

**Letters from the New World (Ukraine) #1:
"Schwartzennation" - Microwave Democracy**

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From where I sit, here in Kiev, it seems that the United States of America has become a nation of **super-people**. At the cost of a very few lives it has defeated an army of hundreds of thousands in Iraq, and occupied a country of 25 million. Like the Spanish conquistadors facing the Incas, America appears to be an era ahead of the rest of the world. And just like the Incas facing the conquistadors, the world is ambiguous towards America, fascinated yet fearful, trying democracy and Wrigley's Spearmint Gum for the first time.

If an American soldier dies in Iraq, every inhabitant of our planet learns about his death almost instantly: **a giant falls with a thud**. When a crowd of Iraqis carried the helmet of a dead American soldier it seemed like it took fifty of them to carry it. Yet like every giant from a fairy tale, the American giant has a vulnerability that may prove its undoing.

Historical eras are often distinguished from one another by technology, both industrial (how things are made) and social (how people interact). A key secret of America's economic and political advantages lies in its use of **pioneering social technology**, especially the concept of **"win/win."**

There are countries where for every ten people who enable there are eight, ten, or twenty of those who destroy or impede. Per capita productivity in Russia is one tenth that of the US. Does this mean that a Russian can't lift a five-pound sack of potatoes? No, it means that **if a Russian wants to open a hot dog stand, a bandit and a tax collector immediately visit him**. In America, one of your neighbors works to feed you and another to educate you. In Iraq, one neighbor spies on you and another teaches you hatred instead of arithmetic.

It is "win/win" social cooperation, supported by social values and a legal system that Americans often take for granted that opens the way for the introduction of new technology, not the reverse: industrial technology can be used only if your neighbors realize that your personal success will in turn help them advance their goals. America has long since accepted the basic

premises of "win/win," and this is what helps to make the American soldier grow a hundred feet tall.

But technology is a human attribute, not the essence of what a human being is all about. Technology, both social and scientific, has helped to make America successful, but America is in danger of neglecting human character, proposing solutions that are purely technical, and thus may well be inadequate.

This danger is nothing new. Paganism was a fascination with the technologies of nature: to be strong, people wore wolf's teeth or feather head-dresses. The Industrial Age worshiped the Machine Tool, a new God that produced everything, and people wanted to be like the Machine Tool's products: unanimous, marching in step, and wearing steel helmets. The Information Age proclaims: you are what you appear to be; ultimately it is all "bits and bytes." If the celluloid Terminator can save the world, it follows that a human Arnold Schwarzenegger can save California. But is it really just a matter of technique and force?

If we compare a McDonald's to a French restaurant, we are likely to conclude that the McDonald's is cheaper, cleaner, faster, and friendlier. It is a triumph of technology, research, and training. The French restaurant has only two things going for it: you will not remember a McDonald's meal for the rest of your life, and you cannot propose at McDonald's. McDonald's stands for a satisfying technologically-assured result, but the French restaurant stands for life, whatever it is. McDonald's has a very useful role to play, but when it proposes itself as a substitute for a sit-down meal, there is a problem.

America says to the world, "Accept our technology because it is really works." And indeed it does usually "work", but the world does not want to accept it - it prefers to keep its old ways of life. People want to be, not just to appear. America wants the world to wear a mask of "nice" and "new," but the world wants to keep its tastes and traditions, its blemishes, its uncertainties, and even its vices. It is not that the world wants to remain "bad": the world simply resists the notion that every problem has a technological solution. The world may not be ready for such "solutions," or it may believe that there are problems that await spiritual rather than technological solutions. The technocratic side of America seems to be saying, "If your marriage is unhappy it could only mean that your marriage contract was not elaborate enough," but the world sees this as technocratic madness, the worship of a new false pagan god, even in the midst of America's purported "spiritual revival."

Of course democracy can be a reasonable goal, be it for Canadians or for Afghans or Iraqis. But when democracy is presented as a ready-made technological solution - three minutes in the microwave, with a pickle and a smile - then people will refuse to swallow this prepackaged sandwich. The world wants to slaughter the lamb, skin it, and eat it with their hands.

The world resists American idea that politics (and art) are no longer about people, but about the application of various technologies – a democratic system of government being one of them. The Terminator saves the world not because he has the largest heart, but because, at the right moment, his guns make the greatest holes. The world sees this exclusion of people, with their hot beating hearts and their imperfect histories, as a serious threat.

India invented quiet contemplation and has congested, noisy streets; Britain invented good manners and reads the stolen letters of royalty; Russia stood for the soul elevated by beautiful literature, and so Russian prostitutes are the best-read in the world. The world abandons its values, and American culture pours in and rules. But the world understands that the American version of good is not good, and the stronger America becomes, the more it tries to impose its will, the more it will be resisted.

America should not be turning itself into a **fearsome giant** that claims technology has made love, identity, and history obsolete: just like in every fairy tale, at the end a single human child will defeat it.



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