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Introduction by Federico Romero

**John Lamberton Harper. *The Cold War*.** Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 9780199237012 (paperback, \$29.95).

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Introduction by Federico Romero, European University Institute

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John L. Harper's *The Cold War* offers a terse, crisp, and occasionally vivid account of the main dynamics and turning points of what Western publics understand - and historians at least until not long ago conceptualized - by that term, i.e. the bipolar conflict that dominated world politics from the end of World War II until 1989. It is primarily a history of decision-making in Washington and Moscow, of the strategic calculations, ideological assumptions and messianic expectations that drove the key protagonists, and of the unnecessary danger - and destructive effects - that they imposed upon large areas of the world.

Harper's Cold War is a "contest for supremacy" between "contending political and economic systems" that were engaged in a "struggle for physical control of places considered vital to both" (1). It resembles a classical imperial rivalry, but one that could neither be fought to the bitter end nor truly accepted by recognizing the adversary's legitimate power, because "Hobbesian fatalism" (17) about the nature and intentions of the antagonist locked Soviet and American elites in a conflict that could have ended much earlier than it did, at considerably lesser cost. If there is a hero in this story - an intellectual no less than a moral one - it is the diplomat and scholar George F. Kennan. His "original notion" of a "firm containment combined with a willingness to talk" is seen by Harper as a much healthier approach which was eventually "vindicated" by "the way the Cold War concluded" (249).

The narrative is concentrated on the origins and the ending of the conflict, but the interpretation is pivoted on turning points situated between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s. When key countries like Indonesia, the Congo and Brazil were firmly (and violently) anchored in the Western camp, the Soviets lost the struggle for the Third World. When China broke with the USSR and opened relations with the U.S., the fate of Communism as an international movement was sealed, and the decline of the Soviet empire became unstoppable. It follows that the American war in Vietnam was "an act of folly and masochism without parallel in the Cold War," since no serious strategic imperative dictated it (246). William Glenn Gray thinks that Harper here goes too far, since he "downplays the extent of the Soviet resurgence in the 1970s" and "neglects the atmospheric significance of America's precipitous decline in prestige in the 1970s." The other reviewers, however, do not dispute Harper's interpretation.

Robert Dean, in particular, commends Harper's view of "U.S. 'victory' in the Cold War not as a triumph of American virtue or leadership, but as a product of both intrinsic and contingent advantages of power." He shares Harper's sombre "moral evaluation" of a conflict that "caused enormous human and environmental damage across big swaths of the earth". If anything, Dean would have liked "more interpretive boldness" in addressing the "irreversible militarization of the American state" and the lasting "illusion of 'victory' through military force" that has ensnared the U.S. ever since.

By and large, the reviewers praise the narrative format and style of this book, a “clear, well argued, and balanced retelling and assessment of events” (Dean), and particularly a “lucid account of Soviet and American decision-making” (Gray). They also agree that Harper does not offer “a sweeping interpretative statement” (Gray) and “does not fundamentally shift our understanding of the Cold War” (Dean). Once they accept that this is an account “cast entirely in a traditional mold, and ... grounded in a literature of ‘traditional’ assumptions” (Dean), they consider it “too dense for impatient undergraduates” (Gray) but quite suitable for graduate students who are looking for “a well-rounded understanding of the Cold War” (Offenbach).

As it is inevitably the case with such a work of extreme synthesis, some of the criticism is focused on aspects that are marginalized or neglected in Harper’s account. Economic issues receive little attention even though they would seem to have an implicit interpretative relevance in the author’s view that bipolarism was always deeply asymmetrical, and that the Soviet empire was increasingly weaker and domestically troubled. Seth Offenbach is also unconvinced by “Harper’s general dismissal of the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD)”. The reviewers underline that Harper’s perspective is solely focused on the superpowers, “usually seen as drivers of events, while sometimes reacting (or over-reacting)” (Gray), but they do not explicitly fault the book for eschewing an alternative, global and multi-centric reading of the conflict. Dean points out that Harper draws a picture of “complicated alliances and savage proxy wars, with other states able to use leverage within the alliance systems”, and Offenbach commends Harper’s choice to highlight the “interaction with some of the world’s smaller players” and notices his “ability to internationalize the Cold War”.

The main criticism concerns Harper’s problematic relationship with recent scholarship and specifically with the ‘new’ diplomatic history, which is largely absent. In particular, scholarship on cultural diplomacy and the intellectual, symbolic, and media realms of the Cold War struggle is not integrated in this story of strategic decision-making. Thus, the book fails to reflect the current state of research and new conceptual approaches to the issue. Gray therefore concludes that this is “a synopsis of superpower diplomacy *during* the decades in question, not a fully synthetic history of ‘the Cold War’ as such.” Rather than simply stating such criticism, however, he uses it to suggest a stimulating reflection on the state of the field. A narrative synthesis like Harper’s should also be considered as “a base line for measuring the potential impact” (Gray) of recent scholarship. The question that arises then concerns the degree and effectiveness of the “interaction between solid traditionalists such as Harper and younger innovators” in the field of Cold War history – and I would add of international history in general. As Gray self-reflectively asks, “if we are not trying to influence interpretations of the fundamental U.S.-Soviet antagonism, are we really writing about the Cold War at all?”

Even though I am not a “younger innovator” myself, I think that the reply to this question is a resounding yes. But if the question needs asking, it is obvious that something is amiss in the intellectual and scholarly interaction in this vast and diverse field, and we all need to address it.

## Participants:

**John L. Harper** is Professor of American Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Bologna Center. In addition to *The Cold War*, he is the author of *America and the Reconstruction of Italy, 1945-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), winner of the Howard Marraro Prize from the Society for Italian Historical Studies in 1987; *American Visions of Europe: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George F. Kennan, and Dean G. Acheson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), winner of the Robert Ferrell Prize from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in 1995; and *American Machiavelli: Alexander Hamilton and the Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). He is a contributing editor of *Survival*, and is writing a book called *The Edge of Empire*, a chronicle of the struggle over foreign and defense policy in Washington during the first six months of 1950.

**Federico Romero** received his Ph.D. from the University of Torino in 1987. He is currently Professor of History of Post-War European Cooperation and Integration at the European University Institute. A specialist on twentieth-century trans-Atlantic relations, he is one of the directors of the European Summer School on Cold War History. He published a history of the Cold War (*Storia della guerra fredda*, Torino, Einaudi, 2009) and he is working on a book on *The integration of post-imperial Europe in a globalizing world, 1968-1991*.

**Robert Dean** is Associate Professor of History at Eastern Washington University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Arizona. Dean is author of *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) and several articles including “‘They’ll Forgive You for Anything Except being Weak’: Gender and the U.S. Escalation in Vietnam, 1961-1965,” in *The Companion to the Vietnam War*, Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); “Commentary: Tradition, Cause and Effect, and the Cultural History of International Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (Fall 2000); and “Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 22:1 (Winter 1998). He is currently working on “cultures of secrecy” in the postwar United States.

**William Glenn Gray** is an associate professor of history at Purdue University, where he offers courses in German, European, and international history. Gray holds an A.B. from Princeton and a Ph.D. from Yale, where his two principal advisors were Paul M. Kennedy and Henry Ashby Turner, Jr. Gray’s interests focus on the historical working of international systems. His first book project, *Germany’s Cold War*, documented the worldwide effort of West Germany and its allies to isolate East Germany in the 1950s and 1960s. A current book project, *Trading Power*, considers the political, military and monetary facets of German power into the 1970s. Gray’s many collaborative projects include co-editing the *Encyclopedia of the Cold War* (Routledge, 2008; 2 vols.).

**Seth Offenbach** currently teaches history at Bronx Community College. He earned his Ph.D. from Stony Brook University in 2010. He is currently working on a book titled “The Other Side of Vietnam: The Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War.” His most recent publication is “Defending Freedom in Vietnam: A Conservative Dilemma” in *The Right Side*

*of the Sixties* (2012), edited by Laura Jane Gifford and Daniel K. Williams. He is also a List Editor and Book Review Editor for H-Diplo.

Review by Robert Dean, Eastern Washington University

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It is understandable that historians demonstrate a perennial fascination with the Cold War. A dramatic imperial rivalry, complex, violent, with the potential for nuclear annihilation hanging over the planet, the Cold War demands attention. Certainly in terms of sheer quantity, the profession has risen to the occasion. The subject heading “Cold War,” narrowed to adult non-fiction books in history or “auxiliary sciences” generates 2,271 hits in World Cat. More than eight hundred of those are “general histories.” (Without the search limiters, the subject heading generates something more than ten times that number of entries.) The grand narrative explaining the whole trajectory of the conflict seems a particularly tempting endeavor for established diplomatic historians.

John Lamberton Harper contributes to the genre with *The Cold War*. Employing a chronological narrative structure, and widely read in the secondary literature of diplomatic, strategic, and economic history of the era, Harper has produced a clear, well argued, and balanced retelling and assessment of events. His account does not offer a radical revision of the standard narratives. But he does put his own imprint on the otherwise relatively generic story. He suggests that the Cold War is best understood as another iteration of imperial rivalry analogous to “Athens and Sparta, Napoleonic France and its enemies, as well as Nazi Germany and the Grand Alliance of 1941-1945.” (2) In this account, however, the leaders of each empire and their policies are depicted as driven by ideological messianism and by “Hobbesian fatalism” regarding the intentions of the other. (17) This was not a bipolar rivalry, Harper argues, but one of complicated alliances and savage proxy wars, with other states able to use leverage within the alliance systems and between the “superpowers” to help shape outcomes. Nor was it bipolar in the sense of symmetry of power—the U.S. was militarily and economically much the stronger empire.

The competition that followed produced lamentably destructive effects, as Harper, and of course, many others argue. Vast resources were squandered on an out-of-control nuclear arms race in preparation for a war that could not be fought. Nonetheless, on several occasions the Americans and the Soviets ratcheted up hostilities, and in the case of Cuba in 1962, took the world to the brink of holocaust. The stalemate spurred repression and violence directed at subject peoples within the communist imperial sphere, while the American imperial managers imposed, subsidized, or otherwise supported brutal right-wing regimes from southern Europe to Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Displacing the overt violence away from the center and onto the periphery, through proxy wars and occasional direct interventions, meant that millions in the developing world bore the brunt of the Cold War. Harper argues that the decisive turning point of this ‘global’ Cold War came in 1964-65, when Indonesia and the Congo, after murderous violence, and Brazil, in a U.S. supported coup, emerged with firmly anti-communist authoritarian regimes. (246) The disastrous American intervention in Vietnam was thus, he asserts, “an act of folly and masochism without parallel in the Cold War,” driven by domestic politics rather than by strategic imperatives. (246)

Chairman Mao Zedong's break with the USSR and the opening of relations with the U.S. set the stage for the final decline of the Soviet empire. Sclerotic, facing incipient or overt nationalist resistance in Eastern Europe, the state could not resist the centrifugal forces unleashed with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policies. George Kennan is once again celebrated for his perspicacity; the winning formula in the Cold War was, after all, "firm containment combined with a willingness to talk." (249)

Harper sees the U.S. "victory" in the Cold War not as a triumph of American virtue or leadership, but as a product of both intrinsic and contingent advantages of power. America began the conflict in a much stronger economic and strategic situation than the Soviets, and maintained that position despite blunders, hubris, and "a mountain of debt [still] to be paid off." Along with a sense of relief at being spared the apocalyptic disaster that was always possible, reflections on the end of the Cold War evoke "humility and regret." (249-250)

I find myself largely in agreement with Harper's moral evaluation of the causes and effects of the Cold War. It was driven by folly, hubris, "Hobbesian fatalism" (perhaps even paranoia) and messianism on both sides, caused enormous human and environmental damage across big swaths of the earth, and misdirected vast social and economic resources into sterile militarism and political regimentation and repression. We are lucky to have gotten through it without even more horrifying outcomes. Harper hints at longer-term consequences, without exploring them much further. Here I think a little more interpretive boldness might better serve the reader. His brief concluding observations on the post-Cold War messianic thinking of American imperial elites point to themes that might usefully have been developed more fully.

With the elimination of the "superpower" rival, the intention to "keep military strengths beyond challenge" is a central example of the "delusional bellicosity" produced by the political culture of the Cold War. (250) A seamless shift from the Cold War to a 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT) reveals the profound, seemingly irreversible militarization of the American state in the last sixty years. The malign naiveté that places its faith in the vast capacity to destroy overlooks the incontrovertible evidence of those decades. The use of military force in American interventions around the world has not produced the "single, liberal path to modernization," as Harper notes. (250) The capacity to destroy, when employed, has instead repeatedly revealed the incapacity of American power to construct legitimate, functioning democracies integrated into the capitalist world order. That such an ideological fantasy of 'nation building' through 'creative destruction' would be entertained at all illustrates the messianic hubris and delusion that Cold War domestic political discourse generated, with lastingly pernicious effects. From 'Shock and Awe' blitzkrieg to a warfare waged through remote control drone assassinations, the illusion of 'victory' through military force has trapped the U.S. in futile perpetual conflict, accelerating the decline at home and abroad that the wars were conceived to prevent.

One lesson of the Cold War and the subsequent GWOT seems to be that nothing more clearly demonstrates to the world the profound limits of American military power than using it. (Of course, this also appears to have been equally true of the Soviets.) A meaningful historical question arises as to why this did not become apparent to the



imperial war managers, despite the evidence of several decades. To answer the question would require stepping outside the traditional governing assumptions that structure this kind of 'synthetic' narrative. For twenty years or so diplomatic history has increasingly and fruitfully embraced new approaches that factor in culture, gender, race, religion, emotion, discursive analysis, etc. to enrich our understandings international relations and the underlying causes of events. *The Cold War* provides us with an adroit and skillful narrative, but one cast entirely in a traditional mold, and one that is grounded in a literature of 'traditional' assumptions about the power of conventional political and biographical narratives combined with assessments of strategic and economic power to explain relations between states. The 'new' diplomatic history is absent. Within the conventionally circumscribed assumptions that structure the genre, Harper's book is readable, thoughtful, and nuanced, providing a useful cautionary tale. It should work well when assigned to bright young undergraduates in diplomatic history survey courses. It takes its place, however, in a crowded, well-trod field, and does not fundamentally shift our understanding of the Cold War.



Review by William Glenn Gray, Purdue University

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*The "Tragic Folly" School of Cold War History*

Harper's book presents a clear, lucid account of Soviet and American decision-making during the Cold War. He does not advance a sweeping interpretive statement along the lines of, say, Campbell Craig and Fred Logevall in *America's Cold War*.<sup>1</sup> Harper's approach is simpler: he sets out to distill the best policy scholarship and memoirs of the past twenty years and to synthesize an account that pays due heed to personalities and politics in Moscow and Washington. Within this purview, the author succeeds very well, though many historians today would expect to see a more thematically expansive definition of what the Cold War entailed.

Harper's writing is vivid by the standards of academic prose, and the text is peppered with brief yet well-chosen quotes – the sort of refinement that is often missing from survey texts. Individual passages are well-crafted and convey large amounts of detail efficiently; only a skilled author could write such crisp, illuminating three-page sections on Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's challenges in 1956 (119-21) or President Richard Nixon's strategy in Vietnam (173-75). The overall effect may be too dense for impatient undergraduates, but graduate students might well appreciate this assignment as a straightforward and relatively brief rundown of the major phases of the Cold War. Unlike John Gaddis' *The Cold War: A New History*, which is essayistic in structure, Harper's book strives for reasonably comprehensive geographic coverage.<sup>2</sup>

The most distinctive interpretive flourish here is Harper's consistent tendency to rebrand what most call *realpolitik* as a "Mackinderian" outlook, that is, an obsession with control of the supposed Eurasian heartland. Anyone described by Harper as a "dogmatic Mackinderian" (such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, 190) thus comes across as a heedless devotee of an outdated, even cranky form of geopolitics. "Messianic" perspectives, whether Wilsonian or Leninist in inspiration, are also handled skeptically by the author (24-27). Only George Kennan stands out as a clear-eyed thinker: according to Harper, Kennan's "original notion" – "firm containment combined with a willingness to talk" – was "vindicated" by "the way the Cold War concluded" (249).

In a determined bid to avoid triumphalism, that haunting specter of Cold War scholarship, Harper plays up the theme of missed opportunities. The cost of containment was far greater than it needed to be, he observes; and he points to a number of moments (1953, 1959-60) when U.S. and Soviet leaders might well have put an end to their outdated confrontation sooner – were they not held back by the domestic dynamics of their respective political systems. He is especially critical of Jimmy Carter's administration,

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge: Harvard/Belknap, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

which completely misread the scope of Soviet successes in the Third World. In a chapter provocatively titled “To the Panic of ‘79,” Harper downplays the extent of the Soviet resurgence in the 1970s. This reading is at odds with much recent literature, which – inspired by Odd Arne Westad’s *Global Cold War* – presents Soviet engagements in Africa as tangible and destabilizing.<sup>3</sup> Taking the long view, Harper suggests that the Soviets had already lost the struggle for the Third World by the mid-1960s, when the fates of Brazil, Indonesia, and the Congo were sealed. This perspective helps to underscore the author’s depiction of the Vietnam conflict as a “tragic side-show” (246). In making the case for an early Soviet defeat in the Third World, however, Harper neglects the atmospheric significance of America’s precipitous decline in prestige in the 1970s. Whatever the wisdom of specific interventions by the Gerald Ford, Carter, and Ronald Reagan administrations, a failure to contest the perception of Moscow’s forward momentum might have been hazardous.

Harper is not especially forthcoming about his own place in the familiar progression of Cold War interpretations. A brief section on “The Cold War as History” runs through the usual Orthodox – Revisionist – Post-Revisionist sequence without explicitly taking sides, except to close with the remark that recent evidence suggests that “both East and West... behaved provocatively and furnished the other side with abundant reasons for alarm” (89). This hints at a post-revisionist approach, yet the author maintains a kind of historiographic nonalignment that serves the narrative in good stead. For example, Harper’s account unfolds mainly as a ‘center-periphery’ model in which the superpowers are usually seen as drivers of events, while sometimes reacting (or over-reacting) haplessly to events beyond their control. Handled rigidly, such a model might tend to crowd out any space for other prominent Cold War protagonists, powers that were neither ‘center’ nor ‘periphery.’ Yet Harper has no difficulty accepting that a Margaret Thatcher or a Helmut Kohl could also shape outcomes. The author comes to take China quite seriously in his discussions of the 1970s and 1980s, to the point of postulating a tacit U.S.-Chinese alliance that dramatically weakened the Soviet position and allowed China to emerge as the single greatest benefactor of the Cold War’s end.

One of the book’s weaknesses – acknowledged explicitly by the author at the outset – concerns coverage of economic issues. The massive aid programs so typical of the Cold War competition are identified here as an innovation of the John F. Kennedy years (“Alliance for Progress”); Harry Truman’s Point Four program of technical aid receives no attention, and the same goes for American use of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for Cold War purposes in the 1950s. Also striking is the lack of consideration given to large foundations. Can one assess the Cold War in Asia without reference to Norman Borlaug, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, and the “Green Revolution”?<sup>4</sup> Nor does the author incorporate recent perspectives on cultural diplomacy.

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<sup>3</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2010).

As such, the book is hardly indicative of the current state of research on U.S. or Soviet foreign relations in the twentieth century. Harper's nondescript title may even irritate some readers: what's really presented here is a synopsis of superpower diplomacy *during* the decades in question, not a fully synthetic history of "*the Cold War*" as such.

Even so, it makes more sense to take Harper's text on its own terms rather than lament all that's missing. Multi-authored works such as the *Cambridge History of the Cold War* can certainly cover more ground.<sup>5</sup> Yet there is real value to a single-author narrative project. Harper provides the rest of us – those of us who are determined to extend the range of Cold War topics to defecting dancers and Gaullist grumblings and gendered constructs – with a base line for measuring the potential impact of our own work. Are we communicating the significance of our research in a manner that might, in theory, demand a re-write of Harper's basic outline of the Cold War conflict when it comes time for a second edition? If not: shouldn't we be? If we are not trying to influence interpretations of the fundamental U.S.-Soviet antagonism, are we really writing about the Cold War at all? At a time when historians are all too prone to ignore one another's work rather than take issue with competing perspectives, one can only hope for more interaction between solid traditionalists such as Harper and younger innovators in the field of U.S. foreign relations.

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<sup>5</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 3vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Writing a book titled 'The Cold War' is an extremely difficult historical task. There are already a plethora of works about the Cold War, including excellent works by scholars who are regular contributors to the H-Diplo list, making it difficult to find something new and original to write about. By reviewing such familiar ground, authors open themselves up to potential criticism. Despite the pressure, John Lamberton Harper's background and prior work render him well suited for this undertaking, and *The Cold War* is a positive contribution to the historical field. Harper skillfully connects a plethora of themes and crises from this period. Though he devotes slightly more time and detail to the start of the war, he still does an excellent job of covering the tail-end of the half-century long crisis.

Harper emphasizes most of the major, and many minor, Cold War policies. His book focuses on "what decision makers in the major countries thought and did" (5). He also analyzes why politicians implemented many of these policies. Those looking for a book about the cultural impact of the war, or for an explanation of domestic pressures on politicians, will be wise to alter their expectations.

If there is one theme for this work, it is the concept of a "Hobbesian Fatalism" that grounded Cold War foreign policy (17). This concept, which Harper expands upon in the first chapter and returns to sporadically throughout the book, is his way of explaining why the Cold War happened despite the intuitive anti-war feelings of the leaders on both sides of the world. As Harper notes in the third chapter, the Cold War was an avoidable conflict and was only "the third best option" for both the United States and Soviet Union (77). The best options would have been total victory or grudging acknowledgement of each side's powers. Instead, the two major parties fell into a pattern of mutual hostility with the perpetual threat of world-wide annihilation. According to Harper, it was Hobbesian Fatalism, coupled with poor decision making (especially on the part of the Harry S. Truman administration) which led to the rise of the Cold War.

An anticipated weakness of *The Cold War* is that Harper fails to acknowledge many events where scholars have serious disagreement, as one would expect with a book that covers a subject with a large and varied historiography in such a short space. For example, he implies that President Harry Truman deserves blame for much of the early Cold War; this is a point that has been debated by scholars. Additionally, Harper's analysis of the start of the Korean War ignores much scholarly debate.<sup>1</sup> Harper argues that Secretary of State Dean Acheson's January 12, 1950 letter to China regarding U.S. interests in the Far East made Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin believe that South Korea could be taken without much risk of a greater war. Though this argument is certainly plausible, Harper presents it as a statement of fact rather than one of scholarly debate. This is the problem with undertaking

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<sup>1</sup> Gye-Dong Kim, "Who Initiated the Korean War?" James Cotton, ed., *The Korean War in History* (Humanities PR, 1989); James Matray, "Civil War of a Sort," James Matray & Kim Chull Baum, eds., *Korea and the Cold War* (Regina Books, 1993).

a book of this magnitude –bypassing some controversies will be necessary, but it can still bring out critics.

One area of surprise to this reviewer is Harper's general dismissal of the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). Though Harper acknowledges that both the United States and Soviet Union increased their deterrent capabilities throughout the Cold War, he does not recognize the policy of MAD until the 1970s. The term MAD does not appear in the book until page 177 (Chapter Seven), when Harper is writing about the SALT I negotiations. Harper argues that MAD did not exist until President Richard Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger took power in the United States. Harper's argument for dismissing the existence of MAD until this time is logical but also atypical. Harper recognizes that both the United States and Soviet Union tried to improve their destructive and deterrent capabilities, but he also writes that American military superiority meant that MAD could not exist. Essentially, he states that the United States could destroy the Soviet Union without fear of a retaliatory second strike. It is true that the United States military had overwhelming nuclear superiority throughout the Cold War. Even though the United States had more bombs than the Soviet Union, in the minds of politicians, policy analysts, and the public, the concept of MAD existed prior to the Nixon Administration and helped define the policies of earlier American and Soviet administrations.

One chapter of *The Cold War* stands out as particularly noteworthy. In Chapter Nine, "Stirrings of Change, 1980-1985," Harper expertly describes the tensions both within the American and Soviet governments, and within President Ronald Reagan's head. Reagan was an extremely complex politician who had conflicting beliefs. Many academics have turned Reagan into a caricature of himself, ignoring the depth of his beliefs. He believed in the imminent destruction of the Soviet Union, the inevitability of the apocalypse, and that humanity needed to be saved from nuclear holocaust.<sup>2</sup> These contradictory beliefs, coupled with Reagan's overly zealous public anti-communist (campaign) rhetoric, make him a hard politician for historians to judge. Despite this, the approximately twenty pages which Harper devotes to Reagan are clear and embrace this complexity on a far deeper level than most authors who have more words to spend on the former President. From Harper's work, the reader gains a clear understanding of how Reagan's religion and campaign rhetoric impacted his thoughts, but also of the pragmatism which underlined many of Reagan's actions. Explaining Reagan's beliefs clearly and succinctly is a difficult task which deserves ample praise when it is successful.

Another strength of *The Cold War* is Harper's ability to internationalize the Cold War. Harper aptly writes about more than fifty different countries and how the Cold War impacted those states. For example, even though Harper's focus is on "decision makers," he writes about the Cuban intervention into Angola and U.S. efforts to "consolidate

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the more impressive works about Reagan are: James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (Viking Press, 2009); Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980's* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

relationships” with nations such as Oman and Somalia (201). Harper’s goal is to emphasize the totality of the Cold War and how this crisis implanted itself into many local conflicts. By bringing up the Cold War’s interaction with some of the world’s smaller players, Harper gives an international account of the war.

Harper relies on secondary sources which make up most of the book’s bibliography. A large percentage of these secondary sources are biographies of people or institutions from the United States or Soviet Union. For example, he references James Mann’s *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan* and Michael Hogan’s *The Marshall Plan*.<sup>3</sup> The majority of Harper’s primary sources stem from papers at the Cold War International History Project and from published memoirs, such as *Khrushchev Remembers* and *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* by Robert McNamara.<sup>4</sup> These sources can offer scholars perspective, but they are of course limited in terms of reliability; this can be a problem since memoirs make up a large proportion of Harper’s primary sources. Additionally, there is a scarcity of sources from nations outside of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Western Europe. This means that Harper’s international approach to the Cold War is taken through the eyes of the Great Powers. Due to the nature of this book, most of these critiques were expected, but they should be of note to scholars who are using this book to guide their research.

A question which this reviewer could not stop thinking about while reading this work is who the intended audience is. When I pick up a book titled *The Cold War*—especially when there is so much secondary material in the book—my expectations are for a well-written work that has a compelling narrative and is engaging to read. Unfortunately *The Cold War* is not that book. Harper’s writing is dense and excluding the first and last chapters, it does not have a coherent theme running throughout. His story is also littered with so many acronyms that the publisher included a four-page list of abbreviations at the start of the book. These unnecessarily complicate the reading of the story. Though factually accurate, I find that it takes away from the writing to refer to the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea as DPRK instead of using the more popular term North Korea. Though scholars are comfortable with such acronyms, the presence of so many acronyms would likely frustrate non-specialists—such as undergraduate students—and hinder their comprehension. Making matters worse, by discussing so many nations, Harper’s argument is occasionally hard to follow. When he jumps from topics such as the Helsinki Accords to the conflict in the Horn of Africa in back-to-back paragraphs (192), it can be taxing on the reader’s attention. For these reasons, I would not recommend assigning this book for an undergraduate course.

Writing is a tough art. I would normally avoid a detailed critique of the readability of a book since so many monographs are written with an academic audience in mind and we are

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<sup>3</sup> Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*; Michael Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*, (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995).



capable of following complex works. However, a book about the Cold War is likely to draw the attention of both undergraduates and the general public as much (if not more so) than it is likely to draw the attention of scholars. Because a book of this nature must briefly address topics and relies on many secondary sources, it is not likely to expand the academy's general knowledge as much as a detailed monograph about a narrower topic would. If this book were written primarily for an audience of scholars, then more primary research would have been expected, along with a stronger argument. Because this book appears as though it was written for a broader audience, this means readability is more important than normal, and in my opinion *The Cold War* falls short in this area.

Perhaps the intended audience for this work is graduate students and similarly interested advanced readers. For graduate students entering the academy who are looking for a well-rounded understanding of the Cold War, this book is perfect. It offers a complete view of an international crisis that lasted for most of the twentieth-century. Each chapter also provides an outstanding example of a historian who is taking facts and making an argument. For example, Harper's fifth chapter focuses on the argument that public pronouncements of both American and Soviet leaders in the 1950s helped ratchet up Cold War tensions. Harper selectively chooses his secondary material in order to make convincing arguments about why the Cold War did not end once President Dwight Eisenhower and Premier Nikita Khrushchev took control of their respective nations. Harper postulates that the fresh blood which Eisenhower and Khrushchev offered (over the Truman and Stalin regimes) might have meant that they could have worked out their differences, but he then offers countless reasons why they failed. His ability to pose the question (could they have ended the Cold War), find relevant sources, and make an argument is commendable. Though seasoned scholars know how to make an argument and how to find supporting facts, graduate students must learn these skills and Harper's work could serve as an example of this practice. In a similar fashion, specific chapters of this book could also be used in an undergraduate course, especially an undergraduate course about historical methodology. While the whole book might overwhelm undergraduate students, graduate students should be able to make use of the book in its entirety.

Overall, *The Cold War* successfully summarizes the major arguments and points of the Cold War. Harper covers the story of how the Cold War lasted for a half-century and how it was the first truly worldwide crisis. Harper's ambitious effort tells the story of two super powers that did not want to annihilate humanity, but in a Hobbesian twist of fate, wound up driving the world to the brink of war. This story, which focuses on top-level diplomats and decision makers, serves as a sound resource for a scholar or budding scholar who seeks to contextualize the Cold War.



Author's Response by John Lamberton Harper, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Bologna Center

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First, a word of appreciation to the reviewers, and especially to Thomas Maddux. We all owe him a debt of gratitude for making the H-Diplo Roundtable series possible.

I'd like to begin by clarifying a few things about the book which, understandably, did not emerge from the reviews. It's part of a series (the brainchild of Christopher Wheeler at Oxford University Press-UK) called "Oxford Histories". The aim is a set of concise, briskly-written overviews of major historical episodes (*e.g.*, the Reformation, the First World War, the Holocaust, the Cold War), based on up-to-date sources. Each volume contains a discussion of historiography as well as a section called "documentary traces". In my case the latter consisted of a selection of contemporary cartoons, pictures, and speech excerpts meant to shed light on basic themes. These include the persistent influence on the U.S. and USSR of messianic world-views and of what I call "Hobbesian fatalism" (the at times self-defeating tendency to assume the worst about the outside world and seek security through expansion). Another theme, however, is the strong incentive at work on the U.S. and the USSR to 'live and let live.' At the height of their rivalry they remained part of the same 'Westphalian' system and sought a *modus vivendi* to defuse the Cold War.

The book's intended audience is under-graduate and graduate students, interested non-specialists, and scholars of the Cold War. The title was chosen by the publisher and the (all-inclusive) 110,000 word-limit was non-negotiable. As I say in the introduction, writing a compact book on a broad subject required what may seem an arbitrary and rather brutal selectivity. The Cold War was waged in various theatres but the reader will not find a detailed treatment of the important cultural, economic, and espionage aspects of the conflict. It is pre-eminently a political and diplomatic history. As one reviewer notes, it focuses on what decision-makers in the major countries thought and did.

A few comments, starting with Robert Dean's fair and largely sympathetic review. I do indeed argue that the turning point in the struggle for the Third World came in 1964-65, when three large, rich, and strategically important countries (Brazil, Indonesia, and the Congo) went solidly into the Western camp. I don't exactly say that therefore the U.S. escalation in Vietnam was "driven by domestic politics rather than by strategic imperatives." (Dean's words) I say that "it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the escalation was above all the result of internal political considerations" (246). Clearly there were strategic considerations involved after 1965, but I think the *most important* factor explaining American behavior was fear of the domestic political consequences of defeat.

Dean wishes I had shown "a little more interpretive boldness" in discussing the consequences of the end of the Cold War. He has a point, and it's a pity there wasn't space to dwell on the ways in which the West's victory conditioned American foreign policy after 1991 (and after 2001). He also says the book is "cast entirely in a traditional mold." I gather this means I don't pay enough attention to (among other things) emotion, religion, and

culture. The book takes emotions into account when they are relevant. It is sensitive to the powerful influences on policy of a secular religion, Marxist-Leninism, and of a highly schematic interpretive framework: Halford Mackinder's geopolitical determinism. It is also very attentive (in the spirit of Campbell Craig's and Fredrik Logevall's recent *America's Cold War*) to the impact of domestic political struggles in the U.S. and USSR.<sup>1</sup> The book frequently invokes what I call the 'iron law' of the two-party democratic competition in the United States: your political opponent will try to make you pay for any sign of weakness in the realm of foreign and security affairs.

I find William Glenn Gray's review generally interesting and insightful, but let me take him up on a few points. I don't mean to say George Kennan was the sole clear-eyed thinker on the Western side (he nursed his own illusions about how the conflict might end), but I argue that he was correct on at least two essential points. First, as he pointed out in the 'Long Telegram', the USSR, unlike Nazi Germany, was neither adventuristic nor inclined to fulfil its aims militarily. I frequently contrast this view with the flawed but influential perspective (typified by Paul Nitze) according to which the USSR might well see advantages in striking first. Second, Kennan was correct that the Soviet Union contained the seeds of its own decay. He wasn't always precise about their nature but (as I say in the conclusion) there were at least three: economic inefficiency, nationalism in Eastern Europe and the non-Russian areas of the USSR, and the gradual flowering of 'new thinking' within the Soviet elites.

I don't think my reading of Soviet policy in the 1970s is really at odds with Odd Arne Westad's view. Indeed, I rely greatly on his account.<sup>2</sup> Nor do I neglect the "atmospheric significance of America's precipitous decline in prestige in the 1970s." It helped to trigger the campaign against détente in the US and was a factor in the Carter administration's panicked reaction at decade's end. I do argue that the Western position in the Third World was basically impregnable after the mid-1960s, but all the more so after China's and Egypt's shift in the 1970s toward the United States. Observers like Kennan and Raymond Garthoff (one could add Cyrus Vance) saw that the 1970s Soviet bloc 'offensive' and arms build-up were greatly over-blown. The influential view that the USSR moved into Afghanistan in 1979 to position itself to control the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean was a delusion, and disputed at the time.

The reviewer 'is right that there is limited treatment of economic issues (and none of U.S. foundations), but it's not quite accurate to say I identify the "massive aid programs so typical of the Cold War competition" as "an innovation of the John F. Kennedy years." After all, I cover the Marshall Plan in some detail (71-76). I'm pleased that he sees real value in this kind of single-author narrative project as a way of testing the impact of more

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Makings of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

specialized research. Pace Gray, however, rather than a “solid traditionalist” I’d call myself an eclectic post- (or ‘post-post’) revisionist influenced by Kennan and Louis Halle, and (among other living historians) Melvin Leffler and John Lukacs.

As for Dr. Offenbach’s review, although I have the impression that he is trying to be comprehensive and even-handed, I find his effort a little confused, at times captious, and rather contradictory in the end.

I do *not* argue that the Cold War was avoidable and was only the third-best outcome for the U.S. and USSR. I write (38) that it is hard to argue that it was anything other than inevitable, although the conflict was not destined to develop exactly in the way it did. The point about “third choices” (borrowing from an argument made by Charles Maier) refers specifically to the rigid, dangerous division of the European continent by 1949.<sup>3</sup> I do not say or imply that Truman “deserves blame for much of the early Cold War.” I argue that responsibility is shared by many, including Franklin Roosevelt (see 46-48), not to mention the leadership of the USSR.

Soviet evidence shows that Joseph Stalin was familiar with Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s January 12, 1950 Press Club speech (it was not a “letter to China” referred to by Offenbach) in which he excluded South Korea from the U.S. defense perimeter. I write: “Acheson’s remarks on South Korea suggested the risks involved in seizing it were lower than anticipated” (101). This is a fact. I don’t claim the speech was the only reason Stalin changed his mind and gave a green light to North Korean leader Kim Il Sung.

I do not argue that Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) did not exist until Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger took power. Nor do I say the U.S. could destroy the USSR without fear of a retaliatory strike. It is a mystery why Offenbach attributes these views to the book.

He notes that secondary sources make up most of the bibliography, and “a large percentage of these secondary sources are biographies of people or institutions [sic] from the United States or Soviet Union.” I don’t quite see the problem. As for primary sources, he argues that I may have put too much stock in the memoirs of protagonists. I’d like to set his mind at ease on this point. I do, as he says, rely heavily on the CWIHP Virtual Archive (containing translated Communist bloc documents), but also on original sources he doesn’t mention: collections of the Digital National Security Archives, and the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series.

Alas (and despite the book’s virtues), he says, his expectations for a “well-written work that has a compelling narrative and is engaging to read” have been disappointed. But, he concludes, “for graduate students entering the academy who are looking for a well-rounded understanding of the Cold War, this book is perfect.” I wonder how he can believe both statements to be true.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Maier, “The Marshall Plan and the Division of Europe”, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7/1 (Winter 2005): 186-74.

Thanks again to everybody.

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