



# What My Younger Self Never Expected

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*At the start of a new year and a new decade, it is both humbling and illuminating to reflect on major global developments that no one saw coming just a few decades ago. For those who grew up during the Cold War or in the ensuing period of American primacy, the economic and geopolitical rise of the developing world must rank high on the list.*

FORT LAUDERDALE – As one advances in age, one tends to mark each new year by reflecting on the broader developments that have run in parallel with one's own lifetime. For my part, I usually focus on the surprises (both positive and negative): things I would have been considered unlikely or even unimaginable in my younger years.

I was born during World War II and grew up in Canada with a general awareness of at least some aspects of the larger world, not least the Cold War. Black-and-white television allowed us to witness the destructive power of nuclear weapons from our living rooms. I and many other children had watched "Our Friend the Atom" on the television series *Walt Disney's Disneyland*, but we nonetheless would lie awake at night listening to passing planes, hoping they were not bearing the instruments of our annihilation.

In the event, the nukes were kept in their silos, owing to the deterrent effect of "mutually assured destruction" (MAD) and the effective leadership shown during close calls like the Cuban Missile Crisis. Eventually, the Cold War ended, and anyone under 30 has spent their entire life in a world without it. To most of them, American economic and military primacy probably seems as ordinary and permanent as the Cold War did to baby boomers. But now we are on the verge of another anxiety-inducing shift in power relations.

In the early postwar years, developing countries – many newly independent following the dismantling of colonial empires – had only just begun a long, complex journey that would transform the world and the lives of billions over the coming decades. Though that journey is not yet finished, few expected many of these countries to achieve the prosperity they have. The terminology used back then – "backward," "Third World" – betrayed a belief that under-development was a semi-permanent condition.

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