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Article

We Will Need to Be Lucky: The Problem of Leadership in a Deep Pluralist World Order Facing a Climate Crisis

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Abstract

This paper assesses the problem of leadership in the contemporary world order. It starts by looking at how leaders are chosen. The argument is that this process is diverse to the point of randomness, and unlikely to change much. The selection processes are mostly not geared to produce leaders who are both capable and virtuous. The argument then moves to consider the difficult context in which leaders will have to operate: a global conjuncture of two major transitions and the interplay between them. The first transition is in the global political economy, from a Western world order to one of deep pluralism, in which wealth, power, knowledge, and political and cultural authority are much more widely distributed than during the past two-hundred years. The second one centres on the fast-mounting contradiction between humankind's unrestrained developmentalism and the carrying capacity of the planet: summed up as the Anthropocene crisis. The argument is that this conjuncture is likely to generate leaders who exacerbate rivalry and conflict. There is a pathway that could open opportunities for virtuous leaders, but we will have to be lucky as well as skilled to find it.

Introduction

Yan Xuetong argues that leaders determine both the strategy and the quality of moral positioning of great powers, within international society.[1] In his view, the type and quality of leadership make a big difference to the balance of power. Yan's attempt to marry morality and *machtpolitik* into *moral realism* contains much of value. As demonstrated emphatically by Trump 2.0, the quality of leadership, especially in the great powers, matters a lot not just to how power rivalries unfold, but also to how well or badly international society is managed.

But Yan does not say much about how to get the right kind of leaders into power. Leaders matter a lot for international society, yet the processes of selection for them work largely at the

[1] Xuetong Yan, *Leadership and The Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

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national level. Sovereignty is a powerful support for leadership selection remaining a largely domestic prerogative.

Neither does Yan say much about the global circumstances under which leaders have to make decisions, or how those circumstances affect the selection of leaders. Seldom are global circumstances easy or benign, and national leaders are often constrained domestically in what options they have. As Dowding argues, different political structures and circumstances require different types of leadership skills. What works in one time and place does not necessarily work in others.[2]

As *CJIP* reaches its twentieth anniversary, the global circumstances within which leaders will have to do their job are looking exceptionally difficult and uncertain. Among these are that many of the disruptive political characteristics once associated with fascism, including ultranationalism, authoritarian leaders, hostility to migrants, and economic protectionism, are returning to the political mainstream.[3]

My argument proceeds in three stages. First, I look briefly at the ways in which leaders come to power. I argue that this process makes it almost random whether the moral and managerial qualities of leaders are low or high. It seems highly unlikely that these deeply set practices can be changed in any global way any time soon.

Second, I sketch out *deep pluralism* as the difficult and challenging type of world order within which leaderships will have to function in the coming decade or two. Because of its origins in the breakdown of the Western world order, deep pluralism poses particularly difficult problems of transition from a world order in which one civilization dominated the others, to a multi-civilizational order featuring strong claims for the right to cultural diversity. This transition could occur in a consensual, cooperative way, but at the time of writing it is heading down a contested and conflictual path.

This transition is likely to exacerbate the problem of leadership selection in two ways. First, it favors leaders who want to increase cultural and political differentiation, and do not much care about the wider world order. The radical right, now increasingly defining the political mainstream, has made globalization their main target. Think of Trump, Modi, and Putin. Second, this transition is burdened by a lot of political baggage left over from the now defunct Western world order. Leadership selection in many places, but especially the Global South, may well favor those prepared to play post-colonial resentment for all it is worth.

Third, I argue that humankind has been particularly unlucky to have this difficult transition of global wealth, power, and authority, coincide with an unprecedented environmental challenge to the planetary conditions on which all human civilizations depend. Leaderships will face not only the challenging conditions of a big change in the distribution of wealth, power, knowledge, and cultural and political authority, but also the entirely new challenge of how humankind's commitment to open-ended development can come to terms with the limits of planetary carrying capacity.

I conclude that we will need to be lucky as well as skilled to get the quality of leadership necessary to see us safely through the coming decades.[4]

[2] Keith Dowding, *Power, Luck and Freedom: Collected Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 155–69.

[3] Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works* (New York: Random House, 2018); Nicholas Michelsen, Pablo Do Orellana, and Filippo Costa Buranelli, "The Reactionary Internationale: The Rise of the New Right and the Reconstruction of International Society," *International Relations*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2023), pp. 3–29; Rita Abrahamsen et al., *World of the Right: Radical Conservatism and Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024); Barry Buzan and Nitasha Kaul, "The Emergent Fascist/Far-Right Global International Society" (forthcoming).

[4] In everyday life, the concept of luck is closely associated with lotteries, games of chance, accidents, genetic inheritance, disease, the drawing of straws, and suchlike. In this context, luck is about the distribution of things or outcomes whose delivery is understood to be random. In other words, one gets a good, or a bad, hand in card games, or wins big in a lottery, purely by chance. Similarly if one boards a plane that then crashes, or inherits a gene that predisposes to illness, or arrives at a bus-stop just after the bus has left. It is in this simple sense that I use the

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Choosing Leaders

Hardly anyone would dispute that it would be a blessing for humankind if its leaders were not only strong and competent, but also morally upstanding and consistent, and capable of taking a wider view. But how do we get such leaders? Occasionally they emerge by what seems like chance, and can do so from very different types of political system. Franklin Roosevelt came out of Democratic Party politics. Deng Xiaoping was a product of communist one-party factional politics. Bhumibol Adulyadej came through dynastic monarchical succession. Nelson Mandela found power via revolutionary opposition and prison.

But overall, the processes by which humankind generates its political leaderships do not look well designed to select virtuous leaders. National environments do not select for such leaders in any obvious or consistent way. There is also the problem of whether people will agree about which leaders are virtuous and which not. Sometimes leaders, who are seen in their day as virtuous, are later reviled. Think, for example, of Woodrow Wilson's journey from visionary peacemaker to racist politician.[5] In the decades since their deaths, both Stalin's and Mao's reputations have travelled from faultless revolutionary and visionary, to a somewhat mixed position in which their mistakes are acknowledged. If the people within a country cannot agree on whether a particular leader was virtuous or not, agreement across countries is even less likely. Very few leaders achieve anything close to universal approval. Nelson Mandela perhaps got as close to that as is possible.

Political leaders may achieve office by many different routes, some transparent, some opaque. Some will get there by ruthlessness and a willingness to use force (Lenin, Mao, Napoleon, and Putin). Some will get there by skill at reading and responding to the mood of electorates (Trump and Modi). Some will get there by being good at maneuvering the complexities of bureaucratic and party politics (Deng and Xi). Some will get there by hereditary luck of the draw plus skill at dynastic politics (Mohammed bin Salman, the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire). Some will use wealth to buy power (most obviously as the moment Elon Musk). Others will get help from outsiders (Lukashenko and Maduro). Many combinations of these are possible.

None of these pathways point towards a strong likelihood of generating philosopher kings or queens. A few leaders may find themselves in possession of something close to absolute power within their realm, able to do much as they please. Most will find themselves constrained by constitutions, parliaments, parties, legal systems, electoral cycles, and obligations to supporters. In an international anarchy, all leaders will be constrained by the distribution of power and norms in the system as a whole.

The picture is not dissimilar in choosing the leaderships of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), except that use of force and hereditary luck are largely absent. In IGOs, leadership choices generally result from rigged systems that favor a particular group of powers, or from complicated bargaining processes amongst many interests. Think, for example, about how the UN Secretary General, or the President of the World Bank, or the Managing Director of the IMF get appointed. Leadership selection in influential non-government organizations is often likewise opaque and factional. Think of how popes are chosen, or leaders of militant movements such as Al-Qaeda or Islamic State.

concept in this paper: luck of the draw. Luck can be good or bad, and the judgment about that is often subjective and differentiated by one's placement in relation to the event. I use "lucky" to mean having good luck, though in a technical sense being unlucky is also a form of having luck. Luck is often unevenly distributed. I do not engage here with philosophical concerns about the complex moral and responsibility implications of luck, on which see: E. J. Coffman, *Luck: Its Nature and Significance for Human Knowledge and Agency* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Dowding, *Power, Luck and Freedom*.

[5] Christopher Cox, *Woodrow Wilson: The Light Withdrawn* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2024).

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If one includes big transnational corporations amongst the units whose leadership matters to world order, the picture is no more promising. Corporate leaders seldom get their jobs through coercion. If they are founders, they might have got there by creative skills at products or marketing (Jack Ma, Steve Jobs, and Elon Musk). But otherwise, they might be hereditary, or reflect skills at bureaucratic and factional politics. They might also get there by skills at technocratic management. Unless they are state owned enterprises, they seldom have much relationship to the wider interests of the people. Corporations are hierarchical, and their main constituency is shareholders looking for profits and payouts.

This array of processes produces a rather random and unpredictable selection of different characters with very different kinds of connections to their domestic constituencies. However they achieved office, all leaders face the challenge of keeping themselves, and often also their parties, in power. The tenure of some leaderships is tightly bound by rules (electoral cycles, term limits), but of others is an open game (many dictatorships). As a rule, state leaders, especially of great powers, will be much more preoccupied with their domestic constituencies, on which their power depends, than with the rest of international society.

All leaders face choices about how well or badly they want to get on with their neighbors and the other powers in the international system/society. Do they want to cling to histories that may support either friendship or enmity, or do they want to transform them? Leaders might be able to shape the opinions of their supporters about these choices, but they are also constrained by them. Each leader faces a set of opportunities and constraints that is unique to the time and place in which they find themselves. Leaders of big countries will generally have more latitude than those of small ones. The particularities of the time might provide room for opportunity, as in the Atlantic world after the Second World War, after 1989, and now. Or they might impose heavy constraints, as in Eastern Europe after 1945.

These are the traditional conditions of political leadership. Little suggests that this overall pattern is about to undergo any general change. Sovereignty, nationalism, and territoriality remain strong as the key primary institutions supporting the modern state.[6] The "new right" is particularly strong on sovereignty and cultural differentiation. This ultranationalist way of thinking is now in power in China, India, Russia, Türkiye, the USA, and some European countries.

We may get lucky conjunctures when the leaderships of the top-ranked states are compatible enough to see eye-to-eye on at least some key issues in the management of international society. Think of the making of the Atlantic community after 1945, or the rapprochement between the USA and China after 1973. Or not. Think of the late 1930s or the rift between the West and the China/Russia partnership that opened up after 2014.[7] So far, there has been no case in which the compatibility of great power leaderships was sufficient to underpin a consensual world order on a global scale. At the time of writing, Trump 2.0 is purposefully breaking down the longstanding relationship between the USA and Europe, with major realignments of great power relations in prospect.

Deep Pluralism as the Emergent World Order

How do these general conditions for political leadership play into the likely framework of world order in the next decade or two? Will that framework make the appearance of virtuous leaders more or less likely? Will the conditions of world order make the task of leadership more or less complex and difficult?

[6] Barry Buzan, *Making Global Society: A Study of Humankind Across Three Eras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), Ch. 8.

[7] Barry Buzan, "A New Cold War?—The Case for a General Concept," *International Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (2024), pp. 239–57.

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The Western world order arose out of the extremely uneven onset of modernity in the 19th century in which a handful of countries—Western Europe, the USA, Russia, and Japan—integrated their societies with the revolutions of modernity, and acquired a huge global advantage in wealth, power, knowledge, and cultural and political authority. From the 1840s onward, this lopsided structure produced a small but rich and powerful core dominating a large, less developed, periphery.[8] Its colonial phase was led by Europe from the 1840s to 1945. Its globalist phase was led by the USA after 1945.

This Western world order is now in retreat. It started to unravel during the 1970s.[9] During that decade, the core powers lost the ability to easily defeat and occupy countries in the Global South. They also began to lose their dominance of the global political economy as a second round of modernization began to take off in East Asia. By 2014, the Western world order was visibly breaking down. Both its ideology and its political structure were in crisis, non-Western actors were playing more independent roles both as great powers (China, India, Russia[10]) and as regional powers (Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, North Korea, Türkiye, Vietnam, and the UAE).

The world order that is emerging to replace the Western one is *deep pluralism*: a substantial widening of the distribution of wealth, power, knowledge, and cultural and political authority beyond the old core of first-round modernizers.[11] There are both more great powers and more significant regional powers in play. Given the widening distribution of wealth and power, and strong feelings against hegemony, deep pluralism will erode the possibility of superpowers. In a multi-civilizational world order, no state will have either the capability or the legitimacy, or perhaps the desire, to dominate all the others.

Deep pluralism will be unlike classical multipolarity both because its primary dynamic will be defensive, and because regional powers will play a significant role. Nobody will want to take over the world. The danger is that the world order of deep pluralism will be seriously undermanaged. Each core of wealth and power will look after its own interests, and none will care much about taking responsibility to act on shared problems at a global scale. Modi's India, Putin's Russia, Trump's USA, and Xi's China all show this inward-looking hierarchy of great power priorities.[12]

Deep pluralism also extends beyond the states-system, including a variety of non-state actors, most obviously groups and movements within the Islamic world, and trillion-dollar corporations and the mega-rich worldwide. In parallel, the internet feeds social pluralism on a global scale by enabling the like-minded to link with each other across the planet.

During the Western world order, the West could plausibly claim to own the future. Under US leadership, that claim was attached to a teleological view of (neo)liberal ideology. That claim no longer stands outside the West, nor, increasingly, within it. The West is losing relative, but not absolute, wealth and power. Its states and societies gutted by the excesses of neoliberal globalization, Western liberal ideology is in disarray. Whether as the West, or as distinct European,

[8] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[9] Barry Buzan, *Timelines for Modernity: Rethinking Periodization for Global International Relations* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2025).

[10] At the time of writing it is a major question whether Europe will be seen as a great power or a group of regional powers.

[11] For earlier discussion of deep pluralism see Barry Buzan and Laust Schouenborg, *Global International Society: A New Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 192–3; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 261–84; Feng Zhang and Barry Buzan. "The Relevance of Deep Pluralism for China's Foreign Policy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 15, No.3 (2022), pp. 246–71; Buzan, *Making Global Society*, Part III.

[12] For interesting attempts to capture what a deep pluralist international society under far-right influence will look like, see: Michelsen, Orellana, and Buranelli, "The Reactionary Internationale"; Abrahamsen et al., *World of the Right*, pp. 144–82.

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American, and/or Anglosphere civilizations, it will remain a major part of an expanding core, more of whose members will not be Western.

It is easy to envisage that deep pluralism will move towards a world order composed of several culturally distinct cores. China, India, and the Islamic world are all challenging the dominance of Western civilization and its supposedly universal values. They differ in their achieved levels of development. But there is much in the current rhetoric and practice of China ("Chinese characteristics"), India (*Hindutva*), and the Islamic world (*umma*), which points in this civilizationist direction.[13] They have recovered their sense of themselves as old civilizations while also undergoing their own distinctive transformations into modernity. Each claims the right to maintain its distinctive identity and practices, and increasingly has the wealth and power to do so.[14] A disaggregating West could easily fit into a world order defined by civilizations, but its transition from dominant core (and for the US superpower) to mere equals within a system of great powers is likely to be difficult and turbulent.

A world order comprised of multiple civilizations will probably lean away from universalist ideologies like liberalism and communism, which are associated with the intellectual hegemony of the Western world order. Such ideologies are anyway in crisis. Liberalism is associated with inequality, instability, and globalization. Communism is associated with a failed economic model that was unable to compete with capitalism in producing wealth and power. The "new right" emphasizes cultural and racial differentiation, and economic protectionism.[15]

Instead, we might well be seeing the emergence of what Buzan and Zhang labelled *cultural politics*, in which different economic, social, and political preferences are understood as specific to different cultures.[16] In deep pluralism, collective social and political preferences will be localized inside specific civilizations rather than being touted as universal principles. Some cultures prefer more individualism, others more collectivism. Some prefer more authoritarian politics, others more democratic. Some cultures are more egalitarian, others more hierarchical. The mantra of "Chinese characteristics" so often used by Beijing signals such a civilizationalist move.

Cultural politics makes deep pluralism anti-hegemonic by definition. Each culture will assert its own values, rights, distinctiveness, and independence. Many carry resentment against the hegemonic impositions and humiliations they suffered throughout the Western world order. These factors point towards political fragmentation at the global level, an open game of great power politics built around spheres of influence.[17] That tendency within deep pluralism is amplified by the ultranationalism, dislike of universal values, transactionalism, and anti-globalization promoted by the fascist/far-right, whose discourse increasingly dominates discussion of world order.[18]

[13] Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya, *Re-Imagining International Relations: World Orders in the Thought and Practice of Indian, Chinese, and Islamic Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Barry Buzan and Feng Zhang, "Multiple Modernities in Civilizational Perspective: An Assessment of the Global Civilization(s) Initiative," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2024), pp. 104–26.

[14] The theoretical underpinning for the diversity of civilizations and models of development can be found in several places: the concept of uneven and combined development (Justin Rosenberg, "Problems in the Theory of Uneven and Combined Development Part II: Unevenness and Multiplicity," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2010), pp. 165–89; Justin Rosenberg, "Kenneth Waltz and Leon Trotsky: Anarchy in the Mirror of Uneven and Combined Development," *International Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2013), pp. 183–230); the idea of multiple modernities (Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Dædalus*, Vol. 129, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1–29); and the notion of selective adaptation (Amitav Acharya, "How Ideas Spread, Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2, (2004), pp. 239–75; Amitav Acharya, *Whose Ideas Matter? Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[15] Michelsen, Orellana, and Buranelli, "The Reactionary Internationale"; Abrahamsen et al., *World of the Right*.

[16] Buzan and Zhang, "Multiple Modernities in Civilizational Perspective," pp. 108–9.

[17] Michelsen, Orellana, and Buranelli, "The Reactionary Internationale".

[18] Roger Griffin, *Fascism: A Quick Immersion* (NPG: Tibidao Publishing, 2020); Buzan and Kaul, "The Emergent Fascist/Far-Right Global International Society".

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Those who have long called for a more multipolar world order seem to be getting their wish. Yet while these mostly anti-Western powers always understood what they were against (the continuance of Western/US liberal democratic hegemony), they now seem to have much less idea about what kind of world order they are for. None wants to step into America's shoes, and the logic of deep pluralism suggests that any attempt to do so would be widely resisted. Yet the rising powers outside the West convey no coherent sense beyond self-interested transactionalism of how they want a post-Western global society confronted by an array of serious shared threats, to be managed.

Stuenkel suggests that the rising powers do not so much contest the major functions and purposes of the legacy intergovernmental institutions of the Western world order, as the distribution of status, influence, and wealth within them.[19] But a wider distribution of wealth and power, a de-throning of the West, and claims for a more equitable distribution of status and influence, do not by themselves tell us how a deep pluralist, world order will work.

The Western world order, especially after 1945, conditioned international society to having a small group of powers prepared to take responsibility for leadership. How will agendas be set, initiatives taken, and decisions made, when anti-hegemonic sentiment is strong, and cultural differentiation high? If there are no clear answers to these questions, a deep pluralist world order will be under-managed. It might well be more of a world disorder than an order. How does this political framing of world order play into the question of leadership?

Three Scenarios for a Deep Pluralist World Order

Within a deep pluralist world order, three general scenarios are possible: hot war,[20] a hostile system of contested spheres and legitimacies, or a more consensual one, possibly even cooperative, based on mutual tolerance and respect for cultural difference. These scenarios correspond to chaos, a very minimally managed world order, and coexistence. Each of these would require, encourage, and support different kinds of leadership.

Hot War

A decent into hot war is not impossible, but it remains unlikely. Nuclear deterrence still works as a major constraint on great power hot war. And under deep pluralism, the problem is not the contest for global dominance that dogged two centuries of the Western world order. It is that no great power(s) either want to lead the management of world order or have some other power(s) do so. Each wants to pursue its own distinctiveness within its own sphere. That kind of international political framing seems less likely to trigger great power hot wars than contests for global dominance and ideological universalism.

A descent into hot war would therefore mainly arise out of a mistake or a miscalculation rather than out of intent. Obvious flashpoints are contested border areas between spheres, such as Ukraine, Taiwan, Korea, and the India–China border. In the medium term, continued escalation of the infrastructure wars—attacks on transport, communication, and power networks, manipulations of social media, cyberwar—could trigger hot war responses if pushed too far. Great power hot war scenarios, and moves towards them, would encourage and generate war leaders committed to national security and militarism. Vladimir Putin is the leading example of this type at the moment, but not the only one. Mao, Churchill, and Mussolini are earlier examples. Warlords are always waiting in the wings.

[19] Oliver Stuenkel, *Post-western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), pp. 434–532.

[20] For discussion on the distinction between hot and cold wars, see Buzan, "A New Cold War?".

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If hot wars spun out of control into nuclear escalation, then that would probably take the circumstances of humankind outside the frame of this discussion. The idea of world order itself might no long have much relevance.

Contested Deep Pluralism

The most likely scenario is that deep pluralism will unfold in a contested, cold war, form. This, indeed, is where we are now. The great powers are intolerant of the cultural and political differences among them. They do not see, or accept, that universal ideologies have given way to cultural politics. They are stuck in the model of the First Cold War, still seeing such differences as global threats. They are jostling with each other over boundaries, identities, military capabilities, and status while remaining profoundly fearful of escalation to nuclear hot war.

The main evidence for the primacy of this scenario is that since 2020, the world order has been openly sliding into a Second Cold War.[21] This Second Cold War is far from being solely driven by a dominant logic of power politics as polarity and power transition theory mainly assume. It has a strong cultural element which makes its political dynamics distinct from the universalist ideological ones that drove the First Cold War. That element resonates with the political drift towards both civilizational identity and ultranationalism.

A key difference between the First and Second Cold Wars is that the dispute over capitalism that was central to the First Cold War (capitalism or not) is absent from the Second. Capitalism won the First Cold War. Even China, in its own way, is now significantly capitalist.[22] One consequence of this, at least so far, has been much greater economic entanglement between the blocs than was the case during the First Cold War. With the dispute over capitalism largely removed from the equation, what divides the two blocs in the Second Cold War appears as much cultural as ideological.

The Second Cold War does not seem a good fit with the assumption of inevitable conflict that realism puts into polarity theory. Indeed, it seems likely that the emerging deep pluralist order will, in broad strategic terms, be mainly defensive. All the new centres of wealth, power, and cultural and political authority seek mainly to consolidate themselves. There is no longer a core ideological dispute about capitalism or not. Even with the rise of economic nationalism and deglobalization, economic interdependence remains considerable. China, Russia, and the Global South want to reduce Western power and influence over them; deny both liberal and Marxian assumptions of ideological universalism; and promote the right to go their own way culturally, politically, and economically.[23]

That said, authoritarians and populists might welcome a long Second Cold War as a support to their domestic legitimacy. And there are, of course, boundary problems around civilizations. Some of these could be contested violently, as is currently the case in Ukraine; and at a lower level of coercion in the South and East China Seas; the Baltics, and along the China-India border. It is these boundary problems, more than any competition to dominate the world, that has pushed deep pluralism into the Second Cold War.

[21] Gilbert Achcar, *The New Cold War: The United States, Russia and China from Kosovo to Ukraine* (London: Westbourne Press, 2023); Buzan, "A New Cold War?"; Zeno Leoni, *A New Cold War: US–China Relations in the 21st Century* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2024); Robin Niblett, *The New Cold War: How the Contest Between the US and China Will Shape Our Century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2024); Richard Sakwa, *The Culture of the Second Cold War* (London: Anthem Press, 2025).

[22] Frank N. Pieke, *Knowing China: A Twenty-First Century Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 8, 20–9, 171–6.

[23] Shivshankar Menon, "Out of Alignment: What the War in Ukraine Has Revealed about Non-western Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, 9 February, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/out-alignment-war-in-ukraine-non-western-powers-shivshankar-menon.

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But there is a big difference between a struggle over boundaries driven by self-limiting cultural claims, and one over which great powers, and which ideologies, should dominate global society. With the decline of liberal and communist universalisms, civilizations are taking on a self-limiting character.[24] Disputes over boundaries, however deep and difficult, should mostly be easier to resolve than disputes over who dominates the world and with what ideas.

So long as no civilization seeks to become globally dominant, and each can convince the others that it does not have such ambitions, contested deep pluralism has a reasonable chance of avoiding escalation to hot war. It would, however, be more of a world disorder than a world order. The dominant incentive for leaders would be to play the game of international relations mainly to seek individual advantage for whatever entity they represent or control. Putin, Trump, Erdoğan, and Orban, are all in their own ways representative of this type of thinking and policy.

There are two higher-level framings that exacerbate this dynamic of self-centredness and differentiation. One is the tension between authoritarian and democratic modes of government. If seen as zero-sum, this tension is a weaker form of the clashes over universalist ideologies that drove the First Cold War. But if subsumed into cultural politics, grounds for coexistence can be found. Given the shared adoption of capitalism, this framing does not look as deep or serious as that over universalist ideologies, though it could be driven in that direction if leaders wanted to do so, as some might. At the time of writing, this tension seems to be diminishing. The Trump 2.0 administration is moving the USA towards fascism, and thereby diminishing the political divide between itself and Russia and China.[25]

The second is the intensifying resentment against the Western world order long felt in much of the Global South. This is becoming one of the defining features of the deep pluralist world order that is currently emerging.[26] This resentment has been in political play since decolonization. Time has not faded memories, which have been assiduously cultivated in many countries to support post-colonial tensions and victimhood politics. What is sometimes characterized as a North–South divide is a political resource for the China-led Eastern camp in the Second Cold War.

The political dynamics of this North–South divide are quite complicated. Looking at it cynically, anti-colonial memories have been kept alive in many parts of the Global South by governments keen to have someone else to blame for their disappointing performance in development. Yet even where development has been successful, as in China, the government still sees advantages in playing victimhood politics by keeping memories of the "century of humiliation" embedded in the public mind.

Given the inequality and humiliation inflicted on the Global South by the Western world order, this resentment is an unsurprising legacy. Racism and the humiliations of colonialism were real and deep cultural insults to many peoples. While formal racism has been banned from world politics since 1945, there are many real and serious issues still to be confronted. These range from the return of cultural artifacts; through adverse terms of trade for commodity suppliers and vulnerability to financial crises; to disappointment about the level and nature of support for development.

Recently, this longstanding North–South tension has been sucked into the politics of the Second Cold War. The main glue of the Eastern camp (China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran) is opposition to Western and US hegemony. They want to see the Western world order swept away. China and Russia have worked hard to align their own anti-Western positions with those

[24] This argument has resonance with that about "self-limiting nationalism" in John H. Herz, "The Territorial State Revisited," in James N. Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp. 76–89.

[25] Nitasha Kaul and Barry Buzan, "Trump's New America: The Question of Fascism" (forthcoming).

[26] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2020); Buzan, *Making Global Society*, pp. 362–5.

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in the Global South, and have had some success with this campaign. In a very neat diplomatic trick, Russia has even distanced itself effectively from its own history and identity of being both white, and having a long, and still active, history of imperialism.

Mishra argues that the deep social turbulence unleashed by modernity has now gone global.[27] He draws a straight line between, on the one hand, the philosophical and political reactions that arose in opposition to modernity in 19th century Europe and gave rise to terrorism and fascism there, and on the other, the *jihadis* and anti-state and anti-globalization terrorists of today. From his perspective, the West has failed to understand the searing social impact of both the enduring inequalities of modernity, colonial and neoliberal, and its violence against the Global South during the colonial-era and subsequently.

The historical grievances of the Global South against the West are growing. They are feeding contested deep pluralism, in a way that adds a more general West–South dimension to the centripetal dynamics of cultural politics.

Contested deep pluralism is thus the dominant strand in world (dis)order at present. It could easily remain the dominant strand for a decade or more. To the extent that its conditions generate leaders who support strong cultural differentiation and self-centredness, such leaders will prolong contested deep pluralism. That, in turn, would weaken the capacity of international society to deal with climate change and other shared threats to humankind. What could break this cycle?

Consensual Deep Pluralism

The third scenario for deep pluralism is that it could—eventually—take on a consensual form. This perspective is not so much about the short-term troubles of the transition out of the Western world order that have generated the Second Cold War. Instead, it builds on Kupchan's description of the future as "no-one's world," an international society in which no great power can, or wants to, dominate the world order.[28] It is a longer view about what happens after the messy transition out of the Western world order.

In this perspective, the question is how multiple civilizations can coexist on equal terms in the decades ahead. The underlying assumption is that the focus of leaderships and peoples will shift steadily away from the false question of who will dominate world order (false because no one can or wants to), towards the increasingly pressing question of how to deal with a rising array of shared fates facing humankind as a whole. Some of these are shared threats such as climate change and pandemics. Some of them are a mix of threats and opportunities, such as AI, biotechnology, and the opening up of access to space. Others are longstanding issues about how to manage the global economy to maintain whatever levels of trade and investment are desired. The task ahead is how to reconfigure the rules, statuses, and institutions of global society to reflect not only a deeply pluralist multicivilizational world defined by cultural politics, but also a set of global challenges that are already beginning to impinge on all peoples and civilizations.

The ideal outcome for deep pluralism would be where civilizational diversity is valued as a resource for humankind. The metaphor is from biology, where biodiversity is understood as a source of strength, resilience, and stability. In some ways, it is not that big a step within international society from claiming one's own rights and virtues, to exchanging mutual recognitions of status with similar entities. This has already been quite successfully done with races, nations, and states. Claims to a right of cultural distinctiveness clearly point towards mutual acceptance

[27] Mishra, *Age of Anger*.

[28] Charles A. Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Other angles on this idea can be found in Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014); and Trine Flockhart, "The Coming Multi-order World," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2016), pp. 3–30.

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of such rights. But it requires leaders willing and able to look beyond their own civilizational claims to make it happen.

In principle, deep pluralism could therefore take a cooperative form. Different civilizations could adopt coexistence attitudes among themselves, and tolerate, or even embrace, their differences, while focusing on the shared threats and opportunities that face them all.

One key to the idea of civilizational coexistence is the ability of cultural politics to localize and contain many ideological differences previously seen as universal. So long as no civilization seeks to dominate the others, this localization of difference makes them less threatening to each other.

All civilizations have their own preferences about how to balance individualism against collectivism, the market against economic nationalism, and divided against centralized political authority. If ideology in this sense comes to be seen as a characteristic of particular cultures, then the whole dynamic of imperial universalism, and fear of local cultures being overridden or obliterated, softens, and possibly even disappears. Ideology would become more a matter of what fits best where. Good ideas and practices might even become more transferrable when detached from a universalist ideological taint.

The most likely solution to the leadership/management problem under civilizational deep pluralism would be some form of concert of powers/civilizations. At least initially, its focus would be on a range of functionally specific shared-fate problems: How to deal with climate change? How to manage the global economy in a way that balances the need for trade and investment, with the desire to retain a significant degree of domestic control? How to address the threats from global pandemics? How to control other forms of pollution that threaten Earth systems? How to deal with advances in science and technology that are changing the meaning of being human?

The only alternative to a concert in some form is a continuation of contested deep pluralism. That would mean failure to achieve adequate management of climate change. Such a failure would threaten the achieved levels of civilization, and the development aspirations, of all. If left inadequately attended, as at present, climate change will by itself transform the human condition. The path to consensual deep pluralism might thus travel through a steady worsening of environmental conditions that becomes sufficient to change the priorities of leaders and peoples away from those currently defined by the Second Cold War. Consensual deep pluralism would require and promote leaders capable of looking beyond both their own and their country's immediate self-interest and taking the wider collective interest of humankind into account.

The Limits to Planetary Carrying Capacity

For the decades ahead, climate change is perhaps the key issue as to how deep pluralism unfolds, and how that in turn plays into the question of leadership. Humankind has for the first time got to come to terms with the carrying capacity of the Earth.[29] It has either to find pathways to sustainable development, or find ways of living on an ever less hospitable planet. Unlike the race to improve AI, biotech, and access to space, all of which incentivize competition, climate change can best, or perhaps only, be addressed effectively by planet-wide coordination and cooperation.

[29] Simon Dalby, *Anthropocene Geopolitics: Globalization, Security, Sustainability* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020); Timothy M. Lenton et al., *Global Tipping Points Report 2023* (University of Exeter: Global Systems Institute, 2023).

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Humankind is thus stuck in a powerful conjuncture between the major transition in world order described in Deep Pluralism as the Emergent World Order, and a rising crisis of environmental conditions. The character of leadership will have a major influence on how this conjuncture unfolds. At the same time, the conjuncture itself will influence what type of leaders get into power, and where.

The climate crisis and the transformation in world order are already playing into the three scenarios for deep pluralism sketched in Deep Pluralism as the Emergent World Order. That is where leaders have latitude for choice. Parallel transformations in technology (AI and biotech especially) could give leaders options in relation to climate change that they do not now have. But they could also add to the burden of big decisions needing to be made under conditions of fear, competition, and imperfect information.

So far, the picture is mixed. On the radical right, it remains common for leaderships to sideline the threat from global warming and reject the option of global cooperation to deal with it.[30] Trump immediately withdrew the USA from the 2015 Paris agreements at the beginning of both of his administrations. Leaders in China and India are less rigidly opposed to taking environmental threats seriously, but they do not yet give them priority over their domestic development objectives. Russia is still committed to hydrocarbons. Europe still promotes environmental agendas but is losing influence.

Despite such political backsliding, the economic momentum towards renewable energy remains substantial. This is not just in terms of pricing policy for fossil fuels and their emissions, but also in terms of promoting a green industrial policy. Countries such as Germany, China, France, Morocco, and Britain now actively promote wind, solar and other sustainable, low carbon, and energy sources against fossil fuels. They have had considerable success in lowering their price to make them competitive. Neither these, nor the voluntary mechanisms set up at Paris, are yet keeping pace with rising levels of greenhouse gases, and their threat of triggering a "hothouse earth." But there is widespread awareness that the race to make development more sustainable is now underway, and that the consequences of losing that race could be an existential threat to human civilization.

While it might sound odd to suggest that worsening global climate conditions could change the way leaderships think about world order, there are precedents. The First World War started to change attitudes towards the utility and legitimacy of war in some countries. More decisive was the arrival of nuclear weapons, which took all-out war off the list of rational policy options available to great power leaders. This history suggests that big enough changes in material conditions can indeed change core understandings and practices in global society. It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that relentlessly worsening conditions of climate change might have such an effect on the aims and practices of development among both leaders and peoples.[31]

All of this can be seen as a legacy of the Western world order. That order generated the now almost universal imperative towards unrestrained development that has come to threaten planetary systems. It embedded the desire, and indeed political necessity, for such development not only in the core but also in the periphery. The problem is not just a legacy of past actions. It is also about an embedded desire in both core and periphery to continue down that path.

The most obvious way to think about this is in terms of scenarios that capture in a general way how the gathering collision between the limited carrying capacity of the planet on the one hand, and the rising burden of human development on the other, might unfold in the decade or two ahead. These scenarios are about how leaders respond to escalating shared threats from the environment in the context of a world order that is in unstable transition from Western to

[30] Sam Moore and Alex Roberts, *The Rise of Ecofascism: Climate Change and the Far Right* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022).

[31] The argument and some of the text following, are edited and reworked from Buzan, *Timelines for Modernity,* Ch. 6, where a more detailed rendition of them can be found.

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deep pluralist. The scenarios depend both on when and how environmental threats begin to threaten human civilizations in a big way; and how, and how quickly, humankind responds.

There are three basic scenarios for this collision: (1) humankind being overwhelmed by the speed and scale of climate change; (2) environmental crisis generating enhanced differentiation and conflict; (3) environmental crisis generating enhanced cooperation. Although these three types are distinct, up to a point, mixtures are plausible.

Overwhelmed

A scenario where some environmental change quickly overwhelms human civilization, and possibly even humankind itself, is the least interesting here because it would create circumstances as different as to put the present discussion of leadership outside the frame of relevance. The basic idea is that some big change happens sharply, reducing the favorability of the habitat that Earth provides for humankind and its civilizations. This scenario resembles the "hot war" one from Deep Pluralism as the Emergent World Order,. It might either end the game of international relations, or change it beyond recognition.

Among the discussed possibilities are rapid global warming caused by a feedback loop of greenhouse gases; a global pandemic combining a high infectivity rate with a high mortality rate; a large space rock on a collision course with Earth discovered too late to do anything about it; one or more supervolcano eruptions creating a sharp global cooling. Any of these could happen tomorrow—or not.

The next two scenarios are more interesting in relation to the question of leadership. The first implies an intensification of "business as usual," and the second implies a transformation in the conceptualization and practice of world order. These scenarios align with "contested" and "consensual" deep pluralism from the previous section.

To keep the subject matter manageable, I will focus mainly on an environmental challenge coming from a steady intensification of global warming. Assume that global warming continues to increase, but that we are lucky enough to avoid a catastrophic tipping point. The current energy transformation also continues. It makes a difference, but does not stop the ongoing worsening of global warming.

Humankind therefore faces a steadily worsening array of consequences. The cryosphere shrinks as ice melts. Sea levels rise, with increasing impact on the viability of coastal cities generally, and ports and navigation in particular. Climate zones shift, with major consequences for flora, fauna, pathogen vectors, food production, and in some places habitability by humans. The sixth great extinction continues to unfold, depleting and unbalancing the biosphere. Severe weather of all kinds becomes more common and more damaging to human investments and activities. Mass migration increases as people are driven out of their homelands by a combination of climate change and breakdown of political and social order.

In the following two scenarios, this environmental hammering counts as good luck for humankind. If we are not overwhelmed by a sudden catastrophic change in our conditions, we have time to respond, and increasing incentive to do so. With very good luck, natural events could even buy us a bit more time. A large volcanic eruption could generate cooling effects that balance global warming for several years.

The question in these two scenarios is how do we respond? What, as a species, do we do in the face of the increasing consequences of the fact that the planetary climate has shifted from the relatively benign and stable conditions of the Holocene, to the ever more turbulent and threatening conditions of the Anthropocene?

Differentiation and Conflict

One possibility is that rising pressures from the environment exacerbate the existing lines of differentiation and conflict that currently define the human condition. As argued in section 3,

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we are in the early phases of a Second Cold War. Dalby captures this possibility nicely with his concept of "Anthropocene Geopolitics."[32]

By bad luck, the climate change crisis is coming to a peak at a point where international society is undermanaged and contested. Differentiating trends are being enhanced. Military force is increasingly back on the agenda as a means of changing territorial jurisdiction and political status. It is all too easy to see how the pressures likely to be created by intensifying climate change might exacerbate these trends.

The current great powers, both the old ones of the West, Russia, and Japan, and the new rising ones such as China and India are all drifting towards what could be called *bastion strategies*. They are looking to increase their self-reliance in technology, production, strategic resources, and finance. Where they cannot do this, they are trying to focus their unavoidable dependencies on friends, allies, and neighbors.

In a general sense, bastion strategies might be seen as prudent responses to a turbulent transition period during which the foundations for a new world order remain unclear. They will be generally attractive to populist and/or authoritarian leaderships looking to strengthen their grip over domestic society. That does not foreclose the possibility that the new world order can be built on a form of defensive and self-preserving pluralism among all the great powers old and new.

The problem is not (yet) the traditional one that bastion strategies are a preparation for a world war over which great power, or powers, will dominate global international society. At this point all the great powers, both the rising new ones, and the declining old ones, have no interest in taking responsibility for running the world. The aims of the rising powers and the Global South more broadly, are two: First, to establish the legitimacy of their own values and cultures both amongst their own people and the other great powers. Second to contest the ongoing privileges of the declining West within the institutions of global international society, and to have their own status upgraded within those institutions.

The possibility of cooperation on the climate change crisis is amongst those things directly poisoned by the historical and political legacy of the Western world order. The Global South demands that since the Global North led the way on driving the atmosphere towards global warming, it should pay a disproportionate share of the costs for addressing the problem. This stance gets the Global South out of having to take responsibility for its own rising share of greenhouse gases.

The extent of this contradiction is exposed by the fact that China, a self-declared member of the Global South, is now the biggest emitter of CO_2. The argument is that the first responsibility of Global South countries to their peoples is to catch up with the level of development of the Global North, and to do so, as the Global North did, regardless of the consequences. This is a recipe for stalling cooperation on climate change as its global consequences worsen. The conditions for climate change to strengthen the differentiating trend in global international society, and the types of leadership that support it, are already firmly in place.

There are many pathways down which this world order of contested deep pluralism could lead to conflict over environmental issues.

Diminished resources, whether food, land, or water, seem likely to become an increasing factor in conflict as global warming intensifies. Some agricultural lands will become less productive or not productive at all. Some coastal plains and river deltas will be flooded or salinated, and many of the ports and cities in such locations might become unviable. The pattern of food surpluses and deficits will alter, and food deficit areas may well expand more quickly than surplus ones.

[32] Dalby, *Anthropocene Geopolitics*.

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As a consequence of diminished resources, global warming will drive ever more extensive unregulated migration. One mechanism will be that populations will leave areas that become incapable of producing the food and water needed to sustain them. They may also be driven out by the political instability and wars that result from the social and economic impacts of global warming. Or sea-level rise may inundate areas that are populated, sometimes heavily. Concern about such migration is already a major political issue not only for the USA and Europe, but also for many places in the Global South such as Türkiye, Mexico, South Africa, and Pakistan. It is easy to imagine this intensifying sharply. There is a securitization tipping point between unwanted migrants being seen as a nuisance, to them being seen as a form of invasion, and the destination countries seeing themselves as being under siege. The far-right is already playing up this way of thinking.

A third example is that as the consequences of global warming get harsher, some actors might take unilateral actions aimed at generating quick mitigation effects. Such actions might be taken collectively by humankind, but in this scenario that fails, or is not even tried. Actors are left with the invidious choice of going ahead unilaterally, or suffering the rising consequences of global warming. Various possibilities for geoengineering exist. Some of these, such as the injection of sulphur or water vapor into the upper atmosphere to increase its reflection of solar radiation, could be done by quite a number of the more capable individual states, or groups of states, or even by some nonstate actors. Their consequences would almost certainly be unevenly distributed, creating a risk of conflict between those perpetrating them, and those adversely affected.

All of this said, a scenario of enhanced differentiation does not necessarily or only lead to conflict. Even now, for example, China, India, and others recognize that they will all be adversely affected if global warming increases. On that basis, individual governments and corporations pursue their own versions of the energy transition, increasing installation of renewable energy sources and nuclear power, and phasing out carbon fuels. Such uncoordinated unilateralism is not efficient, and it generates its own spillover into the economic sector about unfair competition. But it is not a negligible response to climate change either. If uncoordinated responses all pull in the same direction, and do not obviously impose harms on other actors, which might make a difference. The best scenario here would be that the major greenhouse gas emitters find leaders willing to compete in a global virtue race to reduce their national emissions.

Cooperation as Civilized Humankind

The other possibility is that the steadily worsening threat to all of humankind from global warming could generate a higher level of global consciousness, and the taking of responsibility at all levels of society for maintaining the planetary ecosphere in a sustainable form. This response aligns with the consensual deep pluralist scenario discussed in section 3. It can be thought of as the species coming to accept that it is the custodian of the planet on which it lives. In baser terms, we are simply all in the same boat, and it is holed and sinking.

"All" here means both the current human population, and potential future generations stretching out far into the future. Accounting for the rights of future generations would be a key part of any such transformation of identity, and leaders able and willing to speak effectively on behalf of future generations would be crucial.

Like the scenario for enhanced and conflictual differentiation, this one also depends on humankind being lucky enough to avoid an adverse tipping point in global warming during the coming two or three decades. The measures currently being taken to reduce greenhouse gases, inadequate though they are, may still buy us a little time. We can, in part, make our own luck. Humankind will still be subject to the same mounting roster of painful and expensive consequences as global warming unfolds.

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The difference in this scenario is that the increasing battering of humankind by global warming does not just escalate a competitive retreat into bastion strategies. That might be the initial response, but at some point, the rising costs and casualties generate a change of perspective in which cooperative strategies become more attractive than bastion ones. Whereas collective action problems and simple hostility currently block such options, these would be overcome by the worsening conditions in which humankind as a whole found itself.

This would be an unprecedented change in the mind-set governing global international society. It is only imaginable as realistic because the collective threat to humankind posed by climate change is itself unprecedented. Since we have been conscious of ourselves as a planetary species, nothing like this has ever happened. If humankind goes on with its business as usual, climate change promises steadily worsening conditions of existence, a widening and deepening roster of annual punishments.

Envisage the deteriorating circumstances of humankind in which not only do climate conditions worsen each year, but this process comes to appear relentless and accelerating. At some point, it will become clear that bastion strategies are futile in the face of such a global threat. Uncoordinated, competitive responses cannot keep pace with the deteriorating conditions.

There will be a growing understanding that the problem of climate management is not just a self-contained crisis. It is a reflection of a turning point in the relationship between humankind and the Earth. Humankind will come to understand that it has exceeded the carrying capacity of its planet, and that this problem is a permanent one, requiring long-term human stewardship of the planet.

It seems possible that the future of humankind as a species will become a more widely shared concern. Under the pressure of a collective threat to the species, the rise of a sense of inter-generational responsibility could provide a vital normative background to a shift towards more cooperative responses to climate change. By bringing into the accounts the right of future generations to exist, this would change the balance between humankind as a whole, and the various sub-identities into which history has divided it.

Part of this would be a rising consciousness that the present generation, and each one succeeding it, holds the fate of future generations in its hands. Future generations cannot, as in the past, simply be left to look after themselves because they will have better knowledge and better technology. Existing generations will need to become more aware that their own existence becomes meaningless if there are no future generations to carry on the story of humankind.[33]

This is not to propose that the only hope is a wholesale utopian transformation of humankind's attitudes and understandings. It is quite unrealistic to expect that humankind, even under a sustained collective battering from its home planet, will abandon the vast historical legacy of cultural and identity differentiations that has been its preference for thousands of years. The only realistic path towards a greater priority for cooperation is one that carries with it both a strong sense of inter-generational responsibility at the species level, and a deep commitment to differentiated identities that are the legacy of human history.

This should not be impossible. As the social complexity of modernity has unfolded, it has become clear that humans are perfectly capable of carrying many layers and levels of identity at the same time. If compelling changes of circumstance demand it, juggling priorities amongst those levels should be possible. Upgrading the status of the species level and the identity of humankind as a whole, including future generations, does not require abandoning the civilizational, national, ideological, gender, race, and cultural identities by which we are all socially composed.

[33] William MacAskill, *What We Owe the Future* (United Kingdom: Oneworld, 2022).

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What is does require is leaders able to articulate and sell the vision that we can—and must—have both our distinctive civilizations, and a much wider and deeper sense of ourselves as a species. The standard of civilization must include a commitment to bequeath to future generations both a right to exist, and a liveable planet.

Conclusions

Humankind faces a dual transition. The Western world order has broken down, and a new world order of multi-civilizational deep pluralism is unfolding. At the same time, the unrestrained developmentalism that is a legacy of the Western world order is pushing against the limits of planetary carrying capacity. Something has to give.

Only if deep pluralism evolves towards the consensual model will leaderships likely to be capable of dealing with this unlucky conjuncture have a good chance of holding power. But only if the climate crisis gets steadily worse (avoiding a catastrophic tipping point) in a way that favors cooperation over bastion strategies, will such leaders be likely to emerge. The political transition of world order means that the always weak machinery of global governance is particularly weak now, and likely to remain so unless pushed towards a more species-level mentality by the punishments of climate change.

What lies ahead is thus an exceptionally challenging global agenda. To avoid the scenarios of business as usual and climate systems breakdown we will need leaders of singular quality, integrity, and vision. Yet these leaders will have to emerge from the dynamics of largely national level constituencies, and often competitive international conditions. They will be an almost randomly picked set who will be in thrall to a rather traditional set of conditions and constraints.

In part we can still make our own luck. But we will also need to be lucky.

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