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The Asia renaissance

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Tehran is the new Shanghai.

All of Asia is awash in a sea of modernity. The march to modernity launched by Japan during the 1860s as part of the Meiji Restoration has finally crossed China, Southeast Asia, and India to reach West Asia. The fastest-growing economies in the world are found in the region from Tehran to Tokyo. Trade flows are massive. Borders are open. A much-heralded automobile race from Tehran to Tokyo proceeds via Kabul and Karachi, north across Karakoram highway to Urumqi, finally reaching Beijing and Pyongyang and crossing to Tokyo. As competitors speed across this vast region, they view a landscape ruled by peace and prosperity.

The Arab world too is awash in modernity. The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, founded in Saudi Arabia in 2009, has the largest R&D budget in the world. Young Arabs are the world's most optimistic youth, excited about their futures. Many visit the great exhibitions in Baghdad and Damascus to learn how the magic of the great caliphates is being restored.

During the late 20th century, many Western experts predicted contentious geopolitical rivalries between the rising Asian powers, especially between China and Japan or China and India. Instead, the great Asian cultural renaissance now reminds Asian societies that they were all part of one culture before Western colonization divided the region. Nalanda, India's ancient center of learning, which was founded more than 1,500 years ago, has once again become an educational center: the Harvard of the East. Scholars from Kabul and Samarkhand, Jakarta and Hanoi, Seoul, Beijing, and New Delhi once again flood to Nalanda.

In contrast to the geopolitical calm in Asia, Europe is now a tired, old continent that cowers before the Islamic renaissance. Each time the Arab League meets, Europe fears that new demands could be imposed on it to

open its societies to Muslim migrants. In the face of an aging population, Europe has already “imported” 100 million young Middle Eastern Muslims; they are the region’s most dynamic and economically productive population. Still, despite several high-level Christian–Islamic dialogues, the millennia-old division between the two civilizations and their populations continues.

Torn between its Pacific and Atlantic destinies, Russia finally decides to join the European Union and is welcomed in by a worried Europe. Decision making no longer rests in London, Paris, and Berlin. Instead, the Moscow–Berlin axis dominates. The British, like the Portuguese, can barely remember that they once ruled a global empire.

The only consolation the British have is that English has become the common language of the European Union, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Central Asian Caucus. With the English language comes a common set of values concerning how nations and societies should behave toward one another. The principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have become truly universalized. The world becomes a more “civilized” place.

In 2035, the US Congress decided to adopt two official languages: Spanish and English. This facilitates the nomination of the great grandson of Fidel Castro as secretary of state in 2040. He has two major challenges before him: rising demands from Latin America for the United States to join the Latin American Free Trade Association, and an equally pressing demand to join the greater Asian sphere of peace and prosperity. The nation’s still-growing Hispanic-American population demands closer ties with Latin America, while economic logic requires the United States to plug into Asia and avoid further global decline. In frustration, Fidel Castro IV cancels all trips to Europe, calling them a total waste of time. Only the assistant secretary of state for Europe visits European capitals.

In Africa, Nigeria and Sudan have broken into several states, while Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Ghana have become success stories. A recent wave of investment from China and India has fueled the economic expansion of several sub-Saharan states. Most modern African leaders were educated in Asian universities, and they look to the East as they make their plans for the future. The president of South Africa proposes a new Indian Ocean zone of prosperity; as a first step, South Africa and Indonesia set up a free-trade area that revives historical maritime links.

Global leaders are now primarily concerned with truly global challenges. There are no more doubts about the dangers of global warming. The Maldives has disappeared beneath the sea and New Orleans has abandoned its dikes. New diseases rush across the planet. In response to the need for enlightened global leadership, the leaders of China and India have convened a conference to plan a new global architecture, declaring that the UN structure, dating to 1945, has become totally outdated. They commit themselves to creating a new global organization by 2045.

In a new version of the UN Security Council (UNSC), the world agrees that each region should have one permanent seat (with limited and controlled veto powers) and that only China, India, and the United States will have unlimited veto powers. The regions vested with veto powers in the UNSC are the African Union, ASEAN+4, the European Union, the Arab League, the Latin American Union, and the Central Asian Caucus (including Turkey and Iran). The council now has 9 permanent members (instead of 15); this new council declares its determination to put global issues ahead of regional and national interests. The UN General Assembly becomes a true global parliament, with each country represented by three votes: the government, civil society, and the private sector. Majority decisions must be adopted by majorities in all three sectors. The UN also creates a new Council of Civilizations to promote understanding across civilizations.

Western universities now complement the study of the great Greek and Roman thinkers with those from China, India, and the Islamic world. The Asian universities do the same. The mental framework of the world's global elite is no longer dominated by Western thinkers. Instead, when they meet, the world's leaders also speak of the caliphates and the Mughal rulers, the Tang dynasty, and the greatness of Genghis Khan.

These global developments lead to the eventual disappearance of interstate wars. Minor domestic insurgencies persist in the weaker states, but these do not threaten global peace and stability. The whole world is mesmerized by the prospect of a giant asteroid crashing to Earth in 2050, drawing humanity away from local or even national focuses. All this leads to a greater sense of common humanity, with all civilizations and societies declaring that they should focus on their future survival, not past discords. National anthems are done away with in favor of one common ode to humanity. The survival of the human race and planet Earth become the number one preoccupation of all humanity, and all past divisions now seem strange and irrelevant.

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