

**Dean Mahubani Discusses His Book's One World Logic at HKS**

By Kate Hoagland - February 21, 2013  
Ash Center

On February 15, [Kishore Mahubani](#), dean of the [Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy](#) at the National University of Singapore, discussed the major themes of his new book *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World* at Harvard Kennedy School. [Nicholas Burns](#), Sultan of Oman Professor of International Relations, and [Stephen M. Walt](#), Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Affairs, offered commentary on the book's key arguments.



Harvard University Professor Roderick MacFarquhar with Dean Mahubani

"Never before in human history have we seen the kind of upliftment of humanity on the scale we are seeing today," said Mahubani. Calling this "the great convergence," he stated that the world is witnessing an unprecedented merging of interests, cultures, and values due in part to the rise in the global middle class and the decline of poverty.

Mahubani cited the United Nations' achievement in halving extreme poverty, and the U.S. Intelligence Council's projections that such poverty will be completely eliminated by 2030 as examples of the convergence underway. He noted that the middle class in Asia is expected to dramatically expand from 500 million today to 1.75 billion by 2020, an increase that represents more than 1.5 times the total population of the Western world. He also referenced the explosion of cell phone ownership in the developing world and the decline of war as additional indicators that support his claim that "for most people in society, life is getting better and better."

Mahubani illustrated how convergence is causing a change to the world order through a maritime analogy. Instead of countries operating much like individual boats in one global sea, he likened our new order to all countries living on one global boat. As such, pandemics, the global financial crisis, and other major problems, cannot be solved if countries stay secluded in their cabins. "I see it as inevitable that the leaders of the world have to converge and come together if we are to solve problems that are facing the world today," he said.

While optimistic that we are in the midst of "building a new and better civilization," he argued that we must revise Western policies in order to strengthen existing global governance bodies such as the World Bank and the United Nations, and allow China, India, Africa, and the Islamic world to play a larger role on the global stage. Instead of "fulminations against the shortcomings of Western political leadership"—an *Economist* criticism of the book—Mahubani believed his calls for the United States to aid the rest of the world in creating a new, multi-lateral order would also benefit the U.S.'s best long-term interests.

"While there is a transition in power," countered Professor Burns, "the West is not dead as a major locus of international power," a sentiment later shared by Professor Walt. Burns explained that the West has been very willing to take steps towards improving multi-lateral institutions as well as UN Security Council reform, but "in many respects, China especially, but also India and Brazil, are not rising to the occasion" as exemplified by their lack of participation in providing funding, troops, or relief efforts to address world problems. He recalled how China has repeatedly blocked Security Council Resolutions related to supporting the Burmese opposition and demonstrated indifference in Sudan and Darfur.

Professor Walt questioned whether much of the book's criticism of irrational behavior by states might actually be the source of some of the positive developments Mahubani praised. "Is it possible that the American military role in the world, including Asia, has something to do with the absence of intense security competition in a number of places?" he asked. Walt also questioned whether Mahubani's logic of convergence was as powerful as presented in the book. "Is it possible that these old-fashioned ways of thinking about world politics still tell us not how we ought to behave, but how states are behaving?"

*This event was part of Dean Kishore Mahubani's international book tour and was sponsored by the [Ash Center for Democratic Governance and](#)*

Share |

Recommend 1

**Related Links**

- > [The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World](#)
- > [Dean Kishore Mahubani](#)
- > [HKS Singapore Program](#)
- > [Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy](#)

*Innovation's Singapore program, which promotes collaboration in research, education, and outreach between HKS and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.*

---

79 John F. Kennedy Street | Cambridge, MA 02138 | T: 617.495.0557  
Copyright © 2011 The President and Fellows of Harvard College | Report Copyright Infringements | E-mail Web Administrator