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Robert Latham. *The Liberal Moment: Modernity, Security, and the Making of Postwar International Order.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. xiv + 281 pp. $49.50 (cloth), ISBN 0231-10757-9; $18.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-231-10756-3.

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In *The Liberal Moment: Modernity, Security, and the Making of Postwar International Order*, Robert Latham explores the nature and evolution of "forms of social existence associated with the liberal tradition [which] have been intertwined with the military-strategic dimensions of international political life" (p. 4). His study centers on the outbreak of the Cold War, "a superb historical laboratory," in which "Western liberalism experienced its most extensive reach at the same time that security became an especially acute feature of international relations" (p. 4). His argument, simply stated, is that the post-World War II drive to establish "an international liberal order" not only created "conditions and forces leading to the Cold War," but also generated "international political dynamics that shaped the militarization of the West" (p. 4). The militarization of the West, in turn, he claims, rests on "the forging of military relations and power [which] grows out of and is an important element in the political dynamics *internal* to liberal order" (author's emphasis) (p. 5).

Latham sets out his analytic scheme in his Introduction and Conclusion which are the most accessible chapters for non-specialists in global political theory. He seeks to expand the list of "usual suspects" in identifying the causes of the Cold War by challenging the nineteenth and twentieth century axiom that liberalism, in its political, social and economic dimensions, is inherently peaceful. On the contrary, Latham argues, "it was the West's project of international liberal order" and its attempt "to incorporate the Soviet Union within the emerging order ... that led to the confrontation that became the Cold War" (p. 198). The author wants his readers not to be swayed by the feel-good euphoria expressed in Francis Fukuyama's paean to liberalism, *The End of History*, but rather, to be skeptical of any notion of "order" in the international context. Instead, he suggests that the United States should pursue a "foreign policy of the local" (p. 206), modulated by circumstances and self-interest.

The intervening chapters offer denser explications of his argument. Much space is spent on the definition of terms and the elucidation of abstract relationships. Latham weaves a complex story of action, reaction and interaction. For example, he writes that the "international liberal order can be viewed as a potent way for states to or-

ganize the international relations of a complex set of actors which, besides themselves, include peoples, corporations, and international organizations" (p. 121ff). However, he notes, this very organization produces tensions among the various actors, tensions which he then convincingly illustrates by describing Western European resistance to the Marshall Plan (p. 123). The protean character of modernity itself (another of the author's themes) produces a web of intersections that threaten, on occasion, to overwhelm the reader, but the author's penchant for structured argumentation triumphs, in the end, over the myriad complexities he identifies.

In addition, Latham situates his own position *vis a vis* other theorists and historians: Kenneth Waltz, Tony Smith, Hedley Bull, John L. Gaddis, George Kennan et al. The text, in general, reflects a solid understanding of current debates and an impressive mastery of relevant materials.

This is not a text for beginners. As the author indicates in his Introduction, it is an ***interpretation*** of events and ideas. In this regard, I think, it is a success. It is provocative, closely-reasoned, and challenging. The Cold War quickly slipped into a "looking glass" world where the good guy/bad guy explanation seems less and less satisfactory. Latham's thesis that the drive to establish a liberal order (self-defined as peaceful prosperous, non-threatening and based on sovereign states), in and of itself, must be counted as a cause (not, he is careful to point our, as ***the*** cause) of the Cold War is insightful.

On the other hand, Latham's perspective is narrowly focused, perhaps too narrowly focused. Despite the attention paid to "agency" in ***The Liberal Moment***, can an analysis of the origin of the Cold War really afford to minimize Soviet agency? As Tony Judt has recently asserted, "... the Cold War always existed in Stalin's head ... Nothing Western statesmen did or didn't do would have altered that."[1] Despite their reliance on brute force, the members of the Red Army seem just as plausibly potent Cold War harbingers as the liberal, self-fearing (according to Latham), order-builders. Militarization was, as Latham argues, a cheap means of preserving the Western liberal order. Nevertheless, in the liberal West as well as in the Russian-occupied territories, the triumph of Soviet-backed regimes and their accompanying purges framed policy decisions.

Historians of the Cold War will weigh the issue of cause and effect for decades. ***The Liberal Moment*** deserves to be part of that exercise.

Notes:

[1]. Tony Judt, "Why the Cold War Worked," *The New York Review of Books*, 9 Oct 1997: 41.

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