



Daniel O'Connor reviews  
*America's New Map: Restoring Our  
Global Leadership in an Era of Climate  
Change and Demographic Collapse*  
by Thomas Barnett  
(Penguin/Random House, 2023)

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I have always appreciated Thomas Barnett's intellectual courage, work, and message. Barnett, an American military geostrategist, gained prominence at the U.S. Naval War College in Rhode Island, where he directed the New Rule Sets Project, examining the impact of globalization on international security. Later, within the Department of Defense, he served as the Assistant for Strategic Futures, crafting a geopolitical framework distinguishing the world's "Functioning Core" from the "Non-Integrating Gap."

His audacity and the different way he "connects the dots" have often defied traditional thinking. His refusal to pander to popular opinion is evident in his analysis and bold prediction concerning global conflicts and emerging national security threats and challenges. In his recently published book *America's New Map*, Barnett refines and updates his prior theories and presents bolder and, some say, fantastical ideas that may strike some as grandiose. In contrast, others might find them visionary and thought-provoking. In his book, Barnett introduces seven pivotal "throughlines," themes that define our current landscape, the predicament we will probably find ourselves in, and the potential for future triumphs or downfalls. These throughlines offer a structured insight into the inexorable trends already unfolding and shaping what could be our collective destiny.

Barnett's new work builds on his earlier revolutionary ideas, which he argues are now more urgently relevant in the wake of the world's transition from what he calls the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world to what he calls the BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, Incomprehensible) world. His previous thesis was that the world was divided into "the Functioning Core" and the "Non-Integrating Gap." Barnett's seven throughlines build on his previous work, provide a comprehension framework, and walk the reader through the inevitable convergence that will continue to happen. And, pun intended, Barnett tilts the world on another cultural axis.

Post WW2, America built the world in its image: the Bretton Woods agreement, the dollar as a default currency, the petrodollar, aggressive consumption, and robust trade, all contributed to America becoming wealthy, and creating an unparalleled economy that over time became overtaxed, overburdened, and overextended. And now Americans know it. The boomer generation's grasp on power (some will say earned, others gifted) recedes daily, and their decisions demonstrate they are holding on for dear life.

In contrast, Barnett says the younger generation does not suffer the pain of nostalgia or euphoria and wants to move without baggage. Here, Barnett's most potent viewpoint is that climate change is 100% real. He is unflinching and unapologetic regarding his stance on climate change. He eschews the politicization of the issue, focusing instead on the raw, required seismic shift that an imminent reality necessitates; a drastic reorientation from an East-West to a North-South orientation. He doesn't pontificate too much on the reasons or the bipolar rhetoric of

the current debate. But make no mistake, Barnett unequivocally believes that climate change has altered world relationships and will force recognition and compliance into a realignment of relationships and requirements to maintain our leadership position.

According to Barnett, the only way we'll maintain our global leadership position and survive the inevitable climate outcome(s) is to realign the world from an East and West axis to a North and South one. Barnett is adamant it (the realignment) is going to happen with us or without us. His initial thesis is simple: climate change and its impact, coupled with the other trends he identifies, make living in or around equatorial nations practically impossible.

The extreme conditions characterized by harsh terrain, volatile political and atmospheric elements, and relentless, uninhabitable temperatures render the environment primarily hostile to almost all life forms. That geographical hostility will create climate refugees needing to go "somewhere."

Barnett also highlights several accelerating, pressing, albeit not entirely unfamiliar, challenges confronting specific nation-states and global powers. These issues include global depopulation, demographic decline, strategic overextension, and a paradigm shift from horizontal expansion to vertical realignment, challenging ethnic and tribal paradigms.

His thesis further ties together global trends that may appear disparate to many. While initially dynamic and formidable, China will become much more aggressive and attempt to assert dominance while trying to fight back India. Barnett postulates that China has an initial advantage because of its "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)." That may initially appear to be true. Still, many critics will argue that the BRI can lead to significant debt dependencies for participating countries and force them into debt slavery. This "debt-trap diplomacy" by China and its geopolitical ambitions doesn't address their massive impact on pollution, environmental impact, and geopolitical ambitions. Some perceive BRI as a tool for China to assert its global influence and reshape global trade patterns to its advantage.

The book lightly touches on technological espionage, a domain where China faces ongoing international reprimand, particularly from the United States, for alleged intellectual property theft and cyber espionage. Barnett's discussion extends to the controversial Social Credit Score, something he sees as a tool for ensuring societal compliance. While not endorsing it, Barnett avoids dismissing China's social credit system, suggesting its practicality as a compliance measure. He draws a compelling parallel with the U.S., where citizens tacitly consent to various 'social credit metrics' or Persistent Identifiers (PIDs) — from FICO scores to Lex IDs and AbiliTec IDs to Reuters Entity I.D.s. These metrics, employed by numerous data-hungry companies and bolstered by sophisticated algorithms, arguably intrude more into individual lives than a single 'score.'

Barnett invokes a critical perspective on the paradox of freedom: the concept of a social score clashes with Constitutional principles, yet Americans live under the constant scrutiny of implicit evaluative ratings. In this digital era, data reigns supreme. This omnipresent data surveillance, Barnett implies, challenges our traditional notions of liberty and privacy, urging a reevaluation of what these concepts mean in the twenty-first century.

Barnett argues persuasively that China's failed "one-child policy" is bringing about one of the most significant demographic declines in the world. The Chinese economic juggernaut took only a decade to become the world manufacturing leader. China cannot "birth" itself from the reality of an aging and diminishing population. And he also points out it's not a target destination for immigration. Given various factors, the descent could be faster than the ascent. Combined with the E.U. and the USA, the amount of inter-competition will produce significant shifts in global power structures as the U.S. is forced to compete with an assertive but gradually depopulating China for markets and influence in this unstable region.

The E.U., Russia, and India are all aggressive in their desires to reinforce what Barnett calls dyad relationships, which are all vying for power and influence. Everybody wants to rule the world. Barnett doesn't shy away from a patriotic duty and self-reflection either. It takes some intellectual courage and historical chops to point out that America has some nostalgia addiction that inhibits movement and creates a lot of self-harm. According to Barnett, historical blindness causes us to reject our immigrant past and eschew immigration's rejuvenating effect on our economy.

He discusses America as a "brand" and wants to add nations to our American state, adding "Stars" akin to the E.U. We're the best bet in town. But for many reasons, some deeply embedded in our lore and culture, Americans are far more reluctant than others to add countries, let alone ones needing capital, rhetorical tools, and governance to add value. There have been previous conversations about hemispherical annexation/integration, but why would anyone want to? Barnett's retort is simple: necessity.

Barnett's hypothetical 21st-century Monroe Doctrine is one of his more interesting ideas. The original Monroe Doctrine's principle of asserting dominance or influence over a specific region may be rebranded to address or control climate change-related issues. The original Monroe Doctrine was a policy set forth by U.S. President James Monroe in 1823, which stated that any intervention by European nations in the affairs of the Americas would be viewed as acts of aggression, requiring U.S. intervention. The doctrine aimed to prevent European powers from colonizing or interfering in the affairs of the newly independent nations of the Americas. Drawing upon this concept, a 21st-century version might propose a similar regional exclusivity with climate change as its focal point. However, such a doctrine would likely face several criticisms. One of the main criticisms would be that it appears as a form of neo-imperialism or neo-colonialism. An assertion by one nation (e.g., the U.S.) of dominant influence over climate policies in a region could be seen as infringing on the sovereignty of other countries. The irony here is this nation-building thought process might appeal more to the boomers than the later generations. Another issue is inequality. Given the significant disparities in resources, technological capabilities, and financial power, there's a risk that the more powerful countries might dictate terms that are favorable to them but detrimental to smaller or less-developed countries.

Barnett argues that if hundreds of millions of climate refugees are coming, we'd best be prepared and understand the cost of the infrastructure requirements, food and fuel necessary. We also need to be prepared for what he calls the "multiculturalism" inflammation, and the costs associated with such a movement.

Barnett discusses India in some depth. India's rapid rise, with a population that will soon exceed China's, rapid increases in foreign investment, and new assertiveness on the world stage will certainly challenge China in the Indian Ocean and Central Asian regions. As early as 2027, India will have the world's 3rd largest economy, surpassing Japan and Germany, and have the third-largest stock market by 2030. India's 5.5% average gross domestic product growth over the past decade is impressive, and their global offshoring, digitalization, and energy transition—are setting the scene for unprecedented economic growth in the country of more than 1 billion people. Barnett does an excellent job of showing how India's rise is being mismanaged by Xi Jinping and an ineffectual CCP.

Barnett shrewdly notes, "I have not chosen to present any detailed plan for executing the grand strategy here proposed." To be frank, how could he? His proposals are provocative, majestic, and just raw. Is that his underlying motive? Think, recognize, but not do? He may have intended it to be so. Many choose to provide novel or unrealistic solutions to intractable problems. Barnett doesn't grapple with that directly but poses the problem. It is an interesting construct.

Barnett's book is profane and provocative. It's also incomplete. I think it's a designed provocation. His proposals are so grand and sweeping that it is challenging to see how they can be implemented in the current political climate. But I believe Barnett's observations are 100% correct.

But so what? Will America's political dysfunction allow it to be able to respond to these global trends? Time will tell. But here are some things that must be considered. These proposed initiatives have a tremendous cost. Who pays for all this realignment? Poverty may be down, and debt may be rising, but is that a known metric of any value? Barnett would dismiss it as relative. The cost and petroleum needed to initiate, maintain, and achieve this transition must be recognized. What got us here will be required to get us "there." We must recognize the costs of these initiatives. This kind of alignment has to be an all-in or no-in. And who will fight and destroy to maintain, for a global moment, the status quo?

Where will the electricity come from? The power requirements will continue to increase, and storage will invariably improve. But we will need significantly more energy. The minerals required for all the required energy storage do not exist in the amount necessary to meet the projected needs. And what available minerals there are, must be mined, refined, moved, and manufactured. Only oil can accomplish that.

The most compelling line to me in the book is this: "Americans do not endure history; we make it." YES! We've made, exploited, and championed the conditions we find ourselves in. And Barnett believes only America can lead this next epoch. If you believe Barnett's thesis, this is an existential challenge and a call to arms for the current and next generation(s). Debt, cultural disharmony, and coming out of the impacts of COVID have negatively impacted this nation, its leaders, and a future we assumed was guaranteed. News flash: nothing is guaranteed, absolutely nothing. The multiple government shutdowns, polarization, and ongoing politically orchestrated victim concerts have further convoluted our exasperating entitlement. The world will not wait. Barnett presents a focusing vision which is without known precedent. Barnett may be spot on that this realignment thesis is not a matter of if but when. Barnett has been and remains a champion of globalization.

Globalization will need to be rebranded. Globalization's uncaptured costs such as safe and open seas, deep water ports, and minimized pirating activity will also need to be valued and monetized for reimbursement. Barnett understands the utility of social scores for compliance. Barnett wants America to pick up "stars." Alaska and Hawaii were added to the Union in the 1950s primarily due to their strategic importance during the Cold War rather than as a direct result of growth. Alaska, with its proximity to the Soviet Union, offered a valuable location for military bases and defense purposes. As a Pacific Island, Hawaii was a crucial hub for U.S. military operations in the Pacific theater. It's been almost 70 years. Further hemispheric annexation/integration would be a heavy yoke to manage.

Barnett's assertion that "After 9/11, America became obsessed with homeland security" is 100% accurate. And that obsession has disunited us on a variety of levels. What is homeland security? Everything and nothing? America is obsessed with everything and nothing. Hence, we are no longer a serious country. Barnett may be trying to add his idea of the "map" to bring some rationality to the debate regarding the future of globalization, the looming impact of climate change, the prospects of future war with China et cetera.

What he writes may or may not be correct, but it is worth reading a few times. It takes courage to challenge the status quo or conventional wisdom. The future isn't luck; it is born by decisions in the present.

Barnett's style, syntax, and stance ultimately defeat the simple rhetoric. His delivery bothers many and enlightens many too. I don't think he's concerned with either. But his argument(s) require a prepared and vigorous debate. Qui audet, vincit! Who dares win? The challenge is before us. What are we prepared to do?

## About the Author

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