

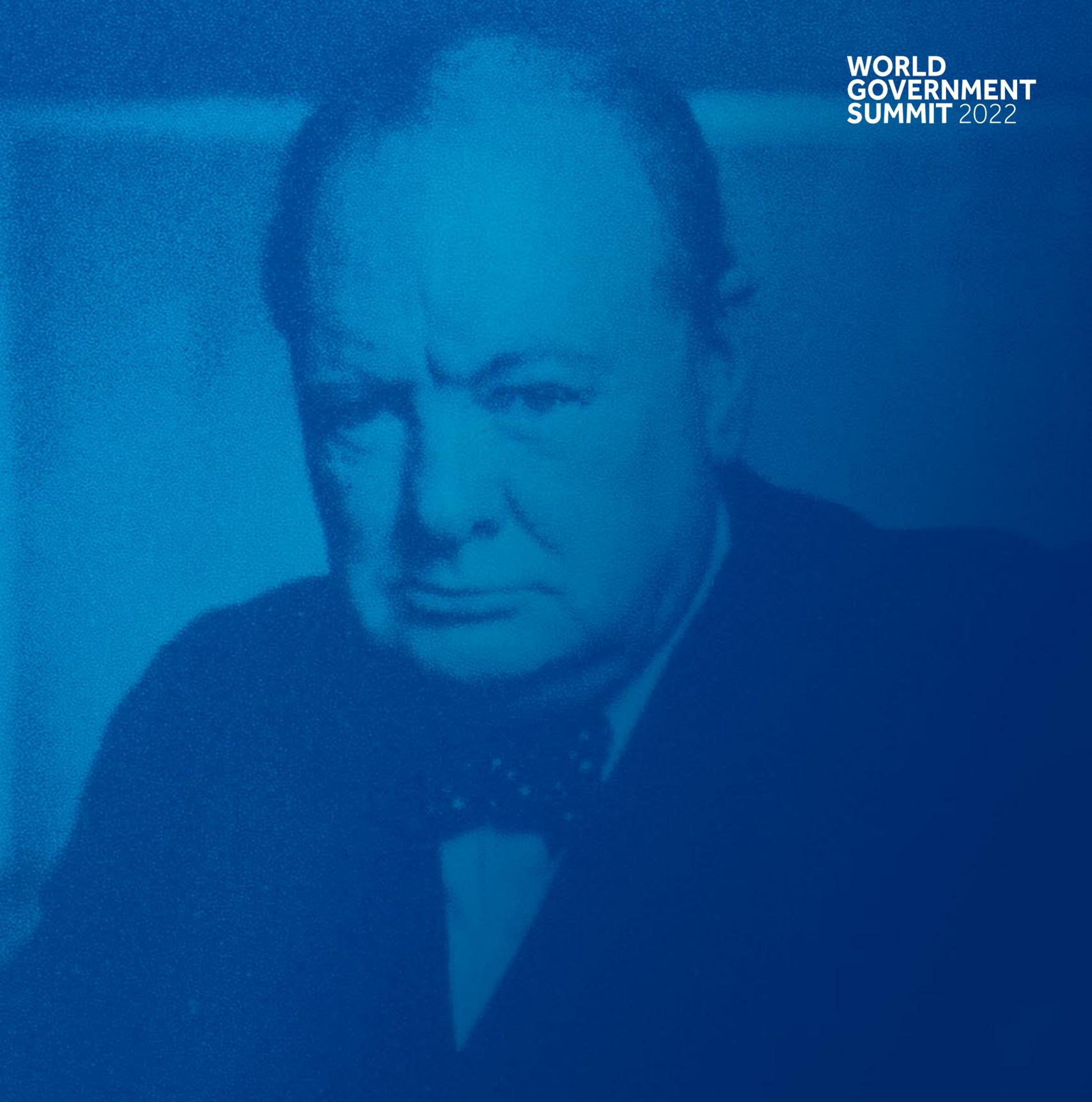
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OP-ED

TECHNOLOGY AND THE PAST

Dr. George Friedman,
Founder and Chairman, Geopolitical Futures





Winston Churchill said that the farther backward we can look, the farther forward we can see.

What he meant is that the past not only shapes our future but that it gives us the strength to reinvent ourselves. Societies with a long and deep past are powerful. With careful study they can give us a sense of what we were, and also what we will be.

The past, its triumphs and defeats, its traditions and its innovation allow us to create. Technology is new, but emerges to serve the needs and appetites of our time, and it is driven by the past. Technologists tend to think of themselves as inventing against the fabric of the past. On the contrary they are wedded to the past.

Technology is successful when it discovers solutions to problems that are pressing against society.

Knowledge multiplied and so has humanity. Managing that knowledge and those communications pressed heavily on the world after World War II.

The microchip was the foundation for both knowledge management and communications. The problem it was solving had become overwhelming but in principle it was not new.



Aristotle and Al-Farabi had struggled to find the true and beautiful embedded in the vastness of the past. The problem that the microchip solved was ancient. Antiquity had become overwhelming.



Part of the past is war. Its importance cannot be denied any more than the pain it costs.

But just as the philosophers struggled with the past in order to create clearer ways of thinking, so too war is both a nightmare and a creative force.



When we look at the iPhone, surely the icon of our time, we find that it was developed for use in the US Army, the digital camera for use in spy satellites, the internet for defense scientists to transmit data, the GPS for use by American submarines.

This is the past of the icon of our times. As with all history, it is filled with sorrow. But the past created it, and the past is not sentimental. It forced us to create these things. Over and over it reinvented how we live. **But more important, it did not touch the far more important question, of who we are.**



So when we speak of technology we must recognize that it emerges from the past. If we do not understand the past, even to antiquity where we all originate, then we will not understand the value of technology. It is not simply something new, but something which addresses the sometimes forgotten but always pressing essence of the past. ”

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