

Inquiring Minds for AUGUST 16, 2019

Topic.. WE NEED IKE.

Moderator.. Al Kaplan

Do we need an Ike?

This article points to the massive potential effect of the Cyber world in this world, on Geo-economics as well as potential Military conflicts. It points to the frightening possibilities that may be inflicted on this world.

So what say you? Do you agree that much more rests on the options presented to the leaders today?

What say you about the differences in economic options and Military options??

Why We Need Someone Like Ike

War is likelier in a world without inhibition, and the cyber era has elevated undisciplined leaders.

By Robert D. Kaplan July 17, 2019 6:57 pm ET

Markets soar even as everyone panics about geopolitics. The same interconnectivity that has wrought fabulous wealth also allows political crises to migrate from one corner of the globe to another. As technology defeats distance, the new digital world is smaller, more anxious and more claustrophobic than ever.

In the middle of the 20th century, the Hungarian-American mathematician John von Neumann contended that a sparsely populated planetary geography had always acted to constrain military and technological advances. But Von Neumann worried that geography was losing the battle. The Earth's finite size would increasingly be a force for instability, as populations expanded and military hardware and computer software condensed distances on the geopolitical map. "This is an easy change to miss because it is gradual," warns Yale political scientist Paul Bracken warns in his 1999 book, "Fire in the East."

Missile systems now overshadow infantry forces. High-end air and naval platforms linked by automated battle networks have become the new face of war, multiplying lethality. Megacities inflamed by social media proliferate. Look at the [Twitter](#) feeds during the recent India–Pakistan crisis, which often manifested raw nationalist hatred. With interlocking crises everywhere, we live in an age of multidimensional brinkmanship. Ethnic and sectarian animosity flows together with raw populist emotion, in which new tariff barriers become the organic complement to nationalist struggles. The temporary stability afforded by the American and Soviet imperial orders is gone.

We are leaving an age of dirty, low-tech land wars in the desert and entering what for markets could be more consequential military eruptions. A war in the South China Sea between the U.S. and China, or in the Persian Gulf between the U.S. and Iran— even if it lasted only a few days—would affect stocks and oil prices in ways that wars since the 2003 invasion of Iraq never did. While several geopolitical forecasters have assessed the probability of such outbreaks at well below 50% in each case, that there are several such scenarios indicates a significant chance of

market-negative geopolitical eruptions sooner or later. The laws of probability over time in a world without an American hegemon to provide direction are generally grim.

We've been here before. The similarities and differences between the early nuclear age and the early cyber age are instructive in decoding the dangers of today's world. The time between Hiroshima and the Cuban Missile Crisis was an age of no rules.

There was the unremitting terror of thermonuclear apocalypse, even as the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was vivid in the minds of Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev. As the historian John Lewis Gaddis writes, the Cuban Missile Crisis, by providing "a glimpse of a future no one wanted," forced leaders in Washington and Moscow to stare into the abyss, helping to stabilize the Cold War. Rules were set in the various arms-control treaties and summit meetings that followed.

The cyber age has no rules and no red lines yet. A state or nonstate actor could initiate an attack on a scale that would elicit a conventional military response. Civilizational fragility is everywhere given how dependent we are on the new technology. As the memory of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan and the testing of hydrogen bombs in the atmosphere recede, there is a palpable loss of restraint among those in power.

Cyber weapons, because they can become obsolete very quickly, can't be stockpiled like hydrogen bombs. The tendency is to use them, encouraging escalatory behavior. Truly destructive cyber weapons are still less dangerous than nuclear weapons but also more likely to be used. While nuclear and massive conventional weapons still define world crisis zones, they are now integrated with cyber weaponry.

The main difference between the early nuclear and early cyber ages is comforting, since nothing is worse than a hydrogen bomb. But another difference is unsettling. The early nuclear age coincided with the print-and-typewriter age. Print is a technology that encourages complex thinking and, with that, moderate and considered opinions, conducive to mature decision-making. On the other hand, the digital-video era and its social-media component encourage rage and passion—and passion is the enemy of analysis. Leaders and their citizenries will likely be less mature, less given to prudent choices, in this new age of communications technology, which enables cyber conflict.

We live in a world without inhibition. The distance between President Eisenhower and his life experience and President Trump and his is vast. And it isn't only American leadership that has deteriorated as we have traveled from the nuclear to the cyber age. So too have global institutions and leadership elsewhere among major Western countries.

Britain and Italy are two examples of utterly irresponsible and immature politics. The new generation of German leaders—on which Europe's fate pivots—won't be like the generations from Konrad Adenauer to Angela Merkel, with deep memories of World War II and the Cold War. They too are the children of the digital mind-set: brimming with ambition and virtue-signaling on climate change, while possibly lacking the requisite discipline to stand up to future challenges from the likes of Russia and China. As digital technology accelerates, politics and memory degenerate. News cycles are more intense, even as they are more quickly forgotten. Consequently, the new generation of Western politicians is fundamentally without character.

The answer lies behind us. Nuclear apocalypse didn't happen mainly because of the hard wisdom of our Cold War presidents, both Republican and Democrat. Throughout history, instilling virtue and character in leaders has been the only effective means of arresting decline, writes James Hankins in a new book, "Virtue

Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy.” Mr. Hankins, a Harvard historian, painstakingly demonstrates that the greatest virtue in civic life—and the ultimate factor determining political stability—has always been principled moderation, whatever the epoch.

It’s that simple, that mundane and that difficult. In a digital age favoring extremists—the purveyors of rage and passion—the rarest and bravest of leaders will have to be moderates. Only they can tame the forces of technology. Only in their hands will humanity and markets be safe.

Mr. Kaplan is a managing director for global macro at Eurasia Group and author of “The Return of Marco Polo’s World: War, Strategy, and American Interests in the Twenty-First Century.”