The Fear of Failure and Decline in the American Experience
（アメリカ史における失敗と衰退への怖れ）

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 歴史的体験を通じてアメリカが常に抱える大きなテーマは、失敗と衰退への怖れである。ニュー・イングランドに入植した初期ピューリタンのリーダーたちがその使命として心に描いていたのは、神政政治体制――「新たなイスラエル」、つまりは「世界中の国々を照らす光」となり、あまねく「キリスト教の福音」（のちに民主主義）をもたらす「丘の上の町」をアメリカに建国することであった。

イスラエルが罪を犯し、神との契約を破棄したことで「かつてのイスラエル」に何が起こったかを建国者たちは十分に理解していた。失敗への怖れは、アメリカ史を通じて常に伴い、影響してきた。

本稿は、このテーマを追求してきた四人の歴史家、政治学者に焦点をあて、分析する。アーサー・シュレジンジャー（Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.）、ポール・ケネディー（Paul Kennedy）、サミュエル・ハンティントン（Samuel Huntington）、そしてファリード・ザカリア（Fareed Zakaria）である。アメリカに課された特別の運命と使命というテーマは、アメリカ史を通して、その思想と行動に大きな影響を与えた。

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From its inception, anxiety, worry and fear accompany the American experience. The leaders of the early Puritan settlers in New England, who came to the New World to establish a holy theocracy—the "New Israel"—were very well versed in the Bible and also in the histories of ancient Greece and Rome. Their historical and religious view was that when a "Chosen People" abrogates its Covenant with God it loses "God's Grace" and it is severely punished. The Hebrews who, according to Christian theology, were exiled from their lands for their sins and condemned to suffer in their diasporas, served as an object lesson for the new Americans.

From the history of the ancient world, and especially from the history of Rome, the Puritans learned that every human political system is destined to become corrupt, perverted and crooked, and eventually would collapse. The Founding Fathers of the American republic, the "Philosophers-Statesmen," learned from history that even democracy could be an intermediate step leading to tyranny and dictatorship. The consciousness of this possibility of failure was ever present and was as strong as the belief in the special destiny of the American experience itself. It was Abraham Lincoln who defined the U.S. as "mankind's last and best hope."[1] The constant mutual presence of a drive for success and fear of failure is a natural concomitant that accompanies American thought throughout American history. The devout Calvinists who reached New England knew that "mankind . . . is evil from its youth" [Genesis 21:8] but at the same time they believed that they possessed a heavenly opportunity to establish in New England "The City upon the Hill," "the New Jerusalem" that would serve as "A Guiding Light to All Nations." Cognizant of the evil propensities of humans, they lived with a constant fear of failure, similar to the failure of the Biblical "Chosen People."

The leaders of the revolutionary generation that proclaimed the Declaration of Independence and wrote the American Constitution were very well schooled in Protestant ideology but were also excellent students of Enlightenment ideas. They lived in constant dread that the fate of the young democratic republic would be identical to the fate of the Roman Republic. Rome was a Republican historical experiment in democracy that they studied and admired.[2] Less than a century later, numerous Americans felt that the Civil War, the most cataclysmic occurrence in American history, was a Godly punishment for its unforgiveable, horrendous sin—the enslavement of African-Americans. Similarly, the Great Depression of the 1930s was seen

by many as punishment for the sins of the Roaring 1920s—the Jazz Age, which was characterized by permissiveness, worship of mammon, violent crime and pursuit of earthy pleasures. Excellent expressions of this thought in America were in Nick's ironic claim in the opening page of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* that he and his father were better than other men and in Nathanael West's apocalyptical vision of *The Burning of Los Angeles*, the title of the painting described at the end of the novel, *The Day of the Locust*, written during the Great Depression in the 1930s.[3]

After the end of World War II and the emergence of a politically bipolar world, the U.S. experienced several hysterical waves, all related to its international status: one such wave began in August 1949, when the U.S. lost its atomic monopoly as the Soviet Union successfully tested its first atomic bomb. By that time, it became clear to Americans that their hopes for a better world to emerge from World War II had been dashed, as all of Eastern Europe was overrun by the Soviet Union, and Communist parties made great gains as a result of the economic plight in devastated Western Europe. This was followed by the great shock of the fall of China to Communism. McCarthyism, the hysteria that reigned in the U.S. in the early 1950s, was one of the direct results of the fear of Soviet nuclear capabilities and the fact that "Communism was on the march." Later, in 1956, the Sputnik was launched and it demonstrated that the U.S. was lagging in the space race, with all its military implications. This was followed by the horrendous military failure in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal and the loss of national consensus as the nation was torn by the Civil Rights Movement, the Afro-American protests, and the murders of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. In the 1970s, the energy crisis demonstrated that the U.S. was dependent on Saudi oil. In the mid-1980s, it seemed that Japan would replace the U.S. as the leading commercial and technological power in the world. Later, there were the events of 9/11 and the American failures in Afghanistan and Iraq. Then came the crash of the American economy in the fall of 2008. Every one of these crises brought about introspection, moral stock-taking, self-examination, and even prophecies about the demise of the American empire.[4]

This study will focus on four transfigurations of the discussions and debates on the topic of the American decline since the 1970s: the article "America: Experiment or Destiny?" written in 1976 and published in

1977 by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., one of the major spokesmen of American liberalism. The article was much influenced by the Vietnam War debacle, the Watergate crisis, and the oil embargo—all events that raised grave doubts about America's ability to maintain its leading stature in the world. In similar fashion, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, a book by the noted political scientist Paul Kennedy, published in 1987, was perhaps the most outstanding of numerous studies predicting that, since the U.S. had overextended its influence far beyond its capabilities, it was doomed to lose its leading stature in the world. Third, the article by the political scientist Samuel Huntington entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" which was published in 1993, and argued that the post-Cold War era would be characterized by a struggle between civilizations in which the power and influence of the West, in general, would decline as would that of the U.S. in particular. And fourth, *The Post-American World*, which was published in 2008 by Fareed Zakaria, editor of the international edition of the weekly news journal *Newsweek,* and was an expression of the debates that raged in the U.S. following the 9/11 events and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars over serious doubts about America's ability to preserve its leadership in the world.

A basic text in the American decline debate is the article by the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "America: Experience or Destiny?" Schlesinger, a Pulitzer Prize winner, was one of the most important liberal intellectuals in the U.S. in the second half of the twentieth century. He was especially close to President John F. Kennedy and served as a special assistant in his administration. Schlesinger published the prize winning study of Kennedy's administration, *A Thousand Days* (1965). His article on America's destiny was published in 1977 in conjunction with the 200th anniversary celebrations of American independence. In it, Schlesinger placed the U.S. on the psychiatrist's couch and examined in depth the manner Americans understood and evaluated themselves historically. His observations revealed religion as a central and continuous theme in the nation's history. According to Schlesinger, since the first English-speaking Caucasians landed in North America, it was possible to point to two major themes that engaged, concerned and greatly influenced America's leaders. Those two basic ideas were influenced by the Calvinistic ethos and over time were bolstered by secular components—and they represented an ideological confrontation the basic suppositions of which accompany the American experience throughout.

One such basic thought dominant in the early days of the young republic was the belief that the U.S. was an experiment. America was perceived as an experiment that was performed openly and completely contrary to and against the flow and rules of history. It was an experiment fraught with great dangers that could result in problematic outcomes. Schlesinger labeled this approach as "traditional" and related its development to Christianity in its Augustinian and Calvinistic persuasions. The Calvinistic ethos viewed humans as corrupt creatures, who existed in the world as, in the words of Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Human existence was temporary, lacking a solid foundation. The Calvinistic belief in a "Heavenly City" was popular among the leaders in the theocratic American colonies in the seventeenth century. The origin of this religious approach was in Augustine's treatise on the *Heavenly City*, written at the beginning of the fifth century. In this treatise, Augustine attempted to explain the destruction of Rome, considered by some to be God's earthy city. Augustine believed that all secular powers were doomed to temporary existence. The lives of these entities are linear: they have a beginning, but they also come to an end. Some of them may thrive for a while, but they all will have the same end—they will decline and finally will be destroyed.

With the American Declaration of Independence, in 1776, the Calvinist zeal subsided and Original Sin was secularized. But the Philosophers-Statesmen—the Founding Fathers of the U.S.—like many of the leaders of Puritans in the seventeenth century, were extremely uneasy while contemplating the fate of the Roman Republic. The Founding Fathers viewed the Roman Republic as the first expression of free men that ruled themselves, and the Americans searched for a way to avoid the fate of Publius, Plutarch, Tacitus and Cicero.[5] In a similar fashion to that of the founders of the Church, the Founding Fathers saw in the history of Rome a model from which much could be learned about society, about the development of political institutions, and about the nature and emergence of dictatorship. Based on the lessons they drew from Roman history, they formulated the American political institutions, wrote their political treatises, and defined the initial American values. They gave to some of their cities Roman names such as Cincinnati, which was named after Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, the Roman military leader, who introduced to Rome the Greek idea of the citizen-soldier—in which a soldier serves during wars and returns home to

civilian life after the end of hostilities. The Founding Fathers wished to find in Greek and Roman histories a guide that would make it possible for the U.S. to avoid succumbing to the fate of Rome. Their efforts only highlighted their belief in the frailty and vulnerability of the nation they had created. They understood that the U.S., like all other nations, was subject to historic forces that were governed by the Almighty and they accepted the transience of the young republic; as a result, they had a very pessimistic but clear-eyed outlook as to its future. For example, John Adams, the second president of the U.S., wrote in 1808 that "Commerce Luxury and Avarice have destroyed every Republican Government."[6] Those fears were reinforced by reading the evaluations of leading European thinkers, who viewed life in the wilderness of the New World as backward, doomed, wretched and inferior.[7]

Though the Founders believed in Original Sin, they never ceased to believe in the ability of humans to choose and mold their reality and destiny, to better themselves and be responsible for their actions and fate; in essence, to be capable of self-governing. The American Experiment was not naive or passive. America was created through invasion, conquest and genocide. It enslaved Africans. It emerged as an independent nation after a bloody revolution. A century later it was devastated by a horrendous Civil War. The American Experiment was monumental; inherent in it were numerous perils and dangers and, for the Americans, an enormous challenge—to control the course of history.

Thus, in direct confrontation with the "lessons of history" emerged the other concept, the "anti-traditional" view. The traditional concept of the Founders, who believed in the inevitable failure of the democratic experiment, a belief deeply rooted in their religious outlook as well as in the lessons of history, was consistently eroded because of the success, phenomenal growth and well-being of the republic. In time, confidence in the success of the experiment increased and pessimism was gradually replaced by cautious optimism. The generation of the Founders came to be perceived as a generation that freed the Americans from the chains and limitations of history. Once their task of setting the foundations of the republic was completed, American history developed along new American premises. America, according to Abraham Lincoln, felt that its experiment was not only resolved but began to feel that its experiment was successful.

According to Schlesinger, the materialization of the "counter

revolutionary" outlook also had its roots in the Calvinist ethos. According to Calvinism, all were subject, obedient and submissive to God's will but there were those that the Almighty favored. Calvin believed that humanity was divided into the "Elect" and all the rest, who were considered damned and beyond salvation. The Founders viewed themselves as God's Elect, yet they understood that they were acting within the confines of history. This view of their operation within historical limitations gradually vanished in the 1820s and 1830s, especially after Andrew Jackson's victory in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. In that battle a small group of volunteer American frontiersmen —"the Rifles of Kentucky and Tennessee"—defeated the professional English forces of General Sir Edward Pakenham, a recent victor over Napoleon. This was followed by the 1820 Missouri Compromise, which regulated the question of slavery in the western territories, kept this major controversy in check for three decades, and enabled the successful exploitation of the rich and vast lands and natural resources of the American West.[8] By 1850, with the annexation of the Southwest and California, with its vast gold fields, the Augustinian "Godly History" became "Messianic History"—the journey of "God's Elect," the Americans, to redemption beyond history.

Hereafter Americans identified themselves absolutely as the "Elect." The U.S. became the new "Promised Land" and the settlers viewed themselves as settling and establishing the "New Israel." From there the road was very short to a thorough intellectual transformation—America as experiment turned into America with a universal Godly mission and Godly special destiny. The U.S. undertook a dangerous and hopeless course of divorcing itself from the dimension of time, of divorcing itself from past history. The patriotic passion of building a new nation was replaced by fanatic messianic chauvinism. The U.S. became a community that felt that it had a mission to bring the blessings of democracy and Christianity to the rest of the world.[9] Excellent historical examples could be found in Franklin D. Roosevelt's and John F. Kennedy's inaugural addresses. Both emphasized that the U.S. "had a rendezvous with destiny."[10]

The physical space was redefined according to a very clear hierarchy. The Puritans who arrived in America felt in the words of John Winthrop, the most important Puritan politician between 1629 and his death in 1649, as well as the leader, ideologue and first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, that the Puritans residing in the colony were the inhabitants of the

"City upon the Hill"—the "New Jerusalem" who were watched by all. They viewed themselves as people who were sent to New England by a divine command in order to fulfill a sublime task. The narcissistic withdrawal from time could only occur because of the transformation that God underwent in American thought from transcendental Godliness to eminent Godliness, as was embodied in the very successful existence of the American experience. The future which in the years of America's history was a source of fear of the upcoming unknown, became clear, live and inevitable because the Americans began to believe that God himself was leading them, his Chosen People, to spread his tidings. Their thinking was based on the belief that in the U.S. God had created a singular, distinctive nation in its superior values, great potential and outstanding purity, and thus succeeded in ridding Americans of earthly motives that were the driving forces of the behavior of other nations. Americans were pure and truthful; thus they shaped history and it was not history that shaped them.[11] The change from Winthrop's and Edwards' somber Puritan views occurred over time and was replaced by the post-independence euphoria resulting from the success of the revolutionary struggle against the then mightiest superpower—Great Britain.

To comprehend America's belief in its special destiny, two more topics need to be considered. Originally the population of the American colonies was composed of people who had escaped or revolted against their past. Fantasies about universal mission and superiority prompted by God's grace or due to historical command were part of the beliefs of empire-building nations. It was a central component of the justification for their ambitions: so it was with the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, the French in the seventeenth and the British in the eighteenth, and the Germans, Japanese and Russians in the twentieth century.[12] Schlesinger emphasized in his article that the "anti-traditional" view gathered influence from the time of the Declaration of Independence and throughout the nation-building process that was accompanied by a long secularization process. The traditional approach never disappeared; Lincoln, for example, thought that all republics have fatal and inherent weaknesses and therefore the foundations of liberty in the U.S. were weak and had to be strengthened by common sense. Lincoln also claimed that God had his own designs. In the background the Augustinian historical approach never ceased to be influential and at times succeeded in moderating the messianic tendencies by stressing the importance of universal

natural laws.[13]

Out of the Civil War, a test or punishment that God subjected America to, the U.S. emerged victorious as the opponents of the evil of slavery were victorious. Thus, the belief in America's uniqueness and mission was bolstered. The doubts that stemmed from the religious background did not disappear but, in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, as America's power and influence increased, the delusion of America's special destiny gained.

Schlesinger, in his article, challenged the growing self-confidence that the U.S. exhibited in itself and in its role and destiny, which transcends history. He wrote it at the time that the failures in Vietnam and in Watergate were in the background. Schlesinger warned that humans become corrupt and nations atrophy, decline and collapse and, like all nations, the U.S. will always have to face the trials of time. America's existence might be temporary, her power might diminish, and therefore repeated challenging experiences and trials are imperative. Schlesinger, who admired John F. Kennedy, used Kennedy's famous words that called on the U.S. to understand that it cannot solve every problem, it does not know everything, it consists of only 6% of the world's population, it cannot tackle every evil or turn back every threat and, therefore, there can't be an American solution to every problem in the world.[14] Messianic thought is a dangerous illusion, no one is "unique" or "holy." All nations, in one form or another, are subject to God's command and authority. America must forever remain an experiment whose outcome will always remain in doubt.

All this did not mean that America could not be proud of the fact that it possesses advantages over most nations—a total and complete secular advantage that was granted to it by its Founding Fathers. The Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution defined goals and commitments and knew how to measure failures. The values that were defined by these documents were the "American Doctrine." The Declaration of Independence represented the victory of reason, liberty and human dignity. It bequeathed to the Americans a yardstick based on a series of universal, rational values and concepts according to which the future of America could be shaped and judged. Those ideas and concepts were eternal and could not be altered; thus the U.S. could be proud in its course, not due to a pretension to act as God's

messenger or as a possessor of a divine errand but because of its constant attempts to live according to its basic values in a chaotic world.[15]

Paul Kennedy on Degeneration and Failure

Paul Kennedy, a professor of political science at Yale and London universities, in 1987 published his study *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000.* This book was the outstanding representative of the fear that enveloped wide circles in the U.S. in the mid-1980s, circles that were concerned about the rapid rise of new economic and technological great powers, especially in Asia. Their fear was that, in the near future, American power and influence would decline. Kennedy focused in his book on the relationship and connection between economic prowess, military entanglements and the decline and collapse of empires in the past 500 years.[16] The book had two parts. Most of the study was devoted to description and analysis of the drastic changes that occurred in the international balance of power since the sixteenth century; its other part, "Towards the 21st Century," attempted to predict which nations would rise and which nations would decline in the near future. Kennedy's analysis of the past and his predictions about the near future were based on a premise that at first glance seemed simple: history taught that there existed a correlation between the rise and fall of great empires and their military power.[17] His thesis, though, was much more profound and sophisticated. In a similar fashion to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Kennedy believed that "nothing is as permanent as change." According to Kennedy, the power of a nation had to be measured according to its economic and military strength, as compared to the power of its rivals. Power was always relative since each society was in constant change and therefore the international balance of power was also constantly changing.

According to Kennedy, capital was at the foundation of military power, and military strength was imperative to protect wealth. Thus, great powers must maintain an internal balance. Strong armed forces were extremely necessary but their cost was steep. Military superiority may, at times, be deceiving, since the cost of achieving it could weaken the preparedness of a great power for future military confrontations.[18] Kennedy maintained

that as the great powers increase their military clout they must increase the resources that help them maintain that stature. If too great a proportion of their resources is assigned to military purposes, this, in the long run, can lead to their weakening. The ability of a great power to counter another power or coalition of nations is directly tied to its economic strength. As a result, when empires are at the zenith of their power, they might find themselves declining in their relative economic strength. This power can only be sustained by keeping a creative balance between development of wealth and military expenditures. Powers in decline accelerate their downfall by increasing defense spending.

Kennedy's main argument was that actual decline in the growth of the American industrial sector coupled with the growth of its numerous international commitments and its massive expenditures on maintaining and servicing its gigantic military establishment would, inevitably, cause enfeeblement of its power. The global interests of the American empire outstripped its capabilities to finance them. Moreover, the U.S. was in the process of decline also because the other great powers—China, India, Japan, and the European Union—were becoming more powerful and more influential. Therefore, the only answer to the question that was debated in the U.S.—Will the U.S. be able to preserve its stature?—was "no."[19]

Kennedy drew his infuriating prophecies about America's bleak future from the lessons he gleaned from the histories of other declining powers. He started his survey with Spain, the first great European empire in the modern era to have interests both in the European continent and overseas. Despite its superior armed forces, the protection of all Spain's commitments caused expenditures greater than its income. The expenditures were financed by deficit spending that resulted in inflation. Spain maintained its leading position only because France, its main rival, handled its affairs even worse. At the end of the seventeenth century France developed a military bureaucratic system that enabled it to exploit its economic resources in a more efficient fashion, so that a coalition of European powers was needed to prevent France from gaining hegemony in Europe. But France also erred and became overcommitted. This error, added to the expensive indulgences of the aristocracy, led France to economic bankruptcy, which was one of the causes of the French Revolution.

France's main rival in the eighteenth century was Britain, which used its

phenomenal commercial success to finance the buildup of a huge navy. The navy was used to rule a vast empire, which enabled it to further develop its commercial base. Thus, Britain built a solid, large capital base that increased its ability to develop and finance pioneering industrial technologies. This process was accompanied by bright political leadership that made Britain, starting from the Napoleonic Wars era, the most powerful superpower in the world. This was coupled with the country's minimal participation in the wars on the European continent. At the end of the nineteenth century, Britain lost its economic leadership to the U.S. and concurrently was forced to devote ever-increasing resources to its military in order to maintain its hold over its empire.

Kennedy claimed that Britain's most important and sophisticated strategic decision, adopted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was not to compete with the rising power and influence of the U.S. The traditional enemies became friends and later allies. It was the aid and support of the U.S. that contributed significantly to Britain's victorious emergence from World War I and World War II. When American assistance dropped off markedly afterwards, Britain could not defend and hold on any longer to its imperial possessions and thus "the sun set on the British Empire." [20] World War II turned the U.S. into a superpower stronger than Great Britain. America's economy was not only unscathed during the war; on the contrary, it became much stronger. America's rivals suffered a great decline in their power and the emergence of new rivals was slow. But gradually the U.S. undertook huge global commitments, much greater than its capabilities, and such commitments endangered the U.S. in a similar way that they had endangered Spain in 1600 and Britain in 1900.[21]

Kennedy's book was published in 1987, at a dramatic moment in history. During Mikhail Gorbachev's term in power, the Soviet Union underwent a wave of reforms that improved its relations with the West but, at that stage, few contemplated, Kennedy among them, that those reforms would result in the creation of a unipolar world. Kennedy was not alone in his bleak prophecies: he was the most prominent among intellectuals that warned in the mid-1980s that the U.S. might lose, in the near future, its leading stature as the supreme world power and that other nations, especially Japan, would take the place of the U.S., or at least become equal to it. Those pundits were termed by Samuel Huntington, an influential political scientist, as the

"declinists." The "declinists" focused on the vast budgets, the great trade deficits and the decline in America's share of industrial production as signs of America's decline.[22] Their view was shared by a large percentage of the American public. A poll conducted in February 1989 found that 48% of the American public thought that the U.S. was declining as a world power and 63% felt that Japan was on the rise.[23]

The developments in the ensuing years were breathtaking: the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989; the decisive victory of the allies led by the U.S. in Iraq during the Gulf War in 1991, which led to a declaration by President George H.W. Bush about "A New World Order" led by the U.S.; the peaceful disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991; the ascendency to the presidency of the young, charismatic Bill Clinton, who led the U.S. to one of the longest economic expansions in its history, coupled with a technological revolution; the emergence of a more democratic Russia under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, a Russia that abandoned its quest for global or even regional hegemony and strove for economic cooperation with the U.S. and with Western Europe; the liberalization of the Chinese economy and the severe economic recession that occurred in Japan—all these turned the decade after the publication of Paul Kennedy's book into a decade in which his predictions as to the imminent collapse of the U.S. as the leading world power seemed to many to be erroneous.

Indeed, a wave of books and articles appeared in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s that presented very different interpretations from those of Kennedy. According to this view, in the post-Cold War era the U.S. would not decline but would keep its position of leadership in the world. The most visible exponent of this view was Francis Fukuyama of the Planning Department in the State Department. In an article published in summer 1989 in *The National Interest*, a neo-conservative journal, he concluded, from the latest developments in Russia, that liberal democracy was the final stage in the dialectic development of the forms of government and the final and only ideological opportunity available to mankind. His article, written during the final disintegration of the Soviet Union, was perceived as representative of thought that claimed that in the future no strategic challenges would face American hegemony in the world.[24]

Other scholars tackled Kennedy's ideas and rejected his predictions of America's decline. Those scholars were called the "revivalists." The

most prominent among them was Joseph S. Nye Jr., head of the Harvard International Relations Center. In 1990, Nye published a book with the title *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power.*[25] In his book he argued that the rivals of the U.S. would not, in the foreseeable future, become more powerful than the U.S. and concluded that the U.S. would remain the most powerful superpower in the world. According to Nye, America's power was based on two sources: "Hard Sources"—armed forces, economy and technology; and "Soft Sources"—culture and ideology. Nye claimed that the world's sympathy for and admiration of the American values of democracy and human rights and the widespread attractiveness of American popular culture had become a unique power source that accorded the U.S. international influence that its rivals did not possess.[26] After the victory of the U.S.-led coalition over Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, Nye published an article in the *New York Times* concluding that success in the war demonstrated that the U.S. possessed a much greater array of power sources than any other nation and that those that supported the decline thesis exaggerated in their descriptions the increase of the power and influence of Japan and Germany, which turned out to be limited only to the economic sphere.[27]

Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*

In September 1993, Samuel Huntington, a leading political scientist, published an article titled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs*.[28] Huntington suggested a new paradigm to understand the international reality in the post-Cold War era. He wanted to warn about American complacency and about the dangers that accompanied the thought that American supremacy was assured in this new era and that humanity everywhere would adopt America's political and other values. He expanded the article into a book three years later, but without the question mark in the title, presenting a simple hypothesis, and as far as its critics were concerned, a greatly oversimplified one. According to the article, the ideological confrontation that characterized the Cold War era would be replaced by a clash of civilizations. The world was not advancing towards creating a single common global civilization characterized by Western liberal values; on the contrary, a clash of civilizations was forthcoming that would challenge

Western supremacy.[29]

Huntington's ideas were not common or accepted in an era when American global hegemony was not challenged. But he was not a solitary, single voice. It was Bernard Lewis, the leading Orientalist, who in September 1990 used that term first in an article, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In that article Lewis attempted to explain the hostility that was felt by many in the Muslim world towards the U.S. and the West. Lewis claimed that the reason for that rage was in the loss of the stature of Islam as the most advanced world civilization. Muslims were incensed by the West not because of its imperialism but because Western democracy and Western capitalism presented, now more than ever, a desirable substitute for the traditional way of life that the Muslims wished to protect and preserve. They focused their anger on the U.S. not because of its actions but because of its leadership of the West.[30] In the heights of the euphoria over America's unipolar status after the Cold War, Lewis warned:

> It should by now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival.[31]

Huntington declared that he borrowed the term "clash of civilizations" from Lewis, and made it clear in his article that he was not only alluding to certain Muslims, but to all Muslims, and not only to Islam but to a series of other civilizations. According to him, there were six reasons why the clash of civilizations would become the new focus of confrontations in the world. First, the differences between those civilizations is basic; second, technological advances make the world "a much smaller place" and thus increase the contacts and friction between countries; third, the process of economic modernization and social changes weakens the nation-states and creates a void filled by religion; fourth, there will be reactions in civilizations that were not Western to the power of the West; fifth, differences

in civilizations, unlike ideological differences, do not alter easily; sixth, the growth in importance of regional economic blocs will intensify the consciousness of belonging among their members.[32]

Huntington argued that the differences between the Western values and those of other civilizations cannot be overcome and, therefore, the attempts to impose Western forms of government as a universal prototype would foster opposition to the West and result in undesirable outcomes, such as the rise of regimes and forms of governments hostile to the West.[33] The greatest challenge to the West comes from the Islamic and Chinese civilizations, especially if they decide to cooperate. The confrontation between Islamic and Western civilizations would be especially cataclysmic because of the degradation the Muslims feel due to the West's absolute military superiority.[34] Huntington's predictions as to the results of the clash between the two civilizations were that the West would find it extremely difficult to maintain its supremacy. The relative economic and military power of the non-Western civilizations would increase in time and that of the Western civilizations would decrease. As a result, the Western powers would have to increase the cooperation and unity and develop greater understanding and toleration in their relations with non-Western civilizations, as well as in making decisions that take into greater consideration the interests of others. Concurrently the West had to invest great efforts in order to preserve the military and economic strength needed for the defense of its own interests.[35]

Huntington's article spawned many debates and harsh criticisms. The manner in which he described the non-Western civilizations as monolithic was far from accurate. For example, the Islam that Huntington described in very general terms was a civilization of more than 1.5 billion believers divided by ethnic origins, language, religious interpretations and practices, tribes and nations that did not agree or operate in cultural or political unison. Moreover, the paradigm that Huntington based his work on was faulty. According to a quantitative analysis performed by Jonathan Fox of Bar-Ilan University in Israel, in the years 1984-2002 inter-civilization conflicts were rarer than intra-civilization conflicts, nor did the end of the Cold War alter the ratio between the two.[36]

The examination of "The Clash of Civilizations?" in empirical terms only might miss the main idea—the warning—that Huntington wished to highlight in the article. Following the traditional debate on America being an

experiment or a destiny, Huntington wished to caution against the euphoria which enveloped Americans after the end of the Cold War, and which characterized American intellectuals like Fukuyama. He wished to clarify that the world remained a very dangerous place, that the challenges facing the U.S. and its global hegemony were still significant and might become even more so, and that there was no chance that the entire universe would embrace American values, nor should Americans embrace the illusion that this could happen.

Huntington expressed in his article a dual anxiety. He feared that, in an era in which societies defined themselves in cultural terms, the U.S. would be drawn into the multi-culturalism which had established a base in the country and which could result in the U.S. relinquishing its values. Second, Huntington worried that the illusions of Western universalism would gain in influence in the U.S., and attempting to promote it would lead to a confrontation between the West and all the other civilizations. To this was added the fear of the Western view of its own omnipotence, which would result in ignoring grave challenges. Many interpreted the article as a prophecy that became true, but this was an exaggeration. Huntington's article can be seen as a demand on American leadership, at the time when the U.S. was at the pinnacle of its power, to recognize the limits of its power and the limitations of the West's ability to impose its values and institutions on other civilizations.

The Post-American World of Fareed Zakaria

Al-Qaida's attack on the U.S. on 9/11/2001, and the wars that the U.S. declared on Afghanistan and Iraq following that attack, renewed the debates concerning America's decline. The damage the U.S. suffered from Osama bin Laden's terrorists, the military failures in Iraq after the downfall of Saddam Hussein, the grave injury that America's stature suffered because of its failure to manage the chaos in Iraq following the removal of Saddam, the heavy cost of attempting to control and govern Afghanistan and Iraq, and the major economic recession of 2008 all necessitated a serious self-examination. The warnings of Huntington, Schlesinger and Kennedy became especially relevant. Huntington had warned about disregarding the dangers

inherent in the Muslim hatred of the U.S. which found expression in the 9/11 attack. Kennedy had warned of the danger of overextension of American involvement globally beyond the limits of its resources. The simultaneous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, added to the plethora of American commitments globally, served as an excellent demonstration of such overextension. Schlesinger had warned of the dangers of America believing that it had a divine, special mission to bring the blessings of democracy (and Christianity) to the entire world. This fit the way many in the liberal as well as in the neo-conservative camps of the American public interpreted George W. Bush's and his followers' efforts to turn all regimes in the Middle East into democratic regimes.[37]

One of the attempts to examine the changing status of the U.S. was made by Fareed Zakaria, the editor of the International edition of the weekly news journal *Newsweek*, in articles and, finally, in a book, *The Post-American World*, which was published in 2008, towards the end of George W. Bush's tenure as president. Zakaria thought the U.S. was in a continuous process of losing its status as world leader but, even if so, it would not become just another power. The international balance of power would consist of numerous powers, but only one superpower. According to Zakaria, in this new emerging world order, which he defined as the post-American Order, China and India would have much greater influence in the regions adjacent to their borders; at the same time Russia would become more powerful and aggressive; Japan would pursue its interests in a more vigorous manner; Europe would also pursue its economic and trade interests more vigorously; Brazil and Mexico would become more influential in Central and South America and South Africa would assume leadership on the African continent. The more active these nations would become in the international arena, the smaller would become American freedom of action. That meant that the U.S., in order to act against certain threats, would be forced to form large coalitions.[38]

Zakaria thought that the claim that other powers were rising whereas the U.S. was declining was a gross exaggeration. One example, according to Zakaria, was the claim that the great financial burden of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars contributed to America's decline. Zakaria presented calculations that pointed out that the cost of the Iraq and Afghan wars amounted to $125 billion per year, which was less than 1% of GNP, while the Vietnam War cost $1.6 billion in 1970, which amounted to 1.6% of GNP; in other words, the

economic burden of these wars was heavy but bearable.[39]

Another example presented by Zakaria was the claim, prevalent at the time, that the U.S. was losing its traditional strengths of education, industry, hard work, and frugal saving (the Puritan ethic) in favor of ruthless consumption, egotistical self-serving, and costly pleasures. The reports of the 2005 National Academy of Science, which received much attention and were quoted by Zakaria, showed that in 2005, 600,000 engineers graduated in China, 350,000 graduated in India and only 70,000 in the U.S. But, according to Zakaria, the figures relating to China and India were misleading. He quoted a study by Carl Bialik of the *Wall Street Journal* showing that the China and India figures included much shorter periods of study of two or three years, designed to train students to perform simple technical tasks. If the number of those technicians was subtracted from the alleged number of new engineers, then the more accurate number of engineers for that year in China would be 200,000 and in India 125,000. Furthermore, in both nations only 10,000 in each received their education in institutions whose level would enable their graduates to work in Western nations. Thus, the real picture was that in 2005, 70,000 engineers graduated in the U.S., whereas China and India combined graduated only 20,000 equivalently trained engineers.[40] Another example of American excellence in education was the London-based *Center for European Reform* report, which calculated that the U.S. spent 2.6% of its GNP on education whereas 1.2% was spent in Europe and 1.1% in Japan. Even though only 5% of the world's population lives in the U.S., seven or eight out of the 10 best universities are in the U.S. and more than two-thirds of the best 50 universities. Since those universities in Europe and in Japan are financed by the government, it could be presumed that these figures would not change in the near future.[41]

An additional significant advantage of the U.S. was its demographics. The population of the U.S. is supposed to increase by 65million by 2030, whereas the European population is supposed to remain the same. The same is true of the populations of China, Japan and South Korea. The only way Europe could overcome its demographic problem is by receiving more immigrants and successfully absorbing those immigrants into the European economy and life-style. But European success in absorbing immigrants has not come close to the American success. The majority of those that immigrated to the U.S. adopted American culture and values, whereas many

of those who have immigrated to Europe remained alienated from European values and culture that they refuse to adopt. Immigration is an engine of excellence: in 2006, foreign students and immigrants in the U.S. received 40% of the doctoral degrees in the exact sciences and in engineering and 65% of the doctoral degrees in computer sciences. A great number of these young scientists remained in the country supporting the American economy and giving America scientific and technologic advantages over other nations.[42]

America's inviting openness was the key to its success in the emerging post-American world. This openness was a major factor that differentiated the U.S. from other economic superpowers that declined in the past. In Zakaria's prescription for competitive success in the post-American world, he emphasized the need to recognize the limits of power, to set political priorities, and to develop a much better use of non-military tools to achieve strategic goals. Zakaria, who immigrated to the U.S. from India when he was 18 years old and became a senior journalist, insisted that the U.S. must remain a nation welcoming immigration. It cannot afford to lock its gates because of the threat of terror.[43] Zakaria's thoughts on the post-American world were written before Barack Obama, the first African-American president, was elected. Zakaria supported Obama's integration of diplomatic realism coupled with his reluctance to use force, both of which characterized Obama's foreign policy, this in an effort to revive the American dream as a focus for global admiration.

Conclusion

From the earliest days of the American nation, an ethos deeply ingrained was the ethos that every human political entity, regardless of how powerful it was, was doomed to decline, fail and crumble. Opposed to that ethos, another one emerged which exempted the U.S. from the rules governing history and turned Americans into the "Elect" messengers of a global mission. In the past half-century, the discussions and debates about America's decline were renewed. Those discussions were directly related to concrete occurrences, beginning with the economic setbacks of the 1970s, through the anxieties in the mid-1980s about the growing strength of the East Asian powers. This was followed by what proved to be the exaggerated euphoria in the early

1990s, which occurred as a result of the America's victory in the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the downfall of Communism in Eastern Europe. Then, in the early years of the millennium came the military and political failures in Iraq and Afghanistan and the acute economic crisis of 2008. All these resulted in a continuous pre-occupation with America's future that was both pessimistic and also sounded warnings about the basic problems that America was suffering from. Despite the seriousness of the problems, those concerns also tell of a society that wishes to face reality and perhaps this is a part of its unique strength.

Notes

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