

## **Good governance for unsettled futures**

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No social system is as dangerously obsolete as are governance systems everywhere in the world, but few governance systems are as dangerous dysfunctional as that of the United States--at all levels, federal, state and local.

That was not always the case. Once upon a time, the idea of "constituting" a new nation by having a group of powerful men write down its basic governing principles so as to keep them and their kind in power was a marvelous new idea. The resulting "Constitution of the United States" (along with the earlier constitutions of the several states) was a marvel of the world.

Based on cutting edge ideas and technologies of the day--Newtonian mechanics, Deistic theology, and the hand-powered printing press (steam-powered printing presses did not come into existence until about 30 years after the US did)--the US Constitution was a breath-taking social invention, brilliantly overcoming a host of design-challenges, though by no means all of them while creating serious future problems as well. It was designed for, and fit for, a vast, overwhelmingly agricultural society with a small, widely-scattered, rural population of semi-illiterate farmers and plantation owners many of whom wanted political independence from their mother country, far, far away.

All of the world copied, and then has uncritically continued to copy, that once-marvelous, once-new idea, along with the cosmologies and technologies of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century that it was based upon. No one has ever tried to do again what the US Founding Fathers originally did: to discuss among themselves what kinds of futures might lie ahead and thus what systems of governance could be created out of the cosmologies and technologies of their time instead only of those of olden times.

Even in the US, where creativity and innovation are said to be prized and widespread, it is apparently absolutely impossible even for scholars, let alone politicians or ordinary citizens, to even contemplate a fundamentally new system of governance for itself based on future challenges and opportunities, and current and emerging cosmologies and technologies. No part of academia, certainly not so-called "political science", seriously considers, much less carefully develops new forms of governance in the way business

schools envision and create new forms of economic enterprises. While some churches do their best to hold on to old creeds and customs, many of the most popular churches today believe things and do things that must cause St. Paul to twirl in his grave, Luther and Calvin to shake their heads in wonder, and Jesus to weep.

The logo-fundamentalism that holds the US polity in thrall is even more destructive than is the economic fundamentalism that has ruined our society and environment.

So I applaud the courage and foresight of The Institute for the Future. As far as I know, you are the only futures consulting firm in the world that includes as a core mission a focus on futures of governance beyond that of simple reforms of the current system.

The Institute for Alternative Futures in Alexandria, Virginia, was founded shortly after US Representative and later Senator John Culver, of Iowa, inspired by Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, inserted changes in the rules of the House of Representatives in 1974 that required all standing committees of the House (except the Appropriations and Budget committees) to "on a continuing basis undertake futures research and forecasting on matters within the jurisdiction of that committee." (Staff Report of the Select Committee on Committees, House of Representatives, Ninety-third Congress, Second Session, *Committee Reform Amendments of 1974: Explanation of H. Res 988 as Adopted by the House of Representatives, October 8, 1974*. Washington, DC: Government Printing House, 41-730-O, p. 56)

The IAF was created initially to respond to the expected demand from Congress to do futures work. It hoped to help create a new kind of governance called "Anticipatory Democracy" (AD), an idea articulated by one of its founders, Alvin Toffler. The congressional demand for foresight never materialized. IAF and my futures center at the University of Hawaii did join to do a considerable amount of modestly-innovative judicial foresight work during the 1980s and 90s, but AD never became the core mission of IAF. The sustaining money for its futures work came from other sectors of the government--primarily the military--and from certain parts of the economy, primarily the health industries.

So the field of new governance invention and design is vacant, and the need is supremely urgent. I hope beyond hope that the IFTF will continue and expand its very important initial work in the most vital aspect of the futures facing humanity--governance: the formal steering mechanism of any social system. Whether based on libertarian or communitarian principles, governance exists, and a governance system that can navigate through the tsunamis of change already engulfing all ships of state--with more to come--is desperately needed.

**What aspects of new forms of governance do I have in mind? Here are a few:**

(Please note I am eschewing my usual "alternative futures" elaboration here and assuming that global system collapse will not occur in the foreseeable future—a heroic assumption for me to make indeed).

1. Almost all modern nation-states were born by processes that involved massive killing. The victors then celebrated the act of killing and placed their historical killers-in-chief at the pinnacle of their political pantheon. Having a strong killing capability, against internal "enemies" as well as external ones, is the number one priority of every nation-building project.

The process of killing which produced the victors also produced vanquished and other internal victims, thus guaranteeing the eternal necessity of having to continue to kill so that the victors can continue to rule. Many nations were born in societies where Hobbes's theories of human nature, and fantasies about the killing "state of nature" without governance, were strongly believed. Government is necessary to kill for peace, Hobbesians insist.

As long as we continue to insist that killing is necessary and that is OK for the state legitimately to have a monopoly on killing within its borders and externally, we will never have good governance in sustainable societies, and are probably doomed as a species. I believe this is our number one priority: to envision, devise, and implement systems of nonkilling governance. Fortunately pioneering work by Glenn Paige, now bolstered by a score of new books on nonkilling governance, has laid the academic foundation we require < <http://www.nonkilling.org/>>.

2. The second need for governance design is to reconcile the realities of globalization with people's preference for localization. The nation-state system with its notions of "sovereignty" is as obsolete as the structures based upon it. We need global governance. But we also need it articulated with effective local preferences. Most nations are too small for the former and too big for the latter. Designing effective and fair *glocal* governance is no easy task either, but there has been work done by the World Order Model Project in the 1970s and the global governance project of the World Academy of Art and Science in the 1990s, among others more recently, that can and should be drawn on for inspiration and guidance. Until recently all governance was fundamentally local while now virtuality increasingly enables many aspects of governance to be performed everywhere/anywhere/all the time/autonomously.

3. Third, "democracy" needs to be reconceptualized, and democratic systems refocused. My definition of democracy is this: "Democracy is a form and process of governance that allows each person affected by the actions of an entity, a continuous and equal opportunity to influence actions of that entity." Until we devise and implement systems of governance that allow all people to participate effectively in deciding and carrying out policies of concern to them when they wish to participate, and that makes them responsible for the consequences of both their participation and their nonparticipation, we will continue to have the kind of power-mongering, posturing, irresponsible, and alienating "politics" we have now. Majority rule creates opposition that tends always to oppose and seldom to cooperate. Consensus is the way most people prefer to make social decisions, but it takes far too long, and also invites posturing and power-mongering. Proposals for systems that enable direct participation when desired while allowing true representation when preferred already exist and should be integrated into new governance

design. Technologies and structures also exist and can be developed that free people from the inhuman necessity of being bureaucratic administrators or violent law enforcers as well. “Smart” governance in the few parts of life that require lock-step behavior is possible. For the rest, “governance” could be a matter of personalized conflict resolution along the model of mediation.

The extreme imbalance between forced over-participation in the economy vs. repressed nonparticipation in the polity needs to be redressed. With existing technologies of automation and artificial intelligence, few people are actually needed to keep the economy functioning. People should be freed from meaningless "work" in order to participate more fully and effectively in their self-governance.

4. Fourth, present systems of government, law, and economics remain based on primitive notions of rationality that clearly are not valid. Policies based on those assumptions undermine the effective and fair operation of both our economy and our polity. Political economies need to be grounded on the very best natural and social science understandings of human behavior and not on ancient fantasies that certain people are able to promulgate and manipulate to their advantage.

5. Fifth, when modern systems of government were formed, social and environmental change was slow. Humanity's footprint on the planet and on the future of life was small and largely unnoticed. Now more of us are coming to understand that we live in a new geological epoch, called the Anthropocene Epoch. As Walter Truett Anderson told us long ago, our duty now is "to govern evolution." Thus, all governance systems need to become seriously and effectively systemic and futures-oriented, seeking to balance the needs of future generations with those of present generations. Law, especially, if it is to have a future at all, must become much more suggestive, flexible, and situational than it is now, based not on precedence, but on consequence. There is a rich literature of future generations analysis that can help us here as well.

6. Finally, the "word" is out as the dominant mode of forming and conveying serious ideas and information. "Constitution *writing*" must come to an end, and new modes of thinking about, "constituting", and communicating preferred human behavior and governance structures that will facilitate it--such as constitution "imaging"--need to be utilized. Ubiquitous technologies can be used positively for democratically-accepted governance, and not only on behalf of narrow corporate interests.

There are many other features of good governance redesign, but I hope these six points give you a hint of what is on my mind.

Does anything that I said have the slightest chance of actually guiding new governance design--if it should? Dator's Second Law of the Futures states that "Any useful idea about the futures should appear to be ridiculous." The stupider I sound, the more sense I may be making--or not. The Institute for the Futures is perhaps in a position to test my dreams, and either discard them, or help them come true.