



***The Global Cold War:
Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times***
Roundtable Review

Reviewed Works:

Odd Arne Westad. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times.* New York: Cambridge University Press, October 2005. ISBN-13: 978-0-52185-364-4. \$35.00 (hardback). ISBN-13: 978-0-52170-314-7. \$19.99 (paperback, published March 2007).

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

The reviewers agree with the award presenters that Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* is a very impressive work of international history that definitely merits the prestigious awards that it has received: the Bancroft Prize, the Akira Iriye International History Book Award, and the Michael Harrington Award from the American Political Science Association. As co-director of the London School of Economics's Cold War Studies Centre and editor of *Cold War History*, Westad has a significant role in the shaping of the new Cold War history. As William Hitchcock emphasizes in his conclusion, "the book reveals that 'the new cold war history' has finally arrived. This new history is global, as was the cold war; it is multi-lingual, as was the cold war; and it operates on a north-south axis as well as on an east-west one, as did the cold war. Westad's book is a model that challenges us to continue to think and write globally."

Westad's study suggests the possibilities for further influential contributions. First, the author's inclusion of extensive research in Soviet archives, with emphasis on the 1970s and 1980s provides one of the most original contributions of the book. The analysis of U.S. policy is necessarily not as original, but the inclusion of both major Cold War adversaries is necessary to advance the scholarship in the field. Second, Westad also includes an analysis of third world leaders from the first leaders of post-World War II independence movements to leaders through the 1980s in Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua and elsewhere. His inclusive approach is similar to the works of Piero Gleijeses, William LeoGrande, and others. Third, Westad avoids some of the partisanship of Cold War studies on the Third World in which authors, reaching back to the 1960s, focus their excessively pro and con interpretations on one side or the other of the external Cold War participants and ignore the Third World leaders. Westad's focus is on understanding the perspectives of all of the participants, the reasons for specific interventions by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, their Western allies, China, and Fidel Castro's Cuba, as well as the contributions of Third World leaders to encouraging and facilitating these interventions. Westad criticizes all external and internal Third World participants in terms of the destructive results of the Cold War in the Third World. Fourth, while Westad looks backward into the history of Soviet and U.S. expansionism as well as the legacies of colonialism in Third World areas, he also looks forward beyond the Cold War into current problems as part of his thesis on the continuation of Cold War policies into the 21st century.

Despite the awards and strengths of Westad's international approach, the reviewers raise some questions and express some reservations with respect to Westad's assessments and perspective:

1.) Westad views the Soviet Union and the United States as similar in their overall ideological commitment to different modernity projects linked to similar legacies of

expansion: the United States in pursuit of an empire of liberty with property in an ordered democratic society, and the Soviet Union applying Marxist-Leninist concepts to Czarist expansionism to promote social justice by overthrowing capitalism and imperialism. (4-5) Westad's emphasis on culture and ideology as central to the perspectives and objectives of both Cold War antagonists reflects the shift since the end of the Cold War to revive the importance of the commitment of U.S. leaders to democracy and capitalism, its survival and spread, and Soviet leaders to a Marxist class conflict perspective and commitment to support revolutions abroad. Several reviewers, however, question whether Westad's concept of both powers pursuing different modernist objectives with Third World countries is too general and minimizes too much the influence of security and geopolitical calculations on both sides and the role of economic and domestic political influences on U.S. policy.¹ Several are also troubled by the sense of parallelism in Westad's central thesis on the two powers and by implication the perception that neither was any more preferable to the other in their projects for the Third World and the methods that they used from armed intervention to civilian advisors and economic projects.

2.) Geopolitical considerations related to superpower status (or the quest for it in the case of the Soviet Union), security, and strategic calculations certainly play a role in shaping the policies of both Cold War combatants. Several reviewers question, however, whether Westad gives sufficient weight to these factors in relation to his ideological framework. Did the Soviet Union in the 1970s and early 1980s expand its involvement in distant areas to spread its modernist vision or did superpower status, competition, and some initial success lead it further afield? As the first of the Cold War powers to enter the Third World after WWII, did the U.S. respond to the collapse of Western colonialism and ensuing crises such as the Congo or Fidel Castro's victory in Cuba out of its ideological perspective or out of concerns about the impact of the changes taking places on its Western allies and U.S. security?

3.) The role of economic considerations in shaping especially U.S. policies receives more consideration from Westad, although he both emphasizes the importance of capitalist ideas and institutions in the U.S. perspective and policies and at the same time downgrades the importance of business interests on U.S. policy. Thus, Westad modifies somewhat the primacy placed on economics by some revisionists and at the same time increases the centrality of a broader commitment to free market exchanges. (28-29) In a number of crisis situations, Westad mentions U.S. concerns about strategic resources in Africa, oil in the Near East, and investments in Latin America as influencing policy, but he consistently gives these economic concerns less weight than the larger quest to promote the American model. Westad also discusses the impact of the American use of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as Cold War weapons to promote its economic model to the Third World. (154)

¹ See also Mark Lawrence's review, "The Other Cold War" in *Reviews in American History* 34.3 (September 2006): 385-392.

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4.) Does Westad give the U.S. too much credit for creating the Third World by 1970 “both in a positive and negative sense? Through its policies of confronting revolution, Washington had helped form blocks of resistance and a very basic form of Third World solidarity. Ironically, its interventionist policies had also contributed to radicalizing many Third World regimes On the other hand, through the world economic system that it had created, the United States had helped prolong the time that was needed for most countries to break out of poverty. This in itself increased the appeal of the Left in most areas of the Third World.” (157)

5.) Is there any specialist on the Third World who would argue that the Cold War had a positive impact on the Third World? Westad certainly emphasizes the failures and disastrous impact of the Cold War interventions and competitions, the destructive wars against the peasantry, the continuing wars by Third World leaders against their own peasant communities, the cultural violence, and the failure of many aid programs and grandiose economic projects to bring the promised modernization. (400-401) Westad defines the tragedy of the Cold War quite differently than John Gaddis did in his article, “The Tragedy of the Cold War.”² According to Westad “the tragedy of Cold War history, both as far as the Third World and the superpowers themselves were concerned, was that two historical projects that were genuinely anticolonial in their origins became part of a much older pattern of domination because of the intensity of their conflict, the stakes they believed were involved, and the almost apocalyptic fear of the consequences if the opponent won.” (397) Does Westad fairly distribute the blame for the failures or does the U.S. receive an excessive amount of criticism for the results? Westad certainly recognizes the contributions of Third World leaders (398-399) and his analysis of the 1970s-80s on Ethiopia and the Horn as well as Afghanistan emphasizes the extent to which the Soviet Union’s application of its modernization model with respect to its own views on the Soviet revolution and the prospects of similar results in Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Angola, and Afghanistan had destructive results and as much if not more failure than the U.S. modernization model. Finally, “what if” the U.S. had not pursued an interventionist approach toward the Third World and limited its involvement to aid and technical assistance programs, the Peace Corps, and support for UN and nongovernmental agency activities? Would this have encouraged the Soviet Union and its allies, China, and Cuba to follow a similar approach that hopefully would have been less destructive?

6.) Westad’s conclusion points to the issue of alternatives and the question of whether he applies too much hindsight and presentism in his conclusion. For example, Westad starts with the Eisenhower administration’s effort to facilitate the removal of Western colonialism from the Third World but at the same time help ensure that newly independent colonies and their neighborhoods remain politically and economically aligned with the Western powers. Westad rightly criticizes the U.S. interventions from Indonesia against Sukarno, to Vietnam and Laos, to Iran and the overthrow of Mossaedeq in 1953, Guatemala and Arbenz in 1954, Castro and Cuba in 1960, and the Congo and Lumumba in 1960. If

² John Lewis Gaddis, “The Tragedy of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 17.1 (January 1993): 1-16. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.1993.tb00156.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1993.tb00156.x>.

Washington at that time and in later interventions believed, however incorrectly, that a security threat existed with respect to possible connections between these situations and the security threat of the Soviet Union, should that reduce somewhat the intensity of Westad's criticism?

7.) Westad devotes considerable attention to Mikhail Gorbachev's reorientation of Soviet policies in Afghanistan and the Third World in general and offers new insights on the internal deliberations within the Kremlin and with its representatives abroad. The preceding chapter on Ronald Reagan does not provide much new analysis with the exception of the important integration of Washington's effort to use the IMF and World Bank to require market conditions for aid in conjunction with the recession of 1981-82 and as a result to pressure and encourage Third World countries to shift away from a Soviet socialist model to a more open, market economy. (357-363) On the contentious question of whether or not Reagan's rhetoric and stepped up aid to so-called "freedom fighters" resisting Soviet supported communist regimes in Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua, and Cambodia had an impact on Gorbachev's policies after 1985 leading to the end of the Cold War, Westad makes a plausible argument against the conservative "victory" school by suggesting that "Reagan's attempts at spreading counterrevolution did not push the Soviets toward withdrawing—on the contrary, evidence indicates that at least up to early 1987 American pressure made it more difficult for Moscow to find a way of its Third World predicament." (364)

8) Several reviewers question Westad's conclusion that the "most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centered but connected to political and social development in the Third World." (396) The relationship between the Cold War in Europe and in the Third World would require at least another chapter or book to fully develop this thesis. By the 1960s when Westad moves from general analysis to more detailed development of the impact of the Vietnamese and Cuban confrontations and beyond, the fire and smoke of confrontation and intervention has moved out of Europe, although the Cuban missile crisis has a critical strategic center along with Westad's ideological calculations on all sides.

9) Westad makes a forceful case for continuity extending back to early U.S. and Russian expansionism, to the "Cold War as a continuation of colonialism through slightly different means," (396) to the assertion that post-September 11th "rampant interventionism" by the Bush administration "is not an aberration but a continuation—in slightly more extreme form—of US policy during the Cold War." The Soviet Union is not present to limit U.S. policy "but the ideology of interventionism is the same, with the same overall aims: only by changing markets and changing minds on a global scale can the United States really be secure."

Participants:

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Odd Arne Westad is Professor of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He co-directs the [LSE Cold War Studies Centre](#) with Professor Michael Cox, is an editor of the journal *Cold War History* and the editor (with Professor Melvyn Leffler) of the forthcoming three-volume *Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Westad received his PhD in history from the University of North Carolina in 1990. During the 1980s he worked for several international aid agencies in Southern Africa and in Pakistan. In 2000, Professor Westad was awarded the Bernath Lecture Prize from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

Westad's main fields of interests are the international history of the Cold War and contemporary East Asian history. Professor Westad has published twelve books on international history and contemporary international affairs. His 2006 book *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press) won the Bancroft Prize, the Akira Iriye International History Book Award, and the Michael Harrington Award from the American Political Science Association. Other major books from recent years include *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (OUP, 2003; with Jussi Hanhimaki); *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1945-1950* (Stanford UP, 2003), and *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (Routledge, 2000).

Jerald A. Combs (Ph.D. UCLA 1964) is Professor of History Emeritus at San Francisco State University where he retired after serving nine years as chair of the History Department and two years as Dean of Undergraduate Studies. He is the author of *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (University of California Press, 1970); *American Diplomatic History: Two Centuries of Changing Interpretations* (University of California Press, 1983); and is now working on the third edition of his textbook *The History of American Foreign Policy* to be published by M.E. Sharpe. His latest publication is "A Missed Chance for Peace? Opportunities for Détente in Europe," in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?*, edited by Klaus Larres and Kenneth Osgood (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

William Hitchcock is a Professor of History at Temple University. He received his Ph.D. from Yale University. His books include *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Stability in Europe, 1945-1954* (1998), *From War to Peace: Altered Strategic Landscapes in the Twentieth Century* (2000) co-edited with Paul Kennedy, and *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945-2002* (2004). His current research focuses on a history of the year 1945 in Europe that explores the civilian experience of war and liberation. He teaches a variety of courses that deal with twentieth century European and international history and is Director of the International History Workshop.

David Painter is Associate Professor of History at Georgetown University. He holds degrees from King College, Oxford University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Ph.D, 1982). He teaches U.S. diplomatic history and international history and is Director of the Master of Arts in Global, International, and Comparative History program.

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His major publications include *The Cold War: An International History* (1999), and *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of US Foreign Oil Policy, 1941-1954* (1986). He also edited with Melvyn P. Leffler, *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (1994, 2005). Professor Painter's research focuses on the political economy of US foreign relations, the Cold War, and US policy toward the Third World. He is currently working on a book-length project on oil and world power in the 20th century as well as a number of smaller projects including an analysis of oil and natural resources, 1945-62, for the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*.

Natalia Yegorova, Dr. of sciences (history) is a Chief researcher at the Institute of General History, Russian Academy of Sciences, where she serves as the Head of the Cold War Studies Center. Yegorova is an expert in the field of Soviet-American Relations and history of the Cold War. She is the author of the books *Isolationism and U.S. European policy, 1933—1941* (1995), *Postwar U.S.—Soviet Relations in American Historiography* (1981) and the co-author as well as co-editor of the book *The Cold War. 1945-1963. Historical Retrospect* (2003). Her numerous articles are devoted to different questions of Soviet foreign policy since 1945, the Soviet decision-making process and European security. Currently she is engaged in her Center's project on multilateral diplomacy and particularly in researching of peace movement during the Cold War. She was a fellow of the Norwegian Nobel Institute (1998) and the British Academy of Sciences (1999, 2003). She is a member of the editorial board of the annual *American Studies* (Moscow) and the journal *Cold War History* (London).

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