

A forum to encourage independent thinking

The THINK Club

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Superpowers Past Present and Future

Can China or EU be the Next Superpower?

Why Will America Remain a Superpower?

America on the Brink?

A Chronology of Superpowers

2009 Book of the Year:
Here Comes Everybody
Author: Clay Shirky



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Press Release

December 28, 2009

The Think Club Publications Announces Book of the Year Award for 2009

Bloomfield Hills, MI, December 28, 2009 The Think Club Publication has chosen *Here Comes Everybody: the Power of Organizing without Organizations* by Clay Shirky, published by Penguin for the Book of the Year Award for 2009. Think Club Publication is a forum to encourage independent thinking among fellow human beings. This annual award is given to the author whose idea or ideas can contribute to the resolution of contemporary human problems based on his or her original and independent thinking.



The Think Club chose *Here Comes Everybody* for this award because the author explains how common people can and are making changes in society by exercising freedom of speech and by using new

technologies of social networking. The author illustrates how an ordinary individual can really have an impact the social norms and can make his or her voice heard without the utilization of traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television.

Shirky illustrates how blogging has enabled the common man to publish his or her own views without depending on a traditional press outlet. The change isn't a shift from one kind of news institution to another, but rather in the definition of news. News is no longer an institutional prerogative. It's part of a communications ecosystem, occupied by a mix of formal and informal organizations and individuals.

This extraordinary book examines the ways that new communications technologies enable groups of likeminded people to form more easily than ever before, regardless of geography. As the invention of the birth control pill and the transistor have led to fundamental changes in society, so too has the invention of social media and the Web 2.0. Online social networks have enabled productive, collaborative groups to have their voices heard more effectively than at any other time in history.

Shirky makes sense of the way that groups are using the Internet. In a treatise that spans all manner of social activity from vigilantism to activism, from Flickr to Howard Dean, from blogs to newspapers, Shirky clearly explains how every institution is prone to being recast by the net, and how to manage that change for the best possible outcome. He picks perfect anecdotes to vividly illustrate his points, then shows the larger truth behind them.

Shirky explains to the readers why internet communication like Twittering is so important. Thus, we present the Book of the Year award for 2009 to Clay Shirky for reminding us about how the vitality and influence of groups of human beings can impact businesses, society and our lives by using net-enabled social tools.

The THINK Club is published quarterly by The THINK Club Publications, a forum to encourage independent thinking among fellow human beings.

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Courage of Conviction

By Anil Shrivastava “Musafir”

Looking for a New Year resolution? How about having some courage of conviction? Courage of one’s convictions means putting one’s opinions into practice. The definition of courage is: *the quality that enables a person to meet dangers without giving way to fear*. Most of us do not practice what we feel due to fear of conflict with others’ opinions, ridicule or consequences. Whatever the circumstance, one needs courage, determination and strength of character to defend his or her viewpoint and not be beaten into submission by other people’s opinions.

Most people I meet have the right ideas about life in general. They talk sense on a one-to-one basis, but when it comes to practicing those ideas, they lose their conviction and succumb to the norm of the collective group over their own individual idea. I understand that it is a daunting task to swim against the current, but how about doing it in small steps? Here are some suggestions based on my personal observations:

1. **Whenever you read or hear an idea or opinion, just ponder to see if they really make sense.** We always used to hear, “A person of color can never be elected to the office of President of the United States.” Now we know that those statements were nothing more than the hyperbole of naysayers.
2. **If another person’s ideas are different from yours, it is not necessarily a put-down.** The US auto companies were warned for years by auto analysts to revamp their cost structure and number of brands. This was always treated as prejudicial and a dysphemism at the best. Ultimately, the same companies now agree with the auto analysts. In other words, do not get upset on hearing criticism; every one of us makes mistakes, and sometimes we need others to help us see them
3. **Do not blindly follow the maxims of organized religion.** All the religious books, dogmas and rituals are written by men and

women on earth. Nothing is written by God Himself. Everything is someone’s opinion or interpretation. Unfortunately, more people die due to so-called religious wars than any other type of conflict. In the past century alone we had the Sino-Japanese War, the Holocaust, the Indo-Pakistani separation, the Arab-Israeli wars, and the Shia-Sunni rebellions in Iraq. I can go on and on.

4. **Believe in the essence of religion.** Every religion believes in God. God is one. Every religion teaches us to love each other and treat others as we wish to be treated. If you know someone who is difficult to deal with, you may not be aware of the reason why that person is being difficult. Strive to learn more about the person. You may be surprised to find that he has undergone some personal tragedy or other circumstances which have affected the way that he relates to others.
5. **Live within your means.** God has created all of us differently. We are all rich in different ways. Material wealth is not the only measure of success. We are all aware of the housing market bubble burst of 2007. The main reason for the debacle was that people were living beyond their means. Again, too many refused to think independently and allowed the so-called experts to do their thinking for them. But almost all of those experts failed to forecast the last recession, and they missed the stock market bubble – the largest financial asset bubble in history and we still believed them. “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”

My opinions expressed above are by no means an extension of existentialism, absolutism, empiricism or any other “ism.” All I am emphasizing is that we should practice our convictions for the greater good of the society and world at large. “A ‘No’ uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a ‘Yes’ merely uttered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble.” (Gandhi) Happy New Year!

A Birthday Wish

By Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"

Last year on December 3, 2009 I received more birthday messages than ever before. I got one from the local Chevy dealer, my dentist's office, a jewelry store in India, Walgreen, and various local stores and chains. I am glad that I spent a lot of money in 2009 and kept the economy going. Consider that a mini (or should I say a micro) stimulus program from me.

After procrastinating for months, I decided to go for a blood test which required fasting for 12 hours. The clerk at the registration desk asked for my birthday and wished me a happy birthday. So did the person at the car wash who gave me a free deal. The surprise of the day was calling my friend, CP in Minnesota who greeted me with happy birthday. It was a surprise because we do not talk very frequently – maybe just four times in six years. I was certainly surprised that he remembered my birthday. I don't know how!

Then there were a few regulars including my wife and our sons, our daughter-in-law and Irene.

I never placed much importance on my birthday. I also realize that no two lives are alike. Mine is different from others in many ways. I do not celebrate my birthday. This is not because of any cultural or religious reasons. It was simply not a tradition in my parents' home. Growing up, I don't recall my parents or siblings ever remembering or celebrating birthdays or anniversaries. Nonetheless, the absence of such niceties did not make us any different than the person next door. We still led a normal life like other human beings full of love, conflicts, ecstasy and agony. We had our share of success and setbacks, luck and misfortune. A lack of birthday celebrations did not make any difference in my life, as far as I remember.

I cannot forget an incident when I visited my sister in India in July 1989. As I was leaving her place, I asked her if she was born in May. She said, "No!"

"How about June?"

"No.!"

"How about July?"

"Yes!"

"When in July?"

"Today!"

My brother-in-law who was sitting by us felt embarrassed and said, "Happy Birthday!" So did I.

My brother-in-law, a simple and honest man passed away a few years ago. He ate simple meals due to a digestive disorder. I wish I had expressed my feelings to him while he was still alive. So, what is the purpose of remembering and celebrating an ordinary life? One may refute and say that no life is ordinary. I will accept that because I value everyone else's life.

What is a life's worth? What is my life's worth? I would like to know. I do not want any celebrations; I do not want to cause anyone stress or inconvenience on my account. If someone is compelled or feels obligated to remember me on my birthday, I want them to just tell me why they think that I am worthy of remembrance. I would like to know one thing that is good about me. Just one thing! That will give me my life's worth. If you want to go an extra lengths, just cook me a bland meal – rice, lentils and vegetables without spices – so that it does not aggravate my digestive system. That is all I want for my birthday – a kind word and a simple meal.



Gandhi, Hef and Deadwood

By Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

Martin Luther King, Jr. was not the only American who emulated Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhi), Hugh Hefner (Hef) is definitely inspired by him too. Both Gandhi and Hef went through a miserable married life and both enjoyed the company of other women. While Gandhi abused and beat his wife (Kasturba), Hef's wife (Mildred) was unfaithful to him.



Gandhi once said, "Show me a man who is very happy in the company of a woman and I'll show you a man

who is not married to her." Questionable? Alright, prove me wrong!

Later in life, Gandhi always kept young women as escorts and even slept with them in the same bed. He explained that he did this for bodily warmth at night and termed his actions as "nature cure." Later in his life he started experimenting with celibacy in order to test his self control. Unlike Hef, there were no video cameras allowed in his bedroom (videos were not invented then). So we do not know what really took place among those consenting adults.

Hef, on the other hand, is very straightforward about the whole thing. Though he does not treat his flings as an experiment in celibacy, one must realize that he is 83 years old, after all. Moreover, his girlfriends very well know that rich and famous men do not remain anchored to one woman.

Like Gandhi, Hef is not bashful or apologetic about his actions. Neither Gandhi nor Hef ever went on talk shows such as Larry King or Jay Leno to apologize for any transgressions in their lives.

Despite the examples set by Gandhi and Hef, Tiger Wood's transgressions came to the media as a

big surprise though they have been covering infidelity since the days of Alexander the Great. Most recently Bill Clinton explained this in a layman's terms in reference to Monica Lewinsky, "because she was available." And poor Monica carried her dirty laundry until the news leaked out and there was the opportunity for making money.

Of all the people, Tiger's wife Elin did not realize that Tiger could have lust in his heart for other women. Or did she? Luckily, Elin Nordegen was able to plea bargain for two years in a 30 room



mansion along with \$60,000,000 in spending money. Rumor has it that Callaway just announced that they are producing a new "Elin Signature"

line of golf clubs guaranteed to beat Tiger.

Unlike Gandhi and Hef, Tiger is suffering from anguish for being a philanderer. Now is the time for Tiger to achieve greatness outside the golf course. So far, he has had affairs with only nine women outside his marriage. The great Wilt Chamberlain used to have nine every night. Fortunately, Tiger is



a free man now as he has lost the trust of his family. He has a chance to achieve greater eminence than Gandhi and Hef. Gandhi once said, "It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything." Questionable? Prove me wrong!

China or the EU, the Next Superpower?

With its rapid advancement in military power, technological and economic growth, will China replace the U.S. as the next superpower or will that honor go to the European Union?

China

This is not the first time in history that China has advanced militarily and economically as a force to reckon with. During the Ming dynasty China had built the largest naval vessels of its time. Those were the flagships of an armada that ventured as far as the east coast of Africa on several naval expeditions in the fifteenth century. Then China suddenly stopped the advancement and looked inward for the next four centuries. Now, many are expecting China to assume the role of global leadership as American might seems to be fading away.

President Obama looked timid in criticizing China on the environmental and human rights issues during his trip to the ASEAN conference recently. He also refused to meet the Dalai Lama in order to appease China. Is this an indication of a game changer in global leadership?

Maybe, not that fast! Unlike the Soviet Union, the U.S. and China are very much dependent on each other. Despite what may seem apparent, both the countries are economically tied to each other. Although China has a massive surplus against the U.S., its own economy is highly dependant on American imports. Additionally, there is no other safe haven for China to park its money than the U.S. Now that China has largely discarded socialism, it's hard to find a definition for what remains of its ideology, values and world view. A superpower needs to define itself before dominating the world.

China is still looking inward. It is busy lifting itself out of poverty; fighting disease and illiteracy; embracing technology that has put Chinese astronauts in space. All this, while allowing an unprecedented flowering of personal freedoms. Yet China is decades behind the U.S. in prosperity, education, infrastructure (outside its mega cities) and in providing freedom to its people.

As a matter of fact, China is reluctant to take a leadership role in world affairs despite America's pressure that it (China) should become a stakeholder in resolving conflicts between Iran and North Korea, Israel and Palestine and India and Pakistan. China has been a reluctant follower not a leader. China's record in the world's trouble

spots, from North Korea to Iraq and Darfur, suggests that it defines its responsibilities in ways that enhance its economic interests.

China has the potential to be a superpower but it may take decades before it can become one. In the meantime, we cannot assume that the U.S. will become a sitting duck while China will keep advancing. Americans know their weaknesses and shortcomings, thus, they have already won half the battle. They also have experience in beating their adversaries in the past – a skill that China lacks.

The European Union

The European Union is more of an economic block where the merchant states form a system of governance. It is more like a supermarket where the traders come to sell their products and services under one roof. Unfortunately, Europe lacks a strong political cohesion to face up to the existing and rising powers. Another problem facing Europe is its shrinking population combined with its inability to attract and integrate immigrants in the workplace. Unlike the U.S., Europe lacks the capacity to structure its national interest and to define international and global interests in terms of its own interests.

Any superpower will need a definite political identity which the EU lacks despite its attempt to ratify a constitution. Even after a constitution is ratified, the EU will lack the cohesion for the radical course needed to become a superpower. Under the proposed constitution, major foreign policy issues will still be decided by the 25 member states which must vote unanimously in order for a policy to take effect. The way the EU has been acting so far, it seems unlikely that they can form a comprehensive strategic policy over their own regional interest and ideology.

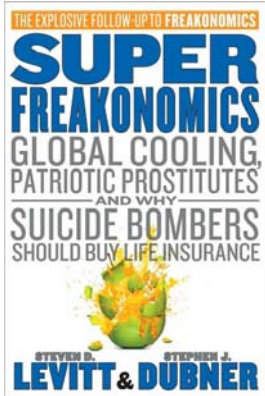
On the matter of defense, the EU is still dependent on NATO. The role of their own security and defense structure is limited to peacekeeping and economic sanctions. A superpower will need a more potent military posture, a rapid deployment capability and a mighty striking force. Looking at the above facts, it is unlikely that the EU will become a superpower in the near term, nonetheless, there is no denying that the EU will remain a pivotal global player, a superpower

Book Review

Super Freakonomics

Authors: Steven Levitt & Stephen Dubner

Publisher: William Morrow & Co.



Unlike the first Freakonomics, the sequel, Super Freakonomics does not appear to be well researched. It reads more like a collection of magazine articles than a serious reading. A popular book like this can't be expected to be completely rigorous, but what we've learned about Levitt since the first book has left us less willing to take him at face value. For example his

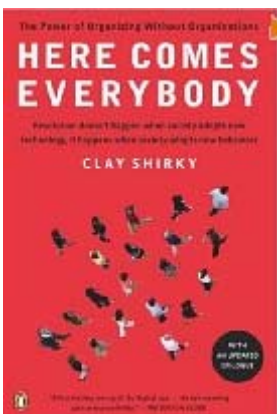
famous study of the link between abortion and crime was later shown to suffer from a programming error in which he neglected to properly normalize a series of crime statistics.

This book is similar to Freakonomics – investigations into how economists use incentives and statistics to tease out counter-intuitive real world facts. They tackle fields not usually considered the domain of economists (pimps, global warming, drunk driving ...) in their pursuit of the counterintuitive. Perhaps the one downside is this book isn't as innovative as the original. The first book paved new ground in pop-Economics. This just took the same roads a few more miles.

Here Comes Everybody

Author: Clay Shirky

Publisher: Penguin Press



Here Comes Everybody provides a relatively concise and thoughtful explanation of social networking and its power to organize or ignite political or intellectual movements. The internet is transforming the way information is disseminated in our society. Big corporations, educational institutions and large media outlets no longer have a monopoly on the business of gathering and publishing data. This book

explains and summarizes the resulting transformation of our social fabric in a way that is valuable to a wide range of readers. It also provides a few unique insights into specialized areas of the online world that even experts in

the field may not have considered. He points out that if we use online tools correctly, we can easily read many summations of particular ideas, cull the best advice from these diverse sources, and combine them in powerful and innovative ways. This was something that was much more difficult to do when even the top people in a field had access to only a few other experts with whom they could share information. Now an outsider in a remote location can easily read the latest ideas from leaders in a field, and can sometimes exchange information with them. This change empowers civilians and turns the tables on conventional experts. Shirky is understandably inclined to point out the internet's strength while glossing over its weaknesses, but he is not blind to the dark side of this new medium.

A surprising number of intelligent people in big corporations don't understand what is happening on the Internet. They believe they are still in charge, and that their power as employees of big corporations or institutions puts them in a unique position to frame and drive public debates. This book shows the fallacy of that position, and explains how the internet has undermined the traditional roles of big media and large corporations to spread information and control debates.

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Last Man Standing

By Tyler Cowen

(Reprinted from *Wilson Quarterly*)

The United States has millions of homes in foreclosure, high unemployment rates, a failing General Motors, numerous insolvent banks, and unprecedented deficits. It is possibly on the brink of a second Great Depression. Yet the U.S. dollar has experienced one of its most rapid appreciations in history. Last summer, when it took about \$1.66 to buy a euro, American tourists in Paris gasped at the price of a Coke. Now, a stronger dollar means that a euro can be had for something like \$1.26.

What's up?

America's relative decline in global affairs has been foretold many times, but it never quite seems to happen. Today, the rest of the world is looking to the United States to pull it out of a recession (or depression), even though many countries also blame us for having started it. The truth is this: The worse things go for the world as a whole, the more the United States gains in relative power and influence. Maybe that sounds counterintuitive, but it has happened before. After the first and second world wars left many other parts of the world in devastation, the United States rose in relative stature. It fell in standing, at least arguably, during the years between 1989 and 2007, when the world as a whole was enjoying unprecedented prosperity and - liberty.

In the terminology of financial economics, the United States is, relatively speaking, a countercyclical asset. It's not that America profits from bad times or war but that we have a relatively greater capacity to limit our losses and eventually bounce back. We are "built to fail," so to speak.

Its size is one reason why the United States has such a robust polity and economy. In bad times, international cooperation tends to break down, which increases the relative influence of larger economic and political units. Smaller countries, such as Belgium, are generally more dependent on international trade than the United States. And in truly dire situations, military power counts for more—and the United States accounts for almost half of the world's defense spending. Even when military power is not wielded directly, it is understood that America cannot be intimidated easily.

The United States also has a more favorable demographic position than many other nations. The populations of Japan and many European countries may

be cut in half over the next 30 or 40 years, mostly because families in those places, if they form at all, have fewer children. China, with its one-child policy, is in one of the toughest positions of any country. If nothing changes, the unimaginable will happen, and within a few decades China's population will begin a rapid decline. The United States is not expected to shrink in population, in part because its immigrants are having children at relatively high rates.

Finally, while Europeans and Asians commonly think of the United States as a kind of "baby state," in reality we have one of the oldest and most durable nation-states. With the possible exception of the Civil War period, the United States has a continuous and consistent governmental history running back to 1789 or, by some accounts, to the colonial governments of the 17th century. American political and economic institutions have been time-tested in a way that few other countries can claim. If you doubt this, compare America's multcentury record with the discontinuous and tumultuous political history of France, China, or Russia.

Amid the flood of alarming commentary, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that the financial crisis has underscored the continuing strength of American global influence. Although the United States has been the epicenter of some of the economic problems, it has exhibited enviable economic and political stability, at least compared with Ireland, Spain, and most of Asia, to name just a few examples. The dollar's appeal as one of the world's safe havens has been redoubled by the recognition that the flexibility of the U.S. economy gives it a greater capacity than many others to adapt to shocks.

It has become increasingly clear that the problems in European governance are severe—and I am referring to the wealthier nations, not Bosnia and Albania. The European nations are tied to each other through the European Union and the euro, but they don't have a good method for making collective decisions in contentious times.

Consider Germany. In January, its industrial production plummeted at an annualized rate of about 7.5 percent. Could Germany now be the financial savior of Europe? When Germany joined the Eurozone, the 16-

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Current Affairs

A Tale of Two Decades

Americans in general felt very optimistic about the country in the beginning of the twentieth century. There was great anticipation over emerging news of many wondrous inventions. The automobile was ready to replace horse carriages. The “flying machine” was about to take shape. The country seemed to be on the verge of a new era of peace, prosperity, and progress. Americans were striving to succeed. Many interesting events happened in this first decade. This timeline shows some of the most important things that happened in 1900’s.

1900	<i>George Eastman makes first portable camera that’s affordable and open to the public.</i>
1901	<i>The electric typewriter is invented. Teddy Roosevelt is elected President.</i>
1902	<i>The U.S. Navy installs the first radio telephone aboard ships.</i>
1903	<i>Henry Ford founds Ford Motor Co. Orville and Wilbur Wright take the first test flight in their plane at Kitty Hawk, NC. The first World Series is held, Boston vs. Pittsburgh.</i>
1904	<i>The first comic book is invented. George M. Cohan, the creator of many patriotic songs and musicals creates his first musical, Little Johnny Jones. The answering machine is invented.</i>
1905	<i>The first Yellow Pages is invented. The Jukebox is invented with 24 songs.</i>
1906	<i>2,500 people die from an earthquake in San Francisco. An animated cartoon is created. Teddy Roosevelt becomes the first president to leave the country.</i>
1907	<i>The Lamiere brothers create still color photography. Pablo Picasso unveils his cubism art, Les Femmes d’Alger (O.J. No. 1).</i>
1908	<i>Henry Ford makes his first Model T for \$850.</i>
1909	<i>A radio S.O.S. saves 1,700 lives after ships collide. First subject on radio talk is about woman’s suffrage. William Taft is elected President.</i>

horizon with the 9/11 terrorist attacks and loss of American jobs from globalization. Americans experienced the biggest collapse of the financial and industrial empires coupled with the diminishing of the American hegemony around the globe. However, Americans also elected their first African-American president in Barack Obama. The timeline below shows some of the most important things that happened in 1900’s.

2000	<i>George W. Bush is elected to his first term as the President in a bitter vote count controversy against Al Gore. NASDAQ peaks at 5134, before beginning a downward descent as the dot-com bubble collapses.</i>
2001	<i>Terrorists attack and demolish the twin towers of the World Trade Center along with other simultaneous attacks on September 11.</i>
2002	<i>The Euro replaces the currencies of 12 of the EU’s 15 members, posing a threat to the American Dollar’s supremacy.</i>
2003	<i>U.S. forces seize control of Baghdad ending the regime of Saddam Hussein during the most controversial and divisive Iraq War.</i>
2004	<i>Spirit Rover lands on Mars. The first of the two Mars exploration rovers, Spirit & Opportunity, seen as the two biggest and two most popular spacecrafts of the decade.</i>
2005	<i>Hurricane Katrina devastates New Orleans; exposes the decaying infrastructure and its neglect. 1,836 are killed.</i>
2006	<i>Pluto, the only planet discovered by an American was demoted to a dwarf planet.</i>
2007	<i>The US Housing bubble bursts when year on year home prices drop by up to 2 - 15% in areas of the country causing increasing numbers of foreclosures.</i>
2008	<i>A series of bank and insurance company failures triggered a financial crisis that effectively halted global credit markets and required unprecedented government intervention. Barack Obama elected the President of the United States of America. Toyota surpasses General Motors as the world’s largest automobile manufacturer.</i>
2009	<i>China beats the U.S. as the largest automobile producer.</i>

The first decade of the twenty-first century started with the fears of Y2K. However, Y2K behind us, new threats to American physical and economic security appeared on the

America on the Brink?

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

If we can't recognize a problem, we can't solve it. The superpowers of yesterday collapsed because they could not conceive of impending failure. We should recognize this and make corrections before it's too late. I don't want America to fail – no superpower has done more for the world as America.

America's greatest strength, is independent thinking. Thomas Edison not only invented a practical incandescent light bulb, he made one that was easily attainable for most people. Henry Ford's vision was to mass produce cars that common people could afford. American farming innovations have spared millions from miserable lives and deaths from hunger. Innovations in science and medicine have made incalculable improvements for people the world over. But, America seems to have lost its ability to think independently. It's no exaggeration that America is suffering from groupthink, allowing others to do their thinking. Oprah, Tom Cruise, Letterman, Dr. Phil, Dr. Chopra, and Al Gore are the intellectual leaders of the twenty-first century. Time was when "leader" was reserved for the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Edison, and Martin Luther King. The recent financial crisis clearly demonstrates how we accepted the advice of financial gurus who say we shouldn't regulate banking and consumers treat their homes as ATMs because a real estate bubble was merely a fool's hypothesis.

Now America is at the place where France was during the reign of Louis XVI from 1789-1799. In debt from fighting a war on American soil, the French were paying more in taxes than was received in government services. With America's prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, President Obama has fewer bullets to fire as he faces the biggest economic crisis in almost a century. Americans are left to pray that China and Japan will continue to buy U.S. Treasury bonds to keep us aloft. Just like Great Britain at the end of World War II America's too thinly stretched, begging for a financial rescue.

Americans think they have a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." The reality is a government "of political contributors by the lobbyists and for special-interest groups." Elections, the theory, remove the corrupt and ineffective. Yet the fact remains that the same people are reelected, disguised as Democrats or Republicans. Americans are happy for a month after elections thinking they voted out the old and voted in the new. But the vicious circle of corruption never ends. Net effect is corruption governmental institutions are designed to protect special interests rather than public. The financial crisis has clearly revealed, regulatory agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission have been captured by the industries they are supposed to regulate.

There is great danger for the U.S. and the world that the American people are losing confidence in their ability to compete with Chinese and Indian workers. However, every problem has a solution. This has always been the optimistic American view. But painful problems usually don't have painless solutions. America must get back to independent thinking and innovation if we want to retain our superpower status.

Our Best Days Are Ahead

By Bala Prasad

As we enter a new year, we should not underestimate the magnitude of the difficulties we face as a nation. We are still fighting wars on two fronts against enemies pledged to our destruction. Our economy continues to reel from a credit crisis of epic proportions, job losses continue to escalate, and the budgets of businesses and families across this country are stretched to a breaking point.

But we, as Americans, have seen darker times. And as we search for a reason to believe that our best days lie ahead, we need to look no further than the Americans who lived through the Great Depression, and the Second World War. While our current situation is indeed serious, it pales in comparison to what that generation faced: a quarter of Americans unemployed, a collapse of our banking system and a World War against a formidable military force that threatened to overwhelm the free world.

What allowed us to overcome these adversities as a nation and prosper as never before is the same thing that will allow us to overcome the challenges that face us today: it is not our policy, but our character. What we saw in the 1930s and 1940s was an unmatched example of the indomitable American spirit, that spirit that made America great. And the people that embodied that indomitable American spirit that were with us then are with us now: the farmers, who diligently plow the fields; the doctors, who selflessly heal the sick; the statesmen, who despite political pressure, do what is in the best interests of their country; the religious leaders, who love the poor and care for their souls; the families, who raise their children to be generous and engaged, not selfish and deceitful; the patriotic soldiers who, in their last measure of sacrifice, give their lives for our country. These were the American heroes who allowed us as a nation to triumph over our greatest adversity in the past, and they are the same heroes who will allow us to triumph over the adversity we face today, and tomorrow.

We can find our way forward by gazing backward to the example of those Americans who overcame even greater challenges before us. Their example instills in us the confidence that our best days are ahead of us. Their example teaches us not to lose faith on our country, and in our fellow citizens' capacity to overcome any problem, no matter how tough.

Ronald Reagan said that America is an exceptional nation, a shining city on a hill that stands as an example of freedom and responsibility for the rest of the world. Twenty-eight years later, Barack Obama underscored this same sentiment when he accepted the Presidency of the United States with this cautionary rhetoric: "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

If our leaders can continue to look at this country with hope and optimism, then it is our humble responsibility, as citizens of the free world, to believe, wholeheartedly that America's best days lie ahead.

Continued from Page 8 Last Man Standing

nation bloc that embraces the euro as its sole currency, the country's politicians promised voters that they would never have to pay for the profligate policies of the "less responsible" member nations. And for almost 20 years, Germans have been paying higher taxes to reconstruct eastern Germany and ease the transition from communism. It's not a citizenry looking to fund more bailouts, especially in a major recession.

But now German citizens are told that they may have to bail out the Austrian banking system and possibly the government of Ireland, while paying additional subsidies to Hungary and perhaps to other eastern European nations as well. Further down the line, Spain, Italy, and Greece, which have all lost their premier AAA credit rating, may require some form of financial aid. The Germans might look to spread this burden around Europe, but there are few places to turn. France and the Netherlands could chip in, but the hat cannot be passed very widely. The United Kingdom had one of Europe's leading economies, but now it is one of the most financially vulnerable nations. You can think of London as a large hedge fund based on Europe, specializing in speculative financing of major European projects. After finance, the two next-biggest British exports—pharmaceuticals and tourism—are solid but hardly economically impressive.

Part of the problem for Europe is that its biggest banks are very large relative to the economies of their host nations—in other words, its component national economies are too small. The major Austrian banks, for instance, have loans to Eastern Europe equal to as much as 70 percent of their country's gross domestic product. The two largest Swiss banks, taken together, have assets four times larger than Switzerland's GDP. Even in the relatively large economy of Germany, the liabilities of Deutsche Bank have been measured at 80 percent of German GDP. These banks have grown too large to be handled or bailed out by their national governments. In the United States we talk about institutions that are "too big to fail," but in many parts of Europe it might be more apt to speak of those "too big to be saved."

In the United States, with its relatively unified system of governance, the Federal Reserve can simply print money to fund bailouts, and even if that is an ugly alternative, the government's ability to act underpins the credibility of the system as a whole. The European Central Bank (ECB) is explicitly banned from creating more euros for the purpose of bailing out national banks. The Swiss central bank could print money for financial bailouts, but the prospect of the resulting inflation and

rapid depreciation of the Swiss franc makes this a very unappealing choice, especially for a country that has marketed itself as a haven of financial solidity. And a weaker franc would only make it harder for Switzerland's big banks to meet their obligations, many of which they must pay in other currencies.

Ideally, the ECB should take on a stronger role as lender of last resort in Europe, but the EU does not make such decisions easily. Fundamental alterations would be needed in the bank's charter, which was written precisely to make change very difficult, in part because Germany, with its historically rooted dread of inflation, insisted on biasing the ECB toward conservatism and inaction. Even if the bank's charter were amended, the member countries would surely impede any action by bickering over who would pay the bills for new initiatives. If the ECB is going to run bailouts, decision-making will have to become a lot more fluid, and that would require Germany to give up control and the bank to move away from price stability as its sole objective. Since the EU member states have not been able to agree on a reform of the Union constitution, it's not obvious they will be able to agree on changing the bank's charter. They've had time—and good reason—to do so, yet have taken no serious action.

It's not impossible that the ECB could at some point simply assume emergency powers and run a bailout on very short notice and without legal authorization. Recall that the Bear Stearns and AIG emergency deals were done by the Fed over weekends. At that point the question would be whether other EU procedural safeguards would maintain their credibility, or whether skeptics within the EU, such as Denmark, would feel that their precious veto rights were no longer being protected.

The relatively weak nature of the ECB reflects some of the problems of coordinating the actions of a number of smaller countries in difficult times. In the United States, coordination between the Fed and the Treasury Department is taken for granted, and Congress is usually willing to back up those institutions. The Troubled Assets Relief Program bailouts passed in 2008 not because Congress thought they were a good idea, but because Treasury secretary Henry Paulson and Fed chairman Ben Bernanke told the legislators that they had better sign on or the sky would fall. This sort of bossiness won't solve every problem, but the European nations have no comparable process, and no comparable centralized power base capable of responding quickly and effectively to crises. In the final analysis, no one knows who is responsible for the European economies.

Continued on Next Page

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If the Chinese are investing in the United States and they have a concern, they can pick up the phone and call Bernanke or the current Treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, and receive a consistent answer, backed by a single national executive, a single legislature, and, ultimately, the world's most powerful military. You could say that when it comes to major foreign investors, the United States has a better "customer service department" (we at home call them politicians) than Europe or, for that matter, Asia.

It's not widely recognized that Europe, because of its systemic weaknesses, already has required implicit bailouts by the United States. European financial institutions are prominent on the list of the bailed-out creditors of AIG, the insurance company that, in effect, was nationalized by the Fed in 2008. Few U.S. financial regulators wish to stress this point, but one reason why the Fed rescued AIG was that it knew that European regulators could not handle the fallout from an AIG - collapse.

It's commonly claimed that the economic future of the world lies in Asia, but that vision too has taken a beating lately. The export-based economies of Japan and Taiwan are contracting more rapidly than those of the United States and Europe. The two countries have not suffered banking crises, but their economies are dependent upon the expectation that global consumers will have more money to spend every year. Their economies are in this manner implicitly leveraged—arguably, more leveraged than the U.S. economy—even apart from whatever explicit levels of debt they hold. The value of Japanese and Taiwanese commercial investments depends on the ability of customers overseas to continue borrowing and spending money—and that doesn't look like a very good bet right now.

One of the most important economic questions is what will happen with China. The Great Depression of the 1930s came to China last, and that pattern could be repeated today. So far, the country's economic growth rate has dropped from 12 or 13 percent annually to a measured rate of about six percent. But given that there are doubts about the honesty of the Chinese government in reporting economic data, the true growth rate may be much lower than that. In any case, the Chinese real estate boom has ended, and massive layoffs are occurring in the export sector. Chinese financial and commercial enterprises are not very transparent, double-digit growth allowed many unsound or speculative enterprises to stay afloat ("The recession reveals what the auditor missed" is one version of an old saying), and the economic expectations of the Chinese citizenry have become high. The nation's leaders fear social unrest. No one knows if Chinese economic and political institutions will hold together in tougher times.

On the positive side, China has the luxury of high savings rates and an immense stock of accumulated foreign assets, especially U.S. government securities. If China survives the current crisis more or less intact, like the United States it will emerge as a large nation with its status and influence enhanced.

In the long run, the fortunes of nations depend on many factors, not just their response to a single financial crisis. Nonetheless, such reactions reflect strengths and weaknesses that show up in other areas of economic and social policy. Despite the separation of powers built into the American political system, U.S. political institutions have, by global standards, proven themselves unusually decisive and effective at critical times. The ability to react swiftly to new challenges is an underlying theme in American history, whether we consider the early missions to the moon, the breakthroughs of the civil - rights movement, the pioneering of environmental regulation, or the pro-market Reagan reforms of the - 1980s.

It's a paradox that it's the large, diverse nations such as the United States that have the greatest ability to maneuver in a crisis and turn on the proverbial dime. That's good for us, of course, but if a new American Century is about to be born, it's another sign that the world faces very serious challenges. And that's not a cause for anyone to cheer.

Sent your comments to:

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Obama Lacks Experience to Be Commander-in-chief

By Robert Bickmeyer

As an open minded conservative I sometimes see some logic and common sense in the writings of a liberal columnist, but never in any column written by syndicated columnist Bill Press. He is one of those liberals whose writings are laden with sarcasm and distortion of facts.

His weekly column appears in one of my local newspapers, the most recent headlined, "General has forgotten who is commander-in-chief." Press believes President Barack Obama is a superior military commander than General Stanley McChrystal, but his writings overlook a few facts. President Obama and Bill Clinton are the only presidents who have served during the last 64 years who never wore a uniform. I don't even think they were boy scouts.

Obama's youth and inexperience do not qualify him to be commander-in-chief.

We entered the Vietnam War about the time Obama was born, so he cannot be expected to be aware of our strategies there ... unless ... he read a history book that accurately portrayed our presence.

Our politicians, intimidated by demonstrations of peaceniks on college campuses, directed our generals, who were not permitted to employ good military strategies. We lost the war!

Press, old enough to know better, has not learned from history and wishes to repeat tactics that lose wars.

A January 1951 Gallup Poll showed that 49 percent of Americans felt that sending troops to Korea was a mistake and 66 percent said we should abandon Korea. President Harry S. Truman, a Democrat, courageously ignored the polls. South Korea is now a successful democracy with a thriving economy. Thus, 54,000 of our military died for a good cause.

President John F. Kennedy, a Democrat, said, "Let the world know that we will bear any burden and pay any price for freedom," as he courageously dispatched more troops to Vietnam. Sadly, 58,000

Americans died in vain because our generals were not permitted to fight a winning war.

What has happened to the Democratic Party that is supposedly so compassionate and wanting to help the downtrodden? There are no Harry Trumans or John F. Kennedys in today's Democratic Party. They were Americans first and democrats second.

Press concluded, "President Obama hired Gen. McChrystal. He can fire him, too. And should."

I think American voters should fire Obama in 2012 and my local newspaper should fire Bill Press.



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A Brief History of Time

Excerpts from Infinity in Your Pocket

by Mike Flynn

Self-awareness is what distinguishes us from the rest of the animal kingdom. We are aware that we have been born, can expect to live for a while, and will eventually die. We are able to surmise this because we are aware of the passage of time. Time has a profound effect on our lives and so it was inevitable that we would attempt to find ways of measuring it, if only to discover how much longer we have left.

Even in ancient times, few people could have failed to notice the rhythmic passage of the season, the phases of the Moon and journey across the sky of the wandering stars. Some of the earlier timepieces relied on the apparent movement of the celestial bodies such as the Sun in order to mark the passage of time.



Passing an alternating current through a piece of quartz crystal causes it to vibrate millions of times every second. This vibration is consistent and can be used as a base against which to measure the passage of time. Quartz technology developed in the 1930s and 40s, improved timekeeping performance far beyond the pendulum.

Atomic Clocks

Atomic clocks rely on the resonant frequency of certain atoms to help in the measurement of the passage of time with extreme accuracy. The energy change of an atom produces a regular pulse, which can be measured, quantified and counted.

The current SI standard for the passage of one second is the time taken for a cesium-133 atom to cycle through 9,192,631,770 of these energy changes.

Sundials

The earliest form of the sundial date from 3500 B.C. They used a stick called a **gnomon**, to cast a shadow across a dial which had been calibrated to tie in with the movements of the Sun. Useful on sunny days only, the sundial proved to be little more than an interesting ornament when the Sun didn't shine or night-time fell.

Candles

Candles that were known to burn at a steady rate were adapted to display the passage of time. Bands were marked down the side of the candles at roughly one-hour intervals.

Pendulum Clocks

The pendulum marks the point at which measurements of the passage of time began to become a little more accurate. A pendulum always takes the same amount of time to complete a cycle, almost regardless of the speed or duration of the swing. As the pendulum slows so the lengths of the swing shortens, which compensates for the drop in speed. This means that a release mechanism tied to the swing of the pendulum will operate Well, like clockwork.

Quartz Digital Clocks

Greenwich Mean Time and Universal Time

Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) was calculated from 0° degree longitude at the Royal Observatory at Greenwich in England. The plan was to avoid confusion over variations in local time by calculating it from this one spot. Originally, 00.00 GMT was at noon, but this was changed in 1925 so that the day began at midnight. Unfortunately, not everyone kept up and confusion reigned once again. In 1928 the International Astronomical Union decided to replace Greenwich Mean Time with Universal Time, which for practical purposes differs from GMT in name only. The term GMT is still used by English speaking navigators.

Astronomical Measurements

The universe is incomprehensibly vast, a fact that was not truly appreciated until relatively recently. In order to interpret the vastness of space mathematically, it became necessary to figure out new ways of measuring it. Because we have a good idea of the speed of light in a vacuum, it seemed that the distance traveled by light during a set period of time might be a useful way of measuring distances in space.

Computer Wars

By David Beagan

It is now time to take a fresh look as the true basis of America's status as the world's only superpower. When I was a youngster, I imagine it was the early 1970s, I remember hearing that in the future, wars would be fought by computer. Even though I didn't understand how the two sides might conduct the computer war, it seemed a bit absurd to me. I thought that whichever side lost the computer war, could still just attack with conventional warfare anyway. Why would both side agree to abide by the outcome of the virtual war?

Looking back from today's perspective, I think my reasoning was sound. But what I couldn't have anticipated back then was that the computer would become inextricably linked to all aspects of the infrastructure that we depend upon for daily life. The electrical grid, including nuclear power plants, and innumerable agencies and offices both governmental and private, are built upon a nervous system of interconnected computer networks. The spinal cord of that network is of course the internet. If this computer network suddenly stopped working, the world, at least the modernized western world, would be reduced to third world conditions.

In the early 1980s, a computer game know as Core Wars emerged in academic computer science circles. The object of this game was for computer programs to compete for control of a computer. In the 1990s as the internet emerged as a ubiquitous tool for all computer users, the pranksters and bad guys started playing a game of core wars for real. While computer viruses and other bad programs existed before this, infecting their targets through floppy disks and computer bulletin boards, the internet raised the stakes by an order of magnitude.

Every day, every hour, every second, hackers are probing each our individual computers, but more importantly, probing the computers of businesses, governmental agencies, and the U.S. defense department. You could say that the war has already started. The nature and extent of the defense departments internetwork and its connectedness to the internet would only be a matter of speculation. We have to believe that critical defense department systems have a very controlled and limited access from the outside internet at large. The computer network servers and the connections that comprise this defense department network must be physically isolated from all other networks. But it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility that some wireless crossover connection could come into existence if some key employee of the government were to be compromised by groups that wish to harm America. Once there is this physical network

breach, one which may go undetected, then the capability for a harmful entity to wreak havoc with America's defense becomes merely a matter of computation and resourcefulness.

We would like to believe that our governmental institutions, that exist for the purposes of protecting us, have the best of technology and the best people implementing and executing that technology. But the sobering fact is, as the attempted Christmas day bombing of flight 253 has shown, that our people and computer systems failed us. The seemingly simple act of discovery, of connecting the informational dots spread across disparate information databases, somehow did not happen. It was only the attempted bombers inexperience and the passengers quick action that averted disaster. If the governmental agencies had stopped the plot, perhaps revoked the attempted bombers visa, we the public would probably never had known about this plot. Other similar plots may have been stopped too. But whatever was different about this one somehow allowed it to get through. Therein lies the problem. There can be a thousand successes in apprehending all manner of potential attacks. But if just one slips through, then they get us. And of course an additional challenge is that there are people who are willing to sacrifice their lives to inflict damage. Thomas Jefferson could never know how true his words would become, "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance."

All failings aside, this shows us that expert application and execution of computer technologies is at the heart of America protecting its freedom. We are not yet in the full computer war era. But now we can see the path to such an era. The minor skirmishes have broken out all over. We can imagine a dark world where chaos rules and the hackers and foreign entities have virtually free reign to disrupt the computer ecosystem. We can also imagine a world where the good guys are able to squelch the hackers and establish a truly safe computing infrastructure. The more realistic outcome is that there is a constant "arms race" where it is always a struggle to stay one step ahead of the evil ones. America's continued preeminence as the world's superpower is fully dependent on its ability to patrol the world's computing infrastructure.

Where man might stop, the computer goes on, for computers know no moral code.

– Boris Raushenbakh

Recent Advances in Medical Field That Have Changed Our Lives

Niru Prasad, MD

Modern technologies, advances in medical research field, gene therapy, new updated vaccines for prevention and treatment of medical conditions and several other research towards better living have all contributed towards better, healthy, life styles for us in the 21st century.

Accidents and injuries are the 2nd leading cause of death following heart attacks. They are now more easily prevented and treated early following guidelines of recent advances in trauma life support. There has been great improvement in the medical research field towards vaccines, gene therapy, bone marrow transplants and treatment of cancers and strokes.

Tremendous advances in computer science technology in the 20th and 21st centuries have enabled us to do on-line courses, medical reviews, as well as gain knowledge on the advances of medicine.

The major surgical advances in field medicine have improved the quality and longevity of our lives; some of these are brain cataract surgery, cardiovascular surgery stent replacement for

coronary artery blockage, cardiac by-pass surgery, procedures for aortic mitral valve repair, and resection of aortic aneurysm. The survival of patients following heart attacks have increased due to defibrillators and improvement in basic advanced cardiac life support.

Our quality of life has improved tremendously due to early diagnosis and surgical treatment of upper and lower extremity injuries. Improved modalities in total hip and knee replacement have enabled us to walk and perform normal physical activities at even at a late age. One of the greatest fears of life is losing our vision as we grow older. The two major causes of progressive blindness are macular degeneration and cataracts. New advanced treatment for preventing blindness in macular degeneration include gene therapy and intra ocular steroid infusion in posterior eye chambers. These new technologies for cataract surgery have improved our vision and our quality of life.

Despite recent advances in the medical field however, healthy living always involves healthy diet, active physical activity, and thinking positive.



Mental Exercise

Figure It Out

By David Beagan

Time on Earth

In an episode of Twilight Zone a man taken prisoner by Aliens and whisked away to outer space. The man asks what time it is? The Aliens respond that there is no time in space. The man says just tell me what time it is on Earth. And the Alien responds that it is 12:00 noon on earth. What is the fallacy here?

Win, Place, Show

You need to find the three fastest horses out of a total of 25 horses. You don't have a stopwatch and so must determine horses speed by racing them. Assume that each time a horse races, it always runs at a consistent speed. The track for racing the horses allows five horses to race at a time. How many races does it take to find the three fastest horses?

Roman Math

Take sixteen matchsticks and form the calculation:

$$I + II + III + IIII$$

If you add this up, one plus two plus three plus four, it totals ten. Can you move just one matchstick, again using all sixteen matchsticks and make a calculation that equals four?

Tri-Bond

What is it that is common about these three things:

Tom-Tom
Bongo
Snare

No Such Animal?

I heard the late Paul Harvey on one of his radio broadcasts mention the absurdity of someone saying they had a milking shorthorn bull. He asked how can a bull give milk? But a dairy farmer called and Mr. Harvey had to admit the laugh was on him, there is a milking shorthorn bull. Why?

Twisted Time

Two sisters are talking to one another on the phone. Both are in the U.S., one sister in an East Coast State, the other in a West Coast State. One

sister asks what time it is. The other sister says, "That's funny; it's the same time here." Both their clocks are working perfectly set correctly for their time zones. How is this possible?

Answers

Time on Earth

There are 24 time zones on earth. From outer space, any of the time zones could be considered equally valid.

Win, Place, Show

Seven races will do it. First race all the horses, in five races. And then in a champion's race the five winners race to determine the fastest overall. Now the second and third fastest can be determined by one more race by picking the right horses for the seventh race. This race includes the second and third place finishers from both races that the champion raced in. And one more horse for the seventh race. The second place finisher in the champion's race, in his first race had a second place finisher. This horse needs to be in the seventh race too. These five horses race, with first and second in this race being the second and third fastest overall.

Roman Math

$$- I - II + III + IIII$$

Tri-Bond

All three are kinds of drums.

No Such Animal?

Milking Shorthorn is a breed of cattle. This breed has both males and females. So there is a milking shorthorn bull, but the bulls don't give milk.

Twisted Time

One sister lives in the western part of the Florida panhandle (Central Time) and the other sister lives in an eastern portion of Oregon (mountain time). The Florida sister has turned her clock back an hour for Daylight Savings Time, but before the other sister needs to. They share the same time for an hour.

The Rise and Fall of World's First Superpower

By Bala Prasad

One cannot discuss the concept of world superpowers without first having a basic understanding of the rise of the world's first superpower, the Holy Roman Empire, as well as of its fall. It all started in 800, when Frankish king Charlemagne travelled to Rome to provide assistance to Pope Leo III. In a ceremony in St Peter's, on Christmas Day, Leo was due to anoint Charlemagne's son as his heir; instead, the pope placed a crown on Charlemagne's head and acclaimed him emperor. It was this public alliance between the pope and the ruler of a confederation of Germanic tribes that launched the concept of the new Holy Roman Empire (although the Holy Roman Empire only becomes formally established in the next century).

During the next century, when Pope John XII needed help against his Italian enemies, he appealed to a strong German ruler, just as his predecessor had done. The coronation of Otto I by Pope John XII in 962 marked the beginning of an unbroken line of Holy Roman emperors lasting for more than eight centuries. Otto I did not call himself Roman emperor, but his son Otto II used the title - as a clear statement of western and papal independence from the other Christian emperor in Constantinople.

Otto and his son and grandson (Otto II and Otto III) regarded the imperial crown as a mandate to control the papacy. They dismissed popes at their will and installed replacements more to their liking (sometimes even changing their mind and repeating the process). This power, together with territories covering much of central Europe, gave the German empire and the imperial title great prestige in the late 10th century.

But, of course, subservience was not the papal intention in reinstating the Holy Roman Empire, and a clash was inevitable. The struggle for dominance between emperor and pope came to a head in two successive reigns, of the emperors Henry III and Henry IV, in the 11th century.

In 1046 Henry III deposed three rival popes, and over the next ten years he personally selected four of the next five pontiffs. But after his death, in 1056, these abuses of the system evoked a rapid reaction. Pope Nicholas II, elected in 1058, initiated a process of reform

This time Henry's response was more aggressive. He summoned a council which deposed the pope and elected in his place the archbishop of Ravenna (as pope Clement III). Henry marched into Italy, entered Rome and was crowned emperor by this pope of his own creation. Meanwhile the real pope, Gregory, was living in a state of siege in an impregnable Roman fortress.

Gregory appealed for help to his vassals the Normans, recently invited by the papacy to conquer southern Italy and Sicily. A Norman army reached Rome in 1084, drove out the Germans and rescued Gregory, who subsequently fled south with his rescuers.

which exposed the underlying tension between empire and papacy. One year later, Nicholas condemned abuses within the church, including simony (the selling of clerical posts), the marriage of clergy and, more controversially, corrupt practices in papal elections. Nicholas then restricted the choice of a new pope to a conclave of cardinals, thus ruling out any direct lay influence. Imperial influence was his clear target.

In 1059 Nicholas II took two political steps of a kind, unusual at this period, which will later be commonplace for the medieval papacy. He granted land, already occupied, to recipients of his own choice; and he involved those recipients in a feudal relationship with the papacy, or the Holy See, as the feudal lord.

This time the beneficiaries were the Normans who were granted territorial rights in southern Italy and Sicily in return for feudal obligations to Rome. The pope, in an overtly political struggle against the German emperor, was playing a strong hand. The issue will be brought to a head within a few years by another pope, Gregory VII.

Pope Gregory seized political control by decreeing, in 1075, that no lay ruler may make ecclesiastical appointments. Powerful bishops and abbots were henceforth to be pope's men rather than emperor's men. Thus spawns "the investiture controversy," being in essence a dispute over who has the right to invest high clerics with the robes and insignia of office.

The nine-year struggle between Pope Gregory VII and the emperor Henry IV provides a vivid glimpse of the political role of the medieval papacy. Henry IV, alarmed at the demands being made over investiture, sent a threatening letter to the pope in 1076. The pope responded by excommunicating the emperor. By his public penance at Canossa, Henry had the excommunication lifted. But the truce was short-lived.

German princes opposed to Henry IV elected and crowned, in 1077, a rival king - Rudolf, the duke of Swabia. Rudolf and Henry engaged in a civil war, which Henry won in 1080. By then the pope had recognized Rudolf as the German king and had again excommunicated Henry.

Clement III returned to Rome and reigned there with imperial support as pope (or in historical terms as antipope) for most of the next ten years. Urban II, the pope who preached the first crusade in 1095, was not able to enter the holy city for several years after his election. Unrest prevailed in Rome, and uncertainty in the empire, until the Hohenstaufen win the German crown in 1138.

And that, good reader, is a brief glimpse of the rise and fall of the world's first superpower, the Holy Roman Empire.

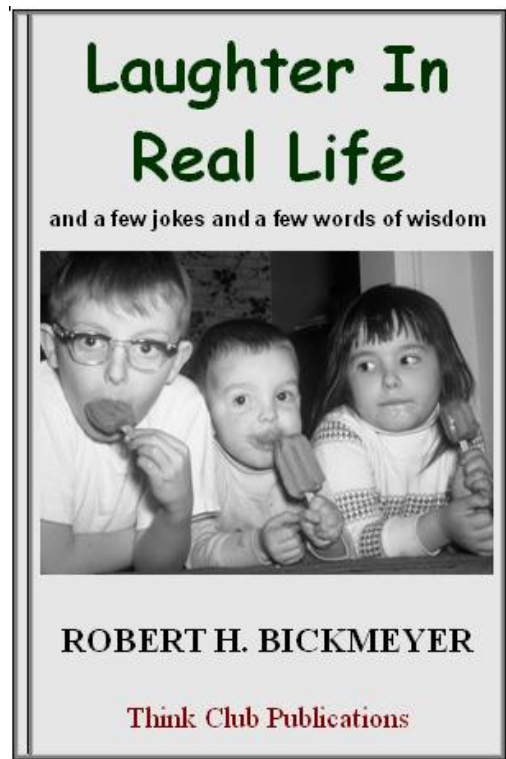
Sincerely, *Bala Prasad*

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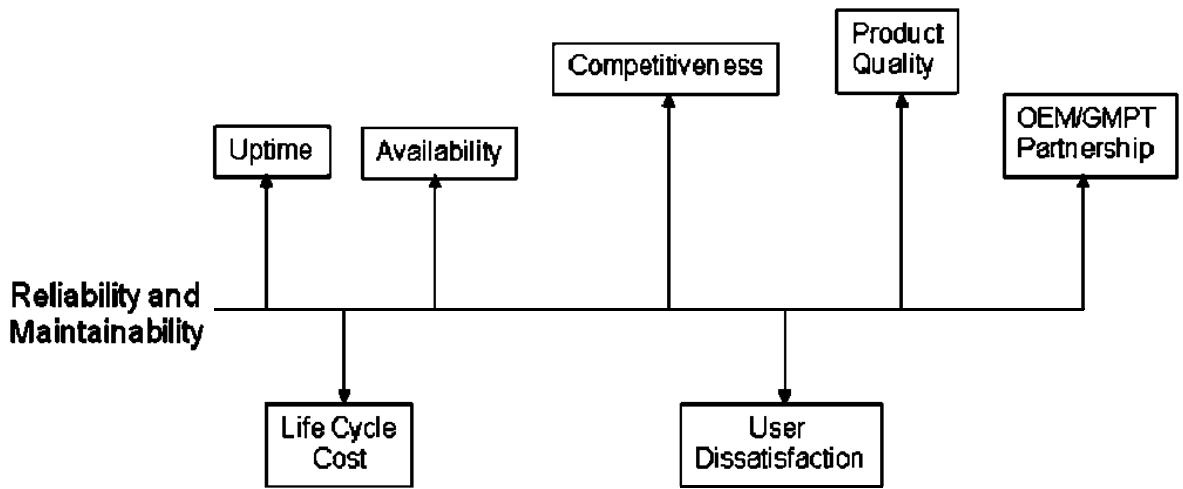
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