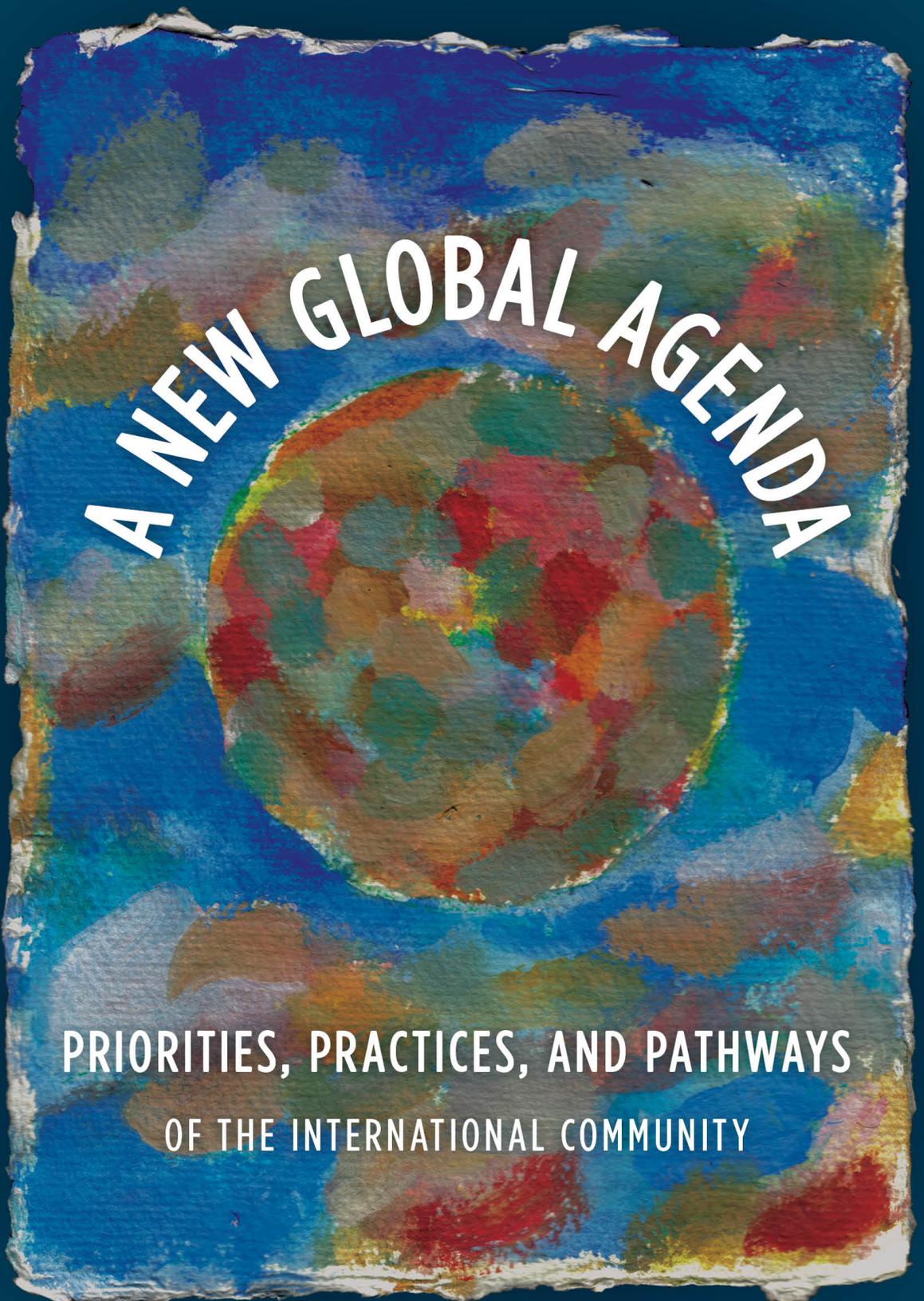


EDITED BY DIANA AYTON-SHENKER

FOREWORD BY ANDREW ZOLLI



A NEW GLOBAL AGENDA

PRIORITIES, PRACTICES, AND PATHWAYS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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THE NEW SCHOOL

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Foreword

On Fear and the Future

Andrew Zolli

Forewords are an odd literary convention. Part encomium, part *amuse-bouche*, they are intended to establish a book's thematic relevance, impart the urgency of its agenda, and tantalize the reader with what's to come.

Yet circumstances have made any such foreword to *this* book unnecessary. After all, who could possibly argue with the need for a new global agenda, when every day we witness the international order being doused with gasoline by a posse of arsonists who would rather reign over its ashes?

Those arsonists' fuel is fear: fear of the loss of jobs, of "sovereignty," of position, of privilege, and, above all, fear of the other, and the fear of the future.

Fear is always combustible. Concentrated, it becomes explosive. Strategically placed, it can be used to detonate institutions, norms, and trust—the three pillars that underwrite cooperation at every scale. It's little wonder that the arsonists are stockpiling it.

There can be no new global agenda without the retrenchment of fear. So it seems apt that in addition to the many worthy developmental, economic, and technical recommendations contained in this volume, I might add a brief, impractical word or two about fear and the future.

We live at a moment of undeniable peril. In our profligate abundance, we are surpassing the boundaries of the systems that make life on Earth possible. This calamity is mirrored in the breakdown of economic and social systems, which no longer serve the majority of their purported beneficiaries. Some communities face inescapable acute and chronic stressors, passed from generation to generation. Dwindling numbers of their wealthier neighbors wall themselves off, in a fiction of apparent separation. But fear is a gas. There is no wall high enough to keep it out.

All of this drives the great trend of the present age, which we might call the Great Repudiation. It is manifested as indifference, self-segregation, zero-sum thinking, future-blindness, and narcissism—a turning away from that which is held in common. Some tune out in disgust or despair. Others fall into the inebriation of consumption. Yet more abandon the civic square for the solipsistic fields of social media, where everything is true and nothing is.

Yet all is not lost. Restoration is possible. What's needed are experiences, policies, and new agendas that cultivate greater compassion, and with it structural renewal, self-desegregation, postmaterialism, non-zero-sum thinking, future-orientation, and the revitalization of the public square.

Happily, our cultivation of compassion, the reduction of fear, and our ability to think about the future emerge from a common set of behaviors, each a consequence of the other.

There is an ancient and persistent quirk of human cognition, in which we naturally discount the future and overemphasize the present. Everyone suffers from this, but social psychologists find that those experiencing chronic stress, anxiety, and fear have an even *more* exaggerated present-tense bias. This often dissuades them from making necessary investments in the future and ties them to the often impoverished circumstances of today.

But researchers, including David DeSteno at Northeastern University, have found the reverse can also be true: that by cultivating our compassion for others, through many means, we can improve our ability to think about the future, even as we expand our ideas of who we wish to see coinhabit that future with us.

This is a foundational truth that all of the world's great spiritual traditions have understood: that, with care and concentration, we can slip the bonds of parochial egotism and come to experience our own sacredness, the sacredness of others, and our interconnectedness within a larger whole. Over time, this understanding compels us to expand our moral community to include ever-widening circles of humanity—and, ultimately, all of life itself—in an embrace of solidarity, generosity, and love.

Yet this is not an argument for pieties but one for policies. We need practical mechanisms that bring us into real engagement with each other, and with the future itself.

Research by psychologist Hal Hershfield at UCLA offers a tantalizing glimpse of one way we might do that. In experiments, Hershfield showed college students images of their own faces digitally altered to appear forty years older. By encountering their future selves, they instantly become better savers, deferring present-tense pleasures for future ones. Imagine if we could prime such future-thinking around climate change, or protecting the world's endangered species, or toward any of the other countless strands in the giant hairball of entangled global concerns that predominate today?

Results like Hershfield's show what happens when you make the future salient for people. Their thinking changes. Likewise, we need to show people a future of fulfillment and creative possibility, one they have a place within. We also need to acknowledge the validity of mourning the loss of a past which is not so much great because it was better, but because it was ours.

In the face of fear, optimism, compassion, and vision are not just moral choices but also moral weapons. Our new global agenda should be armed to the teeth with them. And all our efforts—like the in this exemplary book—should be guided by them. Congratulations to Diana Ayton-Shenker and all of the contributors for bringing forth such a vital project.

In gratitude,

Andrew Zolli
Saint Paul, MN

Challenges of a New Global Agenda A Call to Action

Diana Ayton-Shenker

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

—Arundhati Roy

All around us, we are being called on to redefine our roles and reclaim responsibility in shaping the world we inhabit. We hear this call to action from inner voices of conscience, external demands to step up, the expectant looks of children, the silent cries of our degraded environment and depleted natural resources. The time to answer this call is now. Ready or not, *we are the ones we've been waiting for.*¹

Former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reinforces this urgency in reminding us, “There can be no Plan B, because there is no planet B.” *A New Global Agenda* prompts us to ask: What is Plan A? How do we make sense of our fragile world and our tenuous place in it? What are the priorities, practices, and pathways before us today?

In 2016, the international community embraced historic global agendas as priority frameworks for action on three topics: sustainable development, climate change, and urbanization. These three agreements, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs),² the Paris Accord on Climate Change,³ and the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III),⁴ mark unprecedented efforts in global agenda setting, both in terms of collaborative process and comprehensive scope. The extent to which these agendas succeed depends largely on what we do with them; how we will synchronize, animate, activate, and integrate them. While their outcomes are yet to be determined, their potential to inspire and mobilize action offers hope to us all.

Their achievement should have heralded 2016 as the watershed year of international cooperation and the triumph of globalization. It did not. Coinciding with these accomplishments, 2016 ushered in a spate of political upsets and civil erosion reflecting a groundswell of populism, nationalism, and anti-globalization. In addition to dramatic political events (e.g., the US election of Donald Trump; Britain’s vote to leave the European Union—“Brexit”), global shifts sent shockwaves that continue to reverberate from massive humanitarian crises; increasing inequality within and between countries; entrenched poverty; climate instability and natural resource depletion; looming public health threats; surging violent extremism; and resurgent racism, Islamophobia, and

anti-Semitism. Compounding these alarming trends are threats that undermine our ability to confront them. Public scrutiny, accountability, and the capacity to make informed choices are eroded by political and social tactics that target free press, affront media freedom, limit access to digital information, and dismiss the value and even the validity of truth, data, and science itself. And all these developments have transpired at a dizzying pace, coinciding with breakthrough technological innovations and advances poised to disrupt most systems of human experience.

The acceleration of change and its inherent volatility, as Andrew Zolli suggests, may have “become the new normal.” The volatility of our time has generated uncertainty, insecurity, and a sense of disorientation. It may also fast-track us into action. The international community recognizes that today’s global challenges threaten human security, stability, and sustainability. This fuels fear-based resistance, sparks reactionary politics, and triggers the lowest common denominator of base survival instincts. We need a reorientation to face fears and counter them with the hope of action, clarity, and determination. We need a shift from being reactive to proactive, from resistance to insistence on a finer future, one in which we not only survive but thrive. Zolli advises, “If we cannot control the volatile tides of change, we can learn to build better boats.” And we’ll need better navigational tools to illuminate and guide our way.

That’s where *A New Global Agenda* comes in, offering insight and foresight to steer us through the uncharted and choppy waters rising around us. While many chapters make recommendations, propose solutions, or outline potential next steps to take, they raise more questions than answers. Ultimately, the vision of this book is to invite and frame an emerging dialogue on how we connect the dots, provoke further engagement, pilot new initiatives, and forge potential partnerships for action.

This book is the companion to gnawing questions I can neither fully answer nor ignore. They keep me up at night and get me up in the morning. How does our place in the world and our brief time here honor the legacy of our parents, realize the potential of our vision, and safeguard the future for our children? How do we make sense of and make headway on seemingly intractable challenges threatening human life and the planet that sustains us? How do we anticipate emerging issues and opportunities stemming from technology, innovation, and the unintended consequences of our action, inaction, interaction, and ingenuity? How do we shape a new global agenda, and what role does this play in our lives and spheres of influence? How do we embody and emulate this agenda, both as members of the international community and as individuals, serving as central nodes in our own networks, communities, families? And how might we, both in the process and in the outcome, evolve to become more human and humane? Doing so will require a deeper understanding and practice of resilience, curiosity, humility, compassion, and courage. Our capacity to cultivate these traits will help us make and see our way forward.

In order to “be the change you want to see in the world,” we must first *see* the change we want to be. To help us see the changes we want to be in the world, *A New Global Agenda* explores the most compelling issues of our time

as a call to action. The change I see calls on each and all of us to be more human and become more humane in pursuit of a world that is just, safe, sustainable, regenerative, vibrant, vital. Our humanity, if not our survival, may depend on it.

One of the challenges in approaching *A New Global Agenda* stems from my experience editing its precursor, *A Global Agenda: Issues before the General Assembly of the U.N.*⁵ When I last edited the former annual publication series with the United Nations Association of the United States of America, fifteen years ago, I recall thinking what we really need is a *human* agenda to extend the work of the UN to a broader international community of global citizens worldwide. Today, we recognize that the international community is not only composed of the UN and international diplomats but also includes, and is influenced by, the private sector, business, government, academia, philanthropy, advocacy, media, public intellectuals, civil society, and, yes, global citizens everywhere. Setting *A New Global Agenda* in this context of cross-sectoral perspectives and multistakeholder partnerships asserts that we are all in this together. The work of safeguarding and improving our world is not a task to be abdicated to others; the responsibility lies in many hands, beginning with our own.

Three major shifts distinguish *A New Global Agenda* from the old series, as suggested by this book's title and subtitle. First, this book attempts to set a *new* agenda, highlighting the most compelling challenges of our time, determined less by the operational structure of the UN, and more by the emerging needs of the *Anthropocene*.⁶ Second, the book shifts from "Issues" to *priorities, practices, and pathways*. This shift seeks to animate and activate the agenda from a list of "what" needs to be addressed, to a framework for "how" progress can be made to achieve the better world we see and seek. The book attempts to elucidate strategies rather than impose solutions, illuminating possible ways forward. Third, *A New Global Agenda* extends beyond an exclusive focus on the UN to include a broader spectrum of the *international community*. In taking a more inclusive approach, the book engages thought leaders as contributing authors representing diverse perspectives, personalities, professional backgrounds, and fields of expertise.

Another challenge stemmed from inviting collaborative innovation in the process of editing and writing the book. This collaboration became invaluable to developing *A New Global Agenda*. In discussing the book with a contributing author early on in the project, my colleague gently pushed me to host a convening of all available contributing authors, together with research fellows, to identify and share some common questions, themes, and thinking before we even began writing. The idea was to create a collaborative experience for authors and researchers from the outset, to allow and facilitate dialogue and engagement, as a kind of cross-pollinating, collective intellectual experiment.

It was messy, imperfect, invigorating, inspiring. Participants revealed different and differing opinions and orientations; they raised hard and uncomfortable questions; personalities clicked and clashed; new collaborations were born; and old assumptions were confronted. We wrestled with the term "agenda" itself, struggling with the inherent rigidity of an agenda as a fixed list or schedule, as well as with the implicit arrogance of presuming a few dozen people are entitled

to interpret the priorities for all. “Who are we,” asked one of the contributors, “to set the global agenda for the world?” We gravitated toward the audacity of *agenda* as a launchpad and platform to invite ongoing, iterative, and interactive engagement.

Challenges also arose around the book’s content and structure. Initially, the proposed Table of Contents was really just a new agenda of old topics. Our team of young research fellows quickly brought to light the gaps between residual twentieth-century priorities and rising concerns of the emerging generation. Their input, together with an intergenerational brain trust of colleagues, reshaped *A New Global Agenda* to include the contents that follow. The book takes an anthropocentric approach to where we are and where we are headed in our world. This is a book by, for, and about humans, regarding humankind and the human experience as its central element; it is not a global agenda for Earth, rather for its human inhabitants. In addition to what goes into a compilation such as this, inevitably there are missing pieces from my wish list of what I’d hoped to include. My hope now is that any omissions create openings for further thought leadership.

The structural design itself creates the challenge of how to present inherently interconnected, interdependent topics within the linear constraints of a book format. While acknowledging that many, if not all, of the chapters could be reshuffled to emphasize different aspects of the issues explored, *A New Global Agenda* is organized around three main parts: People, Society, and Planet. *Part I: People* looks at how to promote human rights and pursue justice; how to protect vulnerable people, including refugees and other forced migrants, and women survivors of conflict and violence; and how to safeguard essential freedoms, including global press freedom and digital information access. *Part II: Society* looks at how to improve human systems and structures through regenerative development, health and wellness, and collaborative leadership. *Part III: Planet* looks at how to assure planetary resilience and stability, examining climate change, biodiversity, and urbanization; and how to bring peace and security, through peacekeeping and by containing threats posed by nuclear weapons, terrorism, and new geopolitical dynamics.

In its efforts to articulate a framework and catalyze regenerative solutions for People, Society, and Planet, *A New Global Agenda* plays perhaps a limited yet pivotal role in guiding us to turn aspirational vision into actual reality. In this way, the audacity of agenda is made more meaningful as an imperative for our time to start where we are and acknowledge that it is incumbent on each of us to do what we can. The work to become more human and humane has already begun. We are not required to be the ones to complete this process, nor can we finish the job alone; rather, we commit to its ongoing progress and practice in pursuit of a more perfect union between our values and actions, a more perfect world for humanity.

Notes

- ¹ The poet June Jordan first wrote these words in “Poem for South African Women,” (*Passion*, 1980). The phrase has also been made famous as the title of a book by Alice Walker, quoted in a speech by President Barack Obama, sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock, and is often attributed to Hopi Elders as well.
- ² The SDGs came into effect on January 1, 2016 (*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UNGA A/Res/70/1; <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>).
- ³ The Paris Accords were agreed in April 2016, https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf.
- ⁴ Habitat III was agreed in July 2016, <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>.
- ⁵ Diana Ayton-Shenker, ed., *A Global Agenda 2002–03: Issues before the 57th General Assembly of the United Nations*, a publication of the UNA-USA (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Diana Ayton-Shenker and John Tessitore, eds., *A Global Agenda 2001–02: Issues before the 56th General Assembly of the United Nations*, a publication of the UNA-USA (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); hailed by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as “essential reading” and “an invaluable reference,” and by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as “the bible” of the international community.
- ⁶ “Anthropocene” refers to the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.

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