There is much talk today about the global crisis. It has become a popular topic in the media, in political circles, among the global gamblers and among economic ‘experts’. Evidence for global crisis, we are told, can be seen in the slowdown of the once buoyant Japanese economy, in the sudden transformation of the East Asian ‘miracle’ into a ‘meltdown’, in the failure of Russia’s transition to an instant market economy, and the reemergence of financial problems in Brazil. Even the sources of buoyancy in the United States are being questioned. Such talk sends the global gamblers into selling frenzies that further weaken the economies of these beleaguered countries.

But are these observed difficulties unique? Are they really the signs of a forthcoming global crisis? Those with any understanding of the past will realise that regional problems of this nature are always with us. Similar difficulties emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America, China and even the Western world during the OPEC oil ‘crisis’. And yet there was no global recession/depression. Such problems emerge regularly in various parts of the world owing to the natural process of strategic exhaustion and, less predictably, to the actions of political extremists (as in Russia and China). Once a new dynamic strategy has been adopted, or once the attack by extremists has settled down, the ‘crisis’ is resolved and forgotten. Until the next time. For it will be experienced periodically by other societies around the world. This, as I show in my global history trilogy, is a normal part of the dynamics of human society.

Paradoxically, however, a real crisis of global proportions does exist today. But it is not the crisis claimed by other observers. Rather it is
a hidden crisis that is the outcome not of the contradictions of capitalism but of those who arrogantly think they can control it. These are the global crisis makers who, surprisingly, are either faceless or bland people: people in private who peddle seductively dangerous ideas, and people in public who use these ideas to shape policy.

These ideas and policies threaten to undercut the long-term viability of rich and poor societies alike. Unlike the more visible economic difficulties, it is a problem that refuses to go away, and will remain even after the more superficial difficulties have been resolved. Its persistence arises from its anonymity. It is a malignancy that is widely regarded as benign. Essentially it is a false vision of what constitutes a healthy society and of the means required to achieve it. This is the real crisis we will face in the new millennium.

**The failure of strategic leadership**

At the heart of the hidden crisis is a failure of political vision and leadership. Modern Western governments have lost sight of the real reason for their existence, which is to facilitate the unfolding of society’s dynamic strategy. This unfolding, which must never be regarded as inevitable, enables the citizens of any society to achieve their key objectives of survival and prosperity. It is for this reason that governments emerged in the earliest civilisations of both the Old and New Worlds, and it is for this reason that governments have been maintained ever since. Until now. In the past few decades, governments of the Western world have relinquished responsibility for promoting and shaping economic development and growth. They have placed our future in the hands of the economic experts in central banks and key bureaucratic departments. This failure of strategic vision and leadership is, as I show, a very modern failure. If it were not so, the modern world would not exist. It is a failure that emerged in a widespread manner only during the second half of the twentieth century.

The burning question is: Why has modern strategic leadership failed? While this issue is examined in detail later in the book, it can be said here that it is an outcome of the growing democratisation of modern society. As I demonstrate in *The Ephemeral Civilization* (1997), the unfolding technological paradigm, which has been under way since the Industrial Revolution, leads not only to economic