

The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times

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Orne Westad, Professor of International History and Director of the Cold War Studies Centre at the London School of Economics, has hitherto been best known for his works on China and the Cold War, including *Cold War and Revolution: Soviet-American Rivalry and the Origins of the Chinese Civil War, 1944–6* (New York, 1993) and *Decisive Encounters: the Chinese Civil War, 1946–50* (Stanford, 2003). But he has taught the module on Third World interventions at LSE for some years as he has built up material for the current book, and some of his research in this area has already appeared in shorter works, such 'Moscow and the Angolan Crisis, 1974–76' in the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 8–9 (Winter 1996–7) or 'Prelude to Intervention: the Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists, 1978–9', in the *International History Review*, 16.1 (1994). Those two article titles reflect one of the author's great strengths: his ability to analyse specific historical events in detail, using the latest document releases from the former Eastern bloc, challenging received opinion in the process. In this book-length work he is able to expand upon those detailed case studies but also to look beyond them and draw much wider conclusions about the nature of the Cold War in the so-called 'Third World'. It is a term Westad is happier to use than some other authors because it suggests, like the term 'third estate' in pre-revolutionary France, a group determined to assert itself and find justice. He defines the Third World as 'the former colonial or semi-colonial countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America that were subject to European ... economic or political domination' (p. 3).

What impresses most about his latest work is the way that it exploits not only a broad array of published documents, memoirs, doctoral theses and other secondary sources, but also a range of archives, from the Russian Federation, China, Serbia and Montenegro, Germany, Italy, the United States and South Africa, often with several archives visited in each. The mix of sources in the endnotes is rich and eclectic. This is a genuinely 'international' history that demonstrates a mastery of foreign languages and a willingness to work

on all the continents of the world (bar, it seems, South America) that puts many of the rest of us to shame. Few genuine research monographs are so wide ranging chronologically and geographically, while also trying to absorb insights from sociology and social anthropology. Westad draws on the whole history of the US and the Soviet Union to lay the foundations of their ideological differences and their approach to external intervention, and he traces the impact of such interventions down to the twenty-first century. While the main title of the book may seem misleading in its breadth, the episodes that Westad discusses in detail in the book range from Indochina and Afghanistan, through Angola and Ethiopia, to Cuba and Nicaragua. Inevitably, some of the work reflects previous findings. Piero Gleijeses, for example, has already discussed Fidel Castro's involvement in Angola in *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–76* (Chapel Hill, 2002). But taken as a whole no historian has dealt with the links between the Cold World so fully, so broadly and so thoughtfully as Westad in this new account.

The first three chapters of the book are of an introductory nature, setting out the historical evolution of the attitudes of US, Soviet and Third World leaders to the Cold War world. Tracing US ideology back to the early Republic, Westad argues that the country's beliefs in individual liberty, free market economics and 'progress', led to policies of intervention in East Asia, the Americas and Africa that long predated the Cold War but which became more easy to justify once Communism could be portrayed as a threat. The evolution of American attitudes was far from smooth, taking in as it did the existence of slavery until the Civil War, the virtual destruction of the Native Americans and the creation of US colonies, notably the Philippines. But paternalistic notions of emancipating and 'guiding coloured races' merely served to reinforce post-war agendas of 'nation building' and 'development' in the Third World. As to the USSR, despite Joseph Stalin's apparent scepticism, it developed its own ideologically-driven belief in an agenda of progress and modernisation. While its collectivist, anti-religious and anti-capitalist belief system was very different to the American, Soviet Communism too was a product of the Enlightenment shaped by a sense of exceptionalism, as well as its post-1917 historical experience, into a mission to shape the outside world in its own image.

After 1945 the superpowers found themselves with a sense of destiny, enormous power, an intense mutual rivalry and an agenda that might appeal to Third World leaders, not least because the US and Soviet 'empires' were (supposedly) to be very different in aim to the retreating European empires: 'Moscow's and Washington's objectives were not exploitation or subjection, but control and improvement' (p. 5). As to Third World leaders, they had emerged from decades or more of European exploitation hoping to throw off the remaining shackles of colonialism, create stable new states of their own and build a global agenda based on racial equality, a just international economic system and an end to external interventions. In 1961 (building on the earlier Bandung Conference) Nasser of Egypt, Nehru of India and others created the 'non-aligned movement' to assert their independence of both East and West. But by 1970 all the movement's founders had either died or been overthrown and it had become fractured; many post-colonial governments had been overthrown by the military, the West continued to exert economic domination and some Third World leaders were turning to Marxism as the most promising way forward.

In chapter 4, Westad argues that it was the US that, by then, 'had done much to create the Third World as an entity ...' (p. 157). Its interventions against radicalism in Iran and Guatemala, its support for Israel, its interference in the Congo in the early 1960s and its support for a laissez-faire economic system that effectively kept much of the Third World in poverty, all served to alienate those who had supported the agenda of the non-aligned movement. True, the US was critical of European colonial empires and tried, for example, to extinguish the Dutch presence in Indonesia and the French presence in Vietnam, as well as opposing the British and French over the 1956 Suez expedition. But in some cases, such as Britain's anti-communist campaign in Malaya, the US was ready to prop up colonialism and in all areas the European departure was designed to pave the way for American sponsorship of particular types of regime. Where local leaders were not prepared to follow Washington's agenda (as with Nasser or Indonesia's Ahmed Sukarno) this led to a rapid souring of relations and a tendency of those leaders to turn to Moscow for assistance, at a time when Nikita Khrushchev was more willing than Stalin had been to court support in the Third World. As highlighted in chapter 5 this did not mean a willingness, even from self-confessed Marxist regimes, to behave as Soviet puppets. Far from it: in the 1960s, 'Cuba and Vietnam challenged not only Washington in

defence of their revolutions, they also challenged the course set by the USSR for the development of socialism...' (p. 158). Mao Zedong's China had already paved the way for such independent brands of Communism, criticising Moscow for lacking revolutionary fervour, and while Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh were happy to accept Soviet aid against the US, they were also ready to embarrass the Kremlin in the lengths to which they would go to challenge the West. This was at a time when, in the wake of Khrushchev's overthrow, Soviet leaders had again become more doubtful about backing what were now called 'wars of national liberation'. For a while it seemed that the US still had the upper hand in the Third World, with the mid-1960s seeing the downfall of Sukarno, the consolidation of power in the Congo (Zaire) of General Mobutu and the death in Bolivia of one of the greatest of the new breed of revolutionaries, Che Guevara. But Vietnam, of course, turned the tables, putting Washington on the defensive and encouraging Moscow to revive its engagement with the Third World even as it also tried to develop a policy of détente with its arch-rival.

By the early 1970s events in the Third World were becoming central to the Cold War and Westad's account now enters its most detailed phase. He devotes over a hundred pages to looking at the various encounters that helped bring an end to détente: the Angolan civil war of 1974–6, in which Castro played a major role and where success led Soviet officials to believe 'the world was turning in our direction' (p. 241); the Horn of Africa in the late 1970s, when war between two supposed Marxist-Leninist regimes (Ethiopia and Somalia) alongside growing US suspicion, showed the Kremlin that intervention in the Third World was far from an easy business; and two dramatic events in the Islamic world that spelled difficulties in turn for both the US and USSR – the collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran and the fracturing of the Marxist regime in Afghanistan, culminating in an ill-fated military intervention by the Red Army. In both Iran and Afghanistan the superpowers were challenged from an unexpected and underestimated quarter: the upsurge of a militant form of Islam that rejected both liberal-capitalism and Marxism. But in the 1980s, the focus of Westad's final two chapters, the superpowers remained preoccupied in their competition with each other, the invasion of Afghanistan having destroyed the vestiges of détente. Under Ronald Reagan the US, guided by a 'neoconservative' belief in an aggressive foreign policy yet unable to use its own military forces very easily in the wake of Vietnam, proved ready to work with anyone who opposed Soviet adventurism in the Third World, including the Mujaheddin in Afghanistan, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Pol Pot in Cambodia. After 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev first tried to provide 'right leadership' for Moscow's allies worldwide before withdrawing from the Third World to concentrate on the challenge at home. Helped by an improved relationship with Reagan, the Soviet leader felt confident enough around 1987 to quit Afghanistan and back peace deals in Southern Africa and Southeast Asia, helping bring the Cold War to an end.

A basic element in Westad's argument is that previous historians have tended to focus too much on European issues, seeing US and Soviet interventions in the Third World as some kind of 'afterthought' once Cold War rivalries took off. His case is that, as well as the Cold War having a profound impact on developments in the Third World, 'the most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centered, but connected to political and social development in the Third World' (p. 396, a statement that, at this point, he does not limit to the period after 1974). Some will see this as an exaggeration. While historians may have failed to trace US interests in Africa back early enough, attention has been paid to long-term ideological factors in shaping US policy, and events in Korea, Cuba and Vietnam have long been central to accounts of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s. One good reason why historians have not yet written much on the Third World in the period on which Westad provides most detail, the 1970s and 1980s, is that these decades are only just opening to archival research.

To prove his point Westad perhaps needed say more, not just about why he thinks the Third World was important to the Cold War, but also why Europe and strategic factors were less vital than many believe. The relationship between Third World interventions and the nuclear balance would certainly have been worth exploring. In particular, how far was the Kremlin's willingness to pursue a more forthright policy in the 1970s influenced not only by the Vietnam experience but by the reduced dangers of an American nuclear response after a situation of 'Mutual Assured Destruction' was achieved? Was it not the case that the Nixon administration pursued Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) as part of a process of 'linkage', whereby

the Soviets were to be rewarded with nuclear arms control in return for behaving themselves in the Third World (rather than exploiting America's embarrassment in Vietnam)? As it is, while Westad makes it clear that Moscow never intended the détente process to compromise its support for Third World regimes, nuclear weapons and the SALT process are only mentioned a few times.

Westad's definition of 'intervention' is sufficient for his purposes: 'any concerted and state-led effort by one country to determine the political direction of another country'. But, as he concedes at the outset (pp. 3–4), it is also general enough to cover many more cases of US and Soviet activity in the Third World than those covered in the book. Using a lack of space to excuse this is understandable, yet issues surrounding the notion of 'intervention' need to be explored further in future. There is a particular danger in choosing episodes to suit a particular thesis. Interventions that are covered rather briskly include the US interventions in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and Grenada in 1983, and the US-supported overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile. But to take one example of an episode that is not covered at all: the Nigerian civil war of 1967–70, only a few years after the Congo crisis, saw the post-Khrushchev Politburo making large-scale arms supplies to the government side against the secession of 'Biafra'. Yet the US took a neutral role here, if anything leaning towards the government side, while America's British ally also provided the government with arms. Oddly, the only major power to aid the Biafrans was France. This hardly suggests a simple pattern of intervention in Third World. More could also be said on instances where the superpowers chose not to intervene. Westad himself notes that the USSR was limited in its interest in the colonial world before Khrushchev and rather reluctant to intervene in the Third World in the decade following his downfall. But it is also clear that US Presidents chose not to intervene at times, even when there were good reasons to do so: Truman did not try to save Nationalist China in 1946–9; Eisenhower would not act to prevent the creation of North Vietnam in 1954; Kennedy resisted pressures to intervene in Laos in 1961–2. It would be valuable to know more about why ideological considerations and mutual rivalry did not drive the superpowers into a more forthright policy all the time.

As one would expect from Cambridge University Press, the book is very well presented, including ten maps, ten photographs and five reproductions of posters or propaganda pictures, but the absence of a bibliography is difficult to understand. A list of the major archive collections that Professor Westad has exploited would have been especially useful as a ready reference for what some of the abbreviations in the endnotes stand for: as it is, one has to look back to the first time the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation are mentioned to discover that this is where the documents listed as AVPRF are located. Typographical errors are very few. Greeks might be offended to find themselves included as living in a 'third world' state according to the map on page 116, which also refers to a US intervention in Panama in 1958 that is not otherwise mentioned in the book. Among some inconsistencies, one especially should be drawn out: there are hints (p. 405) that, for all his criticism of the destructiveness of most American interventions, Westad is not opposed to an active policy where this suits a particular agenda: Clinton, it seems, should have done more to tackle poverty, reduce debt and resolve the Palestinian issue. But if so-many ill-fated interventions were driven by the best of motives, why should any US attempt to shape the world along any lines be acceptable? Coverage of the 1990s is also rather cursory, as with the interpretation that the end of the Cold War led to a slackening of the pace of intervention (pp. 404–5). Surely, in Panama, the Kuwait War and Somalia, George Bush Senior had his fair share of interventions and it was the disaster in Somalia, as much as a focus on the domestic agenda, that led to greater caution under Clinton, who nonetheless ultimately became involved in Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo as well as preaching against 'rogue states'. In the last analysis, however, the few flaws cannot detract from the fact that this is a truly seminal work, whose findings will exercise those researching the Cold War for many years.

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