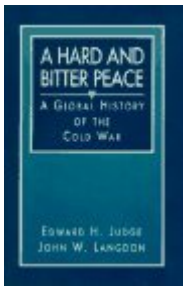
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Edward H. Judge, John W. Langdon. *A Hard and Bitter Peace: A Global History of the Cold War.* Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996. xiv + 338 pp. $17.70, paper, ISBN 978-0-13-234451-7.

Reviewed by Hal M. Friedman

Published on H-Review (December, 1996)

Edward Judge and John Langdon have set out to write a history of the Cold War from an "other-than-us" perspective. In this regard, their book is a success. In eighteen chapters, which start out with the ideological seeds of the conflict before World War Two, proceed into the origins of the Cold War, expand into the Third World, and conclude with its legacy, they have succeeded in providing readers with a general overview of the Cold War and its effects on world history and society in the twentieth century. This book, in fact, could be a reader for undergraduates, including first-year students, because it could provide students who have little or no knowledge of the Cold War with some contextual background.

These positive points being said, this reviewer has many problems with the book in question. It is a *great power* history of the Cold War, but it is not a *global* history of the Cold War. It is, in fact, highly Eurocentric, though the authors have succeeded in breaking away from a strictly US-Soviet rendition of the Cold War. Still, much should have been done differently for the authors to demonstrate their subtitle to their audience.

For example, there are only fourteen pages devoted to the entire ideological basis of the Cold War and the *interwar* events leading up to World War Two. The authors boil the Cold War down to a conflict of European ideologies--capitalism and communism--without exploring the interwar historical context in which non-European leaders, such as Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minn, changed ideologies to fit local situations and made decisions which would drive post-1945 events. Along similar lines, the authors did not explain the historical complexity of the communist revolutions in locations such as China or Vietnam. They could have made it explicit to readers that events in those areas were often driven by local concerns which had little to do with great power interests (p. 181). In essence, fourteen pages (pp. 1-14) is not enough material devoted to explaining the ideological aspects of the conflict or the matter in which interwar and local actions would mold future decisions by political leaders in tense post-1945 situations.

There are other simplifications and unresolved tensions in the book. For example, the authors initially paint the Cold War as essentially an

ideological conflict, but then later reduce it to a great power balance of power issue over Germany alone (p. 51 and Chapter 5)! While I agree that Germany was the most important European battleground of the Cold War to the U.S. and the Soviet Union, I would not agree that the Cold War was strictly about Germany in the early years. Moreover, it would have been helpful to see the authors reconcile the tension in their thesis that the conflict was about the balance of power in the one hand and ideology on the other. Perhaps the conflict was about both.

In terms of events in nations such as China and Korea, there is also much to be revised. In the chapter on the Chinese Communist Revolution, the great powers, not Mao, are again the main actors (pp. 85-99), and although the authors have integrated much of the new research about the Korean War into their book, they have not sufficiently covered this new material. They point out, for example, that Kim Il-sung had to obtain Stalin's permission to launch the attack on the south and that Stalin did not see the attack as a prelude to the Soviet invasion of western Europe, but merely as a "quick and dirty" attempt to unify Korea under communist rule (p. 105). However, they are less than clear, in spite of newly-released Soviet documentation, about Kim's actions to drive Stalin's decision, especially when it came to North Korean preparations for the invasion. The authors have also failed to integrate crucial new material on Soviet military involvement into the account, such as Soviet pilots being stationed along the Yalu River and participating in combat operations against the United States Air Force (pp. 111, 203). The authors also erroneously refer to South Korea as a "democracy" in the immediate wake of the war. There was no democracy in South Korea in 1953 or even the 1980s, just ask the South Koreans (p. 116)!

When dealing with the Third World nations such as Indonesia or India in the 1950s, the authors are correct to point to Khrushchev as the main force in turning Soviet foreign policy toward the non-European world, the US following the U.S.S.R. in that change of direction, and the limits of diplomatic choices imposed by the great powers on Third World leaders. The authors, however, fail to fully capture the nuance of the non-aligned nations opportunities and actions. There is little material, for instance, about how leaders such as Nasser were able to play off the superpowers because of US and Soviet fears about their interests in the Middle East. There is, in other words, little if any analysis of "Third World agency." While the Third World leaders were not running the show, they had more input about what went on during the stage performances than historians used to think (pp. 118-37, 151-56, 229).

Chapter 10, which focuses on the Cuban Missile Crisis, is also less than satisfying. The authors state that "Camelot is dead" but then proceed to tell the reader a very traditional, ***Realpolitik*** story of the Kennedy Administrations handling of the crisis. There is little material about J.F.K. as a Cold War warrior hellion bent on overthrowing Cuba ***after*** the failure of the Bay of Pigs operation. There is no material, for instance, on the Kennedy Administration's plan for a "preventive first strike" against Cuba--long before Soviet missiles were discovered there in October 1962. There is similarly no information on the build-up of U.S. conventional forces in the Gulf of Mexico as early as the spring of 1962, forces which were intended to be used in an invasion of Cuba. Without this information, it is impossible for the reader to discern that Castro may have asked the Soviets for the missiles as a deterrent to perceived U.S. aggression (there's that missing Third World agency again!). Nor is there any exploration that Kennedy's actions during the crisis might have been a foolhardily display of brinkmanship. The authors may not perceive the crisis in these ways, but other scholars (such as James Hershberg and Robert Smith Thompson) have, and their evidence has to be taken into account (pp. 160-64, 170-76).

The authors also get themselves into some trouble when covering post-1970 events. Partially, this rests on the difficulty of dealing with such recent events, especially as new primary sources and historiographical perspectives are being aired in such a fast succession. Still, these other perspectives must also be taken into the overall perspective. The authors are highly critical of Jimmy Carter's human rights polices, as well they might be, but without acknowledging--as Douglas Brinkley has in his recent address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations--that human rights became a cornerstone of American foreign policy after Carter, who was often instrumental in focusing policy and pressuring other nations (including the Soviet Union) to carry out policies more "acceptable" to the U.S. Whether or not practitioners of ***Realpolitik*** like human rights as a foreign policy focus, it has certainly had an effect on the conduct of U.S. international relations in the last twenty years (pp. 238-54).

The authors at least acknowledge the thawing of the Cold War after 1985 to the change in Soviet leadership, and especially Mikhail Gorbachev, and they even provide some fascinating information on Yuri Andropov's reforms, but without documentation, or informations on the reformers of the Brezhnev era (pp. 255-85). Also, isn't there an attitude in the U.S. that the Reagan defense build-up "broke the Soviets?" While I disagree with this thesis, it is a popular one, and should have received some treatment in this work.

Some of the authors conclusions about the legacy of the Cold War are difficult to digest. They claim that the end of the Cold War has brought a "profound" change to international relations. If the Cold War world was based on power relations and ideological conflict, and the post-Cold War world is based on power relations and ethnic conflict, is that such a profound change (p. 286)? It is true that the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and Soviet Union has essentially ended, but isn't there now concern about the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons ***beyond*** the superpowers (pp. 300, 309)? Finally, and most horrifically, there is no lengthy discussion of the damage that the Cold War did to the U.S, especially in an economic sense (p. 314). There is no discussion of the U.S.'s continued addiction to high defense budgets, of the environmental damage caused by its military production, or of the similarities between U.S. and Soviet military industrial complexes on resource allocation, political choices, and militaristic value systems. In fact, this global history of the Cold War only included one paragraph about the effect of the Cold War on the domestic cultures, attitudes, and mindsets (p. 71)!

There are also numerous "minor" points which cannot be ignored by readers. There is no documentation or historiographical explanation of the Ribbentrop 1943 peace feeler to the U.S.S.R. Is this a newly-declassified document? Was southern Sakhalin island really a Yalta territorial concession to the Soviets or merely a case of the Japanese being deprived of an imperial possession (p. 28)? Did U.S. advisers really try to separate military and political decisions, or, as Mark Stoler demonstrated from primary sources nearly twenty years ago, did postwar policy consider them one in the same (pp. 31, 71)? Could U.S. and U.K. goals for post-war Europe be dealt with similiarly when the two nations had such entirely different visions for a postwar world (pp. 38, 54)?

The authors make other one-sided claims throughout the book. Was Germany really to blame for World War One? For historians to convey this outdated thesis in 1996 as an historical fact is a travesty (p.51). Were the Soviets all that aggressive in Eastern Europe after 1947 or was it a "measured" response by Stalin in response to the threat of the Marshall Plan (p. 69)? In a related manner, wasn't the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan a strategically defensive attempt to maintain the Soviets "Brezhnev Doctrine" in Eurasia? The issue is never really explored by the authors and the invasion is merely seen as "Soviet

aggression" (p. 257). Clearly, Stalin was a paranoid figure, but wasnt the U.S. political scene in the 1950s fairly paranoid itself (pp. 113-14, 116)? Why do the authors fail to mention U.S. involvement in the overthrow of Allende in Chile in 1973? Wasn't the C.I.A. somehow involved in that event (p. 228)? Shouldn't the authors have made more explicit the fact that Nixon and Kissinger knew before the U.S. signed the 1973 Paris Accords that North Vietnam would violate the agreement to conquer the South? Was the North's Invasion therefore an unforgivable aggression, or was the whole situation merely the result of a U.S. sell-out of the South (p. 236)? These complexities are simplified by the authors rather than nuanced, and the result is that the communist nations seem "bad" in all of these affairs while the U.S. and its allies shine more brightly. Certainly, post-Cold War history of the Cold War can get beyond this simplistic, "realist" perspective.

Finally, while there is a select bibliography, there are no footnotes. While I would *consider* having undergraduates read the book, I would be leery because of this lack of footnotes. For too long, authors and editors have assumed that readers, especially students, do not need to investigate sources as professional historians do. That mindset, however, is a fallacy, especially in a book covering an ever-changing historical topic such as the Cold War. Documentation is absolutely necessary. Perhaps the authors were prevented from providing footnotes by their editor. Regardless of the case, in any revised edition of the book, I would urge the authors to include complete footnotes, at least if they can convince the editors of such value.

Again, if instructors and readers understand the shortcomings of this book, it could be a valuable book. It certainly breaks out of a strictly U.S. perspective and provides the reader with a great power view of the Cold War. It is not, however, a global history of the Cold War, it is highly deficient in its coverage of the non-western and communist worlds, and it has much of the great power history inaccurately portrayed.

Citation: Hal M. Friedman. Review of Judge, Edward H.; Langdon, John W. *A Hard and Bitter Peace: A Global History of the Cold War.* H-Review, H-Net Reviews. December, 1996.

URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=754