

2018

H-Diplo

 [@HDiplo](https://twitter.com/HDiplo)

Roundtable Review
Volume XIX, No. 31 (2018)
30 April 2018

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse
Roundtable and Web Production Editor: George Fujii

Introduction by Melvyn P. Leffler

Odd Arne Westad. *The Cold War: A World History*. New York: Basic Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-0465054930 (hardcover, \$40.00).

URL: <http://www.tiny.cc/Roundtable-XIX-31>

Contents

Introduction by Melvyn P. Leffler, University of Virginia	2
Review by Christopher Goscha, l'Université du Québec à Montréal	4
Review by Jussi M. Hanhimäki, Graduate Institute, Geneva	10
Review by Robert Legvold, Columbia University	15
Review by Nancy Mitchell, North Carolina State University	20
Author's Response by Odd Arne Westad, Harvard University	23

© 2018 The Authors.

[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Introduction by Melvyn P. Leffler, University of Virginia

Odd Arne Westad has written a wonderful book about the origins, evolution, and end of the Cold War. Rarely is there so much accord among reviewers: Westad's *The Cold War: A World History* is a masterful synthetic treatment of a very complex topic, indisputably the best book yet written on the Cold War.

Although Westad's previous volume, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005) garnered great acclaim and won the Bancroft Prize, among others, this new volume is even more impressive. Westad does more than illuminate the dynamics and impact of the Cold War in what we used to call the 'Third World.' He examines the origins of the Cold War in Europe; illuminates developments in Western Europe and Eastern Europe; deftly synthesizes a sequence of Cold War crises in Berlin, Suez, Cuba, Angola, the Horn of Africa, and elsewhere; thoughtfully explores the decolonization process and ensuing developments in India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia; insightfully looks at the failure of détente; and thoughtfully discusses the dynamics that led to the end of the Cold War. In doing all of this, and more, Westad always provides short narrative overviews of key events coupled with clear interpretive thrusts based on his vast reading of primary and secondary sources. Reviewers disagree about Westad's interpretive framing, his focus on the primacy of ideological impulses, and the space he allots to different events and regions, but there is no dissent that *The Cold War: A World History* is a tour de force.

The four reviewers—Christopher Goscha, Jussi Hanhimäki, Robert Legvold, and Nancy Mitchell—concur on the many attributes of the book. They applaud Westad's chronological and global framing. They like his integration of ideological, economic, and geopolitical factors. They focus on his ability to balance a global rivalry with an understanding of regional and national dynamics. They admire his adroit distillation of the economic, financial and technological developments of the 1970s, developments that reshaped societies and cultures around the globe and that reconfigured the evolution of the Cold War. They respect his clear acknowledgment that the United States won the Cold War, coupled with his strong rejection of Reagan triumphalism. They highlight Westad's ability to weave a textured, nuanced historiographical contribution into a readable, compelling narrative.

Of course, there are criticisms. Nancy Mitchell greatly admires the book, but is not convinced by Westad's ideological focus. She argues that Westad often gives the United States a pass and glosses over Washington's quest for power and wealth. Goscha and Legvold suggest that Westad conflates the Cold War with global history and they question his definition of the Cold War as an international system. Stating that much was happening apart from the Cold War, they seem to conclude that he assigns too much interpretive baggage to the Cold War, and Legvold offers his own assessment of why it lasted as long as it did. Hanhimäki alludes to some of these same considerations, claiming that the Cold War was being transcended by other developments in the 1970s and 1980s, especially the movement toward European integration. Both Mitchell and Hanhimäki note that Westad assigns too little importance to U.S. behavior in the Western Hemisphere, especially in Central America and the Caribbean.

All four reviewers provide luminous critiques of the book, emphasizing its strengths, highlighting its contributions, and discussing issues that inevitably flow from the book, such as whether opportunities were missed after the Cold War ended and whether a new cold war is developing. When they criticize Westad's book, they do so with respect, due respect for this Norwegian scholar whose vast knowledge, linguistic

abilities, cultural sensibilities, relentless inquisitiveness, and exhaustive research make him the foremost scholar of the global Cold War.

Participants:

Odd Arne Westad is the S.T. Lee Professor of US-Asia Relations at Harvard University, where he teaches international affairs and history at the Kennedy School of Government. Among his books are *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), which won the Bancroft Prize, and *Decisive Encounters*, a history of the Chinese civil war. He also co-edited the three-volume *Cambridge History of the Cold War* (University of Cambridge Press, 2012). His most recent books are *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750* (Basic, 2012) and *The Cold War: A World History*.

Melvyn P. Leffler, Edward Stettinius Professor of American History at the University of Virginia and author, most recently, of *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

Christopher Goscha is Associate Professor of International Relations in the history department at the Université du Québec à Montréal, where he teaches courses on the Vietnam War, International Relations, Imperial and World History. He received his undergraduate degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in 1987 and received his Ph.D. from the Ecole pratique des Hautes études at the Sorbonne in 2001. He recently published *Vietnam, Un Etat né de la guerre* (Armand Colin, 2011). He is currently revising this book for publication in English as the *Road to Dien Bien Phu: The State that Made Modern Vietnam* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

Jussi M. Hanhimäki is currently Professor of International History at the Graduate Institute, Geneva and an editor of the journal *Cold War History*. His books include *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2004); *International History of the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2003, 2008, 2015); *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (Oxford University Press, 2003, 2004); *United Nations: A Very Short Introduction* (2008, 2015). He is currently on a book on transatlantic relations since the end of the Cold War.

Robert Legvold is Marshall D. Shulman Professor Emeritus, Department of Political Science, Columbia University, where he specialized in the international relations of the Soviet Union and Russia. His most recent book is *Return to Cold War*. He is currently the director of a new project at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, "Understanding the Challenge of a New Nuclear Era."

Nancy Mitchell is a professor of history at North Carolina State University. She is the author of *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War* (Stanford, 2016), which won the American Academy of Diplomacy's Douglas Dillon Award and SHAFR's Robert H. Ferrell Prize, and *The Danger of Dreams: German and American Imperialism in Latin America* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999). She is currently working on a project analyzing U.S. foreign policy in the 1970s.

Review by Christopher Goscha, l'Université du Québec à Montréal

With the publication of *The Cold War: A World History*, Arne Westad has crafted what may well become the single best general history of the Cold War available in English to date. What he provides in this crisply written and neatly organized narrative is a highly readable yet analytically sophisticated history of the Cold War extending over a long twentieth century. Westad has read and synthesized a mass of new research, much of it published since the end of the Cold War and the opening of former Communist bloc archives. Specialists and general readers will find in his history an up-to-date, reliable, and truly international account of the Cold War. For those of us who teach twentieth-century international relations and the Cold War, this is the book for which we have long been waiting.

At the core of Westad's book are four interconnected arguments. First, to fully grasp the nature of the Cold War, we must see it as a *longue durée* historical competition between two ideological systems—capitalism and socialism—that started in late nineteenth century and intensified throughout the twentieth as the Soviet Union embraced communism internally during the interwar years and pushed it as an alternative way of organizing the international system. The U.S. started to do the same with capitalism. Second, this opposition came to define and configure the international system when the Americans and the Soviets emerged from the rubble of the Second World War. With the Europeans and the Japanese sidelined, they then entered into direct competition with each other as they sought to build the world in their ideological image. To some extent, Westad made both arguments in his previous book on Soviet-American interventions in the Third World, *The Global Cold War*.¹ He goes further to argue here, in his third point, that this competition occurred within a capitalist-driven global transformation of the world which, by the 1970s in particular, had intensified changes within the economic, social, and technological fields like never before. As Westad puts it:

The hundred years from the 1890s to the 1990s saw global markets being created (and destroyed) at a dizzying pace. They witnessed the birth of technologies that previous generations could only dream about, some of which were used to increase mankind's capacity for the dominance and exploitation of others. And they experienced a singularly quick change in global patterns of living, with mobility and urbanization on the rise almost everywhere. All forms of political thinking, Left and Right, were influenced by the rapidity and voraciousness of these changes. (5-6)

Westad agrees that the United States did indeed win the Cold War; but it was, in his view, the globalizing, transformative power of the global capitalist system emerging out of the nineteenth century and accelerating from the 1970s that set the historical stage for the Cold War and its endgame. The Americans won because they were on the winning side of this bigger historical transformation that was moving across the planet with accelerating, integrative speed.

Fourth, while Westad concedes that the Cold War doesn't explain everything in the long twentieth century, it was a "world making" phenomenon (the title of his introduction) and it did much to create the world we now know, as he reminds us in his concluding chapter. Although none of these arguments alone is necessarily original (Jürgen Osterhammel has long demonstrated the transformative power of nineteenth century globalization, and Bruce Mazlish identified the 1970s as the dawn of a new global age defined by accelerating,

¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

technologically-driven integrative change),² it is the way Westad combines, frames, and then weaves these ideas throughout the book that gives his history of the Cold War its explanatory and analytical power and, in the end, its originality.

Westad begins his narrative in the late nineteenth-century Atlantic world, with the rise of the struggle between capitalism and socialism. He then follows it through the two wars that ravaged Europe and Asia. With the Americans and the Soviets taking over the struggle after the Second World War, he moves on chronologically and geographically, covering the main Cold War events in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s such as the Chinese Communist victory, the Korean War, Berlin/Germany, the consolidation of two opposing Europes, decolonization, the Vietnam War, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. If “world history,” the subtitle of his book, means covering East and West, North and South, then he does it admirably well. Westad then proceeds to the 1970s to provide excellent discussions of détente, its disappearance in the late 1970s, and the end of the Cold War a decade later. But for Westad, U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s tough line towards the Soviets does not explain the American victory in the Cold War. It was rather the accelerating level of technological change and market-driven integration operating at the global level with greater force by the 1970s that undermined Communism across Eurasia—first in China, then in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, finally in places like Laos, Vietnam, and most recently Cuba.

Some of Westad’s best chapters deal with the social, economic, intellectual, and cultural transformations the Cold War brought about in Asia, Africa, and Europe. He impresses by his ability to discuss the finer points of social and political ideas in communist China and the Soviet Union, then East Bloc countries like Czechoslovakia, and Poland, before turning to France and Great Britain. Westad writes expertly and convincingly about how the battle for ideas in Europe, in its Eastern and Western halves, worked itself out at the national and regional levels during the Cold War and connected with the wider competition between socialism/communism and capitalism occurring over this long twentieth century. The transformation of Europe into an integrated Union and its ability to open its doors to East Bloc states after the fall of Communism represents the victory of European Social Democracy over Communism. But Westad also shows the extent to which the globalizing nature of the capitalist forces championed by the United States impacted, indeed participated in the very economic, social, and cultural revolution that transformed Europe during the Cold War:

The concept of “The West” was therefore meaningless before the 1950s. There were plenty of public references to a common heritage: Greece, Rome, Christianity, and badly disguised remarks about race. But there were no instruments of cohesion before military, economic, political, and cultural interaction sped up in the postwar era. These placed the United States at the center of western Europe’s consumer revolution, through its music, movies, and fashion as much as through its political ideas. An imagined America made it possible for many western Europeans to escape from restrictions of class, gender, or religion. The United States was therefore part of a European revolution that was in many

² Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) and Bruce Mazlish, “Comparing Global History to World History,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28:3 (Winter 1998): 385-395.

ways as deep, and more lasting, than the Soviet impact in the eastern half of the continent. (211)

One might disagree (I am not entirely convinced),³ but there is so much that is new, thoughtful, and thought-provoking in this history of the Cold War. His book is a breath of historiographical fresh air.

Beyond Triumphalism

That is true, too, because Westad avoids the triumphalism which marked the first general histories of the Cold War coming after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. Indeed, his book is a study in contrasts to the two major post-Cold War syntheses to which his book will surely be compared: Georges-Henri Soutou's *La guerre de cinquante ans: Les relations est-ouest, 1945-1990* (2001, re-baptized in 2011 simply as *La guerre froide, 1943-1990*), and John Lewis Gaddis's *The Cold War: We Now Know* (1997) and above all his *grande synthèse*, *The Cold War: A New History* (2006).⁴ A small historiographical detour here is in order, for Westad's book breaks with the Atlantic triumphalism of these two giants of Cold-War history writing and, at a deeper level, with the Euro-American triumphalism standing behind each of them in the wake of the Cold War which Westad holds responsible for many of the problems confronting the international community today—the subject of his last chapter.

For Soutou and Gaddis, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Communist bloc from Berlin to Moscow confirmed the triumph of Atlantic capitalist liberalism over Soviet communist internationalism. In their respective books, each scholar fully approves of the victory of the Western liberal order. Revealingly, both men genuflect respectively before the two thinkers who defended this liberal order so ardently after the Second World War. For John Gaddis, it is George Kennan. For Georges-Henri Soutou, it is Raymond Aron. No sooner had Gaddis completed his *Cold War: A New History* in 2006 than he published his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of George Kennan, the architect of the American grand strategy of containment and the defender of the liberal capitalist order. In 1990, before anyone could even know that the Cold War was ending, Georges-Henri Soutou had already launched the first installment of a three-volume collection of Raymond Aron's Cold War writings.⁵ Although Gaddis and Soutou incorporated the rest of the world into their Cold War histories, as such dedicated disciples of Kennan and Aron, each ended up telling very Atlantic-centered stories of Cold War triumph, the U.S. for Gaddis and Western Europe for Soutou.

³ Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson would probably argue the global connections differently for Europe. Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 130-133.

⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (London: Penguin Books, 2006); John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Georges-Henri Soutou, *La guerre de cinquante ans: Les relations Est-Ouest 1943-1990*, (Paris: Fayard, 2001, re-edited in 2011 with the new title: *La guerre froide, 1943-1990*).

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), and Georges-Henri Soutou, *Raymond Aron: Les articles de politique internationale dans Le Figaro de 1947 à 1977*, 3 volumes, (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1990, 1994, 1997, respectively).

Soutou and Gaddis also stuck it to ‘the revisionists’ in their Cold War histories. And while they never came out and said it in writing, it is clear that they were going after the founding father of the Revisionist school of the Cold War, William A. Williams and his *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* first published in 1959.⁶ In this classic study of the American diplomacy, Williams blamed the West for starting the Cold War, the Americans above all. Starting at the turn of the twentieth century, Williams argued that the American liberal order in its political and economic dimensions was not necessarily a force for good, but rather an expansionist imperial order, a capitalist-driven empire which had, in reality, provoked many of the twentieth century’s conflagrations, most importantly the Cold War. For Williams, the Soviet empire was not to blame; the American one was.

Gaddis and Soutou disagree entirely. Marching in lockstep, each respectively blames Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in unequivocal terms for starting the Cold War and the Communists more generally for prolonging it. And had it not been for containment and the liberal order on which it turned on both sides of the Atlantic, the world would have been much worse off. The message is hard to miss: Williams and his long list of revisionist disciples were wrong. Aron and Kennan had been right all along. American diplomacy was ‘triumphant,’ not ‘tragic.’

The result of all this? Rather than getting a ‘post-revisionist’ take on the Cold War, it was as if Gaddis and Soutou had sent us into a historiographical time warp.⁷ Although Williams and his devotees have also overplayed their hands by critiquing *ad nauseam* ‘American empire’ and ‘American exceptionalism’ up to the current Middle Eastern wars, Gaddis and Soutou did little in their “new” histories to free our understanding of the Cold War from a circuitous and never-ending debate between ‘Revisionist’ and ‘Orthodox’ scholars, what we can call the ‘Triumphalists’ versus the ‘Tragics.’

Westad’s Critique of U.S. Post-Cold War Triumphalism

Thankfully, indeed mercifully, Westad avoids this historiographical ‘blame game’ in Cold War historiography and, in so doing, moves us forward with great modesty and admirable finesse. However, if I read his concluding chapter correctly, Westad’s beef is not with triumphalist scholars of the Cold War per se, but rather with the Triumphalist American Presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. What Westad criticizes most is how the Clinton and Bush forms of “Post-Cold War Triumphalism” (617-618) blinded them and their strategists to this wider capitalist and technological transformation of the world that had ended the Cold War and, at the same time, created the favorable conditions for the making of a new, integrated and inclusive international system. Atlantic liberals should have integrated the former Communist countries, including post-Soviet Russia, into the internationalist organizations dating from the Second World War, including NATO and the European Union.

In hindsight, at least, it is clear that the economic transition to capitalism was a catastrophe for most Russians. It is also clear that the West should have dealt with post-Cold War Russia better than it did. It is hard, however, to specify what alternative paths would have looked like. The key, I think, would have been the realization, so often lacking

⁶ See also Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 450-457.

⁷ Melvyn Leffler, “The Cold War: What Do ‘We Now Know?’” *The American Historical Review* 104:2 (April 1999), 501-524.

in the 1990s, that Russia would under all circumstances remain a crucial state in any international system because of its sheer size. It would therefore have been in the interest of the West, and especially the Europeans, to begin integrating the country into European security and trade arrangements as soon as possible after 1991. ... An effort the size of the Marshall Plan was certainly not in the offing. But both the West and Russia would have been considerably more secure today if the chance for Russia to join the European Union and possibly also NATO in some form had at least been kept open in the 1990s (623).

What really disappoints Westad is that the end of the historical competition between capitalism and Communism dating back to the nineteenth century and at the core of his book could have produced a 'happy liberal ending' of a European Social Democratic type (which Westad clearly favors) rather than the scary one we now know (and during which Westad presumably crafted his book).

Curiously, U.S. President Barack Obama is absent from Westad's final chapter, which criticizes post-Cold War American foreign policy. Had he taken up Obama's foreign policy, I think Westad would surely have applauded the President's decision to continue improving relations with Communist Vietnam by travelling to the country in 2016 (just like President Bush and Clinton had done before him). Westad would certainly have welcomed Obama's decision to normalize relations with Communist Cuba on the grounds that global liberal capitalism would do more to change the regime than a woefully outdated Cold War embargo. But lest we forget, before leaving office, Obama had also signed a massive Asian trade pact—the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). My understanding of the TPP is that Obama and the like-minded Allies who negotiated this historic commercial accord intentionally excluded China. If true, then surely Obama committed the same strategic sin as his predecessors? After all, the TPP's exclusion of China in 2016 strangely mirrored earlier decisions taken to bar the former USSR from the European Union and NATO. Westad's book is silent about this.

Are we in the midst of a return to the Cold War, as some have begun to suggest? I'm not so sure. For one, few would argue—I think—that Obama excluded China on ideological, anti-communist grounds. While China's political system remains a single-party state based on a Marxist-Leninist model, capitalism and the search for markets and investment drive its economy. One of the basic definitions of a Cold War—ideological opposition—is absent. Indeed, since the 1970s, China has become an essential pillar of the liberal capitalist order. Could it be then that Obama, like his predecessors dealing with the former Soviet Union, wanted to exclude China for reasons other than ideology? Could not one argue that part of what we are witnessing since the 1990s is *also* (but not only) about the continued global competition among three empires in world history—the Russian, Chinese, and American ones. After all, not all empires necessarily decolonized after 1945.⁸ And might this not suggest that the Cold War is but a chapter of a wider global history rather than an accounting of world history itself?⁹

⁸ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Christopher Goscha, "Global Wars & Decolonization in East and South East Asia (1937-1954)," in Martin Thomas, ed., *The Oxford History of Decolonization* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁹ 'Global' and 'world' histories are two very different things. See: Mazlish, 'Comparing Global History to World History'.

What is certain is that Arne Westad has produced the finest and fairest general history of the Cold War that is available in English. We should be grateful to him for this and also for pushing the history of the Cold War beyond the outdated tropes of 'Triumphalism' and 'Tragedy,' 'Revisionism' and 'Orthodoxy.' The Cold War was so much more complicated than this and, as a result, fascinating. Arne Westad brings that complex story to light in this brilliant history.

Review by Jussi M. Hanhimäki, Graduate Institute, Geneva

The Cold War is still with us. Whether it is the recurrent proclamations that Russian-American relations have relapsed to the days of the Soviet-American confrontation; concerns that the relationship between United States and the People's Republic of China is emerging as a global bipolar rivalry; or sweeping pronouncements of the global threat posed by radical Islamic terrorism; multiple authors and commentators continue to find the Cold War an easy reference point. "The New Cold War is Already More Dangerous than Was its Predecessor," read the headline by Princeton Professor Stephen F. Cohen in October 2017.¹ And his was hardly a lone voice in the wilderness. These days hardly a week goes by without some pundit—although rarely a respected academic like Cohen—expressing similar sentiments.

It is therefore crucially important to have a book, like the one under review, to remind us what was both specific and general, contingent and structural, about the rivalry that overshadowed much of the twentieth century. While the Cold War supposedly ended in 1989-91, it would be difficult to make sense of the twenty-first century's global predicaments without considering the now seemingly ancient history of the Soviet-American rivalry or the ideological battles that framed it and helped to expand its scope in the second half of the twentieth century. It might be different—although not necessarily so given the apocalyptic predictions regarding North Korea intentions or Iran's presumed hidden designs—if the Cold War had been 'just' about nuclear arms and power politics. But precisely because it touched the hearts and minds of people across the globe—from Arne Westad's native Norway to India, South Africa and Chile—the Cold War still matters, a great deal.

There are few scholars more capable than Westad to navigate the complexities of Cold War history. Co-editor (with Melvyn Leffler) of the three-volume *Cambridge History of the Cold War*; prize-winning author of *The Global Cold War*; one of the founding editors of the journal *Cold War History*, Westad is one of the few scholars who can stake a claim to having redefined, and re-invigorated, the field of Cold War studies. As one of the pioneers of so-called new Cold War history, Westad has carved himself a reputation for, in particular, emphasizing the ways in which the Cold War was so much more than an episode in the evolution of great-power relations dominated by the emergence of two superpowers after World War II. Ideological currents, economic structures, technological innovations all shaped (and at times were shaped by) the Cold War.²

It is this outlook that is demonstrated throughout the book. Westad's *Cold War* is, at the same time, a sweeping global history the twentieth century *and* a recounting (as well as reinterpretation) of the classic episodes of the Soviet-American, East-West confrontation: the Cuban missile crisis, the Korean, Vietnamese and Afghan wars, and the many confrontations over Berlin, among many, many others. And at the root of all this lies the author's conviction, mostly shared by this reviewer, that at the heart of the history of the Cold War in all its specific manifestations, lies a basic lesson: idealism is all too easily "perverted for the sake of

¹ Stephen F. Cohen, "The New Cold War is Already More Dangerous Than Was Its Predecessor," *The Nation*, 11 October 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-new-cold-war-is-already-more-dangerous-than-was-its-predecessor/>.

² Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds), *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

power, influence, and control” (629). That may sound rather bland; and hardly a conclusion one can only reach after over 600 pages of historical analysis. Yet, I would maintain that *The Cold War: A World History* is a major achievement; a significant marker in the historiography of the Cold War. Three major points stand out, although many others can be identified.

First, there is the temporal and conceptual scope of the book. Westad’s *Cold War* does not begin with the usual suspects—say Yalta or Potsdam; the Marshall Plan or even the crisis in Azerbaijan—but with the *longue durée* ideological, political, and economic developments that gave the twentieth century, or modernity more broadly speaking, its shape. That these broad structural developments have no simple beginning or end also means that the many aspects of the Cold War—not least the quest to find a political system best suited for guaranteeing individual freedom or social justice—remain with us. In a more basic sense, because the Cold War did benefit some—nations, political groupings, economic actors, institutions—over others, a degree of nostalgia, not limited to the current president of Russia, about the ‘good old days’ is evident in contemporary discourses. This fact makes sober-headed historical accounts like Westad’s ever more pertinent.

Second, there is the geographic scope. Westad’s *Cold War* is truly global. No continent was saved from the impact of the ideological influence of Cold War discourses; and many countries suffered greatly as a consequence. In its extreme form, ideological purity coupled with political power could lead to genocide: Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge will always be remembered as an example of ‘red terror’ unbound. In Chile, as well as a number of other countries, anti-communism was used to justify brutal military rule and the suspension of democratic practices that had been entrenched in the country’s political system for decades. That the impact of Soviet or American power or the ideologies those two nations claimed to embody varied enormously from Europe to Asia and Africa to Latin America is unquestionable. But the remarkable point is that such influence travelled to the proverbial four corners of the globe, and continents that remained free of nuclear weapons—as Latin America and Africa did—were still riddled with Cold War conflicts. In Africa this meant external interventionism, civil strife and endemic instability. In Latin America, the Cold War usually affected the shape of individual nation’s domestic politics. Indeed, as Westad puts it at the very beginning of the book: “the Cold War influenced most things, and often for the worse” (2).

Third, there is the timely aversion to thinking in simple terms of winners or losers. To be sure, Westad writes: “If the United States won the Cold War, as I think it did, then the Soviet Union, or rather Russia, lost it, and lost it big” (621). But both parts of this statement are, in fact, far more nuanced than they may appear. In Russia, the collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by massive unemployment, the loss of basic societal security, and a rapid introduction of robber-baron like privatization. “In hindsight at least, it is clear that economic transition to capitalism was a catastrophe for most Russians,” Westad writes (623). It was made worse by the way in which post-Cold War Russia was consistently treated like a pariah by the rapidly enlarging ‘West’; giving many Russians plenty of reason to applaud the arrival of a strong leader like President Vladimir Putin.

If Russia’s loss produced a national tragedy with disturbing consequences, the American victory was ultimately a Pyrrhic one. As with many other scholars, Westad basically concludes that successive U.S. administrations failed to respond successfully to new challenges and either totally ignored or applied the wrong lessons from history. The culprit, it seems, was boundless optimism that the United States was on the right side of history. If in Russia the collapse of the Soviet Union and the chaos that followed created a collective sense of victimhood, in the United States the victory in the Cold War produced a feeling of omnipotence. The United States had become, indeed, the ‘indispensable nation.’

This American triumphalism would have negative consequences and came, Westad maintains, in two forms. The first was President Bill Clinton's version. It emphasized the benefits of global capitalism and prosperity but failed to institutionalize broad-based international cooperative frameworks. Hence, we were introduced to the notion of failed states: old "Cold War battlefields like Afghanistan, Congo, or Nicaragua, where the United States—or most others for that matter—could not have cared less about what happened" in the 1990s (617). When problems of these failed states came to a head—most notably with the terrorist attacks of 9-11—another version of triumphalism came to dominate American policy. The George W. Bush version emphasized America's military preponderance and produced the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq that, as Westad writes, created "two twenty-first-century colonies under the rule of a Great Power with no appetite for colonial rule" (618). This leads to a somewhat depressing but sobering conclusion that "the United States failed to use the better lessons of how it conducted the Cold War in order to get a grip on its role in the post-Cold War era" (620).

No book is perfect. In the case of *Cold War: A World History*, the inevitable critique emerges more as a consequence of the challenge the author has set himself rather than any profound disagreement of interpretation or approach. Westad clearly has a grasp of history in its broadest and deepest sense; he is, after all, the co-author of *The Penguin History of the World*.³ Yet, one is still left wondering whether the task is simply too demanding. To find the right balance between the general and the particular remains one of the most difficult challenges facing any historian. Westad almost always succeeds. But at times the sheer scale of the challenge produces some unfortunately bland statements. To take but one example: "The world had changed tremendously in the 1970s and early 1980s, and in the late 1980s it changed even more" (553). If one of my students wrote this, I would be tempted to bleed a furious red-inked admonition. Happily, the statement is followed by a cogent analysis of the end of the Cold War that shies away from the oversimplifications so prevalent in much discussion about what was, perhaps, the most significant transformation in recent international history. But the statement also illustrates, perhaps, the challenge any author faces in trying to make his/her work 'accessible' to broader audiences. I simply hope that the readers/students, rather than citing this particular statement (and others like it) will ask: whatever does he mean? And read on; for the book is well worth it.

Westad can—indeed he inevitably will be—also be challenged for emphasizing certain developments and certain regions/parts of the world over others. Area specialists will question, for example, the limited treatment accorded to Latin America. Others will demand why Indonesia and the Suharto regime are virtually ignored? Where is Finland? Or Sweden for that matter? In reverse, some are likely to wonder whether the Portuguese revolution in 1974 really lay at the root of the series of events that produced the collapse of superpower détente in the late 1970s.

There are some nitpicking points that one could add. Zbigniew Brzezinski is cited as "the Harvard professor who became Carter's national security adviser" (486). In fact, he joined the Carter administration from Columbia.

There will also be mixed reactions to Westad's account of the end and legacies of the Cold War. As implied above, I would maintain that he gets the basic points absolutely right. The Cold War did not come to a sudden end simply as a consequence of the actions of a specific individual or policies pursued by one country

³ J.M. Roberts and Odd Arne Westad, *The Penguin History of the World*, 6th ed. (New York: Penguin, 2014).

at a particular moment. To be sure, we cannot discount such factors entirely. That the Soviet Union decided not to militarily intervene in Poland to crack down when the rising popularity of the Solidarity movement threatened to unravel the Communist Party's hold on power was, for example, of significant import. But such individual decisions took place in a global context that had, by the late 1980s if not before, exposed a simple fact: the Cold War divisions—ideological and otherwise—no longer resonated in the hearts and minds of people around the globe. Or to put it in more simple terms: by the 1980s, even as Soviet-American tensions exacerbated, the Cold War itself was on the wrong side of history.

There were several fundamental transformations that undermined the Cold War both as an international system of states and as the twilight struggle between opposite political ideologies. In the broadest possible sense one could say that the 'modernity' experienced by many people in the late twentieth century—as a consequence of technological innovation, accelerated urbanization, decolonization, and the emergence of 'post-industrial' societies—meant that the questions that had occupied political thinkers in the early part of the century when the Cold War took its shape had ceased to be relevant. There was, for example, the transformation of China from a closed and centralized agricultural state to the one-party capitalist economic superpower it was to become by the end of the century. The consequences were many but perhaps most significantly "China had started a transformation that marked a definitive break with socialist planning models" (560). China's success in first flirting with and then embracing capitalism could not but undermine the legitimacy of socialist economic planning writ large.

While China's transformation still continues, the histories of the end of the Cold War have tended to focus on two interrelated issues: the Soviet-American relationship and the end of the division of Europe (or the fall of the Iron Curtain). Westad has something significant—perhaps even a bit provocative—to offer on both issues. On the Soviet-American relationship he is fairly categorical in rejecting the Reagan-worship so prevalent in much of post-Cold War mythologizing. Instead of Star Wars or its sudden support for freedom fighters, America prevailed due to its long-term alliances, its superior technological innovation, and its ability to create economic growth that far surpassed anything the socialist model could offer. President Reagan's significance for the end of the Cold War comes from his willingness to negotiate with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, not from his eagerness to confront the USSR.

What about the end of the division of Europe? The old continent—where the Cold War had created an apparently stable and 'legitimate' system of blocs by the mid-1970s—was awash with change in the 1980s. Many West European communist parties had become 'domesticated,' participating fully in the democratic processes of their respective countries and increasingly distancing themselves from the 'centre' in Moscow. In Eastern Europe, as Westad puts it, "western European integration and economic expansion increasingly created an irresistible attraction" (502). Given the current troubled state of the European Union—from Brexit to the lingering problems of the Euro—this may seem strange. But one has to recall that in the 1970s and 1980s, the European Economic Community (EEC) was on an enlargement spree: first the UK, Ireland, and Denmark joined in 1973; eight years later Greece became a full member; and the southern enlargement was completed in 1986 with the membership of Portugal and Spain. The southern enlargement, Westad asserts, was particularly important in the Cold War context, because it "signaled that the alternative to a division of Europe into power blocs might not be war or dislocation, but a world in which countries joined up to decide their own future without Superpower control" (517). While this may overstate the case, the insight is significant and deliciously paradoxical: European integration, a byproduct of the Cold War, had produced a credible alternative to the existing hierarchical system of states. Indeed, European integration must be counted as one of the main beneficiaries of the Cold War.

Odd Arne Westad has, indeed, produced a remarkable account of the conflict that defined the evolution of international relations in the second half of the twentieth century. Most importantly, by placing the Cold War in a broad temporal and structural context he challenges us to rethink the meaning of the Soviet-American confrontation without drawing simplistic 'policy-relevant' conclusions. In a field crowded with 'authoritative' and 'definitive' books, *Cold War: A World History* has set a high new benchmark.

Review by Robert Legvold, Columbia University

The great strength of Arne Westad's superb new book is how far he pushes us to broaden the perspective from which we view the history of the Cold War. In much of his earlier work he helped to transform the image of the Cold War as a two-actor model by broadening the key arenas in which it was fought and introducing a wider cast of players shaping its course.¹ Here, however, he proposes a new and fundamentally different context for understanding the Cold War, including its beginning, evolution, and end. Rather than the customary frameworks of analysis that begin from either the ideological divide and the contest between two opposed political and economic systems or the structural factors from which emerged a bipolar world, he insists on a longer historical perspective that features deeper and broader economic, cultural and political trends.

As a result, his is, while not quite a history of the twentieth century, then a history of the twentieth century as the background against which the face-off between socialism and capitalism played out. The Soviet Union, the perverse embodiment of Marx and Engel's creation, emerges as an ultimate destination—although not the only one—for ideas that had germinated throughout the nineteenth century. But to achieve their effect these ideas floated among other basic transformations remaking labor and women's movements, resistance to capitalist excess, early anti-colonial stirrings, and the technology frontiers being crossed at the turn of the century. Just as the Cold war 'was born' from these earlier transformations, he contends, so was it terminated by equally powerful global economic, political, and technological changes at the end of the century.

Thus, while he places Soviet communism and U.S. capitalism and their "competition . . . for the society of the future" at the center of this history, he cuts a very side swath when filling in the rest of the story (4). His account of the early years of the Cold War "as an international system" (1945-1989) in Asia is as rich and intricate as his treatment of the Cold War's origins in Europe. Not only does he address every major episode in the Cold War (*i.e.*, the Korean, Vietnam, Middle Eastern, and Afghan wars and the Suez, Berlin, Congo, Cuban, and October 1973 crises), but he explores the way the Cold War figured in the international politics in every corner of the globe—from South Asia to Latin America, southern Africa to the Middle East. In casting his net this broadly, not only does he reveal how much more complicated was the role of multiple third parties at key moments, such as the Korean War, but, as a result, how much more amorphous and often perverse were the dynamics of U.S.-Soviet competition when transferred into environments riven with their own indigenous trouble and mayhem.

He makes two further contributions. By incorporating the many spheres in which the Cold War unfolded simultaneously, he allows one to appreciate how complex were the cross-cutting, often countervailing, pressures and forces buffeting the central contest between the Soviet Union and the United States. Second, along the way Westad offers firm, undiluted judgments on key aspects of the Cold War, judgments I applaud, doubtless in part, because they parallel my own. Thus, on the question of whether the Cold War's starting point was over the future of Poland or Germany, he argues that it was Poland. On whether Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin may have been serious when in the early 1950s proposing a reunified and neutralized Germany

¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and "The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Volume I., Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

or simply maneuvering, he explains why, given Stalin's calculations, he was serious. On whether détente in the Nixon-Brezhnev years was real or merely a mirage, he stresses how genuinely leaders on both sides, particularly the Soviet side, sought to alter the scope and terms of the competition, although never imagining its end. On whether ideology played a primary or secondary role, time and again he demonstrates its primacy: on the Soviet side, not merely in Stalin's tragically miscast approach to German Social Democrats in the 1930s, but in his mistrust of the "class basis" for the Chinese Communist Party newly triumphant in 1949, even as late as Brezhnev in his belief "in the global mission of Communism" (366), an important part of the explanation for Soviet behavior in Vietnam, southern Africa, and the Middle East. On the U.S. side: in President Harry Truman's transcendent belief in the virtues of capitalism, not merely from a need to protect U.S. economic interests abroad, in the reasons why Dwight Eisenhower, for all of his level-headedness, could not seize the opportunity to ease the Cold War in the wake of Stalin's death, even as late as George Bush senior in his initial reluctance to trust the change that others saw in Gorbachev's Kremlin.

One further item of praise: throughout, as Westad makes the case for the significance of the large scale phenomena producing (or the product of) change, he introduces stunningly arresting figures, as in the case of the human lives devoured in the course of China's socialist transformation, and offers thought-provoking angles of analysis, such as the impact that he attributes to the "consumer revolution" in vastly swelling the international weight of the United States in the last decades of the twentieth century. This gives both unexpected dimension to and fresh optics for viewing the Cold War.

Aside from simply how much I learned from this book or was prodded by it to rethink aspects of the Cold War, its other value was the chance it provides to raise fundamental questions. What, ultimately, was the Cold War? What were its distinguishing characteristics? What made it fundamentally different from other periods of extended international tension? Why did it go on as long as it did?

"The Cold War," Westad maintains, "originated in two processes that took place around the turn of the twentieth century (19). One was the transformation of the United States and Russia into two supercharged empires with a growing sense of international mission. The other was the sharpening of the ideological divide between capitalism and its critics." Later he asserts that "the Cold War was born as an ideological contest in Europe and the European offshoots, Russia and United States. In the second half of the twentieth century that contest came to interact with the process surrounding the collapse of the European overseas empires" (261). But the Cold War itself he sees as an "international system," and that did not come into existence until the ideological contest merged with the bipolar political structure produced by World War II.

Hence, the Cold War, as experienced, emerged out of World War II, and the questions are, what was the path? What explains the course it took? And, when was that path first entered? In answer to the first question, Westad conveys a loose, clumsy, but largely inexorable process. Stalin may have wished the wartime cooperation to continue long enough for the Soviet Union to recover from the war's devastation, but his actions made that impossible. Truman's actions may have been innocently defensive, but to suspicious Soviet eyes, they confirmed their worst assumptions. Step by wavering step, the two sides stumbled into a Cold War that began, he argues, in Poland (in 1945) and hardened into a military confrontation between the 1948 Berlin blockade and the 1950 Korean War. Typical was the way each side responded to the surge in popularity of the French and Italian Communist Parties in 1947. Stalin feared their readiness to sacrifice principle for U.S. aid to their countries' ailing economies, and sicced Yugoslav hardliners on them. The Truman Administration feared their prospect of electoral success, and launched covert operations to undermine their support.

Westad's explanation for the Cold War also departs from the starker explanations previously offered: either that it was the inevitable conflict between two ideologically driven hegemony, or the product of bipolarity, or a function of Stalin's personality and ambition or, at the other extreme, the consequence of the aggressive nature of U.S. policy. He focuses on a spiral of tension driven by outsized fears and partial misreadings on both sides, in turn occasioned by the incompatible prisms through which each viewed the world and accentuated by the ravaged environment with which they were coping.

Westad does not minimize the suspicion and animosity that Stalin bore to the West or the aggressive nature of his behavior, but, in the end, he blames more the U.S. side for "decisions that pointed toward the containment rather than the integration of the Soviet Union," and "it was containment that made postwar conflict into a Cold War" (69). Given the United States' enormous economic and strategic advantages, "the intensity of the conflict, including the paranoia that it later produced on both sides, might have been significantly reduced if more attempts had been made by the stronger power to entice Moscow toward forms of cooperation."

I would reframe the point: I doubt that as Stalin went about securing the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, a position the map that the war's military outcomes foretold, and as the reality of an ongoing U.S. presence in Europe grew increasingly apparent, that even generous offerings—such as a Soviet *droit de regard* over the future of Germany or a continuation of lend lease assistance into the postwar period—would have led to durable Soviet cooperation. But I do believe that had the United States and key European states been in less haste to militarize the conflict—had delayed the formation of NATO or been less inclined to make of the Korean war a global military threat with direct implications in Europe—the Cold War would, indeed, have been less intense and with less paranoia. In short, I agree with what George Kennan thought of NSC-68.

Why did the Cold War last as long as it did? Here Westad's answer is cryptic to the point of being empty. He says it was because of nuclear weapons, but does not explain how or why this prolonged the Cold War, particularly when he dismisses John Lewis Gaddis' notion of the "long peace." An argument, of course, can be made that nuclear weapons did perpetuate the Cold War by preventing a war between the Soviet Union and the United States that would have undone one side or both. Or that it did so by forcing the two sides to work out rules of the road that made the Cold War manageable and, therefore, tolerable. In my own view, the Cold War endured because of the phases through which it passed, notwithstanding the hiccups along the way, from the crude, unmitigated hostility of the early years, to tentative engagement, to halting agreements, such as the test ban treaty and Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to an effort at managing the Cold War differently under détente, through the Gorbachev foreign-policy revolution and then the end, by which time it had lost its reason for being. Moving through those phases took time, not the least because of the considerable obstacles each step of the way.

This leads to a more fundamental issue, one worth facing and perhaps arguing over. It bears directly on the question of what was the Cold War. Westgard treats it as an international system, and, if it has parallels, he finds them in the sixteenth and early seventeenth-century bipolar rivalry between Spain and England, with its religious ideological divide, or the eleventh-century conflict between the Song and Liao states in China. Its distinguishing qualities, one infers, were bipolarity, ideological alienation, the mobilization of alliances, and the far-flung arenas in which it was fought. In these other instances, however, the contest scarcely embodied the international system, but rather an important fragment of it. The Cold War, for Westad, was *the* international system. At least it was to the extent that "one set of conflicts was repeated over and over again

throughout the century and why all other contestants for power—material or ideological—had to relate to it.”²

An alternative view, although rarely articulated—indeed, conceivably mine alone—regards the Cold War not as an international system perforce conjoined with a bipolar structure, but as a feature of what was a bipolar world. And as a feature of an international system it was capable of figuring in other kinds of international systems, including the one we have now. Viewing the Cold War in this fashion has both historiographical and broader analytical implications. On the first score, distinguishing the Cold War from the international system of which it was a part means the two were not coterminous and each could begin and end at different times. Indeed, in my view, World War II had produced a bipolar system from its smoldering embers—implicit when in 1944 William T.R. Fox coined the label “superpowers”—and this was at least two perhaps three years before a failing Grand Alliance crumbled into Cold War.³ Still more significant, I would argue, the Cold War had largely ended in 1989, when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and President George H. W. Bush at the Malta summit regarded it as over, two years before the collapse of the Soviet Union finalized the demise of bipolarity.

On the second score, viewing Cold War as a unique phenomenon distinct from the international political system of which is a part makes the concept available for understanding other deeply fractured, dysfunctional international relationships. (Dysfunctional in terms both of a relationship’s contribution to international peace and stability and to well-served national interests.) The same thing that makes it useful as a concept in other contexts, however, also contributes to a deeper understanding of the original Cold War. The qualities that distinguished the Cold War in its early, most intense phase—from the Berlin blockade to Stalin’s death—provide a good part of the answer to the question of what was the Cold War.

At one level, as Westad suggests, it was a political-ideological contest between two warring camps bearing the banners of socialism and capitalism. But at its height it also had five other qualities. First, each side viewed the other as wholly responsible for the conflict, and not merely because of the other side’s behavior, but because of its nature. I have called that “the essence of the problem was the other side’s essence.”⁴ Second, each saw the problem as not merely one of conflicting interests, but of conflicting purpose. Third, neither believed the conflict would end until the other side changed fundamentally. Fourth, each disbelieved that areas of cooperation could be more than one-off, other than merely transactional, not cumulative to a degree capable of transforming the relationship. And, fifth, each ensured that tensions around one issue would create or add to tensions surrounding another, guaranteeing that the synergy among issues would be negative, not positive.

In understanding the history of the Cold War, the phases through which it passed were essentially a process by which these qualities, one by one, gave way. At each stage one or more of them fell by the wayside, until in

² Westad, *The Cold War*, 5.

³ William T.R. Fox, *The Super-Powers: The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union—Their Responsibility for Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944).

⁴ Robert Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (Malden: Polity, 2016), 28.

the end, the most primal—the notion that the conflict would not end until the other side changed fundamentally—lost all meaning.

Today, in what I have called the new U.S.-Russian Cold War, all five qualities are again present. When Westad writes, “The long-term U.S. aim, NSC-68 maintained, is to create ‘a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system, a change toward the frustration of the design is first and perhaps the important step. Clearly it will not only be less costly but more effective if this change occurs to a maximum extent as a result of internal forces in

Soviet society,’” the parallel hope guiding U.S. and Western policy toward Vladimir Putin’s Russia resonates loudly (104). So too does the parallel between Stalin’s deep conviction that the West posed an existential threat to the Soviet Union to the extent that it would by any means available strive to undermine his regime and Putin’s comparable conviction, a situation all the more striking, because by Gorbachev’s day that fear had disappeared.

As is obvious, in essential respects, the new U.S.-Russian Cold War is fundamentally different from the original Cold War. This time it does not encompass and suffuse the entire international system. Nor is it driven by a deep ideological animus. Nor (not yet) does it unfold under the threat of nuclear Armageddon. And the fundamental transformations remaking the world, and that figure so prominently in Westad’s history, are changing by the decade. Yet, the recurrence of the five characteristics marking the extreme phase of the original Cold War serve to underscore how deep a hole the two sides are in and how hard it will be to crawl out of it. The history of the original Cold War tells us that this will only be by phases. If so, one would hope those phases, and the speed with which they are traversed, are as compressed as possible.

Review by Nancy Mitchell, North Carolina State University

Odd Arne Westad is tilting at the Cold War. It is a bold and quixotic endeavor. Foolhardy, perhaps. But I thank him for it. *The Cold War* is the best single-volume history of that turbulent period. It is at times infuriating, but overall it is enlightening and provocative. I have already ordered it as required reading for my graduate seminar this spring.

Why is it the best?

First, while *The Cold War* is descriptive, narrative history, it has an argument. This distinguishes it from textbook histories of the Cold War. Westad's argument is that at its core the Cold War was an ideological struggle played out by two states whose very identities were defined by their adherence to, on the one hand, capitalism and on the other, communism. The struggle had its roots in the late nineteenth century, it developed during the First World War, and it burst forth full flower after World War Two. This ideological battle, Westad argues, colored the world. It affected life-altering debates on every continent, just as it defined the superpower struggle.

Second, as the subtitle announces, it is indeed world history. Westad ranges wide. His focus is traditional—the superpowers and Europe—but he broadens his lens to a dazzling if not dizzying degree. *The Cold War* is organized along both chronological and geographical axes. Westad embraces Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American history. He gives a general sweep of events in each region and then zeroes in (briefly) on a few key incidents that shed light on how the bipolar Cold War shaped the politics and the lives of people in these far-flung domains. It is important to note that Westad always gives agency to these 'marginal' actors. While they could not help but be affected by the ideological Cold War, their own needs, pasts, and personalities determined how they navigated it.

Third, it is reliable. All of us will take issue with some of Westad's assertions. But his facts are sound.

Let me then stipulate this: Odd Arne Westad has written the best single-volume history of the Cold War.

He has also given us an enormous and inviting target.

Big history necessarily omits much that fascinates historians: ambiguity, disagreements, unknowns. All these wrinkles are smoothed out to provide a narrative sweep. This can make history seem inevitable. It worries me when I think of my students swallowing his fluid narrative with no resistance. But it is the unavoidable price of writing big.

With no complaint, I note that *The Cold War* is traditional, top-down narrative history, albeit with a global focus. Westad shoehorns in a few comments about African Americans and the Women's Movement, but he focuses overwhelmingly on states and their elites.

Westad's endnotes are spare and there is no bibliography, necessary concessions to the demands of the publisher. Westad has opted in his spare endnotes to privilege the primary sources and remain almost silent about the secondary ones. I understand the allure—experiential and intellectual—of archives, and I know that Westad is one of our discipline's preeminent multi-archival researchers, but this volume is not a monograph. It rests on the shoulders of many, many excellent historians. I read passages in *The Cold War*—of facts as well

as interpretations—that I presume draw on these secondary sources (for example, those by Raymond Garthoff, Piero Gleijeses, Melvyn Leffler).¹ A webpage discussing Westad’s secondary sources would be most welcome. It would not only be useful for his readers, but important pedagogically for students whom we are teaching to give credit where it is due.

While Westad’s command of this vast subject is impressive, it is uneven. His discussion of Latin America is much less sure-footed than that of other regions. His analysis of the U.S. ‘backyard’—Central America and the Caribbean—is particularly thin. And his handling of Cuban leader Fidel Castro’s role, particularly in Angola, will, I fear, lead readers to erroneously conclude that Cuba was a Soviet proxy. Here the details of timing are crucial to a correct understanding; in late 1975 the Cubans acted without Soviet approval and airlifted their troops to Angola for two months before the Soviets stepped up. Westad compresses this sequence, writing, “The Soviets and the Cubans scrambled to get support in to their allies.... Helped by the Soviets who supplied aircraft and artillery, the Cuban and MPLA response was decisive.” (483; see also 568)

Westad writes in what fiction authors call ‘the omniscient voice.’ He is not polemical. He condemns atrocities (and atrocious leaders) on both sides while maintaining a neutral tone. But he has a point of view, and it is deeply West European. Westad is much more curious about how Communism controlled half of Europe and how it jockeyed with West European social democracy than he is about how the United States exerted its global hegemony. *The Cold War* is more an analysis of Communism—of its potency, perversions, and collapse—than it is of capitalism. Time and time again, he seems to let the United States off the hook. For example, discussing President Richard Nixon’s decision to go off the Gold Standard, Westad writes, “For the first time since 1945 US leaders looked more to their own bottom line than to preserving and integrating the world economic system.” (396) He then adds, “Of course, it could be argued that successive US Administrations had upheld that system, because it first and foremost served the American economy.” (396-97) Yes, indeed: that could be argued. So why did Westad make the initial assertion?

I am not advocating for moral equivalency, but rather for a more vigorous attempt to compare the apples and oranges of U.S. and Soviet hegemony. The latter Westad often suggests in lives lost, particularly in the millions of Soviets and Chinese murdered by Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong; the former requires not only an accounting of the millions of Vietnamese killed in the American war; it also calls for deep and sustained probing into less visible mechanisms of political and economic pressure. The end result of Westad’s emphasis on the horrors of Communist methods of control and relatively light touch when explaining the impact of U.S. military and capitalist hegemony is that some readers may come away from *The Cold War* believing—incorrectly in my opinion—that the United States is an ‘accidental empire.’

My biggest question about *The Cold War* is a function of one of its great strengths: it has an argument. But is that argument valid? Was the Cold War *au fond* an ideological struggle? I am happy that reading Westad’s opus has spurred me to grapple with this big question, but I am not convinced that his central argument holds water.

¹ See, for example: Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1994); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

It works best as an organizing principle in three ways. First, it makes sense when explaining the early Cold War, certainly through Stalin's death and to a lesser degree through the 1960s when the bipolar, zero-sum, 'with us or against us' contours of the Cold War were stark. Second, Westad's discussion of how the world beyond the superpowers was affected by the ideological divide—of how political debates were framed, sped up, and intensified throughout the globe by the war between capitalism and Communism—is illuminating and persuasive. Third, his emphasis on how the existential nature of the ideological struggle blinkered its participants and made them take unprecedented risks is useful.

Nevertheless, as an organizing principle, the Cold War as an ideological struggle strains to contain all the facts. The evidence Westad accrues sometimes overwhelms his thesis.

This is particularly true when we arrive at the 1970s, the decade when all organizing principles collapsed. Westad devotes a very good chapter to Nixon's opening to China, clearly an important event. But how can he explain this breakthrough in the framework of the great struggle between capitalism and Communism? Likewise, the war in the Horn, the Chinese invasion (with U.S. foreknowledge) of Vietnam, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 make very little sense in ideological terms. By the time we get to the 1970s, the center cannot hold.

Westad's conclusion casts doubt on his thesis. When the Cold War was over, he writes, "Most Americans still believed that they could only be safe if the world looked significantly more like their own country and if the world's governments abided by the will of the United States." (617) If this was (and still is) the case, which I believe it is, then, to paraphrase Tina Turner, 'what's ideology got to do with it?' Would not Americans have wanted to spread (or impose) their system globally without a Communist threat? Westad dismisses this point of view out of hand: "those who claim such consistency in the international role of the United States are almost certainly wrong." (619) Perhaps.

The Cold War is thought-provoking, sweeping global history. In it, Westad has attempted an almost impossible feat. He has pushed the limits of narrative. He has challenged me, and his readers, to think more deeply about the role of ideology in the Cold War and, therefore, about the meaning of the Cold War.

Author's Response by Odd Arne Westad, Harvard University

Let me first thank the editors of H-Diplo, Melvyn Leffler, and the reviewers for doing such a wonderful job in discussing the book. I really appreciate that colleagues take time off their busy schedule to appraise my work. The reviews are very encouraging and fair, and I welcome the kind and complimentary remarks that are in them. I have been very lucky with this book, in the sense that almost all reviewers (so far!) have understood what I tried to do: to write the Cold War into the bigger picture of twentieth-century history, and to do so without essentializing the conflict or reducing everything else into Cold War pieces.¹

While not too difficult to write—after all, I have worked on these matters for twenty-five years or more—it was a hard book to conceptualize. How do you present an ideological struggle that has lasted for more than a century in ways that are understandable to contemporary readers beyond academia, many of whom grew up after the Cold War as an international system came crashing down? Though I still wonder whether there are better ways of structuring a book like this, I am reasonably happy with how it came out. Including chapters on Latin America, the Middle East, or India allowed me to discuss aspects of the Cold War that are not usually presented in surveys (certainly not those written in the United States), although these chapters came at the expense of a fully chronological narrative. Including both high politics and popular movements (and perceptions) made it possible to argue not just that the Cold War cannot be understood only from above, but also that those who believe that any account of Cold War history is necessarily a hegemonic attempt at subsuming the social or cultural under the political are gravely mistaken. It will be done better in the future, for sure, not least because the generation of historians coming of age today are so much better equipped methodologically and theoretically than my generation. But, as a summing up, for now, I am fairly satisfied.

Chris Goscha, from whose work on Southeast Asia and global connections I have learnt so much, discusses one issue I would have liked to have dealt with more in depth in the book. This is the degree to which one can meaningfully speak of 'The West' before the post-1945 era. I myself have been all over the map on this. I began writing the book with a strong sense that 'The West,' at least in an Anglo-American form, had been with us for almost as long as the timeframe of the book itself—since the 1890s.² But then I read recent work by Adam Tooze and others and started changing my mind.³ What did have deeper antecedents than the mid-twentieth century was of course a coalescence between parts of Europe and America towards capitalism and global markets. But that affinity is not definitory in social and political terms, as all the history of capitalism

¹ For a better understanding as to why this is necessary, see Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, eds., *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

² For possible origins in the 1890s, at least in terms of discourses, see Benjamin Rhode "The Living and the Dying: The Rise of the United States and Anglo-French Perceptions of Power, 1898-99," DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 2018.

³ Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (New York: Viking, 2014). Work by Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) and Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005) have also influenced my views.

up to today shows very well. If it had been, then Russia, China, and the United States would have been on the best of terms in 2018. I was also struck by how important imperial identities were in Britain and France in the inter-war years, and how these specificities prevented a stronger trans-Atlantic identification.⁴

My old friend and former colleague Jussi Hanhimäki stresses the difficulties there are with characterizing how the Cold War era should speak to our own time—beyond generalities (in which historians are often too happy to take refuge). My sense, which I try to convey in the book, is that although we should be cautious in trading in idioms that summarize any era in too simple terms, we should also be willing to draw broad implications when they are truly important. The fundamental (not to say fundamentalist) belief in ideal solutions that came out of the Cold War (and is still with us), is for me the most significant danger from the twentieth century past. Incrementalism, though un-heroic, often works. Grand schemes for the betterment of humankind tend to come crashing down, with countless victims buried under the rubble. That is a ‘generality.’ But it is an *important* generality for those who read about the Cold War today.⁵

Robert Legvold helped me out when I first got involved in this business, and some of my take on the Cold War is strongly influenced by a project both of us were involved in a good twenty years ago.⁶ His fascinating comments in this round-table include a really important discussion of whether the Cold War constituted an international system, or whether it was an aspect of a bipolar system that also had other constituent elements. I have wondered a great deal about this. The discussion is really about whether the rivalry between the United States and the USSR would have created a divided world anyway, even without an ideology-induced Cold War as one of its aspects.

Legvold and I agree that a forty-year-long highly militarized conflict was not a necessary result of how World War II ended. We also agree that some form of tension between the two ‘superpowers’ was highly likely after 1945. Where we disagree slightly, I think, is on how to best define the bipolar system that emerged. To me, each of the distinguishing qualities of the contest that Legvold lists *in addition* to the ideological conflict actually grew out of beliefs in different ways of organizing society. Each side viewed the other as wholly responsible for the conflict. Tick. Each saw the problem as not merely one of conflicting interests, but of conflicting purpose. Tick. Neither believed the conflict would end until the other side changed fundamentally. Tick. Each disbelieved that areas of cooperation could be more than one-offs. Tick. Each ensured that tensions around one issue would create or add to tensions surrounding another. Double-tick.

⁴ For this, see Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). The Enlightenment, and (worse) ancient Greek constituent elements of ‘The West,’ one has to be even more careful with. The Soviets viewed themselves as having inherited at least as much of that baggage as those from the western parts of Europe, not to mention from the Americas.

⁵ This is the reason why I am more preoccupied with U.S. political than historiographical triumphalism. Frankly, in spite of disagreements in emphasis, I do not see the work of John Lewis Gaddis, for instance, as especially triumphalist: triumphalism is a charge better directed against those who today believe that the United States brought the USSR to its knees through relentless military pressure.

⁶ The Carter-Brezhnev Project, the papers of which are now housed at the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C.

These are reasons why the Cold War, at least to me, seems to have been an international system based on ideological confrontation.

Nancy Mitchell, whose work on the Cold War in Africa is so engaged and engaging, opens up a number of issues that I struggled with when writing the book. Getting the balance between elites and non-elites right in analytical terms is not easy in a book like this. As Mitchell's own book on Jimmy Carter and Africa shows, the U.S. government has to be in focus for a fair amount of time when you write Cold War history.⁷ But you cannot make the White House your focal point for all things, whether you agree or disagree with U.S. policy. It was crucial to me, in writing this book, that other actors had agency, too, even if they were less powerful than Americans. That is not letting the United States 'off the hook.' But it is taking the motives of others seriously. This is the case for Cuba as well. I do not at all believe that Fidel Castro's regime was a 'Soviet proxy' in the Cold War—in fact, I do not find many real 'proxies' anywhere throughout the era. But Soviets and Cubans worked closely together for much of the Cold War, not least in Africa. What Cuban motives were we will only fully understand when that country opens its archives to researchers.

The debate on the Cold War will go on and on for several generations to come. My guess, as I say in the book, is that future historians will gradually become more preoccupied with other seminal developments in the late twentieth century—climate change and the rise of Asia, for instance—as key issues of interpretation and discussion, at least after the effects of the Cold War become less visible. What will remain, I think, are the comparative aspects of that great conflict, seen alongside a number of other international systems in history. That is what current historians of the Cold War have to strive to make clearer, and I am grateful to Leffler and the contributors to this round-table for helping me on the way.

⁷ Nancy Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).