

# Climate Shifts Aren't Limited to the Weather<sup>1</sup>

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I have a simple view of governing today: We are in the middle of not one but three climate changes at once to which government must help citizens respond — and Donald Trump doesn't have a clue and China does.

Here is what I mean: We are in the middle of a change in the climate of the climate. We are going from "later" to "now." In the past you could fix any climate/environmental problem later or now. But today later is officially over. Later will be too late. At some point, the deforestation of the Amazon is not reversible.

We are the middle of a change in the "climate" of globalization. We are going from an interconnected world to an interdependent one, and in such a world your friends can hurt you faster than your enemies: Think what happens if Mexico's economy fails. And your rivals' falling becomes more dangerous than your rivals' rising: We will be hurt a lot more by China's economy tanking than its putting tanks on islands in the South China Sea.

And lastly we're in the middle of a change in the "climate" of technology. We're moving into a world where machines and software can *analyze* (see patterns that were always hidden before); *optimize* (tell a plane which altitude to fly each mile to get the best fuel efficiency); *prophesize* (tell you when your elevator will break and fix it before it does); *customize* (tailor any product or service for you alone) and *digitize and automate* just about any job. This is transforming every industry.

Governing today is all about how you prepare your society to get the most out of these three climate changes and cushion the worst. Sadly, that's not our society's priority right now. In the age of Trump we are treating governing as entertainment.

Some conservatives argue that's fine. The less D.C. does, the better. Let the market rule. I disagree. What actually made America great was a government that prepared the right soil in education, regulation, immigration, research and infrastructure, and a dynamic private sector that grew all kinds of flowers in that soil.

Which brings me to China. China takes governing seriously — in a cruel way and in an impressive way. Its leaders wake up every morning and ask themselves two questions. First, how do we stay in power? Their answer, which I find reprehensible, is: We'll use technology to repress our people. I think in the long run depriving China's people of freedom, a basic human right, will undermine their ability to realize their full potential.

But it has worked better than expected, up to now, because China's leaders are just as focused on asking a second question: What world are we living in? Which leads to: What are the biggest forces shaping this world? And what kind of national strategy do we need so our people can get the most out of these forces and cushion the worst?

They know we're in the midst of these three climate changes and have formulated a strategy — "Made in China 2025" — to thrive within it. It's a plan for building the infrastructure, investments, education and regulations that will enable Chinese companies to lead in supercomputing, new materials, computer-controlled machine tools, industrial robotics, space and aviation equipment — including drones — clean cars, clean energy, biomedicine and next-gen medical devices.

Only time will tell how much what China has wrong about governing will undermine what it has right.

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<sup>1</sup> [Article link](#)

By contrast, Trump hasn't even named a science adviser. He pulled out of the Paris climate accord without any input from scientists, and he proposed a budget for fiscal 2018 that eliminated the Department of Energy's innovation lab (the "Advanced Research Projects Agency — Energy") and slashed funding for all of our key national science and medical labs, which provide the basic research for the very next-gen technologies in which China is now massively investing.

He's spending the money instead on a wall against Mexico. Is there anything more stupid?

And then you watch the health care debate. And then you realize that in addition to the executive branch, one of our two parties has gone nuts. For seven years the G.O.P. made replacing Obamacare, which needs improving, its top goal, and when it finally controlled all the levers of power, it was clear that it had done no homework on a better plan or built any intraparty consensus for it. It was all a fraud.

And then you look at all the knife fights between rival Trump aides and you realize that none of these fights were over how to thrive in a world challenged by these three climate changes. They were all about who could get closest to and flatter our Dear Leader most. But our Dear Leader — as we saw in the health care debate — has done no homework on the future, either. He's been too busy promising to restore the past.

This is so dangerous. When the pace of change accelerates in climate, technology and globalization all at once, small errors in leadership navigation can have huge consequences. It's like a 747 pilot who enters the wrong navigational coordinates. You can find yourself so far off course that the pain of getting back will be staggering.

We have such a pilot. It is time for the adult Republicans and Democrats in Congress to come together and take the helm.