record of managing international conflicts, what would Japan do on the Security Council? Japan's case for a permanent seat would clearly be enhanced if Tokyo could demonstrate, as the United States has in the Middle East, that it can take the lead in resolving international conflicts.

Consider, for example, the Cambodian peace process. An excellent peace agreement has been signed, but its implementation has been hobbled by a lack of funding, with the United States finding it hard to raise its share of the cost of UN peacekeeping operations. Following traditional behaviour, the Japanese will wait for the US government to approach them for financial assistance and, after some hesitation, agree to the US request. Instead, the Japanese government should take the initiative and announce that it will meet any financial shortfall in the Cambodian UN operations, and take the lead in meeting the economic reconstruction needs of Cambodia. Japan should declare that it will ensure that the long nightmare of the Cambodian people is finally over, thus fulfilling its responsibilities to both the region and common humanity. The entire operation would cost Japan \$1 or \$2 billion, a fraction of what it paid for the Gulf War, yet the kudos that Japan could earn—in the region, in the West, and especially in the United States—would be enormous. Such a move could drastically alter public perceptions of the Japanese as mere calculating beings with no moral purpose. That is the sort of bold leap that Japan needs to make.

Bold steps, of course, have not been the hallmark of Japanese foreign policy since World War II. Caution has been the key word. But a new trans-Pacific crisis is in the making. Fortunately, both the dangers and the opportunities are equally clear. The East Asian region is experiencing perhaps the most spectacular economic growth in human history. It began with Japan and spread throughout the region. Yet, all East Asian governments realise that their countries' economic growth would still be crippled if Japan were to falter. Japan, therefore, has considerable influence in fashioning a new political architecture for the region. However, to succeed, it will have to meet the interests not only of Japan, but also of its three immediate neighbours, of the East Asian region generally, and of the United States. The future will severely test the diplomatic vision and skill of Japan's leaders.

“THE PACIFIC IMPULSE”

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In September 1994, I gave an opening address at the 36th Annual Conference of the International Institute of Strategic Studies, held in Vancouver.

The conference brought together mainly American and European strategic thinkers. The natural assumption in these strategic minds was that Europe was ahead of the rest of the world in strategic theory and practice, that the key concepts and paradigms had been worked out in Europe, and that the rest of the world could do no better than emulate Europe. My lecture shocked the audience on two counts: first, I suggested that the Asia-Pacific, not Europe, had better prospects for peace; second, I suggested that the ways of the Pacific may provide an alternative *Weltanschauung* for strategic thinkers. The response was clearly hostile. But when excerpts from my speech were published in *Foreign Affairs* (as “The Pacific Way”) and *Survival* (as “The Pacific Impulse”), they drew a kinder response. Gareth Evans, the then Australian foreign minister, told me that he had quoted me in his speeches, especially my suggestions that the Asia-Pacific would unleash a burst of explosive creativity with the fusion of Asian and American civilisations.

Six years later, my thesis has gone through a wrenching test. The 1997/98 Asian Financial Crisis was one of the greatest economic crises of the 20th century. The havoc it created among many East Asian

economies was enormous. Western thinkers have often pointed out that economic crises, coupled with major power shifts, have often led to war, as they did with World War II.

No other region in the world is experiencing power shifts of the scale we are seeing today in the Asia-Pacific theatre. This theatre is also full of geopolitical fault lines: Russia-Japan, Japan-China, China-South China Sea, not to mention the most important emerging strategic relationship in the world—the US-China relationship.

Why then has the region remained at peace through these wrenching times? Why have tensions not resurfaced? All I can say is that six years after writing this essay, I feel vindicated in some of the claims I have made about "The Pacific Impulse". It is alive, not dead. Nevertheless, skeptics abound. Most Western strategic thinkers continue to believe that the Asia-Pacific theatre remains a powder keg waiting to blow. Only time will tell who is right. For the sake of my children and grandchildren (if I have any), I hope that I am.

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THE 21ST CENTURY will see a struggle between an “Atlantic impulse” and a “Pacific impulse”. For the past few centuries, the Atlantic impulse has determined the course of world history. If my assumptions are right and the Pacific impulse takes centre stage over the Atlantic impulse, then Eurocentric strategic analysts will have to rethink their concepts and assumptions to understand the future flow of history.

The 21st century will be unique because there will be three centres of world power (Europe, North America and East Asia) as opposed to two in the 20th century (Europe and North America) and one in the immediate preceding centuries (Europe). In previous centuries, Europe set the course of world history: it colonised most parts of the world, shook up other empires and societies (including China, Japan and Islam) and occupied relatively empty spaces (North America and Australasia) through immigration. The two World Wars of the 20th century, and even the Cold War succeeding them, were essentially pan-European struggles. East Asia, by contrast, had little impact on the rest of the world.

It would be dangerous for both Europe and mankind if analysts were unable to liberate themselves from Eurocentric conceptions of the world. Like all other parts of the world that have experienced greatness, Europe too is becoming exhausted. The time has come for other regions to contribute as much as Europe has in moving the world forward.

THE RISE OF EAST ASIA

In the 21st century, East Asia will shed its passivity. The region’s sheer economic weight will give it a voice and a role. As recently as 1960, Japan and East Asia together represented 4 per cent of the world’s gross national product (GNP), while the United States, Canada and Mexico represented 37 per cent. Today, both areas have a similar proportion of the world’s GNP (some 23–24 per cent), but, with more than half of the world’s economic growth taking place in Asia in the 1990s, the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and European economies will progressively become relatively smaller.¹ Initially, it will be the economic weight of East Asia that

will have the most significant impact. This may explain why both European economists and industrialists treat East Asia with respect. By contrast, ideologues and strategists, seeing no vigorous intellectual challenge from East Asia, believe that they have little to learn from the region.

This may explain why almost all strategic analysts assume only the European experience can explain East Asia's future. And in all the inevitable comparisons with Europe, East Asia comes out second best. Richard Betts says, "One of the reasons for optimism about peace in Europe is the apparent satisfaction of the great powers with the status quo", while in East Asia there is "an ample pool of festering grievances, with more potential for generating conflict than during the Cold War, when bipolarity helped stifle the escalation of parochial disputes".²

Aaron L. Friedberg says: "While civil war and ethnic strife will continue for some time to smoulder along Europe's peripheries, in the long run it is Asia that seems far more likely to be the cockpit of great-power conflict. The half millennium during which Europe was the world's primary generator of war (as well as wealth and knowledge) is coming to a close. But, for better or for worse, Europe's past could be Asia's future."³

Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, after reviewing the history of conflict in East Asia, say:

All of these historical legacies remain and, taken together, they suggest political fragmentation and hostility characterising the region's international relations. There is little that binds its states and societies together but much that divides them. Any chance of finding unifying common ground against the West has long since disappeared. As the particular distortions imposed by the Cold War unravel, many historical patterns that were either suppressed or overridden by ideological and superpower rivalry are reappearing ... History, therefore, strongly reinforces the view that Asia is in danger of heading back to the future.⁴

Many Asians fear that such passages do not merely contain analytical predictions, but that they also represent Europe's hope that East Asia will not succeed and surpass it.

THE TIDAL WAVE

What is striking about the above articles is a blindness to the biggest tidal wave to hit East Asia, which is the fundamental reason for the region's economic dynamism—the tidal wave of common sense and confidence. Over the past decade or two an immense psychological revolution has occurred and is continuing in most East Asian minds: increasing numbers realise that they have wasted centuries trying to make it into the modern world. They can no longer afford to do so. After centuries, their moment has come. Why waste it over relatively petty disputes or historical squabbles?

It is difficult for a European or North American to understand the momentous nature of this psychological revolution because they cannot step into East Asian minds. Their minds have never been wrapped in the cellophane of colonialism. They have never had to struggle with the subconscious assumption that perhaps they are second-rate human beings, never good enough to be “number one”. The growing realisation among East Asians that they can match, if not better, other cultures or societies has led to an explosion of confidence.

This confidence is further bolstered by their awareness that the time needed to catch up with the developed world is getting progressively shorter. The period that nations take to double output per head is shortening: the United Kingdom took 58 years (from 1780), the United States 47 years (from 1839), Japan 33 years (from the 1880s), Indonesia 17 years, South Korea 11 years, China 10 years. The reasons are complex, but they include the faster spread of technology, ideas and business practices, and, of course, the rapid movement of capital across borders.

Many East Asians are also increasingly aware that they are doing some fundamental things correctly in their societies in contrast to many European societies. Many European thinkers celebrate the firm implantation of democracies in their societies as an unmitigated good, especially since it prevents wars. But democratic systems can also be deeply resistant to change. The heavy welfare burdens accumulated by Europe cannot be shed easily, especially since the burden is often passed to future generations. The American Bureau

of the Budget recently forecast that for an American infant born this year, the tax requirement to pay for existing programmes will be 82 per cent of his lifetime earnings. William Rees-Mogg notes that "this figure is obviously unsupportable", but adds that "government spending in Europe is actually higher than it is in the US".⁵

Several of Europe's socio-economic policies are fundamentally untenable. Since 1977, Europe has created only 9 million jobs compared to 30 million in the United States and Canada. During this period, most of the jobs created in the United States were in the private sector, while in Europe they were in the public sector. As a consequence, taxation in Europe is increasing and the social cost linked to wages is, on average, twice that of the United States.⁶

Some forecasts already indicate a 1 per cent annual drop in real European disposable income over the next 25 years. A European child born today faces the prospect of earning less than his parents. By contrast, East Asians are aware that they are about to be carried up by a huge rising tide. This year, the total GDP, in real purchasing-power terms, of the 2.5 billion people in China, India, Japan and the Asian rim is probably about half that of the 800 million in Europe and North America. By 2025, the Asian GDP will be double the Euro-American.⁷

Over 100 years ago, Japan was the first Asian society to attempt to enter the modern world, with the Meiji Restoration. What followed, however, were decades of military conflict which, after some initial successes in the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese wars, led to disaster and ignominy. Is it not conceivable that 100 years later, East Asia could follow the same path: economic modernisation leading eventually to military conflict and disaster?

But there is something crucially different between what Japan tried to do 100 years ago and what East Asia is attempting now. Japan believed fervently that it could become successful only if it joined the premier club of the world then—the club of colonisers. As Richard J. Samuels says: "Japan's early industrialisation was led by military industries to enhance national security by 'catching up and surpassing the West'." This mobilisation was captured by the slogan "Rich Nation, Strong Army" (*fukoku kyohei*).⁸ Economic modernisation

was not a goal in itself, but was, as shown by Europe in the preceding century or two, a stepping stone to military conquest.

The dynamic in East Asia today could not be more different than the environment Japan experienced in the later 19th century. East Asia is trying to achieve something much more fundamental: it wants to succeed in its own right, without trying to become a member of a European Club. It will be an immense struggle to work out social, political and philosophical norms that best capture their people's aspirations, but it will also be an all-engrossing struggle. The most foolish thing that any East Asian society could do is to turn away from this overwhelming challenge and engage in traditional military rivalries: to snatch failure once more from the jaws of victory.

COMPARING GEO-STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTS: EUROPE AND EAST ASIA

Conventional European thinkers are likely to be unmoved by this picture of a great human drama unfolding in East Asia. They focus their strategic sights either on ancient and smouldering rivalries, or on arms races. As indicated above, conventional wisdom suggests that East Asia, in contrast to Europe, is likely to experience a much less benign strategic environment.

Buzan and Segal reinforce this point by looking at the role of what they call "international society" in maintaining international peace and stability. As they say: "International society encompasses the more specific notion of regimes. It suggests a situation in which a whole set of regimes, multilateral organisations and rules exists that enables states to communicate on a regular basis, to establish modes and habits of consultation and cooperation, to coordinate and manage their relations, and to prevent their disputes escalating into conflict of war." They add: "Europe, in particular, and the West, in general, constitute advanced and richly developed international societies. What is distinctive about Asia is its combination of several industrialised societies with a regional international society so impoverished in its development that it compares poorly with even Africa and the Middle East."⁹

Such conventional wisdom, however, fails to acknowledge a

fundamental fact in comparing Europe with East Asia: while the guns are quiet in East Asia, Europe is surrounded by a ring of fire, stretching from the tremors in Algeria that ripple through North Africa, surface again in the vicious fighting in Bosnia, and reach a climax in the Caucasus. From the conflict in Georgia to the explosions waiting to burst in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, more lives are lost daily on the periphery of Europe than in the entire Asia-Pacific region, which has a much larger population.

In comparing East Asia with Europe, several writers stress that the presence of developed regional institutions, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union (EU) and the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), gives Europe a competitive advantage in peace and security. OSCE has even been suggested as a model for the Asia-Pacific region. But of the 53 members of OSCE, the following are experiencing either internal or external conflicts: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Tajikistan, not to mention the conflict brewing in Macedonia and Kosovo. The silence of the guns in the Asia-Pacific and the roar of the guns around Europe is not an accident, but is a result of the fact that Europe's approach to its immediate environment is strategically incoherent, while East Asia is making relatively sound strategic decisions.

There are several flawed elements in Europe's strategically incoherent policies. The first is Europe's belief that it could secure peace by concentrating on the internal unification of Europe while detaching itself from its periphery. To an observer from East Asia, all the efforts to deepen unification through the Maastricht Treaty or widen unification by incorporating "similar" European countries into the European Union seem like a household working to rearrange the living room furniture while ignoring the flood waters seeping in from the rising tides just outside the door. It is puzzling that Europe is trying to draw up its ramparts to cut itself off from its neighbours—excluding them from its growth and prosperity and keeping them as outsiders. In contrast, the strategic impulse in East Asia is to draw all societies into the region's dynamism, starting with Myanmar and Vietnam and eventually including North Korea.

Europe has no choice but to deal with three major forces on its doorstep: Russia, Africa and Islam. In a shrinking world, the turbulence in these three areas will seep into Europe. While Europe has had a marginally successful strategy towards Russia (questions remain about its long-term viability), it has had a fundamentally flawed strategy towards Africa and Islam.

From a long-term perspective, it may have been a strategic error for Europe to admit socially and culturally similar states into the EU ahead of Turkey. It sent a signal that Europe would always be cut off from the world of Islam: that no state in the Islamic world, no matter how secular, modernised or “European”, would be admitted into the “house of Europe”. An opportunity was lost to demonstrate that an Islamic society could cross cultural boundaries and be like any other modern European state. Europe may also have lost a valuable opportunity to demonstrate that it can transcend its cultural boundaries and create, as the Asia-Pacific has done, region-wide institutions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (APEC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which contain a wide variety of cultures.

This exclusion of the Islamic world has been magnified by European passivity in the face of genocide at its doorstep in Bosnia. Few in the Islamic world (or elsewhere) believe that Europe would have been as passive if Muslim artillery shells had been raining down on Christian populations in Sarajevo or Srebrenica. It does not help that Europe condemns the reversal of democracy in Myanmar while endorsing a similar reversal in Algeria. Such double standards are easily shrugged off by cynical Europeans. But they underestimate the enormous price Europe is paying in alienating a force, Islam, that it will have to live with for the next thousand years. For the past few decades, one of Europe’s greatest strengths has been its moral leadership, often providing the right moral responses and massive humanitarian assistance to major crises. Gradually European leaders are waking up to the magnitude of the problem. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl asserted this year that “the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in North Africa is the major threat” to

Europe, while Prime Minister Edouard Balladur of France has called the fundamentalist revolution in Algeria the leading threat to his country.¹⁰

A second flawed element in European strategy is the assumption that the rest of the world, including its neighbours, will follow the European social idea—the natural progression of history will lead to all societies becoming liberal-democratic and capitalist. For most Europeans, this assumption was vindicated when Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev followed this path. The Soviet Union's subsequent collapse and disappearance further vindicated it. Hence, it was natural that so many Europeans embraced the idea that "the end of history" had come with the universal applicability of the Western idea.

This profound belief in the superiority of the Western idea creates a unique weakness or blindness for Europe: an inability to accept the simple notion that other cultures or societies may have equal validity. An essay entitled "Islam and the West" in *The Economist* demonstrates this blindness.¹¹ The article assumes that for Islamic societies to progress, they must become more like the West. Not once does it suggest that the West may have something to learn from Islam. Again, to suggest a simple contrast, both the world's most populous Islamic state (Indonesia) and the world's most economically successful Islamic state (Malaysia) are in the Asia-Pacific. There is no suggestion in the region that they should follow some other model. This belief in the universality of the Western idea can block the acceptance of the principle of diversity and prevent a region living in peace with other cultures. The Asia-Pacific is used to diversity, but Europe is not.

A third flawed element in European strategy is its effort to "lock in" the relatively high living standards of Europe by raising new barriers to free trade and sustaining high subsidies. Here, the contrast between the strategies of the United States and Europe is striking. The United States has taken the relatively bold leap of crossing a cultural as well as a socio-economic divide by entering into a free-trade agreement with Mexico. Effectively it had no choice because if it did not export some low-paying jobs to Mexico

and gain high-paying jobs in return (in a “win-win” arrangement), Mexico could not and would not stop exporting its populace into the United States.

The only permanent solution to the inevitable long-term problem of illegal immigration into Europe is to export some low-paying jobs (in return for high-paying jobs) and enter into free-trade agreements, initially with North Africa. In the long run this strategy is more likely to work if Europe promotes (rather than hinders) global free-trade regimes that will integrate Europe and its neighbours into the rising tide of prosperity in the Asia-Pacific. But to allow Europe’s neighbours to compete in their areas of natural comparative advantage, European agricultural subsidies have to be abolished. It is quite frightening that such a simple, sensible solution to Europe’s long-term strategic problem is considered virtually inconceivable.

In 1990, the ratio of Europe’s population to Africa’s was 498 million to 642 million. According to United Nations projections, by 2050, based on medium fertility extension, the ratio will be 486 million to 2.27 billion—a ratio akin to the white-black ratio in today’s South Africa. Within a few decades, Western Europe will be confronted with impoverished masses on its borders, and increasing numbers will be slipping in to join the millions already there.¹² Unless these masses feel that they are a part of European prosperity in their homeland, they will feel no choice but to move into the “house of Europe”.

Some writers are beginning to recognise that Africa is Europe’s problem. William Pfaff recently asked, “Who is responsible for the African catastrophe?” and answered, “The European powers, who colonised Africa in the 19th century out of an immensely complex mixture of good and bad motives, thereby destroying Africa’s existing social and political systems, its customary institutions and law.” He then asked, “Who outside Africa has an urgent material interest in Africa’s salvation?” and his answer was, “The Europeans. Besides the fact that Europe is the principal consumer of African mineral and agricultural exports, Africa’s foundering means that hundreds of thousands, even millions more desperate people are attempting to get out of Africa to places where they can find order, jobs, security,

a future. Their scarcely controllable migration towards Europe already has created immense social problems and serious political tensions."¹³

These flawed elements in European strategy mean a similar impulse is being exported to the rest of the world. I call this the "Atlantic impulse"—moving towards continental unification rather than global integration, and exporting political development ahead of economic development while ignoring social and cultural differences and creating new protectionist barriers to "lock in" untenable welfare-state policies. If Europe persists with the Atlantic impulse, it will be a loss not only for Europe, but also for the rest of the world, which has benefited so much from European creativity and dynamism.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE OF THE ATLANTIC IMPULSE

The Uruguay Round (UR) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations, which was deadlocked from 1989 to 1993 because of European intransigence, illustrates how the Atlantic impulse can damage global interests. It would have probably ended in disaster if not for the crucial APEC leaders meeting in Seattle in November 1993. The United States cleverly sent a signal that if the UR broke down, it would have no choice but to create an Asia-Pacific free-trade area or regime. The other APEC leaders supported this message, and, after a few critical phone calls between Bonn and Paris, Europe finally decided to sign the UR agreements in December 1993.

It was then decided that the final signing ceremony would be held in Marrakesh, Morocco. Unfortunately, the location of this close to the Atlantic led to the surfacing of the Atlantic impulse through an event that almost undermined the final agreement. After gaining the APEC countries' support to secure European approval of the UR agreement, the United States suddenly switched sides and teamed up with Europe to try to incorporate the "social clause" into the agreement. The social clause is ostensibly designed to improve working conditions in the Third World. Many Europeans defend it as representing a moral impulse. In doing so, they insult the

intelligence of the rest of the world, who find it hard to accept that the Europeans are morally interested in the fate of these workers now that their incomes are rising but were not interested when their incomes were stagnant. The social clause is a charade that will not be of any benefit to Europe.

Working with the Europeans caused the United States to suffer because it was poorly received by its APEC partners, a point that some gracious US officials admit in private. But this whole episode had even greater significance. It demonstrated that the US, given its geographical location, will be torn between the Atlantic and the Pacific impulses over the decades to come. Over the next 10 years, American choices will probably be the most pivotal factor in international relations.

THE UNITED STATES: ATLANTIC OR PACIFIC FIRST?

During the Cold War, the geopolitical environment for the United States was clear. The threat came from the Soviet Union, and the Atlantic alliance was the most important security priority. When victory came, the then secretary of state, James Baker, captured the sweetness of the moment by declaring the creation of a community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok (a circle that virtually covered the whole world except the intervening Pacific Ocean). It was probably the finest moment for the Atlantic impulse.

The interests that will link the United States across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to Europe and East Asia, respectively, will increasingly diverge. Culturally, the United States will look to Europe for its roots. The political and military institutions will also remain stronger across the Atlantic: institutions as varied as the Group of Seven (G7), the OSCE, NATO and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) will attract American leaders across the Atlantic. These links will endure.

But the economic and, perhaps, overall national security of the United States will be determined increasingly by developments across the Pacific. Last year, trans-Pacific trade totalled \$330 billion—50 per cent greater than trans-Atlantic trade. The ratio will reach 2 to 1 by the end of this decade.

There is no doubt which the future growth markets are. By incorporating four more states into the European Union in January 1995, the EU will add 29 million consumers. Even if the larger Eastern European states (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) are included, there will be an increase of 65 million consumers. In contrast, in East Asia alone there are 1,840 million consumers, and, as greater numbers of them reach the critical benchmark of \$1,000 per capita per year, their demand for consumer products grows. Immediately beyond East Asia, India has a soaring middle class (200 million now and 400 million within a decade) and upper class (40 million).

The eyes of strategic thinkers glaze over when consumer products are discussed rather than nuclear proliferation. But major strategic decisions are influenced by consumer markets. In June 1994, the United States finally lifted a major cloud hanging over the Asia-Pacific region by de-linking China's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status from non-trade issues. The critical factor in this decision was the potential size of China's consumer market. (It appears to have been the strong and determined leadership of the United States that defused the North Korean nuclear crisis. Future historians will record that ultimately even leaders like Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were conditioned by regional dynamics not to behave like Saddam Hussein.)

But economics alone will not draw the United States closer to the Pacific. The larger socio-political and military-security environments, as well as cultural comfort, are equally crucial factors. There is a deeply held belief among European strategic thinkers, as well as among the Atlanticists who live close to the Atlantic shores of the United States, that the United States will trade across the Pacific, but be a member of the Atlantic community. Indeed, even the idea of a Pacific community is dismissed because of the diversity and cleavages in the region.

It may therefore be useful to discuss what a possible Pacific community would look like, and how it would differ from the Atlantic community. It will come as a surprise to many Europeans to learn that a vision of such a community is already emerging and,

more importantly, that some of the initial foundations have already been laid. And this, in turn, explains why the Pacific impulse is increasing in the United States day by day.

THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY: A VISION

There has never been anything like a Pacific community before. Hence, those who try to discern the future of the Pacific from its past will be blind to its possibilities. It will be unlike anything that existed before because it will be neither an Asian community nor an American community. The Pacific has the potential to become the most dynamic region in the world because it can bring together the best from several streams of rich civilisations in Asia and the West and, if the fusion works, the creativity could be on a scale never seen or experienced before.

There has already been some such creativity. The dynamism of East Asia is not purely a renaissance of rich ancient cultures; it is the result of a successful fusion of East and West in the reconstruction of their societies. Japan has already demonstrated what success such a formula can bring. Culturally, it remains quintessentially Japanese, but its civil administration (with arguably the most powerful “Westernised” rational bureaucracy in the world), business, science and technology are among the best in the world. It has modernised and is no longer a feudal society (several key imperial ceremonies are conducted in coat tails and Japan has one of the most Europeanised courts in the world), but the Japanese remain Japanese. While many Japanese teenagers look superficially like their European or American counterparts, their homes are Japanese, their souls are Japanese and they are reverential towards their elders. And there is relatively little juvenile delinquency or crime. The deep glue that holds Asian societies and families together has not been eroded by modernisation.

The result, in the eyes of many, is an economic and industrial miracle. Japanese productivity in most manufacturing sectors cannot be matched by any other work force in the world. But this success is due neither to Japanese culture nor to Western methods; it is a result of the combination of the two.

This is why the efforts of American trade negotiators to create a "level playing field" by juggling with trade rules and regimes is seen by many in Asia to be a futile exercise. On a totally level playing field, most Japanese industries will outperform their American counterparts (even though there will be many areas in which the United States will continue to excel). Kenneth Courtis pointed out in an address to the Pacific Basin Economic Council of Canada on 18 April 1994: "For example, in 1993, in its third year of the most difficult recession of the past four decades, Japan committed 18.2% of its GNP to capital investment. In contrast, the figure was only 12% of GNP for the United States. At the peak of an investment-led GNP expansion last year Japan invested some \$5,777 per capita in new plants and equipment, while America invested \$2,519 per capita." In the long run, the United States will be able to match Japan when it undergoes a parallel process of osmosis: absorbing the best of Asian civilisations as East Asia has been absorbing the best of the West.

The real success of the Pacific community will come when the learning process in the region becomes a two-way, rather than a one-way, street. It took a long time for China and other East Asian societies to accept the sensible advice of Yukichi Fukuzawa, the Meiji reformer, "to progress and learn from the West". An American, William Smith Clark, is worshipped in Sapporo because he inspired young Japanese with his remark, "Boys, be ambitious." When an American town proclaims a Japanese (or any other East Asian) as a hero, that will mark the arrival of a two-way street of ideas.

Some progress, however, has been made. Japanese quality-control methods (which were conceived by an American, Arthur Demming) have begun to be transplanted to America. The American car industry is finally eager to learn from Japan, and the United States is now keen to study Japanese methods in specific industrial fields.

Real learning requires humility. Fortunately, the Americans are fundamentally an open and compassionate people. They carry no hubris from history, as the Europeans do. Only this can explain why the United States has been the most benevolent great power in history. European nations with such power would have used it to

advance only their own national interests. Americans pushed an idea. And they have contributed to uplifting East Asian society. East Asia would not be where it is today if it had not been for the generosity of the Sterling Fashion American spirit. With each passing day, the bright young East Asian minds driving the economic effervescence of the region increasingly come from American universities. The United States provides the bridges for the fusion of East and West in the Pacific.

History demonstrates that trade brings with it not just money and goods, but also ideas. The sheer explosion of two-way trade cannot leave the two cultures across the Pacific intact. Over time a fusion will take place. When such fusion is perceived by the American body politic as a positive development in reinvigorating American society, the consensus, for example in favour of a continuing strong US military presence as a stabilising factor, will grow. It is evident that such fusion has already begun, with beneficial effects, especially for regional security.

THE ASIA-PACIFIC: REGIONAL SECURITY

It is not an accident that a region that has experienced some of the greatest wars of the 20th century is now the most peaceful. There must be deeper forces behind this. Some have been touched on earlier in this article. Others may be hard to substantiate, but they deserve consideration. For example, one reason could be the decoupling of East Asian security from European concerns. The two “hot wars” fought in East Asia, Korea and Vietnam, were fundamentally “undertaken in large part because of a perceived linkage to European security”.¹⁴ Facile explanations also have to be questioned. US military superiority in the region cannot be the only explanation (although it is undoubtedly important). If military superiority is critical, NATO should have prevented the crisis in Bosnia.

The Asia-Pacific region is developing a unique “corporate culture” on regional security, an unusual blend of East and West. It combines both Western concepts (for example, of national sovereignty as well as regional organisation) and Eastern attitudes on managing differences. The best current working model is found in Southeast Asia.

Just like Europe, the continent of Asia has its own Balkans that are also tucked away in its southeast corner. In size and diversity, however, Southeast Asia far exceeds the Balkans. It has over 450 million people, which is 10 times the population of the Balkans. In both ethnic and religious terms, it is far more diverse: Islam, Christianity, Buddhism (two schools), Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism coexist. And, as recently as 10 years ago, Southeast Asia elicited far greater pessimism than the Balkans. In 1984, the guns had been silent in Europe since World War II, but Southeast Asia had experienced communist insurgencies and more deaths during the Cold War than anywhere else.

Until as recently as 1965, the prospects for Southeast Asia looked bleak. Indonesia had experienced instability and economic decline under Sukarno; *confrontasi* against Malaysia and Singapore was continuing; Sabah was disputed by the Philippines and Malaysia; Singapore had experienced a problematic and painful merger with Malaysia; and communist insurgencies were rife in the region. All of these countries believed that the tide of history was with them. Hence, the conventional wisdom, less than 30 years ago, was that Southeast Asian states would "fall like dominoes". Thus, Southeast Asia should be wary of excessive optimism.

So how has Southeast Asia become the most successful part of the Third World? It is now experiencing a peace that is the envy of most of the world. And, in what is perhaps the greatest irony, the guns in the Balkans of Asia are quiet while the sound of gunfire in the Balkans of Europe suggests that it is Europe, rather than Asia, that is experiencing a "back to the future".

Southeast Asia has used several elements of the "corporate culture" for regional security. The first is the deeply rooted Asian tradition (symbolically represented by visitors taking off their shoes before entering someone's home) of respecting the household and recognising that one enters as a guest. Hence, virtually every Asian society endorses the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. This is an old adage that also has its roots in Europe. But with the rise of universalistic assumptions in Western societies, this principle has been eroded.

In much of Europe and North America, it is considered “legitimate” to intervene in the internal affairs of a state when certain universal principles are violated, especially human rights. In North America or a Europe exhausted by war, this leads to no conflicts. But, as the experience of South Asia demonstrates, commenting on internal affairs can lead to conflict in less developed states. One essential reason why no war has broken out among ASEAN states for over 25 years is precisely that they adhere to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs.

ASEAN has been heavily criticised for remaining silent on East Timor. If most Asian countries do not comment on each other’s domestic activities, it is probably because they believe in the old Christian adage “Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone”. All our societies are imperfect, but if we are all progressing towards a better state of affairs, why rock the boat? There is a lot of wisdom in the decision, for example, of Japan to exercise restraint in commenting on China. This supposedly “immoral” stand could in the long run save millions of lives by preventing conflict.

A second element is the Asian way of dealing with difficult relations. Apart from the propaganda crossing the ideological divide between North and South Korea (and to a lesser extent between China and Taiwan), it is striking how few East Asian nations engage in “shouting matches” with each other. “Face” is important, and conflict can break out when it is lost, such as when Vietnam humiliated China by invading Kampuchea in defiance of explicit Chinese warnings. Vietnamese diplomats have confessed in private that it had gone against 2,000 years of collected wisdom in snubbing China so openly.

But Asians also accept hierarchy. When this is not violated, peace can reign. The fascination of Sino-Japanese relations is in deciding who should view who as number one. Economically, Japan is far ahead, but in political and military terms, China carries more weight. Japan is more stable than China in the short term, and China needs Japanese economic aid and investment. But Japan needs China’s market, as well as social stability in China. While Japan’s culture is derived from China, Japan carries more weight in

the international hierarchy. So who determines who is number one? There will be no explicit statements or understandings, but it was significant that the Japanese emperor chose to visit China in 1992, at a time when Beijing was still relatively isolated internationally. This was an unusually generous gesture on the part of Japan and may have bought a decade or two of stability to their relations. Symbolic gestures are important in Asia.

These elements indicate the different dynamics operating in the Atlantic and the Pacific. The Atlantic believes in building strong institutions: NATO, the EU and the OSCE are the strongest in their field. Together they ensure that none of the members are directly threatened by a military invasion. But, in an era when invasions are virtually inconceivable outside the usual "tinderbox" regions (for example, the Middle East, South Asia), these powerful institutions seem powerless either to defend their members from non-traditional sources of insecurity (such as rising immigrants and terrorism), or to prevent nearby conflicts (such as Algeria and Bosnia).

The Pacific has no comparable institutions, but is creating networks instead. These are inclusive rather than exclusive, but, even more unusual (and this goes against the conventional wisdom in many European textbooks on international relations), their formation is driven not by the major powers, but by the middle or small powers (especially ASEAN countries). None of the recent regional initiatives were either conceived or built upon in the major capitals.

The annual July gathering of ASEAN foreign ministers was originally confined to the six member-states. Gradually, others applied to attend: the European Community (1972), Australia (1974), New Zealand (1975), Japan (1977), Canada (1977), the United States (1977) and Korea (1991). There were no heavy agendas, formal communiqués or attempts to create Helsinki-type "baskets". Instead, ASEAN emphasised personal contacts and trust-building.

These July meetings paved the way for the creation of two larger region-wide institutions: APEC and the ARF. When APEC was first suggested by Australia, the United States demurred. When

the rest of the region agreed to proceed without it, Washington decided to join. Initially, the United States was an unenthusiastic participant, but when Malaysia suggested establishing an East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), Washington decided that the best way to fight the EAEC was to strengthen APEC. Hence, the United States offered to host the first APEC leaders meeting in Seattle in November 1993—surely the most powerful gathering of leaders in the world (if judged by the portion of the world's GNP and population represented at the meeting). Now these APEC leaders meetings are becoming an annual event and, virtually out of nowhere, a powerful institution has been established. Its quick and sure-footed arrival only makes sense when viewed against the larger dynamic working in the region.

The ARF was launched in Bangkok in July 1994. Japan originally suggested it, but nothing came of it. It did become a reality, however, when ASEAN adopted the idea. After attending several ASEAN meetings, the major powers had confidence in ASEAN's ability to be an impartial but effective leader of the process. Viewed from the inside, the process seems chaotic. But viewed from the outside, it seems amazing how quickly and firmly the ARF has been established. There will eventually be an ARF summit.

APEC and the ARF are unique because the culture that guides both institutions is a blend of East and West. The rules of procedure are Western; English is the only language spoken at meetings of officials; golf, a game with Scottish origins, is the one game they all play; but the behavioural culture within the organisation is heavily influenced by Asia. Direct confrontation is avoided—"face" must not be lost. Everybody must feel "comfortable". And in both cases diversity makes them stronger. The presence of culturally diverse but comfortable "pairs" like Australia and Indonesia, Canada and Korea, Japan and Thailand, the US and ASEAN, and China and Malaysia, to name a few, is precisely what gives the Asia-Pacific region its uniqueness.

Both APEC and the ARF, of course, are fragile new institutions. If they collapse within a year or two, or even within a decade, many assumptions about the future course of the Asia-Pacific

will have been proved wrong. I have to submit my thesis to such empirical verification.

But there is good reason for confidence. APEC can only move as fast as its chairman can drive it. It has no EU-type bureaucracy to carry it. Under the leadership of US President Bill Clinton, it was not surprising that the Seattle meeting succeeded. The chairmanship, however, could not have been passed to a more different actor—Indonesian President Suharto, a quintessential Javanese leader. Yet the Bogor Meeting that he chaired proved even more successful than the Seattle meeting, especially in setting a definite timetable for moving towards freer trade in the Asia-Pacific region.

The next APEC summit will be in Japan, which has already expressed reservations about the rapid pace of trade liberalisation with APEC. Some feel that Japanese bureaucrats will be inclined to slow down the progress of APEC. But Japanese leaders and thinkers are also aware that the results of the summit in Japan will be measured against the two preceding summits in the United States and Indonesia and the two succeeding summits in the Philippines and Canada. If Japan's contribution to APEC suffers in such comparison, Japan's claim to international leadership would also have been dented. As the date for the Osaka summit in November 1995 approaches, Japan will be under pressure to deliver results.

If APEC can be safely passed from one end of the cultural spectrum of the Asia-Pacific to the other without any mishap, it suggests that institutions like APEC and the ARF are riding on a larger, more powerful underlying dynamic, which is what I call the "Pacific impulse".

Neither the Pacific nor the Atlantic impulse, however, is geographically bound. There is no reason why Europe cannot link itself closely to East Asia, as North America is doing. The recent decision by the European Union to launch an "Asia Policy" was a welcome move. If both North America and Europe were to develop the Pacific impulse, we may actually enjoy 50 more years not just of relative peace across most parts of the globe, but also a rising tide of prosperity. The opportunities are enormous.

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SEVEN PARADOXES ON ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY

Europe Asia Forum. February 1998

When the centre of gravity of the world's economy shifts to the Asia-Pacific in the 21st century, the accompanying geopolitical shifts will be equally significant. The three major powers of the region (and perhaps also the world) will be the United States, China and Japan. How they interact will determine the future of the region, and also profoundly affect the rest of the world. A paradoxical Arab proverb warns of the dangers of making predictions: "He who speaks about the future lies even when he tells the truth." This paradox inspired me to make an effort to look at likely outcomes in Asia-Pacific from a different perspective. I tried to see whether thinking in paradoxes might give us a clearer view of the future of the Asia-Pacific than straight-line projections. I came up with seven paradoxes when I was asked to address the Europe Asia Forum in February 1998.

The seven paradoxes, however, have become six. The seventh paradox has been resolved: the United States lifted its opposition to China's entry into the WTO and has passed legislation to enable China's entry. The other six remain valid.

The greatest paradox about the region is actually not mentioned in this essay. It is mentioned in the preceding one: that the one region in the world that is experiencing the greatest shifts of power seen in the

history of man also remains one of the most peaceful regions in the world. It could replace the previous paradox No. 7.

I do not know how or why I have become a lover of paradoxes. It could have been because of my contact with Heraclitus during my studies in philosophy. But I do know that paradoxes remain an excellent instrument for understanding new realities as we move into an era of unprecedented change and turbulence. The best bridges built by engineers are those which have built-in flexibility to absorb varying levels of stress.

Similarly, our minds must become ever more flexible if we are to understand new realities. The search for and grasp of paradoxes facilitates flexible thinking, which will help us to absorb the stress of the many new paradoxes that will be born in the years to come.

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WE ARE LIVING in times of great change, of a scale that has probably never before been seen in the history of man. For the first time, the Pacific Ocean will become the centre of world history (just like the Atlantic or the Mediterranean were in the 19th and 20th centuries). The three largest economies in the world in the 21st century will be the United States, China and Japan. Therefore, how these three powers interact will inevitably determine the course of this region's and possibly even the world's history, although I say this with some trepidation in a room full of Europeans.

This triangular relationship will be rich and complex. It will be difficult to capture in linear statements. Hence, I have decided to present seven paradoxes, in the hope that they will bring out the complexity and lead us to be less surprised in the coming months and years.

PARADOX 1

The first paradox, during this period of change, is to preserve the status quo in the Asia-Pacific. What we have today may be a freak of history. We see the emergence of a new great power (China) but with no immediate hint of conflict. The region today is not preparing for war. It is preparing for prosperity—that is the mood and tone of the region. The economic difficulties have only further reinforced the point that economic, not political, issues hold centre stage for now.

The value of status quo was shown when we had a crisis in March 1996. In reaction to perceived efforts by Taiwan to flirt with the idea of independence, China conducted missile tests in the Taiwan Strait. The United States responded with a despatch of aircraft carriers. There was tension in the air.

But this crisis may have been good for the region. The Chinese word for “crisis” is a combination of two characters: “danger” and “opportunity”. We faced a danger then, but we also saw a new opportunity because it woke up key minds in Washington, DC, Tokyo and Beijing on the importance of preserving the status quo. A new consensus emerged in the region: “Let sleeping dogs lie.” This is why we have not had any major geopolitical crisis in East Asia since March 1996, despite phenomenal historical change in our region.

PARADOX 2

The second paradox is that China has a strong vested interest in the two other powers staying together in an alliance. Last year, China was very critical of the US-Japan defence alliance, especially of the possibility of its extension to Taiwan. Quite a campaign was launched against this alliance. Certainly the extension of the US-Japan defence alliance to cover Taiwan would be unacceptable to China. The reason is history. Logically, therefore, it would appear that China would be better off with a break-up of the US-Japan alliance because it would not mean a two-against-one situation.

Paradoxically, however, it is in China's real interest to see the US-Japan defence alliance continue because if it breaks up—and Japan has to defend itself alone—Japan must surely contemplate a nuclear option. It serves neither the interest of China (nor even the United States) to push Japan into that nuclear corner. Hence, China should see in its interest the continuation of the alliance—even though with the end of the Cold War, the focus of alliance cannot be the Soviet Union and it could become an alliance to defend Japan against China.

PARADOX 3

The continuation of the US-Japan defence alliance does not mean that the United States will always remain closer to Japan than to China. The third paradox is that despite common political systems—both are liberal democracies—and common economic systems, as well as a long history of engagement, we should not be surprised if the cultural comfort is greater between China and the United States than between Japan and the United States.

Having said that, let me hasten to add that this is a controversial point. It seems rather bold to suggest that an ostensibly communist society like China could develop greater cultural comfort with an open society like the United States than Japan could. But having observed Chinese and Japanese students in the United States, my sense is that Chinese students integrate better into US culture than Japanese students do. One of Japan's real strengths is its social cohesion (it is possibly the most socially cohesive society in the

world) and its cultural uniqueness. The unique Japanese tribe is an asset to mankind.

China, relatively speaking, is a somewhat more open society than Japan. Indeed, in one of its most glorious eras—during the Tang dynasty—it was open and cosmopolitan. If, in the 21st century, China, as it becomes more prosperous, emulates the Tang dynasty, we can see the return of a cosmopolitan society. Hence, you could have a paradoxical situation with the United States and Japan having a defence treaty alliance but, culturally, China and the United States becoming closer.

PARADOX 4

The fourth paradox is that while in the US-Japan-China alliance we have two Asian societies (Japan and China) and one Western society, each of the two Asian societies feels more comfortable relating to the Western country—the United States—than to each other.

Historically, Japan and China have lived together for millennia, 1,000 years or more. The United States is the new kid on the block. It is only 200 years old, and it has been in Asia just over 100 years. Hence, the relations of Japan and China with the United States are not heavily burdened with history. The United States is also a unique great power, probably the most benevolent great power seen in the history of man. Apart from its colonisation of the Philippines and Cuba, it has had in general no expansionist designs. Indeed, the Asia-Pacific region will be far worse off if the United States leaves than if it stays.

In addition to this benevolence, the United States provides an open Western form of communication, which is more effective than the polite Asian methods, where you never really say what you think. The Seattle APEC leaders meeting demonstrated the American genius for informality.

PARADOX 5

The fifth paradox is that if we agree that it is in the best interest of China and Japan (and indeed of all East Asian countries) to see the United States retain its presence in the region, then the best way of

doing so is for East Asian countries to draw closer to each other.

We saw the value of East Asian cooperation in the early 1990s. Initially, the United States was sceptical of APEC (a multilateral arrangement). However, after Malaysia proposed the EAEC, the interest in APEC increased because it was seen as a counter to the EAEC. Similarly, it was good that there was a historic meeting in Kuala Lumpur in December 1997 between ASEAN, China, Japan and Korea. Eventually, if all goes well, the combined GNP of East Asia will become larger than that of North America and Europe combined. East Asian closeness will strengthen the hands of those who argue that the United States should remain engaged and not withdraw from East Asia. This will help to contain isolationism or unilateral tendencies in the United States. The United States is a unique great power as it has the most divided decision-making mechanism at the highest levels. East Asia can stimulate continued US engagement not by drifting apart but by drifting together.

PARADOX 6

The sixth paradox is that while this divided decision-making process of the United States is a source of anxiety or aggravation to many Asian countries, it actually benefits Asia as much as it does the United States. One example of aggravation: China. Despite the US adherence to a one-China policy, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, which contradicts the one-China policy. However, despite their aggravations, East Asian countries should welcome the check and balance of the US system because the net result—usually—is a benevolent US policy.

The main reason why Americans operate with a light touch overseas is that the administration does not have all the power in its hands. Just imagine how the United States would behave if President Clinton had as much power as Stalin. Therefore, Asians should tolerate the annual debate on MFN renewal, on human rights and on trade imbalances because they are part of the noise that goes with the US system. Our challenge is to educate decision makers to restrain themselves in congressional debates.

PARADOX 7

The seventh paradox is that even though it is the United States that is putting up the greatest obstacles to early Chinese membership of the WTO (and this is another controversial statement I am making), it is actually more in the United States' than in China's interest to see a faster Chinese membership in the WTO. The emergence of China as a major economy cannot be stopped. It will become larger and larger. The sooner it plays by international rules, the better it will be for the United States and the international community. Of course, if the United States wants to educate China on how to be a good citizen and play by WTO rules, then it should set an example by re-examining the WTO's inconsistent legislations, such as the Helms-Burton Act, the D'Amato Act and so on. Hence, if the United States really studied what was in its long-term interests, it should be doing the exact opposite of what it is doing with China and the WTO and push for early rather than late entry of China into the WTO.

In conclusion, let me hope that I have not confused you about the geopolitical picture of this region with my seven paradoxes. However, as someone who has a ringside seat in the arena of the greatest and the most rapid change in the history of man, I feel that it is my duty to alert you to these surprising developments. My final parting paradox is this: please do not be surprised if you are surprised by developments in our region.

POL POT: THE PARADOX OF MORAL CORRECTNESS

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It is a historical curiosity that Cambodia, a country of 7 million people, could produce one of the evil giants of the 20th century, almost on a par with Hitler and Stalin. When the Vietnamese army removed Pol Pot from power in December 1978, the world applauded. But when it decided to remain in Cambodia as an army of invasion and occupation, an acute moral dilemma was created: to work with Pol Pot, whose help might be needed to remove the Vietnamese occupation. Most Cambodians and Southeast Asians chose to work with Pol Pot, on the same grounds that Churchill had chosen to work with Stalin against Hitler, but every major Western newspaper and journal condemned the partnership.

This essay tries to spell out the paradoxically harmful consequences of such morally correct postures that were the fashion among Western intellectuals in the 1980s. Significantly, such moral correctness dissipated when Western intellectuals had to cope directly with morally complex situations in places such as Bosnia and Chechnya. Still, I was surprised no Western guru dared to articulate the views suggested in this essay.

In the summer of 2000, I had an opportunity to visit Cambodia after 26 years. It still remains a poor society, scarred by the legacy of many wars. But the period during which I returned to Cambodia was

probably one of the most peaceful and stable moments Cambodia has experienced in three decades. It was heartwarming to see so many ordinary folks trying to rebuild their lives after experiencing so many horrors.

The story of Cambodia has had no fairytale ending. Hun Sen gained effective authority over Cambodia following a brief factious military struggle in mid-1997. The institutions of democracy have not been planted in Cambodia. The difficult question of putting former Khmer Rouge leaders on trial continues to haunt Cambodia. Much can be criticised in Cambodia, but the imperfect situation that the country enjoys in 2000 may be the best possible situation for most Cambodians.

All this will not satisfy Western human rights activists who want to settle old scores and have a complete changing of guard in Cambodia. In an ideal world, this might be feasible. But set against the backdrop of 30 years of war and terror, the present imperfect situation seems almost idyllic. The old paradox about the dangers of not working with the Khmer Rouge to liberate Cambodia have been replaced with a new paradox: that the search for perfect solutions may endanger the imperfect solutions that have improved so many Cambodian lives.

Humanitarian intervention is a term that has come into vogue in early 2000. But the examples of Somalia and Sierra Leone show that no outside force can rebuild a society when it collapses internally. Cambodia is going through a fragile recovery. Only Cambodians can complete the job. Outsiders cannot.

IT WAS AUGUST 1942, a dark moment in World War II. Churchill had flown secretly to Moscow to bring some bad news personally to Stalin: the Allies were not ready for a second front in Europe. Stalin reacted angrily. Nancy Caldwell Sorel, who describes that meeting, writes:

Discord continued, but on the last evening, when Churchill went to say goodbye, Stalin softened . . . the hour that Churchill had planned for extended to seven. Talk and wine flowed freely, and in a moment of rare intimacy, Stalin admitted that even the stresses of war did not compare to the terrible struggle to force the collective farm policy on the peasantry. Millions of Kulaks had been, well, eliminated. The historian Churchill thought of Burke's dictum "If I cannot have reform without justice, I will not have reform," but the politician Churchill concluded that with the war requiring unity, it was best not to moralize aloud.¹

The story elicits a chuckle. What a shrewd old devil Churchill was. How cunning of him not to displease Stalin with mere moralising. Neither then nor now has Churchill's reputation been sullied by his association with a genocidal ruler. Now change the cast of characters to an identical set: Margaret Thatcher and Pol Pot. Historically they could have met, but of course they never did. Now try to describe a possible meeting and try to get a chuckle out of it. Impossible? Why?

Think about it. Think hard, for in doing so you will discover to your surprise that it is possible for thoughtful and well-informed people to have double standards. If the rule that prevents any possible meeting between Thatcher and Pol Pot is that "thou shalt not have any discourse with a genocidal ruler," then the same rule also forbids any meeting between Stalin and Churchill. Moral rules, as the English philosopher R.M. Hare has stressed, are inherently universalisable. If we do want to allow a meeting between Churchill and Stalin (since historians do not condemn Churchill, that must be the prevailing sentiment), then the rule has to be modified to "thou shalt not have any discourse with a genocidal ruler, unless there are mitigating circumstances."

This is not a mere change of nuance. We have made a fundamental leap. In Churchill's case, as England's survival was at stake, all was excused. In Pol Pot's case, as no conceivable vital Western interest could be served in any meeting with him, no mitigating excuse could possibly exist for an equally flexible Western relationship with Pol Pot as with Stalin. Hence the total Western condemnation of any direct contact with Pol Pot or his minions in the Khmer Rouge. The tragedy for the Cambodian people is that the West, in applying this strict rule because its own vital interests were not involved, did not stop to ask whether the sufferings of the *Cambodians* could have been mitigated if the West had been as flexible in their dealings with the Khmer Rouge as Churchill had been with Stalin.

These attitudes have caused considerable difficulties for the Western policymakers (in both Western Europe and North America) on Cambodia. Their attempts to fashion pragmatic solutions for the Cambodian problem (pragmatic solutions that necessarily have to *include* the Khmer Rouge) have been excoriated by their press and parliamentarians in favour of morally pure policies *excluding* the Khmer Rouge. Curiously, these moral pursuits would also have opposed any Western military involvement against the Khmer Rouge, especially any new American military intervention in Indochina, leaving one to ask: if you cannot eliminate them and you do not include them, how would it be possible to have a peace agreement? Without a peace agreement, how can you end Cambodia's agony and ensure its future as an independent state?

NGUYEN CO THACH

Someday, historians enjoying the same access to Vietnamese archives as we do now to Soviet archives might be able to document that the Vietnamese leaders, especially Nguyen Co Thach, a brilliant tactician, were able to exploit these Western attitudes to the hilt. He certainly did so at the Paris Peace Conference in August 1989. It is questionable whether that conference could have ever succeeded, given the hardline leaders still in power in Hanoi then. Nevertheless, Nguyen Co Thach chose a brilliant tactic to scuttle the conference, a tactic which the West found hard to challenge.

Towards the end of the conference, he insisted that the conference declaration should explicitly call for the non-return of the genocidal policies and practices of the Khmer Rouge. All present knew that in reality Nguyen Co Thach was not that concerned about Pol Pot's record. (Indeed, Thach once made the mistake of privately confessing to congressman Stephen Solarz that Vietnam did *not* invade Cambodia to save the Cambodian people from Pol Pot, even though this was the official Vietnamese propaganda line.) However, Thach knew that the Khmer Rouge, a party to the Paris conference, would not accept such a reference. Hence, the conference would fail, a failure that the Vietnamese wanted because they were not ready then to relinquish control of Cambodia. Western officials did not dare to challenge him for fear of being branded defenders of Pol Pot by Nguyen Co Thach. In practical terms, from the viewpoint of the ordinary Cambodian, the strong Western consensus against the Khmer Rouge had backfired and ruined any chance of agreement because it prevented Western delegations from exposing Nguyen Co Thach's scuttling of the peace conference. Out of good (the Western condemnation of Pol Pot) came evil (the destruction of a peace conference). This was not the first time it had happened in history. As Max Weber said in his famous essay, "it is *not* true that good can only follow from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who says this is, indeed, a political infant."²

The morally courageous thing for a Western delegate to have done at that Paris conference would have been to stand up at a press conference and explain why the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge was necessary *if one wanted a peace agreement to end the Cambodians' sufferings*. No Western leader even dreamed of doing so—so strong was the sentiment against the Khmer Rouge. This produced a curious contradiction for moral philosophers: the ostensibly morally correct position (that of excluding the Khmer Rouge) produced immoral consequences—prolonging Cambodia's agony.

This was not by any means the first of such moral dilemmas confronted by Western officials. Weber's essay, mentioned above, notes that all politicians, statesmen and officials will experience a tension between what he calls "an ethic of ultimate ends" and "an

ethic of responsibility". Even more boldly, Weber asserts, "No ethics in the world can dodge the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of 'good' ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones."³ In the search for the "good" of peace for the Cambodian people, Weber would have certainly understood why in practical terms Western officials had to deal with the Khmer Rouge.

ROLE OF WESTERN PUBLIC OPINION

This could well be a fascinating issue for future historians to study: Why did Western public opinion not realise that its moral campaign against the Khmer Rouge was being used to immoral ends by others? It is equally surprising that many in the West were prepared to accept the Vietnamese claim that they provided the bulwark against the return of the Khmer Rouge when it was the Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia in the early 1970s that paved the way for Pol Pot to gain power in Phnom Penh. This can be documented. It was the North Vietnamese army that decimated Lon Nol's army and paved the way for the youthful and relatively inexperienced Khmer Rouge forces to take over Cambodia. The Vietnamese praised Pol Pot's rule right up until the moment that they invaded. When they removed Pol Pot from power, they installed former Khmer Rouge cadres in his place.

There is absolutely no doubt that both Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge deserve all the ignominy heaped upon them. Someday they should be brought to justice. The Vietnamese did the Cambodian people a great favour by removing Pol Pot. All this is true. It is equally true that the sole Vietnamese motive in invading Cambodia was to fulfil a long-standing historical ambition to establish hegemony over Indochina. Through the 1980s many Cambodians agreed that Cambodia faced the threat of extinction as an independent nation. Hence, they reluctantly accepted Pol Pot's argument that without the Khmer Rouge the Cambodian nation that had once almost disappeared in the face of Vietnamese expansionism in the 19th century might not survive in the 20th century. Pol Pot may have been adept at exploiting a deep-seated Cambodian fear for his own

political purposes, but one reason he could do so is that many in the West, insensitive to Cambodian history, insisted that the West should merely recognise the Vietnamese-installed regime of Hun Sen. In the eyes of many Cambodians, acceptance of Vietnamese occupation could have meant the extinction of the Cambodian nation. That was the fundamental reason why many worked with Pol Pot, directly or indirectly.

In short, what these Cambodians did in working with Pol Pot was what Churchill did in working with Stalin—work with a genocidal ruler for national survival. Yet all Cambodians who once worked with Pol Pot were vilified, including Prince Sihanouk (but not Hun Sen). Few stepped back to consider for a minute whether these Cambodians had a legitimate fear that unless they worked with Pol Pot to end the Vietnamese occupation, Cambodia would disappear as a nation and the Cambodian people end up like the Kurds. Many Cambodians understood this possibility well. This is what happened to a minority group in Cambodia, the Chams, who had been driven into Cambodia and out of their homeland by Vietnamese expansionism in previous centuries. The Cambodians did not want to suffer the same fate.

From the viewpoint of the Cambodians, the ferocious Western crusade against Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge had many paradoxical aspects. On the one hand it demonstrated the enormous Western concern over the fate of the Cambodians. Many of those who took part in these campaigns were well intentioned. However, in the great Western concern that the Khmer Rouge should be eliminated at all costs (but *without* any overt Western military involvement), they failed to see that this campaign was being exploited by those whom the Cambodians considered equally or more dangerous in the long run—the Vietnamese. The underlying attitude towards the Cambodians in many newspaper editorials was “we know that Hun Sen is imperfect but as he is the best available, take him.” It would have been fair for a Cambodian to respond: Would any Western society accept such potentially lethal colonisation for themselves?

Unfortunately for the Cambodians, their own problems with the Vietnamese may have been unwittingly caught up in a peculiar

problem in the American psyche, the hangover from the Vietnam War. Their age-old problem with Vietnamese expansionism in Indochina (an expansionism as natural as the United States' expansionism into Mexican territory) somehow became entangled with the efforts of many Americans to come to terms with their own involvement in Indochina, especially with their assessments of Vietnam.

This meant that the questions that the Cambodians posed were not posed in the West. For example, it would be reasonable for the Cambodians to ask: Would Cambodia have been better off if the anti-war movement had not succeeded? Would there have been no Pol Pot then? The record of those who remained silent in the Nazi holocaust has been well studied. But the record of those who encouraged the forces that led to Pol Pot's takeover in 1975 has not even been touched. It is still too sensitive.

Would it be fair for the Cambodians to pose this question: If there had been no hangover from the Vietnam War and if some in the West were not looking for ways to justify to themselves their support for North Vietnam during the Vietnam War, would as many in the West have latched on so quickly to the Vietnamese argument that they had gone into Cambodia to save the Cambodian people from the Khmer Rouge? Looking dispassionately at the events in 1978–79 leading up to the Vietnamese invasion, it was clear that Cambodia had once again become a pawn in a complex power struggle involving the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam. However, instead of focusing on the victim's plight in being caught once again in a power struggle of giants, much of the Western media focused on the Khmer Rouge issue, thereby tacitly condoning the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The Cambodians found themselves in a bizarre situation where many in the West were trying to rescue them from yesterday's plight while the then ongoing power game involving Cambodia as a pawn continued unabated and under-reported.

THE UN PEACE AGREEMENT

It is something of a miracle that despite the public distortion of some of the key issues involved, a comprehensive peace agreement was reached on Cambodia in October 1991. In one of the greatest

historical ironies of the 20th century, all those who tried to use Cambodia as a pawn came to grief: the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam. By late 1991, all wanted to release Cambodia from their grip. The agreement was both brilliant and simple. To “save face” (an Asian requirement) of each of the key protagonists, no one was perceived to be the victor. In place of the then two claimants of Cambodian sovereignty, a nominal Supreme National Council was created to serve as the legal repository of Cambodian sovereignty; but effective power would be handed over to a UN administration that would run the country and enable it to reach a certain degree of normalcy until UN-supervised elections could be held. A ceasefire took effect as soon as the agreement was signed. All the military forces in Cambodia would be regrouped and cantoned, and 70 per cent of them eventually would be disarmed. External military supplies would cease. Most importantly, as the Cambodians would not vote for the Khmer Rouge (present or former cadres) in free and impartial elections, this would effectively prevent the return to power of the Khmer Rouge and consign them to the same fate as all the other communist parties of the non-communist states in Southeast Asia as spent forces left to languish in the jungles.

The peace agreement was a wonderful development. Almost immediately after its signing it opened a new chapter in Southeast Asian history, beginning a process of reconciliation among the long-divided ASEAN and Indochinese states. Every state in the region supported it. Yet after its signing, the Cambodian people found themselves again a victim of Western contradictions.

Under the provisions of the agreement, two Khmer Rouge delegates returned to Phnom Penh in December 1991. Some demonstrations were organised against their return to Phnom Penh. Violence flared out of control. One of the Khmer Rouge delegates, Khieu Samphan, was almost hanged. In their reporting and analysis of this event, almost all the Western media claimed that these were *spontaneous* demonstrations against the Khmer Rouge, failing to ask the obvious question: How could spontaneous demonstrations suddenly surface? The editorials focused on how terrible it was that the Khmer Rouge were again being foisted on the Cambodian

people. A *Washington Post* editorial (Sunday, 1 December 1991) said, for example, "Forgetting the past means forgetting the people who were murdered. That is precisely what the Cambodian people are unable and, to their credit, unwilling to do." These papers could not and did not report the real truth: forces in the Hun Sen regime were trying to scuttle an agreement that would eventually kill not just the Khmer Rouge (who would have great difficulty winning UN-supervised elections) but also the Hun Sen regime, who feared the ballot box almost as much.

Fortunately, in this particular incident, the truth was to surface a few months later. *The New Yorker* carried an extensive description that revealed how the whole incident was stage-managed by the Hun Sen regime. The article said, "While Cambodians had every justification for rising up in anger and attacking the Khmer Rouge compound, the fact is that nothing in Cambodia happens spontaneously."⁴ The day before Khieu Samphan's return, students at the Phnom Penh University were given placards written by Hun Sen's Ministry of Interior and told to go and demonstrate against the return of the Khmer Rouge. When the actual attacks on Khieu Samphan occurred, only 20 or 30 young men, speaking Cambodian with Vietnamese accents, were involved. They were far outnumbered by the policemen and soldiers present. Instead of restraining the attackers, the policemen helped them along. How could the dozens of Western reporters who were present in Phnom Penh then get their story so wrong? Were they afraid that in reporting the truth they would do the Khmer Rouge a favour? How could they have failed to notice that the demonstrations would help those trying to scuttle the peace process, a point, as *The New Yorker* article points out, that was obvious to the Cambodian students? Only *The Economist* (7 December 1991, p. 14) was brave enough to say that those who supported the peace agreement should defend the continued presence of the Khmer Rouge delegates in Phnom Penh, until elections were held.

That dangerous moment passed. The Khmer Rouge delegates returned to Phnom Penh. The correlation of external forces that wanted peace in Cambodia prevailed on the Hun Sen regime to

cease its mischief. The UN peace agreement is back on track. Yet it is more than likely that other such dangerous moments will arise until peace is finally restored to Cambodia.

Some American congressmen have threatened to withhold funding for the UN peace plan on the grounds that it confers “political and moral legitimacy upon the Khmer Rouge” and that it “relies too heavily upon Khmer Rouge cooperation for its success.”⁵ Their intention is to rescue the Cambodians from the Khmer Rouge. But if they succeed in cutting off the funding, the peace plan would disappear, war would resume, and the Khmer Rouge would be back in their element. Once again, if these congressmen succeed, the morally correct position would lead to disaster for the Cambodians. Elizabeth Becker has wisely reminded them that in 1975 it was the congressional decision to “cut back American aid to the Phnom Penh regime,” on the grounds that it “would bring peace more swiftly to Cambodia,” that led to the Khmer Rouge victory.⁶ The Cambodians earnestly hope that Congress will not repeat the mistake it made in 1975.

MORAL OUTRAGE VERSUS CLINICAL TREATMENT

When a new disease or plague emerges, even out of human neglect or wilfulness, any moral outrage against its emergence would be accompanied by dispassionate and clinical analysis to find both its cause and cure. The Khmer Rouge represent no less than a plague on Cambodian society. The outrage has surfaced. The clinical analysis has not, creating yet another moral paradox. How could all those who were so outraged by the Khmer Rouge not devote equal time to finding effective solutions to stamp out the Khmer Rouge?

The Left, in both its old and new forms, fought the hardest against any dispassionate analysis of the Khmer Rouge, accusing any poor soul who tried to do so of moral insensitivity. There was a reason for this virulent behaviour. The Left has a powerful vested interest in portraying the Khmer Rouge as a unique pathological phenomenon, not linked to any other leftist movements. The truth, however, is that Pol Pot represents not a unique disease but only the most extreme form of a common plague mankind has seen—the plague of communism. The fundamental mistake that Pol Pot

and his colleagues made was to interpret Marx and Lenin literally. When these founders of the communist movement called for the extermination of the bourgeoisie, Pol Pot assumed that this meant physical elimination, not just their elimination as a political force. In their early years of power, Pol Pot and his colleagues took great pride that the purest form of communism in the world was to be found in Cambodia. Further dispassionate analysis of the origins of Pol Pot will also show that he could never have come to power on his own. He was propelled into Phnom Penh on the back of the Vietnamese revolution, which in turn received massive support from both the Soviet Union and China.

Such dispassionate analysis actually produces hope for the Cambodian people on at least four counts. First, if Pol Pot was swept into power in Phnom Penh with the high tide of communism, his chances of getting back into power are slim because this high tide has receded. Pol Pot and his movement survive like a few marine species stranded in a small pool left behind on the beach, far from the receded shoreline. If the tide does not come back to claim them, they are doomed in a hostile environment. Southeast Asia represents such a hostile environment. It experienced many huge waves of communist expansionism, with communist parties running riot in virtually all Southeast Asian societies. Today the pathetic relics that remain in Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia survive only as spent forces. Eventually, the Khmer Rouge will share the same fate. The tide of history is against them.

Second, the correlation of forces, to use a favourite Marxist expression, that propelled Pol Pot into Phnom Penh cannot be recreated. Instead, the new correlation of forces favours their eventual extinction if only because all of their supporters in the 1970s, the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam, each for their own reasons, want to see the effective implementation of the UN Cambodian peace agreement. This correlation of forces should be exploited by those implementing the UN peace agreement. If either the Khmer Rouge or the Hun Sen regime violate the peace agreement, their respective patrons should be held accountable for their behaviour.

Third, if both Pol Pot and his offshoot, the Hun Sen regime,

represent nothing more than versions of communist rule, their behaviour can be *predicted*. Communism is not a new phenomenon. There is enough evidence available on the methods that communists use to gain power. Under Leninist rules, all is justified in the fight for power. Lying and cheating are routine. Both the Khmer Rouge and the Hun Sen regime have already demonstrated this in the early days of the UN plan. The Khmer Rouge are violating the peace accords by denying the UN access to territories under their control. The Hun Sen regime (although it is divided) is violating the accords by unleashing its thugs to wipe out or intimidate Cambodians trying to form new political parties. The media reports have expressed surprise that this should have happened. A basic book on communist tactics should have told them what was going to happen. The UN should employ a few experienced anti-communist tacticians to help it anticipate the political behaviour of the Cambodian communists. Their mindset is known; therefore, the behaviour can be predicted.

Fourth, and finally, intelligent tactics should be used against the Khmer Rouge. If the Khmer Rouge believe that the UN plan will be rigged against them in the implementation process, they will only fight like cornered rats, giving no quarter, spilling even more blood. However, if they are convinced that the UN plan will be implemented fairly and impartially, they may give it a try. The Khmer Rouge leaders believe, contrary to Western perceptions, that they still enjoy political support for at least two reasons. First, they represent the least corrupted force in Cambodia. Second, with their impressive anti-Vietnamese credentials, they can portray themselves as true nationalists, as they are trying to do.

Extending the analogy of the beached marine species, there is nothing that would kill these species more than exposure to the open sun. Hence, they will make every effort to look for rocks under which to hide. In the case of the Khmer Rouge, the best tactic would be to lure them out from under the rocks and into the open political environment, where they and their supporters will face both the Cambodian population and the international community. They must be made to feel safe to emerge. The subdued response of the international community to the attempted lynching of Khieu Samphan sent the wrong message

to the Khmer Rouge, that the international community would not protest strongly if other Cambodian parties violated the agreement. This will drive them farther away from the sunlight.

It will be emotionally difficult for some of the Western officials involved in the UN operations to be strictly impartial in dealing with the Khmer Rouge. The temptation to work against them, or to remain silent when the Phnom Penh regime attacks the Khmer Rouge, will be strong. But nothing could imperil the peace agreement more than the perception that it was not being fairly implemented. One should always bear in mind that the best poison pill that could be administered to the Khmer Rouge and guarantee their eventual disappearance from the Cambodian scene is the open, impartial and effective implementation of the UN peace agreement. When all the Cambodian armed forces are disarmed and cantoned, and when the citizens of Phnom Penh feel that they can speak freely and not fear assassination attempts, as they do now, from some thugs sent out by the Phnom Penh regime, then a new political chemistry will emerge on the Cambodian scene. In this new political chemistry, Cambodian society will go along with the global trend and reject all forms of communism, whether it be the Pol Pot or Hun Sen variety. The anomalous situation today, where the strongest and best-financed Cambodian forces are the communist groups, will then end.

CONCLUSION

Through 1992 and 1993, the Cambodians will earnestly hope and pray that the imperilled UN peace plan will be successfully implemented and deliver them from two decades of agony. Their fate hangs on its successful implementation. If it fails, it will rob the Cambodians of effectively their last chance of deliverance from decades of suffering. Under these circumstances, the Cambodians could well pose these questions: Why did the ferocious Western campaign against the Khmer Rouge, which elevated Pol Pot to the great historical ranks of Hitler and Stalin while he (Pol Pot) was still alive, have so little *practical* effect on the Cambodian people? Why did the Cambodian problem take so long to be solved even though it became one of the most powerful symbols of 20th-century

tragedy in the Western mind at a time when the West was globally dominant? Why did Western governments find it so difficult to pay for the UN peace operations when both their citizens and media were so exercised by the Cambodian tragedy? Even more curiously, at the precise historical moment when capitalism declared its victory over communism, the two best-financed Cambodian political forces remained the communist forces: the Khmer Rouge through their access to the Pailin diamond mines, and the Hun Sen regime through their ability to raise money in a corrupt fashion in Phnom Penh. Why did the two non-communist forces find so much difficulty in raising matching funds in the West? Why did the ferocious Western media campaign against the Khmer Rouge help the Cambodian people so little? What was the moral value of championing moral causes *without* paying much heed to the consequences of these campaigns? This may not have been the first time that it has occurred. To quote Weber one last time, "If, however, one chases after the ultimate good in a war of beliefs, following a pure ethic of absolute ends, then the goals may be damaged and discredited for generations, because responsibility for *consequences* is lacking, and the diabolic forces which enter the play remain unknown to the actor."⁷

Perhaps the best response that the West can give to all these questions is to cease its efforts to find morally pure solutions for the Cambodian people and instead concentrate on ensuring that the UN peace plan is effectively and fully implemented. When that is done, Cambodia could well be transformed from a symbol of tragedy to a symbol of hope in the 20th century and the Western conscience would be fully assuaged.

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1. Nancy Caldwell Sorel, "First Encounters: Josef Stalin and Winston Churchill", *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1991, p. 141.
 2. Max Weber, *Politics As a Vocation*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1965, p. 49.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
 4. Stan Sesser, "Report from Cambodia", *The New Yorker*, 18 May 1992, p. 48.
 5. Elizabeth Becker, "Up from Hell", *The New Republic*, 7 February 1992, p. 33.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
 7. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

SMART POWER, CHINESE STYLE

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In the 21st century, we will see the greatest shifts of power ever experienced in human history. Such periods of shifts of power have often led to tension and conflict. Throughout history, there has always been rising tension between the world's greatest power and the world's greatest emerging power.

By this logic of history, there should be rising tension between the world's greatest power today, the US, and the world's greatest emerging power, China. Instead, we are seeing diminishing tension between these two powers. How do we explain this historical anomaly?

Many in the West would like to give the US most of the credit for this. Indeed, many wise American policies have contributed to improving Sino-American relations. Policymakers like Robert Zoellick and Hank Paulson have contributed significantly to these policies. Since Washington, DC, is full of think tanks and analysts, it is reasonable to assume that America is a geopolitically competent power. When I spoke at the esteemed Council on Foreign Relations in New York in March 2008, I pointed out that if we wanted to hear the best geopolitical discussions, we should go to Washington, DC, or New York. However, if we wanted to see the best geopolitical performance, we should go to Beijing. This article explains why.

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HISTORY TEACHES US that the emergence of a new power almost always generates tension and conflict. With the exception of the United States replacing Great Britain, relations between the world's greatest power and the world's greatest emerging power have always been difficult, to say the least. No great power cedes its place easily, as is demonstrated by the present reluctance of Britain and France to give up their anachronistic seats on the UN Security Council.

It is remarkable, then, how little tension there is between the United States, the lone superpower, and China, the world's greatest emerging power. This seemingly unnatural state of affairs could be a result of pure luck. Or it could be the result of extraordinary statesmanship in one or both countries. Certainly both can claim some credit, but any objective study will show that this unnatural state is mostly a result of Beijing's geopolitical competence outweighing Washington's tendency towards incompetence. Indeed, Washington could learn a great deal from Beijing's example.

At first blush, this asymmetry seems odd. After all, there is nothing in China to match the rich array of think tanks and the various processes of policy dialogue that one finds in Washington (and in other intellectual centres like New York and Boston). No country can match America's conceptual output in volume. The story is different when it comes to quality, however. There is little debate heard in Beijing from op-ed pieces, television talk shows or think-tank forums, but there is nevertheless a remarkable ability to think outside the box, particularly with respect to long-term planning. The typical time horizon in Washington hovers somewhere between the daily spin for the evening talk shows and the next election cycle. In Beijing the clear focus is on where China wants to be in 50 years in order to avoid a repetition of the two centuries of humiliation China experienced before finally emerging as a modern power. The desire to permanently erase all traces of that humiliation is a profound motivating factor in the psyche of the Chinese leadership. It ensures national unity on foreign policy issues—as when Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai were able to pursue normal ties with America despite the ongoing madness of the Cultural Revolution.

China's deft geopolitical instincts have deep historical roots. For millennia, Chinese empires, kingdoms and warlords have risen and fallen. The pool of historical wisdom that China can turn to is enormous. Indeed, Deng Xiaoping turned to such ancient wisdom to craft his famous 28 characters, which prescribed seven guidelines for China to follow: (1) *lengjing guancha*, observe and analyse developments calmly; (2) *chenzhuo yingfu*, deal with changes patiently and confidently; (3) *wenzhu zhenjiao*, secure our own position; (4) *taoguang yanghui*, conceal our capabilities and avoid the limelight; (5) *shanyu shouzhuo*, keep a low profile; (6) *juebu dangtou*, never become a leader; and (7) *yousuo zuowei*, strive for achievements.

Point number five is especially significant. It explains much of China's recent behavior in international fora. It also makes it difficult to describe Chinese successes, because the Chinese themselves say so little about them. There is enormous pressure on Chinese policymakers not to appear boastful or triumphant, as keeping a low profile is a carefully calculated element of China's geopolitical strategy. Deng passed away in 1997, but his wisdom and advice remain in effect, as a few recent examples show.

A FREE TRADE COUP

Chinese leaders are astute enough to know that some day, when China's comprehensive national power becomes even more evident, America may try either to contain or roll back Chinese power. Indeed, America has already demonstrated this impulse by strengthening its military ties with Australia and Japan, as well as by including India in the mix. The Chinese know that America is buying an insurance policy against the rise of China. The Chinese also know that even though America neglected ASEAN after the Cold War, America might one day try to use Southeast Asia to check China, as well.

In a preemptive strike against potential American encirclement, China has decided to share its prosperity with its ASEAN neighbours. As quoted in the *Financial Times* of February 19, 2007, Joshua Kurlantzick warns:

Chinese 'soft power' in Southeast Asia is now so potent that, for the first time since 1945, the United States is 'facing a situation in which another country's appeal outstrips its own in an important region.' China's aid to the Philippines is now four times that offered by America; twice as many Indonesians now study in China as in the United States.

With strong economic ties to China, the ASEAN countries are not disposed to join any containment policy. Remarking on China's ASEAN policy, National University of Singapore scholar Sheng Lijun writes:

China is no longer using the simplistic either black-or-white, either friend-or-enemy attitude, as in the Cold War, to look at the complex world now. This has fundamentally changed its ASEAN policy and added a lot of flexibility to its diplomacy, which accounts heavily for its initiatives in the China-ASEAN FTA.¹

The boldest and most effective manifestation of this new strategy was China's decision to offer a free trade agreement at the ASEAN-China Summit in November 2001. A senior official from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs told me that the Chinese offer struck Japan like a "bolt from the blue". Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji stunned the ASEAN leaders by offering unilateral concessions to the ASEAN countries, including an "early harvest" provision, giving duty-free access to the Chinese market on 600 agricultural products. Chinese leaders then confirmed their seriousness by completing negotiations for the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (FTA) in record time. A year after the proposal, the agreement was signed by Chinese and ASEAN leaders at the eighth ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh. By its terms, the two sides will establish an FTA within 10 years, first with the six original ASEAN states (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), then expanding to include the less-developed members (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar) by 2015. China also accorded the three non-WTO ASEAN members, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, most-favoured nation status. When fully implemented, the ASEAN-China

FTA will constitute a common market of 1.9 billion people with a combined gross domestic product of \$3 trillion.²

In theory, an FTA is merely a trade agreement. In practice, it represents a strategic calculation that the two parties have long-term interests in forging a closer partnership, or that one party has an interest in strengthening the other. The US decision to offer Mexico trade access through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was driven by a cold calculation that if America did not help strengthen the Mexican economy (even at the cost of exporting jobs to Mexico), then Mexico would end up sending more illegal immigrants to America. Hence, when Mexico joined NAFTA, it appeared to be the big short-term beneficiary in economic terms. In reality, the United States benefited more by reducing the potential for political and economic instability at its own doorstep.

Similar geopolitical calculations drove China's offer. By tying ASEAN into the Chinese zone of prosperity, China created a level of economic interdependence that will make it difficult for ASEAN countries to contemplate anti-Chinese orientations in future. Thus, Chinese initiatives towards ASEAN have paid China significant political dividends. By any objective measure, Japan has given more aid and support to ASEAN than China, but when Japan campaigned for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council a few years ago, only one ASEAN country, Singapore, publicly supported its bid. (Another, Vietnam, offered support privately.) The remaining ASEAN countries hedged their bets and remained silent after strong lobbying by China.

What makes the ASEAN-China deal so remarkable is that when ASEAN was created in 1967, its main political purpose was to work with America to check the threat of communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indeed, China was then supporting several communist parties in the region that were attempting to overthrow their governments. Yet when ASEAN held a summit to celebrate its 40th anniversary in November 2007, it was China that sent its Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, to attend the celebrations. Neither George W. Bush, nor Dick Cheney nor Condoleezza Rice turned up. Indeed, two months earlier, Bush had suddenly cancelled a US-ASEAN

Summit set for September 2007 so that he could make another secret stopover in Baghdad. Similarly, Rice had failed to turn up at the regular ASEAN Ministerial Meetings in 2005 and 2007. (Her predecessor wisely never missed one.)

In each of these instances, American decisions were driven by short-term considerations; ASEAN's long-term value was ignored, as senior American officials have admitted to me in private. By contrast, all Chinese decisions have been driven by clear long-term goals. Joseph Nye captured the result of these bold Chinese moves in Southeast Asia:

The United States was noticeably absent from the guest list when countries from Australia to India gathered recently in Malaysia for the first East Asian Summit. It was a meeting which some fear marks the first step in China's long-term ambition to build a new regional power structure, known as the East Asian Community, that excludes Washington. Couple that with a recent BBC poll of 22 countries, which found that nearly half the respondents saw Beijing's influence as positive compared to 38% who said the same for the U.S., and it is clear that the rise of China's soft power—at America's expense—is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed.³

To understand the remarkable turnaround in China-ASEAN relations, try to imagine America making a similar effort in Latin America. Most Latin American leaders, with the exception of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, try to maintain good relations with Washington. Sheer American power dictates this reality. Yet virtually no Latin American leaders would dare repeat today what Argentine Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella said at the end of the Cold War, that Argentina wanted to have “carnal relations” with America. Today, public opinion surveys show strong anti-Americanism in Latin America, even higher than the usual, fashionable variety. The two largest Latin American states, Brazil and Argentina, have swung leftward and now keep a politically useful distance from the United States.

Even more tellingly, two Latin American countries, Chile and Mexico, joined others in depriving the United States of the crucial

UN Security Council endorsement it needed in March 2003 to legitimise the American invasion of Iraq. Neither then President Ricardo Lagos of Chile nor the then President Vicente Fox of Mexico were inherently anti-American or anti-Western. Both were friends of America. But they were so appalled by the American justification for the war that they felt they had no choice but to withhold support. Indeed, both leaders privately tried to caution America against rushing into Iraq and urged the Bush Administration to give Saddam Hussein one last chance. They provided wise advice; the Bush Administration subsequently paid a heavy price for invading Iraq without Security Council sanction.

LISTENING TO LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA

It is odd: America is one of the most open societies in the world, yet when it comes to listening to the rest of the world or understanding the views of others, America instead resembles a closed society. Indian political scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta once compared India and China by saying, “India is an open society with a closed mind; China is a closed society with an open mind.” The same comparison may well be made between America and China.

The Chinese have developed a remarkable capacity to understand the voices of others around the globe, a facility reflected in the contrasting fortunes of the American and Chinese diplomatic services. The American Foreign Service has never been so demoralised. Over the decades, as ever more American ambassadorial posts have gone to political appointees, the Foreign Service has progressively become less attractive and every day draws in ever less of the talent of the calibre of a Lawrence Eagleburger or Thomas Pickering—men who could rise to the very top of the State Department ladder. Today, the top rungs of the Foreign Service ladder have been sawn off. With such a short ladder to climb, there is little incentive for the best and brightest to leave Goldman Sachs to join the State Department. By contrast, China’s rising international stature has enhanced the standing of Chinese diplomats globally. The Chinese Foreign Service attracts the best and brightest, many of whom are appointed to senior ambassadorial

posts at a relatively young age.

American diplomacy is being trumped by Chinese diplomacy through the powerful combination of enhanced geopolitical acumen and better professional diplomacy. In several regions I have visited, including the Middle East and Africa, local observers marvel at the linguistic skills of the Chinese diplomats sent to their countries. While Chinese diplomats walk around freely without escort, American diplomats live and work in fortress-like compounds, and venturing outside only rarely and with great care in many countries. Tom Friedman once recounted this story from a Turkish industrialist:

I was just on a tour to Amman and we stopped our tourist van in front of the U.S. Embassy there. We asked the guide why they need all these tanks around it, and the guy told us that within this American Embassy they have everything they need so they can survive without going outside.... I felt really sorry for the Americans there.⁴

The Western media fails to appreciate the nature and depth of Chinese geopolitical acumen. There is a considerable amount of alarmist reporting in the Western media about new Chinese initiatives in Latin America and Africa, the former a zone traditionally well outside of Chinese influence. Most of these reports suggest that China has become yet another rapacious great power out to dispossess the poor, defenseless natives of their precious raw materials. No Western commentary dares to suggest the truth: China's entry into these regions is driven not by short-term opportunism, but by a careful calculation that in the smaller, interdependent world we are moving towards, China will inevitably have more concentrated dealings with these regions. It is part of China's 50-year plan.

In the Western Hemisphere, China is taking advantage of the failure of half-hearted market reforms and Washington's unwillingness enthusiastically to pursue genuine "good neighbour" relations in Latin America. China's flexibility contrasts with more rigid US approaches, as noted by Stephen Johnson of the Heritage Foundation:

Obtaining any kind of assistance from the United States requires compliance on a battery of restrictions, including observing human rights, protecting the environment, promising not to send U.S. military personnel to the International Criminal Court (ICC), not assisting current or former terrorists, and not using U.S.-provided equipment for any other than its stated purpose. American commitments also depend on legislative approval and can be reversed if the mood in the U.S. Congress shifts. China, on the other hand, can bargain on the spot without a lot of caveats.⁵

In Africa, China is increasingly making its presence felt in many ways, beyond the quest for natural resources, and not all of them are as controversial as the oil business. Under UN auspices, the China-Africa Business Council opened in March 2005. Headquartered in China, it was created to boost trade and development in the region. China has peacekeepers in Liberia and has contributed to construction projects in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia. China is the only country to host a massive conference, the China-Africa Summit 2006, which was attended by a large number of African leaders in November 2006. There are an estimated 900 investment projects on the African continent financed with Chinese money.

As Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's eight-day tour to Africa began in June 2006, the official English-language *China Daily* highlighted the political tagline of "non-interference". One editorial argued that:

China has been offering no-strings attached financial and technical aid to the most needy in Africa. It has been encouraging the African countries to develop their economy through trade and investment in infrastructure and social institutions, without dictating terms for political and economic reforms.

A Western diplomat based in Beijing commented, "It reads like a direct rebuke of US and Western powers' foreign policy on the continent. ... [I]t is meant to present them as a more attractive world power than the U.S."⁶ By the end of 2006, China had invested about \$6.27 billion in Africa, and two-way trade rocketed from \$10 billion in 2000 to about \$50 billion in 2007.

LONG MARCH TO LONG VIEW

Again, the point is that the Chinese leadership takes the long view in a way that few Western leaders seem capable of doing these days. Determined to avoid future humiliations, China has pursued the single-minded goal of achieving a level of prosperity that will ensure its global status. This policy was spelled out in a 1991 editorial by Secretary Yang Baibing of the CCP Central Committee Secretariat in the Party's mass-circulation *People's Daily*:

We must make full use of the current favorable conditions both at home and abroad to push our economic construction onto a new stage and lay a foundation for rapid development in the next century. If we say that from mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, the Chinese nation finally stood up through more than 100 years of heroic struggles, in which one stepped into the breach as another fell, then from the mid-1900s to the mid-2000s, through another 100 years of struggle, our country will completely shake off poverty and truly stride along toward becoming a developed and prosperous country as a giant in the East.⁷

China has also made a major effort to learn from the mistakes of other major powers. In 2006, China Central Television broadcast an engaging 12-part documentary, *Rise of the Great Powers*, which analysed the emergence of nine great powers, including Spain, England and America, and endorsed the idea that China should study the experiences of nations and empires it once condemned as aggressors. Far from promoting an ideological worldview, the series attempted to be as objective as possible. The message conveyed to the Chinese public was subtle: China can become a great power, but must first understand why great powers succeeded and failed in the past. "Our China, the Chinese people, the Chinese race has become revitalised and is again stepping onto the world stage", said Qian Chengdan, a professor at Beijing University and the intellectual father of the series. "It is extremely important for today's China to be able to draw some lessons from the experiences of others."

The most difficult relationship between China and any of its neighbours is clearly the one with Japan. The wounds have not

fully healed from the Japanese occupation of China from 1931 to 1945. From time to time, the Chinese perceive the Japanese as behaving insensitively, demonstrating a lack of remorse for Japanese atrocities committed during the occupation. The Chinese were angered by then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's decision each year during his term in office to visit the Yasukuni shrine, which includes 14 convicted war criminals among its honoured dead. One of the lowest points in the Sino-Japanese relationship occurred in April 2005, when widespread Chinese demonstrations followed the publication of a Japanese history textbook that downplayed Japan's military aggression in the First Sino-Japanese War, Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II.

The Japanese haven't been the only ones to make mistakes. In November 1998, for example, Chinese President Jiang Zemin made a six-day state visit to Japan that was nearly a disaster. For reasons still unclear, Jiang decided to use his visit to lecture every senior Japanese official he met on Japan's poor record of atonement for its sins in World War II. In his public speeches, Jiang expressed his unhappiness with Japan's reluctance to apologise unequivocally for its aggression during its occupation in China.

Despite the enormous difficulties and tensions built into the Sino-Japanese relationship, the Chinese leadership has worked hard to ensure that this relationship never went completely off the rails. China even managed to put the relationship back on a positive track during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's three-day official visit to Tokyo in April last year. Wen delivered a speech to the Japanese parliament that was both politically acceptable to Japan's detractors in China and politically palatable to a skeptical Japanese public. He displayed enormous political skill, taking personal charge of this challenge:

I did a lot of preparation. Every sentence is written by me, and I did all the research work myself. Why? Because I feel our nation's development has reached a critical moment. We need to have a peaceful and conducive international environment.⁸

The political difficulties inherent in the Sino-Japanese relationship are probably as intractable as those between Israel and Palestine, Greece and Turkey, India and Pakistan, or even the United States and Iran. Considering that 35 million Chinese were killed in the Japanese occupation, the political wounds of the Sino-Japanese relationship may be greater than any of the others. Nevertheless, since China has a deep national interest in preserving good ties with all its neighbours, it is prepared to accept Deng's advice to "swallow bitter humiliation" and focus on making China a great nation again.

Having failed in the great power game in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, as well as having wasted the first eight decades of the 20th century in mostly futile efforts to modernise, few serious observers expected China to emerge as the most astute and effective geopolitical player of the 21st century. But it is doing so, and this is no mean feat, for the geopolitical chessboard is far more complex than ever before.

The international politics of the 21st century will for the first time in human history constitute a system that is simultaneously global in scope and less than wholly Western in character. The decisions that affect the world can no longer be made in a few Western capitals whose cultural parameters in analysing problems and solutions are essentially similar. New cultural and political perspectives are entering the scene. On this more complex chessboard, most Western commentators expected (with good reason) that the Western powers would continue to be the shrewdest and most adept geopolitical actors. Instead, they have floundered; the Europeans because they are introspective to a fault, and the Americans arguably because they are not introspective enough. Western incompetence has provided significant opportunities that China has been able to exploit without paying any serious political price.

The real extent of China's geopolitical acumen manifests itself best, perhaps, in the way it has managed the Sino-American relationship. China's record is not perfect. It is hard to understand, for example, why it initially turned the US aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk* away from a port call in Hong Kong, thereby depriving many

American sailors and their families of a Thanksgiving reunion in November 2007, only later to reverse course and allow the call after it was too late for the *Kitty Hawk* to turn around. The American Navy retaliated immediately by sailing the *Kitty Hawk* through the Taiwan Strait on its way back to Japan. (US aircraft carriers have traditionally avoided this; even during heightened tensions in 1996, President Clinton refrained from sending two carriers into the Taiwan Strait.)

But the Chinese do not make many such mistakes. For example, within two months of George W. Bush's inauguration, a crisis erupted when a US spy plane was downed near Hainan Island following an accident with a Chinese fighter jet. There were a few tense days before the American airmen were released, and the episode could have presaged a difficult Sino-American relationship. Instead, seven years later, it is amazing how solid and stable the Sino-American relationship has become. What happened?

Some of the credit goes to a geopolitical accident: 9/11. After the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked, the Bush Administration shifted its strategic sights to the Islamic world, especially Afghanistan and Iraq. China became an afterthought, something for the State Department to worry about. China could have remained astutely passive in the face of the crisis America was facing, but instead the Chinese acted on the wisdom embedded in the Chinese rendition for the word "crisis", the combination of the Chinese characters for "danger" and "opportunity". China realised that 9/11 provided an opportunity to improve ties with America, and it took full advantage.

One story I heard in UN corridors in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq demonstrated Chinese astuteness. Soon after America invaded Iraq in March 2003 without a legitimising UN Security Council resolution, it realised that it would have a problem if the international community decided that a subsequent US-led American military occupation of Iraq was "illegal". If that became the accepted international understanding of the occupation, a court anywhere could have declared Iraqi oil sales illegal and therefore subject to international seizure. The only way out of this legal

quandary was to get an enabling UN Security Council resolution that declared the occupation “legal” under international law. After the bruising battles with France, Germany and Russia in the UN Security Council a few months earlier, there was no guarantee that America would succeed in this. In the end, however, Washington did succeed with UNSC Resolution 1511, adopted on October 16, 2003. I subsequently asked a senior US diplomat which country had been the most helpful in securing this resolution for America. He replied, without hesitation, “China”.

Why did the Chinese do this? Several possibilities come to mind. Beijing could have subscribed to the general sentiment in the Council that since America has already decided to defy the wishes of the UN Security Council on Iraq, little would be gained by further battles over a *fait accompli*. Or the Chinese may have shrewdly calculated that their interests would be best served by a longer, rather than a shorter, American stay in Iraq.

It is worth recalling that around that time, the Bush Administration was still ebullient about its successful invasion of Iraq. American television replayed scenes of the giant statue of Saddam being toppled in Firdos Square, with Iraqis smashing bits of the toppled statue with their shoes. Vice President Cheney had said that the invading soldiers would be “greeted as liberators”, and so for a while it appeared they were. When President Bush landed on the aircraft carrier on May 1, 2003 under the banner, “Mission Accomplished”, the Chinese might have calculated that by supporting UNSC Resolution 1511 they were only confirming and supporting an American victory.

Not likely, however. Chinese policymakers are better students of history than their American counterparts, and they probably suspected that Bush’s proclamation of victory would soon prove false, or at least premature. If so, they would have calculated that America had walked into a quagmire that might in due course prove useful to China. And it soon did. In 2003, while America was busy with Iraq, the President of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian, unwisely decided to push his pro-independence agenda. Given the ideological orientation of the Bush Administration, it would have been natural

for Chen to count on support from Washington. Instead, he received the opposite. No recent US president has been as tough on Taiwan as George W. Bush. What appears to be an informal *quid pro quo* must go down as one of the biggest coups Chinese diplomacy has secured in Washington.

Against this backdrop, it was natural for China to be helpful to the Bush Administration on the North Korean issue, as well. There is no doubt that the Chinese government was enormously upset when Kim Jong-Il decided to explode his (mini) nuclear bomb on October 9, 2006. This could have triggered a crisis as severe as the one developing between the United States and Iran. Instead, barely a year later, the Bush Administration was thanking China for helping defuse the crisis, proving once again that when China applied itself to a geopolitical issue, it would inevitably achieve success. By contrast, the American handling of the Iran issue has so far proven unsuccessful by any measure, and embarrassing by several others.

There is a very simple explanation for why China has become geopolitically more competent than America: China is aware that the world has changed. China does careful *global* geopolitical calculations in which it tries to objectively analyse its geopolitical assets and liabilities. It then works out a long-term plan to enhance its assets and minimise its liabilities. Each time a new problem surfaces, China looks for advantage in it, assuming that it must adapt to the world, not shape the world as it wishes.

America believes the opposite. One deep-seated assumption among many US strategic thinkers is that the United States is so powerful that it can dictate the terms of world order without having to adapt American policies. This arrogance also explains why the United States has twice failed to take advantage of major historical opportunities to shape world order to its advantage. The first opportunity came when the Cold War ended. The Clinton Administration reacted with a combination of hubris and complacency. It tried to spread the gospel of democracy, abandoned old useful allies (like Pakistan and Indonesia), and became completely indifferent to mounting global challenges that did not fit old categories. The mood of triumphalism prevented any kind of

clear strategic thinking. The Bush Administration blew an equally valuable opportunity after 9/11. Instead of riding the global wave of good will and sympathy towards America, the Bush Administration progressively alienated virtually every major global constituency with its actions in Iraq and elsewhere. It could be said (to paraphrase Abba Eban) that America never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

It is never too late to attempt a comprehensive and global analysis of the geopolitical assets and liabilities that America has in the world. Undoubtedly, America has many assets, not least the many reservoirs of good will America has accumulated over decades. Not all has been lost, but the liabilities have grown by leaps and bounds. The Iraq war is one of them, but so is America's unbalanced pro-Israel policy on the Palestine issue, and without doubt the inability of American strategic discourse to discuss objectively the Israel-Palestine issue has become a Chinese geopolitical asset. The rise of China is warmly welcomed throughout the Islamic world. China is increasingly seen as the only card that the Islamic world can play to temper America's unwise geopolitical policies. Nothing demonstrates this better than China's relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia has been one of America's most loyal allies for more than 50 years. Yet when one visits Saudi Arabia today, one senses the Saudis' exasperation with America. Instead of dealing with a smart and sophisticated ally of the kind they were used to in the Cold War, the Saudis have to cope with a geopolitically incompetent Administration driven by short-term expediency and unable to consider the long-term impact of its own behaviour. This has provided China an opportunity.

For many years, Saudi Arabia, an anti-communist country, kept Communist China at arms length and, indeed, maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan until 1990. Yet on April 22, 2006, when Hu Jintao left America after a rather unpleasant state visit (he was subject to a tirade by a Falun Gong supporter at a White House press conference, the accidental playing of the Taiwanese national anthem, a television scene of President Bush pulling him by the collar, and so on), he paid a three-day visit to Saudi Arabia during

which he signed agreements on defense, security and trade. He also signed a deal for a \$2 billion oil refinery and petrochemical project in northeastern China to be financed by the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC). Earlier that year in January, King Abdullah had made a full-scale state visit to Beijing.

The Islamic world is not the only place where China has benefited from America's geopolitical fumbles. Russia is another country that should be a natural geopolitical ally of the United States. Any objective assessment of Russia's long-term circumstances shows that Russia has far more to fear from the rise of China than it does from America. If America seeks a natural partner to work with in managing the rise of China, Russia should have been it. Russia's longest border is with China. It has vast, unpopulated steppes right next to populous China. Despite all this, America's many geopolitical missteps have driven Russia and China closer together. Russia and China have used the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to squeeze American influence out of Central Asia, as illustrated by the fact that when the Bush Administration attempted to obtain "observer status" at the SCO in 2005 it was rebuffed.

None of this means that all is lost for America. A dynamic and rapidly changing world provides daily opportunities for America to redress the situation. However, for America to take advantage of its opportunities, it has to match China by engaging in similarly comprehensive analyses of both its global assets and liabilities. Essentially, Washington needs two parallel tracks when it comes to strategic thinking, one to manage the daily challenge of media spin concerning issues like Darfur and Kosovo, and another to manage the long-term challenges America faces geopolitically. For now, America attempts only the former.

All this might appear too cynical or Machiavellian to many American minds, but I doubt it. In all my encounters with individual American thinkers, I have found them as sophisticated and aware of global realities as any Chinese. The many politically correct constraints on American strategic discourse, however, seem to prevent them from expressing publicly what they readily admit to me privately. That need not be the case, as I am also confident that

the American population is equally sophisticated and wise enough to understand Max Weber's advice: "It is *not* true that good can only follow from good, and evil only from evil; but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who says this is, indeed, a political infant." If China can heed this advice, so can America.

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PART 4

GLOBAL CONCERNS

THE UN AND THE US: AN INDISPENSABLE PARTNERSHIP

Unilateralism & US Foreign Policy: International Perspectives.

Edited by David M. Malone and Yuen Foong Khong.

Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003

One quirk in my diplomatic career is that I have been posted as ambassador to the UN not once, but twice. My Hindu ancestors would surely believe that this was fate: I was born on United Nations day.

As a result I have developed a deep empathy and affection for the UN. Among the hardheaded thinkers, it is considered softheaded to be a defender of the UN. The UN therefore needs a hardheaded defence.

In today's world, the most important threat that the UN faces is the attitude of the world's only superpower. Were the United States to walk away from the UN, the UN would collapse, like the League of Nations. Hence, to avoid a repetition of that sad chapter, the international community must persuade the United States that it serves American national interests to have a strong UN. This is what this essay tries to do. It has also been published in a volume of essays entitled *Unilateralism & US Foreign Policy*, edited by David M. Malone and Yuen Foong Khong, and published by Lynne Rienner in January 2003.

The events around the Iraq war of March/April 2003 once again demonstrated the fragility of the US-UN relationship. Just before going to war, the United States and United Kingdom sought to obtain a UN Security Council Resolution. They failed but

nevertheless went to war. Inevitably, this was seen to generate a huge crisis. As Kofi Annan said, “The war exposed deep divisions in the international community, with accusations of double agendas.” He added, “The war in Iraq brought to the fore a host of questions of principle and practice that challenge the United Nations and the international community as a whole.” This Iraq episode vividly illustrated the fragility of the US-UN relationship. Hence, the need to spell out clearly the strategic rationale for a strong US-UN relationship remains as important as ever.

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IN SEPTEMBER 2000, on the eve of the Millennium Summit, I wrote in a volume of essays edited by the Permanent Representative of India to the UN the following:

Daily, the forces of globalisation are generating greater and greater interdependence. Actions in one corner of the world can affect a distant corner relatively quickly. Most people living outside the US can feel and understand the impact of globalisation: they feel a loss of autonomy each day. Most Americans do not feel this, or not yet. They live in one of the most powerful countries seen in the history of man. Sheer power and two huge oceans make Americans unaware of how the world is changing. The great paradox here is that the world's most open society is among the least well informed on the inevitable impact of global changes. A tidal wave of change is already on its way to American shores.¹

Rereading this paragraph after September 11, 2001, it is clear that the tidal wave of change has reached American shores. The events of the day were a great tragedy. The entire world joined the United States in condemning these heinous terrorist attacks. But the attacks also clearly demonstrated that we have truly shrunk and become a small interdependent globe.

The key challenge of the 21st century will be to manage this shrinking globe as the forces of globalisation generate growing interdependence. The need for multilateral institutions and processes will grow in tandem. But multilateralism will only succeed if the great powers of the day, and especially the United States, support multilateralism.

Through most of the 20th century, as the United States progressively expanded its power relative to every other state, it treated multilateral institutions with either benign neglect or deliberate constraints. It was no accident that the League of Nations disappeared. At various moments in the late 20th century, when American power saw little use for the UN, the UN, too, faced many precarious moments. It could have disappeared. Fortunately, today, the UN's survival is not in doubt. But it may only survive in its present, crippled form—accepted as part of the international

furniture but hobbled carefully to avoid giving it a major role. The least likely possibility for the UN is that it will emerge as a dynamic multilateral institution whose historical moment has finally arrived—fulfilling its potential to cope with the new interdependent and interconnected world generated by globalisation.

This essay argues that after September 11, 2001, it may serve American national interests to strengthen rather than weaken the UN. Virtually every other state has accepted the fact that the world needs stronger multilateral institutions and processes. However, given the enormous and overarching power of the United States, multilateralism cannot survive or develop in the 21st century without US support. No appeal to universal ideals or principles will convince the American body politic to support multilateralism. Only an appeal to national self-interest will do so. This is what this essay will attempt to do.²

The essay has three parts. The first provides a brief historical description. It describes the processes and events that led to the development of a weakened UN. The second attempts to analyse the causes and consequences of US behaviour. The third and final part suggests some prescriptions that could both strengthen multilateralism and enhance US national interests.

A HISTORY OF US-UN RELATIONS

The history of the US-UN relationship is long and complex.³ Several books spell out well this complexity. The best recent volume is Edward Luck's *Mixed Messages*. Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *Unvanquished: A US-UN Saga* provides a unique perspective of a man who felt injured by the United States. This essay cannot attempt to do a fair summary in a few paragraphs.

In recent years, the main issues in the US-UN relationship have been ostensibly financial. Since the mid-1980s, from the days of the Reagan Administration, the United States held back paying its assessed dues to the UN, leading to arrears totalling some \$1.7 billion by the end of 2000. The primary reason the United States gave for this withholding was that the UN had become a fat and bloated bureaucracy that needed to be reformed. Undoubtedly, some of the

criticisms were justified. But a small personal anecdote may help to explain why some apparently useless UN institutions survive.

In the mid-1980s, I was a member of the group of 18 high-level 'experts' set up to reform the UN. One of our key goals was to trim the fat off the UN. It wasn't easy. Every UN institution we found had some key stakeholder pressing for its retention. Finally, after much effort, we discovered what we thought was a moribund UN Committee on Taxation. All of us agreed that this was not a natural field for UN expertise. We agreed to shut it down. At the eleventh hour, just as we were about to finalise the report, the US expert walked in. Sheepishly, he said that the US Treasury saw great value in preserving the UN Committee on Taxation. So we did.

This is a little anecdote, but it also illustrates that the UN has tried to be sensitive, rather than insensitive, to American concerns. Most Americans will be surprised, perhaps even shocked, by this statement. Some will remember the raging debates in the UN General Assembly, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, when it seemed to produce a string of anti-American resolutions. Two of the most famous were, firstly, the resolution equating Zionism with racism (and this was probably the UN's lowest moment) and, secondly, the resolution calling for a new international economic order. At least two US Ambassadors to the UN, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Jeanne Kirkpatrick, became famous by being seen to be representative of a United States that could say "No" to the UN.

It is true that the US-UN relationship has had its share of difficulties. But the UN is not a single unit. Any discussion of its role needs to be based on conceptual clarity. In reality, the UN is actually a family of institutions. Some are completely independent, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Some are related to and dependent on it, like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). But at the core, three principal organs play critically different roles: the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly and the UN Secretariat.

The Security Council represents the aristocracy. Within it, the five permanent representatives (the United States, Russia, China,

the United Kingdom and France) exercise tremendous powers, both formally and informally. As the UN Charter confers upon the Security Council “primary responsibility for peace and security”, it is the only body that authoritatively deals with vital issues of war and peace. Decisions of the Council, taken by 15 members, are binding on all 189 UN member states.

The UN General Assembly represents the masses. All 189 member states, in an affirmation of the principle of sovereign equality, have an equal vote in the General Assembly. But the decisions of the Assembly are not binding, even though most are adopted by consensus. At best, they are recommendations.

Finally, there is the UN Secretariat. Technically, it is only the implementing arm of the UN. It is accountable to the Assembly in theory, but in practice it pays greater heed to the views of the Council (which has a decisive say in the appointment of the Secretary-General). The Secretary-General does have a capacity to launch independent initiatives and act as a moral force. The personal prestige and stature of the individual Secretary-General does matter, as demonstrated by the current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

Most of the troubles that the United States has had with the UN have been with the General Assembly, which has produced resolutions causing the United States discomfort. But none of these resolutions had the power to hurt the United States, since they were at best (or worst) recommendations, not decisions. But both the Secretariat (including the Secretary-General) and the Security Council have been sensitive and responsive to American concerns. Only one recent Secretary-General, Boutros-Ghali, was perceived to be taking stances independent of the United States. His term was not renewed because of an American veto.

It is vital to mention here that the General Assembly has also been critical of other major powers. In the 1980s, especially during Cuba's chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement, it was generally assumed that the General Assembly, with its Third World majority, would naturally take pro-Soviet positions during the Cold War. But the General Assembly was equally critical of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the (Soviet-supported) Vietnamese invasion of

Cambodia. The United States cheered when this happened. Speaking in the UN General Assembly in 1985, on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the UN, Margaret Thatcher, the then British Prime Minister, said, “When we ask about shortcomings we should start by looking at ourselves. The United Nations is only a mirror held up to our own uneven, untidy and divided world. If we do not like what we see there is no point in cursing the mirror, we had better start by reforming ourselves.”

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of those like Mrs Thatcher, public opinion in the United States turned increasingly against the UN throughout the 1980s, especially in the Republican administrations that were traditionally less sympathetic to the UN. These US-UN frictions became more acute when the Cold War ended. With the end of the Soviet Union, the United States no longer needed a friendly UN for some anti-Soviet causes. Attacking the UN carried no costs for the United States. There was a brief interlude of harmony between the United States and the UN, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War. The UN played a constructive role in helping to build the coalition and legitimise the war. This harmony did not last long. The problem of withheld dues was never resolved.

It is therefore not surprising that US efforts to control or constrain the UN increased in pace through the 1990s. This happened even though a generally pro-UN and sympathetic Democratic Administration was in place from 1993–2000. American withholdings increased significantly. The United States came perilously close to losing its vote in the General Assembly, which (if it had indeed happened) could have led to a repetition of the League of Nations experience, with the United States renouncing membership in the world body. This might be seen as another of history’s interesting “might-have-beens”. But if it had indeed happened, it would have left the United States at a tremendous disadvantage in the battle against terrorism that has been the focus of US foreign policy since September 11, 2001.

By the dawn of the 21st century, the US-UN financial crisis had crested. Thanks to dynamic American diplomacy, under the leadership of Richard Holbrooke, US Ambassador to the UN, the

United States succeeded in lowering its annual assessments to the UN. Under the new formula, the less rich agreed to pay more to allow the richest country in the world to pay less than what it would have paid if the same rule applied to all states. [Note: I have appended to this essay an article I wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* on October 30, 1986, entitled “US Doesn’t Bear Excessive Share of UN Costs”, as its key arguments remain valid today.] A “deal” was reached between the United States and the other 188 member states in December 2000 to resolve the financial crisis. However, the final payments under this deal were made only after September 11, 2001, a telling indication of the real considerations that drive US-UN relations.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCE OF US ACTIONS

In the 1980s and 1990s, when the US media reported on the US-UN relationship, all of the focus was on these financial troubles. The debate was of course complex. But in many American minds a firm impression was left that the United States was doing essentially the right thing in withholding its assessed dues to the UN, in an effort to discipline a fat, bloated international bureaucracy. There was also a perception that the United States had been “over-taxed”.⁴

The sad part of this debate was that the real issue at stake in the controversy—which concerned power—never broke the surface. Since the activist days of Dag Hammarskjöld, the last UN Secretary-General in 40 years to attempt to forge a new role for the UN as an international conscience and an independent global actor, the major powers have tacitly agreed that, whatever their differences, they were all better off with a less independent and more compliant UN. Hence, for the past few decades, the UN has been relegated to a peripheral rather than a central role in international affairs. The UN was told clearly to steer clear of many important and vital international issues, such as the Vietnam War and (after some initial involvement) the Middle East peace process, even though the Charter clearly mandates the Security Council with the “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”. The big, silent ‘conspiracy’ that has surrounded the UN since its creation is a tacit understanding among all major powers, including both the Soviet

Union and the United States during the Cold War, that they were better off with a weaker UN. For most of its existence, the UN has been crippled not by accident, but by design.

The difficulty in substantiating these arguments is that no major power, not even an open society like the United States, has fully admitted its real agenda vis-à-vis the UN. The complex American political process makes it even harder to arrive at simple explanations.

In the past two decades, no power has done as much damage to the UN as the United States. Much of this damage resulted from an irrational and angry US reaction to the Third World domination of the agenda of the UN General Assembly and other multilateral fora in the 1970s and early 1980s. But when the Third World domination ended, the US attacks against the UN continued, often in an incoherent form. As Gene Lyons has noted, "The United States has been seemingly obsessed with reforming UN management and dealing with overloaded bureaucracies, overlapping programs, and unaudited finances—not without reason but without equally expounding on where the world is going and how the UN fits in."⁵

Neither an ostensibly bloated bureaucracy nor an apparent waste of funds can explain the growing negative agenda that the United States has had towards the UN. The UN costs the international community only about \$1 billion a year—an infinitesimal portion of the global GNP.

It would not be 'rational' for a major power like the United States to expend so much energy, or risk so much political capital, for such a tiny sum of money. Accordingly, deeper considerations must be driving such policies. The United States is, ultimately, a rational actor in world politics. And it would be 'rational' for any major power to try to minimise external constraints on its freedom of action generated by multilateral institutions and processes. Many other nation-states, of course, wish that they had such an option. But few have the power to defy the will of the international community.

From the origins of the interstate system, no strong power has allowed itself to be subject to rules set by weaker nations, unless these rules benefit it also. The United States has clearly been the most

benign great power in the history of man. It is reasonable to assume that any other nation with the enormous relative power of the United States would probably have behaved far worse. But it is 'rational' for great powers to walk away from multilateral constraint. As the United States is a complex society that prides itself as being based on the rule of law, domestic debates about the acceptability of such constraints on US power are conducted in sophisticated language: "unilateralism" vs "multilateralism"; "à la carte" multilateralism vs "constructive" multilateralism. But these sophisticated terms disguise realities as much as they explain them. The only way to understand the policies of any country is to look squarely at the deeds. And American deeds on the UN have spoken loudly and clearly.

A case can be made, if a brave senior American figure is prepared to do so, that in the post-September 11 world the time has come for a radical rethinking of US strategy towards the UN. To a surprising degree for an open society, American thinking on international issues easily flows into a rut. The UN is no exception. As I wrote prior to the events of September 11, 2001:

The current overwhelming power and geographic isolation [of the United States] are at best a temporary dam holding back the inevitable impact of globalisation on American society. And when the dam is breached, Americans will regret the fact that they did not use the window of opportunity available to them (when they were clearly and overwhelmingly powerful relative to the rest of the world) to strengthen the UN to help deal with the small interdependent world emerging. Of course, many Americans firmly believe that they will be so powerful forever. History teaches us otherwise.⁶

TIME FOR NEW US THINKING ON THE UN

What makes the absence of new thinking on the UN even more surprising is that the case for a stronger UN is as simple as it is obvious. American technology has changed the world. Distance has disappeared. The world has shrunk to a global village. Every village needs a village council. The UN represents the only real village council we have. There is no other.

Perhaps another simple analogy could help to explain to

Americans why an effective UN serves American interests. Americans, like anyone else, understand the need for traffic rules. Without such rules, highways and interchanges would not function: traffic could not move safely if we were to drive on both sides of the road. With globalisation, new global highways are being opened daily, literally and metaphorically. The traffic of people, money, ideas, goods, etc., around the world is going to increase at an exponential pace. What would happen if we destroyed or weakened the only organisation (or, more accurately in the case of the UN, the only family of organisations) capable of providing the viable setting required for formulating larger global rules?

So far, a few Americans have begun seeing the impact of interdependence in a few areas. They now understand that a new Ebola virus in Africa can reach American shores overnight. Viruses do not need passports. They do not respect borders. Neither do environmental disasters. Americans have not experienced a Chernobyl-like nuclear disaster yet. But they are beginning to understand that climate change can also affect them. In the world of finance, where the United States now appears to reign supreme, the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 proved that a crisis emerging in a distant Southeast Asian country, Thailand, could eventually ripple into American stock markets via Korea, Russia and Brazil. This was a healthy scare. It has made senior American finance officials more aware of global interdependence than their counterparts in other areas. It would be a pity if similar scares and disasters were necessary to open the eyes of other American officials.

After September 11, 2001, the reality of global interdependence should have become still clearer for Americans. As the Secretary-General said on December 10, 2001, when he received the Nobel Peace Prize:

If today, after the horror of September 11, we see better, and we see further—we will realise that humanity is indivisible. New threats make no distinction between races, nations or regions. A new insecurity has entered every mind, regardless of wealth or status. A deeper awareness of the bonds that bind us all—in pain as in prosperity—has gripped young and old.

No one can foretell the future in specific terms. We all know that technology will change the future of the globe, particularly given the explosive and exponential growth of new technology that we experience now. But we can begin to prepare for the future in more general terms, just as one can predict floods in the Ganges River six months after heavy snowfall in the Himalayas. Today we know that the “heavy snowfall” of new technology has descended upon the globe. The floods of change are coming. This much we can be certain about. It is strange, therefore, not to begin preparing for it.

The UN's Role

But what can the UN do to help cope with the impending floods? How can a fragile, much-ravaged institution be a leader in global change? After all, it has stumbled in its response to crises in small countries like Rwanda and Bosnia. How can the UN realistically take on major global burdens? These are fair questions.

Each of the different units in the UN family can make unique contributions to our efforts to adapt to an increasingly interdependent world. A few examples may help clarify the picture. Firstly, norm-setting will become an increasingly important role for the UN. As the world changes, new norms will have to be created, both for the multilateral architecture as well as multilateral processes of the world. The creation of norms, if they are to be accepted in practice, has to be a consensual exercise (which almost by definition makes it a painful exercise). The conversion of these norms into binding legal obligations has to be done in the context of the UN. All new global norms—in the Law of the Sea, in environmental conventions, in the treaty abolishing landmines, in the statute of the International Criminal Court—have been created either under the aegis of the UN General Assembly or in global conferences that are offshoots of the General Assembly (e.g., the Rio, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing Summits of the 1990s). Without this norm-setting function of the General Assembly (or its equivalent), the world would be left paralysed with its old norms. Indeed, global advances in respect for human rights have only been made possible because of their legitimisation by UN processes. This was true before September 11,

2001. The events of that day made global agreement on norm-setting institutions more critical than ever.

Secondly, to deal with specific crises that emerge from time to time and engage global attention (e.g., East Timor, Kosovo, Sierra Leone), the world has to agree on a process of burden sharing. Some disputes are now resolved primarily outside the UN (e.g. Kosovo). But eventually, these need to be brought under the UN umbrella to gain international legitimacy. Also, not all countries can get involved in all disputes. Geography, political interests, treaty relationships and cultural links help determine which countries will take the lead in solving particular conflicts. For example, both history and geography, as well as strong US support, led to Australia's leadership role in East Timor. But Australia could not have intervened on its own without the legitimising role of the Security Council and the participation of other countries from the region. Each new UN peacekeeping operation that is created also means that the world as a whole, rather than merely the countries of the relevant region, are taking responsibility for a specific problem. Until the Security Council got involved in Sierra Leone, for example, ECOMOG had to pay all the bills. After the UN took over, all 188 countries contributed to the expenses. All these decisions can be made only by the UN Security Council. In similar fashion, it was only the UN Security Council that could quickly and promptly legitimise multilateral responses to the events of September 11, as well as make it mandatory for countries to comply with anti-terrorism resolutions.

The Secretary-General, for his part, can provide essential moral and intellectual leadership in the resolution of global challenges. It is surely an amazing fact that on this planet of six billion human beings, only one appears to symbolise the collective interests of all humanity. Therefore, when he speaks, he can draw global attention to global concerns in a way that virtually no one else can. The current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has been relatively bold in suggesting new ideas. In response to the crises in Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo, he has suggested, for example, that the international community has a duty to undertake humanitarian intervention within sovereign states if massive human rights violations occur. This is a bold idea.

No other global leader has had the courage to make this case. He was equally bold when he spelt out the key challenges that the world faced in his Oslo Address of December 10, 2001.

These three examples help to illustrate the constructive role the UN can play in coping with the new world. None of these functions can be performed easily by others. The G7 (now G8) leaders, for example, sometimes make crucial decisions on key global issues. They can move financial markets with their decisions (e.g., the Plaza Accords). But, in the real world, they have no means either to impose their views on other nation states (without the legal authority of the Security Council) or to have these viewed as legitimate by the international community (without the General Assembly's endorsement). Within any modern society, the rich have no authority to make decisions for the whole society. Nor can the G7 speak on behalf of the international community. Only the UN or its Secretary-General has the institutional and moral legitimacy to do so. President Clinton himself told the UN General Assembly in September 1999 that the UN was an "indispensable" institution. His Ambassador to the UN, Richard Holbrooke, has also made a similar point: "The US has only three choices regarding the UN. It can leave the UN as it is and eventually its weakness will undermine its potential effectiveness. It can abandon it and yield to the far right's constant flirtation with destroying the UN. Or it can proceed from the understanding that the UN is flawed but nonetheless indispensable to our national interest and therefore make it more effective."⁷

Working with the World Population

But there is another indispensable element that cannot be ignored in preparing the world for a new future: the wishes of the six billion people who inhabit the planet. Americans tend to make a natural assumption that what is good for the United States is naturally good for the world (perhaps an extension of the old adage that what is good for GM was good for the US). But there is a great diversity of needs, interests and aspirations among the six billion. The great challenge that the world faces is that of harmonising

and balancing the needs and interests of six billion people on a shrinking planet.

It is only natural that there should be differences in the needs and interests of the rich and the poor. The poor wish to put priority on economic development. By contrast, the rich have a vested interest in the status quo. Hence, for example, the United States and most other developed countries have a vital interest in preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, especially the new generation of chemical and biological weapons. Conventions to restrict their development have been negotiated and adopted through the General Assembly process, clumsy and slow though this may be. But the only real way to prevent their proliferation is by creating a global consensus where all the countries feel that they have a common stake in global peace and prosperity. To have such a stake, each society—no matter how rich or poor, small or big—must feel that it is a stakeholder in a global community.

Effective participation in UN processes helps to convert all nations into stakeholders. Both psychologically and materially, all nations must feel that they have a say in the management of the globe. Just as democracy elicits the commitment of the citizen to respect the results of elections and the subsequent decisions of the elected government, a vote in the UN delivers a similar commitment from the nation-states. These processes do not work perfectly, either nationally or internationally. But the crucial role that the UN plays in making stakeholders out of each nation is neither well understood nor appreciated.

Possessing the world's largest economy and the greatest range of global interests, the United States is indeed the single biggest beneficiary of the stabilising role that the UN plays. Ed Luck has put this point across succinctly:

The United States has a fundamental interest in the United Nations as an institution because it has an unquestionable stake in international law, order and stability. However imperfectly the UN performs this function, the world body is, on balance, a net contributor to a more orderly, predictable, norm-abiding and hence stable world.⁸

This statement is simple and commonsensical. Yet few Americans, especially politicians, are able to grasp it or see it. The reason is simple. They have been blinded by stories from the media on how “anti-American” the UN General Assembly had become, especially during the 1970s. In that decade, there was a close alliance between Arabs and Africans to work together to secure strong majorities against apartheid rule in South Africa and Israeli occupation of Arab lands. The United States was often implicitly and explicitly criticised in these resolutions. It then became fashionable for Americans to rail against “the tyranny of the majority” in the General Assembly. This in turn sparked a decade of UN bashing in the US Congress, which advanced increasingly absurd demands that the UN meet certain conditions before the United States would release its legally assessed funding.

The great paradox here, which few Americans have grasped, is that the demonstrated independence of the General Assembly from US domination—while not serving some short-term American interests—does indeed serve long-term American interests. Were the General Assembly to be perceived as a compliant American instrument, it would quickly lose the respect, trust and commitment of the 5.75 billion people who live outside the United States. The more independent the General Assembly is seen to be, the more confidence the people of the world will have in it—and the greater their commitment will be to the larger norm-generating activities done within the Assembly. The greater their commitment to these norms, the more American interests will be served. It may be useful to recall what Adlai E. Stevenson said in a 1963 Senate testimony about the UN:

The United States does not own or control the United Nations. It is not a wing of the State Department. We are no more and no less than the most influential of the 110 members. If we were less, we would be failing to exert the influence of freedom's leaders; if we were more, we would destroy the effectiveness of the United Nations, which depends precisely on the fact that it is not an arm of the United States or of any other government, but a truly international organisation, no better or worse than the agreements which can be reached by the controlling majorities of its members.⁹

The failure of American policymakers (especially those in Congress) to understand this paradox has led them on a futile course of trying, to use a crude analogy, to squeeze both ends of a tube of toothpaste. If you squeeze both the top and bottom ends, no toothpaste will come out. With sufficient pressure, the tube will eventually break. The same could happen to the UN if the United States continues to squeeze both ends—that is, to try to make the UN appear compliant to American interests and yet try to make it an effective instrument to manage larger global interests.

Instead of railing against the UN each time the General Assembly or (rarely) the Security Council demonstrates its independence of American wishes or demands, American policymakers should quietly cheer on the UN's efforts. The United States need have no real fear that, without the current US Congress' Sword of Damocles hanging over it, the UN will turn fundamentally anti-American. This cannot happen, for a simple reason: most of the world shares the fundamental US interest, as Ed Luck says, in "international law, order and stability".

Occasionally, short-term American interests may not necessarily be in the interest of the rest of the globe or in long-term American interests. A particularly egregious example may make the point clearly. Americans have become accustomed to low gasoline prices. They object when the prices increase. Yet if other countries matched American levels of per capita gasoline consumption, the whole world would be in deep trouble, in both the economic and environmental fields. For the long-term interests of the globe (including those of the United States), the international community should urge the United States to increase its gasoline prices and rationalise its consumption patterns. Of course, if anyone were to suggest this now, many Americans would protest in public but thoughtful Americans would also agree in private.

There are many other such areas where US policies do not necessarily serve either global or long-term American interests. The Senate's rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in October 1999 was a disaster. Even America's closest European allies said so. If the United States, as the world's leading status quo power, walks

away from treaty obligations, it is only opening the door for others to do so.

Swallowing Paradoxes

American policymakers are not used to thinking in terms of paradoxes. The American worldview, which seems to be deeply rooted in old American myths, tends to see the world in terms of black and white. Throughout their history, Americans fought well when the “enemies” that they had to cope with could be portrayed in a clear and simple way: the “scalp hunters” (Native Americans), the dark forces of slavery, the Nazi reign of terror, or the “Red Communist Menace”. For the United States to be galvanised into action, the enemy had to be clear and demonised.

For a while, the UN came close to being demonised, but—either through luck or through hidden sources of wisdom—it managed to escape such a fate. It was a shrewd move by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke to invite Senator Jesse Helms to attend and address the august chambers of the UN Security Council in January 2000. When Senator Helms did this, and when he persuaded Kofi Annan to take pictures with his family (and subsequently even invited Kofi Annan to address his alma mater in North Carolina), he lost the capacity to demonise the UN.

But the real challenge American policymakers will face if they want to deal effectively with the UN is to resist the temptation to characterise the UN in either black or white terms. The American policymakers’ minds will have to learn to handle paradoxes and contradictions in trying to formulate coherent long-term strategies in respect of the UN.

A few examples might help to explain this point. American technology is slowly but inexorably creating a global community where global interests will have to be both understood and dealt with. But the only global organisation available to manage global interests is the United Nations, which, despite the preambular words of the UN Charter, does not defend the common global interests of mankind but instead acts as a clearinghouse for the varied interests of 188 nation states. The Secretary-General captured this new

challenge succinctly in his Millennium report:

Here, however, is the crux of our problem today: while the post-war multilateral system made it possible for the new globalisation to emerge and flourish, globalisation, in turn, has progressively rendered its designs antiquated. Simply put, our post-war institutions were built for an *international* world, but we now live in a *global* world. Responding effectively to this shift is the core institutional challenge for world leaders today.¹⁰

It is conceivable that leaders and diplomats working to defend their national interests may end up inadvertently boosting global interests. But the record so far shows that most diplomats find it difficult to reconcile national with global interests.

A current fashion among American (and some other Western) intellectuals is to assert that where selfish government officials have failed to protect common global concerns, the representatives of civil society and NGOs can act as a better conscience of mankind. In theory, this may be so. But the battle of Seattle at the 1999 WTO conference showed that NGOs and other elements of civil society are no less prisoners of their sectoral interests than are the UN's member states. The NGOs may find it easy to claim the moral high ground because in the American scheme of things, non-government representatives believe they represent the public good and the welfare of average Americans better than government representatives do. But, as demonstrated in Seattle, most Third World representatives were mystified by the claims of Western-based NGOs, who have little connection to or understanding of the needs of the billions who live outside the developed world, to speak on behalf of the world's poor.

Altruism is a guise that has been worn by many in history but has been rarely implemented in practice. In real life, governments, business corporations and non-governmental organisations have one fundamental thing in common: each seeks to defend its own interests (even if they believe that their interests best represent mankind's interests). The US government may have a strong case for defending the patent interests of large pharmaceutical companies,

but one cannot deny that this can also effectively lead to depriving the poor of medicine and the loss of millions of lives. This point came through loud and clear in the UN Security Council debate on AIDS in January 2000. Fortunately, the US delegation took a more enlightened view of this issue at the Doha WTO Ministerial Meeting in November 2001. Similarly, Greenpeace may feel that it is doing mankind a favour by saving whales from Japanese whalers. But the list of endangered species is a long one. Why pick on Japan and not some other country? Who should make such a decision and how?

The point of all these examples is a simple one. The world is being driven inexorably into a single global community. A simple enlightened policy for the world to adopt at this stage would be to put into place—ahead of time—the right multilateral processes and institutions required to manage the world to come. After September 11, this should now be accepted as plain common sense by the global community. The largest stakeholder in this single global community is the United States. Only the United States can provide the leadership that this single global community needs.

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1. "Imagining Tomorrow: Rethinking the Global Challenge", edited by the Permanent Representative of India to the UN, 15 August 2000, p. 37.
 2. It may seem strange to an American reader that a diplomat from Singapore would argue in terms of American national interests. The simple reality is that without the United States, neither the UN nor any multilateral institution can survive. Hence it serves the national interests of other states if the United States can be persuaded that its national interests favour a strong UN.
 3. Several books spell out this complexity well. The best recent volume is Edward Luck's *Mixed Messages*. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a former UN Secretary-General, in *Unvanquished: A US-UN Saga*, provides a unique perspective of a man who felt injured by the United States. I cannot attempt to do a fair summary in only a few paragraphs.
 4. For a critique of US resistance to funding the UN during the 1980s, the key arguments of which remain valid today, see Kishore Mahbubani, "US Doesn't Bear Excessive Share of UN Costs", *The Wall Street Journal*, October 30, 1986.
 5. Gene M. Lyons, "The UN and American Politics", *Global Governance* 5 (1999), published by Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colorado, for the UN University and ACUNS (the Academic Council on the UN System), p. 501.
 6. "Imagining Tomorrow: Rethinking the Global Challenge", edited by the Permanent Representative of India to the UN, 15 August 2000, p. 37.

7. Quoted in *Financial Times*, 13 February 2001, "US Signal Sought on UN Stance" by Carola Hoyos.
8. Edward C. Luck, ed., *Mixed Messages—American Politics and International Organization, 1919–1999*, A Century Foundation Book, Institution Press, 1999, p. 20.
9. Charles W. Maynes and Richard S. Williamson, eds., *U.S. Foreign Policy and the United Nations System*, New York, London: W W Norton & Company, 1996, p. 32.
10. Report of the Secretary-General on the Millennium Assembly entitled "We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-First Century", 27 March 2000.

US DOESN'T BEAR EXCESSIVE SHARE OF UN COSTS

The Wall Street Journal. 30 October 1986
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The United Nations is perched on the edge of a financial cliff. On Monday, the US announced that it would contribute only \$100 million to the UN budget this year, less than half of its obligations under the UN Charter. In addition, the Soviet Union owes the UN about \$242 million, a sum that represents payments that have not been made for several years running. If the two superpowers, along with some other smaller nations, fail to pay their dues, the UN may fall off the cliff. As in any crisis, many key points have been clouded. My fear is that the following 10 facts may never become visible.

Fact No. 1: The UN has never had a deficit budget. Most organisations and indeed governments get into trouble when they borrow money in order to spend more than they earn. The member states of the UN have always denied it permission to borrow money.

Fact No. 2: The UN budget is not out of control. In recent years, in response to pressures from major contributor states, the UN Secretariat has presented what are effectively zero-growth budgets. The UN is therefore understandably puzzled that good behavior is rewarded with financial sanctions, such as the withholding of contributions.

Fact No. 3: The financial crisis is a result of illegal decisions made by certain members not to pay their dues. This is not the statement of a Third World state. The European Community, in an official statement, said that the "responsibility for the present financial crisis of the UN lies with all Member States that do not fulfill their financial obligations under the Charter". The EC also

stressed that financial obligations are no different from other treaty obligations.

Fact No. 4: This is not the first financial crisis the UN has experienced. In 1964, the deliberations of the UN General Assembly had to be virtually suspended because the Soviet Union, having accumulated withholdings amounting to two years of its assessments, was technically in default. When the Soviet Union was responsible for that financial crisis, all the reporting stressed that the Soviet government was acting illegally.

Fact No. 5: The largest contributor to the UN's budget (the US) is not paying more than its fair share. UN contributions are normally assessed as a percentage of national income, but the US (as the largest contributor) enjoys a ceiling on the amount of its contributions. If it were assessed like any other member state, without special preference, it should be paying 28 per cent or 29 per cent rather than 25 per cent of the UN budget. The US is getting a subsidy of 3 per cent to 4 per cent from other member states.

Fact No. 6: The UN's system of taxation is regressive rather than progressive, i.e. the poorest member states already pay a much larger share of their income towards the UN than the richest states. As a percentage of national income, the top five contributors are Guinea-Bissau (.93 per cent), Zambia (.45 per cent), Congo (.44 per cent), Sao Tome and Principe (.40 per cent) and Democratic Yemen (.35 per cent). If the US paid the same share of national income that Guinea-Bissau did, it would be assessed \$18 billion instead of a little over \$200 million.

Fact No. 7: The largest single beneficiary in financial terms from the UN is the US. The UN community spends approximately \$800 million annually in New York City alone, giving the US a 4-to-1 return ratio on its assessed contribution to the regular budget. The UN therefore is a net economic benefit to the US, strange as this may sound.

Fact No. 8: The UN does not spend most of its budget on political activities. Only 10 per cent is spent in such a manner.

Fact No. 9: The UN is not a tool of Soviet diplomacy. The Soviet Union is as suspicious of the UN as the US is. Whatever their

disagreements, the two superpowers fully agree that a strong and vigorous UN, led say by an aggressive personality like the late Dag Hammarskjöld, is not in the interest of either power.

Fact No. 10: The 159 member states do not have an equal say over the management of the UN. This is not a classless society. There are two classes of members: the five permanent member states of the Security Council—the US, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China—and then the rest, the *hoi polloi*, including Singapore. As Inis Claude said in his classic study of international organisations, “Swords into Plowshares”:

In its Security Council version, the veto is a weighting device, an acknowledgment of the inequality of states and a means of giving effect to the principle that the most powerful and important states should have special status in international organisations. It spells special privilege for the big five.

In any organisation, rights go with duties, privileges go hand in hand with obligations. In the UN, the five permanent member states enjoy special privileges—but no special obligations, not even the obligation to meet their financial payments. In fact, four out of the five (including the Soviet Union and the US) have in the past contributed to the illegal process of withholding contributions.

These 10 facts do not tell the whole story. The UN Secretariat's management defects and the irresponsible behaviour of some of the UN's legislative bodies have been well documented. Many of these criticisms are valid. But, is the world better off without a UN?

In this shrinking world, the need for a UN has never been greater. The global village needs a village council. If we had to start over again, could we do any better than the framers of the UN Charter did in 1945? Would the Soviet Union and the US retain the privileges they enjoy under the present charter? Ironically, after pressuring for reform for several years, the developed states are about to pull the plug at a time when the impetus towards reform has clearly begun. Perhaps the UN should be given some breathing room to complete the process of reform.

POWER WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY,
RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT POWER:
THE PERMANENT AND ELECTED
MEMBERS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

“The Permanent and Elected Council Members in the
UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century”.
Edited by David M. Malone. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004

The years 2001 and 2002 were two of the most educational years of my life. Singapore served on the UN Security Council in these two years. Almost daily I attended Security Council meetings. Gradually, I began to understand the real inner workings of this body.

The Security Council is in some ways the most powerful international organisation devoted to peace and security issues. It is the only body that can pass resolutions and make decisions which are binding on all 191 UN member states. Through its actions, it can save thousands of lives, as it did in East Timor, Sierra Leone and Kosovo. Through its inaction, it can cause the loss of over a million lives, as in Srebrenica and Rwanda. The Security Council does matter.

Strangely, despite its importance, there has been no serious book written that describes well how the Security Council actually works. Fortunately David Malone has come out with a volume of essays entitled *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century*. This is an edited version of my contribution to the volume.

The underlying theme of most of the essays in *Can Asians Think?* is the gap between myth and reality. The Security Council suffers from such a gap. In theory, all 15 members of the Council enjoy equal status, even though the permanent members occasionally use the veto. In practice, there is no level playing field between the permanent and elected members. This essay of mine may well be the first attempt to describe the actual relations between these two sides. However, the purpose of this essay is to be constructive. My goal is to persuade the permanent members that they can best preserve their unique privileges over the longer term by fulfilling their responsibilities better. This will also serve the interest of the international community. A win-win partnership is possible.

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ON FRIDAY, December 20, 2002, the UN Security Council (henceforth UNSC) held one of its occasional wrap-up sessions, at which members reflected on the achievements and failures of the Council during the year 2002. Ambassador Martin Chungong Ayafor, Deputy Permanent Representative of Cameroon, spoke bluntly about the perception of a fundamental problem in the relationship of the five permanent members (henceforth P5) and the elected members (henceforth E10). His comments are worth quoting at length for he states the perceived problem clearly:

The presence of permanent members in an institution is in itself a decisive advantage. It implies an almost perfect mastery of issues, procedures and practices, and even of what is not said. When that permanent membership is accompanied by a particularly favourable relationship of power, there is a tendency to take advantage of that position to advance one's views and interests, sometimes to the detriment of missions of general interest that led to the establishment of the institution in the first place. Despite appearances, there is a pattern of behaviour that is shared by the members of the Council, who, willingly or not, are often tempted to believe that agreement between five is the same as agreement between 15. The Security Council would benefit from returning to its initial composition. It is composed of 15 members, but little by little, it is becoming a body of five plus 10 members. That dichotomy can only affect the transparency and the legitimacy to which we all aspire.¹

Against the backdrop of this strong public comment, which reflects a growing concern in the UN community, this essay will try to develop an understanding of P5 and E10 relations by answering three questions. Firstly, what is the relationship in theory between the P5 and the E10? Secondly, what in practice have been the relations between the P5 and E10? Thirdly and finally, is there a realistic solution to the problems that have emerged?

It is important to emphasise a key qualification at the very beginning. The great difficulty in writing about the UNSC is the lack of common understanding of the nature and purpose of the organ, both among analysts and participants in the Council's deliberations.

Differences in perceptions among participants in the Council also reflect varying national interests and evolving major power relationships. Also, the Council is a dynamic institution, constantly changing and adapting to new realities and demands. Hence an essay like this on the relationship between the five veto-bearing permanent members and the 10 elected members must be seen as a snapshot: it will capture some structural realities but will expose only a moment in the constantly changing geopolitical landscape which is inevitably reflected in the world's most powerful international forum devoted to peace and security issues—the UNSC.

Expectations of the Council have shifted over the decades. In the early years its main function appeared to be the institutionalisation of a concert of powers, legitimising the great power status of the P5 and ensuring that the UN did not engage in a collision course with any of them. In the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, the Council gradually transformed itself into a problem-solving institution, living up partially to the founding fathers' vision of providing collective security. Much of the transformation took place without careful reflection of its impact on the role and responsibilities of UNSC members. Hence this essay will also suggest that it is time to begin serious reflection of these issues.

PART I: A THEORY OF P5–E10 RELATIONS?

In trying to understand what, in theory, the relationship between the P5 and E10 ought to be, this author has not found in any academic or other literature a satisfactory analysis. Instead, most academic writings in this area focus on the main privilege of the P5, the veto, and attempt to analyse its rationale and purpose.

In his 1964 study of *The Security Council: A Study in Adolescence*, Richard Hiscocks offered a contemporaneous assessment of the veto that remains current in some senses. According to Hiscocks, "The veto accurately reflected the divided world in which it was so often used. It reflected also the deliberate choice of the great powers to pursue methods of diplomacy based on national power rather than to cultivate the high principles of international cooperation and tolerance on which the United Nation's Charter is based."²

A deeper analysis of the privilege the P5 awarded themselves in Article 27 of the Charter was offered by Inis Claude in his classic work, *Swords into Plowshares*, where he wrote:

The most celebrated of the special privileges granted to the Big Five, the right of veto in the Security Council, was not so much an instrument of great power dictatorship over small states as a factor injected into the relationships of the great powers among themselves ... At San Francisco the small states accepted the superiority of the mighty as a fact of life. Their first objective was to ensure that all of the great powers would accept their place in the leadership corps of the new organization; in this they were successful, and this fact was perhaps the major basis for the hope that the United Nations would prove more effective than the League. Their second objective was to constitutionalize the power of the international oligarchy; towards this end they achieved the incorporation in the Charter of a surprising array of limitations upon arbitrary behavior, including the procedural brake upon collective decisions by the great powers which was implicit in the rule of unanimity. Their third objective was to gain assurance that the most powerful members would initiate and support positive collective action within and on behalf of the organization in times of crisis; in this respect there were serious apprehensions of failure, based largely upon the fact that the veto rule foreshadowed the possible paralysis of such undertakings.³

In short, if Inis Claude's analysis is correct, an implicit political compact was achieved between the mighty and not-so-mighty. In return for the veto power, the great powers committed themselves to the principles of the UN Charter and to act on behalf of collective security.

Other writers have also observed the importance of the veto in securing great power commitment. Andrew Boyd in *Fifteen Men on a Powder Keg* disputes British PM Harold Macmillan's assertion in 1962 that the frequent use of the Russian veto had undermined the Council (which Macmillan actually described as "the Cabinet of the World"). Boyd asserts: "The 'foundation on which the UN was built'—by the great powers—was the great-power veto."⁴ And Secretary of State Cordell Hull declared in the 1940s that "our

Government would not remain there a day without retaining its veto power.”⁵

The record since the UN's founding in 1945 shows that the veto has accomplished the purpose of achieving great power commitment to the UN. No P5 member has walked away from the UN, even the United States at the height of its disillusionment with the UN in the 1980s and 1990s. There is recognition among the P5 that both their veto power as well as their permanency in the Council gives them a privilege of significant control over a powerful global institution.

The UN Charter is a remarkable document. It still reads as a document that appears alive and relevant although it was written almost 60 years ago. But the instrument of the veto and the privileges it conferred on the five victors of World War II were designed to remedy the main weakness of the first half of the 20th century: the failure to anchor the major powers in a collective security system and to ensure that no decisions were taken against their interests. Hence it had a negative, and not positive, function. As Philip C. Jessup has stated, the veto is “the safety-valve that prevents the United Nations from undertaking commitments in the political field which it presently lacks the power to fulfill”.⁶ What the UN Charter fails to spell out are the responsibilities associated with membership of the UNSC, permanent or elected. Nor has a consensus developed in practice on what those responsibilities are. The absence of a widely shared understanding of the responsibilities of both permanent and non-permanent members of the Council has developed into a serious weakness for the organisation. Indeed the actual record of the UNSC, especially in the past decade, demonstrates that this weakness has hurt the Council.

PART II: PRACTICE OF P5–E10 RELATIONS

The structural weakness in the Council has resulted from the following dichotomy: in the Council, the P5 have been given power without responsibility; the E10 have been given responsibility without power. This may appear to be an overly crude summary of the situation. But the experience of recent years shows that there

has been growing unhappiness among members of the UN that the states elected to the Security Council have been excluded from the decision-making processes on certain issues, most prominently with respect to the Iraq file.

The great paradox about the UNSC is that this structural weakness surfaced during the phase of its history when it became more active and, often, more effective—in the 1990s. From its creation in 1945 to the end of the Cold War, the UNSC lay largely moribund, paralysed by the dynamics of the Cold War. The cross-vetoes of the United States and the Soviet Union prevented any effective action, except for the deployment of a few Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) by mutual consent. Both powers used each other's vetoes in their propaganda battles. The respective positions of the 15 members (both P5 and E10) in the Cold War would determine their role in this political theatre. There was no P5–E10 divide then because the P5 were divided.

The end of the Cold War created a new dynamic in which the then UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar sensed a great opportunity. He encouraged the P5 to work together to find solutions to longstanding conflicts. The drafting of Resolution 598 as part of the effort to end the Iraq-Iran war has been viewed as the earliest example of a new kind of P5 diplomacy. But the major achievement of the new P5 cooperation related to the 1991 Gulf War. The Security Council's endorsement of the coalition's aims was a major reason for the international community's strong and united response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In the words of the first President Bush, a "new world order" appeared ready to emerge.

As the 1990s evolved, the early positive fruits of P5 cooperation in the UNSC gave way to many painful and bitter failures, especially in the Balkans and in Rwanda. The effete or passive responses of the UNSC to the killings in Bosnia and in the UN mandated 'safe areas' in Srebrenica and to the genocide in Rwanda revealed the structural weakness of the Council. Exclusive focus on the short-term national interests of the UNSC members without regard to the interests of the international community led to the Council's disastrous passive responses.

The institutional tragedy of these episodes was that no effort was made either by the UNSC members to conduct an objective inquiry into the cause of these failures or by the other UN member states to hold the UNSC accountable for its actions. As a consequence, a valuable opportunity was lost to learn the lessons from these disasters. The UN, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and even the Dutch Government commissioned independent reports. Both Kofi Annan and President Bill Clinton acknowledged some responsibility for the UN's failures in Rwanda. But the Council as an institution never took any responsibility nor did it provide an account for its failures. Elsewhere in this volume, Colin Keating addresses this painful episode from his vantage point as the Council's president in April 1994.

The failure of the UNSC to investigate these disasters was probably not an accident. Any objective enquiry would have revealed the P5's domination of the Council and hence their heavy responsibility for this organ's failures. Ed Luck makes the following observations in *Mixed Messages*: "[S]ome Americans have chided the United Nations for not doing more to save lives in the Rwandan genocide, when in fact this inaction was the result of national decisions in Washington, D.C., and other key capitals that were reluctant to become too deeply involved in a situation that posed considerable risks with no easy or quick solution. In the former Yugoslavia the Security Council committed peacekeepers on the ground to implement an ever-changing mandate, subject to the disparate and wavering interests of the United States, Russia, the major Western European powers, and the Islamic states, among others."⁷ In short the principal causes of the failures of the Council were the actions or non-actions of major powers.

Apart from the formal privilege of the veto (which is rarely used in practice), one would anticipate few distinctions between the P5 and E10 in the day-to-day decision-making of the Council. Moreover, in recent years most decisions have been made by consensus. This in theory should give each of the 15 members a veto as their concurrence is required for a consensual decision. The increasing trend towards consensual decision-making might also be cited as evidence that in

practice the P5 and E10 work together on a level playing field in the Council.

Indeed, in the two years that I served on the Council, I could not point to a specific instance where the elected members were treated disrespectfully or as second-class citizens by the P5. We spent most of our time in the closed-door informal consultations which were conducted in a small chamber that sits adjacent to the main chamber shown in most TV shots of the Security Council. Even though we would have occasional sharp debates in these informal consultations, relationships at a personal level were marked by a warm sense of camaraderie, which is often generated by working together in close quarters over an extended period of time. A fly on the wall observing these proceedings could be forgiven for believing that the P5 and E10 representatives all contributed equally to Security Council decisions.

Structurally, however, the E10 are at an extreme disadvantage in the Council's deliberations and decision-making procedures. It is important to understand the many reasons why this is so.

Firstly, and most obviously, the national power of each of the P5 countries is stronger than that of most elected members. The pecking order of states in any international organisation reflects the relative national power of the states, especially their power in the area that the organisation specialises in. In the field of peace and security, the P5 remain the only five legitimate nuclear powers. Of course, within the P5 there is also a pecking order. In UN corridors, it is often said that the Council is dominated by the P1, as the US is sometimes called, rather than the P5, reflecting the unique unipolar moment that the world faces at the opening of the 21st century. After the US, China and Russia are regarded as the two next most important national powers. It is noteworthy, however, that even when the E10 representatives come from states with larger economies than some of the P5 (for example, Japan and Germany), there is no change in the pattern of P5 domination.

Paradoxically, however, the two most active members of the Council among the P5 have been the United Kingdom and France. This situation could be a reflection of their traditional activist foreign

policies, where both have provided leadership on issues far from their national borders. However, many in the UN community also believe that their activism in the Council is an attempt to justify their continuing permanent membership, at a time when there is increased questioning of whether permanent membership should still be conferred only on the victors of World War II 58 years after the end of the war. Thomas Franck has noticed the tendency of these countries to refrain from using their formal veto power and notes that this “self-restraining practice, which, in effect, reduces privileges which have come to be unjustified illustrated their consciousness of the role of coherence in legitimizing the system of rules which is the UN Charter: a legitimacy in which all members have a stake”.⁸

The second reason why the E10 are disadvantaged may appear to be both obvious and questionable: the veto powers conferred by the UN Charter on the P5. It is considered questionable only because the veto is rarely used nowadays in the Council. However, while the formal use of the veto in the open chamber is now a rare occurrence (in 2002, for example, there were only two vetoes, both of which were exercised by the United States), its informal use in the closed consultations has not diminished.

For instance, despite the Charter provision stating that the veto should not be used for procedural issues, in November 2002, the US delegation blocked the procedural proposal for a dialogue between the Security Council and the President of the International Court of Justice, Judge Guillaume. Even though a majority of the Council was in favour of this dialogue, the US exercised in effect a closed-door veto.⁹

This is only a small episode but it reflects a reality that has become firmly entrenched in the corporate culture of the Council. The P5 are allowed to use their veto *implicitly* in many closed-door consultations. This also explains why the UNSC rules of procedure remain “provisional” after 58 years. The P5 have steadfastly refused all effort to remove the “provisional” label, including a valiant effort in 1997 by the representatives of Chile, Costa Rica, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Japan, Kenya, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea and Sweden. In the two years that we served on the Council,

the Singapore delegation made several procedural suggestions to improve the working methods of the Council. We expected a positive response. Instead we ran into a lot of resistance, especially from some of the P5. We were initially puzzled until we heard the private comments of a P5 permanent representative who expressed surprise that the “tourists” were trying to change the arrangements of the Council. This was a revealing comment. It showed that the P5 believe that they “own” the Council. In their eyes, the E10 should make no claim of co-ownership, even if they happen to be elected by 191 member states of the UN.

The E10 are further hobbled by the fact that much of the agenda, procedures and policies of the Council have been settled by the time each new elected member joins the Council. There is a delicate web of understandings reached among the previous members of the Council, especially among the P5, on which issues should receive real attention and which should receive pro forma attention. Within the UN community, there is also a widespread belief that a complex pattern of trade-offs has been worked out over the years. This may explain, for example, why the UNSC remains remarkably passive about long-standing files in which no obvious progress has been made, despite years of resolutions and statements issued by the Council. Georgia and Cyprus are obvious examples. Indeed, the term “Cyprusization” of an issue has been added to the Council’s vocabulary to describe an issue that long remains on the Council’s agenda without resolution. At the beginning of each new year, incoming elected members raise questions about these dormant files, but few changes occur in practice.

In the spring of 2001, a few elected members (including Singapore) raised questions about the absence of a comprehensive policy by the Council on Afghanistan. Limited sanctions on the Taleban and statements on poppy cultivation did not amount to a comprehensive policy by the Council. In private, some P5 members conceded that our questions were valid but they added that “political realities” meant that Afghanistan would remain a “strategic orphan”. 9/11 changed everything. Afghanistan went from being a strategic orphan to a strategic priority. The Council’s

position changed with the shifting of priorities of the P5, especially the P1 (the United States).

Another impediment to the work of the E10 is the absence of any formal institutional memory in the Council, either of the proceedings in the informal consultations (where most of the real decisions are thrashed out) or of the record of implementation or non-implementation of the Council's decisions. The Council is serviced by a small Secretariat staff which, with limited resources, does an excellent job of managing the logistical arrangements for the many UNSC meetings that take place simultaneously. But the Secretariat does not provide support for the substantive deliberations or keep an institutional memory of the proceedings of the informal consultations.

This is an obvious weakness of the Council that needs to be addressed. With the current arrangements, only the P5 members have a continuous record and memory of the Council's work over the years. As the Council often works by referring to precedents, the elected members are at an obvious disadvantage when they have either no knowledge of or background on these precedents.

Several UN Secretariat Departments do attend and follow UNSC deliberations on issues falling under their purview. The Department of Political Affairs (DPA), for example, follows key political issues, like the Middle East file; the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) monitors Council deliberations on PKOs; the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) follows Council discussions when a strong humanitarian dimension exists. Each is heavily burdened by its own responsibilities. Providing background briefings, guidance and succour to the elected members would require additional resources, which are not easily available in the UN system. Over the years, many officials at these departments would have developed long-standing relationships with their P5 counterparts which newly elected members cannot replicate overnight. Many of the UN Secretariat officials strive to be impartial and objective in their work, but they do face real pressures on many key issues. It is not unusual, for example, for some P5 members to insist on seeing a draft Secretariat report before it is shared with the elected members.

Episodes like this confirm that the P5 and E10 representatives do not operate on a level playing field in the Council.

The answer to the question whether the Security Council is owned by all its 15 members, by the P5, by the 191 UN member states or, as suggested in the opening words of the UN Charter, by “We, the Peoples ...” remains to be answered. I do believe, however, that as the role and influence of the Council is likely to grow in the coming years, partly as a natural consequence of globalisation and the growing need for more effective global institutions, the question of the ownership of the Council will inevitably surface again.

PART III: SOLUTIONS

Any efforts to reform or improve the Council must begin with a recognition that change will not be easy. The Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on UNSC Reform has been working for 10 years with no tangible progress made in its efforts to change the composition of the Council. The usual gridlock of competing national interests where each new aspirant state is strongly blocked by a jealous or threatened neighbouring state has stymied all efforts to change the composition. However, the discussions in the OEWG on what have been called Cluster II issues (i.e., the working methods of the UNSC) have led to tangible improvements in the Council's performance, making it, relatively speaking, more open and transparent in many of its deliberations in recent years. The P5 have over the years become sensitised to the concerns of the other 186 member states of the UN through the discussions in the OEWG. The UK and France, in particular, have tried to take on board some of these concerns.

Hence, any change in the Council will only come if there is a clear recognition by the P5 that the special privileges that they enjoy in the UNSC are only viable in the long run if they are perceived to be legitimate in the eyes of the current membership of the UN. Legitimacy is an inherently fragile commodity, which has to be nurtured.

One key source of strength of the Council is the willingness of the 191 UN members to abide by its decisions, even when there is

some unhappiness in the UN corridors with either the procedures or policies of the Council. However, this compliance cannot be taken for granted. In June 1998, the Council faced a major crisis when the OAU collectively decided not to abide by an UNSC mandated flights ban on Libya. In the face of such resistance, the Council wisely suspended these sanctions.

Compliance is tied to the perception of the legitimacy of the Council's decisions. The current legitimacy of the Council is tied to the UN Charter (which has been ratified by all UN member states) and to the recognition that the UNSC exists as an institution within the wider UN fabric of legitimacy. If, say, the current 15 members of the UNSC were to try to create an independent global security council independent of the UN, their decisions would enjoy neither legitimacy nor compliance by the international community.

To preserve these assets of legitimacy and compliance, the Council has to try to anticipate the expectations of the larger UN community. One clear demand that is likely to emerge, in line with a growing global trend, is that the Council should become more accountable for its actions. Traditionally, in most constitutions and organisations, privileges come with responsibilities. The two are often seen to be opposite sides of the same coin. What is remarkable about the veto privilege accorded to the P5 members is that it was conferred without an explicit or implicit agreement that this privilege also carried with it significant responsibilities. It is true that Article 24.1 confers "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" to the UN Security Council (as a whole). However, the Charter does not explicitly mention the responsibilities of the P5. Indeed the veto is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the Charter. Instead Article 27 uses the clever euphemism "including the concurring votes of the permanent members" to simultaneously create and disguise the privilege of the veto.

Significantly, Inis Claude acknowledges that when the Charter was drafted, the P5 "were somewhat disingenuous in their preference for discussing the matter in terms of their willingness to assume special responsibility rather than their insistence upon

being granted special privilege”.¹⁰ In short, the P5 in 1945 paid lip service to the idea of assuming greater responsibilities but never intended the veto to be strictly aligned with responsibilities.

The Charter implies that the elected members should be seen as bearing some responsibility for the international system in order to get elected to the UNSC. Article 23 states that in the election of the “other” members, due regard should be specially paid “to the contribution of Members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security”. However, here, too, no specific responsibilities are conferred on the E10 in the Council.

The lack of clear assignment of responsibilities to either the P5 or E10 members has created a structural weakness in the Council: each member of the Council (be they P5 or E10) puts its national interest ahead of any collective security interests in formulating its national positions on issues before the UN Security Council. Sometimes the cumulative addition of 15 national interests can lead to a happy result of representing the collective security interests of all 191 members “on whose behalf” the 15 Council members act (Article 24.1). Such happy results are rare because the short-term national interests of 15 member states can rarely reflect the long-term collective security interests of the global community. A by-product of the veto is that the collective security structure established under the Charter cannot be used against the P5 or any state that enjoys the full and unqualified support of a P5 member. Nor can it be used in situations, no matter how pressing, in which a particular P5 member is opposed to taking action. In the words of Inis Claude, “[t]he Charter endorsed the ideal of collective security in unqualified terms, but envisaged its application in severely limited terms.”¹¹

A simple analogy may explain this structural weakness more clearly. In having been conferred with “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”, the UNSC is often compared (and often explicitly so in UNSC open debates) to a fire department. The fire department dispatches fire engines as soon as a fire is reported. The UNSC is theoretically obliged to respond each time a major conflict that threatens international peace and security breaks out. But there is a crucial difference in the nature of

their responses. The Fire Department of, say, New York City, reacts instantaneously and effectively regardless of where the fire breaks out, be it on Park Avenue, in Harlem, or in the Bronx. The UNSC, however, reacts only when the interests of the 15 members, especially the P5, are affected. Consequently, conflicts that do not impinge on their national interests can be, and often are, ignored.

This is no abstract analogy. At a lunch meeting days after a Security Council visit to Burundi in May 2001, during which Council members were directly exposed to the fragility of the situation there, P5 ambassadors made it clear that if genocide were to break out in this country of little geostrategic importance, the Council today would be unlikely to act much differently than it did in Rwanda in 1994. The E10 representatives present then declared that if the P5 did not take the lead, they had no ability to do so.

It is remarkable in some ways that the obvious failures of the UNSC in Bosnia, Srebrenica and Rwanda did not make a bigger dent in the Council's standing and prestige in the international community (except perhaps in the eyes of many civil society organisations which were appalled by these failures). Even though the Council never explicitly acknowledged its failures, it may have implicitly done so when it authorised the setting up of the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda. However, were the Council to remain passive again in a similar Rwanda or Srebrenica type episode, it is more than likely that its credibility and effectiveness will diminish, perhaps like that of the IMF which was in the past perceived to be arrogant and insensitive to the concerns of the apparent beneficiaries of its actions.

Implicitly, when the UN Charter conferred "the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" on the Council, it also conveyed the expectation that the members of the Council, both permanent and elected, would balance both their national interests and the collective security interests of the UN family in the decision-making processes of the Security Council. Right now, from time to time, some permanent members may acknowledge in private that they should wear two hats in the Council—their national hat and their collective hat. However, there

is still a deep reluctance to accept any specific responsibilities that are tied to membership of the Council. Sir Jeremy Greenstock, the UK Permanent Representative, probably accurately captured the views of most permanent members of the Council when he said at an open debate in March 2001 that “[m]ost of the time the Security Council is dealing with decisions of policy, and not responding to an obligation under international law. Having a primary responsibility for international peace and security is not an obligation under international law; it is description of a function.”¹²

It is important to stress here that when specific responsibilities are associated with membership of the UNSC, these responsibilities should be assigned to both the permanent members and the elected members. When both begin to realise that they face common responsibilities through membership of the UNSC (and where both are held equally accountable in the public eye), there will be a built-in incentive for both to work together on a more level playing field, rather than one that is overwhelmingly tilted in favour of the P5.

The UN Charter does state in Article 24.3 that “[t]he Security Council shall submit annual and, when necessary, special reports to the General Assembly for its consideration”. No common understanding has developed within the UN community on the meaning of the phrase “for its consideration”. The annual UNSC reports to the UN General Assembly were (until 2002) pro forma exercises, in which no effort was made by the UNSC either to explain or to justify its actions to the UNGA. Nor did the UNSC make any conscious effort to take on board the comments made in the General Assembly Debate on the UNSC annual report.

This ritualistic, pro forma reporting could easily be converted into a meaningful and substantive exchange of views between the UNSC and the UNGA. In the long run, such a substantive dialogue will be deemed necessary as the UNSC and the UNGA have a symbiotic relationship with each other. Each cannot exist and thrive without the other. The UNSC is needed to anchor the major powers within the UN system. The UNGA is needed to legitimise and implement the decisions of the UNSC. A healthy two-way street of communication will eventually be necessary between these two

institutions. Curiously, no such communication takes place now.

When a healthy substantive dialogue is put in place, the elected members should also see both their standing and effectiveness increase in the UNSC deliberations. The 10 elected members can both effectively convey the views and sentiments of the wider UN membership to the P5 as well as defend the decisions of the Security Council to the other UN members. They can only do the latter effectively if they are perceived to be active partners in the decision-making procedures of the Council.

All this suggests that all the UN members should begin a fresh round of discussions on the role and responsibilities of the Security Council, including in particular, the role and responsibilities of the P5 and the E10. Hitherto, the P5 have been reluctant to engage in any substantive discussion in this area. Perhaps the time has come for them to recognise that it will serve their long-term interests to do so. Their permanent positions on the Council would not be threatened by such an exercise. Indeed it could even be enhanced if they are perceived to be effectively delivering the results the UN community expects from them. A new partnership between the P5 and E10 could therefore both enhance P5 interests as well as deliver a more effective Security Council.

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1. UN Security Council S/PV.4677, Friday, 20 December 2002, New York.
 2. Richard Hiscocks, *The Security Council: A Study in Adolescence*, New York: The Free Press, 1973, p. 72.
 3. Inis L. Claude Jr., *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization*, New York: Random House, 2nd edition, 1963, p. 81–82.
 4. Andrew Boyd, *Fifteen Men on a Powder Keg: A History of the U.N. Security Council*, New York: Stein and Day, 1971, p. 62–63.
 5. Edward C. Luck, *Mixed Messages: American Politics and International Organisation, 1919–1999*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1999, p. 154.
 6. Inis L. Claude, *ibid*, p. 147.
 7. Edward C. Luck, *ibid*, p. 149.
 8. Thomas M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy Among Nations*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990, p. 178.
 9. It is also essential to mention here that there have been many academic discussions of the notion of the “double veto”. The term “double veto” is

often used to refer the “second” veto that the P5 can use to ascertain whether a question is procedural or not. Hence, technically, the P5 can prevent a procedural question (on which there can be no veto) from being treated as a procedural question. See, for example, the discussion in Bruno Simma’s commentary on *The Charter of The United Nations* (2nd edition, vol. I), p. 489.

10. Inis L. Claude Jr., *ibid.*, p. 154.

11. Cited in Hiscocks, 1973, p. 60.

12. UN Security Council S/PV.4288 (Resumption 1), Wednesday, 7 March 2001, New York.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: THE SINGAPORE EXPERIENCE

Davos World Economic Forum daily newspaper.

January 2001

In the past few decades, the dominant story about Third World countries is a litany of their failures. Much less has been written about their successes, which, though significant, have been tragically few. The second volume of Mr Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs fills an important gap in development studies: in it he explains the complex policies that led to Singapore's success.

As Kofi Annan said, "The title of this book, *From Third World To First*, expresses an aspiration of all developing countries but so far, alas, an achievement of very few. Singapore is one of those few. This account of its first years of independence written by its founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, will therefore be of great interest to people of other developing countries and to all those who are interested in their fate."

The story of Singapore's success will, however, remain buried for a while more. The prevailing media gurus, especially those in the West, have decided that the conventional wisdom about Singapore should be "Yes, Singapore has succeeded, but ..." And the emphasis is always on the sentences that flow after the "but", not on the bare statement that precedes it.

The tragedy here is that the Western media, with their global coverage, have suppressed a story that would be both useful and inspiring to Third World

populations. My international experience has taught me that there is great interest in Singapore's story. Hence I was happy to contribute this article to the Davos World Economic Forum's new daily newspaper in January 2001.

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WHEN SINGAPORE gained independence in 1965, its leaders cried rather than cheered. The idea that a small island city-state of two million people with no hinterland could survive in what was then a difficult and troubled region seemed manifestly absurd. The odds were always against Singapore succeeding. Remarkably, it has not only succeeded, beating the odds, it has actually become one of the most successful developing nations in the world.

Beating the odds is now a challenge not just for small, vulnerable states like Singapore but also for our planet. As we approach the end of the 20th century, a growing concern in many minds around the globe is that we live on an overpopulated and ecologically threatened planet. In 100 years, the earth's population has trebled from 1.6 million in 1900 to 6 billion in 2000, creating a global average of about 35 persons per square kilometre. Bangladesh, a modern metaphor for overpopulation, has 855 persons per square kilometre. However, the most crowded country in the world is Singapore, with 5,900 persons per square kilometre.

Singapore's success story is now relatively well known, despite the regular knocks it receives from some liberal Western media. But because some of these knocks have been globally transmitted, few have heard the even more interesting story of the innovative social and economic strategies that led to the success story. Singapore's innovative solutions to common economic and social problems may be worth the careful attention of those striving to bridge the growing divide in an increasingly troubled planet. It is timely for the Davos World Economic Forum to address this issue and perhaps equally timely for the *Forum News Daily* to take a peek at Singapore's story.

The economic success of Singapore is well known. Its economy has grown by over 7 per cent per annum since independence in 1965, leading to a per capita income of US\$29,610 (ranked ninth in the world). Some maintain that Singapore has the most efficient port, airport, airline and civil service in the world. It also has the third largest oil-refining capability and one of the largest financial centres. Its total trade is three times the size of its GNP. The policy prescriptions created to achieve this were relatively simple: sustain a free and open economy, avoid any subsidy, welcome

foreign investment and aim for budgetary surpluses. Hard work, thrift and the virtues of increasing worker productivity were always emphasised.

Hidden behind this economic story, however, is another story that is surprisingly little known. Societies should be judged ultimately on their ability to deliver to their citizens most of their human needs: food, shelter, health, education, a clean environment, a sense of community and a sense of purpose in life. It is on these dimensions that Singapore could perhaps provide recipes for a crowded planet.

The socio-economic policies of Singapore are difficult to characterise. They fit neither the capitalist nor the socialist paradigm. Instead, a healthy pragmatic spirit and an openness to innovation and experience characterise the approach of the government. Food is cheap and plentiful because imports are encouraged from all over the world. Singapore produces none at home, but the average worker can buy lunch for two to three US dollars. Shelter is also plentiful. Ninety per cent of the population live in high-rise public housing that occupies only one-sixth of the island. The average dwelling space per family is above the global average. Virtually all Singaporeans live in homes they own because of a compulsory savings programme, the Central Provident Fund (CPF). A worker earning US\$1,000 a month (and many do earn this much) would save at least US\$400 every month: US\$200 from his salary and US\$200 from a matching employers' contribution. Their investment in housing has paid off because the average flat has trebled in value over the past 10 years.

The CPF scheme also enables most Singaporeans to save for medical expenses. The health system has moved away from full government subsidy to increasing co-payment. However, no one who needs medical treatment is denied it because of three-tier protection: personal savings through Medisave; a government low-cost insurance scheme through Medishield; and government assistance through Medifund. The population has become healthier every year. Infant mortality rates have fallen from 26.3 per 1,000 births in 1965 to 4 per 1,000 today. Life expectancy is rising. Education is neither

totally free nor compulsory, but today 90 per cent of each cohort will complete at least 10 years of education, 20 per cent will complete university, 40 per cent will complete polytechnic training, and 30 per cent will complete vocational training. Early educational streaming ensures that the different talents are recognised and developed from an early age.

The story on the environment front is also worth studying. Long before the Green movement surfaced, the then prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, said, “I have always believed that a blighted urban landscape, a concrete jungle, destroys the human spirit. We need the greenery of nature to lift our spirits.” With careful land planning, only 49 per cent of the island is used for residential, commercial and industrial purposes. Hence, half the island consists of forest reserves, water catchment areas, marshes and other non-built up areas. It is a green island, even though the World Bank classifies the population as “one hundred per cent urbanised”. Curiously, there is more biodiversity in Singapore than in all of the United States.

From the early days, Singapore recognised the threat posed by cars. Hence, both ownership and usage of cars are severely taxed. To buy a car, one has to first buy a piece of paper—a Certificate of Entitlement (COE). A limited number of COEs are auctioned every month to control car population growth. Today an average COE costs US\$30,000. Including taxes, a Mercedes-Benz now costs over US\$150,000. In 1998 an Electronic Road Pricing Scheme (ERPS) was launched to control car usage and manage traffic congestion. This penalisation of car transport is balanced by the provision of efficient subway and bus services, which, surprisingly, are not subsidised. Bus companies make money because the word “subsidy” is virtually taboo in Singapore.

This careful attention to meeting the physical and material needs of the population is matched by equal care and concern for the people’s social and spiritual needs. In this, however, Singapore has consciously moved away from the welfare state prescriptions of OECD societies. There are no homeless, destitute or starving people in Singapore. Poverty has been eradicated, not through an entitlements programme (there are virtually none), but through a

unique partnership between the government, corporate citizens, self-help groups and voluntary initiatives. The state acts as the catalyst—matching financial support, sponsoring preventive and social care, and ensuring that basic needs are provided for. Remarkably, the poorest 5 per cent of households have about the same levels of ownership of homes, television sets, refrigerators, telephones, washing machines and video recorders as the national average. Perhaps this, combined with the tough law and order regime, explains why Singapore has one of the lowest crime rates in the world—167 per 100,000.

Singaporean society emphasises the importance of the family. Government policies are skewed in favour of encouraging extended families to live in the same neighbourhood. These policies also encourage families to care for their own elderly. The traditional Asian emphasis on clan and kinship provides a valuable social glue, even as society modernises and develops.

An equally strong emphasis is placed on multiracial harmony, given the experience with racial riots before independence. The government publishes notices in the four official languages: Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English. Every Singaporean child has to be bilingual, and there is no ethnic discrimination in school or in the civil service. To avoid the evolution of racial ghettos in public housing, all estates are required to have a certain percentage of minority population. Citizen and community groups are encouraged to be multiracial. Every constituency is also provided with a community centre, open to all citizens. A dense network of citizen consultative groups enables citizens to participate in managing the affairs of their community.

Singapore is not a perfect society. Nor is it a paradise. Affluence has created bad social habits: excessive consumption and waste generation. According to the UNEP, Singaporeans generated 1.1 kg of domestic waste per person per day, compared to Germany's 0.9 kg. Littering lingers as a bad habit. Singapore is also not spared from the social problems of modern cities—drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, vandalism and teenage crime—even though the deterrents are severe.

The struggle for survival and social improvement will be an eternal one for Singapore. But the few successes that the country has had may carry a message of hope. If the rest of the world could agree to accept the living conditions of Singaporeans, then the 5.25 billion people of our planet may need only an area the size of South Africa to live in. Somehow, this possibility does make the planet appear less crowded.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE NINETIES

Environment Guardian. 21 September 1990

In 1990 I was invited to attend the regular annual UNDP conference in Antalya, Turkey, a truly beautiful corner of the world. I knew little about developmental theory, but I did know that the conventional developmental theory that had been passed on to Third World societies had truly not worked well in developing them. Indeed, the real tragedy of many developing countries was that after the immediate euphoria of independence from colonial rule, they found the business of self-government to be difficult. A few progressed. Many slid backwards. It seemed to me unfair and unjust that Third World minds continued to dish out conventional wisdom that had not worked in practice. Hence, I decided to offer some unconventional thoughts on development. To my surprise, these thoughts travelled well. They were published in many magazines and also in *Change: Threat or Opportunity for Human Progress*, edited by Uner Kirdar, Vol. II, United Nations, New York, 1992.

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1. Thou shalt blame only thyself for thine failures in development. Blaming imperialism, colonialism and neo-imperialism is a convenient excuse to avoid self-examination.
2. Thou shalt acknowledge that corruption is the single most important cause for failures in development. Developed countries are not free from corruption, but with their affluence they can afford to indulge in savings and loan scandals.
3. Thou shalt not subsidise any products. Nor punish the farmer to favour the city dweller. High prices are the only effective signal to increase production. If there are food riots, thou shalt resign from office.
4. Thou shalt abandon state control for free markets. Thou shalt have faith in thine own population. An alive and productive population naturally causes development.
5. Thou shalt borrow no more. Thou shalt get foreign investment that pays for itself. Thou shalt build only the infrastructure that is needed and create no white elephants nor railways that end in deserts. Thou shalt accept no aid that is intended only to subsidise ailing industries in developed countries.
6. Thou shalt not reinvent the wheel. Millions of people have gone through the path of development. Take the well-travelled roads. Be not prisoners of dead ideologies.
7. Thou shalt scrub the ideas of Karl Marx out of thine minds and replace them with the ideas of Adam Smith. The Germans have made their choice. Thou shalt follow suit.
8. Thou shalt be humble when developing and not lecture the developed world on their sins. They listened politely in the 1960s and 1970s. They no longer will in the 1990s.
9. Thou shalt abandon all North-South forums, which only encourage hypocritical speeches and token gestures. Thou shalt remember that the countries that have received the greatest amount of aid per capita have failed most spectacularly in development. Thou shalt throw out all theories of development.
10. Thou shalt not abandon hope. People are the same the world over. What Europe achieved yesterday, the developing world will achieve tomorrow. It can be done.

WANTED: NEW THINKING, NOT TINKERING

The Straits Times. 6 November 2008

The annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meetings in Davos are remarkable events. They bring together a stellar collection of world leaders, public intellectuals, media heavyweights and civil society leaders to have a broad discussion of key global challenges.

The visionary founder of WEF, Dr Klaus Schwab, has now created a parallel track that draws in leading intellectuals from all over the world to meet in Dubai. In November 2008, these global intellectuals met for the “Summit on the Global Agenda” in Dubai to focus on key global challenges.

.....

The need to reform global governance has never been greater. Paradoxically, at a time when the world urgently needs new thinking in global governance, old thinking dominates. *The Economist's* cover story on global governance in July 2008 brilliantly used the image of the Tower of Babel to capture the contradictions and confusion surrounding the global governance debate. Sadly, the essay itself was full of conventional wisdom to the effect that we only need to reform existing global governance institutions.

Tinkering will not work. The world has changed fundamentally since 1945 and will change even more radically. We need new thinking, not new tinkering. To arrive at the new thinking, we need to focus on three tensions that have arisen in global governance.

The first tension is between the desire to cling to sovereignty and the need to respond to globalisation. Globalisation has changed the world fundamentally. Most new challenges respect no borders. Neither terrorism nor epidemics, financial crises nor environmental challenges respect borders. None can be solved by any country working alone. At a time when the global village needs to convene global village councils to address these issues, these very institutions are being weakened.

Sadly, the most powerful country in the world, the United States, is allergic to global governance. Strobe Talbott explains this allergy well:

It is not surprising that talk of global governance should elicit more scepticism, suspicion and sometimes bilious opposition in the US than elsewhere. The more powerful a state is, the more likely its people are to regard the pooling of national authority as an unnatural act.¹

Paradoxically, the United States has the most to gain from good global governance because the richest home in any village has the most to lose from global disorder and instability.

The second tension in global governance is between the old and new rising powers. We are coming to the end of two centuries of Western domination of world history. All the new emerging powers are non-Western. Yet, the West continues to be over-represented in

existing global institutions.

The United Nations' founding fathers wisely created the veto to anchor the great powers in the UN. Sadly, they did not anticipate that the great powers of the day could become the great powers of yesterday. Britain and France could help by giving up their seats in favour of a common European seat. If they did, they would embarrass the Asian powers who are busy undermining each others' bids to gain key seats in global organisations.

Similarly, the G8 represents the great powers of yesterday. It maintains a charade of addressing global challenges. This charade is sustained by the Western media, which legitimises the G8 as a global village council, though it represents only 13.5 per cent of the world's population.

Persuading great powers to give up privileged positions will not be easy, unless a new social contract can be created that also serves their long-term interests. The rich Western powers stand to lose the most from global disorder. Hence, it should be in their interest to support a new principle that all new and old powers who want to occupy privileged positions in global organisations should take on responsibilities commensurate with their privileges. Hence, if genocide breaks out in Rwanda or if a financial crisis arises in Asia, all great powers must assume the responsibility to address these challenges.

This approach will also help to resolve the third tension between great power imperatives and the need to reflect the views and interests of the majority of the world's population in global governance. Great powers can no longer dominate global politics as they did in the 19th and 20th centuries. The majority of the world's population has gone from being an object of world history to becoming the subject. People want to take greater control of their destinies and not have their views or interests ignored.

Hence, any reform of global governance should pay attention to both institutions that respond to great power interests (like the UNSC and G8) and institutions that respond to the universal interests of humanity (like the UN General Assembly).

It will not be easy to resolve these three tensions. If we are unable

to do so, both rich and poor countries will become losers, and our global village might be destroyed. Therefore, there is an urgent and pressing need to discard old thinking on global governance and prepare new perspectives. Every villager understands the wisdom of this phrase: “To protect our home, we must protect the village.” Hence, we should say: “To protect our country, we must protect the planet ...”

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1. Strobe Talbott, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States and the Quest for a Global Nation*. Simon & Schuster; 1st Simon & Schuster Hardcover edition January 1, 2008.

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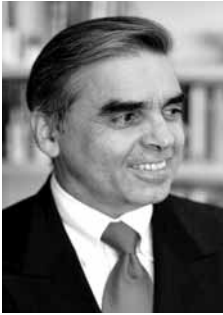
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



IN MARCH 2009, the *Financial Times* published a list of 50 individuals who will frame the debate on the future of capitalism. This list included Kishore Mahbubani. Prior to this, he was listed by the *Foreign Policy* and the *Prospect* magazines as one of the top 100 public intellectuals in the world in the fall of 2005. Clearly, Professor Mahbubani, a student of philosophy and history, has made his mark as a global public intellectual.

Professor Mahbubani has had the good fortune of enjoying a career in government. With the Singapore Foreign Service from 1971 to 2004, he had postings in Cambodia, Malaysia, Washington, DC, and New York, where he served two stints as Singapore's Ambassador to the UN and as President of the UN Security Council in January 2001 and May 2002. He was Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Ministry from 1993 to 1998. Currently, he is the Dean and Professor in the Practice of Public Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore.

Professor Mahbubani has published globally. His articles have appeared in a wide range of journals and newspapers, including *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Washington Quarterly*, *American Interest*, *The National Interest*, *The Wilson Quarterly*, *TIME Magazine*, *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*. He has been profiled in *The Economist* and in *TIME Magazine*. He is also the author of two other books—*Beyond The Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust between America and the World* and *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*. More information on his writings can be found on www.mahbubani.net.

In 1998, Professor Mahbubani was conferred The Public Administration Medal (Gold) by the Singapore Government. In June 2004, he was awarded The Foreign Policy Association Medal in New York with the following opening words in the citation: "A gifted diplomat, a student of history and philosophy, a provocative writer and an intuitive thinker."