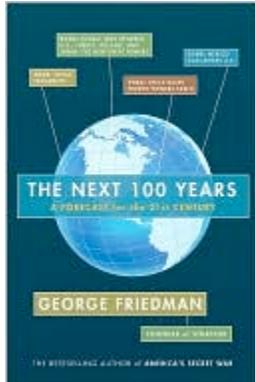




## The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century

George Friedman , Joanne J. Myers

January 28, 2009



The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century

- [Introduction](#)
- [Remarks](#)
- [Questions and Answers](#)

### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to welcome our members, guests, and [C-SPAN Book TV](#).

Today it is a great pleasure to host one of our country's most astute geopolitical forecasters, [George Friedman](#). Mr. Friedman is the founder and CEO of [STRATFOR](#), a private global intelligence firm which has an unmatched ability to provide clear and unbiased perspective on the relevant geopolitical issues of our world today.

As an avid reader of his reports, I personally have found his analysis of international events to be always thought-provoking and engrossing. In addition to identifying and explaining the major concerns of our times, Mr. Friedman is the author of four books, including the widely acclaimed [America's Secret War](#), in which he identifies the United States' most dangerous enemies, delving into everything from presidential strategies of the last quarter-century, to hidden reasons behind the attack of 9/11, to the true aim of the war in Iraq. He has also published numerous articles on national security, information warfare, computer security, and the intelligence business.

While much of the world may be focusing on [Barack Obama](#)'s first 100 days, there is one person who has set his sights further afield. In his latest work, [The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century](#), our speaker provides a lucid projection for the change we may not necessarily believe in but the change we can expect in the years to come.

The desire to predict the future is an innate human trait. Nevertheless, our speaker has no crystal ball and is no seer. But he does have the rare ability to take geopolitical patterns and use them to forecast future events. Still, you may ask, how is Mr. Friedman able to make these predictions?

To begin with, these projections are not as random or unpredictable as they appear, because what our speaker is really trying to do, as he says, is transmit a sense of the future. His goal is to identify the major tendencies, whether geopolitical, technical, demographic, cultural, or military, in the broadest sense and to define the major events that may take place. Accordingly, he believes that so long as you can adhere to the notion that the fundamental human condition remains constant, you can predict certain changes—or, as he says: be practical; expect the impossible.

As Mr. Friedman takes us into the future, describing what the world will look like in the 21st American century—and he does emphasize the word "American"—his predictions may surprise you.

Please join me in welcoming a very unconventional thinker who is bound to make you envision the future in a way you have not done before, our guest today, George Friedman. Thank you.

## Remarks

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** Thank you for that very kind introduction. I hope I can live up to it.

I am very, very honored to be here at the Carnegie Council. There are few venues that I would want to speak in more. Thank you for having me.

I have written a book, called *The Next 100 Years*, which is probably the most presumptuous book you can possibly imagine. In one sense, it is, certainly—how could I possibly know what's going to happen in the next 100 years? But in another sense, the reason that I have tried to create this book is to get a sense of this moment.

When I talk about the next 100 years, what I really want to think about is: what are the forces that are real and permanent—not today's headlines, not today's angst, not today's crises, but what are the things that are going to be discussed 50 years from now, 100 years from now; what are the forces that are developing underneath the surface of our global system that are going to be driving events?

So if we started back in 1900, and I said to you in 1908 that, "Look, by the year 2000, all of the European empires will be gone, the [Hohenzollerns](#) will be gone, the [Hapsburgs](#) will be gone, the [Romanovs](#) will be gone, the Turks will be gone; the great event of the century will be the rise of American power; China, Japan, Korea, these will be great economic powers; and in the Middle East it will be Israel that will be the great military force," they would carry me out, give me medication, and assure me that if I tried to help myself, I could be helped.

But it's not just the 20th century. If at the beginning of the 19th century I would say to you, "Well, by the end of the century the great new global power will be the United States"; if I said that, in 1800, "the [Ottoman Empire](#) is finished, you won't be worrying about it; the British were going to conquer Africa and, by the way, India as well"—again you would think me mad, because the worst way to approach thinking about the future is to use common sense.

That is the only, and overriding, principle that I have discovered in history, which is that if I stand at any point—if I stand in 1980 and tell you that by 1990 the Soviet Union would collapse, or in 1960 that the United States would fight a war with the communists, but it would be the Vietnamese and we'd lose—if I did any of these things, you would be convinced that I were mad.

Therefore, if I am going to think about the 21st century—well, first off, I would be mad to want to—but I have to suspend common sense. In other words, the attempt to extrapolate, simply and simplistically, that the future will be like now only more so is, I think, inherently wrongheaded.

The [CIA](#) recently published a study, which said that India and China will be emerging powers. What the CIA did was simply draw straight lines.

But the century that we've passed is a century full of discontinuities. So the question that I am asking here is: What are the discontinuities that will occur in the 21st century and, equally, what are the forces that create those discontinuities?

So I guarantee you that the concrete suggestions I have about the century will sound completely mad—and perhaps they are—but they are not intended to be. They are no more mad than understanding this century in 1900.

So what are the underlying forces that are framing the century?

Let me begin with the first one which I think is critical to understand, which is the end of the population explosion. Everywhere in the world birth rates are collapsing. It is projected by the [United Nations](#) that population growth will go from 100 percent in the past 50 years to only 50 percent by 2050, and by the

end of the century 10 percent growth. To replace population each woman needs to have 2.1 children. In most of Europe, that number is 1.5, 1.6, 1.7. In Japan, it's similarly low. It is, therefore, arithmetically certain that the populations of the leading countries that we are looking at are going to decline dramatically, as well as age, but that once the baby boom has passed away—to talk about me, and that's fairly clinical, when I'm gone, the population decline will accelerate.

Nor is it likely to reverse. In agricultural society or early industrial society, having a child was profitable—you sent him to work at an early age; when you retired, he would take care of you.

Today, if you talk about conspicuous consumption, nothing is more expensive than a child who remains a child into his mid-20s, when he tries to find himself and you have to finance it; or if he picks a profession that doesn't quite work out and comes home. In other words, having children is a luxury, not a necessity.

People are not going to indulge this luxury excessively, and, therefore, there are fewer children.

And that's not simply here. There is nowhere in the world where the birth rate is not in precipitous decline. In the advanced industrial world, it is already in that position.

Middle-tier countries, like Mexico or Brazil, are readily approaching levels of zero population growth. And even in areas where population is still growing rapidly, such as countries like Bangladesh, Congo, third-tier countries, you have a fall from a 7.5 birth rate to about a 5.0 birth rate. So we are seeing a transformation of what I will call the European model of demography.

Europe begins, from my point of view, in 1492 with the first globalization of the economy, because the first global economy that was ever created was the European.

Until that point, the [Aztecs](#) had no idea there were [Mongols](#); the Mongols were really not connected to the [Zulus](#). It was the European imperialists that tied all of them together and made the world aware of itself, created a global system instead of a group of isolated systems.

And part of the European model was this population explosion, which came about for a host of reasons, from health care to different models of production and so on.

But the basic assumption that is built into the economic system was that there would always be more people—more workers, more consumers, more soldiers. And so in the history of Europe the armies got larger, the economies got larger, the world got larger.

That system is ending. It is ending because the European model is in decline. In fact, one would say that Europe is in decline, because if I were to point to the single most important event of the 20th century, it would be the end of the European imperial system. The collapse of the British empire, the collapse of the French empire, the Dutch empire, the Belgian empire, had a more profound effect on the way the world worked than any other single event.

The origin of that collapse was the fact that the Europeans, while they conquered the world, also waged an endless civil war against each other of ever-intensifying proportions, with larger armies and so on, until in the 20th century they simply ripped themselves apart. They could no longer dominate the world.

The fact that the Europeans are no longer fighting is of course gratifying. But as I like to say, they are exhausted and call it virtue. After the 20th century, it is not clear to me that the Europeans as they gave up their empire are the same Europeans that landed in their boats in Latin America, burned them, and proceeded to conquer empires. They were barbarians, and they had the virtues and the vices of barbarians.

Now, while the European Age was critical, Atlantic Europe—the countries on the Atlantic—dominated the world, and the heartland of the international system was of course the north Atlantic. Whoever controlled the north Atlantic controlled Europe's access to the world. Whoever controlled Europe's access to the world could shape the empires. And of course, for hundreds of years the Spaniards, the French, the Dutch, the British, fought for control of the north Atlantic.

But in 1980 an extraordinary event happened in human history: for the first time ever, trans-Pacific trade equaled trans-Atlantic trade. It was somewhere around 1980. It's hard to pin it down; it could have been 1981, 1982. That was an extraordinary event that we all experienced.

But think what it means. It means that at that point not only was Europe no longer the pivot of the global system, nor was the north Atlantic by itself the key to global power.

There were two keys: the Atlantic and the Pacific. Therefore, by definition, any power that was native to both bodies of water was in an extraordinary position, particularly if it had the wherewithal to exploit that.

Now, South America, for reasons of geography I won't go into here, can't be native to both the Atlantic and the Pacific. It looks like one continent. It really isn't. It is divided and subdivided and can't be one.

But North America is the power that is native to the Atlantic and the Pacific and, therefore, has the lowest cost of projecting power into both basins. So the cost for a European empire to maintain a major naval presence in the Pacific is extraordinarily high, the cost for an Asian power to maintain an Atlantic presence is extremely high, but the cost for the United States of maintaining both, while high, is not extraordinarily high.

Therefore, I would argue that North America became, particularly with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the centrality of the European conflict, the center of gravity of the international system, in the same way that Europe had been the center of gravity of the international system for 500 years. From 1492 to 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, almost exactly 500 years, Europe had been the pivot. Now it had become North America, and, as it happens, the United States is the dominant power for this century in North America, and, therefore, it is the center of gravity of North America. That does not necessarily mean it is eternal. It doesn't even mean necessarily that it is powerful by itself. It just means by the geographic facts of the way the world works it is in the right place.

It is also an extraordinarily powerful country because it dominates a united continent, it has no continental enemies, it has not in 100-and-some-odd years had a domestic war to devastate it, which differentiates it from almost all other great powers, and, therefore, it is extremely wealthy.

We speak about all of the crises of the United States, all of which are very serious, but the fact remains that the United States' economy is larger than the next four economies combined: Japan, China, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Combine all of them and they're not quite as large as the American economy.

We speak of the de-industrialization of the United States, and that certainly has happened. American industrial output is about \$2.8 trillion a year, much less than it used to be, which means that American industrial output is only larger than the combined outputs of China and Japan.

It is utterly vital to understand the scale of the American economy to begin to measure American power. It is extremely important to understand that—I won't call it orders of magnitude greater—the power of a united continent native to both the Atlantic and the Pacific is extraordinarily more powerful than those of other countries.

And you add to this one other fact: never before in human history has a single power controlled all the sea lanes in the world. The [United States' Navy](#) may not be everywhere, but it can be anywhere. And no other naval force, no matter how combined with allies—if you throw all of the world's navies against the U.S. Navy, it doesn't begin to measure up. Which means that if you are in a dhow in the Arabian Sea, if you are in a junk in the South China Sea, if you are in a cabin cruiser in the Caribbean, you are under the surveillance of American space-based systems and liable to interception by the U.S. Navy. This has two obvious outcomes that are very important:

- We get to invade other people; they don't get to invade us. Now, that is not a trivial advantage if

you've ever been invaded. It does not make us wise, it does not necessarily even make us effective, but it gives us a unique advantage.

- The second thing, which matters in the course of a century—and this really is important—is that it has the potential to reshape patterns of international trade if it chooses. The United States throughout the 20th century, the second half in particular, has operated under the principle of a free-trade regime in which its Navy was primarily used to facilitate international trade. It did not seek to develop any special advantage from that, save those sanctions and blockades that we occasionally imposed for immediate political purpose.

But there is no reason to believe, with that enormous power, in the 21st century that the United States won't choose to reshape international trade if it finds itself under extreme economic or political pressure. One can have power that isn't exercised. That, by the way, is the definition of soft power. When you talk about soft power, it is what you could do that you don't do. That gives you the opportunity to be gracious, friendly, and pleasant.

So when we speak about the United States having soft power, that soft power derives from these absolutely overwhelming facts. I say these because these facts are obvious, noncontroversial, and yet continually neglected in the face of what are serious but passing problems. I say this at a time when we are all in a great economic crisis.

But I recall another one, being old enough to remember the 1970s. I remember when we had a housing crisis because interest rates were 15 percent and you couldn't buy a house because they were at 15 percent; and unemployment was over 10 percent at the same time; and inflation was 11 percent or 12 percent; and there was an oil shortage and you were standing on lines; and we had lost a war in Vietnam; and everybody knew the United States was in absolute decline and that something terrible was going to happen. And then, the Iranians, as the Iranians tend to do, intervened, kidnapped some embassy personnel; we had a catastrophic outcome of [Desert One](#); and there is no question that the United States was a declining power.

Three or four years into the [Reagan](#) Administration, and "morning in America," whatever he was talking about, the fundamental reality of American power reasserted itself. In other words, the underlying reality of the size and magnitude of both American economic and military power reasserted itself, and what seems so absolutely obvious, the decline of the United States, turned out not to be so obvious.

I've just written an op-ed piece where I begin with a section from [Jimmy Carter's](#) famous "[malaise](#)" [speech](#), in what I say is "the president said this," and I don't tell anybody that it's not Barack Obama until later on.

We Americans vastly tend to overestimate our problems and the rest of the world eagerly overestimates our problems. The great desire—and I speak as someone born in Hungary—of every European is that the United States should suffer the same fate as Europe. Not yet.

So then, what is it that we can expect?

Well, firstly, I argue in the book, to go very quickly, that the [U.S.'s hottest war](#) is not a [100 years' war](#); it's about over. Certainly, there will be radical Islamists who are prepared to commit terrorist acts—there have been for 1,000 years. But—and this is what is very important—the United States is withdrawing from Iraq (that was set in place by [Bush](#)) and in due course we will be out of Afghanistan. Certainly, what [Alexander the Great](#) couldn't do and the Russians couldn't do and the British couldn't do, we're not going to do.

What comes next? Well, when I started to write the book, it was fairly controversial, because I asserted that the Russian empire was reasserting itself. This is now far less controversial. Never take two years to write a book.

But, clearly, the United States and the Russians are in a minor competition. This is not a cold war, in the sense that the Russians are not supporting wars of national liberation everywhere. This is not a near-nuclear confrontation where the hour hand of the scientists is one minute away from midnight. Nevertheless, it is a very serious confrontation, because as soon as Russia reunites itself—its border is with Europe, and on the northern European plain this time the border is not at the [Fulda Gap](#) in central Germany; it is on the Polish border. The Russians are extremely interested in what the Americans are doing in Poland, such as giving them ballistic missile defense systems, F-16s, and all sorts of other things. And, of course, the Americans are extremely interested in what the Russians are doing in Belarus, Ukraine, and everywhere else. And each is trying to influence the other.

There will certainly be a period of extreme tension. I doubt very much that the Russians have the ability to maintain a long-term competition with the United States. But, certainly, they have certain advantages.

The fact that the Europeans are utterly dependent on them for their energy means that European foreign policy must take into account the consequences of alienating the Russians. We saw that with the Germans when war broke out in Georgia; the United States pressed forward with the argument that there should be [NATO](#) expansion, and [Chancellor Merkel](#) went to Saint Petersburg, where she met with [President Medvedev](#) and declared that she had no current interest in NATO expansion. And the Russians were very thoughtful about that and pleased, and they only cut off gas for three weeks this time. Undoubtedly, they wanted to influence the Ukrainians, and if the Europeans got the message that the Russians had them in a very uncomfortable position vis-à-vis the Americans and the new administration, they didn't really object to that at all.

So the Russians and the Americans are going to be competing again. That's yesterday's news. I don't think that they will survive.

So let me go to the radical parts of the book. What are the great powers of the 21st century? Bear in mind, please, that in 1900 some of the predictions would have been insane as well.

Well, I am not impressed by China. I mean China is overwhelmingly a third-world country, where the majority of people, the vast majority of people, earn less than \$2,000 a year, if that much. It is two countries; it is two countries at odds. And China is essentially an extension of the American economy—when we catch cold, they get pneumonia, as they say.

And when a Chinese worker becomes unemployed, he does not face problems with his 401(k). He had been earning \$60, \$70, \$80 a month, and he is facing problems with malnutrition. The Chinese are terrified of unemployment, as they should be, working very hard to keep it from that. It costs them a great deal of money and inefficiency in keeping factories going. These are self-limiting factors of the Chinese economy.

The Chinese have done extraordinarily well for 30 years. The probability that they will do equally well for the next 30 years is as likely as the idea that in 1985 Japan would be a new super-state vastly exceeding the United States. We tend to draw straight lines where straight lines shouldn't be drawn.

If I take a look at Asia and I say "Who is the great power in Asia?", the answer is rather self-evident: that is Japan. It is the world's second-largest economy. It has a substantially effective navy, it has a good air force, it has an army larger than the British Army—and that's when their constitution demands that they not have any of these things. Imagine what will happen when they change that constitution.

Japan is a great power. That it chooses to act in modest and careful ways should not delude anyone in the intrinsic power that Japan has. So I expect Japan to be a player, to say the least, in the 21st century.

The second, a little odder, is Turkey. Turkey is the world's 17th-largest economy. It's larger than Saudi Arabia. It has an excellent army. It lives in a sea of chaos, and, whatever internal problems it has—and all countries have internal problems—it is not in chaos. You see Turkish influence spreading in the Balkans; you see it in the Caucasus; you see it to their south in Iraq and in the negotiations they are

carrying out between Israel and Syria; you see it in the alliances they have created (for example, the alliance with Israel); the extreme caution with which Iran treats Turkey under any and all circumstances. You see a country that is emerging.

But when you remember that for 500 years Turkey was the center and the organizing principle of the Islamic world, the Ottoman Empire, that shouldn't be that odd. The last 100 years were odd, while Turkey enclosed itself, and the Anglo-French, if you will, organized the region, the Balkans and also the area south in the Middle East. But as that area leaves the control of others, including the Americans, the Turks become much more important and much more influential.

My third and final choice will be the most controversial: Poland. Why? Well, firstly, because Poland faces Russia. The north European plain has no natural boundaries—the boundary now is drawn on the line Poland/Russia/Belarus/Ukraine—and Poland is the key if Russia is not to return to central Europe, which it may not want to but it may wind up doing that kind of *en passant*.

Now, the United States is extremely interested in Poland, and that has a certain impact on a country. When a country becomes of fundamental strategic importance to the world's leading power, able to make massive economic concessions and technology transfers, that has a real consequence.

As an example, I'll give you South Korea. If I said to you in 1950 that South Korea would be one of the most robust, dynamic economies in Asia, you'd laugh. Why did that happen? Well, it happened because South Korea was of fundamental interest to the United States. The United States had to make certain of the viability of South Korea. South Korea benefited wildly from that relationship.

Another example is Israel. There was no intrinsic reason why Israel would have emerged as anything but an economic basket case save for the financial and economic transfers the United States chose to make. And these are excepting the obvious cases of West Germany and Japan.

Strategic relationships with the United States, not poverty relationships with the United States, but the places where the United States badly needs a country, transforms an economy, particularly when you have a disciplined and capable work force, which the Poles have; and especially when you are sandwiched between two countries that may well cooperate and for whom you have no great love. I mean if you ask a Pole about whether you'd prefer a Russian or a Germany, they'll say "an American." Last time it was the French. They prefer anyone.

And it is not clear that Germany is prepared to participate in other competition with Russia, that it is in a position to do so. It is certainly not clear that Russian and American interests in this matter are going to go hand in hand. Therefore, the United States either concedes the possibility of a German-Russian entente, which would have geopolitical implications for the United States that would be substantial, or the United States has a relationship with Poland. Clearly, it was the decision of the Bush Administration to have that strategic relationship with Poland. The Obama Administration is now reconsidering it. Whether or not there is a missile defense system or not is really inconsequential. Poland is a critical country.

So my view of the middle of the century is that a set of new powers will emerge. Well, that's not exciting news. New powers always emerge. Powers rise and fall.

My reason for Japan is: Why shouldn't the second-largest economy be a great power? My reason for Turkey is: Consider how you bring order to the Middle East; it will not be the United States doing it, and one country has a vested interest in stabilizing it and the power to do so, and that's Turkey, an historical choice. And Poland is simply a historical and geographical accident. It is where Russia meets the West, and, therefore, the place where the Americans will play the game they play the best, which is technology transfer and kick-starting strategically located economies.

The United States' power will grow continually. Since 1870, the single most important fact of the world in this sense has been the continual growth of American power measured in every way. From where it was in 1870 to where it is today is just an extraordinary story. When you actually sit down and graph the economic growth of the United States during this period, it's interesting to note that the [Great Depression](#)

is kind of a bump, not a major event. When you look at it from the point of view of 100 years or 150 years, things that are enormously significant, such as the [Spanish-American War](#), usually aren't. You should have read about the Spanish-American War. It was in all the papers. Elections ran around it. It was a driving issue.

Things come; they pass away. Some things are permanent. I have tried to look for what is permanent. What's permanent for me is the shift in the demographic system, the rise of American power.

Finally, I would point out that the United States has a population density of about 34 people per square kilometer. Japan has a population density of 365 people. Germany has a population density of 285 people. The Old World is highly, intensely populated. The United States is relatively unpopulated. In a world of declining populations, the United States knows how to live in a continent with relatively few people, and also knows how to welcome immigrants very effectively.

That gives it two additional advantages. This is not a jingoistic argument, that we are more virtuous than anybody in the world, that we're smarter than anybody in the world. It is simply a geographical fact. We are in the right place at the right time.

And it is an attempt to put thing in perspective. Things that look absolutely horrendous right now won't look so horrendous in five years. To check that out, go back to 1978-1979, the last time we thought the world was ending.

Let me stop there and invite questions.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Well, I read somewhere that you would be satisfied if you could explain something about how the world works today and how that in turn clearly defines how it will work in the future, and I think you have succeeded.

I'd like to open the floor to questions.

### Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** I'd like to bring you back into Central Asia and the question of oil. For a long time, until about six or seven years ago, the United States was noticeably absent from Central Asia. Their missions and embassies were understaffed. There was no policy that one could see vis-à-vis Central Asia. It was when [Madeleine Albright](#) first went to the region that a panic policy began to emerge.

**QUESTION:** [Professor Sam Huntington](#) came out with a very influential [article](#) in *Foreign Affairs* in the early 1990s where he essentially argued that now that the East/West conflict was over, now that the ideological conflict between communism and capitalism had abated, that the new way we were to look at the world was frictions across civilizations, frictions across cultures. He outlined a number of different civilizations and argued that that would essentially be the straw that stirs the international drink. Others argued that no, economics, economic frictions, would be more important in understanding how the world was ordered.

I wanted you to comment on the Huntington thesis, in terms of what is it essentially that will drive these countries and what will be the dominant motivations in international affairs over the next, say, 20 or 30 years?

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** I disagree with Professor Huntington. I admire him. But when you talk about "Islamic civilization," you can't talk about it as a single entity. You have to draw some distinctions between [Sunni](#) and [Shiite](#), Arab and non-Arab, secular and religious, varieties of religion, and so on and so forth.

When I look at the Islamic world, I think in terms of Egypt and Syria and Iran, I think in terms of nation-states, and I think in terms of the competition between, for example, Egypt and Syria or Egypt and Iran.

My answer to that question is that economics doesn't exist. I mean I can't imagine the American

economy without American politics, certainly today, when the [Federal Reserve](#) and everybody is getting into the game. You can divide academic departments very nicely. Economics departments don't talk to the political science departments. In real life, if you are a banker in New York today, you had better be aware of politics and economics. And you might want to keep the military in mind too; that might affect you as well. So the idea of the primacy of economics as a freestanding event is unpersuasive to me because I've never seen economics freestanding.

The idea of civilizations is persuasive until you drill down to the next level, when the civilizations dissolve into competing entities, and where a country like the United States, or any country really, can manipulate the differences very effectively.

To give an example, the United States is very closely aligned with Egypt. Whatever happens to [Mubarak](#) is another question. So to say that the United States is standing in friction with the Islamic world, when the United States has extremely close relationships with Turkey, Egypt, and so on—these are major countries—it's very hard to really recognize the world functioning.

I regard the basic engine of the international system, what has been really since the 18th century, and in a certain sense for a very long time, the nation-state. The nation-state, for reasons we can't go into right now, remains the driver. In order to understand the next century, I think very traditional methods have to be used, which is what I have tried to do.

**QUESTION:** One or two points.

First, about power, your definition of power and soft power. [Professor Nye](#), who wrote the [book](#) with that title, has a totally different version of soft power than what you said. You kind of said you hold it—military power—behind your back but you don't use it. He actually talks about persuasion and so on, dealing with countries without trying to impose our way.

Then, there is this question of whether this is going to be America's century or whether, as other people have said, we live in a multipolar world or a nonpolar world. So it's not so much whether it's China or Japan or Poland or Turkey, but whether we have to work in a cooperative world, because most of the issues we are dealing with are not power issues, along the lines of what you've said, but things like climate change, environmental catastrophe, migration, and so on. I also have some other thoughts, but I wanted to capture my questions about your thesis in that way.

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** I, of course, know Professor Nye's view. My view was shaped in the Bronx. In the Bronx, we had a saying: "You can get more with a smile and a gun than you can get with a smile alone." [Laughter]

When someone tries to persuade me, my question is, "Well, why should I listen to you?" To which the answer may be, "Because I'm enormous, virtuous, and smart, and if you listen to me, you will be better off."

But I find that in running a business, the "or else" is more persuasive. I tend to disagree vehemently with Professor Nye's view.

The idea that cooperation takes place in the world is of course true. I mean take a look at the period where British power was enormous. The British were also cooperating on a micro and a macro level. Their power in India was tremendous. That did not mean that they did not have alliances, manage relationships, or try to create mutual benefits.

The choice is not between power and cooperation—the two always coexist. The question is what is the shaping force.

So we speak of climate change, which is a perfect example. Until the United States chooses to participate in that climate change, because the United States produces 26 percent of the world's gross domestic product, all the conversations that people have are fairly meaningless. It's not going to happen. It may be that Belgium agrees to something, and it may be that Singapore believes in something, but it really is

the United States that has to be persuaded.

So there certainly is a matter of international cooperation, but the question to ask in these matters is: Who is dispensable and who is indispensable? The argument that I am making is in the 19th century when you talked about the concert of Europe, some countries were dispensable (the Serbs) and some you really had to take into account (the British). We happen to be in that position now. So my view is, again, more traditional, perhaps less imaginative.

**QUESTION:** You have described the fortuitous situation of America's geographic position and its industrial power and so on. But much of a country's stature in the world depends on what goes on inside of that country—its internal psychology, its demographics, its economic growth. So could you address those kinds of questions with respect to the United States in the next century?

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** In my book, I talk about American culture, and I describe three states of culture, if you will:

- Barbarism: The belief that the laws of your village are the laws of the universe;
- Decadence: The belief that there is no law—relax; and
- An enormously complex civilization, believing deeply in something yet being open to the possibility that you are in error. To me that happened in Europe in the 18th century. It was an unstable concept that blew itself apart. It drives itself into places.

I would not even regard America yet as a barbaric country. We are an extraordinarily young culture. To understand the United States is to understand a 15-year-old. It ranges from traumatic hubris and belief that everything is possible, to total despair and suicidal conviction that nothing is possible and I've completely failed, in between rage attacks. If you've ever had a 15-year-old at home, you will recognize it.

There are two things to say, which is that when I traveled the world there was a conviction that the Americans were barbaric imperialists, a conviction that the Americans had completely bungled the world because of their parochial lack of understanding, and that in fact they would never recover. This was 1975. So when I traveled in Europe in my life there has been a constant conviction, insistence, belief, about the insufficiency of American culture and everything else.

I will say profoundly that I think Americans know Europe much better on the whole than Europeans know America. Some of the things that Europeans think about America are funny.

But there is a simple truth to be said: we are an immature country. I think of us as [Baby Huey](#), if you remember the old cartoon—way too big, much too clumsy, way too emotional, too sure of ourselves, too depressed.

It is very difficult to get the measure of this country at this point in time. I think the 21st century will be a period where American culture begins to mature, that it begins to reach the point where it has both barbaric self-confidence, if you will, but at least has a sense of perspective, because the one thing to be said about the United States as I look at it is the lack of perspective, how many times this century we believed it's all over for us, and how many times we believed that we could do anything we wanted in the world.

So I don't see any solution to our culture except growing up. I doubt that my book contributes anything to that, but if it does it would be nice.

**QUESTION:** I was wondering. There is one country that you haven't mentioned at all, and that is India. Could you tell us where you think they will be?

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** India's problem is it is not one country. It is a group of countries driven together by the British with a central government but with tremendous power still vested in the states and the

state bureaucracies. These states have unique ideologies, some of which are very open to foreign investment and some of which are violently opposed. Doing business in India is extraordinarily difficult. The bureaucracy is not inefficient. It is set up in various states to limit investment and so on.

We do not see the forces inside of India that will change this basic dynamic. So we see that, whereas the [Chinese Central Committee](#) in 1975 put in motion a set of national decisions as to what was going to happen, there is no similar central authority in India to do that. And therefore, while superficially, given size and everything else, one would say that the Chinese surge should be replicated by the Indians, there are self-limiting factors in India that will prevent that.

That isn't to say that they aren't growing. It, however, does mean that there are structural limits on how quickly they can grow, from land use issues, to mobility of labor issues, to a bunch of other issues.

India is a country where the armed force in many ways is going to be the most advanced and capable, because it is simply run by the central government, whereas the fragmentation of the economy is very severe. Therefore, we really don't look at India as a country, without a massive revolution that I don't foresee in India, emerging in that role.

**QUESTION:** Thank you for a most provocative and fascinating analysis, which has really woken up a lot of us, despite the snow and everything else.

There is one area you haven't had a chance to touch upon, and that is the question of energy. We say we have a crisis with oil. There are many people who are trying to find alternative sources of energy. How do you see it from the long-term perspective?

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** I'm glad you asked.

Clearly, the hydrocarbon age is over. It is going to die a slow death. I'm delighted to see in Texas I can get gas for \$1.50 a gallon. But it's over.

What takes its place? It's nuclear power, which is extremely expensive to invest in; it's really had to do with fluctuations in cost, and it takes a long time to bring on-line; and there's solar power—wind power or sea power, these are all varieties of solar power.

Land-based solar power has built-in inefficiencies. The three are: night, clouds, and, most importantly, the space in which land-based solar collectors have to be put in. So if you ever calculated current technology and tripled its value, you'd cover Nevada to power the United States. Now, Nevada may be no loss to you—I personally like to gamble—but the point is that the environmental effect of land-based solar energy is massive free land use and damaging the environment.

But solar energy is necessary. The place where I think solar energy will go by the middle of the century is in space, because in space you've got a lot of room, you don't have night, and you don't have clouds.

You also have a robust military program on the part of the United States for developing space-lift capacity. Now, one of the interesting things about major social advances in the United States in the 20th century is how much it was driven by military considerations—from the Internet, which begins as a military project; to the interstate highway system, which was conceived of as a way to get troops from one side of the country to the other; to the airline industry, which was really driven by the U.S. Army. Some of the greatest innovations of our time are really funded and underwritten for military uses.

Everybody has wondered what we are going to do in space. It's kind of as if [Columbus](#) came here, looked around, and went home, and said, "So what do I do next?" Well, the answer in space is space has one thing that's of extraordinary importance, and that's energy unlimited.

Now, how do you get it to the face of the Earth? You use two technologies: (1) [tethered technology](#)—you literally drop a cable to the face of the Earth; or (2) you use [microwave radiation](#) to ground collectors. Lest you think I'm totally insane, which is possible, this is a [NASA](#) project that is underway. NASA is funding the Space Solar Energy Project, which is underway.

There is nothing in what I've said here technologically that's a breakthrough. These are known technologies.

The primary issue is: how do you underwrite the cost of space-lift? One way you do it is by dropping the cost, which is why [Jeff Bezos](#) is doing this. Jeff Bezos and the head of Virgin Airlines, [Richard Branson](#)—all of them are in this field, and they'll say, "Well, it's tourism." Come on, guys. You know what you're doing it for. Drop space-lift costs and you can be Saudi Arabia. That really is what they're looking at.

My expectation is that (1) the pressure on the ecology will decline as there are fewer humans—not quickly, but that would be one of the things—and (2) the technological fix is going to come in the context of U.S. control of space, which the United States will happily jump into because it will also put us in the position of making Germany dependent on us instead of on the Russians, which will be very nice, and will also drop the price of fuel here.

So there are a lot of advantages to that technology. For those of us who didn't imagine the PC, this is actually not as radical. It's where I think we are going to go.

**QUESTION:** None of the three countries that you highlight is a member of the [Security Council](#). I was just wondering how or where the United Nations might fit into your vision of the next 100 years—or does it fit into your vision of the next 100 years?

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** The United Nations will remain what it is, the largest and best-funded NGO in the world. When everybody agrees the United Nations should come in, they will come in. Occasionally, they will facilitate some things. But—this is my discussion of soft power—the power of persuasion that the United Nations has is secondary to the power of other things.

I have no idea institutionally what the future will be, nor whether or not anybody will reorganize the Security Council—I suppose they should. But, I guess, my view of the United Nations is that it is a useful tool in the general conflict and competition and cooperation between nations. It's a facilitator, not a critical player.

**QUESTION:** I'm a graduate of the Navy and I fought both in the Pacific and in the Atlantic. I'm also a graduate of the Naval War College. I have never heard [Alfred Mahan](#) articulated as well as you have just done.

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** Thank you. You noticed.

**QUESTIONER:** Our Navy got its real start in the war of the [Barbary pirates](#). But, not only that, it was the first time, and ever since, we have been involved in the Middle East, through every single president that has been a president of the United States.

My question is a sea change that is possible in the next century that you didn't mention. It's partly because of some of the things that a previous questioner mentioned. I think that [Wilsonian](#) self-determination is coming to a total end. I think the reverse may be starting to happen, that nations will become larger by becoming bigger than their neighbors and joining forces with their neighbors.

One of the areas that I see as a possibility—I hope a possibility—is in the Middle East. To me, an article recently by [Gaddafi](#) was a very interesting article, the idea being bruited more and more, that there will be one [Isratine](#) and not two separate states in the Middle East. This may be one of the sea changes that is coming.

**GEORGE FRIEDMAN:** When the Israelis and Palestinians say that I'll be interested. I would be more interested in Gaddafi suggesting amalgamation with Egypt. But that he left out.

I mean look, there is a great experiment with multinationalism going on in the world. One form of multinationalism was the imperial model. Another form was the alliance model. Now we are watching whether a group of countries that have historically been at war with each other can forge themselves into

a multinational state. I am speaking, of course, of Europe.

So far what we have seen the Europeans do is reach the point at which some of them have agreed on the common currency; none of them have agreed on a common economic policy; some have not agreed to the common currency; others have not agreed to be members of NATO. We are in a transition period.

Wilsonian amalgamation, which is what I think the Europeans are trying to do, hangs in the balance. I think the latest economic crisis and the decisions of the Europeans to go with national solutions rather than a single, integrated, multinational solution was a breakpoint in European history. This was their test. If they could say, "Look, we are going to leave national sovereignty issues aside and money will flow across borders; others will join us who are not part of the Eurozone now," I would have been more impressed.

What I saw in October was a reassertion of nationalism on economic areas. What I have seen in NATO is a reassertion of nationalism. I don't think the answer is there yet. We will see how it will unfold. But at the moment I feel fairly pessimistic about that possibility. If the Europeans at this historical point can't do it, I don't think the Israelis and the Palestinians will pull it off.

But I do thank you for noticing Alfred Thayer Mahan, because in fact the unstated father of what I am talking about is Mahan, who, if you don't know, was certainly the greatest strategist in American history and in many ways the founder of modern grand strategy, and certainly the Naval War College.

**JOANNE MYERS:** With that note, I'd like to thank you for taking us off the beaten track.

Thank you so much.

Copyright © 2010 Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs