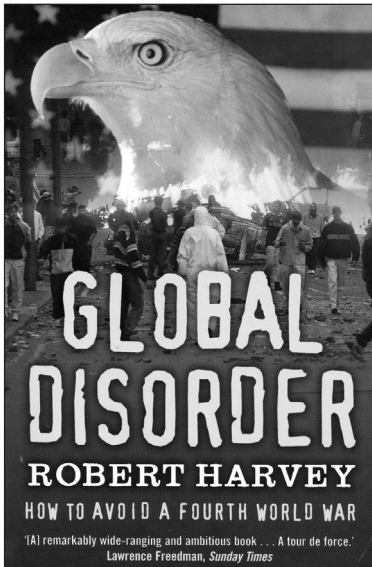


## GLOBAL DISORDER

*How To Avoid A  
Fourth World War*

ROBERT HARVEY

Robinson, London, 2003, 477 pages



This book looks at the factors that are likely to create an unstable world, possibly even leading to a fourth world war in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 period. Harvey identifies a wide range of issues that are taking place around the world, some of which are already creating conflict. He looks at the threat of terrorist organisations, border disputes between nuclear India and Pakistan, the 'menacing' North Korea, the implications of the fissures between the US and the EU, and the contradictions that are inherent in the globalisation of capitalism. The book explores these issues in vivid detail, introducing some of the debates in the fields of international relations and security studies. Without doubt, Harvey is well versed in historical detail and uses this intelligently to put forward some of his arguments.

The common thread running throughout the book is that the above factors have the potential to draw the world into another world war if they are left unchecked. The US and the EU therefore need to form a partnership to create order in the international system and enforce this through a reformed United

Nations system. The US should forsake its unilateralism and seek to build consensus around its foreign policy so that it is not viewed as a rampaging bull.

The book debunks the myth that Islam is an inherently violent and intolerant faith. The author shows that fundamentalism is not specific to Islam. Most religions have produced extremists who have sought religious legitimisation of their views through perverted interpretations of the scriptures. Such fundamentalism is a perversion of religion for political gain. It is more a process of struggle against the order of the day in view of the inability to influence the political process through peaceful means. Thus, it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The lack of genuine democracy in the Middle East is very significant, if only because of its strategic importance to the US. Thus Harvey argues that it is important for the US to engage the rulers of Saudi Arabia in order to open up democratic space to guarantee the flow of oil from that country. Therefore it is important for the US to moderate some of the excesses of the royal family in Saudi Arabia to allay the feelings of discontent that are leading to increasing extremist militancy in that country. Should the US fail to do this, it may be forced to intervene militarily to guarantee its supply of oil.

Another area of concern is the erosion of democracy in all democratic countries because of the influence wielded by multinational corporations and private business. Multinational corporations can have a devastating impact on livelihoods in the Third World and this book brings this to light. It emphasises that the international political economic system must be reformed.

A disconcerting feature of the book is the way in which it legitimises and even extols US domination of the world. The author speaks of the world as if it were a state of America. The analogy of a sheriff is used, where the US consults only to legitimise actions designed to enhance its national interest. By 'consulting', the author means essentially with the EU and Japan.

The split on foreign policy between the US and EU over Iraq, Harvey argues is 'one of the most serious problems in the post cold

war era'. It is a problem because 'it would be nice to have two sheriffs'. The US and the EU are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in the international arena. This is undeniable. What is debatable, however, is the extent to which this is a bad thing. It can be argued that it holds benefits for less developed countries (LDCs) that are bullied and cajoled by the major powers. A divergence in foreign policy between the EU and the US will limit the excesses of these powers. Cooperation will be sought from the Third World in the pursuit of legitimating policies, whereas a harmonisation of policies between these two will lead to the further marginalisation of the Third World in the consultation stakes.

The US and the EU have insisted on retaining patents on HIV/AIDS medication in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), although this disease is ravaging the poor countries that cannot afford to purchase these medicines. They have consistently maintained agricultural subsidies while forcing less powerful countries to liberalise their markets, thus rendering their produce uncompetitive. To now argue that these countries represent some enlightened force for good in the international environment is to belittle the efforts of those who have been attempting to form Third World coalitions in order to refashion the international system based on equity and justice.

The myth that the US is God's gift to humankind is perpetrated vigorously without much consideration for historical experience. Hence Harvey talks of a 'benign empire'. In comparative and historical terms, this is the case. However, the US is not so benevolent as Harvey would have us believe. On the contrary, it acts only to further its own sometimes narrowly defined national interests. Where benevolence does not serve this, it is sacrificed. The 'stone ageing' of Iraq despite international opinion is an instance of the self-centred element in US foreign policy, which betrays the outdated crass realism of Morgenthau in foreign policy circles in that country. The reluctance to intervene to halt the Rwandan genocide in 1994 is a demonstration of this. What is in it for the US is always a prime consideration and no one outside the US is under any illusions about this.

On the question of terrorist organisations,

Harvey portrays them as merely groups of fanatics who exploit the concerns of the poor for their own benefit. This is an incomplete analysis. Without justifying the use of extra-legal and inhumane means for political goals, it may be said that terrorist groups exploit legitimate gripes with the US and most of the Western world. Support for Israel and Saudi Arabia are just two of these. The West has shown no urgency in engaging Israel and Saudi Arabia to bring about changes in dealing with Palestine and reforming the Saudi political system. Instead, the USA continues to support these regimes to the detriment of millions of Muslims. The disempowered are bound to resort to extreme measures to regain their power. That is precisely what terrorist organisations thrive on – riding on the back of justifiable causes. That the measures used are cruel does not diminish the validity of the concerns that prompt these organisations into action. Thus, employing only the military to deal with this threat misses the point altogether. Empowering the disempowered is bound to bring about some respite for those who are the objects of terrorist actions.

*Global disorder* makes for interesting and entertaining, reading regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the arguments put forward. What is likely to interest readers is the clear background he gives for each topic and the way that this crystallises the issues. Some of the arguments, such as the need for reform of the UN and the international political economic systems, are thought provoking and worth digesting, yet at times one feels that the author does not consider some of the major arguments that go against his own. The major shortcoming of the book is the relegation of the Third World to a position of relative insignificance in international affairs.

*Theminkosi Gcoyi (Research Intern, DSP)*

BOOK REVIEWS