

From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s

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In *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s*, David Reynolds seeks to bring a sense of contingency to existing considerations of the 1940s, 'the most dramatic and decisive decade of the twentieth century' (p. 1). As Reynolds reminds us, neither World War II nor the Cold War was inevitable. The development of both depended on decisions and situations, actions, and reactions in a changing world. Reynolds therefore argues for a nuanced view of the state, contending that, 'The state is not a unitary actor: we need to understand the dynamics of policymaking and the complexities of bureaucratic politics' in order to understand both the behavior of states and the decade's international relationships (p. 4). Nevertheless, the central focus of the book reflects Reynolds's previous work on both Churchill and Roosevelt. As such, multiple chapters explore how the United States and, particularly, Great Britain created, nurtured, and secured their 'special relationship' through a decade of global conflict. Reynolds argues that this relationship was largely the product of British initiative, as British policymakers hoped to use it to retain global influence and national power at a time when Britain's position in the Allied alliance was declining; a decline facilitated in part by the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union. In keeping with this emphasis on British initiative, the book implicitly argues for recognition of Great Britain as an important force shaping the early Cold War, on the basis that the Anglo-American alliance served as a key global relationship in the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, in Reynolds's analysis, the 'special' nature of this relationship has continued into the twenty-first century, continually strengthened and distinguished by the 'historic tradition of Anglo-American liberalism' (p. 330).

From World War to Cold War brings together two decades of Reynolds's work in the form of a collection of

essays, most of which he previously published elsewhere and updated for this re-release. The eighteen essays are divided into six sections, the first four of which focus on World War II, including separate sections on Churchill and Roosevelt. The sections based on each of these two figures offer essays on that leader's personality, leadership style, and wartime goals. This format leads to some repetition, particularly in Reynolds's discussion of the Anglo-American wartime alliance, Churchill's political and diplomatic activities in the early war years, and the birth of the 'special relationship'. Reynolds takes care, however, to link the essays together, particularly by clearly summarizing his main arguments and analyses at the end of each essay.

The fourth section, entitled 'Mixed Up Together', highlights Reynolds's emphasis on the importance of a multilayered conception of the state by looking at Anglo-American interactions below the diplomatic level. He considers Anglo-American wartime connections, such as the growth of American studies in Britain during World War II and the 'inter-attachment' programme that successfully sought to strengthen the daily working relationship between British troops and American troops stationed in Britain by instituting short-term exchange programmes. The British created these programmes with 'considerations of postwar diplomacy' in mind, considering it 'essential that the wartime alliance be perpetuated into the postwar world as one of the foundations of British foreign policy' (pp. 215, 224). Reynolds thus integrates his conceptualization of the multilayered state into his discussion of the creation of the 'special relationship'.

In the next section, Reynolds offers a more limited discussion of the Cold War, focusing on Europe in general and, in particular, on the trilateral relationship between Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union from the dawn of World War II to the division of Europe in 1948; a division that was 'unwanted and unintended' (p. 265). The sixth and last section of the book, entitled 'Perspectives', brings together the main themes that have been explored, while extending Reynolds's considerations of the Anglo-American relationship beyond the 1940s and seeking to elucidate its 'special' qualities. The final chapter offers a review of the discipline of diplomatic and international history over the last twenty-five years, arguing for an integration of the recent 'linguistic and cultural turn' that balances cultural frameworks with a sense of contingency, agency, and causality to avoid cultural determinism (p. 351). Reynolds thus does not investigate every aspect of the Anglo-American relationship but focuses on select inquiries from which he ultimately draws broader conclusions about both the relationship between the two states and the practice of international history.

Although these essays do not all build upon one another in the creation of one cohesive argument, Reynolds connects them by several themes and conceptual approaches that run throughout the book. The first of these, central to Reynolds's conceptualization of the 1940s, is contingency. He devotes several chapters to exploring the figures, circumstances, decisions, and courses of action that determined the nature of both World War II and the development of the Cold War. In investigating the 1940s in this way, it is crucial that the periodization of the work crosses the World War II-Cold War divide. Simply put, things did not have to turn out the way they did. Indeed, an essay entitled '1940: Fulcrum of the Twentieth Century' makes exactly this point, arguing that the fall of France in 1940 'turned a European conflict into a world war and helped reshape international politics in patterns that endured for nearly half a century, until the momentous events of 1989' (p. 26). Germany's military success therefore provided a crucial sense of initiative and momentum to the Axis powers. Reynolds contends that Japan capitalized upon this momentum especially strongly by signing the Tripartite Pact and pushing into Southeast Asia and, later, Pearl Harbor. In Reynolds's analysis, it was after 1940 that the war pivoted away from a stagnant European conflict—and repeat of World War I—to one of global fighting and its postwar consequences, particularly in the form of decolonization. The year 1940 also dramatically changed the parameters of the war within Europe itself as the fall of France not only left Britain standing alone in Western Europe, but made it increasingly clear that victory in Europe would depend on the United States and the Soviet Union. This led to a new centrality for the United States in British strategic thinking while contributing to the 'rise of the superpowers' (pp. 30, 44). As Reynolds states, 'the fall of France, apparently inevitable in retrospect, revolutionized the perceptions and aspirations of most other powers' (p. 44).

The importance of perception, the ways in which these historical actors conceptualized both their own

options and the behavior of other states, serves as another analytical link throughout the work. Exploring British thinking after the fall of France, for example, Reynolds argues that Britain's continued fight against Germany was not a given, but was based on contemporary British understandings of both Germany and the United States. Assessing Britain's chances in the summer of 1940, many British policymakers, including Churchill, were hoping not for total victory but for an acceptable negotiated peace (pp. 96–7). Moreover, British policymakers based their 'decision' to keep fighting on the mistaken belief that Germany's economy was stretched to the limit, ready to be broken by American involvement. Britain thus made the right decision for what Reynolds asserts were the 'wrong reasons' (pp. 97–8). Reynolds seeks to remove the sense of inevitability that surrounds the most discussed events of the early war years, the fall of France and Britain's 'finest hour,' to present a closer consideration of how the war actually developed, based in part on each country's understanding of its own position, options, and capabilities. In discussing the Cold War, he takes a similar approach, asserting that the 'Big Three' wanted to retain an element of wartime collaboration that did not fully dissipate until 1947. In 1947, however, both events, particularly those leading up to the Truman Doctrine and the announcement of the Marshall Plan, and changing perceptions of the possibilities of a collaboration ended this possibility, and 'wartime allies' remained unwilling 'to limit their geological and ideological aspirations,' particularly in Germany (pp. 285–6). For Reynolds, events themselves are not the sole determining factor. Rather, the perceptions and possibilities developed in response to these events determine their impact and effects.

In exploring these linked themes of contingency and perception, Reynolds also takes his analysis in more unexpected directions, particularly through his explorations of language. He devotes several chapters to breaking down key terms used to describe the events of the 1940s, including 'world war' and 'iron curtain.' For Reynolds, the labels applied to events by contemporary actors are central to the process of interpreting these events, of creating the reactions and understanding that are crucial in determining how states and policymakers will move forward, and in the political and ideological process of self-definition. It was Franklin Roosevelt, for example, who most strongly popularized the use of the term 'world war,' seeking to 'globaliz[e] events to prod his countrymen out of their regional cocoon' (p. 19). The all-encompassing sense of the term, however, also illuminated the 'ideological battlelines' between Roosevelt and Hitler, both of whom were 'waging "World War", in fact and in name, for their own ends' (pp. 19, 21). In utilizing a term that conveyed the global consequences of the conflict, Roosevelt and Hitler created a situation where the war was seen and understood as such. 'Ideology' thus 'played a significant role in establishing [not only] the terminology' but also the course of events themselves (p. 21).

Reynolds extends this consideration of the interplay between language and circumstances by exploring Churchill's 'iron curtain' speech. Whereas Roosevelt used the term 'world war' to alter interpretations of contemporary events, Reynolds argues that contemporary events and responses altered the intended meaning of Churchill's speech. For Churchill, the focus of the 'iron curtain' speech was not antagonism between England and the United States on the one side and the Soviet Union on the other, but the importance of a continued close relationship between Great Britain and the United States, for which the postwar position of the Soviet Union remained a crucial context (pp. 259–60). Moreover, Reynolds posits, the rhetorical strength of the term 'iron curtain' has led historians to underestimate 'the remarkable persistence of [Churchill's] wartime optimism about Stalin' (p. 249). This statement exemplifies another central goal of Reynolds's work, namely the importance of distinguishing between myth and history, especially in the figure of Churchill himself. Reynolds advocates a more balanced understanding of Churchill, a Churchill who was far less certain about the possibility of British victory during World War II, and not entirely convinced of the necessity of the Cold War. Nevertheless, in large part due to the responses that the speech received in both the United States and the Soviet Union, this evocative phrase has served as the speech's main legacy, as a rhetorical solidification of global antagonisms which served further to heighten those antagonisms.

Reynolds's considerations of language raise a central question for studies of diplomacy and international relationships, namely the extent to which historians can accept language and terms at face value. Often the decision to use certain terms is as telling as the terms themselves, highlighting the importance of considering diplomatic language in analyzing the reasons behind a specific outcome. As Reynolds himself contends,

these considerations also serve to remind us that seemingly-decisive terms and even moments must be explored in a more nuanced context. In focusing on issues such as language, Reynolds is attempting to fulfill a goal detailed in his introduction, ‘the need to understand Anglo-American relations in a framework of “culture” as well as “power”’ (p. 5). What Reynolds implicitly asserts in his analysis, however, is that culture is not only a framework for analysis but also serves as a form of power. Whether through language, shared liberal values, education, or the military culture of the staging area and battlefield, the higher level of cultural ‘closeness’ that existed between Britain and the United States, developed during the war and in its aftermath, gave the two states a strong connection, indeed a unique relationship, and contributed vitally to shaping the early Cold War.

In seeking to elucidate these ‘special’ qualities, however, Reynolds’s almost-exclusive focus on Europe limits his analysis. Though the fall of France made World War II a global war, the rest of the world rarely figures in Reynolds’s study. Certainly Roosevelt and Churchill were heavily focused on Europe during World War II, but many of the war’s key legacies—the occupation of Japan, the division of Korea, the re- and de-colonization of Southeast Asia, the resumption of the Chinese Civil War, and the changing nature of the British colonial presence in India and the Middle East—took place elsewhere. It would therefore be helpful to consider more fully how these global changes affected Reynolds’s core focus, the Anglo-American alliance, in terms of the context in which it was created and the challenges posed by a swiftly changing world. In doing so, Reynolds could have explored more fully the myriad other places where the United States and Britain worked together during the 1940s, including North Africa and Southeast Asia. This would have allowed him to consider the political and cultural connections between these two nations outside a European locale.

Reynolds’s European focus also leads to a limited definition of both the Cold War and its development. In his analysis, the key moment is the division of Germany, as though the Cold War took shape in Europe and then radiated out to the rest of the world. Although Germany certainly was central in shaping Cold War antagonisms, focusing exclusively on Germany prevents a more complex consideration of the many different, yet simultaneous, ways that the Cold War manifested itself around the world. The book’s narrower focus thus restricts its abilities to present an exploration of the 1940s that places both Europe and the United States in a global context. Although Reynolds subtitles his book an ‘international history’, one of his own essays offers a better description of its contents. Here he explains the book’s true emphasis is to ‘illuminate the wartime Anglo-American relationship and its place in the history of the 1940s’ (p. 331). A broader and more global conceptualization of the 1940s, however, would have helped him in this goal by offering both a more nuanced understanding of the context and qualities of this ‘special relationship’ and its importance to each of these country’s own understandings both of the relationship and themselves vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

From World War to Cold War ultimately functions as an effective summation of Reynolds’s own work, while thoughtfully inserting itself into key debates over the Anglo-American relationship, the development of World War II, and the beginning of the Cold War. Reynolds’s essays rely largely on secondary sources, yet show careful consideration for the existing body of historiography on these topics. In this sense, the book is well suited to scholars aware of the existing debates on these subjects. It is especially effective in discussing the early years of World War II, particularly 1940 and 1941 when the outcome of the war hung in the balance, leaving Roosevelt and Churchill with tough situations and even tougher decisions. Reynolds is thus convincing in reminding us that World War II was the product of a series of perceptions, reactions, and decisions, rather than pre-ordained events. Several chapters—particularly those in the section entitled ‘Mixed Up Together’—also serve as excellent models for those looking to explore how ‘state level goals’, such as a close post-war Anglo-American relationship, are pursued on a variety of levels, often below the level of official diplomatic contact. Finally, Reynolds’s closing essay, which reflects on the development of the study of foreign relations, changing terminologies from diplomatic to international history, and future directions for the discipline, is helpful reading for graduate students seeking to grasp a changing field. While Reynolds’s volume does not stand alone as an international history of the 1940s, nor fully explain the shift from World War to Cold War, it presents a variety of inquiries into the Anglo-American relationship.

Reynolds's book thus serves as a strong reminder that the Cold War world was shaped by alliances as much as antagonisms, ultimately demonstrating the importance of the Anglo-American 'special relationship' as a key enduring legacy of World War II.

The author thanks Professor Miller for her review and does not wish to respond further.

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