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## In Between the Covers

### A Look at the Key Thoughts from

### *The Post-American World*

By Fareed Zakaria

New York: W.W Norton & Company. 2008.

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Globalization is upon us - in full swing - conquering the world in every way. And this book brings us face to face with the reality of our new business climate. The whole world affects our customer base, our competition, and our metrics. We are all truly players in a global marketplace.

This theme has been chronicled, discussed, ranted against and embraced. But Zakaria's volume states the reality simply: we are entering a "post-American" world. This new world is *not* an *anti*-American world, just a *post*-American world. The world is moving from anger against America to indifference toward America. We are simply no longer the "*only* show in town" in this big town named Planet Earth.

Among those books that deal with "big picture" issues, this may be *the biggest picture* there is. We will all be better prepared if we know what kind of world we are entering.

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## Quotes from the book

This is a book not about the decline of America but rather about the rise of everyone else. It is about the great transformation taking place around the world, a transformation that, although often discussed, remains poorly understood... Though we talk about a new era, the world seems to be one with which we are familiar. But in fact, it is very different (p. 1).

Look around. The tallest building in the world is now in Taipei, and it will soon be overtaken by one being built in Dubai. The world's richest man is Mexican, and its largest publicly traded corporation is Chinese. The world's biggest plane is built in Russia and Ukraine, its leading refinery is under construction in India, and its largest factories are all in China. London is becoming the leading financial center, and the United Arab Emirates is home to the most richly endowed investment fund. Once quintessentially American icons have been appropriated by foreigners. The world's largest Ferris wheel is in Singapore. Its number one casino is not in Las Vegas but in Macao, which has also overtaken Vegas in annual gambling revenues. The biggest movie industry, in terms of both movies made and tickets sold, is Bollywood, not Hollywood. Even shopping, America's greatest sporting activity has gone global. Of the top ten malls in the world, only one is in the United States; the world's biggest is in Beijing. Such lists are arbitrary, but it is striking that only ten years ago, America was at the top in many, if not most, of these categories (pp. 2-3).

At the politico-military level, we remain in a single-superpower world. But in every other dimension - industrial, financial, educational, social, cultural - the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from American dominance. That does not mean we are entering an anti-American world. But we are moving into a *post-American* world, one defined and directed from many places and by many people... What does it mean to live in a post-American world (pp. 4-5)?

Americans may admire beauty, but they are truly dazzled by bigness... Europeans prefer complexity, the Japanese revere minimalism. But Americans like size, preferably supersize (p. 87).

Countries are becoming more open, market friendly, and democratic. As long as we keep the forces of modernization, global interaction, and trade growing, good governance, human rights, and democracy all move forward. That movement is not always swift... (p. 218).

Over the last fifteen years, the United States has placed sanctions on half the world's population. We are the only country in the world to issue annual report cards on every other country's behavior. Washington, D.C., has become a bubble, smug and out of touch with the world outside. It

was not just the substance of American policy that has changed in the unipolar era. So did the style, which has become imperial and imperious. There is much communication with foreign leaders, but it's a one-way street. Other governments are simply informed on U.S. policy (pp. 47 & 224).

To foreigners, American officials seem clueless about the world they are supposed to be running. "There are two sets of conversations, one with Americans in the room and one without," says Kishore Mahbubani, who was formerly Singapore's foreign secretary and ambassador to the United Nations. Because Americans live in a "cocoon," they don't see the "sea change in attitudes towards America throughout the world." (p. 226)

For America to thrive in this new and challenging era, for it to succeed amid the rise of the rest, it need fulfill only one test. It should be a place that is as inviting and exciting to the young student who enters the country today as it was for this awkward eighteen-year-old a generation ago (p. 259).

### The key concepts

Because the rest of the world is rising, the United States needs to be less arrogant and more a part of the world community. The hour could be late.

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### Some numbers

1978 - 200 air conditioners sold in China

2005 - 48 million air conditioners sold in China

1978 - Total exports from China in one year

2007 - More total exports from China in one day than in all of 1978

2007 - 20 fastest growing cities in the world were all in China

2010 - More Starbucks projected in China than in the United States

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There were three tectonic power shifts over the last five hundred years:

- 1) The rise of the Western world, from the fifteenth century through the late eighteenth century
- 2) The rise of the United States, in the closing years of the nineteenth century
- 3) The rise of the rest - **now**

1. The United States is not falling - the rest of the world is rising. (The rest of the world is represented by China and India.)
    - Remember Wal-Mart. Not too long ago, they were focused on "*Buy American.*" Now they import \$18 billion from China in one year.
    - While the United States continues to see a rising GDP, the American percentage of world-wide GDP is shrinking *because* the rest of the world is rising.
    - The predictions about the world economy after 9/11 were all wrong - the world economy grew at its fastest pace in nearly four decades...
    - "In a globalized world, almost all problems spill over borders... No issue (e.g., terrorism, nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, economic crisis, water scarcity) can be addressed without significant coordination and cooperation among many countries..."
    - China has grown over 9 percent for almost thirty years, the fastest rate for a major economy in recorded history. "China is the most successful development story in world history." (Jeffrey Sachs)
    - "Wal-Mart's global supply chain is really a China supply chain."
    - India is rising. India is "a country of several Silicon Valleys, with three Nigerias in it."
    - India is an extraordinary democracy.
    - Only Americans have a more favorable view of America than India.
      - 71% with a favorable impression...
    - Like China, development is India's overriding national priority.
  2. About American Power -- Higher education is America's best industry. American schools may be struggling, but the American universities are places where people learn to *think*.
  3. About American Purpose -- Because the rest is rising, America must learn and embrace consultation, cooperation, even compromise.
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Here is an excerpt from the *New York Times* review of the book:  
The irony of the “rise of the rest,” Mr. Zakaria notes, is that it is largely a result of American ideas and actions: “For 60 years, American politicians and diplomats have traveled around the world pushing countries to open their markets, free up their politics, and embrace trade and technology. We have urged peoples in distant lands to take up the challenge of competing in the global economy, freeing up their currencies, and developing new industries. We counseled them to be unafraid of change and learn the secrets of our success. And it worked: the natives have gotten good at capitalism.”

### Reflections and Observations

Globalization is upon us, and we will not (be able to) turn the clock or calendar back. Paradigms can't be unshifted, and we are truly in a globally competitive environment and marketplace.

Mr. Zakaria argues strongly that the more we know, the better prepared we can be. And he warns America against arrogance and any hint of imperialism. He tells many stories in the book. One that is especially powerful is the way that President Franklin Roosevelt went the extra mile (and for a man with polio, it was the extra mile) to meet with Stalin and Churchill a long way from his home. And he insisted on putting China on the newly formed United Nations Security Council, because he felt that part of the world needed a legitimate voice and representation. Such an example would be good to remember today. China is rising - as is India, and the rest of the world. It is a *post*-American world, and playing a genuinely *humble* leadership role will be the challenge our country faces in the years to come.

About Fareed Zakaria: he is the editor of Newsweek International, the host of a news show on CNN, a best-selling author, and a native of India.

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