The History and Future of Planetary Threats: Fareed Zakaria's Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World

Welcome
SAFWAN M. MASRI

Speaker
FAREED ZAKARIA

Panelists
LAWRENCE R. STANBERRY
ANYA SCHIFFRIN

Moderator
WILMOT G. JAMES

LENIN ONCE SAID, "There are decades when nothing happens and weeks when decades happen." This is one of those times when history has sped up. In a virtual event, held on 8 December 2020, CNN host and best-selling author Fareed Zakaria discussed his new book, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*. Covering topics from natural and biological risks to the rise of "digital life" to an emerging bipolar world order, Zakaria helps readers to begin thinking beyond the immediate effects of COVID-19. The webinar was co-sponsored by the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP), Columbia Global Centers, Columbia University's Programs in Global Health at the Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University's Earth Institute, and The Academy of Political Science. It was the second event of The History and Future of Planetary Threats series convened by ISERP.

SAFWAN M. MASRI[1]: On behalf of all of us here at Columbia University and the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, I welcome and thank you for joining us. Today, we'll be hearing from journalist, political commentator, and author Fareed Zakaria, along with a distinguished panel of Columbia scholars. Fareed, Wilmot James, Lawrence Stanberry and Anya Schiffrin, it's really wonderful to see you all. Thank you, Fareed, for joining us on this really important occasion, the publication of your new book, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*.

I'll leave it to Fareed over the next 90 minutes to impart the 10 lessons he has learned. But if you'll indulge me, I'd like to share a brief impression, or two, after having read his new book.

[1] **SAFWAN M. MASRI** is Executive Vice President for Global Centers and Global Development at Columbia University and a Senior Research Scholar at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

We all know one isn't supposed to judge a book by its cover, or a book by its title in this case, but Fareed issued a challenge to readers when he titled the book, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*. After all, the pandemic is very much alive. Accordingly, might it be premature, dare I say audacious, for Fareed to perform an autopsy on COVID-19 now?

In keeping with Fareed's approach to analyzing and explaining the issues of the day, the book's title, as well as the book's content, is gloriously counterintuitive. It is timely and spot on. Fareed concludes, rightly, that the global reset brought on by the pandemic isn't coming months from now—it appeared the first day the virus was let loose, or actually before that. Pre-pandemic, Fareed asserts, history was already being reshaped at an accelerated pace. This reshaping has been simultaneously exhilarating and unsettling. The result is that we now live in a world of extremes: extreme poverty and extreme wealth, extreme changes in the weather, extreme partisanship, extreme market fluctuations, extreme distrust and hostility towards institutions. Which leads me to the eleventh lesson I took away from the book.

Fareed makes an impassioned, full-throttled appeal for something that has become unfashionable these days: moderation. He challenges us to think carefully about the unintended consequences of our actions, and to strive to restore balance in an imbalanced world. One particularly salient lesson in the book for those of us in higher education is his contention that if we expect people to listen to the expert class, the experts also need to listen to the people.

The students who attend Columbia University, and our Global Centers as well, become members of the expert class. With that privilege comes responsibility. The acquisition of deep technical expertise is only half of the equation. We must also bring to our scholarship and future careers deep empathy for the people whom our expertise will impact. We have inculcated this ethos at the Global Centers since we opened the first one 11 years ago in Amman, Jordan—from where I'm speaking to you today, and where I've been since March.

Our purpose with the Centers is to promote and facilitate international collaborations, new research projects, and academic programming. The Centers are conduits for local, regional, and global knowledge, expertise, and networks. For us, cross-cultural engagement is not limited to academic exchanges. We place equal emphasis on engaging fully with the world, and are driven by a motivation to learn from, and with, the world.

I'm delighted to report that Fareed's talk today is being watched by our Global Centers' audiences and students in Amman, Beijing, Istanbul, Mumbai, Nairobi, Paris, Rio, Santiago, and Tunis. Columbia students are also tuning in from a number of other cities around the world, including Shanghai, Shenzhen, Seoul, Hong Kong, Singapore, Tel Aviv, London, and Athens, where we've established pop-up sites as a response to the pandemic—since visa and travel restrictions left many of our international students unable to travel to New York.

Before we hear from Fareed, I want to introduce Wilmot James, who will moderate today's proceedings. Dr. James is a Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy at Columbia. He is also a highly regarded member of our social sciences faculty, where he teaches a course on one of the most timely and relevant academic topics of our time: catastrophic risk. An academic by background, with a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Dr. James was previously a member of South Africa's parliament and Shadow Minister of Health. Dr. James is the author or editor of 17 books on topics ranging from public policy in South Africa, to increasing public understanding of science, to editing a collection of Nelson Mandela's presidential speeches. I could not think of a better person to engage Fareed Zakaria around the topics of his book than Wilmot James.

WILMOT G. JAMES[2]: Thank you very much, Safwan, for your most generous introduction, and for your comments. Also, thank you for describing how widespread the audience is for today—spread across the globe through the Columbia Global Centers. It's my great pleasure and honor to host today, and to discuss Fareed Zakaria's quite extraordinary book on the COVID-19 pandemic, which is set against a wide-ranging intellectual context that lies behind the wave of pandemics we've been witnessing over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This session today is the second in The History and Future of Planetary Threats series hosted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy. They are convenings to consider catastrophic risks and hazards in the following domains: geological, infectious disease, biological, environmental, chemical, extreme weather, radiological, and nuclear; or some combination of these. By catastrophic, we mean classes of events that could lead to sudden, extraordinary, widespread disaster beyond the collective capacity of national and international organizations and the private sector to control, causing severe disruptions in normal social functioning, heavy tolls in terms of morbidity and mortality, and major economic losses. In some events, it may well cause a change in the direction of history itself. COVID-19 is an example of events that fall into that class.

At our first session, we had the pleasure of listening to Dr. Ernie Moniz, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Chair of the Nuclear Threat Initiative and former U.S. Secretary of Energy under the Obama administration, speak about nuclear security today. Now we have as our second speaker, Fareed Zakaria, who will be talking about the pandemic. I cannot think of a better person to reflect on what we have learned from this pandemic, and for how we organize our lives, now and in the future.

I have been waiting for a long time for an occasion where I can sincerely say, without any intention to flatter, that the person I'm about to introduce requires no introduction. He is known worldwide as the host of GPS for CNN. He is a columnist for *The Washington Post* and a contributing editor for *The Atlantic*, as well as being a best-selling author. One of my favorite books of his is *In Defense of a Liberal Education*, which he published a while back. His most recent book, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*, is the subject for discussion today.

GPS is a weekly international and domestic affairs program that airs on CNN in the United States, as well as around the world on CNN International. Since its debut in 2008, it has become a prominent television forum, and a major point of reference for global newsmakers and for thought leaders. Fareed is regularly a host of primetime specials for CNN Worldwide, and frequently contributes his analysis of world events and public affairs to CNN.com.

It turns out that Fareed and I shared an institution, Yale University, where I was a Fellow of Southern African Studies in the mid-1980s at the same time he was there, though I didn't meet him then. We share in a British post-colonial experience that played out so differently in India and South Africa. We also share in the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, who left a powerful influence on the histories of both of our countries of origin.

I would like to start the conversation by asking a question that Safwan began to raise. Why would you be so moved to write a book on the COVID-19 pandemic only six months into the pandemic itself?

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[2] **WILMOT G. JAMES** is a Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP), College of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University.

FAREED ZAKARIA[3]: Thank you so much, Wilmot. It's a great honor and pleasure to be here. Columbia is one of the great jewels of New York. It happens to be one of the world's great universities as well.

Safwan and you summarized the book and the ambition perfectly. I'm always at work on some book. I was at work on another book—a big book on the age of ideological revolutions, when the politics of one age gives way to a new politics of another. I feel like we are living through one of those periods. I had been studying the periods around the Dutch Republic, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution in Britain to try to understand parallels. When COVID-19 happened, we all had the same experience with lockdowns and canceled travel. I thought I'd get to work zealously on the book, but I couldn't stop thinking about what COVID-19 was doing, the effects of the lockdowns and the economic paralysis, and I recognized that we were really in a unique moment.

When I was talking to a businessman friend in India, he pointed out that September 11 hadn't changed his life much at all. He said it was something between the United States and the Middle East. They got a few more X-Ray detectors in airports, but that was about it. Of the global financial crisis, he said they felt a bit of the effect of the downturn, but that was it. Then he said that every person in India has been affected by the pandemic. It occurred to me that this may be the first event in my lifetime that has affected every person on the planet in some way. That happens rarely.

I put the book that I was working on to the side, and thought about this incredible moment of history in the making. I started to jot down on a piece of paper the things that I thought were happening. I wouldn't look at any of the news of the day—none of the daily counts or debates about masks. I was trying to look out into the future. I did that every day for four-and-a-half months. I would get up at 6:30 in the morning to write, research, and read for about three hours.

I found myself seeing the world, as you said, already in the making, but intensified and accelerated by this process. It occurred to me that the particular course the pandemic took was not as important as the forces it had unleashed and the acceleration it had produced. It was going reshape the world—whether it ended up having two or three waves, or 12 months or two years to get done with. The wheels of history had been put in motion, and had started spinning faster. I wanted to describe what I was seeing.

JAMES: We are at the stage when there's a second wave. Vaccines are being rolled out. We're in another phase of the pandemic. In your book, you make a powerful argument for the importance of leadership to mobilize the capacities governments have to respond to a pandemic.

We know what Donald Trump has done wrong. In fact, he has shown no leadership on a national level. Now we have a new administration coming up. What advice or pointers would you communicate to the Joe Biden administration about how to lead the United States' considerable national capacity to prepare for the next wave that's coming, including the role of the vaccines?

ZAKARIA: The United States is a very odd country in that it's vast, messy, and ragged. As a result, you can find in it what you want. There are people who will look at it and see Silicon

[3] **FAREED ZAKARIA** hosts Fareed Zakaria GPS for CNN Worldwide and is a columnist for *The Washington Post*, a contributing editor for *The Atlantic*, and a bestselling author.

Valley and the greatest technologies in the world. Then there are people who will look at it and see that 10 or 15 percent in the richest country in the world doesn't have healthcare, or look at the poverty in parts of the inner cities. All of which is true.

Trump took a country with the best assets in public health in the world, and was not able to mobilize them toward a concerted effort. The first thing I would say is, you have to recognize that governing in America is hard. This is hard work because America is set up as a kind of anti-status society by design. This goes back to the colonialists' concerns about Great Britain and London. It has to do with a deep, anti-status libertarian tradition. You've all seen the flag with the rattlesnake that says, "Don't tread on me." That is, in a sense, the core of American nationalism. It is a fear of concentrated power.

Yet, what you need in this circumstance is concentrated, coordinated power. You need somebody who can corral together the three branches of government, the dozens of federal agencies, and the 2,900 separate local governments to coordinate healthcare policies. So, don't think this is going to be easy. It is intrinsically hard to get American government to work.

The second point I would make is, Biden has one element of great timing going for him, and one element of great caution to worry about. The first phase of this crisis required a public health response, and the United States handled it very badly. To be fair, most countries handled it badly. The countries that handled it well were the countries of East Asia, without any question, and a few countries in Europe. But with those exceptions, by and large the public health response has been deeply inadequate. It reminds us that this is a glaring problem in the makeup of almost all governments.

The second phase of this crisis, which we are now entering, is going to be dominated by therapies and vaccines. It is the private sector, not the public sector, that is driving the response. Here, I think, Biden will get lucky. You are going to have a much better response from the private sector than people anticipated. Think about the vaccine. Fifteen years ago, not so long ago, it would take about 10 to 15 years to develop a vaccine. We have now managed to do this in nine months. They essentially got the mRNA vaccines right in the first month, after which it's just been a process of testing. The science was available at an extraordinary pace.

Biden will benefit from this private-sector technology and science-led second phase. But here's the caution. While the United States screwed up the first phase of the crisis at a public health level, it handled the economic piece of this crisis very well with a massive $2.2 trillion stimulus program. To remind us, that is twice the size of the Barack Obama stimulus in 2008–2009, passed within half the time. It put a floor under the American economy and, to a large extent, the world economy. That's why we haven't seen some of the worst economic fallout that we expected. The United States, China, and Europe have all put floors under that.

We may end up in a situation where Biden is able to take advantage of the pharmaceutical companies, the private sector, and technology, and get the medical response of the second phase right, but not the economic part. This is because of the partisanship and the deadlock. Republicans might want the economy to do badly right from the start under Biden, as they did under Obama. Remember, we've seen this movie before. The Republicans were extremely tightfisted, and they tried to return to austerity very quickly under Obama.

Biden has to recognize that we are a little bit like cartoon characters who have walked off the cliff. There is a chasm here waiting for us if we do not extend economic measures. If that happens, even though we succeed on a public health footing, this crisis could careen out of control on an economic one.

JAMES: Thank you so much for that. You mentioned the star performance from Southeast Asia. We just completed a study of African performance on the pandemic and looked at five countries. Their performance in terms of containing the pandemic was quite good. There are some interesting lessons there. Would you comment on who you think the star performers were in Southeast Asia and why? And I'd like to hear if you're worried about India.

ZAKARIA: Let's start by acknowledging a certain degree of humility. As social scientists, we can't fit everything into a pattern. It's still early, and the data is uncertain. There are some places that make, frankly, no sense. Why Pakistan is doing better than India when they had virtually no response is a little unclear. In general, the developing world and countries in hot areas seem to have done much better than people predicted. Some of this may be the weather. Some of this may be a different strain of the virus. Some of it may be in-built immunities because people in these poor countries have not been as vaccinated and inoculated, and have not had as many antibiotics. So that's a caveat.

But in general, with the data we have it's absolutely clear that the countries that did best were Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong. I'm calling them all countries just for the sake of analysis. China does pretty well, but it started off very badly. So that's why I give it a mixed grade. What's striking about these countries is that they all acted aggressively, early, and intelligently. The aggressive and early are obvious. The intelligent piece was explained to me best by the vice president of Taiwan, Chen Chien-jen, a Johns Hopkins trained epidemiologist who ran the effort. He said the key to understanding how to handle a pandemic is for a very small number of people to get infected. Public health has to test people, trace people, and then isolate the infected and potentially infected. Virtually all countries have failed at that third phase. It's not the testing and tracing—some got that right. But the question is then: Can you remove those people so they don't infect the others?

Taiwan had mandatory quarantining of 14 days of anyone who was infected or potentially infected. That entire universe of infected individuals was only 1 percent of Taiwan's population—240,000 people out of 24 million. By isolating those people, Taiwan was able to achieve miraculous results with no lockdown. By isolating the 1 percent, you allow the other 99 percent to continue to have business as usual—with every now and then pulling out one more or 10 more people who are infected or potentially infected. By doing this, Taiwan was able to achieve results which are thus seven COVID deaths among 24 million people. To give you a comparison, New York State has 19 million people, and we have 36,000 COVID deaths. The United States has per capita 2,000 times as many deaths as Taiwan.

I'm using Taiwan because it's the best, but you see this pattern in East Asia in general. Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, China, Vietnam, and Japan all managed to do this. So then the question becomes: Why were they able to do this? If you were to generalize, you would say it's not the size of government—some are big, some are small. It's not the kind of regime—some were dictatorships, some like Taiwan and South Korea are raucous democracies. But they all have highly competent technocratic governmental institutions with bureaucracies that have a lot of autonomy, specialists who work there, and a culture of high performance. Because of all that and low levels of corruption, in general, you have trust between the public and these agencies. So when the government says to "put on masks," people put on masks. As I say in the book, the lesson is that it's not the quantity of government, it's the quality of government that matters. These East Asian countries by and large, with a little bit of variation to be sure, have

been able to do that. They've done it in poor countries like Vietnam. They've done it in middle income countries like China. They've done it in rich countries like Singapore.

JAMES: It's about the quality of state capacity and the speeds of response. It's about the level of social trust that has been accumulated over the course of time. And it's about leadership. I think, as Arthur Schlesinger once said in *The Cycles of American History*, it's maybe that love will smooth the way, but it's leadership that makes the world go around. I think that leadership qualities are the key chemistry, and you beautifully illustrate that in your book. Thank you very much for that.

I now turn to Larry Stanberry. Larry is an Associate Dean for International Programs, and he is Director of the Programs in Global Health at Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. He's a pediatrician and infectious disease expert. His work focuses on viral diseases and drug and vaccine development. He serves on numerous advisory boards and review panels, including the Vaccine Study Section and the Pediatrics Review Panel at the National Institutes of Health. Larry's authored over 200 scientific articles and chapters, and authored or edited seven books. His current work focuses on children's hospitals globally to prevent, detect, and respond to disasters and infectious diseases' pandemic potential.

LAWRENCE R. STANBERRY[4]: Thank you. It's a real pleasure to be able to have this conversation with you today. Clearly, I'm coming from a slightly different perspective. Reading your book, I love one of the quotes that you had in the section on lesson number four, "People Should Listen to the Experts—and Experts Should Listen to the People." It was the quote from the Dutch political scientist, Cas Mudde, in his definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups—"the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." It looks like we probably belong to the corrupt elite.

I'm quite concerned though about this complete erosion of public trust in the advice of experts. You mentioned the importance of technocratic driven governments in terms of controlling disasters—and we seem to be constantly on the verge of disasters. We have an even greater looming disaster than we are seeing with the pandemic in the form of global warming, which is going to have consequences well beyond the maybe 18 months we're going to experience the pandemic. In writing the chapter on listening to experts, you spent a very long time describing the problem and a very short period of time discussing the solution. What do we do to restore public confidence in experts?

ZAKARIA: You're absolutely right. In that chapter I was most dissatisfied with my ability to describe a solution, but let me tell you why. I think what I'm describing is a very deep structural problem. People think that it's just the elites and the people. What if the elites were a little nicer, and the people were to understand that they need to listen to experts and wear masks? It actually comes from a much deeper place. Over the last 30 years, the two forces driving change in the world have been globalization and the information revolution. Both have had this quality of turbocharging change, but massively privileging one group and dis-privileging or subjugating another group.

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[4] **LAWRENCE R. STANBERRY**, M.D., Ph.D., is the Associate Dean for International Programs and the Director of the Programs in Global Health at Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Basically, the digital elite, the cognitive elite, the "symbolic workers"—people who manipulate words, numbers, symbols, and images for a living—have benefited enormously from these changes of globalization and the informational revolution. They are running societies because the economies are becoming increasingly digital economies. The people who are not, are increasingly left behind—and not just economically. Construction workers are doing well for example. They are left behind in the sense that the master narrative of society is all about these cognitive elites and these urban elites. The structural forces that are driving these two groups apart are very profound. I do not know what mechanism to use to bridge this gap. I don't have an easy solution because of that. I think the onus is on the elites.

When Trump was elected, a rural person, smart guy, wrote a blog post describing his world. He wrote of how every day he gets up and watches the television. It's being beamed from some cool hip place like New York or San Francisco or Chicago. Then he watches a movie set in New York or San Francisco or Chicago. Then he listens to a song which comes out of New York or San Francisco or Chicago. He says that by the end of it, you just feel like you don't exist. That's the nature of the divide.

These forces are accelerating so fast that we are now entering a world of neural networks, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence. This means some guy is going to go to his doctor saying he has a problem. The doctor is going to feed the symptoms into the machine. The machine is going to tell us what is wrong and what is the therapy. The doctor is going to be able to understand what the machine is doing and interpret it. Imagine the guy, whose life is going to be changed because of something that a machine told a highly-credentialed urban elite to do. He's going to have to undergo chemotherapy, a surgery, or something like that because of a process of which he has no understanding or awareness. That's the world we are entering.

We have to get much better at understanding what life looks like. We have to get much better at empathy if we are going to manage to make these societies not fall apart.

STANBERRY: Thank you. In carrying along that theme, David Brooks in late November had an editorial in the *New York Times* on the topic. You both share a common view that we are experiencing an epistemological crisis at the moment. What is truth? There is the notion that there is a segment of the population that completely disregards information that is largely recognized as being true. The divide is along political lines at this point. You touched upon this in your book. This segment of the population is largely not college educated. They are living in non-urban settings. Their earning potential is much lower than others because of their level of education and because there are fewer well paid job opportunities in the places where they live.

In his editorial, Brooks mentioned a paper which was an assessment of happiness based on a U.S. government survey taken from 1972 up through 2016. They showed that for white people who are college educated, the level of happiness on a three-point scale—very happy, pretty happy, or not so happy—was rock steady over the last 30 years. White people who were not college educated showed a steady decline. They're not happy. They're not earning as much. They're disenfranchised. Interestingly, black people, college educated or not, have remained fairly stable in that regard. In our country at least, this seems to be particularly a white problem, and specifically a white male problem.

Then you look further at what's going on in the population to which we need to be listening, we find a disproportionate number of people dying from diseases of despair—suicide, drug overdose, and alcoholism. This population is voting, by and large, for Republicans. One of the comments you made earlier was that the Republicans, now that Biden is coming in, may delay

economic reforms that could benefit most importantly the very population that is voting for them. Part of the issue is that you have to feel safe in order to be happy, or to think about how you want to spend your life. If you're miserable and disenfranchised, you're not going to be able to do that. I think the divide that you've described is going to accelerate.

In your book you mentioned Denmark as having a safety net for people who lose their jobs. In the event of job loss people are still provided for through a government program. In this situation you are far less likely to have an angry disenfranchised segment of the population. In the United States, I can talk to people who buy into unfounded conspiracy theories forever about why vaccines are safe, but nothing is going to change if they don't feel safe and secure. So what can our government do? What can Biden do to try to close that gap? Is it an economic support system? Is it turning to socialism? Any thoughts?

ZAKARIA: You analyzed the situation exactly right. I would just add one twist. We've become such a marketized society, that these losses of income and the loss of an upward trajectory become hugely consequential. Think about what life used to look like 30 or 40 years ago. I talk about this in the book. If you went to a baseball game, whether you were rich or poor, we all sat in the same kind of seats. Today if you're rich you get air-conditioned boxes with catered food. If you're poor, you sit in the bleachers. If you go to an airport and you're rich, you essentially have a separate airport and separate lounges. There's a line in *Jerry Maguire* where the single mom is looking wistfully from her seat in coach at the first-class cabin, and the kid asks her what's wrong. She says, "First class, that's what's wrong. It used to be a better meal, now it's a better life." The sense that everything has been marketized is one observation I've made. But to your point, I think the central dilemma is that some strange combination of economic anxiety and cultural anxiety is fueling this. And you have to get at both. You can't just get at the economic anxiety. People don't feel culturally safe. This is the great insight of the Republican Party.

What happened, not just in America but throughout the Western world, after the 2008–2009 financial crisis—a crisis that was largely caused by the irresponsibility of the private sector? The spectrum moved not left economically, but right culturally. People got uneasy after 2008–2009. When you get uneasy, your first instinct is not economic. Your first instinct is to ask: Is my country still the same? Am I losing control of the character of my country? Who are all these people who are coming in? Why are they coming? Your concern about being culturally denuded and overwhelmed becomes more important than the economics.

People sometimes say that people don't vote rationally. Poor white people vote for the Republican Party—a party that is largely devoted to tax cuts, budget cuts, and things like that. It's not that they're being irrational. It's that they're voting their cultural interests and identity, not their economic interests. Frankly, a lot of wealthy, educated, urban people are voting for a party that is going to tax them more. That's not economically rational, right? But you're voting your cultural identity in that sense. We have to understand that. I think that's part of the challenge of making this work.

Biden has that capacity. I think he understands how to give people dignity, no matter where they come from. He is the first since Ronald Reagan to be elected president without an Ivy League degree. He comes out of the white working class. The challenge is that it's always easier to weaponize fear rather than hope. What Trump has done is to weaponize all these anxieties and is to say that it's all because of *those* people. And it's not just Trump. Prime Minister Narenda Modi does this in India. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan does it in Turkey. President

Vladmir Putin does it in Russia. In his own way, Xi Jinping is doing it in China. This is an age where a bunch of people are saying that they represent the pure people against the corrupt elites, and they are going to reach out to you directly. And that cultural arbitrage works very well.

We need to find more people like Joe Biden and Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton was the last Democratic president who really connected with the white working class. To add one level of complexity, part of this is going to be very hard, if not insoluble. Let me put it bluntly. The white working class in America has derived some of its status from the fact that, despite it was poor, it was one level higher than blacks. And this is very deep. This goes all the way back to the wonderful book by Edmund Morgan called *American Slavery, American Freedom* about Virginia in the eighteenth century. It points out that this is a consistent theme, which is why I think Obama, or a black family being in the White House, was so startling to so many people. That is part of the challenge. In the American context, there is a specific racial element here. But everywhere we face the same problem—cultural anxiety, not just economic.

JAMES: In that respect, South Africa has some similarities as well. This is a great moment to turn to Anya Schiffrin. She is the Director of Technology, Media, and Communications at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, where she teaches a course on global media innovation and human rights. She writes on journalism and development, as well as investigative reporting in the Global South, and has published extensively over the last decade on the media in Africa. More recently, she's become focused on solutions to problems of online disinformation and misinformation. She's the editor of a book called *Global Muckraking: 100 Years of Investigative Reporting from Around The World*, and also *African Muckraking: 75 Years of Investigative Journalism from Africa*.

ANYA SCHIFFRIN[5]: Thank you very much for having me. I'm honored to be in such illustrious company. I'd love to congratulate Fareed on being the first person to get the post-COVID book out, because I'm sure there'll be so many. You were obviously very disciplined to do it so quickly. I also hope you'll come back to teach at Columbia, especially since you're in the neighborhood. We'd love to have you back as an adjunct if you could spare the time.

I had the same impression as Lawrence. You talk so much about the need for trust, cohesion, and strong government, and the beauty of the Scandinavian model that we've talked about—not just Denmark, but also Sweden, where there's a safety net so people feel empowered to go start new businesses.

Something that was missing is a more in-depth discussion of redistributive policies. You talk about the National Health Service (NHS) in England, but that was the culmination of a fight from the socialists and the labor unions. I understand your point completely about cultural anxiety and fear of "the other." I also think that's been weaponized by demagogues, who then use it to distract from the fact that they're not necessarily providing income and opportunities for the disgruntled.

I really wanted to hear you talk a little bit about redistribution. We all love the big tech companies. You thank Google and the Schmidt family in your acknowledgements. But we have

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a lot of billionaires in this country that are not paying taxes. On paper, our corporate tax rate was among the highest in the world. But in reality, it's not collected. I wonder how you see redistribution as part of this picture. Given the constraints that Biden will face, what can be done? Or, are you giving up on that? Do you think it's just impossible? Are we going to have to let these zillionaires and huge companies carry on, and not get the tax revenue we're going to need to help the displaced?

ZAKARIA: What we really need in order to get government right is reformed government. The truth about the American tax code is that it's actually quite progressive. Why do I say that? If you look at European countries, European countries raise most of their money through a value-added tax, a 25 percent sales tax, which is highly regressive. America raises most of its money through the income tax, which is progressive. In fact, if you look at the numbers, the top 10 percent pay a huge amount of it—40 percent of all taxes are paid by the top 10 percent, roughly speaking.

It's not so much that the system is not progressive. It's that we have an incredibly corrupt and convoluted system because we raise money for elections through the private sector. We essentially have a fee-for-service mechanism where people can buy exemptions to the tax code or the regulatory code. The American tax code is 74,000 pages long, if you add in all the regulations, which compares to European tax codes that are 600, 800, or 1,000 pages long. So, it is partly the corruption of the code. We have a trillion dollars of tax expenditures—tax credits and things like that—which are provided to people. Almost all of this goes to the top half of the population, rather than the bottom half.

It is probably more accurate to characterize the American tax code as fairly progressive in terms of whom it taxes, but incredibly regressive in terms of whom it spends the money on. We spend very little money on the poor. We spend a lot of money on the middle class and a lot of money on the rich—in the sense of favors bestowed, mortgage deductions, employer-based healthcare, and things like that.

What we really need is to reform that system. We do need to tax the rich. We need to tax them more. I think that the point you're making is an important one. You don't need to change any of the tax laws right now. You just need rich companies and people to pay their fair share, which means IRS enforcement has to go up. We are at the lowest levels of IRS audit and enforcement in 40 or 50 years. Why is that? Because the Republican Party has savaged the budget of the IRS over the last 25 years.

There are so many areas where it's not a question of changing the tax code. It's that we have allowed all this leakage, all the slippage. But then I think we have to be honest. We have to focus more of that money to provide equal opportunity to people who are not getting it. That is not the American middle class. That is the American poor. Providing a write-off of all college loans is not the best expenditure of $1.5 trillion when you have the levels of malnutrition, childhood poverty, and all the things we have. That's where we need to focus the attention.

I think that one of the virtues of the Scandinavian model is this ability to stay open to the world and to market forces. As I said, in Denmark it's easier to hire and fire people. But in a sense, they're going to make that the golden goose that provides revenue. They're going to use that revenue to provide equality of opportunity. And that really means for the poor.

That has proven to be a very hard thing in the United States, partly because the poor are dispossessed politically. They don't vote. They don't write op-eds. They don't make campaign

contributions. As a result, their concerns are not front and center. As voting becomes easier in America and as more people vote, my hope is that you will see poor people and young people voting more, and representing themselves. Ultimately this is not going to happen as an act of charity. It's going to happen, as you pointed out, with people pushing.

Whatever you may think of the NHS, and I think it's a mixed bag, there's no question it happened because of people power—people asserting themselves in the 1940s. We need something like that in America right now. Otherwise, as you point out, only one side is weaponizing. I don't like weaponizing, but what's even worse is asymmetrical weaponization.

SCHIFFRIN: Fareed, thank you for that. I hope you start pushing for that reform and for better distribution of taxes. I used to co-teach a class on Panama Papers. We spent a lot of time looking at tax avoidance. The *New York Times* had an article on who has been in on the big sales of real estate in New York this last month. Every single person had a shell company to protect their identity.

ZAKARIA: The tax code is written to benefit the real estate industry, more than any industry in the country. There are great family fortunes that pass from one generation to the next in real estate with essentially no inheritance taxation.

SCHIFFRIN: Absolutely. For those who haven't read the book yet, Fareed Zakaria has a beautiful section about government and why it often doesn't work in the United States. For decades we've been trying to fix one of the biggest hubs for people in the country. He takes Penn Station as a case study, and why that has been sabotaged. I thought that was a wonderful section.

I'd like to turn to a topic that you don't really cover in the book, but which a lot of people are thinking about right now, which is the quality of information, disinformation, the role of our friends in tech, who have recommended extreme content for years now, and how that has come home to roost.

I've just finished advising a student capstone that looked at communication strategies around the world, including in many of the countries that Fareed talks about. In places like Taiwan, Vietnam, and South Korea, governments, which had trust from their citizens, were able to come out very early on with powerful messaging about COVID. That success engendered more trust in government. And in a way, Fareed, it's an exact case study of what you're talking about with the failures in the United States—of the decentralization, the mixed messages, and the confusion.

I think COVID has, once again, shown us what journalists always knew—quality information is important for the functioning of societies. Since the pandemic, audiences are doubling or tripling all over the world. People have been turning to trusted sources, such as the BBC and the *New York Times*, to get information. There's been, I think, a recognition of the importance of quality information and journalism.

But at the same time, we have seen a huge amount of disinformation being circulated on the tech platforms. The tech platforms have stepped up. They have tried to take a lot of this down, and they've redoubled their efforts. The result is everyone saying: They know how to take this stuff down. They know how to deal with this stuff. They could have done it years ago. Why did they let hate speech and incitement circulate in Burma, or Nigeria, or India? Why haven't they hired more content moderators? What is it going to take to get them to do what is socially responsible?

There's been lots of discussion in the United States about getting rid of Section 230, starting global supervisory boards, auditing algorithms, and all kinds of things. The European Digital Services Act is about to get revised. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is trying to force Google and Facebook to start paying for news. Google and Facebook have responded very strongly by sending out alerts to users in Australia saying they are going to stop showing local news if they have to pay for it. I'm oversimplifying a little bit.

We've been so engaged at Columbia in these questions about tech. How do we support quality information? What regulations do we need? Since you didn't have time to get to that in your book, I was hoping we can hear a little bit now.

ZAKARIA: I am learning as I go along on this because it's a very complicated problem. How do you privilege truth versus falsehood, and still believe in free speech and freedom of expression? I come from an old-school, liberal point of view that tends to believe—as John Stewart and all the great avatars of classical liberalism melded—that you want to allow a free rein of ideas, a free exchange of ideas, and a free debate of ideas, and let the best win.

But you're absolutely right. What we have seen in this new digital space is the ability for lies, rumors, conspiracy theories, and falsehoods to be accelerated and privileged. They have the quality of exciting us more, seducing us more, and tantalizing us more. When you marry it to the profit motive, algorithms are written in a way that they go farther and faster than other things.

It's a huge problem. It's undermining democracy. I don't know what the answer is. I think you're pointing to some of them. You could do a certain amount of content moderation. Though, when Twitter puts a notice on one of Trump's tweets, those tweets apparently get more noticed.

Is there a way to make the algorithms such that they are not privileging what is seen as lies, without having the government be the determiner of what is a lie and what is the truth? I'm very queasy about Mark Zuckerberg being the person who decides what is truth and what is falsehood. I would much rather it be some democratic system—a mechanism that comes out of democratic politics. I am a little bit contrarian on this. People ask: Why don't the tech companies take all this stuff down? I would like there to be a different system. I don't want to rely on the good judgment of Zuckerberg or Sergey Brin.

I would like to rely on the judgment of a democratic political system that creates laws or regulations which those people then have to dutifully follow. That seems to me to be the right direction to go. But how do you do it without getting into the business of determining truth and falsehood? I hope there's a way to make sure that these algorithms do not intensify or spread falsehoods. You can publish something, but that doesn't mean there should be encouragement for those things to go viral.

But look at the fundamental problem. As we speak today, the President of the United States is creating a black is white universe. In his universe, he won the election, it was stolen from him, and all that needs to happen is for the legislatures to overturn the results of those elections. It appears, on the basis of polling, that 70 to 80 percent of registered Republicans agree with him.

Should a bunch of liberal elites in urban areas come up with algorithms to quash these ideas? I think that is a recipe for a political explosion. That's what I'm grappling with. How do you do this in a way that doesn't seem to suppress views that are clearly held by large parts of

the population, though erroneously? Where is the line between truth and falsehood or between somebody's extreme opinion and another person's extreme opinion?

JAMES: That was absolutely fabulous. The points that you raised about the epistemology—what's truth, what's fiction, what are the tests, and how you go about regulating—are the challenges of our times. It is fundamental. I now want to draw Safwan and Larry back into this conversation, and to ask them what their views are on this.

MASRI: It's always fascinating, Fareed, to hear you talk, and to hear a conversation with Wilmot, Larry, and Anya. I feel incredibly fortunate, and I am walking away having learned so much.

I'm fascinated by your explanations, in the book and today, about East Asia and why East Asian countries have done so well. It's not about the regime. It's not about the population size. It's about having highly competent technocratic governments that are trusted by the people.

We've also seen successes in places like New Zealand and Australia. We've also heard and read a lot about the role of women in leadership in some of those countries, New Zealand being prominent amongst them. There's been a lot that has been studied, or at least concluded, in terms of trust of local government. Can you talk about the trust factors some more, but more broadly? Should we expect, for example, that local governments will play more of a role? What kind of lessons can we draw from countries that were able to contain the virus? What's transportable? What's not?

I loved your lesson eight, "Globalization Is Not Dead," which was very reassuring for somebody like me. Everything that I do is about global. I'd love to get your thoughts on these issues.

ZAKARIA: Safwan, you've isolated the crucial question with regard to what makes these governments work. It's important to understand what kind of trust. It's not just trust. There's a great book that Edward Banfield wrote in the 1950s, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. The term he came up to describe Southern Italian society was "amoral familialism." Basically, mafia. I will trust my kith and kin, I will trust the people around me, and I will trust nobody else. We don't want that kind of trust. What we are talking about is trust in institutions and in rules. The ability to extend your trust beyond kith and kin to rules, to contracts, to institutions, to procedures, and to experts.

MASRI: And to science.

ZAKARIA: And to science, exactly. What is it that builds that? One of the crucial elements here is the absence of corruption. If you can't get corruption out of the system, it is very difficult to make people believe in those institutions or those rules, because they see those institutions as predatory. They see those rules as mechanisms for that predatory behavior. It's not an accident, I think, that what you've seen in all of these countries is a much greater functioning of quality institutions, technocrats, and not much corruption.

You don't have to be like Singapore. Singapore is off the charts. They pay their ministers like investment bankers. They pay their cabinet secretary. Everybody in Singaporean government is paid well. So there's no corruption. If you look at a place like Taiwan or South Korea, 40 years ago these were very corrupt places. But they did reform, and they did go through a process where they privileged technocracy, expert opinion, and things like that. We don't think

about globalization as the globalization of ideas, of best practices, or of examples. A lot of what happened here is that people are learning.

One of the things we can do is force some of these countries to understand it is not God given that there has to be corruption. Taiwan was as corrupt as Jordan. Why was Taiwan able to reform, and why is Jordan not able to reform? Why is India not able to reform? That seems to me at the heart of this issue. If you can't get around that, we are still in the bad kind of social trust. The trust of your family, and not the trust of experts, rules, institutions, and science.

MASRI: Why is it that some countries are able to deal with the issue of corruption and others are not?

ZAKARIA: In the book I tried to go back to Max Weber, and the paternalistic societies that created these original bonds, which have weakened over time. One of the things that seem to make a big difference is crisis and failure. If you look at South Korea, the experience of the Korean War—the threat that came from there and the pressure from the United States—created an environment that helped that happen. In his book, *The Rise and Decline of Nations*, Mancur Olson points out that Germany and Japan, because they lost the war, adapted their institutions and reformed them much more than a lot of the countries that won the war, like Britain, which retained a lot of its old sclerotic systems.

Part of it is the ability to learn from failure and from crisis. One thing we can do, and that does seem to matter, is pressure from the outside. If all you're looking at is your little world, it's always easy to say that things are better now than they were 10 years ago, or things are better in Aman than they are in Baghdad. That's not the relevant comparison. We have to broaden the lens. We have to make people realize that you can benchmark against the best in the world. That pressure of best practices, globalization, may be one of the things that helps.

At the end of the day, leadership matters more than anything else. I used to see Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, when he would come to the United States. To the end of his life, he would always fly first class and he'd take two seats. But he would never use a private plane. To him, it was a symbol of government corruption—that the government can afford private planes, but the people don't have food to eat.

JAMES: A number of fundamental points were made in this discussion. One had to do with developing and upscaling the capacity of countries to generate revenue for public spending. The second has to do with the reduction and elimination of corruption. Speaking as a former politician, two things are quite important for that.

First you need bold politicians to tackle the question of corruption because of the scale of entrenched interest in corrupt systems. It's not an easy thing to tackle. You have to tackle it with sufficient political backing. And you have to have an element of bold leadership, which is the point that Fareed was making.

The second thing that's required are systems of transparency, both domestic transparency and global transparency. In the end, to build trust in government you need to build systems of trust. Trust is earned by government keeping its promises. That is best activated in the noisy system of democracy. Citizens have the right to mobilize. They have the right to vote. They can use the resources at their disposal to make governments accountable. That's fundamentally important. Governments have to be accountable.

ZAKARIA: Do you think the transparency imposed by international lenders, organizations, and countries helps? Or is it easy to turn that into a cudgel, and say, "We're not going to listen to the imperialists"?

JAMES: It helps if it's tied to a package of assistance and a partnership. If you use an index for corruption, and require countries to tackle corruption before granting aid, I think that's one way of building it in. A lot of what's happening in the world are partnerships—shared agreements, sharing of expertise, and so on. It's quite important to build in the extent to which countries make transparent progress in meeting goals that are set. Everybody agrees that corrupt systems are bad. If built into agreements, I think it works. If not, then it's simply an outside and imposed measure that's seen as serving the interests of the West.

I want to give Larry a chance to speak on the question of epistemology and truth, because of his science background. The entire biological architecture that we have today, which serves humanity so well, rests on the theory of evolutionary biology. Yet, so many people in this world simply don't believe it. So much of science is of great benefit to humanity. Science can also cause great harm. Therefore, the knowledge base of that science is something of great human value. How do we make progress on fact- and evidence-based science?

STANBERRY: Fareed, you described the scientific process in your book. Science is inherently a self-correcting mechanism. We do studies, and we publish the results. Sometimes we get it right. Most of the time we get it right because of peer reviews. People look carefully at how the work is done, but not always. You can't build a solid system and continue to follow science that has turned out to be flawed. It will collapse because the fundamentals aren't solid enough to support whatever you're trying to build on top of that science.

There was a quote in your book about pulling the hood off—we're just another group of clerics. I've never thought of science as a religion, but I suspect some people could view it that way. I think, as you point out in your book, it falls to people like me. It probably falls to all of us who are involved in intellectual work, but certainly to those who are in the qualitative sciences, to try to have the public better aware of the processes. This isn't fake news. This is rigorous research that is looked at, as you point out, by technocrats who are well-educated and able to judge.

You pointed out early on that it's taken less than nine months for the vaccine. I was aware of the Pfizer data on 17 November. That was the same day as the first case of COVID-19 in Wuhan. One year later, we had a vaccine that worked. That's never happened before. That's science. Pfizer's motto is about science serving people, "health for all." But it's a process. It's not witchcraft. It's our job to find ways to explain this in a way that people understand. It should not be controversial.

JAMES: Thank you very much. The following audience question, Fareed, reads: Martin Wolf, the economic editor of *The Financial Times,* stated that in handling the COVID-19 crisis, countries with currencies pegged to the dollar will face the risk of devaluation of their currencies due to inflation from printing. What is the risk of that happening, and how can that be mitigated?

ZAKARIA: For the most part, we are at a time when countries that can are going to issue a lot of debt. I think we are going to go beyond what anybody has ever seen before, largely because

there is a very powerful political and moral consensus that people have suffered for no fault of their own. There are massive declines in demand in travel, tourism, and economic activity everywhere. It's an act of God, if you will. As a result, governments are going to be much more comfortable doing it.

There will be a huge divide between the governments that can issue debt and those that can't. Again, this is one of those great areas of inequality that I worry about, because you are going to have governments like the United States, the European Union, Japan, China, Switzerland, and Britain that will be able to issue debt. I don't think that will be a huge problem. All the others will rely on short-term debt issued in a currency they don't control. They may face a very different world. I think that's the real worry. You are going to see a real world of haves and have nots—a real division.

I think that the impulse behind the question is based on the idea that the currency will weaken, inflation will go up, and interest rates will rise. I don't think we're in that world. I think we are in a world of new zero interest rates, and we are going to be in a world like that for a long time. The data overwhelmingly shows that for the last 25 years, every central bank in the world has been surprised by the decline, if not the disappearance, of inflation.

If you go back to the point I was making, two of the biggest forces in the world right now are globalization and information technology. They have both acted as global deflation machines. On the one hand, globalization is pumping down the price of whatever it is you're making because somebody is making it cheaper somewhere in the world. Information technology is constantly putting pressure on prices. Think about the cost of a computer. It keeps going down and down as it gets more and more powerful. The result of this has been the disappearance of inflation.

In such a world, you have many problems. The biggest problem is that labor has no pricing power. This is the greatest challenge we face. People who work with their hands do not have pricing power. As a metaphor for what I'm describing, look at what Uber has done to the pricing power of a taxi driver anywhere in the world. Therefore, it's difficult to get hyperinflation and the massive devaluation of currencies. The dollar may go down a bit, but remember the dollar's been going up almost uninterruptedly for 25 years. If it goes down for a couple of years by 20 or 30 percent, prices find some stability. I don't think that will be a huge problem.

JAMES: There are a number of questions about a different connection between government, leaders, and citizens. Earlier, you said that we should get a lot better at empathy. If you can, as a final comment, say something about what that means.

ZAKARIA: The biggest danger of a merit-based system and a meritocracy—I'm a product of this meritocracy, and probably everybody on the panel is a product of this meritocracy—is that you tend to believe a little too strongly that you are where you are because you deserve to be there. We did well on the tests. We got good grades. We got the right jobs. We did well in our performance evaluations. And so, we are where we are for objective and justifiable reasons.

Now, what that means is that the person who's not there, who is in a very different place in such a system, is also in his or her place for justifiable reasons. In other words, we deserve our good status, and they deserve their bad status. That is a very pernicious way to look at the world. It is a way of looking at the world that robs you of empathy.

I think the more accurate way to look at the world is: We may have had some talent. We also had a lot of good luck. We had fortunate circumstances. and each of us know what those

are. Warren Buffet often says the biggest stroke of luck for him was that he was born in the United States. Somebody with his talents born in Bangladesh would be out picking rice, or something like that. The ability to analyze stocks is not particularly valuable in rural Bangladesh. Luck and an extraordinary combination of circumstances may have led you to be in one place. It's important to understand that same process is true on the other side.

Growing up in India, I would meet so many smart people. I would think to myself that if this person had a little bit of education, he or she could be an engineer, a doctor, or an entrepreneur. You see people like that all the time in countries like India, and South Africa, and Kenya. It's a way of reminding yourself of the ancient roots of all great religions—in the eyes of God, we're all the same. I think we've lost sight of that. We, in the cognitive elite and upper echelons of the meritocracy, need to commit to the idea that we don't deserve our place in some deeply moral sense. There has to be a system to sort talent. This is the one we have. It doesn't make us blessed, and it doesn't make the people on the other side of that cursed.

JAMES: Fareed, it's been an absolute delight to have you with us. I'd like to thank you for giving so much of your time. Thank you for sharing your insight with us in what has been an extraordinary discussion. I'd like to thank Larry Stanberry, Safwan Masri, and Anya Schiffrin for joining us as panelists. I'd like to thank Harlowe Wang and Jennifer Ward-Costa, who have been managing the technical side of this. I'd like to finally thank all the people that participated in the webinar. On that note, thank you very much again, Fareed. It's been absolutely fabulous. We're very grateful to you.