

Book Review

World Disorders: Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era

By Stanley Hoffmann

Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000

Updated Edition, 288 pp.

Coming to Grips with the Global Society

Rene Wadlow*

**Rene Wadlow is Editor, Transnational Perspectives, Geneva, Switzerland and Editorial Advisor, Journal of Peace Studies, New Delhi, India.*

Stanley Hoffmann, professor at Harvard University, USA, is as he wrote of Hadley Bull a “highly civilized voice in which scepticism and hope are admirably balanced.” Here he deals with intellectual efforts to analyse the Post-Cold War world and the nature of the global society. For most international relations scholars, the Cold War was the focus of analysis for two generations. For most international relations scholars, the Cold War was the focus of analysis for two generations. As Hoffmann notes:

“We have concentrated for fifty years on one particular kind of nightmare, the nightmare of a bipolar nuclear conflict between two superpowers- the traditional duel of Athens and Sparta – and it concentrated the mind because the risks were so obvious. I fear that the mind is much more difficult to concentrate on the kind of chaos we face now.”

During the Cold War, the superpowers, driven by fear of nuclear war, devised by trial and error, a network of rules and restraints aimed at avoiding direct military collision. The United States and the Soviet Union set out “rules of the game” through negotiations between themselves. These “rules of the game” were a combination of international laws which could gain wide consensus among other states and a balance of power with mutual respect for spheres of local preponderance.

Within the framework of the Cold War structures, we have seen the rise of new movements and actors which play a role in today’s global society. Among these forces is the end of colonialism and the rise of non-western regional powers: India, China, perhaps Brazil in Latin America, potentially at a later stage, Iran. Social currents world wide have broken down rigid hierarchies. Today, we do not have equality of opportunity but we do have the emergence of many individuals from groups situated at the bottom of society. There has been a transformation in the role of women and the young. Social welfare, education, and health programmes have

become wide spread. With the end of the Cold War, these new social forces stand out better and require both analysis and policy proposals for steering and governance within the global society.

Hoffmann stresses that: “We are dealing with an extraordinarily complex system in which we still find all the traditional goals that states used to pursue: prestige, influence, might; even territory is still often important insofar as it is (for instance, in the Arab-Israeli conflict) a component of national identity. And yet next to traditional goals we also have new one, particularly in the world economy, where one of the main stakes is really control of market shares. Finally, we confront the problem of the failed state, formidable both because of its human consequences – chaos, civil wars, refugees – and because of the risk of external meddling.”

In order to make wise policy proposals we need to set out strategies that would minimise violent conflict among states, reduce injustice among and within states, and prevent dangerous human rights violations within them. However, as Hoffmann quips “Goals are easy to describe. What matters more is a strategy for reaching them.”

Although there was scholarly analysis during the Cold War on the growing power of multinational businesses, their role was always overshadowed by the hard politics of arms and security concerns. Today, in the emphasis on the global society, we see better the rise of independent economic actors, of corporations, banks and investor-speculators which are linked but not fully dependent on states.

Thus, the study of today’s global society requires going beyond some of the traditional approaches of international relations to place more emphasis on the link between domestic concerns and international policy making. As Hoffmann notes “Many of the issues in trade negotiations these days are about labor standards, environmental policies, and human rights (for instance, products fabricated by child labor): these are all deeply domestic matters in international affairs.”

There is the need to see that the global society is a wider world political system in which states are only one part. There is a need to study transnational forces and institutions that exist across state borders as well as the increasingly important role of Non-Governmental Organizations. Hoffmann’s encouragement to such broad analysis needs to be taken up.