

The Civilizational DEATH Of The US Empire Is REAL | Drs. A. Moeini & C. Mott

Enjoy the Empire while it lasts, for the outlook does not look good. Join two US analysts in their quest for understanding the trajectory of decline. Kyoto University Symposium 2026: "Geopolitics in the Time of Monsters" Presentation 7: Dr. Arta Moeini & Dr. Christopher Mott Arta Moeini and Chris Mott examine the language of civilization in American foreign policy and the possibilities of a changing international order. Moeini argues that Marco Rubio's rhetoric repackages global primacy, while Mott explores historically rooted political communities through China, India, Iran and other examples. Their discussion considers geography, cultural difference, empire, ideology and coexistence. Audience questions challenge their definitions, examine American history and European militarization, and ask whether civilizational thinking can support peace without reproducing familiar forms of domination. Recorded at the Kyoto Symposium, 15 October 2026. CHAPTERS 00:00 Arta Moeini: civilization and American power 04:28 Limits of the liberal order 08:19 Support Neutrality Studies 12:50 Chris Mott: civilizational states 20:18 India, history and political identity 27:40 Power, geography and coexistence 34:19 Audience questions and discussion 51:00 Civilization, colonialism and the American republic GUESTS Arta Moeini and Christopher Mott — Institute for Peace & Diplomacy <https://peacediplomacy.org/experts/> CONFERENCE <https://neutralitystudies.com/events/kyoto-symposium-2026> NEUTRALITY STUDIES Newsletter: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop>

#Arta Moeini

Well, thank you. Thank you, Pascal, for organizing this. We're very happy to be here. And as it needed.

#Arta Moeini

Okay.

#Arta Moeini

Yeah, there's a reason. I was like, this is a very good map that I can use. No, but we're very happy to be here. And one of the things that, I mean, what we're going to do is we're going to talk about civilizations and what's happening in terms of the new grand strategy move in the United States. But we're going to do this in two ways. I'm going to try to deconstruct something that happened last week, which is a speech by Marco Rubio, the Secretary of State of the Trump administration. And

then we're going to talk about sort of the problems of what that speech was and what that represents. And then I'm going to switch the floor and give it to Chris to talk about what a proper civilizational theory could look like.

And then we'll answer any questions. So, just because we have a lot to cover and we have 20 minutes, I decided late last night to type everything up, so bear with me. But... So, just last week, against the iconic monumental backdrop of the Acropolis in Athens, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio delivered a speech framing the current global inflection point not in terms of geopolitics or realpolitik, or even defense of democracy, freedom, or the rules-based order, but as an existential struggle to save Western civilization. Harkening to the Greco-Persian Wars, Rubio urged Europe to awaken from its long slumber, embrace the unapologetic pursuit of national power, and join Washington in a grand defense of Western identity.

To the casual observer, or those enchanted by the populist Trumpian post-liberal right, this rhetoric sounds quite revolutionary. It presents itself as a decisive break from the liberal internationalist paradigm and discredited globalism of our past decades. It claims to retire the stale universalism of the post-Cold War era in favor of a rooted, sacred, and historical identity. But, my friends, do not be deceived. If the aspiring elites of the new right tell you that they are abandoning America's grand strategy of global primacy, they are simply lying to you. What we witnessed in Athens was not the birth of a post-globalist or interest-based grand strategy.

It was a tactical rebranding, a cosmetic window dressing for the globalist American empire. In today's lecture, I want to unpack the deeply ideological and weaponized nature of this new right civilizationalism and argue that, rather than reflecting a genuine civilizational turn or civilizational pluralism, Rubio's framework reifies and subverts the very concept of civilization and its potential. It converts civilization into an exclusionary, Manichean ideological weapon designed to prolong American hegemony under a new identitarian banner. So, to understand Rubio's speech, we must first trace the structural crisis of U.S. grand strategy over the past eight decades.

The defining feature of the post-war era was universalism, the ideological faith in the absolute superiority of Western Enlightenment ideals and values. Supported by an aberrant concentration of power following 1945, first in a bipolar and then unipolar structure, this universalism gave rise to what was dubbed the liberal international order, and more recently it was rebranded again as the rules-based order. But as many critical scholars have pointed out, myself included, this rules-based order was always a moral cloak and disguise to hide U.S. American hegemony and its violent nature. For generations, Washington's foreign policy establishment married itself to ideational and performative projects to rationalize its primacy.

For neoconservatives and neoliberals alike, the central pretense was liberal democracy. But in practice, this pretense caused endless foreign military interventions and regime change wars, as well as nation-building and responsibility to protect according to humanitarian ideals. But the true strategic aim was never simply this abstract promotion of human rights and democracy, or whatever

good words you want to use today. It was to disrupt the natural balance of power across key Eurasian regions and undermine the rise or the endurance of autonomous regional powers. But this project has now reached its structural limit for two reasons.

One, the global war on terror exposed the utter hollowness of the liberal premise, not just to the rest of the world, but to the American people. Second, the unraveling of unipolarity, accelerated by regional quagmires, economic shifts, and ongoing conflicts in Eastern Europe and now the Middle East, with this disastrous fiasco that's called the Iran War, has rendered unipolar power projection prohibitively costly, ineffective, and unsustainable. So we have actually now arrived at the dawn of a post-hegemonic, post-American, and post-liberal world. A world defined empirically by multiplicity, regionalization, cultural sovereignty, and multi-alignment.

But faced with these tectonic structural shifts that are actually empirical, none of the things that I said so far is normative. I'm not arguing that multipolarity is something that we should go and protest for. But facing this, facing these shifts, how has the post-liberal New Right responded? They claim to reject the reckless hubris of neoconservatives. Yet rather than foregoing primacy and retreating to a constitutional or continental republic, seeing America as a continental nation, they have simply swapped terminology and rebranded America itself as a civilizational state.

They have traded the squishy and abstract notions of freedom, human rights, and liberal democracy for equally amorphous and nebulous concepts like Western civilization or my favorite, Judeo-Christian heritage, which does not exist. Notice the ideological trick being played here. Instead of framing autocracies or the axis of evil as enemies of democracy, the transatlantic space is now framed as engaged in a permanent, existential, civilizational war against the Third World and an array of perceived barbarians from Tehran to Beijing. Some on the New Right flirt with bringing Russia into a concocted white Christian civilization, but they are divided, and others reject it. Nevertheless, the structural goal is the same.

When Marco Rubio stands in Athens and speaks of an existential threat to our civilization, he is not referring to a retreat from empire. Instead, he is offering a rebranded rationale for global power projection. It is a semi-disguised form of white Christian identitarianism that acts as a new globalist ideological crusade. Think of it as a new right responsibility to protect, weaponized not for secular or liberal values, but this time for imperiled Christian minorities in Nigeria or Western inheritance across the globe. And this map that I kept, it shows how big this civilizational paradigm that they have actually looks like. And it's completely unfettered from any understanding of history and culture and civilizations in history. So...

#Arta Moeini

So instead of relinquishing Washington's self-appointed right to intervene, this rhetorical civilizationism arbitrarily divides the world into the civilized to be defended and the Third World other to be resisted. It perpetuates bloc thinking, containment, and Manichaeian conflict under a brand-

new identitarian banner that can also be applied at home. The fundamental intellectual flaw and the chief danger, in my view, of New Right civilizationism lies in how it conceptualizes civilization itself. Historically, empirically, and analytically, the true essence of civilization as a geocultural category is multiplicity, is difference, its historical depth and embodied collective experience and existence.

#Arta Moeini

Civilizations and civilizational paradigms should have peaceful coexistence inherent within them. They are also organic, regionally rooted, dynamic ecosystems of human social life. They are inherently pluralistic. By contrast, the New Right performs a violent reductionism. It does a bait-and-switch. It first does a reification. It takes civilization, strips it of its complex, evolving, and open-ended geocultural history, and turns it into a static, essentialistic, reified monolith. Second, it universalizes it. It transforms a specific regional heritage that it concocts, in this case, into a grand abstract universalism.

It then says our civilization represents the apex of human history, and it must assert hegemony to survive, weaponizing said civilization to continue the previous objectives. And finally, it subverts by reducing civilization, capital C, to a political weapon for state power projection. It subverts the very thing that makes civilizational study valuable: the recognition of coexistence, mutual respect, and genuine difference. So Rubio's speech is fundamentally disingenuous, precisely because it distorts the empirical reality of the post-unipolar era.

The desire sweeping the non-Atlantic world and Eurasia today is not a desire to join the US-led civilizational war or re-engage in bloc thinking. It is a desire for cultural recognition, strategic autonomy, and regional sovereignty. But when the New Right treats civilization as a shorthand for its endless zero-sum ideological clash, not only does it betray the actual promise of civilization, it actually locks humanity into a self-fulfilling prophecy of catastrophic conflict. To conclude, when we listen to speeches like the one delivered at the Acropolis last week, we must look past the allusions and romantic references to Greek antiquity, the Roman Empire, and some sort of a mythical founding.

Marco Rubio's civilizationism is not a defense of culture. It is an instrumentalization of culture, just as the multiculturalists also subverted culture. It is an attempt to repackage U.S. global hegemony into categories acceptable to post-liberal populist identitarianism. It subverts the true nature of civilization, which is rooted in heterogeneity, pluralism, regional nuance, and history, to forge a new weapon for global primacy. But in a kind of multi-world, as they have called it, peace is not achieved by imposing a single civilized standard from Washington or Brussels, nor is it achieved by dividing the planet into the West versus the rest.

It is built by reconstructing a durable global concert of powers, a dynamic *modus vivendi* rooted in mutual restraint, regional equilibrium, and respect for cultural sovereignty. Our task as scholars, analysts, and citizens is to reject the faux civilizational clash and instead expose the New Right

civilizationism for what it is: a dangerous reactionary effort to preserve an unraveling empire. Only by embracing a genuine cultural realism, one that respects the multi-world for what it truly is, can we lay the theoretical and practical foundations for a stable, peaceful, and post-hegemonic international order. Thank you.

#Arta Moeini

Okay. Up then. Perfect.

#Chris Mott

So you've heard what a civilizational state, an aspirational civilizational state, is not. But it's also interesting to consider what they are, using an actual definition not based on a clash of civilizations per se, but an understanding of history and organically rooted things that naturally grow around the world. And I think that, following Arda's lead by starting with something that happened perhaps more recently as a hook, if we saw Marco Rubio's speech as a kind of bastardization of the term civilizational state, then we should look at something from a country he doesn't like very much to see an example of the reverse of this.

So in Iran, after the joint U.S.-Israeli assaults began, because there were, of course, multiple assaults going back to the year before this, without saying any of the rhetoric that Rubio said, you saw this very immediate turn rhetorically, online, and on the posters they have in public in Tehran and Isfahan. All of a sudden, the Islamic Republic, which for decades tended to dismiss, look down on, or ignore its pre-Islamic history, tended to view itself as a more mission-driven state, all of a sudden, it was speaking the language of the Sasanian Empire. It was speaking the language of the capture of the Emperor Valerian by Iranian troops.

It was showing these pictures of these old bas-reliefs that are famous in the Middle East, showing these triumphs, triumphs of Parthia. And this is an example of a state that had become a modern revolutionary theocracy and therefore kind of buried this civilizational element, or at least disassociated from it to some degree, rediscovering its true nature, its true deep historical nature. And the nature of the civilizational state, which is ultimately above and beyond any specific one form of government or one period in history, is a collective experience that includes a succession of governments. And not just singular governments, mind you. It is a plethora of little pieces that are part of a single cultural whole. They can be enemies with each other.

Keep in mind, the Greek city-states, right? For most of ancient Greek history, these were city-states or tiny little kingdoms. They didn't get along. They fought each other to the death oftentimes. This is, of course, famously where we get a lot of our core texts from international relations theory and Thucydides. They did see themselves, however, as part of a common civilization, and therefore their civilization predates the civilizational state. Sometimes, however, a state will arise that will clear the field, if you will, using it as kind of the same term they use in astronomy. When they want to

delineate between a planet and a dwarf planet like Pluto, they say the difference is that the main planet clears its field.

It is no longer—it's not sharing an orbit with anyone. Its moons clearly orbit it. It does not have all this junk in the way. It is dominant of its particular sphere. And that's what happens when, in a civilizational complex, one state ends up taking over a large chunk of it. Now, usually this happens in a geographic sense. And this is what I would say is the material underpinning of the civilizational state. This is not simply an idea. This is not an abstract. This is when the right combination of forces come together that a power can dominate a river valley or a place between mountains or what have you. It's a natural borders phenomenon. It creates a level of stability.

And this is key. The civilizational state is not a nation-state or a tribe, which is, of course, the original nation-state. A civilizational state is a combination of different people who have been in the same place for a long time, interacting with each other, and it is the interaction between those different people that creates the civilizational element. So this is not one sect, this is not one ethnic group, this is not a race thing, but it is a spatial thing. And in certain spaces, geography and historical circumstance sometimes allows the rise of something that combines all these things and forges it into something which is politically unified. Now, a great example of this, if you want to go way back, is, of course, the Qin Dynasty in China.

Chinese civilization predates a unified bureaucratic Legalist China. So when we think of pre-modern China, we think of a certain thing. We think of a certain combination of dynasties. But the culture complex behind that was already thousands of years old. There already was a succession of kind of more feudal kingdoms. They weren't always aligned. Sometimes they fought each other—the Warring States period, most famously. And it was the Qin state, notably—and keep this in mind for later—a kind of frontier of the Warring States, the westernmost state that had the most exposure to non-Han, what we would now call cultures, that became the strongest one with the strongest military, the best logistics, and the best-functioning bureaucracy.

And it was this state that would eventually conquer the others, found the Qin Dynasty, and unify the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers into one big thing that would eventually create a succession of states. Now, sometimes China would split up. We all know that. Multipolarity is actually much more normal in Chinese history than many people realize. But after the unification of the Qin, you would see a return to a unified civilizational state on many occasions. It would take a while sometimes. Sometimes it would be very fast. The Qin Dynasty itself only lasted, like, barely over a decade after unification, and it came down. But its example was so powerful and its legal reforms were so respected that when the Han dynasty came to replace it, it was a very quick transition.

And then, of course, the Han dynasty reined in the law and militarist excesses of the Qin and created a more combined synthesis that enabled it to last for centuries. And this is why it's often called back to in Chinese history as the most formative dynasty. Though it would clearly not put an end to there being periods of division in Chinese history, it would show that periods of division did not end the

civilization. And this is key. This is all within a defined geographic context. Here, you can look on the maps and you can see they're not always the same, but these dynasties have a similar core area. And while over the course of time they would grow, and that's important, these are never static.

When I talk about geography, I'm not talking about a static sense of geography. It's ever-moving and ever-flowing. But it has a core base, and the speed at which things grow or not grow is often determined by the difficulty of the terrain and how different the people that live there are. Now, let's move southwest a bit, but stay pretty far in the past, if you'll forgive me. I am very fond of pre-modern history. But going to South Asia now, we had for a very, very—once again, very, very long time in South Asia, in India, there was already a civilization. There was already a culture long before there was a civilizational state. And then there's the rise of the Maurya Empire.

And the Maurya Empire particularly should be interesting to international relations scholars because its founder, Chandragupta Maurya, had a really, really impactful advisor named Kautilya. Sometimes I think it's Chanakya. Sometimes people say that. And Kautilya was arguably the first international relations theorist to talk about something that we would recognize as kind of offensive realism. He very much viewed the world spatially, and this is why I think it's important to see that he was part of this new civilizational state, and he put everything in the context of spatial relations. He compared things to a mandala. So it's a figurative depiction of the heavens and how they work.

And he said that every state is effectively a mandala state. It's at the center of its own world. It's surrounded by different things. And he was very egalitarian in this sense because every other state was acknowledged to have this sense of interest. They were all together, in a sense, self-interested actors. And his concept of space—keep in mind that he's advocating for an expansionist government—is that you're always friends with someone a little bit further afield because you share hostility with the people between you. So your near neighbors, they're your enemies. Your far neighbors, they're your friends. But this sounds pretty simple.

But there's an interesting caveat that people that talk about Kautilya, they don't often mention this. That wasn't the extent of his concept of spatial relations. He also had an interesting thought about people that weren't from the majority community. As the state was growing, he said it can destabilize the state if it grows too much too fast, and it will be a liberation if you annex people that are like you and they enjoy your presence, but it will not be a liberation if you take over people who don't like you very much. And so he said, well, okay, maybe you're in charge. You have these people under your command, and they don't like you. Why not consider making them buffer states?

He didn't use that term, of course, but that is the overall gist of it. Why not have them bulk up your frontier, prevent border clashes in places you don't want them by having autonomous regions, or even regions that perhaps, once again, to use a modernism, are neutral between you and the other, in order to stabilize your frontiers, in order to lock in the geographic stability that you wish? So this is, to me, a good point of seeing where the civilizational state first kind of began as something that people talked about, rooted in history, even if, obviously, they perhaps were not calling it that at

that point. And this is an organically rooted thing that comes from a specific land, and therefore each one is different from each other one. They are highly context-dependent. They are multi-ethnic, but they are also non-universal.

They are not meant to claim to be speaking for all of humanity. They are speaking for a specific regional order. Now let's go forward in time, but not quite modern yet, to my personal favorite political thinker, Ibn Khaldun, who is from 14th-century North Africa. And he, I think, adding him to the depiction enriches our concept of civilization even more. Because when people hear the term, particularly people that use it as a clash-of-cultures way, they often talk about civilization versus barbarism. And they often say that it's a binary. It's the good side, the cultured side, versus the horrible people that will vandalize everything. And Ibn Khaldun's idea was actually this is a mutual relationship.

And while it often has hostility and often does have strife, it is ultimately beneficial for both parties, for nomadic frontier people, outsiders, whatever you will—perhaps some would call them monsters—to be in a relationship with these civilizations. Not only because they—he was speaking in the context of Berbers in North Africa and Turko-Mongolian people in Eurasia—and he saw them as militarily potent, because they were. And so they often became the ruling elite. They would take over these farmer people, these settled cities. And he saw that as, yes, in the short term, it is destructive. But in the long term, it is beneficial because it clears out the old decadent elite. He's understanding that entropy is constant, right? Everything is always declining once it's been founded. He grew up in North Africa, and he was surrounded by the ruins of Carthage and all these things that came before.

And so he was thinking in this cyclic way. And he said, well, maybe these civilizations, they can last a lot longer if a new ruling elite from outside that has a little bit of a different perspective comes in, shakes things up. You know, it sucks when they first come in. You know, it's war. But to kind of rejuvenate this place. And they now have a relationship to this land and this core area. And likewise, the civilized people get to have a little bit of a better military for a while. They get to obviously have disproportionate influence because they're more likely to be literate. They get to rethink and reboot, but without reinventing the wheel. Change is continuous, but it can be gradual rather than a constant chain of huge abrupt breaks. This worldview was actually picked up in moving further ahead towards our present time.

In the late 19th, early 20th century, by an American scholar named Brooks Adams, who was in his study of history very much—although I do not believe he was familiar with Ibn Khaldun—he came to many similar conclusions, albeit in a different, very Victorian kind of way. But he himself lamented the end of roving barbarians and frontiers, because he wondered, well, where are we going to get our rejuvenating force from? Now we're just going to sit here and we're going to be entropic forever. And so he was deeply concerned about this. He saw this as maybe this is the end of civilization, because we'll never go anywhere from here. We'll just sit here and decay without a proper challenge from a real outsider.

And so he feared that civilization would be static if it didn't have engagement with other cultures, particularly in its near abroad. So that brings us now to why does this matter today, right now? And I would say that in this discussion of multipolarity, we know that a disproportionate amount of the powerful actors in the world are not nation states or what we once would have called tribes. We know that they are regional powers that usually are multi-ethnic and not particularly tied to a singular ideology so much as the perpetuation of their spatial relations between these different peoples within them. China is obviously the big one because it has been an uninterrupted state project for thousands of years.

India, while the modern state is very new, is obviously drawing from this tradition. It is coming back from this tradition of the civilization is perpetual, and so if it went away or broke apart, it can come back again in the same space. Then we have Iran, which, like I said, was kind of living in denial about being a civilizational state for a little while, but now clearly, if unofficially, seems to be embracing it. There's also a potential candidate, which is Russia. I'm not personally sure how to classify it myself. I think Russia has many attributes of an over-large nation-state, but it also has many attributes of a civilizational state.

I think they need to figure it out themselves because, as you see, a lot of Russian nationalist rhetoric is very, very confused and self-contradictory. But they certainly have all the ingredients to eventually be one. And I would even propose that there's the possibility that the United States could, in fact, one day be a civilizational state, because there's no reason that they all have to be old. After all, not all of these things were born in the Bronze Age. Some of these civilizations we're talking about, especially Russia, came much later. So why couldn't, so long as it doesn't Balkanize or something like that, why couldn't the United States one day be a civilizational state? A very young one.

But it bears many of the hallmarks of it. Its entire success is rooted around a specific geography. Even today, in its bloated global form, it is rooted in the security and defensibility of its geography and the immense wealth of its resources. And that combination of those two things is really what has made it a huge dynamo. And those are the kinds of things that lead to a civilizational state. So even if the United States faced a cataclysmic state failure event, it is not guaranteed that that would finish it off forever. There could be a period of division, a warring states period, if you will, and then it could be reforming. And it would be a bit different, but it would also clearly be of the same legacy.

This is purely hypothetical, but I'm just saying that all of the great powers, all of the countries, most of the countries we talk about in a very serious way right now, they all have this relationship, whether they're a little bit civilizational state, like maybe America, somewhere in between like Russia, or all the way like China. But they all have this relationship that goes above and beyond simple nationalism. But also, at the same time—and this is very important—it's an in-between space, it's a liminal space, you could say. They are 100% not universal, except, of course, for the declining United States, who is declining specifically because rather than be of a particular place and have a particular rooted sense of interest, it has decided to rule the world.

And this, of course, has unmoored it entirely from having the stability of a core region. And it has undermined its domestic politics, too, I would say, by just removing everything from context and leaving only a military-industrial complex in its place. Now, obviously, this was done for financial reasons. Obviously, this was done so that a pre-existing elite could make more money. It's not a huge—this isn't a huge grand civilizational thing itself, but what it is doing is it's undermining social solidarity at home. It's leading to these tripwire conflicts abroad.

Defense contractors are enriching themselves, but the core nature of this, you know, proto-civilization, if you will, is being smothered by this because it is this kind of organization, while it may be more, shall we say, multicultural, to use an awkward term, than a nation-state, is still nevertheless a particular thing. And the U.S., by trying to be a universal thing, has completely damaged this process, much like perhaps the Soviet Union was a bit overextended and had its own issues being a kind of, at least rhetorically, universal power. So what I want to have people consider is the theme of the monster. So the monster, and I know that this is a reference to Gramsci, and I know the quote this is from.

I'm not ignoring that. But the theme of the monster, to me, is the other, the outsider. Your initial instinct is to be afraid of it. But the civilizational state and its history shows that the other and the outsider is not something automatically to be afraid of. It's something that could be useful. It's something that you can have a contractual relationship with. Here in Kyoto, you can go down to Pontocho, you can see the tanuki statue. It's called a yokai. It's a creature that isn't human, but lives in the human world. And the tanuki is viewed as a kind of—you could say, "Oh, that must be a pest," right? It's based off an animal that eats garbage that's been anthropomorphized in mythology.

But you could also say, well, look at the statues of them. They're shown as happy. They're partying. They tend to show up in economically prosperous areas because that is a sign, oh, this area is prosperous enough that it draws tanuki to eat the garbage, right? There's a mutual relationship there. And I would say that the civilizational state, if used constructively and correctly, and foregoing all missionary activity to convert the world and learning to live and let live with other cultures, which they should as particular powers, will learn to live with the monsters and perhaps even benefit from their existence. Thank you.

#Pascal

Thank you so much, Chris. Now I'm glad I made the monster cute. Yeah. Okay, the power of the monster, so not as something bad, but as something useful. I like that. So we will open the discussion, and we'll just go this way around.

#Dennis Riches

Yeah, I really like the ideas you had there, Chris, about the United States needing to consider becoming something different. And I think if you compare them to France, where the French

Revolution and the American Revolution happened more or less at the same time, France, as Eureka mentioned, has gone through five republics now, maybe the sixth one soon. But in the U.S., the Constitution is sacred, and they just can't imagine changing it. They do amendments, but I think they have to start conceptualizing a totally second republic. So that's my comment. If you want to comment on my comments...

#Chris Mott

I mean, maybe, but I think right now our social cohesion is so low that the Constitution might be the only thing preventing something worse from happening. But in the long term, yeah, I would agree. There needs to be a more serious look at systemic reform.

#Alexander Mercouris

And Alexis?

#Alexander Mercouris

First of all, thank you for talking about what I thought was Rubio's extremely sinister and very troubling speech altogether. Is all this talk about Western civilization, protecting Western civilization, about maximizing power in order to take on China? Because I wonder sometimes whether this is really what this is to a great extent about. And if so, it is getting some traction in Europe as well. There was a very disturbing article a short time ago in The Spectator, I think written by the editor of Die Welt. It was a German writer, saying, "The West must win," and it defined it very, very much.

Yeah, as the West versus the rest: China, Russia, most aggressively the Islamic world. And I have to say, much of what was written about the Islamic world and Islam horrified me, and I would say was straightforwardly racist in the most objectionable and horrible way. And what also shocked me even more was the fact that on the thread of this article, there was comment after comment after comment saying what a wonderful, outstanding article this was. But going back to what I said, is that really what this is all about? In which case, it's deeply disturbing because we are not looking at a policy of peace, obviously. We're looking at a policy of conflict and aggression against non-Western countries, but China specifically.

#Arta Moeini

Thank you. That's exactly kind of what I was getting at with the talk, right? There is an element in which China is raised up as America's new permanent enemy. And it's probably the one thing that the Democrats and the Republicans agree on, sort of: they have to challenge and compete with China. And David talked about it, and I've also written about the need for a permanent enemy for the class. However, what we have in this case, because again, there are people in the Defense Department who want to do a very sort of like standard offensive realist competition with China. This

is not that. The civilizational paradigm is specifically designed or changed or subverted to appeal to the worst elements of the populist movement.

It's supposed to at once speak back at home about the anxieties about immigration, but then combine that with this us-versus-the-world kind of posture. So you're absolutely correct that this is actually the reason. This is why I don't like the term Global South. I don't like any dualistic, Manichean term for this reason, because it tends to reduce and flatten various different experiences and regions and cultures into one or the other. And it's always in response or a reaction to some sort of a Western ideal. And that Western sort of construct is itself political, and it's used politically and is going to be used increasingly strategically outside of America, but also internally with regards to immigration and this idea of America representing the general crusade for a white Christian civilization.

And I think that's why they love to talk about Islam, because that's another universalist religion. So what I said about moving away from sort of Huntingtonian frameworks on civilization, one of the reasons is because he kind of used the civilizational paradigm in terms of just religion. But there is no, I would say, the same way that it's preposterous to talk about Judeo-Christian civilization from, you know, Israel and the Greco-Roman world to America, it's equally preposterous to talk about the similarity of Indonesia to the North African peoples. So religion is not ever a good indication for civilization. And we need to get away from—we've got to be, in a way, post-religious in our framework to understand civilizations for what they are.

#Chris Mott

Just a brief addition to your point. I also want to point out that this especially weird aspect of building up China as this kind of, like, globe-stomping threat when, A, the country hasn't invaded anyone since 1979, and, B, America has been lucky in one way, aside from its geography. And that is, most of its enemies have been really, really dumb. This is not the case. If America wants to be the enemy of China, they are finally picking a rivalry with someone who is designed to humiliate and outclass them in a way that our previous foes never could because they usually were less capable.

#Alexander Mercouris

So, that now, and then, ready, action.

#Nel Bonilla

Okay, so thank you for both of your talks. I liked them very much, the topic about civilization. I want to comment because I also work a little bit with the topic, and even, like, what I talked about yesterday has some relation to this. So what I want to comment on is that, for example, in the case of Marco Rubio's speech, I totally agree that this is about this global power projection, about trying to preserve U.S. hegemony. But I would add that it is specifically, if we think about the context

where he was talking, it was Greece, and then, like, some months ago, he also had a similar speech in Munich, in Germany. So I suspect the purpose behind this is to create specifically, like what I called yesterday, partial consent, like searching for the most radical groups, so to speak, that could absorb this narrative.

And the most radical groups. Why? Because these would be the ones that could drive forward militarization and would be actually willing to, well, fight in war and things like that. So this is one point I thought would be interesting to point out. And then also, well, why in Europe? Why is he talking about this in Europe? Because right now, as Ulrike Guérot really excellently pointed out, Europe has more like these remnants of, or these ruins still of this liberal but U.S.-influenced discourse about the external threat.

For example, but this external threat discourse is just not enough, possibly, to drive forward militarization in European societies, which is why you then see so much—I mean, it's not the only reason, of course, material deterioration too—why you then see these protests. And then if you say, "Oh, okay, we will seek out those groups that actually don't buy into this liberal discourse, but into this identitarian one," this is, like, I guess, the strategy behind this: to say, "Okay, we need Europe to move faster with militarization, so here's, like, the people we are calling the rebels. I call them specialists of violence. They are trying to seek them out, call them."

And then finally, I would also like to add that I wouldn't say exactly that the U.S. or the security establishment, et cetera, and so on, have no ideology. Rather, because exactly they are, one could say, like the controlling sphere or command sphere of the U.S.-led empire, they have, in the context of capitalism, imperialism, et cetera, the ideology of capitalism as such, which is like dichotomous, which is about barbarians and civilizations, light and dark, good and evil, et cetera. It is the foundational ideology, whether they are aware of it or not. And of course, there are then these structural drivers of the system itself.

And then finally, I would say, even, like, when we talk about civilizational states and so on, that they don't have an ideology, true, but I mean, I would say they still do have something which—well, it's not me, it's a concept from sociology of knowledge. This is called the orientation framework, which is based on, okay, what acts, what behaviors, what patterns of behavior are we seeing, and what can we then surmise is actually, like, the driving force behind it, the driving sort of values and types of perceiving behind it. So at least civilizational states have, I would say, an orientation framework, which is possibly not the same as ideology as such, like groups have ideology. And did I forget something? No. So these are just my thoughts about the topic because, yeah, I researched it.

#Arta Moeini

Thank you.

#Pascal

If you want to react to it.

#Chris Mott

Yeah, just briefly. I wouldn't say that the civilizational state doesn't have an ideology. I think the point would be that the civilizational state is above and beyond ideology, which is not the same as not having one. So ideologies come and go, but the civilizational state will remain because it's not simply based on ideology. A state that is much more fragile and doesn't have historical rooting, perhaps like the Soviet Union, like then it collapses. If the ideology collapses, the state collapses. So that would be a different, that would be a different thing.

#Radhika Desai

Okay, thanks for a very thought-provoking set of presentations. Again, so many questions to ask, but I'll confine myself to just one, or maybe two. One is, how do you define a civilizational state? And secondly, I'd like your comments on the following. This year marks the 250th anniversary of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, and so on. The historian Gerald Horne has actually written—he describes 1776 as a counter-revolution, which was undertaken precisely in order to preserve slavery, which the British were in danger of abolishing at that time, or turning towards abolishing. So if you think about it, the United States is actually a relatively modern creation of a slaving oligarchy—a slaving, sorry, I had a couple of other words as well. Yeah, a slaving oligarchy, patriarchal oligarchy. So can you please comment on that?

#Chris Mott

I can handle it. So I've heard this theory a lot, and as someone who is more on the left, I gave it a lot of thorough consideration when I was younger. But I know a lot about American history, and I just completely disagree with it entirely. Not because I'm like, "Oh, I'm defending patriotism." I just think it's a very weird, myopic view, because not all the states were dependent on plantation economy. And it wasn't actually the British Empire abolishing slavery at that time. That happened generations later. They were talking about it because William Wilberforce was around, but they weren't actually doing it yet. There was nothing on the mark.

And the interesting thing that completely, to me, discredits the narrative is that the most pro-patriot, they were called, as opposed to loyalist, pro-British states, were the New England states that were already phasing out slavery. And when the country became independent, the New England states, most of them, outlawed slavery immediately as their first act, even before the Constitution. Whereas the most pro-British states were the southern states that were utterly dependent on slavery. And of course, later in the Civil War, Britain would back the South's, for other reasons, of course, back the South's attempt to become an independent country. So I have never bought into this argument whatsoever. It certainly applies to the state of Texas breaking away from Mexico. That was a pro-slavery revolution.

But to me, I don't buy it just because I think ultimately, and I talk a little bit about this in the book chapter coming out in Pascal's Future Neutrality thing, that American identity and interests were diverging from the British and were becoming what we might call now anti-globalist, and they wanted local control over their finances, and they didn't want to be part of the British Empire's more everything-goes-to-London kind of thing. That was more important. There were pro-slavery elements of the American Revolution, but there were also anti-slavery elements, just as in the British Empire. So I don't think that was remotely the core issue. And I honestly don't think the British Empire would have gotten rid of slavery if they had won the war and kept the Carolinas, or at least it would have taken them much, much longer to do so.

As we all know, they did replace slavery with the coolie system. So there was an element of getting free labor out of the whole thing anyway. But as to your other point, I did predict this question would come up. So since I didn't want to read my whole thing verbatim, I've saved it for the Q&A. But I do have a definition of what I would consider to be a civilizational state. Arda can disagree with me if he wants. But I wrote, "...the civilizational state is neither an ideological, religious, universal, or national entity, but rather the interlinking of multiple cultural influences into a single long-term relationship bound by geography and lifestyle on a timescale of centuries." So obviously, these things have existed in the past. And sometimes, like other states, they die. But they do seem to have more longevity than most state forms.

#Arta Moeini

Yeah, no, I agree with Chris's definition. I mean, one of the things that we have to sort of focus on is to just look at the map of what these small states—I mean, we talked about small states. A lot of these, you know, nation-states that were created after, you know, with the Wilsonian sort of internationalism, but then after World War II, a lot of these states were in fact driven by sort of an American desire, previously a British desire, to disrupt these historical civilizational spaces, also called empires, and create new kind of entities that would be easily manipulable by America. And America is using the same exact model and framework in Europe today. So this is something that's very permanent.

#Aghogho Akpome

Okay, thank you, gents. I thought, Arta, your deconstruction of Rubio was very on point. I agree mostly with what you say. And then the question will go to both of you. So you begin by exposing Rubio's attempt to appropriate the notion of civilization to label the project. And then you do the riskier thing. You actually hazard a definition of the civilizational state. What would you say to the idea that this is, again, another very maybe problematic creation of Western philosophy—the idea? I'm sure you've heard of the arguments about the myth of civilization.

It's again something for people to aspire to and helps, as you have shown very brilliantly, helps to cloak more banal, more unethical, more crazy, more monstrous projects. So this ascendance in discourses of the civilizational state, is it possible to protect the idea, which I think is a noble idea, it's a logical idea, from being usurped, sucked into these projects? And as Nell has said, they do find resonance. They do find resonance. So, like, the whole idea of civilization, I mean, that's what—it's one of the strongest intellectual ideas upon which slavery, colonization was built on. We're going to civilize the savages.

#Arta Moeini

Thank you. Let me say a few things. I think this is a very important question because it puts its finger on a sort of conceptual divide that we need to sort of address. The word civilization, capital-C civilization, the way that it's basically used throughout the colonial projects as well, it was that kind of a colonial imperial project that looks at civilization, says there is one universal civilization, says that the Western world has specific access to this civilization, and then it will therefore develop the rest of the world according to those models.

The model that we are developing, you know, independently and together, is directly against that, because that was never... So there is a historical, empirical understanding of civilization that looks at philosophical anthropology and human anthropology and sees how, in some places, we develop nations, and nations are a thing. To say that we have to, like, for example, look at the world as a bunch of equal nation-states, that's an ideological posture, because there are civilizational states, there are imperial states, there are continental states, and there are nation-states. So a world is not going to only be civilizational states; it's not only going to be nation-states.

But the way that these states differentiate themselves, the very conceptual paradigm of civilizations and cultural complexes, it lies in this kind of middle ground between an anti-universalist posture where it allows you to revel in particularity versus a kind of hierarchical notion that exists in the regional order that allows for a collective multiplicity in an embodied form. And it allows for, you know, when you go to, for example, when you come to China, you see that there's different realities being experienced. So I'm challenging Enlightenment humanist ideals of anything universal. I'm the most anti-universalist person that you can probably find. Sorry.

#Aghogho Akpome

My point is, I buy your interpretation. I'm saying, aren't you fueling a fire? Aren't you participating in a discourse whose progress or whose evolution you wouldn't be able to control?

#Chris Mott

No, because we're responding to Rubio and we're contesting what he's saying. He started this discussion, and we want to end it.

#Arta Moeini

But I mean, also just, I mean, this is something that specifically we, I think a lot—I'm a realist. Chris is a realist. And I think realists have to understand how to move away from this sort of parameters of ideology that were set in history and everything else. And what is happening now is we are highlighting this because this is what's happening. So this idea of culture and cultural realism and civilization is something I've written about for three, four years. The right is—this kind of a right is taking this over because it lacks any kind of intellectual integrity and because it lacks an actual ideological footing to stand on.

And so, because it wants to protect, I mean, it's a response to the frustrations of the American decline. And so it's something to allow for that new map that allows for Europe and different parts of the world to be subjugated, but then also create this new, you know, how is— And again, you can see it in Netanyahu's speeches. There's a lot of correlations between what Bibi Netanyahu says and what Rubio says, right? He talks about civilizations and Amalek, and we need to, you know, he's adding sort of biblical language to this. There is a reason for all this. And my point is that what that papers over is the actual difference as an ontological reality of human experience.

#Alexander Mercouris

Yes.

#Arta Moeini

Okay.

#David Gibbs

Okay. I'm sorry. Should I go? Yes. All right. Fine, fine. Okay, okay. I'll be very quick. You know, the Rubio speech, I guess, is interesting in that it raises the question of in what way and to what extent is the Trump foreign policy fundamentally different from what came before. Exactly. And I'd say rhetorically, what it establishes is it states frankly that American foreign policy is based on a combination of, I don't know, self-interest, violence, and cultural and maybe racial condescension. All right? And that's very different. American exceptionalism. I'm sorry?

#Arta Moeini

American exceptionalism.

#David Gibbs

Well, perhaps. Although American exceptionalism in terms of, "We're superior, we're better," again, culturally, maybe racially. And that's very different from the rhetoric of the past. The rhetoric of the past, pre-Trump, maybe 1990 to Trump, had been altruism. American foreign policy is about protecting the weak, advancing democracy, that kind of thing. Substantively, I would say there's no change at all, frankly. I would say it's the same thing. But rhetorically, there's a difference. Now, you could say, in a certain sense, the Trump foreign policy is preferable because it's more honest. And so you could say American foreign policy has always been about self-interest, violence, and condescension, and nothing else. And so, if that's the case, why not say it frankly? Thank you.

#Pascal

Let's just quickly combine with your comment, and then.

#Ulrike Guerot

Yeah, I also have a question, because first I would contest the idea that the Americans, you said it, ever, ever can become a civilizatory power, just because as long as you kill people, you will never be civil. And it counts for all other nations. I mean, if it's a civilizatory project, then capital punishment is just not a civilizatory achievement. And I think this accounts for all nations. So that's the first thing. The second is that, indeed, I would deny that the Americans, which is a young project of military and fiscal overstretch and nothing else, it's not a 5,000-year-grounded Chinese, Indian, Persian, Maya, whatever sort of civilization, even if I count Europe, like Athens and Acropolis and Jerusalem and Rome.

So that is the one part of my thing. But the second is it all denies the republic. If we go back to political theory, the civilizatory thing, which is based on culture, isn't sort of me, I am here, you are there. Yeah. But the sort of 2,000 years of political thinking is, how do we organize politics? And the term for this is the republic, is the commonwealth, and everywhere so. And it's not trivial that the Iranians are the Republic of Iran and the Indians are the Republic of India, and that we have lots of republics in Germany, and that Hannah Arendt wrote up and down about the republic and not about the nation-state.

So the nation-state, and then now the civilizatory whatever sort of luck that you put over it, I think it's just a return of distinguishing, and it goes away from the first sentence of mankind, which is everybody is born free and equal in rights and dignity. And then Hannah Arendt comes and says, no, obviously that's not the case, but politics is there to make it ever more so. So, I mean, I'm just asking where in all this civilizatory power thing here is Kant and the Eternal Peace Project, which is basically the global republic. I mean, you see? Yeah.

#Arta Moeini

Yeah, very quickly, I guess. I don't believe that there will ever be a global republic. I also think that both the Indian and the Persian examples, for example, or even the Chinese example, the internalization of the republican system into these areas was part of Western hegemony. Number two, to David, I would say I agree with everything you said. But that was basically the premise of my talk, which was to say that there's really no qualitative difference between what Rubio is doing and what was done before him. However, I think the rationalization is important. I think the reason they're rationalizing it in this way versus democracy and freedom and whatever, that matters and means something.

I also, I forget who said it, but I tend to believe that actually America is not a civilization, will never be a civilization. It's a unique, sui generis experiment which will lead into a continental state. So a continental state is this new category that we have never had before. That's, in fact, what is unique about America. We don't have to straightjacket countries into nation-states or civilizations. We need to figure out what each state is and what that means. And the civilizational paradigm is an analytic framework. I'm not saying that civilizations are inherently good or bad. Civilizations could kill people. Civilizations could be good. I'm arguing for an empirical understanding of ultimate relativism that actually exists and defines human life.

#Chris Mott

And just quickly, I would say that the whole point here has been that there is no universal system, and attempting to follow one is more likely to lead us to conflict than it is to prevent it. Diplomacy is based around acceptance of difference, which means that this kind of North Atlantic attitude where everyone eventually becomes Enlightenment humanists, that has to go. I mean, just as any other global religion has to go. It will prevent actual stability from arising from people negotiating. And I think that in multipolarity, the people that will struggle with it the most are people that believe—that are effectively human rights activists and missionaries—because it's a world that makes them effectively irrelevant.

#Pascal

Thank you very much, my friends. Very well done.