



Perspectives

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## THE 76-YEAR CENTURY

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**T**he 20th century started late and ended early, framed not by chronology but by conflict. It opened in June 1914 with the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. And it ended with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2nd a year ago.

Taken alone, these two events are remarkable for their relative inconsequence. Few could have imagined that the death of an unloved duke in a remote corner of Europe would move all the world to war. And Saddam's initial attack on an oil-rich micro-state caught Washington planners by surprise and gained only passing mention in the news. Yet each event triggered far larger forces, changing the global order forever.

The bomb that killed Ferdinand also dealt a mortal blow to the tottering monarchies governing most of the continent. By 1930, politicians, not kings, headed a 20th century Europe of nation-states carved by conflict from the 19th century empires. Another world war and the century of nation-states ossified into the bipolar world of the superpowers.

Now the world has changed again. Saddam lost the Gulf War, but not before his tanks blasted a weakening superpower order into oblivion. Saddam's southern ambitions were restrained for decades by a Soviet Union engaged in a geopolitical balancing act with the United States. But *perestroika* and growing internal crises turned Soviet concerns inward. The Soviet Union abandoned its superpower role, freeing Saddam and others to pursue old desires.

We entered a new century as Saddam's army crossed the Kuwaiti border. Washington optimists talk of a new uni-polar world dominated by the United States, but it remains to be seen whether the world must have at least two superpowers for any superpower to exist at all. It is as if the United States and the USSR occupied opposite poles of a geopolitical magnet, with other nations coherently aligned between them like so many iron filings. Now one pole is disappearing, and the pattern is dissolving into complex, unpredictable uncertainty. Freed of external threats, cold war allies are rediscovering old enmities. And old adversaries like the two Germanys are finding new common ground. Last year, Francis Fukuyama, a policy planner for the U.S. State Department published an essay entitled "The End of History?" in which he predicted the defeat of communism and the triumph of

Western liberalism. In fact, we are experiencing a return to history on a global scale, as slumbering national and regional rivalries held in stasis by the superpower conflict reawaken.

We are entering a new hyper-polar century dominated by the many and ultimately by no one. It will be a world of complex and constantly changing alliances and rivalries within multiple spheres of influence and endeavors. Allies in one sphere may be competitors in another, just as Japan and the United States are trade rivals and security partners today.

The United States will remain a dominant economic and military force in this hyper-polar century, but this dominance may prove insufficient to influence the course of events to any meaningful degree. Translating power into useful action will be harder than ever, for the consequences will be impossible to predict. Already, the victory of Desert Storm is dissolving into the uncertainty of the outcomes it has unleashed around the globe. That uncertainty is the signature of a century arrived a decade early to change the global order forever.

## COLOMBIAN EDUCATORS SAMPLE MULTIMEDIA

**F**ew new technologies have enjoyed the enthusiasm that greeted multimedia in educational circles. But the definition of multimedia and its uses in the classroom remain hazy. Research Fellow Andrea Saveri addressed these issues in a keynote speech at the Eighth National Conference on Information Technology in the Colombian University at the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, Colombia. The conference was sponsored by the Association of Colombian Universities (ASCUN).

Multimedia is not a technology, she said, but a collection of technologies that can be accessed in a unified way through a single, integrated platform. It also offers nonlinear information presentation and allows users to pursue multiple paths. Researchers and professors from all major universities in Colombia saw numerous demonstrations of educational technology's technical and theoretical capabilities. Ms. Saveri put such technology in perspective by discussing whether and why

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