

Resenha

How to Run the World: Charting a Course to the next Renaissance*

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In his new book, Parag Khanna, Director of the Global Governance Initiative at the New America Foundation and author of “The Second World”, seeks to answer how we can deal with global challenges in a more effective way in the years to come. In merely 214 pages, Khanna covers a vast array of challenges – from climate change, nuclear proliferation, poverty, human rights to the Middle East Conflict to the disputes in Kashmir, Iran and Afghanistan. As a natural consequence, some of his analyses seem a bit rushed (for example, his thoughts on nuclear proliferation are limited to just a few pages). Yet Khanna’s aim is not to engage in profound historical analysis; rather, the book can be understood as a smart brainstorming session on how to tackle the world’s most urgent problems. Academics will frown at his approach as Khanna’s assertions are not based on empirical research, yet he is certainly courageous for approaching big issues in a sweeping way.

Similar to Khanna’s previous book, *How to Run the World* is well-written, and a lot of his ideas are interesting and seem worth further consideration. For example, Khanna argues that aside from combating Somali pirates, more needs to be done to reduce illegal fishing in the region, which has led to the problem in the first place. In addition, instead of imposing futile sanctions against Iran, he advocated “flooding” the country with “contacts through commerce, media, and diplomatic channels that would force greater transparency on all its activities.” The author is also right to point out that private sector actors will undoubtedly play a key role in global governance, although his prediction that large corporations will soon issue their own passports for employees, with pre-negotiated visa-free access to countries, seems exaggerated.

Yet, as in any brainstorming session, particularly one on challenges brilliant minds have sought to address for decades, several of his ideas strike the reader as somewhat ill-conceived. Khanna asserts that terrorists need failed states as safe havens, concluding that “the places that seem beyond salvation require intrusive (...) peacekeeping forces and even subversive plots and assassinations.” Yet 9/11 has shown that terrorists do not need a failed state, quite to the contrary, they lived in Germany before the attacks. He neither explains how failed states should be identified, nor who should decide which leader is evil enough to be killed. Aside from being a highly questionable recommendation from the perspective of international law and ethics, it raises doubts about how to deal with a place in case an assassination of a dictator has negative consequences. Khanna thus inadvertently seems to buy into some of the most dangerous mistakes committed by the Bush administration.

Khanna’s recommendation to break up states plagued by secessionist movements to settle disputes for good is correct in principle, but does not take into account that reality may be more complex. For example, secessionists may commit terrorist acts and seem determined, while it remains unclear whether they are backed by the local po-

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pulation. For example, should Spain have allowed the Basques to secede, giving in to ETA's leaders? Had President Lincoln followed Khanna's advice, he would have allowed the South to become an independent nation. In the same way, Brazil, India, France, China, Italy, who have all experienced secessionist movements at some point in history, would no longer exist had they not insisted on maintaining national unity.

At the same time, this recommendation seems to contradict his assertion that we increasingly live in a borderless world. If national boundaries no longer matter, and generational identity trumps geographic identity, why go through the hassle of breaking up states, create Pashtunistan and Kurdistan, running the risk of causing horrific wars such as the Nigerian-Biafran War in the late 1960s?

Finally, Khanna's recommendation to involve NGOs and celebrities on the highest level overlooks the fact that non-state organizations face serious challenges regarding their legitimacy. Contrary to the author's claims, decision-making processes in large NGOs (Khanna calls them "Super-NGOs") are by no means transparent. For example, bringing Greenpeace's Executive Director Kumi Naidoo to the table raises the question about whom and whose values he represents. In the same way, he fails to take into consideration that figures such as Bono and Madonna, while grabbing a lot of attention, do not necessarily advocate the right causes.

Aside from his specific recommendations Khanna argues that we are entering "neo-medieval times". Yet the parallels he cites between today's world and the Middle Ages often seem a bit contrived and far-fetched, failing to convince the reader. The author's main claim is that the rise of non-state actors (NGOs and corporations), celebrities and organized groups in cyberspace make the world look like pre-Westphalian Europe. Yet this phenomenon is hardly news, in fact, Joseph Nye has written about it years ago. He also affirms that, just as in the Middle Ages, we are becoming more superstitious to deal with growing uncertainty and the global crisis, pointing to a growing fear of the future. In this regard, his views are oddly western-centric: America may be in fearful decline, but Brazilians, Indians and the Chinese do not fear the future, and they are more optimistic than ever before. It is particularly these countries whose rise will strengthen the Westphalian system, not weaken it. Finally, his assertion that current structures like the UN Security Council have passed their prime is popular, but too simple: Brazil's and India's efforts to join show that the Council continues to be regarded as legitimate – provided that it can reform itself. Our current structures are clearly in trouble, but not all is as bleak as Khanna paints it.

