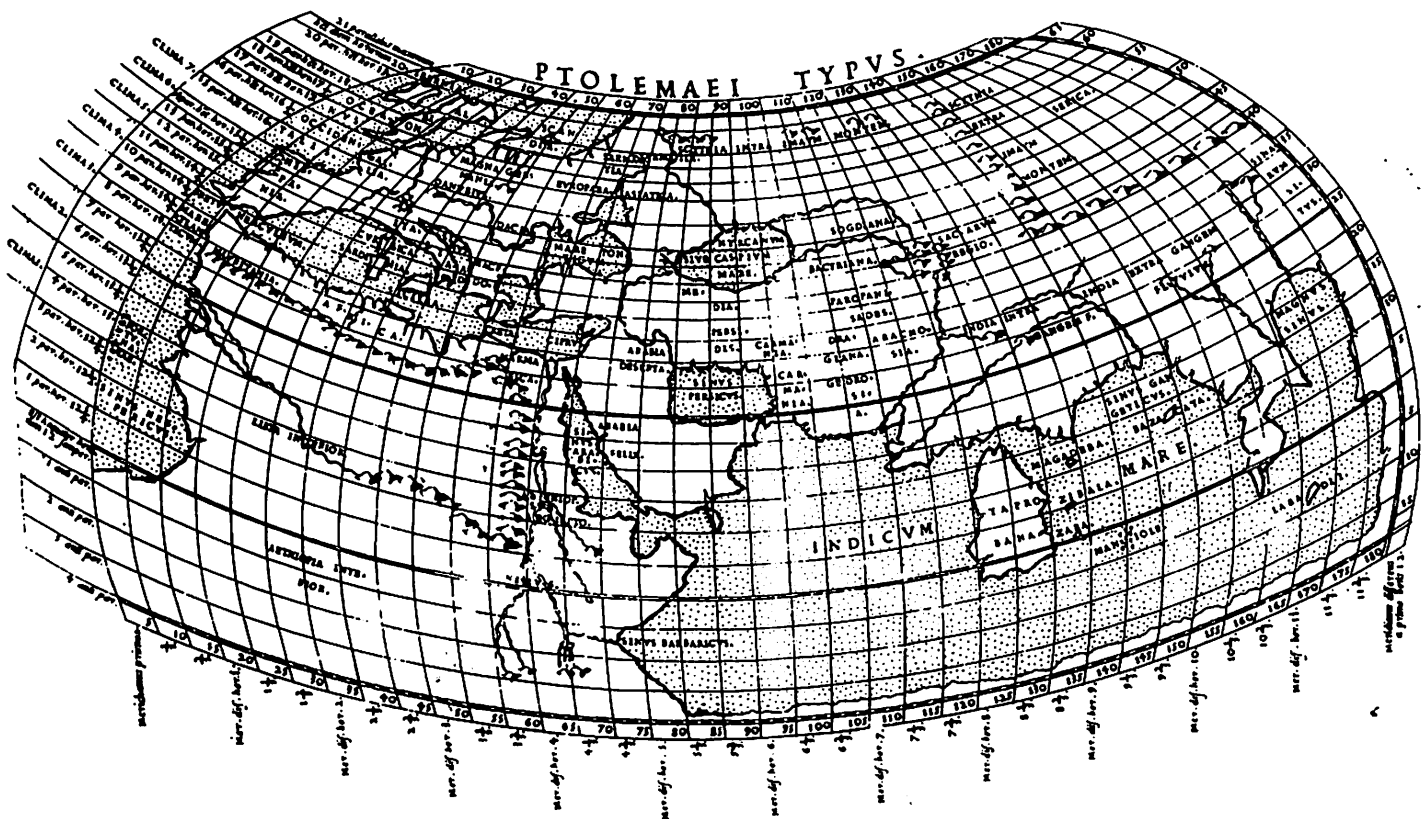


Center Report

Thinking About World Change



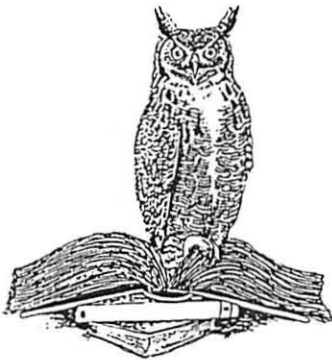
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Many program members made special contributions to this report.
While underscoring their role, the author wishes to
restate that responsibility for the
views contained in this
report is his alone.

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Teaser

Why should you want to read this report? It's long, you're busy, and anyway, we all know world change is happening. You don't want to *think* about it; you want to *do* something about it. Well here's a teaser, a glimpse at what you're missing:

- **The World as Place of Many Realities.** Our contention is that, with the end of the period where the United States attempted to assert a global culture, cultures (like Japan) and culture areas (like Western Europe) that took part in the American mission will once again, naturally, go their own way. We will transit from an historical period where the world was driven by the vision of one culture to a new historical era (and in some ways a more familiar one) of a world of several smaller "worlds": a cultural pantheon of several distinct realities. And they are getting more, not less, distinct. The world is not, and is not becoming a "global village." If you must, the great globe itself is a series of villages, each beating with the pulse of hundreds of millions.
- **Seizing the Future for the Present.** Though the new world has not yet fully taken shape, and its outlines are still obscured, we must not cling vaingloriously to the hope of a U.S. global culture--one culture, three operators (U.S.-Canada, the EC, and Japan)--nor to the institutions the old reality premises created, of which NATO has symbolic primacy. That would be dangerous. We must look to the world after the transition. We must voice it first and then create it. Our current policies, the speeches, the treaty-making, the operational stuff, will become increasingly empty if they have no future content. Once Americans recognize the transitional aspect of things today, then a new national policy can be created. This is a golden opportunity if taken, a debacle in the making if shirked.



- **And Now to Ourselves.** World change unlocks change here. The claims of our postwar mission--the quest to create a global culture--have held back the pressures for change in the U.S. We are on the edge of what Max Lerner calls "Big Change," and we don't see it because we are entranced by world change. A time of American Big Change has been in effect postponed for over a decade. It should have been in full flood at the end of the 1970s. But the world we had created would not let us go. Now it has. We must understand ourselves first if we are to unlock the other puzzles of a world driven by culture area change. And the biggest puzzle of all: Where are we going? Answering this question will drive American foreign policy for years to come.

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INTRODUCTION

The Program on Long-Range Change

In the spring of 1988, the author of this report was invited to join the Department of State as director of its Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs (CSFA). He was charged with transforming this office into a site for long-range thinking. The aim would be to develop and introduce a new, perhaps alien, perspective in a place institutionally wrapped around the operational claims of the day-to-day conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

No one would deny that a workable framework for understanding change might help the policymaker. But in a time of global transformation the need for such a tool grows. We felt a program was needed to show that serious long-range thinking is possible, and that future analysis can make practical contributions to the work of the Department.

This report is the outcome of such a program. From September 1988 through May 1989, the CSFA engaged some 300 area specialists, scientists, and historians in a series of 50 conferences. Often meeting also in small groups, these experts sifted the *processes* of change across the range of human relations and the world as a whole. What follows is not a summary of our activity: it is a synthesis of a year's debate, of questions and of quest.



Preliminary Issues

Our research agenda was driven from the start by two questions: First, how can we give useable shape to something as amorphous as "long-term change?" And second, how can any approach to change really contribute to policy-making?

The first question has several dimensions:

- First, what makes long-term change different from other kinds of change?
- Second, what makes change adaptive (leading to reform) or traumatic (leading to revolution)?
- Third, how do cultures work as the makers and movers of change?
- Fourth, how do physical forces and ideas interact and shape the process of change?
- Finally, what determines the broad direction of long-term change, or "History?"

The second question faces the need to make any approach to long-term change relevant to today's policies:

- How can the models of highly specialized disciplines fit into a framework useful to generalists?
- How can long-term developments be related to current political issues?
- Where do we stand now in a transforming, global process of change?
- And how can today's political choices enhance the long-term security and prosperity of the United States?



Prophecy or Direction? The Purpose of Long-Range Analysis

A program that seeks to demonstrate the importance and utility of long-range thinking faces a fundamental choice from the start. Should it try to predict the future, or should it instead show how change works? Should it play prophet or guide?

The temptation to play futurist is both alluring and false. Modern prophets titillate on two levels. They offer the seductive comfort of inevitability, and they feed our endless appetite for melodrama, conjuring visions of wonder and terror to suit popular taste and anxiety. Whoever plays the prophet is guaranteed an audience for awhile.

Yet we know that the future has not been fixed. "The future" does not exist; it is ours to make, or unmake. Today we can see an infinity of alternative futures. We also know that the future is an extension of the present in time and space; that what will be is conditioned by what is. The physical structures of our world are both the objects of change and the very means to make change happen. What is needed is a method of *interpreting* significant shifts taking place within each sphere of human activity, a hermeneutic of social change that seeks not to predict but to unlock the process of change.

Hence the purpose of long-range projection, as we have conceived it, is to provide a compass to national and global change, a method of analyzing and interpreting changes yet to take place. We identify with Tiresias, the ancient Theban seer who, though blind, was a sure guide through unknown lands. Like Tiresias, we must use of what is familiar in order to interpret *terra incognita*. This means using what we know of past change to interpret future change.

"The future" does not exist; it is ours to make, or unmake. We also know that the future is an extension of the present in time and within the same space; that what will be is conditioned by what is.

What is needed is a method of interpreting significant shifts taking place, a hermeneutic of social change that seek not to predict but to unlock the process of change.

Overview

The mind and its cultural belonging in the place where global change happens. The shared ideas of men and women as they cluster along a range of variant human regions are taken as the key to unlocking the process of change.

We describe Big Change as a conflict of visions over national symbols, national identity, and national purpose.

Our report offers such an interpretive framework, or hermeneutic, for analyzing how change works for different societies (or "culture areas").

Our methodology and language, "A Glossary of Change," could have been Part I. We have put it at the end, to give the report a faster flow. It should serve as a reference point for the reader, where key terms for interpreting cultures' different realities are explained. Our approach differs from more familiar methods, by focusing on the mind and its cultural belonging as the place where global change happens. The shared ideas of men and women as they cluster along a range of variant human regions are taken as the key to unlocking change. Taking "ethos" as the subconscious script or subtext of human reality, we introduce the notion of "paradigm" as its more visible reading: the conscious script of our reality. The process of change can then be seen as a "paradigm shift"—where our basic premises about how the world works are literally reshaped, and our relationship to society, and of society's role in the world, redefined.

In Part I, we apply our methodology of change to the American experience. Five periods, each defined by its own distinctive reality (as a national paradigm), are identified, and three are examined in depth. Introducing the notion of a "national pantheon" of quasi-sacred premises and myths, we describe Big Change as a conflict of visions over national symbols, national identity, and national purpose. Part I concludes with a look at the pressures pushing us to another time of reinterpretation.

In Part II, we sketch a roadmap to global change by breaking the image of a single world into a mosaic of different realities, of separate culture areas. Our cartography of culture areas, in contrast to our treatment of America, is necessarily impressionistic. This roadmap looks at global change taking place on two levels —*within*



culture areas, and *between* culture areas. Global change, it is argued, must be understood as the result of these two related, but discrete processes. Rejecting the notion of a cosmopolitan society of shared values and norms, we analyze global change as mediated by distinctive cultural prisms.

In the final section, "America and World Change," we return to the familiar terrain of the policy maker. After suggesting the major international issues that will confront us, we present the policy challenge as more than finding working solutions to emerging problems. World change, we argue, is unleashing Big Change in our own society. The policy challenge is to respond to world change while reinterpreting national values, and indeed, our world role.

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