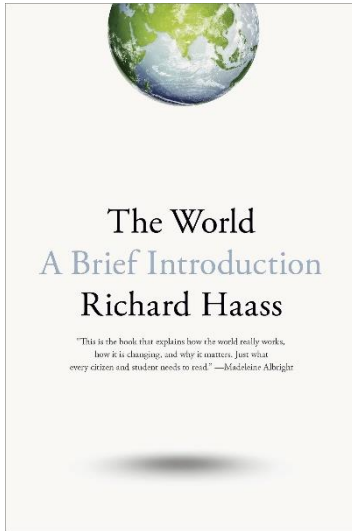


# COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

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## **Book Club Discussion Questions**

*The World: A Brief Introduction*

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Like it or not, we live in a global era, in which what happens thousands of miles away has the ability to affect our lives. This time, it is a coronavirus known as COVID-19, which originated in a Chinese city many had never heard of but has spread to all corners of the earth. Next time, it could be another infectious disease from somewhere else. Twenty years ago, it was a group of terrorists trained in Afghanistan and armed with box cutters who commandeered four airplanes and flew them into buildings and claimed nearly three thousand lives. Next time, it could be terrorists who use a truck bomb or gain access to a weapon of mass destruction. In 2016, hackers in a nondescript office building in Russia traveled virtually in cyberspace to manipulate America's elections. Now they have burrowed into our political life. In recent years, severe hurricanes and large fires linked to climate change have ravaged parts of the earth; in the future we can anticipate even more serious natural disasters. In 2008, it was a global financial crisis caused by mortgage-backed securities in America, but one day it could be a financial contagion originating in Europe, Asia, or Africa. This is the new normal of the twenty-first century.

*The World* provides readers with the essential background and building blocks necessary to make sense of this complicated and interconnected world. It gives them the tools they need to become more informed, discerning citizens, better able to arrive at sound, independent judgments. While it is impossible to predict what the next crisis will be or where it will originate, *The World* provides a foundation that will allow readers to understand the basics and the choices for how to respond.

In short, readers of *The World* will become more globally literate, which is a must in this global era, as what goes on outside a country matters enormously to what happens inside. Even if we want to ignore the world, it will not ignore us. The choice we face is how to respond. We are connected to this world in all sorts of ways. We need to better understand it, both its promise and its threats, in order to make informed choices, be it as students, citizens, voters, parents, employees, or investors.

*The World* is divided into four sections. The first emphasizes history and is global in scope. Chapters are devoted to what is essential to know about the period of several hundred years leading up to World War I, the three decades from World War I to the end of World War II, the four-plus decades of the Cold War, and the current period.

The second section of the book begins with an introduction to the world writ large and includes chapters on six principal regions of the world: Europe, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas. Each chapter explains the importance of the region, provides its core history, and explains its dynamics.

The third and longest section of the book addresses globalization and global challenges, including climate change, global health, terrorism, cybersecurity, development, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, migration, and trade. Depending on how well these challenges are managed, they can be a source of disorder or stability. This requires examining global governance in each of these realms.

A fourth and final section deals with world order, the most basic concept of international relations, as well as what brings it about and what threatens it. This part of the book delves into some of the principal sources of stability in the world, including the notion and reality of sovereignty, deterrence, the balance of power, alliances and less formal coalitions, and the role of international organizations, democracy, trade, and international law. It also assesses disorder in the world and ends with a discussion of what all this means for the current international era.

## **Book Club Discussion Questions**

1. Which of the global challenges outlined in the book do you think is the most serious long-term challenge (e.g. global health, climate change, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, migration, etc.) and why?
2. What does the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic tell you about the world, and how do you think it will affect the world?
3. What do you believe are the best and worst aspects of globalization? Can you use any examples from your life to illustrate these positives and negatives? Do you believe globalization has on the whole led to a more prosperous and better world?
4. Imagine you are advising the president of the United States. Which regional or global issue would you recommend be put at the top of the agenda and why? What would you advise that they do to address it?
5. What do you think accounts for the success of some regions and the failure of others? Which region do you think is best positioned to succeed in the coming decades? Worst?

6. History, Mark Twain is alleged to have said, does not repeat itself but rhymes. What moment in history do you think most closely parallels the present? What lessons should we learn from that moment in history?
7. *The World* labels the era we currently live in the “post–Cold War world,” which describes where we have been but not where we are heading. In ten or twenty years, what new events do you think may arise that will change how we describe this era?
8. Some argue that the world is fundamentally more peaceful than it has ever been, pointing to the lack of major wars between countries. Do you agree or disagree?
9. Some argue that the United States and China are destined to become locked in a new cold war. Do you agree? If the United States and China do end up in a new cold war, what might be the consequences for both countries and for the world?
10. What do you think accounts for the United Nations’ inability to play a more central role in promoting and upholding order? How would you reform the UN to allow it to increase its contribution to order?