
As the Soviet Union disintegrated, American Secretary of State James Baker suggested that a hub-and-spoke system would replace the bi-polar Cold War world. Every country would go through the United States to reach its destination. Baker was right—for about a decade. In the twenty-first century, according to Fareed Zakaria, the editor of *Newsweek International*, more and more nations feel empowered to bypass the American "center," taking point-to-point routes, "with new flight patterns being mapped every day."

In *The Post-American World*, Zakaria examines the implications of "the rise of the rest." His account of the diffusion of global power is stimulating, sweeping, and smart. Because he does not interrogate the premises that animate his analysis, however, he's better at describing the new world order than explaining how it took hold. Zakaria believes that government policies matter—sometimes. But for him finance capitalism is king, with a momentum that is all but inexorable. In his increasingly flat world, economics trumps politics, modernization marches on, the feudal, family-based, hierarchical order dies, and the perplexing problems are "the problems of plenty." China and India, he implies, will grow in the global economy, with or without active and effective state intervention. The United States can manage, but not prevent, its relative decline.

Zakaria maintains that the "cascade of bad news" about Afghanistan and Iraq gives the wrong impression. With dramatic declines in organized violence, the world, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, has actually been "unusually calm." In the war on terrorism, governments have gained the upper hand. Al Qaeda is little more than "a communications company." In Muslim countries, support for suicide bombers has plummeted. Jihadists continue to kill, but the impact
of their actions has diminished with each attack. And nuclear weapons "are harder to get than many think."

In the twenty-first century, Zakaria proclaims, prosperity is even more pervasive than peace. Thanks to the free flow of capital, technological innovations, the revolution in communications, and the spread of independent banks, countries all over the world are booming. In 2006 and 2007, the economies of 124 nations, including thirty in Africa, grew at a rate of four percent or more each year. The GDPs of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are robust—and Turkey's economy is increasing by a whopping seven percent per annum. Inflation exceeds fifteen percent in only twelve countries in the world. Although fifty countries remain economic basket cases, poverty is declining in places where eighty percent of the world's population live. "The Cup Runneth Over," Zakaria declares, and the "great expansion" shows no signs of abating.

Zakaria's assumption that economics trumps politics frames his snapshots of China and India, the poster-children of the post-American world. China, he reminds us, has grown at nine percent a year for three decades, the fastest rate in recorded history, lifting four hundred million people out of poverty. Zakaria credits central planning, but does not sort out the respective roles of the government and "the private sector" in the economic miracle. The ruling regime, he writes, may or may not relinquish power, dismantle patronage networks, and relax restrictions on dissent. They may or may not forsake "militarism, empire, and aggression." But, he seems convinced that somehow, with its vibrant market society and gigantic population, China will, eventually, emerge as "the alternative" to the United States.

India has become the second fastest growing economy in the world, Zakaria contends, despite the government, not because of it. An "open, eager, and confident" society has produced the nation's greatest asset, human capital. Where other countries have been propelled forward by
market-friendly and capital accumulating government policies, the consumer is king in India. A vast cadre of entrepreneurs, managers, and service providers, familiar with the English language and Western business practices, "speak globalization fluently." Even if the state remains "hesitant, cautious, and suspicious of the realities around it," ill-equipped to "play its rightful role in the new world," Zakaria suggests, somehow India will be fruitful and multiply.

In responding to "the rise of the rest," Zakaria believes, the principal challenge to the United States is political. He is surprisingly sanguine about the American economy. The U.S. share of global GDP, he indicates, has remained remarkably constant for decades, and is not likely to slip significantly any time soon. A "dynamic economy at the cutting edge," America dominates in nano-technology and bio-technology. Its colleges and universities are the best in the world. It isn't falling behind, per capita, in the students it trains in science, mathematics and engineering. Zakaria acknowledges that there are legitimate reasons for concern. The savings rate has fallen fast; government deficits are growing; and Medicare "threatens to blow up the federal budget." But these "dysfunctions," he emphasizes, "are not the product of deep inefficiencies within the American economy."

They are the consequences "of a highly dysfunctional politics." Zakaria insists that a "set of sensible reforms could be enacted tomorrow to trim wasteful spending and subsidies, increase savings, expand training in science and technology, secure pensions, create a workable immigration process, and achieve significant inefficiencies in the use of energy." In foreign policy, he recommends an end to protectionism, unilateralism, and scare-mongering (among its own citizens and others) about terrorism.
Zakaria doesn't seem confident that the political system is up to the challenge. He leaves us wondering whether the American economy and American society, like India's, will "adjust, adapt, and persevere" anyway. Or whether politics will trump economics.

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