



Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

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This is a very ambitious book on a very important topic. Jeremi Suri has sought to recast our understanding of detente by examining domestic politics in the United States, the Soviet Union, France, the People’s Republic of China, and the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1960s. In order to write an international history of the social origins of detente, he draws on primary and secondary sources in English, French, German, and Russian and devotes most of the book to setting the context from which detente emerged. He discusses such topics as the arms race, “charismatic leaders” in the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and China, student protest movements, the Vietnam War, and the “global disruption of 1968,” before turning in the penultimate chapter to West German *Ostpolitik*, and the US-Soviet-Chinese “triangular diplomacy” that constituted the core of detente.

The Cold War, Suri argues in the first four chapters, had reached a series of stalemates by the 1960s, and these stalemates provided much of the impetus for the social upheavals of 1968, which are covered in chapter 5. Detente then emerged as policymakers in the United States, the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany “used agreement with foreign adversaries” and “promises of international peace to deflect attention from domestic difficulties and to free their resources for repressive measures” (213). In Suri’s view, “detente was a profoundly conservative response to internal disorder” ... that “sacrificed domestic reform for the sake of internal stability” (5). Its origins as a “desperate attempt to preserve authority under siege” meant that detente “could never provide a foundation for long-term harmony among states and peoples” (216). Finally, by isolating policymakers from their publics, “detente contributed to the pervasive skepticism of our ‘postmodern’ age” (262).

As Carolyn Eisenberg observes in her review, Suri deserves praise for being “willing to think in bold, broad terms about core issues of international politics and the internal affairs of nation-states.” In addition, his research is multinational as well as multi-archival, and his effort to pull together topics that are usually treated separately opens up useful lines of inquiry. *Power and Protest* is also engagingly written, though at times transitions between topics seem a little abrupt.

Suri is surely correct to argue that the domestic unrest that affected a large number of countries in the 1960s had an impact on detente. He is probably also correct that some aspects of detente had a conservative impact, though his apparent nostalgia for the “moral clarity” of the early Cold War makes one wonder what he means by conservative.

Despite these strengths, the book falls short of achieving its goal of providing an alternative interpretation of detente. Part of the problem is organizational. *Power and Protest* does not provide an integrated analysis of the domestic origins of detente but rather consists of a series of essays on a number of topics that the author believes are important. As Christopher Jespersen notes, however, Suri does not explain why he chose these topics and not others. Moreover, while Suri has clearly read widely, his archival research, while impressive in its breadth, does not go into depth on any topic.

One unfortunate result is that the first five chapters are unremarkable overviews of well-known topics that add little to our overall understanding of the period. In many cases, moreover, his discussion is so selective that it raises doubts about the degree to which his overall argument has shaped his use of evidence. For example, the chapter on the arms race in the 1950s and early 1960s, in addition to being vague and disjointed, does not address what most scholars see as one of the key issues-US determination to maintain nuclear superiority. Likewise, there is no discussion of extended deterrence, and, as Eisenberg points out, Suri fails to note that US and Soviet leaders “continued to regard nuclear advantage as key to their geopolitical influence.” Although Suri’s discussion of the Vietnam War bears the suggestive title, “The Illiberal Consequences of Liberal Empire,” he fails to address the systemic reasons for US involvement that have long engaged the best scholarship on the war. He also seems to accept the discredited premise that North and South Vietnam were separate nations (see pp. 138, 158, 163), and thus that any involvement by the North in the South constituted aggression. He further departs from recent scholarship by neglecting the Vietnamese role in their own civil war. Finally, as Greg Grandin points out, *Power and Protest* “reduces the global crisis of the 1960s to youth revolt,” and all three reviewers fault Suri for ignoring economic factors. (1)

Similar problems plague the final chapter on detente. Suri’s discussion of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* misses the central paradox behind the strategy—the recognition that in order to end the division of Germany and Europe, the first step was to recognize it. Instead, he makes the unconvincing argument that Brandt and his adviser Egon Bahr abandoned their earlier aspirations to end the division of Germany and Europe. He does not, however, cite any evidence that Brandt and Bahr had changed their mind, and he ignores the justifications they used to defend *Ostpolitik* in 1969 and 1970.(2) He also repeats the dubious charge that by recognizing the legitimacy of Communist leaders *Ostpolitik* bolstered Communist control of Eastern Europe (pp. 5, 225-26), ignoring scholars who doubt that the Soviets would have accepted the peaceful end to their sphere of influence in Eastern Europe in 1989 without the extended period of reassurance and reduced tensions that *Ostpolitik* fostered. While he is probably correct in arguing that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger saw their foreign policy initiatives in part as ways to thwart their domestic opponents, they also saw detente as a way to circumscribe, and eventually change, Soviet behavior.

Even if there were not problems with Suri's treatment of the various topics, their relationship to his overall argument is not clear. Although he repeatedly asserts that detente was a conservative reaction to domestic unrest, he does not provide sufficient concrete evidence of the links that would be necessary to support his interpretation. Moreover, he does not attempt to relate his argument systematically to other interpretations of detente. In short, he fails to make convincing connections between his evidence and his argument.

Book reviewers are supposed to review books as they are, not as we wish they might have been. Still, it is difficult not to wish that Suri had devoted less of his time and energy to producing selective essays on topics whose connection to detente he fails to demonstrate. Then he would have been better able to focus his considerable talents, and the insights he gained from his broad reading and research, on analyzing the links between domestic politics and the origins of detente. If he had followed this strategy, he might have achieved his goal of producing an international history of detente that recast our understanding of this important era.

Notes:

(1) James E. Cronin, *The World the Cold War Made: Order, Chaos, and the Return of History* (London: Routledge, 1996), provides a much more comprehensive overview of the same period.

(2) See Ruud van Dijk, "'It Looks Like Brandt Is In Over his Head:' *Ostpolitik and Détente*, Bonn and Washington: Disconrdant Beginnings, Conflicting Ends, 1969-1970," Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the German Studies Association, New Orleans, LA, 2003. See also Gottfried Niedhart, "Ostpolitik: Phases, Short-Term Objectives, and Grand Design," in David C. Geyer and Bernd Schaefer, eds., *American Détente and German Ostpolitik, 1969-1972* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2003.), 118-36.

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