

## **Peter Calvocoressi, World Politics 1945-2000** (Pearson Education Ltd, Eight edition 2001)

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For almost fifty years<sup>1</sup>, Peter Calvocoressi has been developing this fundamental piece of research which now exceeds, in every aspect, requirements of teaching courses such as International Relations or International Politics. In the world of today, reading and studying a piece like this has become a necessity. It is not often that readers can enjoy and benefit from a single author's pen and perspective over such a long (and critical, from the historical aspect) period, particularly having in mind multitude of political issues, courses and events which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. "World Politics 1945-2000" is a capital work which sublimates Calvocoressi's work and research in politics in the period marked by the Cold War, rise (and decline) of superpowers and international governmental organizations, increasing incidence and toll of non-nuclear wars, new states and political issues emerging and supra-state organizations developing, etc.

Peter Calvocoressi is a figure of distinction in the field of International relations. A former reader in International Relations at the University of Sussex, he is the author of numerous books including, *Independent Africa and the World*, *Fall Out: World War II and the Shaping of Postwar Europe*, and *Resilient Europe: A Study of the Years 1870-2000*. During the war he worked in British Intelligence at Bletchley Park and from 1946-47 attended the Nuremberg Trials. As the author himself has stated, this is the final edition, as it has grown "bulky" (reaching almost 900 pages) and the five years since the last edition (in 1996) were fully assessed to complete the century. With this edition, Calvocoressi shares the experiences of his long and distinguished career in modern international politics, by giving brief personal assessments of some of the key figures from the period including; Margaret Thatcher, Francois Mitterand and Deng Xiaoping. While obviously building on the past research, the whole text has been thoroughly revised with further reflections over the whole period.

The very beginning of this book depicts several developments which have crucially influenced world affairs. Firstly, it is the nature of superpowers' struggle and the Cold War which dictated the pattern of world politics for most of the second part of the century. The two superpowers were not equally potent "spiders in the bottle" and it was not a duel between exclusive autocracies, as in ancient times. Furthermore, nuclear weapons which deemed to be their exclusive

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<sup>1</sup> The first edition of Calvocoressi's "World Politics" was published in 1968.

“badge” seems to be also in the hands of other nations. In the days when this review was being prepared, just to mention the most recent example, North Korea announced its nuclear tests, stating that it would not be the first to use the bomb. In the words of Calvocoressi:

“In the event they spread to other states in many parts of the world, so that by the end of the century they appeared less dangerous in the hands of superpowers than in regional conflicts. Although potentially devastating, they were inefficient weapons of war, barely credible political weapons, and not used after the Second World War. They made war supremely irrational, conferred more powers on fanatics than on sanely calculating statesmen...” (p. XIII)

Second, the US power of making alliances (e.g. creation of NATO) and regional wars in the last decade of the XX century, like the Gulf War of 1991, marked a tidal change: the US was no more an unchallengeable power in world affairs. The nature of world leadership has changed – the dominant power lost freedom of choosing to act on its own or with its allies. This has inevitably affected both its home and foreign policies, especially their fine tuning, leaving little time and space to “celebrate” the dismantling of the Soviet Union and/or communism.

Third, a new burdening issue of world affairs emerged on the basis of problematic relations between two world actors or two acting dimensions: between a world power (US) and a worldwide intergovernmental organization (UN). Although the prevention of inter-state wars and protection of human rights have been declared as its main purposes, the UN Security Council could nevertheless allow interventions in domestic affairs of countries. The Council members often had to choose between the rule of law and the support to human rights – if and when it was decided those rights were jeopardized (Iraq 1991, Serbia 1999). Wishful thinking and/or compromised sincerity on the part of the UN Charter signatories in 1945 clearly emerged as a root of the international system problems. A changing nature international actions is summarized as follows:

“The rule of law, a valid and urgent goal, remains just that, and so long as it is more goal than reality there is a ‘meanwhile’ during which particular crises will be handled with a mixture of expediency, improvisation and impatience.” (p. XVI)

Fourth, a new political geography emerged, proving that the Cold War patterns were largely false: bipolarity vanished (the rise of Japan, China) and non-alignment appeared, ideological content of conflicts in world affairs was easily crossing territorial boundaries, religion has overtaken ethnicity as a set of driving motives behind regional wars and violence, new states emerged to face a

sharp discrepancy between their cherished political independence and the economic reality, requirements of international trade and transnational investments resulted in new groups and organizations being formed, etc. The European Union is, from this aspect, considered as the outstanding political innovation of the century, wherein a new base for international power is being built through the subordination of political and economic powers of nation states, as well as through overcoming numerous particularities and differences for the purpose of building new cultural identity and common institutions to regain the position western Europe once held.

Finally, two factors, external or almost outside the boundaries of human management, which affected the world affairs in the later half of the twentieth century, were population growth and globalization. In Calvocoressi's words, a "disturbing demographic fluidity" all over the world was coupled with floods of migrants, refugees and in general millions of people seeking better life. Globalization has proved to be the most important factor in world affairs of today and probably tomorrow: this irreversible process has already undermined state sovereignty, as well as purpose and effectiveness of all organizations with territorial limits; it has opened world markets much beyond the theoretical concept of "free markets", but it has also allowed much more people to become informed and get in contact with world affairs.

The book is divided in six larger parts, covering major geographical areas, and detailed chapters on main states, actors and issues within each part. Most of the chapters are constructed to present basic socio-economic conditions and trends, changes in major aspects of a country's social structure and main lines of political developments, beginning in 1945 and taking readers through decades that followed. Of special importance for readers in general and students in particular is the authoritative selection of critical years in certain aspects of the country's international relations, which undoubtedly helps readers to remain focused. In addition, for each country in this study, Calvocoressi seeks to give at least an outline of major changes in the economic policy and resulting effects, thus sending a clear message that international relations and/or world affairs cannot be studied only within the realm of politics but one has necessarily and heavily to rely also on domestic and cross-border economic relations. This feature of "World Politics" is not often found in political studies which traditionally tend to put too much focus solely on international political relations, "leaving" economics and economies to the domain of International Political Economy.

Part One, entitled "World Power and World Order", takes readers through a variety of issues, a few countries and historical milestones/developments which have fundamentally influenced the course of world politics. The chapter on rise of superpowers naturally includes a description of the Cold War beginning and its peculiarities (not a war episode, but a state of affairs characterized by the mutual hostility and fears of the protagonists), the stabilizing effects on Europe -

stemming from the western non-military victory over the Berlin “battle” (1948-49), the spill-over effects on conflicts in Asia, its (geographical) effects in mapping the spheres of influence, and its direct effects on the superpowers’ arms race. The evolution of the US role is presented in a very illustrative way, though its obstructive role (political arrangements regarding further advances of the USSR in Europe), reconstructive role (the US funds to support UNRRA operations in the USSR and Yugoslavia, and also aid to Greece and Turkey) and constructive role (Marshall Plan). Apart from the Cold War, the chapter on superpowers includes also a brief description of NATO creation, which was

“...an affirmation of the dissolution of the wartime alliance. It was based on fear of Russian aggression, compounded by revulsion against the nature of Russian domination in eastern Europe, frustration turning to hostility in German affairs, the exposure of western Europe as a result of war damage and demobilization, and the failure to internationalize the control of atomic energy.” (p. 20)

Situation in the Russian “empire” after Stalin’s death is meticulously portrayed through political battles among two colliding streams (veterans vs. technical experts), Khrushchev’s efforts to introduce the concept of peaceful coexistence and to secure wider international recognition of the German Democratic Republic (partially to offset the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany was in NATO) and through problems in Sino-Soviet relations (due to the Soviets’ rapprochement with the US).

History of the arms race is presented as a general background for examining two superpowers since the 1980, the US (“unique but not omnipotent”) and the USSR. Increasing differences in ‘real’ figures of resources and growth between the two, accompanied with changes in other states’ perceptions of superpowers, irreversibly affected all aspects of the bipolar world. The author concludes that the decline in American power and prestige was largely due to its own mistakes and misjudgements in both economic management (heavy burden of financing the post-war operations and the alliance, improper management of the costs/benefits of the arms race, consequences of the emergence of Eurodollars, trade deficits, rising taxes and oil prices, etc.) and external policies (El Salvador, Panama, Nicaragua, Vietnam...). An important political development in this context has to be mentioned: it was the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1972-75) at which the US and Canada were accepted as rightful and essential members of the European polity. As far as the USSR is concerned, the problems were of a very different nature. The end of Cold War was there perceived as a military defeat due to economic reasons, at the same time causing dramatical changes in the political and social system and leading eventually (but not solely because of that) to the country’s disintegration. Regardless of Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost, resistance to changes in almost all aspects of the social structure (economy, political sphere, state

organization) was significant, partially due to unclear vision in which direction the country should develop and because of political fear of social unrest. The absence of a coherent policy was accompanied by simultaneous upsurge of dissidence and even separatism in a number of republics.

“The history of Europe in the twentieth century offers no more startling contrast than that between the brevity and the achievements of Gorbachev’s rule. He confronted the most daunting problems...

He was limited not only by the constraints of his situation but also by the isolation inseparable from an autocratic temperament. But above all Gorbachev failed because he was trying to reform the unreformable.” (p. 81)

After examining the rise of Japan to the level of great power, with mighty industries and trade but without nuclear weapons, and China, an independent nuclear power with the largest stock of resources and growth rates in the world, Calvocoressi analyses two principal aspects of world order: first, wars and efforts to reduce their number and incidence (exemplified by the UN, its structures, successes and failures in the state-centric world), and second, economic turmoils and efforts to manage them, as ‘a strong economy is the prime element in political power and in the public mood’ (through a review of the IMF, the World Bank, GATT, APEC, NAFTA and WTO).

Part Two, entitled “Europe”, contains perspectives on western Europe, central and eastern Europe and a separate chapter on Yugoslavia and Albania, including specific notes on the Northern Ireland, the Basques and Cyprus. As crucial factors in the post-war recovery of western Europe, essentially sound and skilled economies, the author points out the Marshall Plan of 1947 and the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, which were accomplished due to American financial aid but also because of the fear of the collapse of the countries extremely important to the US in the Cold War and in Europe in general. What had been started with Adenauer’s efforts to focus more on Europe and less than on the US, finally achieved during Mitterand and Kohl, the French-German relations improved to the level of alliance building and military co-operation, which have significantly influenced further development on the European political stage.

Concerning the UK, its recovery lasted for almost a decade but without achieving its pre-war position as an independent Great Power, with the leadership lost in major dominance aspects, such as the financial centre of the world, stock of foreign assets, industrial leadership, etc. In the second half of the 1950s, the UK turned its focus on foreign affairs: the improvement of the alliance with the US, decolonization in Africa and relations with the European Economic Community. In the 1970s, Britain was hit hard by a number of economic shocks and the political leadership (Labour) was disunited on several major issues, such the exchange rate of pound sterling, rising unemployment, relations with the Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, etc. But, the most

important dilemma British have had relates to their “belongingness”: overseas (Commonwealth and the US), or continental (Europe). After Thatcher’s years of xenophobia towards the EC, changing various aspects of Britain’s social structure (education, social service, state functions, etc) and re-introducing market economy “as free as possible”, John Mayor put great efforts to convince the country it could not escape its commitment to the EC. As it eventually became the EU member (but keeping the pound sterling) and with the 1997 victory of the Labour Party, Britain has again turned itself towards repairing the alliance with the US.

The history of European Union is discussed from the aspects of its two main purposes: to create a solution for the “German problem” in Europe, and to organize its members in way which could secure their economic prosperity in an increasingly competitive world. The European Coal and Steel Community (viewed as an essentially Franco-German undertaking) was the first step towards making functional intergovernmental organizations, followed later by the formation of European Economic Community and European Atomic Community (both in 1957), development and strengthening of its political functions both internally and externally, introduction of common economic policies over state borders (e.g. CAP), as well as further subordination of member-state powers. Due to dangers posed by the worsening of economic climate in the 1970s and threats of serious currency instabilities, the European Monetary System was created in 1979, presenting a further step towards integrating and subordinating (obviously, at the same time) national economies, which led to the formation of the European Monetary Union and the removal of one of the most powerful political tools – national currencies. In this whole process, naturally still going on, Germany’s economic advancement was the key engine for the European economic and monetary integration, which came at a high price for other members, especially when the unification costs became due. With the fall of Iron Curtain and with a number of advanced countries being left outside, a new set of economic, political and organizational problems for the EC have started to emerge. The EC was conceived as a self-help organization (from the economic aspects) of developed economies in north-western Europe, but the events of 1989-90 in central and eastern Europe have definitely altered (or defined) its future course(s) of development towards a union. Since the beginning of 1990s, the EU has started to develop the Community’s state-like functions, organs and policy domains, like foreign affairs, in addition to the member’s bilateral relations with other countries, embryos of joint forces were set up, new high-ranking posts in the organization were created, a European citizenship was introduced, etc.

Part Three covers the Middle East, from the creation of Israel and Suez War, over the destruction of Lebanon and the creation of a Palestinian state, issues of oil and nationalism, Gulf War and the Persian gulf, with additional notes on the Kurds, the Shi’ites and sectarian violence. The latter subsection is particularly

illustrative from today's point of view over global terrorist threats and general (mis)conceptions about its roots.

The rest of Calvocoressi's book deals with a number of states, organizations and economic and political issues in Asia (India, the Indo-Chinese peninsula, ASEAN, Afghanistan and Korea), Africa (north, west, central and east Africa, with special parts devoted to the very southern part, and the ventures of Russia, China and Cuba into African politics) and America (analyzing Canada, south America, Mexico and the central America, as well as Cuba and the Caribbean).

As this research has outlined, the political history of world we live in and the world order we try to comprehend is extremely multidimensional and relies on multilevel webs of relations. Instead of making conclusions for future research and study in world politics, let us quote Calvocoressi's own words:

“As the globe shrinks in human terms it becomes more complex and contradictory, demanding more efficient co-operation in the restraint of armed conflict, the protection of human rights and the management of resources and production.” (p. XX).

Writing a review of such a fundamental and extensive research as “World Politics 1945-2000” is has proved exceptionally difficult, regardless of pure length limitations posed by a journal's publishers, and we have to admit much injustice done to this book by selecting a few of its parts to be presented in more details. Nevertheless, if the review has at least made readers intrigued, the purpose has been achieved.