

Mike Wallace Excerpt

Dr. Canton's Entry Excerpted from Mike Wallace's 50 Years From Today

As a futurist that advises organizations worldwide, my work is about better preparing leaders and organizations about what is coming next, the risks and opportunities. Often it is about just getting people to think about the future as long term narrative of open possibilities that they can influence the outcome of. My future horizon is divided our investigation into multi-year phases: short-term or one to three years; mid-term or five to ten years; and long-term, the time exceeding ten years. The insights I have learned also remind me that the future is born of a convergence of trends—lifestyle, health, economics, security to name a few—not one domain. I have developed a holistic approach to forecasting that has been useful.

Population is a case in point. In the decade between 2050 and 2060, how many people there are and where they live will be of substantial concern. Let's consider first the number: over 9 billion people are expected to inhabit the earth at that point. We will need careful planning and adroit use of technology to bolster the carrying capacity of our planet and feed, clothe and produce habitat for these people. Today, one sixth of the people in the world have never seen a glass of clean water. We cannot afford to have three billion people in that category in the future. The big future trend question is will the carrying capacity of the earth be able to meet the needs of an explosive population? We must prepare for this future today.

And where will they live? There are likely to be 200 to 300 megacities, three out of four of them in coastal areas where the risk of floods, storms, etc., is most extreme in the future by 2040. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to expect a divide that might even be described as a chasm to develop between the aging developed economies - US, Europe, Japan and perhaps by then China - where the birth rate is being contained by shared values and governmental policy and the developing world -- Africa, Latin America and the other countries in Asia - characterized by a youth boom and developing middle class. Figure into that equation the fact that of the 1.3 billion people in China today, nearly one half are under the age of 25.

China's rise in economic and political power, already watched carefully by many, is only one element of a significant realignment of nation states. A new Super Power is emerging that will set a new dynamic in play worldwide. I believe the intimate collaboration between the West and Asia must be a force for future security, stability and progress for the entire planet. But there is much work to be undertaken to enable this to come to pass. We need to cross the cultural divide of suspicion and fear that threatens this vital future view.

One of the chief issues is poverty and war. They go together. Right now we live in a world where there are 15 to 20 "micro-wars" going on at any given time. We simply cannot tolerate that level of conflict in 50 years. By then, demands for water and other natural resources will have escalated dramatically. Our current understanding of climate change should provide sufficient warning that for issues such as these there are no instant fixes. When you consider the risk of future wars given forecasts of extreme climate, poverty, and conflict over natural resources in the future you begin to realize that there are no quick fixes, that will bring peace and security, without immense change and cooperation among nations. The challenges that face humanity are daunting to say the least.

We need twenty to fifty years of planning and development, and a public that demands leaders who think both strategically and holistically. I would maintain that this is the real challenge that confronts us—the right courageous leaders who have bold visions for the future.

The global GDP today is 3 to 4 percent. In 50 years it must be 7 to 10 percent to keep pace with global population change. Innovation is the key driver for both the developed and developing worlds, and there are four specific building blocks: information technology, life sciences, nanotechnology (the redesign of matter at the atomic level) and neurotechnology. Advanced tech will create jobs, security and progress for a world that is hungry for innovation. Innovation is the key driver of the global economy and I might add peace and security. Innovation goes hand in hand with democracy. The more nations that embrace democracy,--free minds, free markets, free enterprise the less war, poverty and conflict. The conflict between innovation-based democracies and religious and secular fundamentalist dictatorships will define the future of the planet in the 21st century.

While it can be argued - and I do - that because of the innovation deriving from American industry the US must regain a position of leadership not just in security, but in science, health and education, it is equally true that decisions we make henceforth must be driven by concern for the well-being of the whole world. The Kyoto Protocol controversy, embroiled in the discussion of who gets to pollute and how much, is a prime example of wrong thinking. Right thinking says we are all in this together. Developed nations must help developing nations catch up. Giving them a pass on polluting is hardly the answer. Developing incentives whereby a cessation of pollution will produce access to innovation is the productive tack. In essence, we need a Marshall plan for a global future.

We also fall prey to incomplete thinking on the health care front - and the effects 50 years hence could be disastrous. There are those who insist the burgeoning cost of health care may well bankrupt government

programs. The question is not whether we can afford health care. It is instead, how we can transform health care so that all are served.

We have known for more than 30 years that by changing lifestyles we will simultaneously save people and ease the burden on society. Yet we still have no really good incentives for individuals to manage their own health status. Whether the system be socialized medicine or managed care, the costs will go up. I fully expect that within not 50, but 10 years the entire system will need to change. Then we must:

- Agree that self-care is the critical missing piece, and devise education programs and incentives to radically increase individual responsibility. We shall each know our personal genome and be able to predict our future health.
- Optimize our potential for the use of new medical breakthroughs by communicating potential risk factors and focusing on technology that will not only treat but prevent illness.
- Be aware that we face an a high risk of future pandemic based on the confluence of: increased travel, rapidly growing population in areas where water and food sources are challenged and people are in close contact with birds and animals, and the consequent potential mutation (and therefore resistance to treatment) of different diseases.
- Recognize that global terrorism may at some point be carried out on the biological level, and search for a means to create a world where social stability and international understanding counter the impulse to maim and kill.

The record of humans taking care of each other must improve and I am hopeful that it will. It is all too easy to predict the future, and forget that we also can - and I believe must - shape it. We all can agree to take the risks necessary to shape outcomes in a way that will benefit humanity as a whole. Collaborative thinking and behavior have never been more important. We have the opportunity to create a future that is prosperous, productive and peaceful. We need to better plan for and envision a future of our design, not by chance. We need to have the courage to invent solutions with an eye to the future. We need to embrace innovation and democracy for all. I encourage all to meet the challenges of the future by better preparing today.