
A User's Guide to the Century

THE «NEW world order» of the twenty-first century holds the promise of shared prosperity . . . and also the risk of global conflict. This is the paradox of our time. The scale of human society—in population, level of economic production and resource use, and global reach of production networks—gives rise to enormous hopes and equally momentous challenges. Old models of statecraft and economics won't suffice. Solutions to our generation's challenges will require an unprecedented degree of global cooperation, though the need for such cooperation is still poorly perceived and highly contested by political elites and intellectuals in the United States and elsewhere.

Our world is characterized by three dominant patterns: rapid technological diffusion, which creates strong tendencies toward technological and economic convergence among major regions of the world; extensive environmental threats resulting from the unprecedented scale of global economic activity and population; and vast current inequalities of income and power, both between and within countries, resulting from highly diverse patterns of demography, regional endowments of natural resources, and vulnerabilities to natural and societal disruptions. These characteristics hold the possibilities of rapid and equalizing economic growth, but also of regional and global instability and conflict.