

Letter from the “President of the United States:”

Last May, I received a report from the first governmental panel ever established to survey the long-range future, to think about developments that could represent major changes in the way the world works fifteen to twenty years ahead, and to make recommendations about near-term adjustments in policy that would be prudent in light of the panel’s findings. Their work was productive in the sense that it has helped me identify more clearly what worries me most deeply when I think about the future. This greater clarity leads me, in turn, to ask for the services of this new panel comprised of Americans of broad experience and vision in many areas of endeavor. Let me share with you now my thoughts and my thanks – in advance – for what I am sure will be excellent work.

The task of any American president is not only to meet the challenge of the hour, but to do everything possible to hand on the essential idea of our country – which I think we can agree to call “liberal democracy”—in the best possible condition. By liberal democracy, I mean a system of representative government based on the individual person as the fundamental unit of social accountancy and on the sovereignty of the people as the basis for the legitimacy of government. Some have argued that liberal democracy is the end of the line in terms of human political evolution. But, having examined the findings of the panel which precedes you, I am left with a deep concern that liberal democracy may in fact be faced with its most severe test yet, in light of a number of powerful long-term trends.

Let me illustrate this concern, in each of the areas examined by your predecessors.

In the field of military defense, we have achieved overwhelming dominance – but our style of warfare and our approach to the use of force is based on the requirements of a free society, and it may or may not work well against enemies who do not mass against us as armies, but who instead blend with the population even while bringing destruction among them.

In the field of science and technology, we are again at the forefront – but I sense that our knowledge may be outstripping our wisdom: in particular, bringing into view multiple challenges to the value of the individual as our primary unit of social value. In fact, perhaps even challenging the definition of what it means to be human.

In the field of economics, our country has made tremendous strides by leading the way towards the creative employment of globalization. But I worry that this process, if it continues at the present rate will lead to forms of economic organization that respond to the will of no government and of no people; that the ability of government to assure responsible behavior by those who hold economic power will be destroyed.

In the field of governance, despite our many imperfections we have nevertheless attained much of what our founders dreamed. But I also see that national governments everywhere

are subject to forces that erode their competence and push them in the direction of pooled sovereignty in multilateral organizations. I am concerned that this process will greatly attenuate the principle that governments are subordinate to people, and specifically, that it can erode the U.S. Constitution.

Perhaps you will agree with my concerns, perhaps not. But in the coming months, I ask you to examine in each of the areas I have identified, to see whether there are long-range trends which in fact constitute not only particular threats to our security and well-being, but also in a general sense a threat to the fundamental basis for our existence as a nation. I also ask that you present any recommendations you deem worthy for now, within the framework of our system and our political philosophy, and how we might deal with these challenges, in deciding exact actions I might take during my term.

In particular, I want to hear from you whether there are measures that I could set in motion that would deepen the capacity of the United States government to grasp the meaning of significant changes of the kind you will be studying, rapidly enough to encourage early deliberation.

All observers agree that the rate of change in all areas of life is accelerating, and that the ability of government to deal with change is increasingly challenged. I have always believed in the need to identify the most important challenges as far as possible in advance and to make choices early about how to influence them: something I have called Forward Engagement. This panel carries the process of Forward Engagement to its next level: examining the general impact of accelerating change on our first principles as a society. I look forward to your work under the guidance of my National Security Adviser, and to your report on November 1, 2001.