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Navigating a Fortress World Contribution to GTI Forum [Which Future Are We Living In?](#)

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As usual, Paul Raskin, in his [opening reflections](#), exhibits his uncanny ability to conceptualize the global historical moment as a holistic reality, giving a plausible account of its most characteristic features. And he does so without diminishing the complexities presented as the shifting tectonic plates of adaptive change during a time of systemic transition. There are many indications that Raskin's general portrayal enjoys a strong resonance for those of us who similarly are trying to understand the most globally significant developments of the last twenty years. Among this small, yet growing transnational community of commentators, the only future-affirming responses that seems responsible are forms of engagement that enhance the prospects for positive transformation.

Whether an acceptance of global scenarios of fundamental change is instructive enough to alter our basic perception of the human condition is crucial in contemplating what lies ahead. A specific priority concern relates to whether the world in 2022 appears to be significantly more prone to collective disaster than that in 2002, and whether such a dismal trend is poised to continue, and likely accelerate, over the course of the next twenty years. In effect, [Barbarization](#) in the dual forms of [Fortress World](#) and [Breakdown](#) scenarios is appropriately receiving increased [civil society](#) attention compared to twenty years earlier. This is a reaction to such earth-scale happenings as greatly heightened dangers of major wars between nuclear weapons states, the COVID pandemic, and the worsening of adverse climate change indicators. It is not only this widespread harm that has been and is being done and threatened, but the added perception that dramatic failures to exhibit any strong disposition on the part of the most influential political leaders and economic voices on the planet to take any meaningful account

of the ongoing transition from our modern world of distinct moving parts to an overriding reality of unity reflective of an emergent planetary civilization. The distinction between a fragmented world managed by centers of power and authority and an integrated world underpinned by the ethos and praxis of the whole usefully stretches our imaginative capacities beyond current systemic limits. As such, it gives global-scale problem-solving the promise of effectiveness and legitimacy in the process of shaping the contours of a new paradigm.

It seems that we are experiencing the sunset phase of the old paradigm that guided modernity more convincingly than the dawning of such a New Paradigm. Yet we cannot be sure. The jumps of consciousness that have produced the greatest historical discontinuities—as with spread of religions or empire, technological breakthroughs, major wars—have been mainly interpreted and understood after the fact. In contemporary circumstances, the primary challenge is to make the jump by thinking ahead because drifting into the future, as at present, seems to be exemplifying a dysfunctional collective resignation in the face of the inevitable, which amounts to a “waiting for the Apocalypse.” Implicit in the [Great Transition scenario framework](#) is a haunting bio-ethical-genetic question: do humans have a robust enough species will to survive and flourish?

Up until this century, or at least up until the explosion of the first atomic bomb, the presence or absence of such a species will seemed irrelevant to the kind of futures that now not only confront humanity, but also underlie prospects for maintaining the ecological habitability of the planet. In the past, parts in the form of tribal communities, nations, even civilizations would collapse and disappear, but the integrity of the whole was not at stake. The radical difference now is that the whole is in a situation of seeming end-time jeopardy.

And yet despite this growing knowledge of planetary precariousness, reinforced by expert consensus and the nightmare visions of prophetic voices, the fears and anger of the multitudes seem to be being sidetracked by the worst forms of fragmentation associated with state-centric nationalism, regional bloc formation, and rising geopolitical tensions. It is not only the tenacity of the old paradigm, but the concentration of resources, energies, and passions on maximizing the competitive dominance of parts variously configured as “global states” or regions.

Although we glibly talk of a state-centric world and international law as underlying the UN Charter purporting to be founded on “the equality of states,” the design and operation of this world-of-

parts existentially rests on inequality, hierarchy, and hegemony. A variant of this configuration is itself embodied in the UN Charter, as the five winners in World War II, among the most dangerous political actors in the world, were given a right of veto in the one part of the UN vested with the power of decision, the Security Council. The landscape of power has changed since 1945, but the reality of this vertical structure of a fragmented world remains.

Indeed, after the Soviet collapse, the US government gradually seized the opportunity to preside over a hidden transition to “a planetary civilization” by managing its embodiment in Fortress World. It paid the costs of sustaining hundreds of military bases throughout the world and navies and air power in every ocean, as well as achieving control over space and the technics of cyber conflict. Every conflict was potentially within the strategic reach of the United States, which retained for itself the exclusive prerogative of intervening by force while enjoying all the benefits of impunity. In this sense, the US has been constructing a unipolar sequel to the bipolar “balance of terror” that existed throughout the Cold War. This undertaking could be interpreted as the first credible effort to take account of the emergent planetary civilization, adopting the form of Fortress World, which Raskin labels as one of two types of Barbarization.

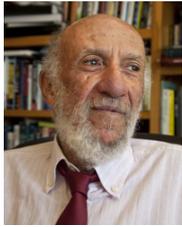
Perversely, given the circumstances, Fortress World could be seen as the safest and currently most plausible entry point to a planet-centric world, even though unpalatable from the perspectives of human rights, humane governance, and civilizational diversity. I never thought that I would entertain such a distasteful view of the human future, but given the foreseeable remoteness of more desirable alternatives, it deserves a further assessment of positive potential.

More than Great Transition alternatives, Fortress World is already in being, although currently under serious challenge in both Ukraine and in relation to Taiwan. Russia and China strongly reject the postulates of US management of Fortress World, as does most of the Global South, at least rhetorically. If Russia incurs defeat in Ukraine, and China backs off challenging the independence of Taiwan, a more benign and responsible version of Fortress World could emerge in Washington, more closely resembling the leadership role played by the US in the period immediately following the end of World War II. I am imagining the growing pressures of transition inducing a hybrid scenario of a demilitarizing Fortress World fusing with a New Paradigm based on hierarchically guided global problem-solving, centered not in the UN but in the responsible geopolitics of the

dominant state, a rebuilt “city on the hill,” a redemptive “American exceptionalism.”

This postulated future is not congenial to my values, aspirations, and calculation of probabilities, nor could I hope for any influence in the manner of its evolution should it come to pass. In this sense, my existential engagement in the politics of transition would continue to be conditioned by the strivings of “a citizen pilgrim” for a new order premised on human rights, ecological reverence, social democracy, global rule of law, universal accountability, and nonviolence. This collective reality would amount to a process of continuous pursuit of humane global governance, embodying a patriotism for humanity and ecological well-being, privileging local empowerment and globally constituted problem-solving. In effect, a New Paradigm that built on solidarities and a sense of planetary community managed and guided from above and below by mysterious movements of a North Star shining upon the global common good. Now the stuff of dreams, but who really knows?

About the Author



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