

The world is round; that which  
cannot revolve will fall.

*Anonymous*

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## Insights From the Past

There is no better way to demonstrate the need for long-term thinking than by trying what is known as “an exercise in retrospection.” This is a mind game that is often used by futurers’ researchers. We use this approach to attempt to understand what will happen in the future. We imagine ourselves living in another time and place, on a 100-year axis, and then see how the future was eventually shaped.

Imagine it is 1910 and you are a 13 year-old Jewish boy living in London. You come from a wealthy family of global traders. You have just had your Bar-Mitzvah party, which was quite lavish. Relatives from all over Europe came to the big city to share your joy. No one wanted to miss the opportunity to visit what was then the capital of the world. In 1910, Europe dominates the Eastern Hemisphere and is experiencing a time of peace and prosperity, with a flourishing economy. The United Kingdom leads the continent. No wonder, then, that key people of the day believe that wars are a thing of the past and that if they ever do break out, they will be relatively minor and probably last no more than a few weeks, not only due to international pressures, but mainly because the world’s financial markets are not able to endure the tension and distress of prolonged and bitter warfare.

From the British point of view, the future is looking bright, with years of anticipated security and prosperity in which Europe, and chiefly Great Britain, will rule the world. For you, as a boy from a wealthy Jewish merchant family in commerce, the future is even brighter and more promising. In due course, you will also travel the world aboard ships laden with the world's goods, become acquainted with many different cultures, and one day you will be the proud manager of the business your father has always planned to leave you. You are, in fact, a lucky fellow.

Now imagine yourself ten years later. It is 1920, you are 23, and your father has died recently at the old age of 55, some ten years above the average life expectancy in Europe at the time. Europe is awakening to a new reality after having been torn apart in a horrible, bloody, all-out war that will come to be known as The Great War, and even later, as World War One. The old world order has changed beyond recognition, as did the foundations of the business your father left you. The Austro-Hungarian, Russian, German, and Ottoman Empires on which all business ties were based have gone under in the grueling four-year carnage, along with several million souls.

You are now looking for new outlets and places to promote your business and family interests. Countries such as Japan and the United States, that had been on the margins of Great Britain, are suddenly global superpowers. The agreements signed at the end of the war dictate that Germany will not resurface as a military power in the foreseeable future, and your common sense tells you that business opportunities await you there. Japan and the US are too far away and you lack the resources or personal ties needed to succeed there. Germany, however, appeals to you because you still have some distant relatives there. They convince you to move there and join them, arguing that this land, with its rich culture, is the most promising for business in times of peace. Furthermore, they

argue that they can help you by opening doors for you. You decide to relocate to Germany, marry, and start your own family there.

Now try imagining the atmosphere in Germany in 1935. Your son will have his Bar-Mitzvah next Saturday, while the streets of Berlin are teeming with Nazi hooligans who enjoy harassing Jews. You sit with your wife and a group of relatives in your spacious salon as the children play in the garden, and you air the deep concern you have been feeling for several months, cautiously raising the possibility of relocating your family to the US. The polite conversation grows tense. Patiently, you say that you sense danger, that it may not be possible to restrain the street gangs indefinitely, and that one day the mood might turn from incipiently dangerous to murderous. You outline the business opportunities that you believe await you in the US, and hope to bring your relatives around to your point of view, and perhaps even attain their blessing before you depart. Based on the average life expectancy in Europe, you figure you have some 15 years still to live. You are 38 already and, at best, you will reach 55 by 1952. You promise to come for frequent visits and return to Berlin if things do not work out overseas.

Your relatives, however, tell you in no uncertain terms that they consider you are being unnecessarily alarmist and they know that some German leader will sober up and dispel the current wave of anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, you summon up your courage and draw out all your savings, and travel to the US with your wife and two children. You could not know it at the time, but this will be the last time your wife will ever see her relatives. Germany not only rebuilds its military might, but soon dominates Europe. Having survived their revolution, the Bolshevik Communists are now in alliance with the Nazis, while Britain, the land of your birth, will be the only country to stand up to the Third Reich. All the others do not want to take sides in these power struggles. They just want to live in peace. In 1939, many believe that the 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries will be

dominated by the Nazi regime. No single country sees that it should be the one to stand up to Hitler's megalomania and everyone turns a blind eye to his geopolitical whims.

It is 1941. The US finally joins the war effort, reacting to the barbaric Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that shakes the US public. Your 19-year-old son is among the first men drafted to fight in Europe. All that you know is that he is a fighter pilot in the US Air Force. You catch a nap here and there, but your wife's worry won't let her sleep.

In 1945, ten years after you left Europe, rumors of a great disaster that has befallen the Jewish People in Europe are being corroborated. Historians calculate that some six million Jews have perished in what will come to be known as the "Jewish Holocaust," the *Shoah*. One-third of your nation has been wiped off the face of the earth in just five years! Of the 18 million Jews in the world, only 12 million are now left. Aside from this, World War Two has left in its wake the death of some 70 million people of all nations and races. The figures are staggering. Pictures that appear in the newspapers are too grim for words. Gradually, the ghastly realization dawns on your wife that her entire family in Europe has perished. She will never recover from the loss.

The war that the US has just won has shattered Germany and split it into two. Europe has been divided into two blocs: the Western bloc is led by the Americans, while the Eastern side is under the USSR's control, and the two vie for the assets of the now-extinct European empires. Suddenly, the US has emerged as an omnipotent superpower, and it is powerful in a way that has never been seen before in all of history. It dominates the oceans of the world, and has an advanced aerial technology which allows even ordinary people to shuttle between continents. With possession of the mighty power of nuclear weapons whose destructive capabilities have just been demonstrated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the US is able to dictate terms to all the

other world countries. The USSR feels trapped and intimidated by this new superpower and sobers up to a geopolitical nightmare that World War Two has left behind. It seems that the only way out of its distress is to invade Germany and conquer Europe. Pundits start to prepare the ground to sway public opinion in advance of the next world war, warning it will be even more devastating than the last. Sensible people are beginning to lose faith in the sanity of humanity.

The War has ended, but your son is not returning from Europe. In his latest letter, he described what he witnessed in the Nazi camps. He claims that establishing a Jewish state in the biblical Land is the only way to prevent such horrors from ever being repeated. You start to realize that he is now enthusiastic about Zionism and your heart skips a beat. You eagerly wait for him to return home. His younger sister, age 21, is soon to be married, and the whole family wants him to be there. Suddenly you realize that he is 23, the age at which you wondered which way to turn after World War One. You recall that you did not believe such wars could ever take place again in your lifetime, and you begin to realize the amazing nature of the twists of history.

You personally have made scant economic progress since you immigrated to the US in 1935, barely managing to establish a small business. You hope to expand it now that the war is over, believing the American market is recovering from the economic crisis that started in 1929 and peaked when you immigrated there. You hope that when your son returns, he will join you in the family business.

Now imagine he has returned and you are having an intense father-son chat. You talk about the central role you have in mind for him in the family business, but far from appearing excited about this, he seems to have other plans. So you try to find out what he is thinking and what he intends to do now that he is back safe from the European killing fields. Imagine how surprised and disappointed

you are when he gently tells you that he has been thinking about volunteering to work on a kibbutz in Palestine. He goes on and on about communal life and socialist ideals. He tells you in confidence that the Haganah, the Jewish military organization, is fighting against the British and the Arabs in Palestine. He talks about the security needs of the Jewish settlement there. He tells you they need the Jews of the Diaspora to help them, and as you listen intently, you wonder how it is that he knows so much and what this new zeal in his voice really means.

When you at last gather the courage to probe a little deeper, he casually mentions a girl he has met in the French port town of Marseille. She has come from a kibbutz in Palestine to help Holocaust survivors immigrate there, having herself emigrated from Morocco as a child.

You try to talk some sense into him. After the war, the US is now the safest place for Jews, you tell him. Why should he travel to Palestine – to that dangerous and malaria-stricken place? As a former Briton, you know that the British Government will never agree to the Jews establishing their state in Palestine. You put forward the argument that you are not even certain that the Jews are capable of running their own state, because they lack the tradition of self-administration or a culture of independence. Moreover, if they ever dare to declare independence, their chances of withstanding the onslaught of the neighboring Arab states are zero. You tell him all this, feeling something akin to desperation.

When you realize that your words are not having any impact, you fire the last of your ammunition – your final salvo – telling him sadly that you are almost 50 and not getting any younger. Though you pray that nothing will happen to you before he returns to the US next year, he should take this into account. But when you realize that the boy is in love and nothing will make him change his mind, you give up.

Now try to imagine yourself three years later. It is 1948. Your

son has remained on the kibbutz and will not be coming back. He writes sparingly, but you read his letters over and over, and you find yourself over the moon to discover that you have a sweet grandson, one of the first children born in the newly established State of Israel. When you read his identity number to your wife, you cannot hold back the tears, somehow reminded of the numbers that the Nazis tattooed on the arms of your family members. The sharp contrast has taken a grip on your feverish mind. You go mad with joy and worry when you learn that just a few days before Ben-Gurion declared Israel's Independence, he appointed your son a senior officer in the Israel Defense Forces, commissioning him to build an air force for the Jewish state. You stare at the three letters, I-D-F (acronym for the Israel Defense Forces), hoping that no one is listening as you repeat them, and staring at the pictures of your son and grandson in your office.

Two years later, your son has a daughter. Your first granddaughter. The thought of this baby girl fills your heart with joy. (I will tell the story of her grandson and his life in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at the end of this book.)

Now imagine it is the summer of 1967. You are 70. Never, in your wildest dreams, did you think you'd reach this age. When you were born, the US average life expectancy for males had been 48 years; whoever would have thought that in your own lifetime another 22 years would be added to that figure and that you, like many others, would reach the venerable age of 70 so healthy and fit? Astonishingly, Israel has just beaten the surrounding Arab nations and won the Six-Day War, finally putting your doubts to rest about the future of the Jewish state.

Meanwhile, American society has been through an unprecedented crisis, and an era of intense soul-searching, having been torn apart by the Vietnam War. Still, everybody continues to believe the US has enough might to emerge victorious. You worry

about your daughter's two grown sons who were called up and are fighting the Vietcong. You have no way of knowing that they will take part in one of the worst US failures ever to affect generations to come. Concurrently, in Israel, your eldest grandson has also joined the army, and he has become an officer in the paratroops, and was among the liberators of the Western Wall. And so, while the US was being defeated – not by the USSR, but by what seems like unorganized guerrilla bands of North Vietnamese Communists – Israel is not only undefeated by the Arabs, but actually beats several armies in just six days and liberates the whole of East Jerusalem. You respond with awe to these thrilling historic events that you have witnessed in your own lifetime, wondering what else the future holds in store for you.

Assuming that you live for many more years, the historic upheavals you will witness are practically unimaginable. Israel survives another war in 1973 in which it was almost conquered by Syria in the north and Egypt in the south, but in 1977, only ten years after the Six-Day War, none other than Anwar Sadat, president of one of the biggest and strongest Arab countries, lands at Ben-Gurion Airport. Sadat addresses the Knesset, calling for peace between Israel and Egypt.

If you continue to live till 1989, you will have seen the USSR crumble. Eastern and Western Europe are reunified without a single shot being fired, which in itself was unconceivable for many decades.

In the wake of these events, Francis Fukuyama, one of the greatest thinkers of the time, writes a controversial book called *The End of History and the Last Man*.<sup>3</sup> In it, he argues that the downfall of the Communist bloc was not, in fact, just another event in the long history of human conflicts over differing views, ideologies, and regimes that led to clashes between their supporters, but rather this event marked the end of a certain type of history and a transition to an era in which liberal democracy will prevail all over the world,



unchallenged by any other ideology. He claims that conflict between states will, henceforth, be restricted to a few regions.

Supposing you live another four years, you now see the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, landing in Israel and signing an agreement with his archrival, Yitzhak Rabin. Then, seven years later, Rabin's deputy at the time, Shimon Peres, joins Ariel Sharon, once a fierce and unbridled warrior, in a government that fights a bitter war against Arafat in Lebanon. Three years after the Lebanon War, the selfsame Sharon unilaterally pulls Israel out of the Gaza Strip, against the better judgment of his own party members and voters. Sharon will be feted by Israel's Left and the governments of the world, but does not bask in this for long: he suffers from a major stroke less than half a year later.

In 2000, you are truly amazed when your great-grandson, your son's oldest grandson (who just completed his military service), decides to leave Israel and move to China – the superpower as conceived by many of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (perhaps not militarily, but definitely economically). At the same time, you find it hard to believe that one of your American daughter's grandsons becomes a follower of the Chabad hassidim and immigrates to Israel.

Now comes one of the hardest things you have ever had to stomach. In 2001, the US economy has been ahead on every count. It enjoyed an unprecedented standing on the domestic and international front. Experts unanimously believed that democracy and capitalism had emerged victorious in the history of nations and that the world would be based upon the US model for the next 1000 years. But then a group of 19 fundamentalist (but educated) Muslims with university degrees changes the course of history again. On September 11, their murderous attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center's twin towers rocks the foundations of the current world order. After that, the 21<sup>st</sup> century took an even more surprising turn.

In this book, I wish to describe aspects of the course that the

21st century will take from now on, focusing on the Middle East. When it comes to the future, the one thing we can be certain of is that common sense tends to be wrong. Still, we must resort to it to some extent. One has to try to explain that course of events in a way that will not err on the fateful issues, and perhaps will even identify opportunities that can transport us to great achievements and more lofty goals.

If we stood on the doorstep of the 20th century, as that British boy did, we most certainly could not have foretold the events that occurred, but we could probably have identified various major trends if we had been able to deploy the research method I will propose later. For example, it was clear that after Germany was united in 1871, it became an important European power trapped between Russia and France that needed to redefine its European and international status. Most of the struggles waged in the first half of the 20th century were about Germany's European status. Though no one could predict the precise location and timing of the wars, their probability could have certainly been predicted, as, indeed, some did.

I must admit that the magnitude of devastation that these wars left in their wake, which led to the downfall of the old European empires, was very hard to predict. Still, certain predictions forecast results that were much more dire on account of the invention of dynamite. If only someone had bothered to connect the dots between these technological and geopolitical trends, we might have been able to predict certain characteristics of the 20th-century wars. The rise of the US and the USSR was definitely predictable, as Tocqueville foresaw.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the Middle East witnessed extraordinary shifts and achievements during the State of Israel's first 60 years of existence. Some of their negative aspects could have been prevented had we pre-examined expected long-term trends with a reliable method, and a bit of luck. There is a way to describe these shifts and to examine

how they will shape the events of the 21st century. In writing this book, my greatest challenge has been to examine how world events are reflected in the Middle Eastern context, which I do while standing on the shoulders of many others who are involved in research of the future, and adding the Israeli angle.