

BOOK REVIEW

**RICHARD HAASS, *THE WORLD:
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION*, BUCUREȘTI :
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The book *The World: A Brief Introduction*, written by Richard Haass, an American diplomat and the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, represents a significant and clear contribution for the understanding of the major events which shaped and continue to influence the international relations. The author organized his work in four parts, which concentrate on the essential history, on the main regions of the world, on the globalization period and on the paramount issues of order and chaos.

The author considers that the essential modern world history begins with the 17th century and the Peace of Westphalia, a treaty following which the principle of state sovereignty began to be internationally accepted. However, the violent and destructive history of Europe emphasized the states' lack of respect for the concept of sovereignty and implicitly, their constant predisposition to the option of war. The World War First is particularly highlighted by Haass as a war of negligence or as a war of choice, which could have been prevented. The origin of the World War Second is considered to be the punitive peace which did not provide a recovery solution to Germany after the so-called Great War. Nevertheless, the saving grace after the end of World War Second consisted in the development of a clear vision for peace, according to which the defeated states were also treated with respect. Furthermore, according to the author, the Cold War did not transform into a direct confrontation because there was established a balance of the military powers through NATO and the Warsaw Pact and due to the fact that the nuclear weapons have sustained the traditional and conventional balance of power. In this specific context, Richard Haass

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claimed that "there is no exaggeration to say that without the existence of nuclear weapons, perhaps today we would have read about World War III and not the Cold War."¹

Within the first part which describes the essential history, there are also mentioned the dramatic events (such as the Yugoslav Wars or the genocide in Rwanda) which led to the common decision of voting in the UN General Assembly the concept of R2P, namely the responsibility to protect. The other major events which are briefly highlighted as part of the essential history are the September 11 attacks and the financial crisis of 2008.

Based on the regional perspectives illustrated by Haass, Asia-Pacific (for instance, China) represents the most successful part of the world in the post-cold war era. On the other side, the Middle East is presented as the least successful region of the world. Europe, which seemed a region of success, is currently facing a myriad of challenges, such as, the problem of euroscepticism, the phenomenon of populism, Russia's annexation trends and the rise of right-wing nationalist parties. While Latin America is experiencing an era of democratic consolidation, Africa has attained only small democratic accomplishments. In South Asia, the tension between India and Pakistan prevails, while in Central Asia, there is a general level of peace due to the authoritarian political system and in certain situations, the oil-dependent economies. Last but not least, the United States is presented as the main architect of the post-World War II world, trying to avoid future military interventions. As a conclusion for the first part, the author does not agree with the idea that this is the best period in the world's history. He claims that without the fundamental role of the United States in maintaining a general direction of stability and freedom, this period will be most likely characterized by deterioration and by the absence of an effective global leadership.

The second part of the book, *The Regions of the World*, emphasizes the history, the challenges, the geopolitics and the perspectives of the regions chosen by the author in order to be analyzed. First of all, although Europe is generally considered as a successful region due to the North Atlantic Alliance and the European integration project, the author sustains that the best period of the continent is coming to an end. Within the part which describes the geopolitics of the continent, Haass concentrates on the threat represented by Russia, which is

¹ Richard Haass, *The World: A Brief Introduction*, Bucuresti: Nemira Publishing House, 2021, p. 60.

nevertheless illustrated as a great power more in name than in reality. Regarding Europe's and the United States' reaction in relation to Russia's position, the author perceives NATO's enlargement as an error, claiming that the Eastern Europe's security concerns could have been differently tackled. At present, Europe's vision for peace and prosperity is blurred by the rise of right-wing and left-wing populism.

The second analyzed region is represented by East Asia and the Pacific. A significant emphasis has been put on the representative example of the Four Asian Tigers, namely, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. The high levels of economic growth since the 1960's are mainly the result of the region's political stability, the specific work culture and the major investments in the education sector. In addition, according to the author, the achievement of this economic boom was also possible due to the United States' involvement and role in the support of the free trade, an aspect which constituted a development mechanism for many Asian countries. Furthermore, in the attempt to outline the political portrait of South Asia, Haass briefly mentions the problems of the countries from the region. While India has to deal with a growing population and an increasingly marginalized Muslim community, in Pakistan there is a weak civilian leadership, the real power being held by the army. Bangladesh is also facing major climate changes. All in all, South Asia is described as an insecure and uncomfortable region, which also experiences the Indo-Pakistani conflict and dispute over Kashmir.

The interest for the Middle East region mainly consists in the paramount natural resources of the area. The region is the source of more than half of the world's certified oil reserves and of almost half of the world's gas reserves. When he refers to the existence of war in the region, the author specifically mentions the 1980 Iraqi invasion of Iran and the war initiated by G. W. Bush in Irak in 2003. At that time, Richard Haass did not sustain the Bush administration's decision, considering the war as "a war of ill-advised choice." (p. 162) In this context, Haas thinks that changing an old regime with a better and more sustainable one is an utopian achievement which can not be attained easily or promptly. Moreover, the problem with Iran's nuclear program and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is also emphasized in the book as another source for the region's high instability and future level of violence.

Africa is portrayed as a continent whose significant challenge has been the establishment and consolidation of the foundations of good governance.

However, as the author mentions, the countries which have managed to develop a strategy for achieving the goals of development represent the exception rather than the rule. In addition, the future of Africa is described as unstable due to the population growth rate and as lacking the necessary unity and vision for achieving the vital peace.

The last region examined in the book is represented by the Americas. While referring to the United States, the author mentions "the rare luxury" (p. 187) of the country to focus its attention beyond the Western Hemisphere. The United States enjoys this possibility because it represents the only nuclear power in the region and due to the fact that it does not have to tackle other existing threats in the area. In this regard, the Americas are a region where the tradition of the great power rivalries is not so prominent. However, the author admits the existence of an increased level of violence within the countries of the analyzed region. Countries such as, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, are illustrated as the symbols of fragile democracies, also dominated by an endemic corruption and in certain situation, even drug and organized crime epidemics. On the other side, the neighborhood with Canada is perceived as a gift and as one of the reasons the USA managed to devote its energy in other directions.

The third part of the book analyzes the characteristics and the evolution of the globalization process. In this regard, Haass mentions the inevitable threat of terrorism, highlighting at the same time the possibility of a future use of a radiological dispersal device or dirty bomb. Moreover, the emergence of countries with nuclear weapons is perceived as a destabilizing factor for the world's security and in this specific context, the author develops the case of Iran and the fragility of the JCPOA talks. Although the nuclear weapons represent a value for many governments, the main current challenge remains the one of limiting or reducing the countries' stock of such an arsenal or of preventing the countries without nuclear weapons of developing such a devastating technology.

Emphasizing the major problem of climate change, the author provides the example of Bangladesh, which is recognized as one of the most vulnerable countries to the impact of global warming. Furthermore, regarding the subject of migration, Haass mainly talks about the international efforts to assist the refugees, stressing the importance of the USA as the country with the most immigrants. The internet governance is also portrayed as one of the most

important challenges of the century, this specific technology being explored by the majority of the population (unlike the nuclear weapons, for instance).

Although the level of global health is considered to be characterized by the best indicators in history, this part of the book highlights certain stringent health related issues, such as, the urbanization and the increasing temperature, which created the suitable environment for the outbreak and transmission of diseases. At the same time, the author highlights the possibility of the onset of a pandemic, the antibiotic resistance crisis and the prevalence of the non-contagious diseases, which receive only few cents for every dollar spent on the well-known infectious diseases. Thus, Haass proves to be more concerned about the appearance of an epidemic of non-communicable diseases.

Presenting the trade and the investments current dynamics, the author suggests the essential solution of educating and training the workforce for the novel jobs. The exchange rate, the monetary policy and the development indicators represent the last subjects of the third part of the book. The author compares the dollar with an international currency, this aspect being defined as an incontestable factor of prosperity. Moreover, within this part, there is provided a list of countries by Human Development Index, as well as a series of indicators which suggest the improved literacy rate, the increased life expectancy and technological capacity. Nevertheless, the international community still has to tackle fundamental issues, such as the one of eradicating the extreme poverty and hunger or the one of achieving universal primary education.

The fourth and last part of the book illustrates the oscillation between order and chaos. According to Richard Haass, the respect for the most basic international rules is not universally shared, providing the example of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation or Russia's involvement in the 2016 US elections' results. In this part, there are also mentioned the cases of Taiwan and Kosovo, their example contributing to the conclusion that the sovereignty is in the eye of the beholder. As the main sources of order at present, there are embraced the following: the principles of democracy, the economic interdependence, the global governance and the international law. However, the democratic peace theory is perceived as a concept rather than a reality and the global governance is said to be affected by the UN weaknesses. Thus, the possibility of a future complex war is not at all excluded and in this regard, the author created several scenarios regarding a potential conflict between the following: the USA and China because of the situation with Taiwan; NATO and

Russia; USA and North Korea or Iran and India and Pakistan. As a consequence, the reasons and causes which determined in the past the rulers and nations to initiate wars have not completely disappeared.

The book ends with an overview of the most stringent problems which destabilize the current order. These issues are considered to be the following: Russia's aggressive hyperpatriotism, China's emergence as a global economic power, the emergence of more sources of power (Iran, North Korea), the appearance of the non-state actors, the phenomenon of populism and the lack of a general effective leadership (see the example of the UN Security Council). Since the liberal world order is not a natural state, the near future will show whether the image of the world will become again similar to the one from the previous century or whether the current benefits will be maintained and protected.