RETHINKING THEORY and HISTORY in the COLD WAR

The State, Military Power and Social Revolution

Richard Saull

With a Foreword by Fred Halliday

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RETHINKING THEORY AND HISTORY IN THE COLD WAR

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In the new history of the Cold War that has been forming since 1989, many of the established truths about the international conflict that shaped the latter half of the twentieth century have come up for revision. The present series is an attempt to make available interpretations and materials that will help further the development of this new history, and it will concentrate in particular on publishing expositions of key historical issues and critical surveys of newly available sources.

1. *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, Odd Arne Westad (ed.)
2. *Rethinking Theory and History in the Cold War: The State, Military Power and Social Revolution*, Richard Saull
3. *British and American Anticommunism before the Cold War*, Markku Ruotsila

Dedicated to the memory of my mother,
Jane Irene Saull (1942–87)

Foreword

Richard Saull's work is a vivid example of how, with the conclusion of the Cold War, analysis of this momentous four decades of international conflict becomes more challenging, even as it takes up issues that were debated during the Cold War itself. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, combined with the opening of large quantities of Soviet archives and publication of other materials, have provided a new, creative, vantage point from which to assess the Cold War in general, and its impact on particular regions of the world. Not only do we have a historical ending, and verdict, on that process, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and all that was associated with it, but we also have a mass of new documentary, interview and memoir material from which to address the analysis of the 40-year conflict. Little wonder, perhaps, that, in the words of the American historian John Lewis Gaddis 'We Now Know' about the Cold War in a way that was not possible before.[1]

There are, however, important reasons for questioning such a claim if simply stated, not only because there are many things that we still do not know, but also because there are quite a few things that, prior to 1991, we already did know. In the first place, we hardly need reminding that historical distance does not resolve analytic questions: the very abundance of documentary material and the verdict of history do not, alone, resolve major historical issues, be they the origins of the First or Second World War or the causes of the Russian Revolution. There will, when every archive and memoir is available, be plenty of room for analytic and political dispute on the events of these four decades. Secondly, we should be careful about how much has, in fact, been released and about its historical balance. While the American and Western systems are comparatively more open in general, there is plenty that is kept secret on their side, and the process of disclosure this time around has been even more selective: masses of Soviet material have been released, but in a haphazard and often fragmented manner. Research on Soviet materials relating to Afghanistan, for example, has identified areas where a mass of, often trivial, documentation is available, while material on key periods and decisions is not.[2] Those involved in researching the Cold War based on Soviet materials have encountered many difficulties in this regard. Thirdly, we must beware the temptation to proclaim as 'new' that which was well argued, if on the basis of less

evidence, before 1991. The Cold War, including its Third World dimensions, was much debated while that conflict was still in progress, debate classically falling into an 'orthodox' and a 'revisionist' camp. The shift of perspective after 1991 has not resolved this issue one way or another: on some specific questions, for example, the invasion of South Korea in June 1950, evidence has confirmed an 'orthodox' position, but on others, for example, the role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy-making, or the degree of control exercised by Moscow over Third World allies, it has been the 'revisionists' who would appear to have been vindicated. Those of us who, in the 1970s and 1980s, argued for both these latter propositions, not least in regard to the Middle East, would feel vindicated by some of what has subsequently become more proven.[3]

These questions of analysis are, however, secondary to the much broader issue of interpretation which any straightforward 'We Now Know' approach may confuse. For beyond the history of what occurred, there are, as Saull demonstrates, broader analytic questions that, in the aftermath of the Cold War as during it, remain in dispute and which documentary materials alone cannot resolve. Four of these are of particular interest.

What Was the Cold War 'About'?

The Cold War was a multi-dimensional conflict, in the Third World as elsewhere. It involved, most evidently, a strategic and military competition, which took the form of the nuclear and conventional arms races, and of competition for influence in spheres of control and, outside of Europe where the boundaries were clear, in disputed areas. The Middle East, for example, was certainly an arena for military competition, directly and through rivals, and it prompted several of the nuclear crises of the Cold War. But the Cold War had other dimensions: a competition over economic models, between Western capitalism and Soviet planning, and at the same time an ideological conflict, about the character of the state, involving first colonialism and then the character of independent states. For example, the influence of the USSR could be seen in the ways in which states that otherwise differentiated themselves from the Soviet system nonetheless replicated aspects of the Soviet state model (party structure in the case of Arab Ba'thism in Syria and Iraq, five-year plans in the case of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, state social engineering in South Korea and Singapore).

Conversely, the influence of the Western, particularly US, life-style was felt even in countries that were aligned with the USSR. Personalities also mattered in this most structuralist of conflicts: one of the classic early accounts of the Cold War in the Middle East, Mohamed Heikal's *The Sphinx and the Commissar* is as much about Nasser and Khrushchev as

about global strategic rivalry. Mao, Sukarno, Ho, Nehru and Castro are all figures of this epoch. Different histories will follow from different analysis of what was at stake in the Cold War, as will different analyses of the legacy of the Cold War.

Determinants of International Policy

One of the central issues in dispute in the Cold War, as in retrospect, is that of the factors determining the strategic policies of great powers, be they the USA, USSR, Britain, France or China. In the Cold War itself this was explained by the respective states in terms of their own justifications – security, the support of allies etc. Several of the most important statements of US strategic doctrine were formulated in regard to the Third World – Truman Doctrine, Eisenhower Doctrine, Kennedy Doctrine, Nixon Doctrine, Carter Doctrine and, with regard to Afghanistan, Reagan Doctrine. On the Soviet side, each of its major formulations of Third World policy, from the 'Non-Capitalist Road' to 'New Thinking', shaped subsequent policy. The colonial powers had their own doctrines, but these were less to do with the Cold War more with the extension of strategic (in the British case) and territorial (in the French case) interests. China's policy was determined as much by rivalry with the USSR as by anything else. 'Revisionist' analyses tended to draw attention to the role of corporate interests, on the US side, and to the inner weaknesses of ideology, on the Soviet side. Here the opening of archives has provided much new, relevant, material.[4]

Regional Actors and External Powers

During the Cold War it often appeared as if in the Third World the external powers were the dominant actors, if not the sole ones. The polemics of both sides suggested that those acting in disputed regions, such as the Middle East, East Asia or Africa were under the control of the external powers: hence the language of 'clients', 'agents', 'mercenaries', 'proxies' not to mention 'running dogs', 'lackeys' and 'puppets' of one side or the other. Interstate conflicts and wars within states were cast in Cold War terms. Yet this was, even at the time, far from being the case. Local states often acted independently, if as they sought to draw their strategic patrons into conflict on their side. External states repeatedly found themselves at odds with Third World allies. Two obvious examples where caution is in order: in the Arab–Israeli conflict, the relation of states and 'non-state' actors (the Zionist movement before 1948, the PLO from 1964) to strategic patrons was far less uni-dimensional than polemic suggested; Iran after

1979, but also in some measure before, was an autonomous actor. The same applies equally to communist allies of the USSR – China, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba. Against this will be set the cases where external actors did, directly or more probably indirectly, shape events through coups. Yet here caution would still be in order; even where a clear case of external intervention is evident, as in Iran in 1953 or Chile in 1973, the success requires a domestic ally. It is precisely the lack of such an ally which has bedevilled attempts to oust Saddam Hussein since 1990. Where, for example, this leaves analysis of successive Turkish, African or Latin American coups, all blamed on the United States by their opponents at the time, is an open question.

Variant Histories: Political, Social Economic

The diversity of factors underlying the rivalry of external powers is replicated in the complexity of the Cold War *within* states and societies. Conventionally, the history of the Cold War is a history of states, be they global or regional: a focus on military, especially nuclear, rivalry reinforces this. But there is another history of Cold War that, as Saull argues, pays greater attention, in terms of causation and in terms of long-term impact, to the role of social forces. These would include mass movements of a nationalist, communist and Islamist kind, and also the ways in which the Cold War shaped, but was also shaped by, movements of class structure, of ideology and of revolutionary upheaval within states. In the Middle East, Latin America and East Asia, the role of these forces tended to be underplayed during the Cold War, not least because each was presented by its opponents as under the control of external powers. But the briefest of analysis of the Third World during the Cold War can identify a contrary perspective, moments at which it was upheaval within society that led to change. The Cold War was as much a process of social revolution as it was of nuclear rivalry and crisis. Equally it was the development of class and attitude that shaped the longer-run impact of the Cold War, be it in the consolidation of new statist elites or shifts in ideology from secular to more religious ideologies within the Middle East, or the long-run erosion of confidence among the Soviet elite. A study of this, for this region or any other, would involve looking at the Cold War from below, and from the point of view of state formation, class structure and political culture. The social history of the Cold War invites further attention. It would include a discussion of ideology and political vocabulary, as well as a study of literature.

Wide-ranging as discussion of these issues was before the end of the Cold War, it is now in the aftermath that a more extensive discussion becomes possible. If Marxism was mistaken in the specific way it sought

to place the Cold War in its socioeconomic context, its insistence on the socioeconomic dimension retains its central validity. Richard Saull's analysis is a rebuttal to any simple reduction of the Cold War to its military or strategic dimensions, even as it opens up the debate on how the political, ideological and social dimensions of the conflict can be integrated with them.

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January 2001

NOTES

1 John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
2 Fred Halliday, 'From "Second Mongolia" to "Bleeding Wound": Soviet Decision Making in Afghanistan', *Review of International Studies* (October 1999).
3 Fred Halliday, *Soviet Policy in the Age of Crisis* (Washington: IPS, 1979), reissued as *Threat from the East?* (London: Penguin, 1981).
4 The work of the historian John Kent has, for the British dimension, showed how important strategic colonial interests were, as distinct from Cold War concerns. John Kent, *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War 1944–49* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993); 'Informal Empire and the Defence of the Middle East', in Roy Bridges (ed.), *Imperialism, Decolonization and Africa* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

Series Editor's Preface

Over the past half century, historians and political scientists have developed a long and honourable tradition of speaking past each other in their respective studies of the Cold War. For most historians, the Cold War conflict was about crises and coups, presidents and dictators, strategies and weapons. For most International Relations (IR) specialists, it was about systems, alliances, power and deterrence. Historians, with a few exceptions, tended to deal with the specific; IR people, however, wanted to see the general and comparative. Even when practitioners from the two disciplines reached roughly the same conclusions, tradition prevented them from reaching out across the professional divide and embracing.

The new history of the Cold War has begun to change this pattern, although only gradually and tentatively. The massive amounts of new evidence available from both sides of the former East–West divide have forced both historians and IR specialists to simultaneously re-evaluate their previous conclusions, and in that process they have sometimes sought help from each other. In a few cases they have even sought further afield, and helped stimulate interactions with sociologists and anthropologists on Cold War-related topics. Some of the necessary re-examination of the epoch can now be said – in terms of disciplines – to be transcending those often artificial boundaries that the Cold War concepts of social science imposed. The first volume in this series is an indication of the stirrings created through processes of intellectual cross-fertilization.

The second volume – Richard Saull's present book – is very much inspired by these processes. The intention of the volume is to submit a critique of the Realist-dominated IR approach to Cold War studies, which stipulates that the Cold War was primarily about power and 'national interests' and thereby a continuation – in conceptual terms – of international politics as constituted in Europe since the mid-seventeenth century. On the contrary, Saull claims, the Cold War should be seen as a unique and specific period defined primarily by the conflict between two opposing social systems that emerged with the creation of the Soviet Union in 1917. It is this historical and sociological framework that Saull insists that his IR colleagues take seriously, because if they do not, he asserts, their theories will always lack concrete explanatory power.

This challenge from a Marxist-inspired historical sociology is something

from which Cold War studies stands to benefit. In terms of explanations, one of the main weaknesses of the field – across disciplines – has been an inability to link ideologies and state interests, political rivalries and strategic conflict, domestic systems and international roles. What Saull offers here is an attempt to define the Cold War through establishing the domestic social constitutions of the main protagonists and how these, in different ways, contributed to the militarization and interventionism that characterized the epoch. While acknowledging that there is much we do not know and do not understand about the framework of the conflict, especially at the international level, Saull wants to push the field in the direction of asking broader questions, in the hope of getting more comprehensive answers.

Saull's approach is particularly useful for understanding the internationalization and the gradual transformation of the Cold War conflict. Both, according to Saull, have their roots in the social changes that took place globally and within the superpowers themselves in the latter half of the twentieth century. Externally, the challenge came primarily from revolutionary sociopolitical shifts outside Europe. Domestically, it came from the failure of the Soviet state, mainly because of its authoritarianism, to prevent a re-privatization of the economy and other forms of social interaction.

At the core of Saull's analysis is a willingness to address the key questions of social and ideological *differences* between the contending states during the Cold War. This approach must be welcomed whether one agrees with his conclusions or not. There has so far been surprisingly few overall attempts at constituting these differences as the conflict's chief *raison d'être*, and it is to be hoped that Saull's contribution will stimulate a new preoccupation with such issues within IR, international history and beyond.

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PART II: HISTORY

1

Introduction: What Was the Cold War?

The Cold War as a focus of intellectual enquiry has occupied a rather unusual position within the discipline of International Relations (IR). Although recognized as a distinct period in world history,[1] its theorization, at least in terms of traditional theories, did not recognize it as such. The acceptance of the transformation of world politics that the Second World War and its end produced did not manifest itself in the form of a reconstitution of traditional IR theory. Rather, IR theory sought to downplay the uniqueness of the Cold War, instead subsuming it within a broader history of great power conflict, or limiting it to a discussion of strategic (nuclear) rivalry.

Moreover, even with the intellectual and political excitement sparked by the collapse of the Soviet bloc after 1989, most of the debates surrounding the end of the Cold War did not seek to redraw the theoretical assumptions that had guided the study of the Cold War.[2] This anomaly – the lack of a general theoretical and historical recognition of the Cold War – is the principal concern of this book. The guiding assumption is that reflection on the Cold War within the discipline of IR, particularly after the end of the Cold War, has not fully addressed its historical uniqueness and sociological specificity. The central claim, then, to be outlined in the following chapters is that the Cold War reflected a unique period in the history of international relations that began in 1917 with the emergence of the Soviet Union, a state born of social revolution and constituted by a new form of politics and international relations.

The basic challenge that this book puts forward is founded on a number of issues that tend to characterize existing understandings of the Cold War. The first of these relates to the temporal definition of the Cold War, in particular, the generalization that it began after the Second World War, indeed, that it was a product of the war. This approach tends to overlook any linkage between the Soviet Union of 1917–45 and the USSR after 1945. The problem with this is that not only does it exaggerate the significance of the postwar conjuncture, but it also ignores any continuity in Soviet *and* American international relations, that became *more manifest* after 1945. While the changes produced by the Second World War were important, did they define the origins of the Cold War, or were they a repetition of the *nature* of the relations