

A BRIEF RETROSPECTIVE FROM 1996 TO 2026

WHAT DID 1996 TEACH US THAT STILL MATTERS?

The author compares prevailing perceptions and trends that marked the end of the last century with the current attitudes and realisations that often contradict and discredit the predictions made then about the End of History and the universal validity of Western liberal individualism and capitalism. Instead, the diversity of civilisations is now being recognised and Localism is becoming popular as a guiding principle of political and economic management.

HERVÉ JUVIN

Some kind of utopia brought many thinkers and politicians like Francis Fukuyama to believe in the end of history, and people all around the world trusted promises of unlimited progress for everyone's benefit.

There was a view that universal peace would prevail, based on a consensual acceptance of the Western model of society and economy of the time. Following Margaret Thatcher's statement that: 'There is no alternative', Tony Blair declared it the best system ever devised, adding that every human being who had experienced it would want it to be implemented in his country. Those were heady times when the world was said to be moving softly towards political unity under the pink flag of liberal individualism. The future seemed to belong to global democracy, under 'the rule of law' and, of course, there would be no more wars between nations—just trouble-makers to be eliminated.

Globalisation was the major trend reshaping international relations, but far from calling for equality between sovereign nations, globalisation amounted to the Westernisation of the World. (*Herve Juvin and Gilles Lipovetsky, The Westernization of the World - A Debate, Grasset (Ed.), 2012*) Very few noticed that China first, and then other countries like India, Vietnam or Indonesia, were lifting hundreds of millions of people out

of poverty, far away from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) or financial market infrastructure (FMI) dogmas. Some called Westernisation the new face of colonisation, carried out through lawyers, consultants, accountants, and money managers implementing Western systems as the only way to succeed. France and Great Britain were members of the Security Council of UN despite their relatively diminished status. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was the more powerful military alliance in history, facing no more enemies or threats. Behind the curtain, the new ideal was governance without politics. No more socialists, conservatives, or liberals because those were outdated notions for old people. Market society has nothing to do with nations, ideologies or politics, and governance will put an end to governments. Even China made unlimited use of rigged words like the rule of law, open markets, governance, etc. The new era would be defined by wokeness and deconstruction; men are not men, women are not women, all those so-called biological realities are only ideological concepts, forgeries and fairy tales. Perhaps for the last time, French intellectuals, from Foucault to Derrida and Deleuze, led the world, or at least they reigned at some elite American universities.

International institutions, from the United Nation's Organization or the G20, to the EU, mainly shaped by the Anglo-American victors of the Second World War, gained legitimacy by helping to manage the post-Cold War era's economic and environmental challenges. Although they failed to bring peace to the Middle East, they built a good track record in fighting poverty, promoting better governance and supporting development. Principles and rules were not contested; even the Popular Republic of China, after the great opening of 1976 by Deng Xiao Ping, under Jiang Ze Min (1993-2003) and Hu Jintao (2003-13), was committed to joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) and worked hard to meet the required criteria. Common sense suggested that China, after rising out of poverty would turn liberal, democratic, and more similar to Western society.

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The USA, then the only hyper-power, far mightier than any rival, was still relatively benevolent and posed as a role model for peacekeeping, with the Peace Corps and USAID, the US-built order was not just propaganda. The digital communication grid was an undisputed gift of the Silicon Valley. There were benefits for those who dealt with it. Under the US umbrella, Europe had been peaceful for half a century, and the high social welfare benefits were made possible by the US taxpayer. The integration of former Communist Eastern Nations was a success, mainly for Germany, and prosperity was real for the middle class. The average EU per-capita incomes are still on par with North American ones, far above those in the other continents.

The rules of the game were clear. Systemic individualism was the new universal principle. The world was moving towards a market-driven society, even more than a market economy. Political liberalism, individual rights, the capitalist economy called for a fully connected, integrated world without borders, allowing for free flows of capital, people and goods. The ROE (Return on Equity) was to be the one and only benchmark of performance. The European Union was rushing to adopt the euro and pushed for further integration of member-states; the advent of the single European currency was a symbolic step indicative of the resolve of the EU to erase the nations that had made it. Financial markets, currencies and rates were still a Western-controlled domain, with the SWIFT and Euroclear systems as its guardians.

THIRTY YEARS LATER, WE ARE FAR FROM CONGRATULATING OURSELVES.
MANY ILLUSIONS OF THE PAST HAVE DISSIPATED

Like it or not, war is back with a vengeance. It rages in areas where it was waged 80 years ago, between the same powers: Russia on one side as a successor of the USSR while Ukraine, Germany, the Baltic States, on the other, are returning to their Nazi past. The British are the wild card, obsessed with their centuries-old resolve to deny Russia its access to the Black Sea, the Mediterranean or the Indian Ocean, and also driven by some vindictiveness against India, the former jewel of their empire. War in Europe, wars in the Middle East, wars in Southeast Asia, between Cambodia and Thailand, wars in Africa, American colonial raids in Latin America... War is shaping the future of a world and driving it off-track. Once more, wars are putting societies through a major test of resilience. Game over for the weak!

Any hope of a new international order, the dream of Henry Kissinger, is out. ‘Multipolarity’ is a fancy word whose definition varies. The US dreams of a G2 with China, others see a G5, between the US, China, India, Russia, Brazil and Indonesia—and perhaps no room for European nations. Alliances are shifting; the EU stands is largely run by people who embrace the American ‘Neo-Conservative’ globalist ideology ‘with European characteristics’, NATO is struggling to survive, while Washington would like to strike an agreement with Russia to roll back China, and India is being pressured to cut links with Russia. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran who predicted the rise of a non-polar world may have been right. (*Speech at the Eurasian Security Summit, Minsk, Belarus, October 2023*) Several powerful nations such as Turkey, Iran, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria and Kazakhstan, no longer wish to be buffer zones or proxies of the bigger powers. The question is: does ‘no more world order’ mean simply that there is no global hierarchical system, or does it imply anarchy?

Financial indexes are at their highest levels; money makes money as never before. But other indexes are not so good. In the UK and the US, life expectancy is declining after decades of improvement. In Western countries, as in some South American and Asian populations, obesity, chronic diseases, and diabetes are becoming a matter of national concern; less than one-third of young Americans are physically fit to join the army. In part of Asia, the US and Europe as well, woke culture destroys self-confidence and self-esteem. Many men and women suffer from a deep identity crisis, and some European countries are facing cultural extinction under disruptive foreign influences, as the National Security Strategy document issued by the US government in December 2025 rightly points out.

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The reversal of radical individualism is amazing; those who once proclaimed: it is forbidden to forbid anything, now call the police on neighbours who have conservative opinions. Those who lectured the world about democratic values are manipulating elections. Those who hailed freedom of speech and freedom of opinion as pillars of a liberal society are applying mass censorship and shutting down opponents. The fact is that old European nations are no longer liberal democracies. The UK, followed by Germany and even France, are turning into illiberal oligarchies under the EU's flag. Who is there to remind them that the difference between Democracy and Tyranny is whether the private sphere is or is not beyond the reach of the state? It is not surprising that China is becoming the new role model of governance. Predictably, less and less citizens are committed to voting in elections. Many of them are finding an exit in the digital world, far from any local lived-in community. They are retreating into their private sphere, and feel like strangers in their own countries, surrounded by alienated, aggressive migrants and contemptuous of the Leftist policies of their national regimes.

The second decolonisation is well on its way at a rapid pace. It took decades for African or Southeast Asian or Latin American nations to fully comprehend the old British saying: 'give them Parliaments, and keep the banks'. Now, they are setting up their own banks by joining the BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and other regional institutions. 2026 will bring further fragmentation of financial markets and banking systems. Since the introduction of extraterritorial laws by the US Department of Justice, billions have been confiscated from foreign companies and banks for not complying with the one-sided, mostly illegal US sanctions and embargos. SWIFT was used as a spyware to control and disrupt any financial operation not in conformity with US policies and decrees. The last nail in the coffin was the attempt to seize Russia's central bank assets, and the freeze of more than 300 billion US dollars held in Euroclear/SWIFT accounts. Step by step, Russia, China, OSCE members and BRICS countries are building a clearing and settlement system for international transactions out of US reach, far more performing than the old SWIFT system. More and more energy and raw materials trades are labelled in *renminbi* and other digital and real asset-backed currencies. Softly, the new world is breaking out of the shackles of the crooked American system. This evolution brings with it an increasing risk of US overt and covert interventions in North and South Americas, as well as in many other regions where the Americans and their surrogates face existential threats—and de-dollarisation process is an existential

threat for the US and UK whose wealth rests mostly on financial operations and on reserve currency privilege. For that reason, the Third World War is not far away.

Old alliances are breaking. Germany and Japan want nuclear weapons, and NATO agrees, based on Habermas's big lie: 'Trust us, we did the worst, so we will not repeat it'. France has long been faced with the imperative to bring Germany down, and take Britain out! German panzers could in the not far future fight Russian tanks in Kursk, on the very same field where Zhukov's tanks defeated Nazi panzers in the biggest mechanised battle of all times. Kaja Kallas, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, called China and Russia 'revisionist powers' when their leaders stated that they had defeated Nazis and Japanese fascists. *(in President Xi Jinping's speech, at the national military parade in Beijing on 3 September)* *(responsiblestatecraft.org/Kaja-Kallas-history/)*

The denial of history becomes a means to help modernity survive its many failures. The UK prefers to control truth under State policy, and introduces African actors into historical films to make young people believe that some of their rulers were black a few centuries ago. The EU is turning into a new Reich, censoring and punishing free speech, implanting spy devices in private homes, cancelling free elections, and making massive use of state-sponsored terrorism. Is this because the median income in the European Union is now less than half of what it is in the US, and not much above that of China?

The surge of singularities, the quest for identity are perceptible everywhere, from the Russian orthodox patriotic revival to Hindu nationalism, and from 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' to 'Make America Great Again'. Fears of existential threats are everywhere, from Israel to Russia and from India to the US. Decaying powers play on fear based on manipulated crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the purported Russian 'aggression against Europe', for holding on to power. They are playing with fire.

State-sponsored terrorism, torture and killing of unarmed prisoners are common. Assassinations and abductions of foreign leaders are becoming more frequent, and many wars, as in Gaza, result in systematic devastation, and even genocide.

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The weaponisation of everything, from fresh water to minerals, places any economic decision under geopolitical constraints. Economic course material has to be rewritten. Mandeville, List, Keynes are newly relevant and it is useful to have a look at the Chinese Global governance, Global Civilisation and Global Cooperation initiatives to deal with the near future, for those who wish to be the new leaders, not mere followers.

In the new world's map, population size is becoming more connected with economic power often three centuries of European and Euro-American imperial domination when so few ruled over so many. The law of numbers prevails again. One consequence is that existential threats are reshaping foreign affairs and relegating international law, so-called values and institutions to the backburner. The global pivot is shifting to Asia, somewhere around Hong Kong or Singapore. The downfall of democracies is just the beginning; not because of right-wing extremists but because big tech controls populations without improving their lives. Non-elected, non-governmental powers are leading Western societies. If the main goal of governance is to ensure the betterment of life for all, with protection of identity and cultural safety, and effective majority rule on the collective choices, then democracies are failing and authoritarian powers are doing a better job. Struggling against internal decay, democracies try to evade responsibility by faulting other countries: Russia, China, or the 'Global South'. If the US has a drug problem, it is because of Venezuela, China or Mexico. If the EU has a civilisational problem, it is due to US propaganda or Russian aggression. And if both are declining powers, it owing to the unfair practices of 'unstoppable China'. Being in denial attracts unintended consequence; Western democracies, including most EU members, have turned into warmongers, and may well trigger a Third World War in a desperate attempt to delay their downfall.

HOW FAR WILL WE GO FROM HERE IN THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS? OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SOME MAJOR TRENDS SHAPING OUR DESTINY.

For the first time since decades, the four major powers on the planet do not stand for the universalism championed by Western Liberal Enlightenment. President Xi Jinping through the 'Global Civilization Initiative' (GCI) recognised that the diversity of human societies is a treasure we must cherish. President Putin in Valdai defined the Civilisational State as the future basis for international peace and cooperation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi defined Hindutva as

the inclusive moral and cultural standard that all citizens of India should follow to belong to the national community. (*Ram Madhav, Hindutva, The Hindu Paradigm, 2022*) Even President Donald Trump, in his lecture to the West Point military Academy in February 2025, declared that ‘culture is destiny’. This spells the demise of source fake universalism, and the realisation that territory matters, singularities prevail, and humans are not the same anywhere despite their commonalities. This means that the only peaceful universalism is a universalism of differences, acknowledging that ‘to exist is to differ’, for any political community as well as for individuals. (*G Tarde, Monadologie et Sociologie, 1893*) We should remember Claude Levi-Strauss’s aphorism which can be paraphrased as: ‘There is no civilisation if there are no civilisations’.

Distance matters, borders matters, and climate matters. This is the main lesson to be learnt from the ‘burning’ environmental issues; for long we were all living according to the assertion of French economist Jean-Baptiste Say: ‘Natural resources being unlimited are for free for everybody’. (*J B Say, Traité d’Économie Politique, 1803*) We could die from that belief. We are far from enjoying free resources. We have to pay for fresh air, through energy regulations and ‘carbon neutrality’ programmes, we have to pay for fresh drinking water that must be filtered and processed; indeed we are charged for everything that used to be free and that will get more expensive; clean air, pure water and living soils will be more valuable than gold. We discover that the poisoning of food, air and water is of far greater importance than climate change, natural or anthropogenic; ultra-processed food is a major cause of social security deficits, because of the diseases it generates. The link between environment and health leads nations to curb the power of private business. Human well-being is too important to be entrusted to Big Pharma, Big Chem, Big Agriculture and Big Insurance, what US Human Services Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr is fighting against. Localism is the upcoming ideology of this century because it calls for life-centred politics, people-centric governance, reviving democratic systems based on subsidiarity, and employment to serve the community in a circular economy.

Human beings are slowly discovering that culture results from a gradual

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adaptation of humans to local conditions found in nature. Regaining local-level autonomy implies taking control over the outcome of scientific research, and not giving a blank cheque to the ‘witches’ of AI, Biotech, Nanotech, and other frontier, largely untested technological applications. We should question the fairy tale of theoretically free and open competition that has led to monopolies that often don’t offer more competitive products, but instead set up ‘tollbooths’ to keep rentals flowing in. In the sort of Liberalism we experience very large private companies exercise unchecked pricing power and kill competition; private profits are more and more similar to government taxes and citizens pay twice; once for the products they buy, and secondly for the ill effects of these products on their health, and on the community as a whole.

New public priorities have to shape new politics and new types of governments. The end of human rights as they are defined and applied (or ignored) is on the horizon; what do human rights mean apart from human duties? Likewise, how can individualism exist outside of any community? To be a human is to belong to a group and to mankind as a whole. The coming decades will point out the error of Benjamin Constant when he wrote: “Political freedom is the freedom of the past, individual freedom is the freedom of the future”. (*B Constant, De la liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes, 1819*) Instead it is political freedom that is the freedom of the future; the freedom of any political community to choose its destiny. Outside it, no individual freedom could be sustained. The exhortation ‘Take back control’ is in the air; it means that freedom of choice must prevail over the compulsions generated by technical achievements. Digital technology is the real master of the world since the onset of the digital age.

The history of the USA and European nations is steeped in war; their mindset is conditioned by it and they will use all possible violence to remain dominant. The question is, while the ‘Global South’ and even BRICS are not united, separated as some are by mutual distrust, what about the Western world after Donald Trump’s breakaway from any rules or values ?


Some have concluded that this is the end of five centuries of the Western-led gradual uniformisation of humanity according to concepts of progress, growth and the economy. As Canadian Prime Minister Carney recently said, Western societies promoted ‘modernity’ as a tool to maintain their dominance on other parts of the world by claiming that they for fought fairness, social justice and democratic equality to all. (*M Carney, Speech at World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, 2026*)

We must realise that the human condition as it has largely remained since

millennia is drastically changing. Not because of nuclear weapons, the Internet, or even AI but because of symbols that are constantly shifting—and we are symbolic beings. We have invented sex without conception; we can now have conception without sex. Soon, babies could be ordered like consumer products and without going through the maternal womb; human reproduction will become an industrial process, and ‘parents’ will pay for the genes of the future genius or fashion model they desire to have as a son or daughter. Consequently, the respective roles of men and women may be discarded. What we call love or desire will be unneeded for most. These changes have anthropological consequences. The systemic deconstruction of the

human condition is the flashing point of the digital age; the new era ushered in by AI and sex robots will be run by a collective super mind gathering in its cloud all human knowledge, science and information, and directly connecting to any individual mind. Humans will be parcels of an engineered post-humanity. The dreams of Google, Meta, Huawei, Palantir, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, et al. will thereby come into being, and they will also provide a technological illustration of the Buddhist metaphors.

In the new digital age, most of the human population will no longer need to think; the global AI-powered cloud will think for them, perhaps inducing some kind of collective analogy of ‘nirvana’ in their minds.

At the end of the day, our species will realise that our bodies are the only things that account for our individual identities. ‘Cogito’ is not an exclusive human prerogative. The living human body is. 

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