

The Role of Values

Vaclav Havel has observed that the end of Communism has brought to an end not just the 19th and 20th centuries, but the modern age as a whole. He characterizes the fall of Communism as a victory for life, human individuality and pluralism, over misplaced confidence in systems and social design. Our future lies not just in our abilities, but in the soundness and justice of our instincts and values. He refers to the defeat of Communism as a powerful signal coming at the 11th hour when we all know civilization is in danger.

I start with this point because there are notions around that the end of the Cold War is a signal that we can withdraw from the world, as if what happens in other places is now of concern only to the people who live there. This is seen in the rise of political fundamentalism in Canada, and it is certainly true in the current election race here in the United States.

The Need for Global Effort

You don't need reminding that global economic recovery can only be achieved by global effort, that the ozone layer can only be mended if we do it together, or that other common dangers surround us.

Is nuclear terrorism any less believable now, given the kind of political changes we've seen since 1988? Is the fact that per capita incomes in Africa are lower than they were in 1960 a problem for North Americans? Will there be refugees from war and poverty-stricken areas? Will there be violent leaders of desperate people? Will there be other dangers?

Of course, there will. But there are also unique opportunities that our two countries and others must seize.

At the end of the Cold War, the world is poised before different possibilities of future history. The two extreme versions are a potentially catastrophic fragmentation into rivalry and disorder on the one hand and the responsible promotion of the best in human potential on the other.

Working Together

In either version, countries and continents will be interdependent -- we will all be dragged down by waves of disorder or we will share the benefits of working together.

Just to be clear -- I do not mean that by working together we can solve every problem, ease every hardship, and create a perfectly predictable order through one more social design on a global scale. We can't. But we can create a framework for international co-operation based on the best of what we have