

2014 -- the next world crisis?

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A cataclysmic "Great Event" is approaching which will occur in or around the year 2014 and determine the course of the rest of the 21st century, according to a startling new thesis published this week.

The remarkable claim forms the central message in a new book, 2014 - How to survive the next world crisis, written by the University of Cambridge academic, Professor Nicholas Boyle.

His study brings a lifetime's research in fields including [politics](#), economics, philosophy, theology and literature to bear on the state of global politics and the causes, consequences and wider meaning of the present financial crisis.

It warns that the [economic collapse](#) of 2007-2008 could mark only the start of a wider breakdown in international relations, and predicts that by the middle of the decade just dawned, the United States will find itself the key player in a series of make-or-break decisions about the future of the world.

The choices the US makes will either condemn us to a century of violence and poverty, or usher in a new age of global co-operation, the book asserts.

It adds, however, that the more peaceful alternative will only be realised if the international community can accept that nation states are no longer strong enough to deal with the world's problems and construct an

effective system of global governance instead.

"We are approaching a moment of decision, when the deeper issues that have begun to make themselves felt in recent years can no longer be postponed," Professor Boyle said. "By 2014, our legacy to the 21st century is likely to have been determined, for better or for worse."

Those issues represent some of the major flashpoints of world politics; among them economic management, the emergence of new powers such as China and India, and the need for international co-operation on climate change.

While these are all 21st century problems, the book suggests that the timing is not a new phenomenon. Professor Boyle argues that the themes which characterised world politics in each of the last five centuries became apparent over the course of their second decade. In 1914, the result was a catastrophic war which heralded decades of conflict and tension. By contrast, in 1815, the Congress of Vienna ensured almost 100 years of relative peace.

Similarly, the study says, the middle of this decade appears set to witness the convergence of the most pressing concerns of the present day. It draws parallels between Germany's rise circa 1910 and China, which is similarly squaring up to the modern era's leading superpower, the US. America will have had to come to terms with the rising powers of Asia as they approach parity by 2014. Meanwhile, the effects of a prolonged economic downturn could restore an aggressive, Bush-like figure to the US Presidency.

"Everything, in the end, may depend on whether America can react more imaginatively to a decline in relative economic power - to sharing with others both the world's resources and its own standards of living - than, sadly, Britain was able to do in the years before 1914," Professor Boyle

writes.

At the heart of that response, he says, should be the realisation that a model of global governance is needed to bring politics into line with the global economy. The book argues that the recent banking collapse happened because no such form of regulation existed to control international finance.

To strengthen existing international structures, one measure the author calls for is a Tobin-style tax on banking to provide the revenue needed to guarantee financial stability and support other "global goods", such as the Millennium Development Goals and the dramatic changes needed to fight climate change.

The book adds, however, that global governance can only occur if there is an accompanying change in the philosophy that underpins international relations. Professor Boyle describes sovereign nation-states as a "20th century experiment that failed" but warns that they are also in many ways an American invention which the US needs to accept as out-dated and no longer fit for purpose.

With the exception of the 20th century, Boyle contends that the model which has guided world progress throughout history has been that of Empire. Similarly, the book argues that in the 21st century, it is a network of global organisations - from multinationals to the still only partly-acknowledged "Empire" of America - that determine many aspects of our lives.

"It is a profoundly hopeful sign that we begin the 21st century with very many more international and intergovernmental organisations than we had at the start of the 20th," Boyle says. What longer history suggests, he adds, is the need for a system of "imperial of global regulation, if the 21st century is to be one of relative peace.

"The only conceivably peaceful route to that goal is through a continuation of the pax Americana," he writes. "But both the world's understanding of America, and America's understanding of itself, will have to change fundamentally for that goal to be achieved."

2014 - How to survive the next world crisis, is published by Continuum Books on Thursday, June 17th.

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