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The historian David Wattnoted in 1984 that "since the 1970s Anglo-American relations, considered entirely by themselves, have ceased to be very important or very interesting."[1] James E. Cronin’s latest book, *Global Rules: America, Britain and a Disordered World,* has surely repudiated such an assessment. In a sweeping analytical narrative Cronin has delivered a first-rate work on how American and British domestic and foreign policy has helped to shape the international system to the extent that the promotion of human rights, the commitment to free trade, and the advance of liberal democracy can now be considered to be "norms" of international society. This central thesis is cleverly argued throughout nine separate chapters which are based upon Cronin’s extensive reading of the secondary literature and primary source material from government documentation from both sides of the Atlantic. The incorporation of oral history interviews with some of the former key policy-making protagonists (largely former British ministers and civil servants) further complements the impressive research basis that forms *Global Rules.* The endnotes run over thirty-five pages and are not limited to simply providing the necessary bibliographical or archival citation. It is within the endnotes that fuller explanations about historiographical nuances are explained and the opinions of a number of interviewees are provided. Thus, for the aficionados, the endnotes of *Global Rules* are essential reading.

What becomes readily apparent throughout the first two substantive chapters of *Global Rules* is that the United States was in almost continual disagreement with its main allies as it struggled to extricate itself from the Vietnam War and tackle the dual challenges of monetary reform created by the instability of the dollar and international energy challenges spawned by the Arab oil embargo of 1973-74. Cronin’s assessment here complements the arguments found in the growing body of literature that has recently been produced on Anglo-American relations in the era of détente.[2] Where Cronin sets his study apart, however, is in the extended analysis of how domestic economic policy in both the United States and Britain evolved during this period away from broadly Keynesian conceptions of economic management to ones dominated by monetarist theories associated with the ideas of University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman. Cronin then demonstrates how these domestic policies translated into the international sphere and had a profound impact upon the structure of international relations in the next two decades.

Whilst the relationship between the United States
and Britain was often strained, subtler cooperation in regards to the promotion of human rights and international economic liberalization persisted. Cronin highlights throughout chapters 4 through 6 how Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher worked in tandem (though not always harmoniously) to ensure that their vision for global governance became central to international institutions. Such was the success of these policies that by the time the Cold War ended, “the collapse of the socialist alternative was clearly a victory for the advocates of markets and democracy and a massive defeat for the other side in the great debate of the twentieth century. It was in particular a vindication of the vision that Thatcher and Reagan had articulated during the final decade of the Cold War” (p. 180).

In the final two chapters Cronin analyzes how Europe was re-created along the contours of the norms that had been championed by the United States and Britain during the 1980s. Cronin therefore explains how the administration of Bill Clinton and the British government of John Major attempted to lock in the promotion of international free trade, liberal democracy, and human rights as new international organizations emerged to underpin the new global order. But events in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Somalia, Haiti, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe ultimately undermined such efforts. In each case, Cronin identifies how the new international organizations promoted by both the United States and Britain failed to prevent sectarian violence, civil war, or genocide. The United States and Britain failed to stop the violence because of a mixture of domestic constraints coupled to a perceived lack of strategic and economic interest to engender suitable domestic or international cooperation to overcome these problems. Anglo-American cooperation was decidedly lacking in each of these scenarios. Anglo-American cooperation would, however, become rejuvenated once Tony Blair became prime minister in 1997 (through 2007) as both Washington and London emphasized the need for humanitarian interventions. Such was the success of this joint strategy that by 2005 the United Nations General Assembly formally approved the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect, which has its origins in a united Anglo-American vision of promoting international human rights.

There are some quibbles with some of Cronin’s argument and certain interpretations. Perhaps, for instance, Cronin exaggerates the extent to which the former Soviet states in Eastern Europe had no alternative but to assume liberal democratic principles following the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, maybe the level of political coercion exercised by Washington against London is played down too much, especially with regard to the Richard Nixon-Henry Kissinger-Gerald Ford era.[3] Likewise, the section on the International Monetary Fund crisis of 1976-77 omits some important points such as the British government’s flirtation with scrapping its strategic nuclear deterrent, Polaris. Nor does Cronin mention the fact that the Ford administration seemed to be prepared to abstain from providing economic assistance to Britain even if it led to the fall of the James Callaghan government. Evidently there were limits to just how “special” the Anglo-American relationship was during this era, which perhaps Cronin could have more thoroughly inspected.[4]

Global Rules is, however, less concerned with the minutiae of Anglo-American relations and squarely focused on the global ramifications of US and British foreign and international economic policy. Global Rules advances an original and challenging thesis which, as all good books should do, makes one think critically about the subject they are reading about. Global Rules should therefore be required reading for students of Anglo-American relations and international economics, those interested in the interplay between domestic and foreign policy and how domestic policy in the United States and United Kingdom influenced one another, and scholars and students of international relations. Global Rules should also be read by those concerned with the apparent growing chaos in the world today as the “Atlantic Rules” conceived by the United States and Britain are challenged by China, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and a resurgent Russia. If history can serve as any guide to policy, policymakers would be well served to read Cronin’s Global Rules.

Notes


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