

Book Review
By
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Richard Haass, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 352

A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order is written by Richard Haass. He has been the long serving president of the Council on Foreign Relations. Earlier he was the senior Middle East adviser to President George H. W. Bush and served in the US National Security Council.

A world in Disarray is a timely contribution to literature on challenges faced by the world political order. *The book* is divided into three parts; the first part traces the history of the world order from the rise of the modern state system to the end of the Cold War, the second part gives an account of the momentous shifts and changes in the world order in the last quarter of the previous century, and the third part suggests specific steps that could tackle many forthcoming challenges to the world peace and order.

The fundamental elements of the world order, established after WWII, worked well till it ran its course with the disintegration of Soviet Union. Besides his own analysis, the author has drawn from prominent scholars works, who have analyzed international political transitions. He refers to Hedley Bull's perspective on international system and society and his emphases on citizens, freedom of action within the state's borders, and in the larger international society. He also

discusses disagreements and friction in state to state relations in some detail. Haass analyses the issue of “legitimacy”, as defined by Kissinger to mean international agreement on the nature of workable arrangements in the foreign policy of states. He is of the view that, in the real world of power politics, legitimacy alone does not guarantee security against military aggression. Haass also refers to historian Peter Wilson the author of “*Thirty Years War.*” who explored the world trends of the 17th century in which he surmised that secular sovereign states had become pre-eminent and empires founded on religious identity would cease to be common in international system. This approach to order may seem narrow but it brought about an enormous change in Europe’s political and economic history.

The author considers that all wars have three phases. Each one of them has an impact on the international trends. The first phase comprise forces whose interplay led to the war in the first place. The second, of war itself that takes place on the battlefields, and the third the debate about the lessons of the war and the wisdom of the aftermath. He agrees with the political scientists who are of the view that after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War in 1989, a stable new world order did not emerge. Relative stability of a bipolar world in which the heavily nuclear-armed United States and the Soviet Union had maintained restraint was disturbed and the new order was not founded on stable foundation. The new international order became further complicated in a multi-polar world, with the elements of globalization, nuclear proliferation and rapid advancement in technology. This part also explains the historical developments that have made the world, both,

more interconnected and vulnerable to the forces of disintegration.

The second part of the book describes the order taking shape in the post Cold War era. The author categorizes the efforts being made by world powers to set rules that would regulate international trade, and finance. He discusses the role of the relations among the major powers i.e US, China, Russia, Japan, Europe and India in defining international political and strategic discourse. In Haass's opinion no direct military conflicts are likely to happen in near future but the configuration of forces may lead to economic and strategic crossroads. The US-China economic power struggle may become the major event in the 21st century and Russia's role in Ukraine crisis is prominent in the post Cold War world order scenario. Haass, however, perceptively sees the gap emerging in post Cold War world order. He has listed three criteria which according to him, would be central to the stability of order. One is the extent to which the rules and principles by which the world is to operate are supported by the wider international community, second implementation of rules on all states, and finally the balance of power among major and regional states.

While portraying the current grim picture of world affairs, Haass started with the Middle East by asserting that its chaos is likely to continue. Asia is grappling with the problem of China's rise and unpredictability of North Korea. Stable region of Europe has come under the burden of prolonged low economic growth, and immigration challenges. Rooting of populism and nationalism in political discourse by world leader has contributed to further instability. Haass seems to be inclined to side with Thucydides approach to world political system that

major powers rivalry, and competition shape the international system.

The book is a useful contribution to the history of international relations. The language of the book is simple, and aids in understanding the important trends in the contemporary international system. Readers may not agree with some of author's assessments but the book provides a quick review of current state of world affairs in contemporary perspective with a short and compelling history of international/foreign relations started from the Peace of Westphalia through the end of the Cold War.

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