



The Cold War: A World History

Sarah B. Snyder

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Now, labelling the US as an empire has no particular scholarly value or significance. However, Westad's contextualisation of the Cold War in modern world history tells us that the permutations of empire did not end with decolonisation, that the struggle against Soviet Communism was only a stage (albeit a crucial one) in the US search for global influence, and that Western presumptions of superiority remain to this day a key determinant of international (dis)order. How we reconceptualise notions of empire in modern history remains a key scholarly task ... perhaps for the next book.

Federico Romero

European University Institute

 federico.romero@eui.eu  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9221-780X>

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3. Sarah B. Snyder

Few historians have shaped our understanding of the Cold War more than Odd Arne Westad. His extensive scholarship and role in key institutions such as the *Cambridge History of the Cold War* and the journal *Cold War History* have transformed the way historians view the conflict and have inspired a generation of scholars dedicated to exploring the global reaches of the Cold War. *The Global Cold War*, which won the 2006 Bancroft Prize, remains one of the most widely read books on the Cold War. Thus, many readers of this roundtable could fairly question what more Westad might have to say about the Cold War.

Yet with *The Cold War: A World History*, Westad demonstrates that he retains the capacity to upend our existing narratives on the subject. On the first page of his new book, Westad elongates the Cold War's periodisation, arguing that the years 1945 to 1989 mark the 'peak' of a longer struggle between capitalism and socialism. In Westad's view, those years, which many might consider almost the entire Cold War, represent instead 'the prime' of the conflict (p. 1). With this chronological expansion, Westad signals to his readers at the very outset that he has a new conception of the Cold War.

He goes on to explain that he views the Cold War as beginning in the 1890s – a time when he argues capitalism experienced crisis, labour strengthened, and the American and Russian empires expanded geographically. Given Westad's starting point, an alternative reading of his book could be as a story of the rise of the United States to global power as he devotes considerable space to describing the changing role of the United States in the world.

Westad's exploration of the early twentieth century enables him to examine the links between the First World War and the Cold War – and not the conventional connection hinging on the Bolshevik Revolution. Instead, he highlights the generation of political leaders that came of age during the First World War and who all influenced the Cold War in significant ways, including Clement Atlee, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Konrad Adenauer, Joseph Stalin, and Ho Chi Minh. He demonstrates how the war weakened Europe's empires, later facilitating the Soviet Union and United States' emergence as the world's two superpowers. Westad's earlier vantage point also enables him to show that the Second World War, 'set the framework for half a century of Cold War' (p. 43). He argues that war accelerated broader international trends such as the rise of US power.

Thinking of Rosa Brooks' recent book, I feared Westad might end up identifying the Cold War everywhere in the hundred-year expanse between 1890 and 1990.¹ He does not. As Westad put it in his final chapter, the Cold War 'did not decide everything' (p. 627). Westad thoughtfully delineates the intersections and also key points of separation among the Cold War, colonialism, and decolonisation. Similarly, Westad explores the ways in which globalisation and consumerism impacted the Cold War without muddling the different phenomena.

In terms of audience, I wondered if the beginning and end of the book were written for scholars of the twentieth century with the middle aimed more at a popular reader. The latter will certainly be satisfied with this account. For all of its heft (629 pages of text), *The Cold War* reads easily. As we might expect of this prize-winning author, the writing is crisp, and the pace is brisk. The former will find much of value as well. For example, Westad devotes an entire chapter to the Cold War and India, which has not received sufficient attention in existing accounts. In this chapter and elsewhere, *The Cold War* dedicates greater attention to Third World leaders and the distinctions among them than many previous histories of the conflict. Similarly, scholars of the Cold War will welcome his discussion of the different forms of socialism that developed during the Cold War, for example the Vietnamese adoption of Soviet Communism in contrast to Cambodia's choice of the Maoist model. I particularly appreciated Westad's account of Algeria as a site of transnational, revolutionary activism.

A number of other aspects of his interpretation stand out. First, not surprisingly given that Westad has authored a book on the Chinese Civil War, he offers a nuanced and complicated account of Chinese politics in the late 1940s. In addition, Westad productively examines the unprecedented Soviet support for China in the 1950s before Sino-Soviet relations reached a breaking point in the 1960s. Westad, like Columbia University political scientist Robert Jervis, sees the Korean War as central to understanding the world in the subsequent 60 odd years. Jervis, however, focused on the influence of the Korean War to US policy-making, whereas Westad emphasises the Korean War's contribution to Chinese domestic politics and Sino-Soviet cooperation. In his discussion of China and West Germany, readers are treated to considerable economic history and domestic political history. Westad clearly believes that domestic policies influence foreign ones.

Westad sees some elements of the Cold War as unavoidable, including the broad outlines of the competition between the United States and the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe. By contrast, he does not view détente as inevitable, seeing 'real courage' as required to advance that agenda in the 1970s (p. 421). Westad's decision to title his chapter on the late 1960s and 1970s 'The Age of Brezhnev' is notable first for characterising this era as an 'age' of an individual rather than of negotiation, cooperation, or détente, and, second, for choosing Leonid Brezhnev rather than Richard Nixon or Henry Kissinger as that individual. An additional strength of the book is that despite its chronological and geographic sweeps, Westad does not neglect the costs of the Cold War to individuals, for example, quoting the testimony of those who suffered torture in Chile.

Interestingly, Westad locates the end of the Cold War 'around 1990', significantly a year before the breakup of the Soviet Union (p. 4). For him, the collapse of the Soviet Union 'removed the last vestige of the Cold War as an international system' (p. 616). In Westad's view, the Cold War ended at different times in different places. Furthermore, Westad argues that in many ways our understanding of those ends is flawed. For example, he contends that actors in the Global South rather than Eastern Europe drove the global transformations of the late 1980s. Similarly, he asserts that countries such as India and Vietnam were moving away from the Cold War before it ended. Finally, in contrast to triumphalist accounts, Westad notes that the end of the Cold War did not bring peace and prosperity to all regions. In contrast, he argues it led to 'misery' in the

¹Rosa Brooks, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2016).

Middle East (p. 565). Fundamentally, Westad's interest in the end of the Cold War is different than much existing scholarship. Rather than ask why the Cold War ended, Westad is much more interested in answering the question of with what legacies the Cold War left us.

There are, however, several ways in which *The Cold War* could have offered even more to its readers. Midway through the book, Westad broadens his lens geographically. Whereas much of the first half of the book explored the domestic politics and international relations of the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and European powers, in the second half he turns to examining the Cold War in Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia. At this point, Westad shifts to chapters organised by geography rather than chronology, which means that we read about Eisenhower in Lebanon after learning about Nixon's visit to China. Such a juxtaposition may present a challenge to more general readers. Given that the book's structure reveals the author's conception of the Cold War, he might have more explicitly explained this choice and its advantages to his readers. Similarly, the subtitle of *The Cold War is A World History*. For the benefit of his scholarly readers, Westad might have explained what is gained by adopting a world-history approach as opposed to those of international history or transnational history.

Westad's chapter on India hinges around 1971. Although he does not assert this explicitly, the chronological centre of many of his later chapters suggests he sees the 1970s as a key decade for the conflict. Yet, Westad argues that it was in the 1970s that the Cold War seemed 'an entrenched international system' (p. 475). He might therefore have said more about to what extent the Cold War was either 'transformed' or 'shocked' by the decade.

Finally, Westad frames the Cold War as the high point of conflict between two socio-economic systems, 'the market' and 'the plan', but he also writes about the Cold War as a system itself: 'the last great international system' (pp. 2 and 4). In the end, it is complicated to conceive of the Cold War both as a clash of two systems and as a system itself. I wished the author had distinguished between these different uses of the term.

Just as *Global Cold War* reshaped the study of that conflict, broadening its scope in terms of focus, actors, and sources, so too will *The Cold War* redirect the work of many in the field. Seasoned scholars and budding graduate students will similarly be inspired by *The Cold War* to expand the chronological lens of their research or reconsider the conflict in other fruitful ways.

Sarah B. Snyder
American University

 ssnyder@american.edu

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4. Rana Mitter

Disconcerting as it is for those of us who can remember the Cold War clearly, the period has incontrovertibly become history. We who teach undergraduates have had to come to terms with the fact that for today's teenagers, the Soviet Union has about the same sort of meaning as the Holy Roman Empire – certainly real and recognisable, but only as a purely historical phenomenon.

Odd Arne Westad's magnificent, wide-ranging volume *The Cold War: A World History* does justice to this strange period in global history, whose after-effects have not yet been fully absorbed in our own times. Westad's specialist monographs have ranged over a variety of topics within the Cold War era, from the Chinese civil war to superpower interventions in the developing