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The Post American World. Fareed Zakaria. New York: Norton, 2008. p/bk 292 pp. ISBN 978-0-393-06235-9. Price $7.99.

Fareed Zakaria belongs to a very peculiar cohort of American public intellectuals. Speaking with American interests firmly in mind but from an avowedly global perspective, writers like Zakaria, Niall Ferguson, Francis Fukuyama, and Thomas Friedman fancy themselves as standing above the messy games of partisanship, as sober voices of reason amidst the myopia of party politics. For them, history is a story of inexorable and linear progress that culminates in the ascendancy of the United States to world-power status and the ensuing *pax Americana* of the late 20th century. During the heady days following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and indeed up until quite recently, it seemed unquestionable that the happy marriage between liberal democracy and global capital had decisively resolved the fundamental problems of modernity in America's favor. Who could take Communism seriously anymore? And conversely, who could really question the legitimacy and effectiveness of capitalism as a mode of economic organization? If liberal-democratic capitalism represents the endpoint of history, then consequently the objective simply becomes the peaceful integration of more and more societies into a world economic system benignly administered through the economic, military, political, and cultural supremacy of the United States.

These are the basic elements of the powerful, simplistic, and very influential discourse that is peddled by Zakaria and his colleagues in publications like *Foreign Affairs*, *Newsweek*, and *Foreign Policy*. However, it is to Zakaria's credit that he recognizes, in 2008's *The Post American World*, that the disposition of the United States within an increasingly multifarious global order is changing rapidly. For Zakaria, the central story of the moment is the so-called "rise of the rest," in which "countries all over the world have been experiencing rates of economic growth that were once unthinkable [...] creating an international system in which countries in all parts of the world are no longer objects or observers but players in their own right. It is the birth of a truly global order" (2-3). In the convenient moral universe of this book, a given nation-state can either be in favor of or against this global order, as dangerous "rogue states" shun and close themselves off from it, while others embrace "open markets, trade,

democratic governance, and an outward orientation" (17-18). It is partly this facile but compelling, dichotomous worldview, in which one either supports the capitalist global order or virulently opposes it, that accounts for the influence of public intellectuals like Zakaria.

But the future is unclear for Zakaria, for while the previous twenty years or so have been essentially characterized by the uncontested military, economic, and ideological dominance of the United States upon the world stage, the increasing assertiveness and political autonomy of market-coordinated, nominally liberal-democratic societies is shifting the global balance of power. "This hybrid international system - more democratic, more dynamic, more open, more connected - is one we are likely to live with for several decades. It is easier to define what it is not than what it is, easier to describe the era it is moving away from than the era it is moving toward - hence the post-American world" (43). The book, then, is largely devoted to understanding this world and attempting to discern what the role of the United States might be within it. It includes Zakaria's breakdown of the world-system as he understands it, some reasonably detailed profiles of Chinese and Indian society, and some general policy prescriptions for good American governance in the 21st century. As such, its target audience seems to be that class of professional politicians, policy-makers, bankers, and lawyers with whom Zakaria brushes elbows during his trips to the World Economic Forum, and whom the sociologist C. Wright Mills famously defined as the "power elite."

Unfortunately, time has not exactly been kind to Zakaria's argument in the years since 2008. As is well known, in the same year that saw the publication of *The Post-American World*, the global economic system - upon which Zakaria lavishes praise for its stability and efficiency - came the closest since 1929 to a total collapse, and has since descended into a cycle of recessionary deflation and grinding austerity that will be with us for the foreseeable future. In the face of a general crisis of capitalism, assertions like "markets do panic but over economic not political news" seem rather incongruous (7). At a bare minimum, the crisis in the Eurozone has demonstrated that politics and economics are inextricably interrelated in Zakaria's vaunted global order; that in a world where financial markets determine the fate of entire nation-states, a given country's politics are acceptable -- provided they do not infringe upon the profits of bankers and bond-holders. In this context "democracy" and democratic values like self-

determination and political autonomy are considered legitimate and good as long as they do not impinge upon the interests of the true power brokers of the contemporary global economy.

Nevertheless Zakaria, as a stock establishment intellectual, exhibits considerable subtlety: *The Post-American World* recognizes some of the limits that curtail the ability of the United States to project its power on a global scale, but at the same time insists that it continues to play a central role in the emerging global order, whatever form the latter might take. Accordingly, for Zakaria America represents that which is the most great and good about the liberal-democratic, markets-based global economy, and thus its greatest hope. Unfortunately, however powerful it may be, there is only so much one country can do to support, stabilize, and sustain a fully internationalized and increasingly volatile regime of global capitalism.

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