

America's Edge: Power in the Networked Century

WE LIVE in a networked world. War is networked: the power of terrorists and the militaries that would defeat them depend on small, mobile groups of warriors connected to one another and to intelligence, communications, and support networks. Diplomacy is networked: managing international crises — from SARS to climate change — requires mobilizing international networks of public and private actors. Business is networked: every CEO advice manual published in the past decade has focused on the shift from the vertical world of hierarchy to the horizontal world of networks. Media are networked: online blogs and other forms of participatory media depend on contributions from readers to create a vast, networked conversation. Society is networked: the world of MySpace is creating a global world of "OurSpace," linking hundreds of millions of individuals across continents. Even religion is networked: as the pastor Rick Warren has argued, "The only thing big enough to solve the problems of spiritual emptiness, selfish leadership, poverty, disease, and ignorance is the network of millions of churches all around the world."

In this world, the measure of power is connectedness. Almost 30 years ago, the psychologist Carol Gilligan wrote about differences between the genders in their modes of thinking. She observed that men tend to see the world as made up of hierarchies of power and seek to get to the top, whereas women tend to see the world as containing webs of relationships and seek to move to the center. Gilligan's observations may be a function of nurture rather than nature; regardless, the two lenses she identified capture the differences between the twentieth-century and the twenty-first-century worlds.

The twentieth-century world was, at least in terms of geopolitics, a billiard-ball world, described by the political scientist Arnold Wolfers as a system of self-contained states colliding with one another. The results of these collisions were determined by military and economic power. This world still exists today: Russia invades Georgia, Iran seeks nuclear weapons, the United States strengthens its ties with India as a hedge against a rising China. This is what Fareed Zakaria, the editor of Newsweek International, has dubbed "the post-American world," in which the rise of new global powers inevitably means the relative decline of U.S. influence.

The emerging networked world of the twenty-first century, however, exists above the state, below the state, and through the state. In this world, the state with the most connections will be the central player, able to set the global agenda and unlock innovation and sustainable growth. Here, the United States has a clear and sustainable edge.

THE HORIZON OF HOPE

THE UNITED STATES' advantage is rooted in demography, geography, and culture. The United States has a relatively small population, only 20-30 percent of the size of China's or India's. Having fewer people will make it much easier for the United States to develop and profit from new energy technologies. At the same time, the heterogeneity of the U.S. population will allow Washington to extend its global reach. To this end, the United States should see its immigrants as living links back to their home countries and encourage a two-way flow of people, products, and ideas.

The United States is the anchor of the Atlantic hemisphere, a broadly defined area that includes Africa, the Americas, and Europe. The leading countries in the Atlantic hemisphere are more peaceful, stable, and economically diversified than those in the Asian hemisphere. At the same time, however, the United States is a pivotal power, able to profit simultaneously from its position in the Atlantic hemisphere and from its deep ties to the Asian hemisphere. The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans have long protected the United States from invasion and political interference. Soon, they will shield it from conflicts brought about by climate change, just as they are already reducing the amount of pollutants that head its way. The United States has a relatively horizontal social structure — albeit one that has become more hierarchical with the growth of income inequality — as well as a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. These traits are great advantages in a global economy increasingly driven by networked clusters of the world's most creative people.

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama will set about restoring the moral authority of the United States. The networked world provides a hopeful horizon. In this world, with the right policies, immigrants can be a source of

jobs rather than a drain on resources, able to link their new home with markets and suppliers in their old homes. Businesses in the United States can orchestrate global networks of producers and suppliers. Consumers can buy locally, from revived local agricultural and customized small-business economies, and at the same time globally, from anywhere that can advertise online. The United States has the potential to be the most innovative and dynamic society anywhere in the world.

LIFE IN A NETWORKED WORLD

IN 2000, Procter & Gamble made a decision that reinvented how the company would do business in the twenty-first century. Instead of closely guarding its secret recipes for everything from soaps to potato chips, Procter & Gamble chose to open up its patent portfolio, making virtually all its formulas available to anyone willing to pay a licensing fee. At the same time, it asked its top managers to bring in half of their ideas for new products and services from outside the company. They now look to far-flung groups of inventors around the world and online, where innovators gather at sites such as InnoCentive, an auction Web site for ideas. Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams, the authors of *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, call businesses like InnoCentive "ideagoras," modern-day public squares that join people looking to sell their ideas with businesses seeking to buy them. In 2006, Samuel Palmisano, the head of IBM, predicted in these pages that corporations would move from being multinational, with small, self-replicated versions of themselves in every market, to being what he calls "globally integrated enterprises." Today, IBM funnels tasks to wherever they will be done best.

Consider the experience of Li & Fung, the world's largest and most successful export sourcing company. Its clients are retailers of virtually every kind of product known to man, or at least made by man. The job of Li & Fung is to identify suppliers from over 40 countries around the world and connect them in order to fill specific orders. The resulting networks must be fast, flexible, and able to work to a common high standard. According to William and Victor Fung, two of the current owners of the family business, the secret of sourcing is "orchestrating networks." It is the managerial equivalent of creating a system in which one can select a destination on a Paris metro map and see a possible route light up with a connecting web of differently colored lines — except, of course, that riders at each station might have their own ideas about how best to travel.

At first, these global webs may seem to be just the next generation of outsourcing. But something much deeper is going on. Outsourcing requires a central command that specifies precisely what and how much should be produced and then, through an established hierarchy, communicates those decisions to producers in multiple nations. In contrast, under a system of peer production, supply chains become "value webs," in which suppliers become partners and, instead of just supplying products, actually collaborate on their design. Boeing is a particularly striking example, given how it could be seen as the heart of old-style manufacturing. It has shifted from being simply an airplane manufacturer to being a "systems integrator," relying on a horizontal network of partners collaborating in real time. They share both risk and knowledge in order to achieve a higher level of performance. It is not simply a change in form but a change in culture. Hierarchy and control lose out to community, collaboration, and self-organization. At its core, a company can be quite small, often no more than a central node of leaders and manager-integrators. But with the right networks, it can reach anywhere innovators, factories, and service providers can be found. In this world, as Tapscott and Williams write, "only the connected will survive."

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOS), too, have realized the power of connections. An early example was the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which began in 1991 as a coalition of six NGOs from North America and Europe. It eventually grew to include over 1,100 groups in some 60 countries, and with this breadth came clout. After it won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997, the network successfully pushed for a global treaty banning the use of land mines (although China, Russia, and the United States, among others, have refused to sign it). NGOs pursuing other causes have followed suit. In 1995, a small group of human rights organizations began calling for the creation of an international criminal court to try war criminals. They succeeded in convincing governments to establish a permanent court in 1998. Today, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court includes over 2,000 organizations from every corner of the world, which are now working to expand the court's jurisdiction. More recently, a global alliance of NGOs has been instrumental in pushing for action to stop the ongoing violence in Darfur.

In each of these cases, NGOs gained leverage over otherwise reluctant states. They formed transnational networks that multiplied their lobbying power and put their message on the agendas of international institutions. As Francis Sejersted, then chair of the Nobel Committee, noted when he recognized the land-mine campaign, "The mobilisation and focusing of broad popular involvement which we have witnessed bears promise that goes beyond the present issue. It appears to have established a pattern for how to realise political aims at the global level."

Governments have been slower to understand twenty-first-century challenges and to reform themselves accordingly, but they, too, are gradually moving toward a more networked structure. A report entitled *The Embassy of the Future*, issued by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in 2007, calls for U.S. diplomats to be "decentralized, flexible, and mobile," as well as "connected, responsive, and informed." U.S. embassy staff would have a more "distributed presence," both virtually and physically, if they worked at multiple locations and with a wide range of different groups in their host countries.

Similarly, Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control, realized after the anthrax scare in 2001 and the SARS crisis in 2002 that the CDC needed to create a network of public and private actors from around the world. Managing this network would, in turn, require a much more flexible and horizontal organization at the CDC'S headquarters, in Atlanta. Gerberding was expected to get results but lacked the authority necessary to produce them. For Gerberding, the solution was to find partners around the world and to connect them in ways that would allow for the creation and sharing of knowledge during a crisis. Many judges and government regulators have had a similar insight. Bankruptcy judges, for example, now communicate with one another around the world, signing agreements to manage together the bankruptcies of multinational corporations. The current financial crisis could have been even worse if the world's central bankers had not already been connected and able to coordinate their actions.

Power can also flow from connections across different sectors. In his book *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making*, David Rothkopf explains how leaders connect across different power structures, from the worlds of business and finance to those of politics and the arts. "In fact," he writes, "such linkages are as distinguishing a characteristic of the superclass as wealth or individual position." In other words, it is connectivity, more than money or stature, that determines individual power. This dynamic can even extend to terrorist groups such as al Qaeda. John Robb, a former air force colonel and military strategist, has observed that Mohamed Atta was the leader of the 9/11 hijackers because, although no formal hierarchy existed in the group, "Atta had twenty-two connections to other people in the network, much more than any other, which gave him control of the operation."

The power that flows from this type of connectivity is not the power to impose outcomes. Networks are not directed and controlled as much as they are managed and orchestrated. Multiple players are integrated into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts — an orchestra that plays differently according to the vision of its conductor and the talent of individual musicians. Obama's team-based campaign, with its relatively flat structure and emphasis on individual organizers, is a model of the twenty-first century's management style.

Most important, networked power flows from the ability to make the maximum number of valuable connections. The next requirement is to have the knowledge and skills to harness that power to achieve a common purpose. The United States is already following this model in a few specific ways. In combating terrorism, it has been able to stop planned attacks thanks to a dense global network of law enforcement officers, counterterrorism officials, and intelligence agencies. The U.S. government dramatically improved its standing in the Muslim world due to its swift and effective relief effort in Asia following the December 2004 tsunami. It coordinated an emergency-response strategy among government agencies and aid workers in Australia, India, Japan, and the United States itself. More recently, when the global financial crisis hit this past fall, the United States first reached out to central banks around the world to coordinate a monetary response and then reached out to central banks in key emerging markets to make sure their foreign currency needs were being met.

From this vantage point, predictions of an Asian century — such as those made by Kishore Mahbubani, a foreign policy scholar and dean of the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy, in Singapore — seem premature. Even Zakaria's argument about "the rise of the rest" takes on a different significance. If, in a networked world, the issue is no longer relative power but centrality in an increasingly dense global web, then the explosion of innovation and entrepreneurship occurring today will provide that many more points of possible connection. The twenty-first

century looks increasingly like another American century — although it will likely be a century of the Americas rather than of just America.

MORE PEOPLE. MORE PROBLEMS

DEMOGRAPHY IS often cited as the chief factor behind the relative decline of the West. China and India make up over a third of the world's population, while Europe and Japan are actually shrinking and the United States is suddenly a relatively small nation of 300 million. This argument, however, rests largely on assumptions formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout most of human history, territory and population translated into military and economic power. Military power depended on the number of soldiers a state could put into the field, the amount of territory an enemy had to cross to conquer it, and the economy's ability to supply the state's army. Population size mattered for economic power because without trade a state needed a domestic market large enough for manufacturers and merchants to thrive. With trade, however, small mercantile nations such as the Netherlands and Portugal were able to punch far above their weight. In the nineteenth century, to increase their power, small countries expanded their territory through colonization. But by the twentieth century, as political unrest in the colonial world grew, the advantages of trading rather than ruling became increasingly clear. Although the United States and the Soviet Union, two great continental powers, dominated the second half of the twentieth century, the countries that grew the richest were often the smallest. In 2007, the ten countries with the highest per capita GDPs all had populations smaller than that of New York City, with one notable exception: the United States.

In the twenty-first century, less is more. Domestic markets must be big enough to allow national firms to obtain a foothold so as to withstand international competition (although such markets can be obtained through free-trade areas and economic unions). But beyond this minimum, if trade barriers are low and transportation and communication are cheap, then size will be more of a burden than a benefit. When both markets and production are global, then productive members of every society will generate income across multiple societies. Business managers in one country can generate value by orchestrating a global and disparate network of researchers, designers, manufacturers, marketers, and distributors. It will remain the responsibility of government, however, to provide for the less productive members of society, namely, the elderly, the young, the disabled, and the unemployed — think of them as national overhead costs. From this perspective, the 300 million citizens in the United States look much more manageable than the more than a billion in China or India.

A shrinking population can actually act as a catalyst for innovation. In China, the answer to many problems is simply to throw people at them — both because people are the most available commodity and because the Chinese government needs to provide as many jobs as possible. In Japan, by contrast, the answer is to innovate. Nintendo, the Kyoto-based gaming giant, is bringing much of its manufacturing back to Japan from China and other parts of Asia. How can it possibly compete using high-cost Japanese labor? It will not have to — its new factories are almost entirely automated, with only a handful of highly skilled employees needed to run them. This approach uses less energy, costs less, and guarantees a higher standard of living for the Japanese population. As the priority shifts from economic growth to sustainable growth, the formula of fewer people plus better and greener technology will look increasingly attractive.

Finally, size carries its own set of political challenges. Over the past four centuries, the arrow of history has pointed in the direction of national self-determination. Empires and multiethnic countries have steadily divided and subdivided into smaller units so that nations, or dominant ethnic groups, could govern themselves. Ninety years after Woodrow Wilson laid out his vision of self-determination for the Balkan states, the process continues in Kosovo. In many ways, the breakup of the Soviet Union was another round of the decolonization and self-determination movement that began in the 1940s. It continues today with the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as with the potential for conflict on the Crimean Peninsula and in eastern Ukraine. Much of China's 5,000-year history has been a saga of the country's splitting apart and being welded back together. The Chinese government, like the Indian government, legitimately fears that current pockets of instability could quickly translate into multiple secessionist movements.

The United States faces no threats to its essential unity, which has been forged by a political and cultural ideology of unity amid diversity. The principal alternative to this ideology is the solution employed by the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in which individual states come together as larger economic

and, gradually, quasi-political units. The most promising dimension of recent Chinese politics has been its adoption of a version of this solution with regard to Hong Kong and Macao — and one day Beijing may apply this model to Taiwan.

The United States benefits not only from its limited population but also from who makes up that population. It has long attracted the world's most entrepreneurial, creative, and determined individuals. A vast mixing of cultures has created an atmosphere for a fruitful cross-fertilization and innovation. These arguments still hold. In San Francisco, for instance, a new municipal telephone help line advertises that it can talk with callers in over 150 languages. This diversity, and the creativity that it produces, is visible everywhere: in Hollywood movies, in American music, and at U.S. universities. At Princeton University this past fall, five of the six student award winners for the highest grade point averages had come from abroad: from China, Germany, Moldova, Slovenia, and Turkey.

In the nineteenth- and twentieth-century era of nation-states, the United States absorbed its immigrants and molded them into Americans, thereby creating the national cohesion necessary to build military and economic strength. Today, diversity in the United States means something more. Immigrant communities flourish not only in large cities but also in smaller towns and rural areas. A mosaic has replaced the melting pot, and, more than ever, immigrants connect their new communities to their countries of origin. Along the southern border of the United States, for instance, immigration experts talk about "transnational communities," about clusters of families in the United States linked with the villages of Mexico and Central America. Now, where you are from means where you can, and do, go back to — and whom you know and trust enough to network with.

Consider, for example, how valuable the overseas Chinese community has been to China. Alan Wang, a former student of mine, was born in China, moved to Australia with his family at the age of 12, and went to college and law school there. He later came to the United States to pursue a graduate degree at Harvard. For a while, he practiced law with a large British firm in London, and then moved to its Shanghai office. When I asked him how he identified himself, he replied, "overseas Chinese." Millions of people similar to Wang have spread out from China throughout Southeast Asia, Australia, the United States, and Canada, creating trading and networking opportunities for people in all those places. Similarly, the United States must learn to think of its ethnic communities as the source of future generations of "overseas Americans." Already, young Chinese Americans and Indian Americans are heading back to their parents' homelands to seek opportunity and make their fortunes. Soon, the children of U.S. immigrants from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East will follow a similar path and return to their ethnic homelands, at least for a time. The key to succeeding in a networked economy is being able to harvest the best ideas and innovations from the widest array of sources. In this regard, the United States is plugged into all corners of the global brain.

Beyond its immigrant communities, the United States can also depend on a new generation to forge connections around the world. John Zogby, the influential pollster, calls Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 "the First Globals," a group he describes as "more networked and globally engaged than members of any similar age cohort in American history." More than half of the respondents aged 18 to 29 in a poll conducted in the United States in June 2007 by Zogby International said that they had friends or family living outside the United States, vastly more than any other U.S. age group. Other Zogby polls have shown that this generation holds passports in roughly the same proportion as other age groups but uses them far more frequently. A quarter of this group, according to Zogby's data, believes that they will "end up living for some significant period in a country other than America."

These young people spreading out around the world will be a huge asset to the United States. Children born abroad who acquire U.S. citizenship as a result of their parents' heritage or life decisions will add to this number. A college classmate of mine was born to Hungarian immigrants in Canada and later acquired U.S. citizenship. After graduation, he moved to China and then Japan, where he gained a Japanese residency permit while also applying for Hungarian citizenship. He now lives with his Chinese wife in Beijing, where his daughter was born. Not long after her birth, he took her to Tokyo so that she could register as a U.S. citizen and reenter China on a U.S. passport. These stories are legion in any large global city — couples from two different countries who are raising their children in a third or fourth or even fifth country. For many people who orbit in this floating cloud of nationalities, a U.S. passport, particularly now that the United States has relaxed its rules on dual citizenship, has become a new kind of reserve currency. With one, even the most venturesome and peripatetic have the guarantee of the political

and cultural stability of the West. The United States must devise the incentives and conditions that will allow it to both encourage this phenomenon and profit from it.

THE WORLD IS ROUND AGAIN

FOR MOST of modern history, the Eurocentric view of the world has placed North and South America in a hemisphere of their own — the Western Hemisphere. Today, the world is mapped in the round, with Asia in the East and Africa, the Americas, and Europe in the West. That, at least, is how some Asians increasingly think of themselves. In his recently published book, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, Mahbubani argues that the era of "Western domination of world history is over" and that the world is witnessing an "Asian march to modernity."

But if half of the world is now "the East," defined as the Asian hemisphere, then the other half is the Atlantic hemisphere, made up of Africa, the Americas, and Europe. It is quite a promising neighborhood, home to a wealth of human, economic, material, and natural resources. Politically, Europe and North America constitute a spreading community of liberal democracies that accounts for one-sixth of the world's population, almost 60 percent of global GDP, and the two primary global reserve currencies. More trade and direct investment pass over the Atlantic Ocean than any other part of the world — over \$2 trillion in cumulative foreign direct investment alone. The potential for further integration of the hemisphere is enormous.

Even more important is the potential for deeper economic integration within the Americas. On energy questions, Canadian oil sands and Brazilian sugar cane are more promising than depending on Russian pipelines or Sudanese oil. Markets for renewable energy — such as from biomass, wind, geothermal technology, and other sources — are growing in Latin America. Miami is already a financial center for Latin America, and the steady growth of the Latino population in the United States will only deepen intra-American investment. The rise of Brazil and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Mexico will create an emerging counterbalance to the United States south of its border. But any initiative for strengthening economic ties must come from the United States itself. It first must address its immigration policy and then, similar to the economic and political assistance it provided to the European Union, offer support for an economic union in Central and South America. The result could be an integrated market and trading bloc of 800 million people, with tremendous natural resources, enormous opportunities for development and sustainable growth, and deep ties to Africa, Asia, and Europe.

That market would still have the protection of two wide oceans, and even in a networked world, there are benefits in being disconnected. Those oceans protect the United States against massive refugee flows, against other threats to security from civil and interstate wars, and, increasingly, from the effects of climate change. Researchers at Princeton University have found that rain over the Pacific Ocean washes out of the air substantial amounts of ozone and some other gases emitted in Asia before the air can ever get to the Americas. Most climate-change projections forecast rising waters overflowing the deltas of South and Southeast Asia, potentially threatening millions of lives in countries such as Bangladesh. Increasing desertification in northern Africa will force emigrants across the Mediterranean and into Europe; a similar process in northern China could push even greater numbers into Russia. Conflict is likely to follow these displaced peoples. New democracies, such as Indonesia, and one-party states, such as China and Vietnam, will find themselves economically and politically vulnerable. Of course, the Americas will not be fully protected from rising oceans, flooding, desertification, or the other nasty consequences of climate change. Still, both geography and demography — and the absence of hundreds of millions of people on the move — will insulate the New World from the afflictions of the Old.

A CULTURE OF CREATION

A NATION'S ECONOMIC fate depends on its being able to maintain and nurture innovation. This past year, all the U.S. presidential candidates made repeated calls for a renewal of the conditions that had long made the United States the world leader in innovative technology. In the twenty-first century, corporations, civic organizations, and government agencies will increasingly operate by collecting the best ideas from around the globe. In such an environment, it is critical not only to stimulate domestic innovation but also to foster networks that can produce collaborative innovations across the globe.

To this end, the United States needs to improve education and increase government investment in science and technology. But the most important U.S. edge in innovation is cultural. Fundamental flaws in China's political and economic systems will make it very difficult for China to move from being the world's factory to being the world's designer. The Chinese government is determined to develop innovation as if it were developing a fancy variety of soybeans, relying on industrial parks that mix equal parts technology, education, research, and recreation in self-described "talent highlands." The results can be extraordinary, as I saw last year at the Shanghai Zizhu Science-Based Industrial Park. The park, built in just five years, has enormous university campuses, research headquarters for over 20 Asian and Western firms, and a residential complex. The aim is to inspire innovation through a balance of nature, science, and ecology, or, as its planners suggest, to create the "building blocks" for a future Chinese society, just like the building blocks for a new generation of skyscrapers.

The park is awe-inspiring. "In China," our guide told us, "anything is possible." Looking at the pace, scale, and quality of the construction, it was quite possible to believe it. In the end, however, the Zizhu industrial park struck me as being similar to an aquacultural facility for manufacturing cultured pearls. But as all pearl lovers know, the richest innovations are created through unexpected and irregular irritations, not tightly controlled conditions. In 2003, the University of California alone generated more patents than either China or India. That same year, IBM generated five times as many patents as both countries combined. The problem is certainly not a lack of creativity on the part of Chinese or Indians; Silicon Valley is full of entrepreneurs from both groups. The issue is the surrounding culture, or what the urban studies theorist Richard Florida calls an "innovation ecosystem."

At the same time that China is seeking to maintain political tranquility, it depends on continued growth powered by innovation, which requires conflict — not violent conflict but positive, or constructive, conflict, the kind of conflict that produces non-zero-sum solutions. This is the kind of conflict found on American playing fields, in American courtrooms, and in the American political system. It is the conflict of structured competition, in which losers have a chance to win another day and everyone has a stake in continually improving the game. It is also the conflict of creative destruction, the process of destroying old business models to make way for new ones.

Most important, a culture of constructive conflict rewards challenging authority in every domain. Perhaps the best example is Google, a company in which hierarchy is almost nonexistent. Individuals are encouraged to go their own way, come up with their own ideas, and counter orthodoxies at every turn. In the United States, educational institutions have long emphasized critical thinking in ways that China and other countries are now trying to emulate. But a culture of innovation requires more than the ability to critique. It requires saying what you think, rather than what you believe your boss wants to hear, something many Western managers struggle fruitlessly to encourage in China. A culture that requires a constant willingness to reimagine the world is not one that the Chinese Communist Party is likely to embrace. Indeed, a culture of innovation requires the encouragement of conflict within a larger culture of transparency and trust, placing a premium on cross-cultural competence. It is a culture for which Americans are ideally suited by both temperament and history.

[THE WORLD OF WIKIS](#)

STARTING WITH Alexis de Tocqueville, nearly every observer of American culture has noted that Americans are inveterate joiners, volunteers, and debaters. Today, however, instead of sewing circles, debating societies, and charity bake sales, Americans have MySpace, blogs, and the Clinton Global Initiative. These qualities are evident in a growing number of collaborative enterprises, both online and off. In the world of wikis, perhaps best exemplified by Wikipedia, ideas are challenged, edited, and challenged again. The final product is the result of a different and gentler kind of adversarial process than that found in the U.S. legal system. But the premise is the same: multiple minds clashing and correcting one another in pursuit of the truth. The work of one contributor is open and available for others to use. Participants in this process are trusted to not take advantage of that openness but instead add their own contributions.

In a world that favors decentralization and positive conflict, the United States has an edge. Although trust and transparency are not unique to the United States, it is still one of the most open societies in the world. The Internet world, the wiki world, and the networked world all began in the United States and radiated outward. The characteristics of those worlds are the keys to innovation and problem solving in the twenty-first century. '

In his book *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, Robert Wright, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, writes of human history as a steady process of increased exposure to complexity and the resulting ability to turn zero-sum problems into non-zero-sum solutions. The barbarian invasions that swept across Asia and Europe, for instance, were disastrous for many individual societies. Yet by adding new ideas and practices to the sum of human knowledge, the invaders spurred the process of innovation and problem solving. In other words, they brought progress. Today, the invaders are online rather than on horseback, and interaction is considerably more voluntary. The benefits will flow to those individuals and states that are most comfortable reaching across cultures. It will become increasingly necessary to appreciate and absorb contributions in any language and from any context.

Here, however, the conventional wisdom depicts Americans as woefully ignorant of foreign geography, languages, and cultures. Many Americans may still fit this description. But many others — immigrants and their children especially — negotiate cultural differences every day in their schools, in their workplaces, and on the street. From Boston to Los Angeles, recently immigrated Africans, Arabs, East Asians, Latinos, South Asians, and Southeast Asians all rub shoulders with members of more established communities, both black and white. At the elite level, the top graduate schools in the United States offer a similar education in multicultural competence; many of the cross-cultural couples who are changing the face of global cities met at places such as Harvard and Stanford. Obama's parents may have been ahead of their time, but today far more young Americans than ever before are following their example. They are truly, as Zogby calls them, "the First Globals."

[HOW TO GET THERE FROM HERE](#)

AT THE MOMENT, the United States' edge in this new world is more potential than actual. The country will face a vast amount of work in digging itself out of the many holes it has gotten itself into, both at home and abroad. In the process, the United States must adopt five policies and postures that will seize on its edge and sharpen it.

First, the United States must adopt comprehensive immigration reform that will make it easier for immigrants and guest workers to move across borders, regularize the status of the millions of illegal immigrants currently in the United States, and increase the number of visas for the world's most talented individuals. Part of changing U.S. attitudes toward immigration must include a recognition that because of their ties to their home countries, immigrants are potential engines of economic growth. New economic policies could offer subsidies or tax incentives to immigrants who create businesses based on connections they have cultivated to markets and talent in their home countries. Instead of a one-way, outgoing flow of remittances, the United States needs a two-way flow of goods, services, and people.

Second, as part of overhauling its educational system, the United States must come to see overseas study as an essential asset for all Americans. Indeed, organizations such as the BrownBell Foundation promote opportunities to study abroad for students at historically black colleges and universities, where such programs have traditionally been lacking. Just as important, the United States must see the children of immigrants who grow up learning Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Spanish, and other foreign languages as huge assets. Government programs and private initiatives should encourage them to study abroad in the countries of their parents or grandparents and, assuming they keep their U.S. passports, to gain dual citizenship.

A networked world requires a genuinely networked society, which means fostering economic and social equality. The United States has never been as egalitarian as it imagines itself to be, but this divide has worsened in the past decade, as the rich have become the superrich. Between the late 1950s and 2005, the income share of the wealthiest one percent of the U.S. population more than doubled. Even the Democratic Party is not immune: on the night that Obama accepted the nomination to be the Democratic presidential candidate, at Invesco Field in Denver, Colorado, his campaign blocked off an entire section of the stadium for big donors, stopping everyone else at the door. For a time, a culture in which money could buy status was a radically democratic and egalitarian idea. Instead of the European class system, in which breeding always trumped money, Americans could rely on education and employment for self-advancement. But this same culture becomes radically inegalitarian if only a relatively few have the chance to prosper financially. As the political scientist Larry Bartels argues, rising economic inequality is a political choice: Republican presidents have generally allowed inequality to expand, whereas Democratic presidents have not. If so, then the United States can choose to decrease inequality by making its society more horizontal, more

democratic, and more integrated by class and race — and this is the third reform it should adopt. Doing so would add more potential circuits to the network.

Fourth, in foreign policy, the United States should put more effort toward engaging Latin America — not at the expense of its ties with Asia but in addition to the strong history of transpacific relations. Brazil, for example, defines its foreign policy in terms of concentric circles. It starts with Mercosur, the South American trading bloc, then continues to Latin America, the Americas, and then the rest of the world. Similarly, the United States should think in terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Americas before turning to the rest of the world. The potential for growth and development in the Americas is enormous. Population links between the United States and Latin America are strong and growing stronger. Spanish is now taught in virtually every American public school from the early grades. Strengthening ties with Latin America also means cultivating links across the South Atlantic to Mediterranean countries such as Spain and Portugal, and also to France and Italy. Lastly, African blood runs in the veins of many North, Central, and South Americans. This fact is the legacy of a ghastly institution, but it means that many Americans have an African heritage that can allow them to reconnect with Africa today.

More generally, the United States must learn to see both itself and the world differently. If power is derived from connectivity, then the focus of leadership should be on making connections to solve shared problems. This approach is not only a different leadership style than that which has prevailed in the United States in recent years but also a fundamentally different concept of leadership. In contrast to the way it is in a hierarchy, in this concept of leadership a single leader cannot be directly in charge of everyone else. Different countries can mobilize diverse coalitions for specific purposes. Regional powers, for example, can address crises in their particular parts of the world: consider Australia's role in promoting stability in East Timor, ASEAN's ability to convince the Myanmar government to accept foreign aid after Cyclone Nargis, or Turkey's work in pushing for talks between Syria and Israel. The range and complexity of foreign policy challenges — and the speed with which a crisis can escalate — mean that knowing the right people to call and the right levers to pull in any corner of the world must be a key element of U.S. diplomacy.

Finally, the United States must recognize the necessity of orchestrating networks of public, private, and civic actors to address global problems. The era of government formulating and executing policy entirely on its own is over, even with a revitalized U.S. government that has a greater social and economic mandate. Outsourcing government functions to private and civic contractors is not the answer, however; government officials must instead learn to orchestrate networks of these actors and guide them toward collaborative solutions.

[SHARPENING THE EDGE](#)

IN THIS CENTURY, global power will increasingly be defined by connections — who is connected to whom and for what purposes. Of course, the world will still contain conflict. Networks can be as malign and deadly as they can be productive and beneficial. In addition, the gap between those who are connected to global networks and those who are excluded from them will sharply multiply existing inequities.

But on the whole, the positive effects of networks will greatly outweigh the negative. Imagine, for example, a U.S. economy powered by green technology and green infrastructure. Communities of American immigrants from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East will share this new generation of products and services with villages and cities in their home countries. Innovation will flow in both directions. In the United States, universities will be able to offer courses in truly global classrooms, relying on their international students and faculty to connect with educational institutions abroad through travel, the Internet, and videoconferencing. Artists of all kinds will sit at the intersection of culture, learning, and creative energy. U.S. diplomats and other U.S. government officials will receive instant updates on events occurring around the world. They will be connected to their counterparts abroad, able to quickly coordinate preventive and problem-solving actions with a range of private and civic actors. The global landscape will resemble that of the Obama campaign, in which a vast network brought in millions of dollars in donations, motivated millions of volunteers, and mobilized millions of voters.

In a networked world, the United States has the potential to be the most connected country; it will also be connected to other power centers that are themselves widely connected. If it pursues the right policies, the United States has the

capacity and the cultural capital to reinvent itself. It need not see itself as locked in a global struggle with other great powers; rather, it should view itself as a central player in an integrated world. In the twenty-first century, the United States' exceptional capacity for connection, rather than splendid isolation or hegemonic domination, will renew its power and restore its global purpose.

In the twenty-first century, "only the connected will survive."

It is connectivity, more than money or stature, that determines individual power.

The United States is plugged into all corners of the global brain.

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By Anne-Marie Slaughter

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