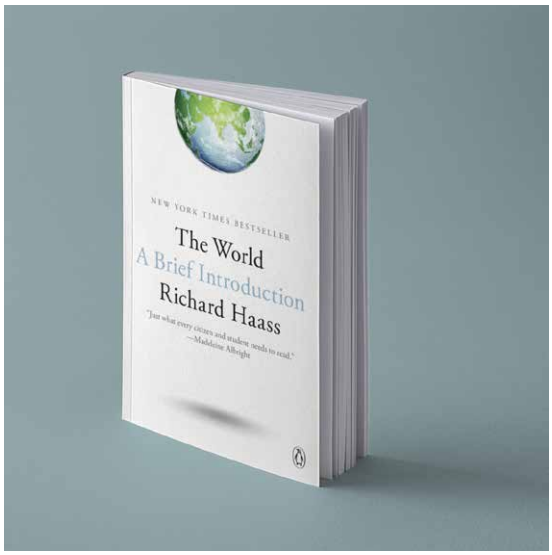

The World According to Haass: A Concise Guide

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The World: A Brief Introduction
by Richard Haass
Penguin, 2021
378 pages

Richard Haass is troubled by the fact that students in the United States can complete their studies at the best universities without understanding the world, globalization, and economics, or even how the American administration works. His declared purpose in this book is to "provide the basics of what you need to know about the world, to make you more globally literate" (p. xviii).

Haass' observation is correct. A massive amount of information is available about each of the issues that capture the headlines or those that occupy us on a daily basis— health, security, employment, food, housing, technology, and climate. However, not all of us understand how the price of a product or service is determined, the government's role in setting the price, or how climate agreements will affect our lives over the next fifty years.

In order to provide the essential basic information, Haass joins the process of Wikipedia-ization, which in turn has become a process of Twitterization of knowledge, or in brief, its minimization. And herein lies the dilemma—if in fact there are readers prepared to invest the time and effort in reading Haass' introduction on understanding the world, and if they then achieve a better understanding. For example, it is pretentious to assume that anyone who reads a few pages about the world economy (pp. 215-239) will understand how it functions. Even after reading these chapters, readers will not know how the fiscal and monetary policy of the United States affects global prices of products and services. Indeed, Haass himself recognizes that in three hundred pages it is impossible to investigate subjects fully, and at the end (pp. 309-313) and in the enlightening endnotes (pp. 315-370) he refers readers to more in-depth reading.

The book has four parts. The first part gives a summary of history, that is, what Haass considers important for readers to know in order to have a better understanding of today's world. Haass starts with a brief mention of the Treaty of Westphalia, which defined the principles of state sovereignty, recognition of borders, rejection of force as a way of changing them, and non-intervention in internal matters. Although this treaty has been breached innumerable times since 1648, Haass is right to choose this point in time for the start of his short journey through modern political history (p. 11), and here he follows Henry Kissinger, who in 2014 published his book *World Order*, which stresses the importance of the Treaty of Westphalia.

The two World Wars are surveyed by Haass in 15 pages. Both, and particularly the Second World War, shaped the world and still have an influence on its development. The political boundaries in the Middle East were drawn at the height of the First World War, as were the

subsequent treaties (most of which are not mentioned in the book), and the League of Nations—the first version of the United Nations—was established after this war. Phenomena such as Nazism, the semi-mad leader who drags the masses into internal and international wars, the sense of national affront as a motive for war—perhaps the first version of fake news—these and others underlying the two World Wars and contemporary international events receive only partial and insufficient mention, particularly for a basic guide to understanding the world.

Haass identifies the end of the era of American influence in the Middle East and attributes it to President Obama's failure to react to the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime.

With the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War, which developed in the wake of the Second World War, the question arises whether that was just the end of the first stage, and we are witnessing the start of the second stage, with the United States once again positioned as the leader of the free world against a coalition of countries led by China and Russia. In the current stage, the rivals have not yet defined the geographical borders of the struggle, or decided whether these borders include only central Europe and the Asian side of the Pacific, or whether the struggle focuses only on areas of influence with the aim of controlling markets and resources. As other countries join in the activity there is also a danger of the struggle spreading to these areas.

In view of the emergence of Cold War 2.0, it is possible to understand why Haass devotes two pages to Ukraine (pp. 79-80) and several pages to Taiwan (mainly pp. 89-93) in the second part of the book, which deals with various regions of the world. Haass stresses the lack of logic, whether economic or strategic, that guides China's relations with the United States and puts the two powers in opposition to one another (p. 94).

With respect to Russia-United States relations, there is also the question whether the decisions to preserve NATO even after the collapse of the Soviet empire and to bring Ukraine into this organization are correct. Haass leaves this question open, which suggests that he too wonders whether it could be the basis of a deal to prevent the danger of losing control over the growing tension between Russia on one side, and the US and its NATO allies on the other.

Readers who use this book as a basic guide will not understand how political systems in the United States, China, and Russia function. For example, after reading the book, it is highly probable that even an American university graduate will not know about the constitutional dispute over who in the United States has the authority to declare war.

The chapter on the Middle East does not add to the basic knowledge of the typical reader of newspapers. The spotlight that Haass shines almost exclusively on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in his review of global problems and disputes is somewhat exaggerated. It is interesting to note his prediction in this regard, that the current Israeli occupation will continue, "or a version of it where Israel annexes certain territories where settlements are concentrated while Palestinians have a degree of self-rule in remaining parts of the West Bank and Gaza" (p. 121). But although Haass has served in senior positions in the US State Department and the National Security Council, he does not express his opinion of this forecast or its chances of being acceptable to the United States and the international community.

Haass identifies the end of the era of American influence in the Middle East and attributes it to President Obama's failure to react to the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, which crossed a red line defined by the President himself, and President Trump's failure to react to the Iranian attack on Saudi oil installations. According to Haass, even after the elimination of the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary

Guards, Qassem Soleimani, there are still doubts in the region over the commitment of the US. Haass does not critique the emerging phenomenon of weakening American influence or its effect on the growing chaos in the region, to which he refers in the last part of the book. Nor is there a short analysis of the region's economic and water problems, which could lead to outbreaks of violence like the Arab Spring. He also notes that the Arab League consists of 22 members (p. 128) but does not mention that almost a third of them do not function any more as sovereign states, and this in effect ignores a situation that poses implicit risks to international order and stability. His forecast for the region's future is fairly gloomy.

The third part of the book deals with the global age, in which Haass analyzes the problems and main issues facing humanity, and it is not an easy task to refer to all of them. He rightly points to the revolution in communications and compares the time—an entire month—that elapsed between America's Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the arrival of the news in London, to the immediacy of communications in 2015, referring to the first time that a US President mentioned a foreign leader on Twitter, in this case, the Pope (p. 160). Haass notes the problems created as a result of the multiplying ways of transmitting information and opinions and the speed at which this happens. In particular, he stresses the desire of certain countries to control the content of information flowing to their citizens and the means used, maintaining that "ideas often have a way of entering even closed societies" (p. 163).

Terror is not a new phenomenon in modern history, but in recent decades it has changed the lives of many in the global population, and combating it has become a financial burden. Haass's reference to the subject is too general, and ignores, for example, the ideologies and geographical locations of movements that champion terror.

Nuclear weapons proliferation and the dilemmas that it poses command much attention from Haass, for example, in his analysis of the problematic nature of a balance of nuclear fear and its consequences. Haass decidedly rejects the idea, because of the possibility of errors of judgment, the risk that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of terror organizations, and their use by elements that are prepared to sacrifice their lives and certainly the lives of others to achieve their goals. His statement that the Non-Proliferation Treaty is "an honor code system in a world of honor where people are not always honorable" (p. 176) supports the position of Israel, one of the three nuclear countries (together with India and Pakistan) that have not signed the treaty. On page 179 Haass also quotes an American source that gives a number for Israel's nuclear warheads.

The book was written and published before the resumption of talks in Vienna focusing on the possible return of the United States to the framework of the agreement with Iran (JCPOA) and it therefore does not mention the negotiations. Still, the author has very interesting ideas about potential alternatives—a renewed agreement with a high ceiling for Iranian capabilities; an attack on these capabilities that could lead to escalation; or a situation that could drag other countries into the nuclear arms race (p. 178).

Haass' forecast about climate change and the global fight against it, to which he justifiably devotes an extensive chapter, is not optimistic. Coal, the most polluting energy source, will continue to be the source of 20 percent of global energy until 2040 (p. 188), and the conduct of various countries, mainly India and China, regarding the use of coal reinforces this assessment. As with other topics in the book, Haass stresses the essential weakness of the international handling of the climate issue. The declarations of various countries express intent rather than commitment, and in any case there is no international enforcement mechanism. Reading this chapter of the book strengthens the view that this will be one of the

central issues for humankind in the 21st century, and it is possible that ecological disasters will hasten the processes, still slow, of minimizing the damage that human beings inflict on their environment.

Throughout the book Haass clarifies his preference for a liberal world order, guided by the camp of democratic countries led by the United States.

Groups of creatures, and particularly human societies, have always moved around the globe, whether compelled to do so or voluntarily, but it appears that the size and frequency of waves of migration have been especially prominent over the past hundred years. Most have involved refugees from war and from the rule of dictators such as Stalin in Russia or Bashar Assad in Syria, but Haass concludes that "it is only a matter of time before climate change becomes the greatest cause of refugee flows" (p. 198). A shortage of water will drive refugees from deserts to more fertile areas, while the rise in sea level due to global warming will drive people away from coastal areas to higher land. These and other insights do not yet translate into political, legislative, and economic planning, and certainly not at an international level, but the time for systemic thinking about these issues is drawing closer.

Systemic thinking on cyber issues already exists, although not at the international level. In his chapter on this subject (pp. 201-207), Haass points out that there is still no international regulation of cyberspace, and even if this is achieved, it will be difficult if not impossible to implement, when there are disagreements even among friendly countries on matters of principle such as the protection of privacy (p. 205). Haass correctly assesses that this is one of the central issues for the 21st century, but adds little to the debate and does not mention names such as Google, Facebook, WeChat, or on the other hand, Quantum.

The absence of an effective international mechanism is also damaging to how the international community handles global health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Haass even comes close to blaming China and the World Health Organization for the failure to prevent the outbreak (p. 209).

Haass' explanations of the international economic system are too general and will not help readers understand developments in this sphere. However, it is interesting that he argues that the United States was wrong not to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, because this has enabled China to enter the resulting vacuum and set up its own Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (pp. 226-227). Haass does not expand about the economic competition between the United States and China and its implications for the world economy. For example, he fails to mention two huge ventures, the Belt & Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which have become tools for economic and political influence in Asia. In his reference to the subject of direct foreign investment (pp. 228-229), Haass also fails to mention the concrete danger of this economic instrument and its exploitation by China for purposes that are not purely economic in some of the countries that are targets for Chinese investment. Nor is there any reference in this chapter to matters such as the impact of international crime, the drug trade, and money laundering.

The fourth and final part of the book deals with the world order or lack thereof. Order is oxygen and its absence is chaos. The failure of the attempt to create a world order after the First World War was partly responsible for the Second World War, while the Cold War remains cold precisely because the two rival powers have created tools to maintain order (p. 255). Haass characterizes the current period with the term "disarray." His examples of a region suffering from anarchy or chaos—the wars involving Iraq between the years 1980-2003,

the Arab Spring, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Iran's efforts to achieve nuclear weapons and strategic positions all over the region—are important examples to illustrate the idea of lack of order.

In this context, Haass' observation on the failure of the attempt to create a mechanism for global governance is correct. Neither the UN as a whole nor specifically the Security Council has succeeded in this task because none of the powers in the period following the Second World War would renounce any elements of their power, or as Haass writes: "Institutions are never more influential than the degree to which their principal members are prepared to agree and act in collaboration" (p. 274). Global governance may not exist, but it is impossible to avoid the regulatory contribution of international organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, and its counterpart IATA, the International Air Transport Organization, which successfully regulate one of the most complex global issues, with aspects involving politics, the economy, and security. Haass underestimates the importance of international economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund in setting economic standards to prevent the financial collapse of several countries. He also fails to mention other organizations that regulate global banking cooperation, or bitcoin and other digital currencies as possible currencies of the future, with their advantages and disadvantages.

In conclusion, throughout the book Haass clarifies his preference for a liberal world order, guided by the camp of democratic countries led by the United States. He admits that order is not the natural state of international relations (p. 303), but it has existed since the Second World War. Now it is unravelling due to "the decline in America's relative power along with its increasing reluctance in recent years to lead and in some cases even remain on the international stage" (p. 297). His recommendation, aimed mainly at Washington, is for the United States to try to rebuild its status as a constructive actor, cautious in the use of force and aggressive use of its economy, and above all, to return to the use of multilateral organizations and tools. Here Haass levels stinging criticism on the conduct of the Trump administration: "It is one thing for a world order to unravel slowly; it is quite another for the country [i.e., the United States] that had a large hand in designing and building it to take the lead in dismantling it" (p. 302).

Even though Haass was forced to flatten subjects in order to write this practical book as a basic guide for readers who want to understand important issues in greater depth than appears in the headlines, I recommend reading it. To the author I will say that the life span of a book on the front shelf of bookstores depends on keeping abreast of the changing and multiplying events that affect the global picture; otherwise, the current edition may be revealed as irrelevant in another two years.

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