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Review Essay

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Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume I, *Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, £110.00). Pp. xviii + 643. ISBN 978 0 5218 3719 4. Volume II, *Crises and Détente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, £110.00). Pp. xviii + 662. ISBN 978 0 5218 3720 0. Volume III, *Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, £110.00). Pp. xviii + 694. ISBN 978 0 5218 3721 7.

In his typically provocative contribution to the final part of *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Matthew Connelly wonders whether the collection as a whole "could . . . one day be seen as a tombstone?" Admittedly, the possibility of a cataclysmic Third World War between the superpowers has provided an understandable focus of attention for scholars, but, Connelly writes, this was only "something that might have happened." Subjecting the few Cold War crises to ever finer dissection "yields diminishing returns," while he conjectures that scholars in years to come will "have to work harder to explain [the Cold War's] importance to future generations" (III 466). It is always wise to try to gauge the degree of one's insularity: for many undergraduate students now being taught in our universities, the Cold War is a term that has little (and sometimes no) resonance, and whose ideological disputes, shifting allegiances, and attempts to determine the ebb and flow of power are as distant to their world view and preoccupations as the Thirty Years War of the seventeenth century – an analogous clash of power and belief systems – was to a previous cohort. In his own essay in the *Cambridge History*, Connelly chooses to stress that one of the great trends in global history during the second half of the twentieth century – the exponential growth of the world's population – had its own, independent roots, trajectory, and long-term impact (III 468). Nevertheless, this trend did not merely coincide with the events of the Cold War: the conflict not only shaped contemporaries' understanding of the phenomenon but helped to spawn public-health campaigns, trigger migrations, and accelerate pressures for population control in a "Third World" often conceived of in demographic terms. In this kind of approach, the Cold War is given more of a "global perspective, one that takes account of changes in populations and the environment, and not just national governments and international borders" (III 487).

Connelly's turn to "global history" represents only one of the many diverse approaches that are adopted in the seventy-three essays that feature in the wide sweep

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of *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. But Connelly's manifesto also leads one immediately to question the a priori assumption, contained in most of the essays in these volumes, that the "Cold War" is itself a phenomenon which demands recognition as a discrete and productive field of inquiry.

Attempts to periodize and so define the Cold War are unavoidably problematic and controversial. A conventional starting point would treat the Cold War in terms of a US–Soviet confrontation the ideological roots of which emerged in 1917–18, at the climax of a previous global conflict, between Wilsonian internationalism, with its expansive attempts to extol the virtues of liberal capitalism, and Lenin's revolutionary Communism. Its domestic manifestation in the United States was the Red Scare of 1919–20, and the attendant suspicion of Soviet intentions and "alien" influences in American society, along with attacks on organized labour (making this also, as in the foreign-policy realm, a prototype for the McCarthyism that was to follow in the later 1940s). And it was that same sense of Wilsonian internationalism that helped to animate American public opinion during the later 1940s as Soviet models of political control and economic development were imposed on the eastern half of the European continent, while Communism itself experienced a new, albeit dubious, lease of life following the prestige earned by the defeat of Nazism. Alternatively, if ideological differences were put aside, one's frame of reference could be switched to longer-term geopolitical factors that need to be considered. Here the dormant power of the American republic as it began to engage in continental expansion had been appreciated by many nineteenth-century observers, and the possibility that it was destined to compete with the colossal territorial expanse and numbers of a "Eurasian" Russian Empire were highlighted in famous fashion by Tocqueville in the 1830s. Control of the Eurasian heartland, in the geopolitical theories popularized by Halford Mackinder at the time of the Versailles Conference of 1919, became the great prize of the European civil wars fought from 1914 to 1945, which only the intervention of an extra-European power, in the form of the United States in 1941 and again in 1947, could prevent.

It is, however, possible to go a step further and argue that a Cold War framework had often acted to obscure rather than throw more light on some of the most significant developments of twentieth-century international history. Attention has been drawn away, for example, from the emergence of numerous new actors on the international stage, whether newly independent states or international organizations; or from the global spread of capital and free-market economics which have had a profound effect on the international division of labour and the position of workers in the global South. It has been very much in vogue for scholars of US foreign relations to analyse the intersections between the processes of decolonization and the Cold War, but transposing the effects of US–Soviet competition onto the phenomenon of European imperial retreat since 1945 and the attainment of political independence by much of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East can also serve – through overemphasis – to distort processes which had just as much to do with the breakdown of collaboration in the colonial periphery between administrators and indigenous elites, and economic decline in the metropole. When it comes to decolonization, perhaps there was a "Wilsonian moment" in 1917–19 (so providing connections with American political culture), but a more significant event for the future of Asia was surely the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905, an outcome which had long-term consequences for the racial order that Western imperialism had imposed across the region during the second half of the previous century. In this longer-term view, the crucial event

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here was the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which brought to power a new modernizing elite, intent on transforming the Japanese state, and ultimately its place in East Asia (not least in relation to its weaker Asian neighbours, and the European powers with their regime of unequal treaties).

Indeed, how far the "Cold War" can be mapped onto the geopolitical, economic, and social changes experienced by Asia during the past seventy years represents a great challenge. Before 1949 and the emergence of the People's Republic of China, the cockpit of the Cold War was located in Central Europe, and rooted in the immediate aftermath of Germany's aggression and then defeat. It was the persistence of "the German problem" that came to define the structural conflict that lay at the heart of what many considered the Cold War, at least until the 1970s and the settlement of the unresolved status of postwar borders and the legitimacy of the East German state (though even here there remained ambiguity until the events of 1989–90). While spheres of influence and control might be conceded in Western and Eastern Europe by the two superpowers after 1945, the orientation of Germany's internal politics and external policy remained of crucial concern as Adenauer's federal republic rebuilt its economic strength and power potential in the 1950s and early 1960s. In East Asia, it was the outbreak of the Korean War, and the almost simultaneous "internationalization" of the Indochina conflict in 1950, that provided a new setting for clashes between the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the United States that were loosely seen as another manifestation of the Cold War. Lasting only a decade or so, the Sino-Soviet alliance – the bridge that crucially served to link the conflicts in Central Europe and East Asia – was, however, only a temporary phenomenon, and its demise occurred at roughly the point in the early 1960s at which the structural instabilities that were associated with the German problem, and that had contributed so much to the Cold War in Europe, were also beginning to settle down. Taking a longer-term perspective, it could be argued that what one has seen in East Asia since the late 1940s, in the broadest sense, has been Sino-American interaction and rivalry spreading through a region recovering from the ravages of war and colonialism (of both the Western and Japanese variety). Ideology here played a role in the revolutionary context of South East Asia in the 1950s and 1960s, but by the 1970s this feature was being supplanted, not least as Washington and Beijing arrived at a rapprochement – though one conditioned more by their shared distrust of Soviet intentions (and a disdain for Japan) than by any common vision of East Asian development. The proclamation of Deng Xiaoping's four modernizations in 1978, and China's gradual embrace of capitalist economic organization finally and effectively blurred, if not removed altogether, the comforting nostrums of Cold War conflict, and replaced them with the more traditional manoeuvrings of great powers simultaneously both wary of each other's capabilities and transfixed by the economic possibilities that deepening interchange presented. Again one can see that viewing Asian events since the Second World War through a "Cold War" lens could have quite distorting effects, and that Sino-American interactions might be better considered on their own terms, or in a broader perspective stretching back to the first US encounters with China in the late eighteenth century.

These brief snapshots suggest the perils and ambiguities, as well as the formidable analytical challenges, faced by any attempt to regard the Cold War as a distinct and coherent period of world history. If one were, nevertheless, to try to reduce the term itself to its bare essence, attention naturally focusses on the absence of major, all-out war between the two dominant powers in the international system for the two decades after

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1945: this was, after all, what made the Cold War "cold." For many who lived through these crisis-ridden years, the existential dread of the outbreak of a cataclysmic atomic or thermonuclear war was something that became part of daily conditioning and seeped into the cultural bones of numerous societies; overlying this was a period in human history where universalizing and totalitarian ideologies became allied to state power, with the means to inflict unprecedented levels of destruction, in a ferocious, violent, and oppressive cocktail. Or as George Orwell, who first coined the term "Cold War" in response to the arrival of an era of nuclear weaponry, once put it,

> This is a political age. War, Fascism, concentration camps, rubber truncheons, atomic bombs, etc. are what we daily think about, and therefore to a great extent what we write about, even when we do not name them openly. We cannot help this. When you are on a sinking ship, your thoughts will be about sinking ships.[1]

Both of the distinguished editors of the *Cambridge History* have themselves written award-winning general histories of the Cold War which convey their own particular frameworks of analysis. Arne Westad has stressed the importance of superpower competition in the development of a non-European world emerging from colonialism (which helped create immense and often unacknowledged suffering in Asia, Africa, and Latin America), while Melvyn Leffler has provided an account which highlights the role of mutual perceptions of security interests, historical memories, and ideological fixation, through examination of a number of crucial turning points in US–Soviet relations after 1945.[2] Now, with two decades having passed since its demise, Leffler and Westad see the Cold War as an episode that can be productively examined as a "thing of the past" (I xv), much as with the two world wars of the last century. Alongside this basic rationale, the production of the *Cambridge History* is also regarded as apt due to the release of Communist-era records from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which have allowed new insights, interpretations, and understanding to be gained from "the other side of the hill"; this is also a development apparent with the emergence (sometimes officially sanctioned) of more records from the People's Republic of China, which throw fresh light on Beijing's confrontation with the United States in East Asia after 1949, Chinese diplomacy in the 1950s and 1960s, and Sino-Soviet relations.

A project examining the history of the Cold War in a three-volume set with such a large number of contributions covering a multiplicity of themes cannot be accused of a lack of ambition. This smorgasbord approach attracts obvious reservations – anticipated by the editors – about the lack of a satisfying coherence that could potentially be offered by a single authorial voice, or perhaps a small team each assigned an overarching theme such as ideology, economics, military power, culture, or empire. But given the grand objectives espoused by the editors, it is difficult to imagine how one individual, or even a small group, could do sufficient justice to their aspirations. As part of their task of presenting a "comprehensive, systematic, analytic overview of

[1] George Orwell, "Writers and Leviathan," in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell* (London: Penguin, 1984), 459.

[2] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007).

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the conflict that shaped the international system and that affected most of humankind during the second half of the twentieth century" (I xv), the editors acknowledge that it is necessary to go beyond the confines of regular interstate diplomacy, and to offer work that deals with social change, cultural interactions, economic developments, science, gender, race, and intellectual thought. There are also various geographical areas, bilateral relationships and state actors to consider, and contributors who are given the scope to deploy their knowledge of national history, sociology, political science, economics, and strategy. The result is ultimately a work of reference, which will be approached by scholars and students wanting an expert overview and interpretation on a period, subject, or theme, and which can perhaps be connected with other chapters in the volumes: this is a feast not easily digestible at one (or even several) sittings, but a collection to return to repeatedly for the enlightenment and stimulation that many of the essays offer. In its quest for comprehensiveness, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* has no peers, but also invites criticism from those who feel that one aspect or another of the conflict has been neglected. In many respects this is obviously unavoidable if the Cold War is defined in broad and global terms, touching virtually every region of the world, and being played out in almost every conceivable realm.

To some the Cold War was an era of the "long peace," where the international system was distinguished by an absence of the great-power war that had so marked the first half of the century. It is still characteristic of most studies of the Cold War that they are framed by reference to the US pursuit of a policy of containment of expanding, or at least menacing, Communist power in Europe, and later East Asia. The nuances of the German problem are typically combined with the intricate complexities of nuclear deterrence and its theology, to produce, by and large (and with due deference to a number of close shaves with catastrophe, such as in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962), a success story. After fifty years of confrontation between two heavily armed blocs, the world had managed to emerge relatively unscathed, and the Communist model of authoritarian state-led development was dismantled and discredited. But for others, however, the Cold War was, for example, the setting for the "last colonial massacre" in Latin America, where the ideological clash between the free market and state socialism brought misery and death to millions from Guatemala to Chile; this point is brought home in Rosemary Foot's essay (III 450), which also stresses the catalyst for change that the concept of human rights, though so often abused in the observance, could also provide when challenging the legitimacy of authoritarian forms of government.[3] The great-power imperative to intervene also generated countless killing fields in East and South East Asia, where civil conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, rooted in the experience of colonial occupation and the class and cultural tensions of domestic society, became the settings for wider wars. Mass, industrialized violence was hence introduced to the developing world in that "other Cold War," to borrow Heonik Kwon's phrase; it is Kwon's work too which reminds us of the possibilities of deepening our understanding of global events by adopting a local sociocultural or anthropological perspective on the violence which modernity brought to the non-Western world in the latter half of the twentieth century.[4]

[3] Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[4] Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

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In the introductory essay to the first volume of the collection, Westad sets out his own manifesto, which sees the volumes as marked by such conflicting interpretations, and an intrinsic scepticism toward mono-causal modes of explanation – that it is impossible to compile a "definitive" history of the Cold War. Westad asserts that there is a need to place Cold War history in a longer chronological and global perspective, and to show how Cold War conflicts were connected to "broader trends in social, economic and intellectual history as well as to the political and military developments of the longer term" (I 2). It might be that the most successful attempts to incorporate the Cold War in twentieth-century international history, Westad argues, can be found in studies of regional conflicts – such as in the Middle East, South Asia, or Latin America – that see it "from the edges, as one part of much bigger histories," and that this is "perhaps the best way for the future to make sense of it all" (I 8). For Westad, placing the Cold War in the wider context of global processes of change in the twentieth century helps us to understand that for the leaders and the followers of the United States and the Soviet Union, after the crises and wars of the 1914–45 period, they both "represented the last, best hope for the rescue of a rational, transcending modernity from the horrors of war and nationalist conflict" (I 17).

The supreme irony, then, was that the Cold War also saw the ultimate harnessing of technology, science, and organizational technique by the state, which made possible both surveillance and control of human beings in unparalleled fashion, and the construction of nuclear arsenals capable of extinguishing all life on the planet. It was a conflict conducted during the era which has come to be associated with "total war," where whole societies were mobilized by the state to pursue its ends, and with mass politics, from which political leaders could draw legitimacy and support – and this applied just as much to societies where democratic forms of representation were conspicuous by their absence, as in the "Eastern bloc," but where the will of "the people" was invoked to justify state behaviour.

The three volumes in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* are divided into broad chronological sequence, with the first covering the origins and early development of great-power conflict in Europe and East Asia from the end of the Second World War to roughly 1962; the second looking at the period from the early 1960s to the onset of détente in the mid-1970s; and the third exploring the years marked by the decline of détente, the revival of superpower tensions, and the sudden collapse of Communist systems in the Europe where they had first arisen. But there are chronological variations and departures within each of them, so that, for example, the wars in Indochina from 1945 onwards are featured in an essay by Fredrik Logevall in Volume II, and Japan and the Cold War from 1960 to 1991 is dealt with by Michael Schaller in Volume III. The essays that appear in Volume I tend to cover a fairly conventional range of geographical topics, such as those on Soviet foreign policy, American grand strategy and national security policy, the Marshall Plan, the Korean War, developments in the Balkans, and Eastern and Central Europe. Though there are essays on Britain and the Cold War up to the mid-1950s, and the division of Germany, there is no specific offering on the politics of Western Europe and the course followed by the left-wing parties that had gained such popularity following the events of the war (and, in this context, the rupture caused by the Hungarian revolution in 1956, which played such a critical role in discrediting Communist ideology and practice for numerous intellectuals, activists, and workers, though briefly mentioned by Wilfrid Loth in Volume II, at 513, is a notable omission). Thematic

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essays are also provided on such topics as ideology and the origins of the Cold War by David Engerman, the world economy by Charles Maier, culture and the Cold War in Europe by Jessica Gienow-Hecht, and decolonization and the "global South" by Mark Philip Bradley.

Volume II follows the path of the Cold War as it was projected into the developing world, and European decolonization and imperial withdrawal shifted the focus of crises from the heart of Europe and the periphery of China to the comparatively poorer, weaker, and more fragile societies of South East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Among the highlights of this volume are Michael Latham's compelling overview of how this process worked in practice, and Marc Trachtenberg's rigorous analysis of the structural elements of great-power politics in the decade that followed the Cuban missile crisis. That latter event is examined by James Hershberg in a synthesis of sources from East and West, while Frank Gavin dwells on the issue of nuclear proliferation in the 1960s. Lively thematic essays are also provided on intelligence services and espionage in the Cold War by Christopher Andrew, on propaganda and "information diplomacy" by Nicholas Cull, on the counterculture and dissent by Jeremi Suri, and on identity by Robert Jervis. The volume is led by a typically pithy piece by John Gaddis on grand strategy in the Cold War, which manages to both annoy and beguile at the same time.

The third volume of the collection, which deals with the final phase of the Cold War, begins with an outstanding essay by Jan-Werner Muller on the intellectual history of the years from the mid-1970s onwards. Muller underlines the point that the social anxiety and cultural pessimism of the 1970s did not disappear with the West's apparent "triumph" in 1989, and that many of these aspects of the uneasy development of liberal capitalism are still with us (III 21–22). This serves as a useful corrective to any tendency to regard the "ending" of the Cold War as an "ending" to postwar history in general, where 1945 still represents such a rupture between the past and the present modes of living. Excellent essays also appear in this volume on the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe by Jacques Levesque, and the unification of Germany by Helga Haftendorn, while Archie Brown gives us a masterly survey of the "Gorbachev revolution" and its role in transforming US–Soviet relations. Beside these more conventional approaches, there are also essays by David Reynolds on technology, Emily Rosenberg on consumer capitalism, and J. R. McNeill on environmental change, the last highlighting how superpower confrontation hastened the "Green Revolution" in agricultural production, construction of transport networks, and the development of nuclear weapons and their testing, which in turn formed particular "Cold War ecologies" (III 443). Adam Roberts reminds us that in 1984 Henry Kissinger gave a speech where he said that the Soviet Union had to decide whether it was "a country or a cause" (III 534). Mikhail Gorbachev tried to make it into the former – a state acceptable to wider international society – but discovered that "when the USSR ceased to be a cause it rapidly ceased also to be a country." Like the Soviet Union, Roberts perceptively notes, the United States was also "a cause and a country," and, coupled with the notion of having triumphed over Communism, this was to constitute both a strength and a weakness as it confronted the complexities of a post-Cold War world.

Peculiarly ambiguous, ever-shifting and elusive, the Cold War prompts a number of broad and fascinating questions: how can it be defined, why did it begin, was it inevitable, why did it never generate all-out war between its main antagonists, why did

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it last as long as it did, and why did it end? Readers looking for short and simple responses to questions of this kind are likely to be disappointed by the *Cambridge History*. But for those who relish the complexity of the subject, and appreciate the multiple perspectives that one can adopt, these volumes, with their clear and accessible essays, based on some of the latest research in the field, will provide lasting nourishment.

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