

## The New World Economic Order: Implications for Insular Areas

For the Second National Conference: "Looking to the Future": Relations between the US and American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands

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As you just heard, I have been asked to fill in as your final luncheon speaker of this Conference instead of appearing on yesterday's plenary panel, as originally scheduled, since, for whatever reason, it was impossible for the Conference organizers here to wrest someone away from her busy schedule at the White House to address this august group.

I am sure this last-minute absence of a White House speaker does not surprise this group at all. Such snubs and absences from US governmental officials in the past are at least one half of the reason we are having this meeting at all. The other half is what happens to you when a high-ranking US government official does show up. Then you know you are in deep doo doo. As the Senator Lutu said the other afternoon, it is often better to let a sleeping giant snooze blissfully away, ignorant of your needs and wishes.

As you also just heard, I am not from the government, and I am not here to help you. Which is about the only good news you will get from me for a while. So my apologies to you for the message which I now bring to you, as a humble representative from the future you have been allegedly looking into for the past several days.

Unlike most other speakers at this conference, I have been very generously allotted somewhat more than the twenty minutes everyone else got, to talk about some things which I think you should factor in to your considerations about your future relations with the US and each other. Nonetheless, I am going to try to be as brief and clear as possible. Thus I will cut out all of the explanations, qualifications, and alternative interpretations that you and I know belong if I were to give a more balanced discussion of the topic I was originally asked to discuss at this conference--namely, "the new

world economic order: implications for insular areas"--and get directly to what I believe are the conclusions, and what I think you and I ought to do about them.

Also, while the title of my assigned topic is "the new world economic order" I also feel impelled to mention some things that are not, strictly speaking, merely "economic."

Finally, since the overall theme of this conference is "Looking to the Future," I will try to say more about the future than about the present or the past.

Perhaps, like many of you, because I come from an island which has in the past been, and certainly in the future will be, shaped and influenced by tsunamis--which used to be called, and which you may still call, "tidal waves"--I have recently been using the metaphor of "tsunamis" to try to signify the speed, magnitude, and multiplicity of changes which are rushing at us from the future. That's right. I think the future will be so novel, so unexpected, and so poorly prefigured by our present situation and our past experiences, that I am convinced that it will be more helpful for us to believe that the future is rushing towards us, rather than that we are moving into it.

At the same time, in this metaphor, most of us are so concerned about comparatively trivial political or personal issues, which often are rooted in the past, that we are unmindful of or insufficiently attentive to the oncoming tsunamis.

It is as though we are having a picnic at the beach. We have spread out our mats, placed our food on the ground, and are now loudly complaining about the sand in our drinks and the ants in our food, while also arguing about who forgot to bring the mustard for the hotdogs and indeed whether hotdogs are part of our culture's way of eating at the beach in the first place, or, more seriously, whether the very concept of a "picnic" is a measure of our captivity by cultural imperialism.

This is all well and good. I am definitely not saying these sorts of discussions are irrelevant. They are not. They are vital. But I do believe that they need to be made within the context of a future which I have not yet heard discussed here, and don't hear discussed much anywhere.

Nonetheless I must immediately say that I have been very impressed by the fact that so many speakers have repeatedly observed that we are now in a very different world from the one we were in only a very few years ago, when Mandela was in prison in South Africa, the Berlin Wall stood tall, and all was evil in the Evil Empire. The frequently-quoted Chamorro proverb is true: what is impossible in a century becomes possible in a minute.

Or, as I put it, beware of the futurists' curse which is, "may your dreams come true." In other words, you had better be clear about what you want, because you are liable to get, and more quickly than you expect.

I say this with some personal anxiety. During the decades of the 1980s, I was first Secretary General, and then President, of the World Futures Studies Federation. This is an organization of persons and institutions professionally concerned with futures research. We began from an international meeting in Oslo, Norway in 1967; are officially headquartered in Paris, France, and now have members in over 90 countries from all regions of the world.

During the 1980s, I spent a great deal of time in the then-socialist countries. Many scholars and others--members of the academies of science in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in China, North Korea and elsewhere--wanted to join the WFSF because they knew that the future was a safe place to criticize the present by envisioning a better tomorrow.

I would come back from those trips and tell anyone who would listen that big changes were about to happen behind the Iron Curtain for which we in the US should be prepared. But everyone laughed at me and could not imagine it, and did not even want to imagine it for the most part. But it did happen, as many of you have observed, and we were not--are not now--prepared to deal with it.

But more importantly, neither, for the most part, were my futurist friends in Eastern Europe, many of whom became very high officials in the new governments after the fall, and none of whom were ready to make the most of the opportunities when the future arrived so unexpectedly.

They had dreamed their dreams, they yearned for a better tomorrow, they wanted the end of totalitarianism. And then one

night, much to their surprise, it happened. And they were left standing with the awesome duty of making their dreams come true. I would say that they basically failed. While things are better in some areas and worse in others, none of them made the substantial improvements they imagined because they had all failed to ask, "what next?" After my dream comes true, then what? What about the future after the future arrives?

Well, I want to suggest that you may now be standing at very much that same moment. Your frustrations about the past may be nothing compared to your--to our--inability to take advantage of some mighty big waves of change rushing at us from the future. If we don't stop bickering about the past and present, and turn around and face the future, I am very much afraid we will all, friend and friendly-foe, be wiped away by the oncoming surf.

Thus, I urge you all to adopt the attitude of a surfer and learn to surf those tsunamis of change. Turn around, study the waves, check where the reefs are, where the rip tides pull, where the sharks are trolling. Then bend down, wax up your boards, and paddle out to ride those tsunamis of change. You cannot stop them, but you can use their power to ride where you want to go, and, most importantly, to enjoy it. Surfing is fun, and the bigger the wave the more fun it is. And the more dangerous.

So, what are the tsunamis I am talking about? Let me just mention four or five. Even so, all I can do is point out the tips, the whitecaps, of these powerful forces. I challenge each of you to find out more about each them, how they might crash against you, and where you would like to use their power to take you.

1. The first tsunami I will mention is the assigned topic of my talk: Economics. During the time every person in this room has been alive, and specifically over the life span of all of the old timers in this room, the United States changed from being a modest, comparatively nonintrusive and isolated, largely agrarian and only moderately industrialized, and utterly nonmilitarized nation (having no standing army to speak of, and in fact regarding those in the tiny professional military service at that time as being basically social misfits and parasites who could not find productive jobs) into the world's largest superpower, stalking the globe as the world's policeman and chief busybody, with such a lust for military adventures that eventually the militarized portion of the US economy grew so big that virtually

every household in the US has some one who (1) works directly in or for the US military; (2) at one time worked in or for the military, and thus still receives substantial military welfare benefits; (3) works or worked in a research organization or a factory which, under a military contract or grant, supplies ideas or products to the military; or (4) otherwise has found that the best way for them to be all they can be was to do it in or for the Army. I know you all agree. Most of you were in the US military at one time or another.

As a consequence, by the end of the 1980s, the United States had become the world largest, and the only successful, command economy. In spite of all the rhetoric about the glory of free market capitalism that spews forth continuously from so many lips, in this city especially, in fact so many people sup at the trough of military contracts and entitlements that it is not too much to say that the truly "free market" sector of the US economy became over the past 60-odd years largely just some yummy frosting on an otherwise very tough command economy pound cake.

When the Cold War suddenly, unexpectedly and quite undesirably came to an end, the rationale for this entire, largely unacknowledged command economy came to an end as well. While there have of course been cutbacks and layoffs in the militarized sector of the economy, that there have not been more is not due to the fact that we must remain armed to the teeth--if not to the moon--in anticipation of some as yet unidentified rival superpower--is it Iraq? Is it Japan? Is it North Korea? Is it Zhirinovsky's Russia? Is it anthrax from Libya? Is it our own shadow?--it is that so many people in the US, and around the world, are dependent on our command economy that if we cut back sufficiently to meet any credible military threat, our real economy would look even worse than that of Russia today.

And the reason for that is that the creation of the US command economy was achieved by causing the US to sink further and further into a yawning black hole of debt. By which I do not mean only the well-celebrated and hotly-debated national debt, which, though lessening temporarily, is horrifying enough, but the largely unacknowledged levels of corporate debt, much of which has been "disappeared" by bankruptcy, write-offs, and government bailouts so that the CEOs can return to "GO", collect \$200 dollars, and start all over again.

But the mightiest anchor which may eventually drag the US ship of state to a halt and to its demise is the massive and again-growing levels of consumer debt--debt achieved not only while the economy was said to be growing, as in the 1980s, but even now, while the economy is dead in the water, or at best said to be moving ahead dead slow over the flotsam and jetsam of hundreds of thousands of unneeded workers, white collared as well as blue, who have recently been discharged from their unnecessary labors by corporations, private as well as public, worldwide.

Of course, as a consequence of all this "rightsizing", the "economy" is said to be recovering. Unfortunately the people are dying.

Well folks, it just doesn't get any better than this--for most of us, that is: some folks surely can expect to continue to be quite filthily rich for the foreseeable future. But the US government, per se, is not like to be one of them. So if you expect Uncle Sam to provide for, or to care very much about, his insular areas, you might as well forget it. In fact, given half a chance, he would get rid of the lot of us if he could do so without too much embarrassment.

Indeed that may be at least part of the message underlying a vision for the future of US-insular relations based on "partnership", "facilitation" and "self-empowerment," however intelligent, sensitive, sincere, and well-meaning the architects of that vision may otherwise be.

As you all know, for the most part we insular areas are viewed--when we somehow manage to come into view at all--as being nothing but a bunch of brown(ed) skin troublemakers anyway.

Which is my second tsunami. Namely, the changing demographics in the US and throughout the world.

2. Demographics. My favorite concise quotation on this comes from Mahdi Elmandjra, of Morocco, a member of the Club of Rome and a former president of the World Futures Studies Federation. Elmandjra pointed out that about one hundred years ago the population of the world (and probably for the first time in history) was roughly equally divided into white and nonwhite people. However, over the past 100 years, the fertility of the white portion of the globe has declined, while it has not declined in the nonwhite portion. Death rates have declined there, however, so as a consequence of this, not

only has the total population of the world ballooned from about 1 billion people then to over 5 billion now, but also most of that growth has been in the nonwhite regions, so that now the white regions of the globe have only about 20% of the world's population.

If these population trends continue, and there is nothing happening to suggest that they won't, then by the mid point of the 21st century, the white proportion of the world's population will be between about 1-5%. That is one reason I feel so at home in a meeting like this.

Unlike so many meetings the US government is involved with, this is much more representative of this aspect of the future.

As a Micronesian friend of mine said when he heard me tell this tale some time ago: So we are entering a new Bronze Age!

The reason I make this point is that one reason we, in the insular areas, are part of the US now is because of the fact that the unusual demographics, along with the technologies and ideologies, of the past 100 years made it possible for white folks to dominate and control nonwhite folks fairly easily.

That time is also over, I am sure you have noticed.

Now, of course, the US is fast becoming a nonwhite nation itself. Just take a stroll around the neighborhood if you don't believe me. Well, I don't mean the neighborhood of this hotel. We are in a kind of ghetto here. I suggest you take a stroll through NE DC to get a better flavor for the future of this country, in more ways than one.

However, I have observed that people of color are as eager to dominate other people of color as--how you say?--"colorless" people are, so there is no reason to assume that an America where everyone is a minority will necessarily treat us insular areas with any more tender loving care than we have been getting over the past one or two hundred years. But then again, it might.

In any event, my point here is: please don't assume that the future of the world, or the US, and of your islands will continue to be controlled by the cultures and worldviews which controlled it in the past. Big changes are underway in the New World Cultural Order, as there are in the New World Economic Order. And the two--the cultural and the economic--will be very much intertwined.

Just looking at these two variables alone suggests that the dominant sectors of the world over the 21st Century will be found in Asia--the Confucian North East, the Hindic South, and the Islamic Center--with plenty of opportunities for conflict and domination there.

Indeed, we folks in the islands had better hope that those giants don't wake up, or to change the metaphor, that those elephants don't pick our neighborhoods in which to engage in their frenetic war dances. If they do dance over our homes, some of us might conclude that Western domination had some few things to recommend about it after all.

But I think it would be a big mistake, in trying to understand the coming New World Order, to focus on economics and culture alone.

3. Tsunami Three: Environmental Change. I believe that global change--global environmental change--will knock all of those optimistic projections about economic growth in Asia (or in Europe and North America, for that matter) into a cocked hat. Poor old battered mother nature just can't continue to accept all of the insults we plan to launch against her with our out-of-control global population growth and conventional economic "development" patterns.

I am especially concerned about those of us who rely on the fishing industry now, and/or who hope to do so in the future. Unless we can find some fast, effective, and fair way to manage our global ocean commons--or even our own EEZ's--substantially better than we do now, there may be virtually no fish left for anyone to eat in the 21st century, never mind a fishing industry on which to base our economic development.

Of course there are some very powerful new technologies emerging or on the horizon. Thus, I would urge your universities and research institutions to be on the forefront, or to continue to be on the forefront, of research and development of those technologies. I am thinking primarily of biological engineering and especially molecular engineering, two technologies which have the potential of totally displacing the old industrial technologies and all of the institutions and values based on them.

But while I do believe there are new technologies which could permit sustainable development over the 21st century and beyond for the

10 to 20 billion people expected to inhabit it, I don't see those technologies coming on line soon enough or being used extensively enough--especially in our insular areas--to serve as the engines of development which can thus replace the environmentally and socially destructive energy sources, modes of production, and social institutions which are currently being used and planned.

So it seems to me very likely that economic growth of the kind presently envisioned will come to a lumbering halt, and that we humans--especially we humans on low-lying islands--are going to be much more worried about staying afloat and staying alive than about improving our standards of living.

In the meantime, if you are not already dependent on the tourist industry in your island, keep it that way. If you are dependent, rejoice. Skin cancer has risen astronomically over the last two decades, and the US weather service is going to begin issuing UV warnings shortly, advising colorless people to avoid exposure to the sun when ultraviolet penetration is particularly high. Those warnings are going to do wonders for those of you concerned about tourism's negative effects on your culture. With the US military gone, the US government broke, and tourists staying home and indoors in droves, I hope you have a new economic base in mind. You may get your chance to try it out real soon!

4. Tsunami Four: New Technologies, Especially Communication Technologies. I've said something already about technology as a significant tsunami of the future. In my view, it was the industrial technologies of the 19th and 20th Centuries that are bringing you the economic, environmental, and demographic tsunamis I have already mentioned. The biological and molecular technologies I alluded to will be even more determinative of the mid 21st Century and beyond.

In the meantime, barring especially rapid social disintegration, current and impending communication technologies will continue to destroy the need for human manual and mental labor in the production, distribution, and repair of most goods, and many services, humans want. This will, on the one hand, make it impossible for most people to find a job, even if they want one, and eventually will require all of us to reorient the purpose of our lives away from work for wages or profits to something else--probably to environmental protection and amelioration.

At the same time--again, barring too rapid social disintegration--these communication technologies will continue to transform the meaning and effect of time and place. For those whose labor is still needed, it will no longer be necessary or often even desirable to go to work. Travelling to urban centers is no longer necessary. Instead the work can and should come to you down Vice President Gore's Information Superhighway. And so will education, and soon, I can assure you, so will governance.

Among other things, modern communication technologies demand that we rethink our structures and processes of governance fundamentally. All current forms of representative government are woefully obsolete and inadequate for the challenges and opportunities of the future, being based on limitations of geography, demography, ideology, and resources of yesterday, and not of today, nor tomorrow.

As I sat listening to most of you these past days, I realized that in so many ways, you and your communities represent the future much better than does the city surrounding you, or the republic on which it stands. The US may be, for now, one nation, indivisible, but for how much longer? How is it possible for the US to be uniquely immune among all the nations on earth to the localizing forces that you all so eloquently represent? If Canada is too big a nation to embrace its provinces, or even Yugoslavia too big to let Serbs and Croats live together, who can possibly think that the US should survive eternally--one from sea to shining sea? There are many places in this great land who would love to have the sort of relationship with Washington enjoyed by the Northern Marianas, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico--perhaps not Guam. I know, and so do you, that plenty of folks in Hawaii are somewhat less than thrilled about all that statehood brings. I urge you to think about that carefully.

I would also like to add at this point that I hope all of you will pick up on the excellent suggestion made by Senator Kenneth McClintock the other afternoon, and join the various organizations he mentioned--such as the National Council of State Legislators and the National Council of State Governments--as well as the ones he only alluded to, from the Governor's Association on down to the association of dam and reservoir inspectors. I myself have worked closely over the years with what was called the Council of State

Planning and Policy Officers, the Congress of Chief Justices, and especially the Council of State Court Administrators.

Because they are owned and controlled by the members themselves, all of these organizations do what the US Federal government seldom does: they help state and local governments achieve their own goals--and better understand what their goals are--by providing comparative information about what is happening in other state and local governments. Also from my point of view they often provide what all governments need most--namely, how to obtain useful information from and about the future. In other words, these helping organizations are what federalism should actually be but seldom is. So yes, join them, whatever your preferred future political status might be.

I should also like to add that there are some similar international or transnational organizations which you should join as well. There is a lot going on around the world that you could learn from that is not adequately known or shared by anyone in the United States.

So at the same time that modern communication technologies are localizing governance, and everything else, they are also continuing to knit the world into a single global entity of some sort. I don't think the terms "global village" or "world community" or even "planetary culture" are adequate to express what this future global entity will be. We certainly should not expect the creation of a single global nation-state in the foreseeable future.

But these communication technologies do mean, among other things, that while no man is an island, a thing unto himself, at the same time, every man, woman and child is an island so that our current concerns about community, culture, nationality and sovereignty are probably more about yesterday than they are about tomorrow.

The kind of political sovereignty which emerged over the last several hundred years--namely, the nation-state and the global international system--is very problematic over the next several decades and beyond. No nation-state, certainly not the United States of America, is big enough to manage the global economic, environmental, demographic, and technological waves sloshing all over this planet. Some kind of global governance as well as more viable forms of local governance--and the relation between the two--must be created

during the 21st century if humanity is to exist at all in the 22nd Century.

In the meantime, more and more global as well as local political power will continue to be exercised by seemingly economic entities, such as some transnational corporations, and especially by the forces of international finance which already exist wholly independent of meaningful control by any formal political decisionmakers today.

I would urge leaders in the insular areas to look to these global economic entities also, and not only to obsolescing nation-states, for their clues to the future.

Conclusion: So I suppose the bottom line for us insular areas is this: on the one hand, we will have to expect to be able to go it much more alone in the future than we have in the past as far as those persons, policies, and places which control us now, and in the past, are concerned. But at the same time, we will be even more under the influence--and be more easily able to influence--persons, policies, and places now seemingly remote and foreign to us.

In other words, now is an exceedingly good time, and this conference an excellent place for us to ask each other what do we have in common that we can knit together for our common good? How can we support each other to somehow be able and eager to go it alone if we have to, or want to? And how can we do all this while focusing more on the future and less on the past; more on the arena of possibility, over which we have some control, and less on the tragedies and injustices of history, over which we have no control at all.

We have a great chance to leap ahead, if we have some good idea of where it is we want to leap, now while the dead hand of the past is releasing its grip, and before the many grasping hands of the future reach us and once again wring our puny throats.

Or, to go back to the metaphor I began with: Wax up your boards and prepare yourself for one helluva ride. Surf's up!

Or in deference to the theme of this conference, "Looking into the Future," let's steal that famous line from Casablanca and say boldly to the future, "Here's looking at you, kid."