

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXV-10

Jessica Chapman, *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2023. ISBN: 9780813197623

29 April 2024 | <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT25-10>

Editor: Diane Labrosse | Commissioning Editor: Seth Offenbach | Production Editor: Christopher Ball

## Contents

---

Introduction by Robert Steele, Austrian Academy of Sciences.....	2
Review by Gregory A. Daddis, San Diego State University.....	6
Review by Ruodi Duan, Haverford College.....	10
Review by Ryan Irwin, University at Albany.....	12
Review by Mitchell Lerner, The Ohio State University.....	15
Review by Mattie C. Webb, Yale University.....	18
Response by Jessica Chapman, Williams College.....	22

## Introduction by Robert Steele, Austrian Academy of Sciences

In correcting the Eurocentric nature of earlier Cold War scholarship, modern Cold War historiography, particularly since the publication of Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* in 2005,<sup>1</sup> has “helped forge a rare scholarly consensus,” in Robert McMahon's words, “that the Cold War constituted a truly global contest, in which the Third World served as a critical theatre, and that it was an event in which non-Western actors assumed a large and substantive role.”<sup>2</sup> As these global histories are uncovered, we are coming to understand that leaders such as Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, and sundry others were not merely pliant tools of the imperial powers, but were, in the words of Roham Alvandi, “active agents of history who often abetted and manipulated the superpowers in the pursuit of their own local ambitions and interests.”<sup>3</sup>

The Cold War coincided with other developments that caused profound global change. In the decades following the Second World War, dozens of countries around the world achieved independence from colonial rule and became full-fledged sovereign members of the international community. Between 1945 and 1970, member nations of the United Nations increased from 51 to 127,<sup>4</sup> and the organization became a forum in which newly independent states could argue for the continuation of decolonization and recognition of national rights. Across the Global South, local communities struggled to break free from the chains of imperial bondage that had tied them politically to global Western powers.<sup>5</sup> But decolonization was not, as Cyrus Schayegh and Yoav Di-Capua note, “simply the negotiation and management of the transfer of state power (‘changing the flag’), central to classic histories of empire,” but rather “a complex multiphase process...[and] one of a handful of macrohistorical processes shaping the world as a whole.”<sup>6</sup>

Decolonization and the Cold War were two interconnected global processes that in some way or another and to varying degrees shaped the political fortunes of all countries in the Global South. Events and movements such as the Bandung Conference of 1955, the non-aligned movement, and the Islamic Conference, cannot fully be understood without an appreciation of the connected histories of the Cold War and decolonization.<sup>7</sup> In *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War*, Jessica Chapman aims to elucidate the entangled nature of the twentieth century's two most seismic and multifaceted processes, which, though known to have been intimately entwined, are, as Chapman writes in this roundtable “too rarely charted globally and systematically.” Chapman's goal is not to produce an encyclopedic account of the intersection of the Cold War and decolonization, but rather to provide snapshots in case studies from Asia and Africa—India, Egypt, Congo, Vietnam, Angola, and Iran—that illuminate the global dynamics and complexities of imperial competition in the Global South during the era of decolonization.

<sup>1</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. McMahon, “Introduction,” in *The Cold War in the Third World*, ed. Robert J. McMahon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, “Growth in United Nations Membership,” online: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/growth-in-un-membership>. The number of members would reach 166 in 1991, on the eve of the end of the Cold War.

<sup>5</sup> On the anticolonial struggle for self-determination, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Cyrus Schayegh and Yoav Di-Capua, “Why Decolonization?” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52:1 (2020), 137-38.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion, see the introduction to Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake eds., *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Chapman's second goal is to offer an account of the Cold War and decolonization that appeals to both specialists and generalists, integrating complex global processes into a readable and accessible narrative. Chapman does not attempt to break new ground or introduce newly declassified archival material, but rather constructs a coherent narrative based on a wide range of established scholarly literature. The reviewers of this roundtable commend this aspect of Chapman's approach—in her contribution to the roundtable, Mattie C. Webb calls the work “an expert synthesis of scholarship.” In his review, Ryan Irwin makes the case that the book would be strengthened by integrating a more explicit discussion of historiography into the narrative. Such a discussion, Chapman responds, is unnecessary; it would merely weaken the work's central thesis and distract readers from “the complex interconnections and local particularities that I wanted them to see by foregrounding a potentially polarizing and oversimplified interpretive claim.”

The contributors to this roundtable agree that Chapman's work is outstanding and will form a major contribution to the scholarship. Several of the reviewers regret the absence of certain details or events—two note the lack of serious discussion of the issue of race in relation to the Cold War in Angola and South Africa. Others would like to have seen case studies from other parts of the world, for example South America and Cuba. This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of producing a work on a subject that covers so many geographical areas and themes, as regional specialists are bound to be disappointed. As Mitchell Lerner writes sardonically in a footnote to his comment on the absence of analysis on Korea, “I should note in fairness that I think every book I read needs more Korea, so that probably says more about my own shortcomings than the book's.” Chapman adequately addresses these issues in her response to the roundtable, arguing that possible oversights identified were the result of “fairly ruthless editorial decisions.” These decisions were taken in order to maintain the goals of producing a concise and readable history that would appeal to a broad audience, introducing them to complicated subjects and serving “as a platform for expanding their own inquiries.”

The reviews in this roundtable provide a thorough and thoughtful discussion of the book, but as the only Iran specialist on the panel, I would like to contribute some observations. The case of Iran is very interesting because the country was not formally colonized during the period of European colonialism. Nonetheless, its sovereignty had been frequently subverted by the British and Russians since the nineteenth century, and these interactions, as Chapman notes, profoundly impacted how Iran viewed its position in the era of the Cold War and decolonization.<sup>8</sup> Although the shah was firmly on the side of the United States in the Cold War, Alvandi argues that “the Pahlavi state sought to project an image of a resurgent Iran as an autonomous actor within the Western bloc.”<sup>9</sup> In the context of the changing world order that decolonization presented, the shah attempted to “serve as a bridge between East and West, North and South.”<sup>10</sup> An interesting question is the extent to which the shah's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy during the Cold War, and Iran's relations with other countries in the Global South, were facilitated or inhibited by Iran's partnership with the United States.<sup>11</sup> I would perhaps have liked to have seen more discussion of this, particularly in the period after the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971 when the shah confidently pursued his Indian Ocean policy.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> For some recent scholarship on this subject, including case studies from Algeria, China, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Vietnam, and others, see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet and Robert Steele eds., *Iran and Global Decolonisation: Politics and Resistance After Empire* (London: Gingko Library, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Roham Alvandi, “Iran in the Age of Aryamehr,” *The Age of Aryamehr: Late Pahlavi Iran and its Global Entanglements*, ed. Roham Alvandi, (London: Gingko Library, 2018), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Alvandi, “Iran in the Age of Aryamehr,” 17.

<sup>11</sup> For discussion see Robert Steele, “Iran and the Ogaden War, 1977–78,” in *Iran and Global Decolonisation*, ed. Kashani-Sabet and Steele, 237–271.

<sup>12</sup> James F. Goode, “The Iranian Intervention in Oman, 1972–75,” *Iranian Studies* 47:3 (2014), 443; Rouhollah K. Ramazani, “Iran's Search for Regional Cooperation,” *Middle East Journal* 30:2 (1976), 180.

Benefiting from oral histories, greater access to archival material, and the publication of memoirs and biographies,<sup>13</sup> recent scholarship tends to offer more nuanced assessments of the shah's reign beyond simple characterizations of the anti-Communist, pro-America dictator.<sup>14</sup> In Chapman's account of Pahlavi Iran, we do not get much of a sense of the shah aside from his "brutal authoritarian rule" (211) or his "corrupt and repressive regime" (223). Whereas Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq merely "rigged a referendum" to earn 99 percent of the votes (219), the shah's 1963 referendum on the White Revolution is described as "egregiously rigged" (225), though it received a similar vote share. On some of the key events described, such as the Azerbaijan crisis of 1946, the 1953 coup, the revolution, and the Iran-Iraq War, one might have expected more references to the core scholarly literature or most recent scholarship.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the chapter on Iran is excellent, and Chapman does a terrific job of writing the post-Second World War history of Iran and the Iranian revolution into that of the global Cold War.

The reviewers of this roundtable broadly agree on the ambition of Chapman's work and praise her for producing not only a rigorous piece of scholarship, but also an immensely readable narrative, which will appeal to both specialists and students. They consider that *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War* is an outstanding work, "a master-class in historical concision" (Gregory Daddis) and "an integral contribution to scholarship on decolonization and the Cold War" (Ruodi Duan).

### Contributors:

**Jessica Chapman** is Professor of History at Williams College. She is the author of *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War* (University Press of Kentucky, 2023) and *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Cornell University Press, 2013). She is currently working on an international history of Kenyan runners, part of which appears as "Running to School: U.S.-Kenyan Athletic Pipelines in the 1970s," *Diplomatic History* 48:1 (January 2024): 20-47.

**Robert Steele** is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute of Iranian Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences. He is the author of *The Shah's Imperial Celebrations of 1971: Nationalism, Culture and Politics in Late Pahlavi Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), *Pahlavi Iran's Relations with Africa: Cultural and Political Connections in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024 [forthcoming]), and co-editor (with Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet) of *Iran and Global Decolonisation: Politics and Resistance After Empire* (London: Gingko Library, 2023).

**Gregory A. Daddis** is Professor of History and the USS Midway Chair in Modern US Military History at San Diego State University. He is the author of *Pulp Vietnam: War and Gender in Cold War Men's Adventure Magazines* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

---

<sup>13</sup> For example, Abbas Milani, *The Shah* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> For a recent critique of such characterisations, see Arash Azizi's review of John Ghazvinian's *America and Iran: A History, 1720 to the Present* in the *Middle East Journal* 75:3 (2021): 473-75.

<sup>15</sup> For example: Louise Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Louise Fawcett, 'Revisiting the Iranian Crisis of 1946: How Much More Do We Know?', *Iranian Studies* 47:3 (2014): 379-399; Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Ervand Abrahamian, *Oil Crisis in Iran: From Nationalism to Coup d'Etat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Ali Rahnama, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic* (London: Penguin, 2013); Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

**Ruodi Duan** is Assistant Professor of History and East Asian Languages & Cultures at Haverford College. Her broad research interests include modern Chinese social and political history, comparative ethnic studies, China-Africa relations, and international histories of the Cold War.

**Ryan Irwin** teaches US and the World history at the University at Albany-SUNY. His first book, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), explored how African decolonization changed great power politics during the Cold War. Right now, he's writing a book about the American legal profession, which explores how disagreements over imperialism and capitalism affected US great power during the twentieth century.

**Mitchell Lerner** is Professor of History and faculty fellow at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies at The Ohio State University, where he is also Director of the East Asian Studies Center and Faculty Fellow for the Eminence Scholars Honors Program.

**Mattie Webb** is a Postdoctoral Fellow and Kissinger Visiting Scholar with International Security Studies (ISS) at Yale University's Jackson School of Global Affairs. She is also an affiliate with Rhodes University's Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit in South Africa. A historian of the United States and southern Africa, Mattie's research explores the history of the anti-apartheid movement by considering the impact of US business reform on South African workers, particularly those employed by US multinationals. Her work has appeared in *Enterprise & Society*, *Ethnic Studies Review*, and *Cold War History*. She received her PhD in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where her work was funded by a Fulbright fellowship.

Review by Gregory A. Daddis, San Diego State University

---

Reading Jessica Chapman's latest work had me feeling a bit like former New York Yankees shortstop Phil Rizzuto. Granted, I'm no baseball player. I spent far more time on the bench than in the field during pre-teen Little League games. Nor did I ever have the chance to see "The Scooter" play in person; he retired more than a decade before I was born. But as a kid growing up in New Jersey, I listened gleefully to him announce Yankees games for the New York City station, WPIX. What I remember most about Rizzuto, and how I felt reading Chapman's book, was his trademark expression. "Holy Cow!"

Holy cow, *Remaking the World* is a gem of a book that covers more ground in under 250 pages than I thought possible. Chapman offers a master-class in historical concision, packing loads of information into every page with seeming effortlessness. Even more impressive, her six judiciously chosen case studies covering the expanse of the Global South's Cold War are immensely readable. Not only are her chapters self-contained analyses of diverse areas, they also become mutually supporting when read as a whole. This is one of the more enjoyable, and most useful, books I have read on the Cold War in a long time.

While Chapman offers a number of perspectives on the process of twentieth-century decolonization, I was left with a central, arguably necessary, question: what did "independence" truly mean in the post-World War II era? Pulled together, these diverse commentaries showcase how competing definitions of independence during the Cold War rippled across the globe. They demonstrate that disconnects in definitions, between (and among) local actors and Cold War super powers, contributed to political violence that lasted long after "wars" were deemed to be over. Here are the porous boundaries between our popular misconceptions of "peace" and "war" that Mary Dudziak outlines so well in *War Time*.<sup>1</sup>

If decolonization centered upon notions of independence, then any discrepancy over its meaning opened the door to conflict and, ultimately, extreme acts of political violence. Chapman realizes that incongruities were not limited to haggling between Cold War superpowers and local leaders. Within newly formed nations, definitions of independence, citizenship, and belonging fostered infighting that foreign interventionism only made worse. Here, the author takes a page from Middle East expert Rashid Khalidi, who argues that both the United States and Soviet Union—and, to a lesser degree, China—had a bad habit of "exacerbating and aggravating pre-existing local conflicts or producing new ones, and envenoming the political atmosphere in numerous countries."<sup>2</sup> For those seeking a patriotic tale of US benevolence in the Third World, this work surely will disappoint. And rightfully so.

The first chapter is nothing short of a historical tour-de-force. In less than 30 pages, Chapman covers the breadth of the Cold War in almost ruthlessly efficient fashion. Early on, there was a sense that decolonization, as a process, would be messy. Superpower competition over ideologies and access to strategic resources almost were destined to seep into independence struggles, with policymakers in Washington and Moscow viewing local elites as pawns in the increasingly militarized, zero-sum Cold War game. Yet, as the author reveals, time and again leaders from New Delhi to Saigon to Luanda never quite played their assigned roles. If independence was to be debated, postcolonial peoples were going to have their say.

Students, who are Chapman's intended audience, likely won't find a better, more concise overview of the Cold War in this first chapter. More importantly, they will see clearly the crucial relationships between Europe, Asia, and Africa as the Cold War unfolded, with decolonization placed in its proper global, geostrategic context. Recent scholars have pushed back on the traditional bipolar narrative of the post-World

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 1.

War II era, a trend that Chapman admirably advances, while also acknowledging the role that both superpowers played in shaping a new international system.<sup>3</sup> From the US perspective, containment and decolonization appeared to be two sides of the same coin. Yet American and Soviet leaders alike viewed the decolonizing Third World as both threat and opportunity, the former usually taking precedence in policy reviews and, thus, justifying the exportation of violence abroad.

The following chapters are no less impressive and the extent of the author's scholarly command is notable. In her analysis on Vietnam, for example, Chapman effortlessly weaves into her narrative the drafting and implementation of National Security Council Paper NSC-68 under President Harry S Truman, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's 1961 speech supporting "wars of national liberation" (56), and President Richard Nixon's larger efforts at "triangular diplomacy" (66). None of these added bonuses feels out of place or forced into the storyline. Moreover, Chapman's narrative follows a loose chronological timeline that aids in telling a larger story of the Cold War unfolding across the globe.

Chapman begins in India, a newly decolonized nation "born in crisis" (40). She highlights the problems that local elites like Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru faced when seeking nonalignment within the larger Cold War construct. Yet with fears underlying both US and Soviet foreign policies, even neutrality was deemed suspect. Moreover, local disputes made any political and economic transition from British rule a rocky one. Chapman, nonetheless, offers one of the clearest descriptions of the complicated India-Pakistan conflict I have read, discussing religious affiliations, questions of political legitimacy, and the weight of geopolitics with equal skill. Were US policymakers so informed? Instead, like Secretary of State Dean Acheson, many saw only the possibility of Communist subversion as India staggered from political crises to economic ones. As Chapman argues, American officials too often were "blinded by the Cold War belief that nonalignment was little more than a pitstop along the way to communism" (51).

Similar views informed US policy in Egypt, one of the book's two case studies covering the Middle East. Ideology surely mattered, but so too did American access to oil. Here, Chapman threads together a tale of the United States' voracious appetite for natural resources alongside Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's conceptions of Egyptian nationalism and Pan-Arabism. As the 1956 Suez Crisis demonstrated, local actors could wield power against their superpower competitors, while cautiously playing to each side. For all the talk of the Cold War being an ideological struggle between democratic capitalism and Communism, Chapman reveals that local leaders had to assume a realist approach to foreign policy if they were to survive. When they overreached, as Nasser did in the 1967 Six-Day War, the results could be disastrous.

Other nations making the transition to sovereignty faced crisis after breaking with their former colonial overseers. In the Congo, leaders like Joseph Kasavubu and Patrice Lumumba diverged over the practical meaning of independence, over whether their form of rule should become a "strong centralized government" or a "loose confederation of mini-states" (111). A failure to reconcile these competing visions predictably led to violence. Mirroring his American counterparts, Khrushchev saw an opportunity to carve out inroads in Africa, challenging Western influence while gaining access to the Congo's wealth in gold, copper, and uranium. Some sense of national unity might have facilitated a defense against these superpower intrusions, but the civil war that soon followed "independence" left the Congolese ill-prepared for such protections. Pragmatic officials like Lumumba might have been able to play one superpower off another for satisfying short-term local needs. Yet such dangerous gambits too often inspired the opposing side's wrath with deadly consequences.

---

<sup>3</sup> For an example of this scholarship, see Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).

Given Chapman's previous scholarship, the sophisticated chapter on Vietnam is unsurprisingly excellent.<sup>4</sup> In North Vietnam leader Ho Chi Minh's rise to power, Chapman highlights the disconnect from and disappointment in Western rhetoric about self-determination and national independence. She also offers a reasonable assessment of Ho himself, a committed leader who "envisioned a two-stage revolution, first nationalist and antifeudal and then socialist" (146). Yet Chapman also stresses the importance of anticolonial fervor, a rallying cry for leaders like Nehru, Nasser, and Ho to mobilize their peoples against foreign adversaries that were far more advantaged than them. While the author overlooks the emphasis that US counterinsurgency theory placed on nonmilitary programs, she rightfully stresses the grisly levels of destruction that accompanied the American war in Vietnam, undermining the very reason why US troops were there in the first place.<sup>5</sup> Building an independent South Vietnamese state seemed far more difficult than destroying one.

That Chapman returns the narrative to Africa with a case study on Angola suggests her intention to highlight for students an understudied region of the Cold War conflict. Latin Americanists might wince that she virtually ignores what historian Greg Grandin calls the US "empire's workshop," but the narrative flows from Southeast Asia back to Africa rather seamlessly.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Angolan case study allows Chapman to spotlight the role that Cuba played in stoking revolutionary fervor far outside the Western Hemisphere. (One still wonders how Cuban soldiers were motivated to fight in such a faraway place as Angola.) Once more, the author helps make sense of a complicated civil war, with multiple competing actors, that played out as the Cold War entered a new phase during the early and mid 1970s. In the aftermath of Vietnam, the fighting in Africa also prodded American neoconservatives to push for a more aggressive foreign policy to help wash away the stains of a lost war in Southeast Asia. The interconnectivity of global decolonization processes becomes clearly apparent.

The final case study takes readers back to the Middle East, this time to Iran and, ultimately, the 1979 Islamic revolution that ushered in yet another Cold War phase. With Iran, Chapman underscores American policymakers' habit of backing authoritarian regimes—in this case, the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi—by assuming that dictatorships offered far more regional stability than revolutionary movements. Yet unintended consequences, such as the rise of revolutionary Islam, often followed. Once more, the author pithily covers vast amounts of material: the rise of Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq and the nationalization of Iranian oil; the resultant CIA coup; President Dwight Eisenhower's inflated fears of Communist subversion inside Iran; and President Jimmy Carter's political undoing thanks, in part, to the hostage crisis.

The discussion of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the eight-year war with Iraq that followed, allows Chapman to shed light on how the Cold War's end affected local leaders. The military-industrial complex seemed a clear winner in this decades-long global contest, as both sides provided their proxies with massive amounts of military aid. The author acknowledges that both superpowers funneled "unimaginable quantities of military hardware to the regional allies" (107). Surely, they bear some responsibility for the more than million dead in the Iran-Iraq War given the number of arms shipments that reached both sides.

While Chapman concludes with the theme of interconnectedness, I could not help but reflect on how the Cold War contest over independence in the Third World remains with us today. For her part Chapman suggests that the Cold War did not "mark an end to the process of decolonization," marshalling for evidence the "stark wealth inequalities that overwhelmingly favor former colonial metropolises" (248). The practice of

---

<sup>4</sup> Jessica M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).



imperialism, it appears, long outlasted most debates over what it meant to truly be independent in the post-World War II age.

For students, a few strategically placed maps would have been helpful. But this quibble aside, I can't imagine a better conceived, more tightly written work on Cold War decolonization. So, in my best Phil Rizzuto voice, "Holy cow, Chapman ripped this one out of the park!"

Jessica Chapman's *Remaking the World* is an ambitious, absorbing retelling of the twin arcs to decolonization and the Cold War, the two most consequential global developments of the twentieth century, from six vantage points in the postcolonial world: India, Egypt, Congo, Vietnam, Angola, and Iran. While it is well-known, especially among historians of Asia and Africa, that these dynamics entwined in significant ways, Chapman lays out precisely what this entails.<sup>1</sup> Each of the cases transformed the course of superpower conflict in the postwar decades.

I especially appreciate the attention accorded to the impact of regional events and frictions, including the Indian rivalry with Pakistan, the Sino-Indian Border Conflict, and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. These are an often-neglected angles in Cold War histories written from singular places. As one example, Chapman points out that in the case of North Vietnam, it was Chinese Communists who made the new country a focal point of Cold War contention. These international exigencies then affected the course of internal politics, as when Vietnamese leader Le Duan executed a campaign against “modern revisionism” in 1964, with the goal of eliminating any influences of Soviet “peaceful non-existence” on national culture (169-170). This is an insightful point about the enfolding of multipolar Cold War discourses into domestic struggles over the blueprint for anticolonial and postcolonial liberation.

In a similar fashion, Chapman aptly describes the process by which border disputes between China and India in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which were aggravated by the controversies surrounding Indian asylum to the Dalai Lama, became fodder and fuel in global geopolitical conflict. As the Soviet Union declared a neutrality that was tantamount to betrayal from the Chinese perspective, the Kennedy administration substantially stepped up its aid packages to India which it hoped would serve as a counterweight to Chinese hegemony in the region. These decisions pushed Pakistan towards a more definitive alliance with China, however, and to accept a magnificent new loan from the Soviet Union (56-61). Not only did I find this recount of Sino-Indian conflict compelling as a whole, I read the episode as a nuanced example of how regional contestations within the Third World often carried profound international reverberations, and helped shape Cold War trajectories in indispensable ways.

Even so, my reading of *Remaking the World* leaves me with additional questions. While the book tackles the significance of Cuba and China for Cold War trajectories in complex ways, I wonder if the interrelated roles of Eastern European actors in African decolonization—which other historians have referred to as the “Second World’s Third World”—could have added more texture to the story.<sup>2</sup> Like Cuba and China, the Eastern European countries occupied uneasy positionalities between “global power” and “the formerly colonized.” Recent scholarship sheds light on the multifaceted forms of assistance that the countries of Eastern Europe, which did not pursue complete alignment with Soviet wishes, provided to anticolonial networks and activists throughout Southern Africa.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake, *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); and Hajimu Masuda, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> This term is taken from David Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12 (2011): 183-211.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Quinn Slobodian ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Chris Saunders, Helder Fonseca, and Lena Dallywater eds., *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War “East”* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Immanuel Harisch, “East German Friendship Brigades and Specialists in Angola: A Socialist Globalization Project in the Global Cold War,” in Katja Castryck-Naumann ed., *Transregional Connections in the History of East-Central Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023): pp. 291-

I would like to also ruminate on the question of race, which is touched on in this book, to further open up the conversation. In Angola, diverse racial identities and legacies complicated the consolidation of Marxist rule by the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), as rival leader Jonas Savimbi of National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) marshalled the sentiments and discourses of racial nationalism to challenge Agostinho Neto, later the first president of independent Angola.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Cold War conflict in many cases is, perhaps, tied to the racial histories inherited from or exacerbated by colonial rule. Could this be an additional way in which decolonization and the Cold War, as Chapman writes, proceeded as “mutually constitutive processes” (8)?

Relatedly, Chapman acknowledges China's radical agenda as an “accelerant to Cold War conflict” in galvanizing increasingly revolutionary posturing from the Soviet Union (246). What is the corresponding side to the story? Why was the prospect of radicalism so appealing to a generation of Third World nationalists? In the introduction, Chapman states that beginning in the mid-1950s, Chinese challenges to Soviet leadership amplified the superpower competition in Asia and Africa. As a result, the United States and the Soviet Union “had to contend with nascent Third World solidarity movements, which China manipulated as part of its earliest effort to displace the Soviet Union as leader of world revolution” (19). I want to reflect on this framing of Afro-Asianism and postcolonial alliance-making. To describe the dynamic as “manipulation” by Chinese policymakers can perhaps elide indigenous agency in explaining the importance of Maoism for Third World revolutionaries, for whom its theories regarding racial nationalism, militancy, cultural revitalization, and the urgency of revolt figured centrally.<sup>5</sup>

As a historian of twentieth-century China in global contexts, I am familiar with the themes and questions Chapman explores. The entire arc of China in the Cold War is, at its core, one of a relentless search for allies in the postcolonial world, encapsulating the mutuality of decolonization and international geopolitical contention.<sup>6</sup> *Remaking the World* does justice to the intricacies of its story. In sum, the book is magisterial, well-written, and easy to read. While on a few issues, greater complexity could have bolstered the narrative, the book is an integral contribution to scholarship on decolonization and the Cold War, which still tends to be organized by regional training and expertise.

---

314; and Chris Saunders, Helder Fonseca, and Lena Dallywater eds., *Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa: New Perspectives on the Era of Decolonization, 1950s–1990s* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022): 169-180.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Robin Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Society, and Culture* 1 (1999): 6-39; G. Thomas Burgess, “Mao in Zanzibar: Nationalism, Discipline, and the (De)Construction of Afro-Asian Solidarities,” in Christopher J. Lee ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010): 196-234; Nomi Dave, “Becoming Militant: Embodying the Guinean Revolution and Guinea-China Relations,” *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 90 (2020): 721-745; and Matthew Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism: China's Red Evangelism and the Cambodian Communist Movement, 1949–1979* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Gregg Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry During the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); and Alexander Cook ed., *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Decolonization is probably the most confusing thing that happened in the twentieth century. On the surface, the story seems simple. Once, empires organized almost everything. Then they ceased to do so. For proof, just look at a world map. At the twentieth century's midpoint, there were about 50 countries. Now, there are 195. The confusion starts the moment you dig into this characterization. For instance, do 195 countries actually exercise sovereignty today? (Probably not.) Should 195 countries exercise sovereignty today? (That's harder, and likely to divide opinion.) How has decolonization interacted with the twentieth century's organizing ideologies of capitalism and communism?

This last question has generated a lot of scholarship and very few clear-cut answers. For instance, one of the strangest features of the decolonization literature is that scholars disagree about basic things like periodization and conceptualization. You may think that decolonization unfolded in Asia and Africa during the Cold War; many colleagues will clapback that the story began with the end of Spain's American empire. Similarly, one might believe that decolonization changed world politics and international norms, but others will insist that it did nothing more than reshuffle imperialism. Decolonization has generated terrific scholarship because of these disagreements.<sup>1</sup> But how can scholars teach something so elusive?

Jessica Chapman's *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War* is a brave attempt at conceptual consistency. Her approach is indebted to Odd Arne Westad's Bancroft-winning *The Global Cold War*.<sup>2</sup> About two decades ago, Westad cut a new path through this thicket, situating decolonization in the midcentury modernization projects that were spearheaded by the United States and Soviet Union. Drawing on archives from the Caribbean, South Africa, East Asia, and beyond, Westad took a conflict that was typically narrated from Europe and flipped the script by exploring the Cold War from the Global South's perspective. Arguably, this move has irrevocably changed US foreign relations history. The field's traditional protagonists, who hailed once from Washington or Moscow, have faded to the background as a new generation of historians have followed Westad's example with tales from regions once characterized as peripheral to world politics.<sup>3</sup>

Chapman pulls together the scholarship that has been published since *The Global Cold War*. At the outset she asks ten questions. Some of them are definitional: What did postcolonial elites want and how did the great powers interpret the decolonizing world's desires? How did people on all sides interact with transnational ideas like modernization? Other questions are multi-scalar: How did the Cold War alter decolonization at the global and local levels and, conversely, how did decolonization change the Cold War as a local and global phenomenon? Chapman's narrative sidesteps sweeping conclusions about the field's most divisive topics. For

<sup>1</sup> For context, Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945–1962* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009); Robert McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake, eds., *Decolonisation and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Lawrence, eds., *Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

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

<sup>3</sup> Some germane works include Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Elisabeth Leake, *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); H-Diplo Roundtable XXI-42 on Bessner and Logevall, "Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations,"

<https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XXI-42.pdf>; H-Diplo Article Review Forum 975 on Manela, "International Society as a Historical Subject," <https://issforum.org/reviews/PDF/AR975.pdf>.

instance, *Remaking the World* does not ask the reader to reperiodize decolonization, nor does the book offer a bold new take on whether the efflorescence of juridical sovereignty continued or disrupted the imperial status quo. Chapman's book is about entanglement. Its central premise is that everything became connected during the late twentieth century, and its primary objective is to bring a diversity of voices and agendas to the forefront for her reader. In her words,

The outbreak of war in Korea directly affected Washington's strategic assessment of disparate events in India, Vietnam, and Iran, inspiring policies that shaped the long-term political development of each country. [Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal] Nehru's vision of nonalignment influenced [Egyptian President Gamal Abdel] Nasser's conception of Arab nationalism and informed [Ghana's] Kwame Nkrumah and [Congo's] Patrice Lumumba's embrace of Pan-Africanism. A nuclear test in India altered the prospects for Iran's nuclear program. The Vietnam War was shaped by the same Sino-Soviet rivalry that it would ultimately help transform, along with the very nature of the Cold War international system. And the US defeat in Vietnam, the Sino-Soviet split, and Cuba's revolutionary foreign policy spurred Soviet intervention in faraway Angola (244).

Chapman supports this thesis—that everything was interconnected—with case studies about India, Egypt, the Congo, Vietnam, Angola, and Iran. These chapters are perfect for undergraduates in classes about the Cold War in the Third World. The prose is accessible and the stories are well told, with compelling vignettes about interesting, important individuals. By design, Chapman's chapters rarely break fresh interpretive ground. The book is better engaged as an opportunity to take stock of all we have learned. Whereas Westad's narrative reveled in primary sources—piecing together stories rarely chronicled by others—Chapman holds these events at arm's length, using direct quotations sparingly, making each story accessible to lay readers. Her narrative visits only six places, but these locales are well chosen and each chapter coalesces around a representative observation. For instance, India's story accentuates the hope and disappointment of nonaligned politics. Then the Egypt chapter lingers on the way in which the superpowers adapted to nonalignment. The Congo chapter is about the collision of these rival ambitions, which sets up a Vietnam chapter where the Sino-Soviet split widened. In the Angola chapter we are introduced a wider cross-section of characters who were emboldened by Hanoi's success, before moving on to Iran, where the 1979 revolution introduced a cocktail of old methods and new ideas.

At the end, I wanted these chapters to add up to a bolder argument. I am persuaded that everything was connected—and that people operate in unique settings and make distinct claims—but when I finished *Remaking the World*, I struggled to pinpoint what Chapman's synthesis revealed about the field as a whole. Chapman offers some final provocations about the dangers of Cold War triumphalism, but this argument pushes through an entryway that never really had a door. Francis Fukuyama qualified his infamous “End of History” years ago, so I am not sure we can continue to trot him out as the field's boogey man—not without dating ourselves as products of the nineties.<sup>4</sup> My own students barely remember the War on Terror, let alone the Cold War, because most of them were born after 11 September 2001. Politicized by US President Donald Trump's ascendancy, a growing majority seem to believe that the United States is worse than most other countries, poisoned by either racial capitalism or postmodern multiculturalism (depending on the student's preferred information ecosystem). Chapman characterizes the Soviet Union and China—and leaders from India, Egypt, the Congo, Vietnam, Angola, and Iran—as rationale actors with legitimate intentions. She is

---

<sup>4</sup> For early qualification, see Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2002)

more critical of US officials, concluding that they “replicate[d] the power dynamics of the colonial system that they so fervently condemned” (246), which is a conclusion that nicely captures the scholarly consensus.<sup>5</sup>

Still, I sometimes worry that this characterization pushes young people further from comprehending the world they are inheriting from us. When we tell students that the good Washington devolved political power to others and the bad Washington circumscribed sovereignty with international institutions and covert interventions, we feed into a morality play that obscures the stakes around liberalism, capitalism, and communism, simplifying processes that (for better or worse) have turned absolute sovereignty into a chimera. For more than a century, liberal internationalists have equated freedom with rights—the holy trinity being life, expression, and property—and they have tried to spread “freedom” by uniting states under various kinds of rule-making partnerships and organizations. The United States, as a country and a metaphor, has spearheaded this project, and scholars are right to criticize its track record and the gap between its rhetoric and behavior. But why disguise the project’s logic? Communists and nationalists, we are told, oppose imperialism, which is always the right thing to do, but liberals seem to limit the autonomy of others for reasons that defy explanation. *Remaking the World*’s portrayal feels lopsided because everyone is rational except the people from the country where the book is published, and it is unclear whether students will walk away with new understanding or more cynicism.

Is there a difference anymore? *Remaking the World* reflects the literature, so this question doubles as an invitation to think about what scholars now know and how the conversation about decolonization might evolve in the coming years. Perhaps the United States implemented noble ideas badly; maybe it was the twentieth century’s greatest villain. Regardless, the field’s internationalization has ironically pulled attention from the logic of US power. Perhaps the next wave of scholarship will move from high-level leaders to mid-level bureaucrats, confronting the way juridical sovereignty fostered dependence on a system that was never supposed to result in absolute sovereignty. If historians call this process decolonization, the question remains: has this transformation left us better off or worse? Every day, as the costs of climate change come into sharper focus, and as powers like China, Russia, and India jostle to reset international norms, students are invited to take stock of what came before and whether we—as a species—should adopt a radically new path for self-preservation. History cannot answer the question, but it will illuminate the stakes, which is one of the many reasons why *Remaking the World* deserves a close read.

---

<sup>5</sup> For useful snapshot, Daniel Immerwahr, “The Greater United States: Territory and Empire in U.S. History,” *Diplomatic History* 40:3 (2016), 373-391; Paul Kramer, “How Not to Write the History of U.S. Empire,” *Diplomatic History* 42:5 (2018), 911-931; Immerwahr, “Writing the History of Greater United States: A Reply to Paul Kramer,” *Diplomatic History* 43:2 (2019), 397-403

Between 1945 and 1965, as Jessica Chapman notes in the introduction to her terrific new book, *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War*, more than 50 nations declared their independence from a colonial system that had held millions of people in shackles across the globe (2). Subsequent waves built on this decolonial moment, with consequences that are still at the fore of our tumultuous current era. Although these struggles played out in every corner of the globe and were shaped significantly by local and indigenous factors, they did not operate in isolation. Instead, as Chapman shows through six detailed and engaging case studies, decolonizing states both shaped and were shaped by the Cold War competition in ways that connected them across chronological and geographic boundaries even while they retained their local and regional characteristics. Anticolonial nationalists, she reminds us, navigated paths to independence that were unique and yet also intertwined with superpower politics on ideological, strategic, political, and economic levels that shaped them.

*Remaking the World* takes the reader through six familiar Cold War hotspots: India, Egypt, the Congo, Vietnam, Angola, and Iran. Each case study gets one chapter to cover the entirety of the Cold War period in that nation, although each one tends to focus on a few critical and dramatic moments of Cold War intervention: the 1956 Suez Crisis in Egypt, for example, or the Congo Crisis of the early 1960s. Chapman's goal is to synthesize and articulate broader connections rather than dig too deeply into any particular moment, so much of the material draws from prominent secondary sources and will be generally familiar to most diplomatic historians. Still, the larger connections that she draws, the impressive level of depth and detail in each case study, and the brilliant writing and organization, make this book a wonderful tool for anyone who is interested in decolonization and the Cold War.

Five central themes are echoed throughout the book. The centrality of modernization efforts stands as a principal topic, one that Chapman suggests “rested at the heart of post-World War II international history” (3). *Remaking the World* traces the implementation of numerous programs and strategies from superpowers on both sides of the Cold War that were intended to win converts to their economic development model. As her narrative demonstrates, though, such efforts often reflected paternalistic and racist hierarchies and were implemented through heavy-handed and arrogant tactics that rarely advanced the aims of their providers and instead tended to reinforce anticolonial sentiment. Their inevitable failures helped usher in a greater reliance on covert operations and military power in ways that resembled the tactics of former colonizers and further undermined relations with the Third World. Some case studies (India) suggest that local authorities had a measure of success in manipulating their benefactors to win extensive aid while preserving a degree of policy impudence and internal stability. Others, such as Iran, were less auspicious. Overall, though, *Remaking the World* confirms that Cold War modernization efforts, at least when those efforts were birthed from an ideological ménage-à-trois that reflected the values of writer Rudyard Kipling, National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, and General Curtis LeMay, resulted in far more negative than positive outcomes regardless of where they were implemented.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one of the great contributions of the book is to clearly and repeatedly articulate the halting impact that superpower intervention had on the very modernization processes that its adherents ostensibly championed, with often devastating consequences. Cold War modernization was certainly not the sole reason for contemporary global instability, Chapman recognizes, but it was important and not simply because of the devastation of dramatic wars and conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Many subsequent problems were

---

<sup>1</sup> Please accept my sincere apologies for the mental image of a ménage-à-trois of Rudyard Kipling, Walt Rostow, and Curtis LeMay.

<sup>2</sup> There is a broad range of works that connect modernization with American diplomatic history. Amongst others, see Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation Building' in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Nils Gilman,

instead, she explains, “simply a function of the superpowers’ disruptions, distortions and derailment of the decolonizing process that began before the Cold War and was far from completed by its end” (249).

Second, Chapman makes much of the ability of local actors to shape the course of events by playing to the exigencies of the Cold War. Third World leaders everywhere quickly recognized the influence bequeathed to their nations by the global propaganda struggle connected to these different modernization paths. They also skillfully capitalized on both the global Cold War rivalry between the communist and capitalist blocs, and the internecine splits within the factions themselves. Local actors in far less prominent positions also demanded, protested, and sometimes took violent action that transformed global relations. The Cold War may have been directed in Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, but *Remaking the World* reminds us of the importance of voices in Cairo, Hanoi, and Tehran.

Third, *Remaking the World* is determined to move beyond an American-focused narrative and integrate the latest information from the Communist-bloc archives.<sup>3</sup> The degree of material from Soviet and Chinese circles varies a bit by chapter, of course. The Vietnam section (perhaps unsurprisingly considering Chapman’s own expertise) is perhaps most attuned to the “other side” of the story, but there are interesting revelations and tidbits scattered throughout.<sup>4</sup> Particularly noteworthy is the scrutiny given to the impact of the Sino-Soviet rivalry on Soviet policy and the discussions of the Chinese impact in South Asia.

Fourth, Chapman demonstrates that while Third World nationalists shared commonalities—and in some cases even developed close bonds—that were rooted in their anti-colonial feelings and rhetoric, there was much that distinguished them on a practical level. One of the book’s great strengths is its emphasis on the fundamental and indigenous imperatives at the core of each study. The nationalism of Egypt’s President Gamal Nasser, Islamic influence in Iran, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s nationalistic non-alignment model, and Pan-Africanism all had much in common and built on each other. But, as Chapman makes clear, there were differences as well, ones that preserved the local and regional character of their efforts while hindering the establishment of a more closely connected movement. “Solidarity of action proved more difficult to attain than that solidarity of spirit,” she explains (245).

---

*Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Bradley Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960–1968* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008); David Johnson Lee, *The Ends of Modernization* (Nicaragua and the United States in the Cold War Era) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); David Engerman, Nils Gilman, et.al. *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Although the sources Chapman uses are primarily English language secondary sources, her focus on telling “both sides” of the story reflects the important influence of the “new Cold War history.” Excellent examples of this literature include Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Brazinsky, *Winning the Cold War: Sino -American Rivalry during the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution, Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Warid Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Jian Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (University of California Press, 2013); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Tim Naftali and Aleksander Fursenko, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy 1958-64* (New York: Norton, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See especially Jessica Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, The United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Cornell University Press, 2013); Chapman, “The Sect Crisis of 1955 and the American Commitment to Ngô Đình Diệm,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5:1: (February 2010): 37-85; and Chapman, “Staging Democracy: South Vietnam’s 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai,” *Diplomatic History* 30:4: 671-703 (September 2006): 671-703.



Finally, the book never loses sight of the long-term devastation that was left by this element of the Cold War struggle, especially on the long-term development of the Global South. Each case study follows the story into the current era, with Chapman offering balanced assessments of the legacy of the earlier years for the world of today. The Iran chapter, for example, may focus on 1953 and 1979 (and does a nice job with the years in-between) but it concludes by connecting these events to the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s and even the contemporary War on Terror. The story of the Congo Crisis and the aftermath is related with all of its brutality, but it is also connected to the long-term violence and repression across Africa that continued to wreak havoc long after 1965. The triumphalist American narrative of “winning” the Cold War is here displayed as not just simplistic but abhorrent in the face of the devastation it left behind, devastation Chapman powerfully described as having “wrought havoc across the third World, costing millions of lives, scarring landscapes, cultures, and political systems, and stoking enmities that would fuel future wars” (247).

There is not much to take issue with in this wonderful book. In both the introduction and conclusion, Chapman notes the role of neocolonial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, but they do not get a concomitant amount of attention in the narrative. I longed for some discussion about how the two Koreas perfectly embodied so much of her story, but the book does not explore that connection.<sup>5</sup> Trying to condense the stories of six complicated Cold War engagements into individual chapters requires the occasional oversimplification and even some omissions, but this really cannot be avoided in such a format and Chapman has managed to squeeze in far more depth and detail than one could possibly have expected. The writing is brilliant; the case studies are beautifully detailed and convincingly analyzed; and the connective tissue is clearly articulated and effective. In the end, then, *Remaking the World* stands simply as one of the best syntheses of the relationship between the Cold War superpower struggle and the anticolonial movements, and it is sure to occupy a prominent place in both the historical literature and in the classroom.

---

<sup>5</sup> I should note in fairness that I think every book I read needs more Korea, so that probably says more about my own shortcomings than the book's. But, the connection between the Cold War competition and the legacy of the Korean War is explored nicely in Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: Norton, 2014); Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Balazs Szalontai *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism 1953–1964* (Palo Alto; Stanford University Press, 2005); and Samuel Wells, *Fearing the Worst: How Korea Transformed the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

In a March 2023 forum on “Transnational and International History” in the *American Historical Review*, Paul Thomas Chamberlin stated that the field of international history “must embrace synthetic works that draw liberally from secondary materials,” works that might appeal to a broader audience.<sup>1</sup> Jessica Chapman’s expansive synthesis, *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War*, is a timely and bracing contribution to the field of international history, one that will appeal to both specialists and generalists. With compelling prose, Chapman probes the intersection of two of the most seismic events of the second half of the twentieth-century: the Cold War and decolonization in the so-called Third World.

Vividly placing national narratives of struggle against imperial rule into a global context, Chapman’s narrative neatly summarizes the vexing and often violent encounters between decolonization and the Cold War. *Remaking the World* posits a multi-pronged contention: the dual processes of decolonization and the Cold War impacted local, regional, and national politics. Further, local, regional, and national events in the Third World in turn influenced the shape of decolonization while transforming the Cold War. Although stretching back to World War I, the bulk of *Remaking the World* is centered on the post-1945 period, encouraging readers to consider the longer term and often calamitous, present-day legacies of the Cold War and decolonization. It is a fast-paced and engaging read that is sure to appeal to scholars, students, and readers with an interest in the Cold War, the politics of decolonization, and the structure of today’s international system.

Chapman examines the intersections of the Cold War and decolonization from a political, strategic, and intellectual position. While Washington, Moscow, and Beijing sparred for influence in a rapidly decolonizing world, anticolonial figures formed solidarity movements, fought for their own independence from European rule, and often prioritized national needs and goals over the influence of the Cold War. Throughout *Remaking the World*, Chapman demonstrates that both Washington and Moscow made regrettable and irreversible mistakes, often due to perceived or real outside influence. China often forced Moscow to take more revolutionary positions, while Washington repeatedly dragged the US into proxy conflicts, fearing the spread of Soviet, and therefore Communist, influence in the decolonizing world.

With each successive chapter, Chapman draws out the myriad ways the Cold War and superpower priorities did not so easily map out onto local contexts and anticolonial objectives, the latter of which were more central to anticolonial leadership. Thus, Chapman argues that Soviet and American policymakers “made too little effort to understand, much less adapt to, these contexts” (6). Even worse, the Cold War superpowers actively “contributed to the militarization of Third World conflicts” as Cold War intervention worsened existing discord, often taking on destructive, neocolonial valences (6).

Artfully written and accessible, *Remaking the World’s* chapters both seamlessly fit together yet could also be read individually. In seeking a balanced account of the superpower conflict and the more localized dynamics of decolonization, Chapman asks a series of incisive questions, namely: “In what ways did the Cold War alter the process of decolonization both as a global phenomenon and at the local level?” and “In what ways did decolonization alter the dynamics of the Cold War and affect the politics and diplomacy of the superpowers?” (7). In answering them, Chapman divides her work into seven core chapters: a background chapter, followed by a series of six chapters, each of which is focused on an individual country. Meticulously chosen due to their “geopolitical significance and representativeness of a range of key characteristics of the Cold War in the Third World,” the case studies include India, Egypt, the Congo, Vietnam, Angola, and Iran (8). Cutting across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, these core chapters “speak to shifting Soviet, American, Chinese, and Cuban policies; the centrality of modernization; movements for Third World solidarity and nonalignment; the

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Thomas Chamberlin et al., “On Transnational and International History,” *American Historical Review* 128, no. 1 (2023): 255-332, here 263.

role of the United Nations; the often-outsized influence of regional actors like Israel and South Africa; the significance of the Sino-Soviet split; and seminal post-Vietnam War shifts in the international system” (8).

An expert synthesis of scholarship, *Remaking the World* is supported by an array of both established and recently published secondary-source material. Chapman’s ability to cover vast national and regional historiographies with each chapter is commendable, drawing from an array of international histories of the Cold War in the Third World, anti-colonial nationalism, and empire.<sup>2</sup> She relies heavily on foundational Cold War scholarship, including Odd Arne Westad’s *The Global Cold War*, similarly making the case that the real epicenter of the Cold War was not Europe, but rather the Third World.<sup>3</sup> Chapman cites a small sample of primary sources, including the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) historical records, some presidential papers and speeches, and a series of newspaper articles. The bulk of her sources, however, are historical monographs, articles, and edited volumes.

The core country-specific chapters are preceded first by a background chapter, which operates as a sweeping overview of both the longer histories of decolonization and the origins of the Cold War. Chapman uses this chapter to expand on her introduction, situate the remaining chapters, and provide readers with a general timeline. The case studies begin with chapters on India and Egypt, both of which chart the politics of nonalignment. While forging a path distinct from the superpowers, Indian nationalist Jawaharlal Nehru dared to posit the idea that “colonialism, not communism, posed the greatest threat to world peace” (46). In this chapter, Chapman also begins to outline the origins of the Sino-Soviet split, the politics of nuclear non-proliferation, and India’s big power ambitions, each of which influenced the shape of Indian nationalism.<sup>4</sup> The chapter on Egypt again presents the politics of nonalignment, showcasing how US-Soviet rivalries did not always neatly slot into regional conflicts.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the United States struggled to appeal to Egypt’s President Gamel Abdel Nasser. Washington often sided with conservative Arab regimes and Israel while misreading Nasser’s nonalignment politics. With both chapters, Chapman underscores the regional and often religious conflicts that plagued both regions, asserting that the Cold War is essential to understanding them.

Moving to the Congo, Chapman highlights the risks anticolonial elites faced in maintaining a nonaligned position—which ensured that Washington never fully trusted Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. With a common story of the United States fearing Soviet takeover, the limits of US claims to defend democracy grow more apparent. This is a theme that resurfaces from this chapter forward. Although illustrative of the “militarization of the superpower conflict in the Third World,” the Congo example is also a story of race and the Cold War, where domestic US discrimination against African Americans hindered US engagement with

---

<sup>2</sup> A few examples include Jeremy Friedman, *The Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).; Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War Killing Fields: Retinking the Long Peace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).; Leslie James and Elizabeth Leake, eds., *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 396; Robert McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> For more on these topics, see David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Jayita Sarkar, *Ploughshares and Swords: India’s Nuclear Program in the Global Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022). Robert B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016). Peter Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington, DC: Potomac, 2005).

Lumumba (142).<sup>6</sup> Fearing instability in the resource-rich Congo, Washington planned Lumumba's assassination, which resulted in the dictatorship of US-supported anti-Communist Joseph Mobutu.

US support for brutal, anti-communist dictatorships formed a pattern, which Chapman underscores in her Vietnam chapter. The outcome of the US war in Vietnam marked the undoing of Communist solidarity in the Third World, but also deepened the American proclivity to misread the ideological bend of nationalist leaders. Like its support for Mobutu, the United States also propped up an anti-communist but repressive and unpopular dictator: Ngo Dinh Diem.<sup>7</sup> Unlike US intervention in the Congo, Washington no longer relied on the UN, but instead pivoted to direct involvement, leaving Vietnam in a state of disarray after decades of violence.

After the Vietnam War and the collapse of détente, Soviet and American leaders turned their focus to southern Africa and the wave of late decolonizing states, formerly under Portuguese control. The initial 1975–1976 war in Angola drew in the Soviets and Americans, but also the Cuban and South African regional powers. Drawing from the work of Piero Gleijeses, Chapman shows that, like in Vietnam, the United States colluded with the wrong people—white minority leadership in South Africa and the charismatic though repressive Angolan nationalist leader, Jonas Savimbi.<sup>8</sup> For the Soviet Union, Angola proved a chance to reinvigorate support for revolutionaries in the Third World, including Cuba and the South African ANC liberation movement. Although “shifting Cold War logics” blunted direct US involvement, the United States found itself on the same side as white South Africa, an international pariah state (183).

Finally, Chapman ends with a chapter on Iran, underscoring how the legacies of the Cold War conflict have dire repercussions today. In what is now a familiar story, the United States bolstered another dictator, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in a country that had not been formally colonized but rather had a recent history of British and multinational company control. The United States became entangled in support for the repressive and unpopular Shah following the CIA-supported ousting of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq.<sup>9</sup> US leaders acted out of fear of possible communist takeover in the region, even though Mosaddeq “rejected an alliance with the communists during the pivotal period in August 1953” (220). Like the Lumumba assassination, the CIA operation against Mosaddeq only led to a slew of unintended consequences, reflecting the tendency for the United States to maintain Cold War tunnel vision. In addition, the United States was again interfering in a country's internal affairs in a way that “subjected it to charges of neoimperialism across the Third World” (221). What emerged in the later Cold War years was an Islamic revolution hostile to both Soviet and American versions of modernization.

In an account covering such a wide geographic span, there are likely to be some lingering questions. Chapman notes in the introduction that “decolonization posed a fundamental challenge to the Southern Hemisphere's absolute subordination to the North, and to the global power structures that grew out of colonial-era epistemologies of race, civilization, and culture” (5). What does looking at these case studies in isolation, as well as in dialogue, reveal about the role of race in the broader Cold War and processes of decolonization?

---

<sup>6</sup> Here, Chapman references Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 129. Borstelmann argues that US views of Lumumba were rooted in racism.

<sup>7</sup> Jessica Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

The intersection of race and the Cold War comes out more clearly when Chapman is discussing the early Cold War, but is less present in her reference to the late-1970s period on. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, there could be an expanded outline of the complexities of race and the Cold War, particularly with respect to South Africa's role in the region. A discussion of the situation in South Africa would have clarified why the United States refused to condemn the authoritarian, apartheid regime. President Jimmy Carter's approach could be further explored, perhaps with further reference to existing work, like Nancy Mitchell's *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War*, which explains why the United States aligned with South Africa, in part to reach a resolution ending white minority rule in Rhodesia, in addition to South Africa's role as an anti-communist bulwark.<sup>10</sup> South Africa was the subject of "international scorn," as Chapman notes, but the United States delayed targeting apartheid, largely due to the Cold War context and fear of communist rule in the region. Anti-communism trumped anti-racism, further adding to the troubling logics of the Cold War in southern Africa.

With respect to Washington, one is left wondering about the role that domestic US politics played in shaping US foreign policy with respect to the decolonizing world. We see this relationship play out in sections of *Remaking the World*, including some discussion of Lumumba's visit to the United States, and some mention of the anti-Communist McCarthyism hysteria (151). These turning points shaped US conduct abroad, with respect to both decolonization and the Cold War, but they could be highlighted further. Finally, it would be possible to further outline some of the diverse nationalist and internationalist perspectives and political visions that drove anti-colonial movements globally. This could also entail expanding beyond the scope of elites and more traditional high-level politics to include more discussion of the grassroots or by drawing transnational connections between anticolonial movements, in turn further underscoring their centrality to global politics.<sup>11</sup>

As each chapter demonstrates, "superpower intervention in the decolonizing world took many forms" (10), and independence was not a "cure-all" (246). Aware of the limits and challenges of independence, Chapman invites readers to consider the lingering impact of the Cold War and decolonization today. At the conclusion of many of her chapters, readers are left with an honest and pessimistic illustration of the world order and the ways processes of decolonization outlived the end of the Cold War. This is an open invitation for readers to question the meaning and existence of a postcolonial world. *Remaking the World* is an ambitious and vivid account of the Cold War and decolonization, one that will undoubtedly make readers think deeply about the disastrous consequences of superpower intervention in the decolonizing world.

---

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Palo Alto, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford University Press, 2016), 15, 322. Mitchell's work is cited once, but not to explain Carter's policy.

<sup>11</sup> Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).; Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: the Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019).; Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter, *The Anticolonial Transnational: Imaginaries, Mobilities, and Networks in the Struggle Against Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Response by Jessica Chapman, Williams College

---

I want to start by expressing my gratitude to the H-Diplo editors—especially Seth Offenbach—for deeming *Remaking the World* worthy of a roundtable, and for lining up such a fantastic set of reviewers. I am honored and humbled by my esteemed colleagues' sustained engagement with my work, and am heartened not only by the overall positive responses, but also by the critiques of where I may have left things out or missed the mark. My hope has never been that *Remaking the World* would serve as the final word on the relationship between the Cold War and decolonization. Instead, the book is meant both to facilitate the process of teaching about that relationship and to advance the scholarly conversation by integrating disparate literatures into a single narrative. Ideally it will serve as a credible foundation and jumping-off point for further discussion among students and scholars alike about the complex interconnections between these two global processes. If it opens the door for conversations about intricacies that did not make the page, all the better.

My overarching goal with this project was twofold. First (if I may admit it), writing this book was an exercise in mapping for myself the connections between the Cold War and decolonization that, as Ruodi Duan notes, are well known to have “entwined in significant ways,” but that are too rarely charted globally and systematically. Frustrated with gaps and perplexities in my own thinking, I set out to fill them in ways that might benefit others. Second, I aimed to convey the complexities of the Cold War in the Third World in a narratively engaging package that would invite readers—especially students—into worlds that are predominantly charted by specialists for specialists, and all-too-often rendered in terms that are both confusing and fragmentary, making them difficult for non-specialists to parse. My hope was that this would not only prove useful pedagogically, but that it might also invite scholars of different regions—and disparate methodological approaches—into a common conversation. As Mattie Webb aptly notes, my vision for the book, though conceived well prior to Paul Chamberlin's contribution to the March 2023 *American Historical Review* forum on “Transnational and International History,” is consistent with his call for synthetic works of international history that draw liberally from secondary materials that might appeal to a broader audience.<sup>1</sup>

As Mitchell Lerner generously points out, the project of condensing the stories of six complicated Cold War focal points into individual chapters “requires the occasional oversimplification and even some omissions.” Likewise, Webb acknowledges that a work of this geographic scope is likely to leave some lingering questions. By the time *Remaking the World* went to press, the cutting room floor was littered with details that were slashed in service of clarity and concision. The ruthless efficiency that Gregory Daddis identifies in the first chapter was achieved by reducing its initial word count by more than half. It was, in its original form, a much more convoluted and less useful guide to the Cold War and decolonization than the final product. Yet, it was more detailed and, in some ways, more nuanced. All of this is to say that I have great sympathy for the reviewers' calls for greater complexity on certain points, and for attention to neglected angles. Even more, I deeply appreciate their willingness to take the book on its own terms even as it fell short of total comprehension.

Several of the reviewers wished for greater attention to the roles and perspectives of particular actors or entities. Duan hungered for deeper engagement with the significance of Eastern European actors to African decolonization, Lerner might have preferred more detail about the two Koreas and neocolonial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and Daddis wonders about the implications of my choice not to give Latin America and the Caribbean—especially Cuba—a chapter of its own. Webb would have liked to read more about the role that US domestic politics played in shaping the country's foreign relations. And I can relate from my own experience of teaching this book for the first time in fall 2023 that my students were equally hungry for insights into the roles of Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban domestic politics in shaping their respective foreign policies. I can hardly argue against the signal importance of each of these considerations to the process of decolonization that played out under the shadow of the Cold War, and can

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Thomas Chamberlin et al., “On Transnational and International History,” *American Historical Review* 128, no. 1 (2023): 255-332.

only hope that readers will appreciate the fairly ruthless editorial decisions that I made in service of the tight narrative that so many of the reviewers have praised. Even more importantly, I hope they will take the opportunity to explore connections that the book suggests but does not fully explore. If *Remaking the World* is anything close to the “master-class in historical concision” that Daddis suggests, that concision required tough decisions to limit the book’s scope, with the hope that readers would use it as a platform for expanding their own inquiries.

There are a few critiques that I would have loved to read before the book went to press, as I believe my analysis could have been strengthened by addressing them, at no cost to the project’s overall design. First, both Webb and Duan ruminate on the relationship between race and the Cold War, noting especially that the book would have benefitted from greater attention to the role of race in Angola, both internally among the country’s rival factions and externally in terms of South Africa’s role and Washington’s refusal to condemn Pretoria’s apartheid regime. As Webb and Duan note, I could and should have made better use of works by Nancy Mitchell, Jeremy Freidman, and others to infuse this chapter with a more effective discussion of race.<sup>2</sup> Second, Robert Steele’s suggestion that the Iran chapter could have been improved by a more nuanced presentation of the shah’s reign is well taken. Finally, Duan points to a cringeworthy line indicating that Chinese policymakers manipulated Third World solidarity movements in an effort to displace Soviet influence. This phrasing does, as she suggests, “elide indigenous agency in explaining the importance of Maoism for Third World revolutionaries.” While Lerner and others note that the work is generally attentive to the agency and perspectives of Third World actors—indeed one of my abiding scholarly commitments—the lapse that Duan identifies may extend beyond phrasing on this particular point.

Ryan Irwin, whose review is the most critical one, seemingly wishes not so much for greater attention to certain angles, but for a different book altogether. While he longs for a bolder claim about the field as a whole, I viewed the project not as an explicit commentary on the state of the field so much as an effort to distill connections between the Cold War and decolonization across time and space that are often missed due to the compartmentalized nature of scholarship that, as Ruodi Duan notes, “still tends to be organized by regional training and expertise.” The absence of a bold historiographical argument was by design, for fear of distracting readers—especially students—from the complex interconnections and local particularities that I wanted them to see by foregrounding a potentially polarizing and oversimplified interpretive claim. This is not to deny the validity of Irwin’s desire to see a more audacious historiographical commentary, but the other reviewers’ descriptions of *Remaking the World* as “an integral contribution to scholarship on decolonization and the Cold War,” “a gem of a book,” and “simply one of the best syntheses of the relationship between the Cold War superpower struggle and the anticolonial movements” suggest that many other readers will see the merit of my calculation.

While the above can be chalked up to a stylistic difference of opinion, I am more inclined to take issue directly with Irwin’s other principal critique: that the book “feels lopsided because everyone is rational except the people from the country where the book is published,” an imbalance he suggests will only fuel students’ mounting cynicism about the role of the United States in the world. Rather than launch a philosophical debate about the meaning of rationality in foreign policy, I will simply note that my goal in *Remaking the World* was not to posit Soviet, US, or Chinese officials as more or less rational—or predatory—than their counterparts, but to examine the perspectives held by each party that shaped how they understood events unfolding around the globe and conditioned their responses. The picture that emerges is one of frequent conflict stemming from flawed assumptions, breakdowns in communication, ideological rigidity, and oppositional, sometimes irreconcilable perspectives. In each of the book’s case studies, that fulcrum of misunderstanding included not only the Cold War superpowers, but also their regional interlocutors, who

---

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022); Nancy Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Palo Alto, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford University Press, 2016).

were themselves beset by epistemological Rubik's Cubes. The United States was far from the only country to get things wrong or to act against its own interests. Yet, while perceptions held by US officials during the Cold War may have been no more flawed—or less rational—than those of their counterparts in China and the Soviet Union, Washington possessed far greater power than either of its foes. It is from that power imbalance, not my coverage of it, that the lopsidedness Irwin identifies derived. It enabled the United States to act on its perceptions disproportionately, leaving a greater mark—and ultimately a more harmful legacy—on the Global South. I remain convinced that there are more effective ways to decenter the United States than to deny or subordinate that reality.

Lest these defenses appear defensive, I want to make clear my gratitude to all of the reviewers for their engagement with my work. While their lines of praise are music to my ears—and I hope they will encourage others to read and assign the book—I take their thoughtful critiques as equal signs of respect, and as welcome opportunities to advance the scholarly conversation of which we are all a part.

As a coda to this response, let me note how gratifying it is to see the reviewers praise the book as well written, engaging, and narratively pleasing even as it does justice to global and local complexities. International history is replete with great stories—and compelling characters—that can spark curiosity and impart nuanced understandings of the conflicts and events that have shaped our world, but it is all too rarely approached by academics as an opportunity for storytelling. I hope this book does some of that work, and encourages others to do the same.