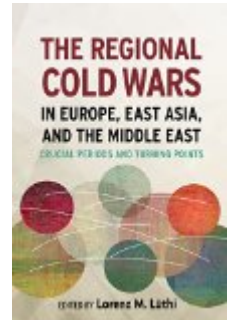


Lorenz Lüthi, ed.. *Regional Cold Wars in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East: Crucial Periods*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. 416 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-9285-1.



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The Regional Cold Wars is an edited volume published as part of the Cold War International History Project Series run out of the Woodrow Wilson Center. It merits the attention of scholars for its perceptive lines of reasoning and keen insights into the ways in which regional cold war theaters in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East intersected with each other and with the broader superpower conflict. The editor, Lorenz M. Lüthi, has put together a volume that both expands and complicates our knowledge of the Cold War and its constituent parts.

The volume benefits from a tight chronological, geographical, and thematic focus. First, it advances the argument that four periods within the Cold War comprised critical moments for the development of that international system that both captured its fundamental dynamics and brought about important adjustments that helped to set new vistas: 1953 to 1956, 1965 to 1969, 1978 to 1983, and 1986 to 1991. Second, the volume homes in on case studies of “the regional cold wars” in specific places in Europe, Asia, and the Middle

East for each period. Finally, Lüthi asked each contributor to discuss lateral links among the regions and vertical connections between regional actors and their superpower counterparts.

Lüthi describes this as a patently mid-level approach that lies between “the systemic Cold War” and the “subsystemic cold wars,” a focus that he hopes will build on previous work to continue to “erase borders in the mind and on the ground” (p. 4). The volume succeeds in this broad objective because its contributors explore many different connections between levels, over space, and across time. The benefits of such a methodologically rigorous focus are evident in a number of cases as the contributors make interesting and important connections between the system and the subsystem, as well as among the subsystems.

The chapters on the Middle East, for example, are excellent. The first, by Jovan Čavoški, analyzes the origins of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser’s “so-called Arab positive neutralism,” which Čavoški sees as an ancillary “brand of non-

alignment,” in the struggle by Egypt to exercise its independence in the early 1950s (pp. 88, 89). Using original research in Yugoslav/Serbian and Chinese archives, as well as published collections in English and Russian, Čavoški reminds historians of the influence of the example set by Yugoslavia’s Josef Broz Tito. He does this by examining how Nasser exercised Egyptian independence to open the Middle East to other outside influences, in particular to the Soviet Union and, in order to prevent Egypt from becoming a “bargaining chip” in the superpowers’ negotiations, to the People’s Republic of China (p. 98). Čavoški then links these events to the now-familiar story of the Czech arms deal, the recognition of China, Nasser’s meeting with Tito and Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru in Brioni, and the decision by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to cancel American financing for the Aswan Dam. After explaining the international response to the Suez invasion, he concludes that “the unexpectedly swift ending” to the crisis, in which the United States worked closely with Afro-Asian countries in the United Nations, was a major victory for Nasser’s and Tito’s brand of neutralism (p. 102). In short, multilateral support for Egypt after Suez was just one part of a broader network of relations between Egypt and actors in Europe and Asia that gave Nasser the ability to “open the doors for everybody, breaking the foreign monopoly and isolation, expanding opportunities for cooperation, and enabling historical giants ... to actively compete for Arab favor and influence” (p. 103).

The second chapter on the Middle East, by Guy Laron, again uses multilingual research in Arabic, Czech, and Russian to explore the links between that regional cold war and the others, this time in the late 1960s. He arrives at a similar conclusion about “the agency of so-called smaller powers in the economic South”: the story of inter-Arab disputes is one in which different regional actors attempted to use conflicts from the other regions, namely the Sino-Soviet split and competition between East Germany and West Germany, to

shore up their own power (p. 170). Nasser again plays a key role, this time in his failure to reassert his leadership in the Arab world by creating a consensus against West Germany’s 1964 decision to supply arms to Israel and 1965 recognition of Israel. Most interestingly, Laron’s chronology points to the influence of the growing West German market on oil-producing Saudi Arabia and Libya, whose leaders continued to sell oil to Germany despite recalling their ambassadors. Similarly, he argues for the influence of the Sino-Soviet split in luring an unwilling Nasser into the June 1967 war with Israel. The chapter is particularly attentive to the domestic politics in Syria, where the competing factions of the neo-Baath regime in Damascus tacked between the Soviet Union and China in an increasingly volatile internal struggle that abetted greater pressure for action against Israel under the concept of “the popular war of liberation” (p. 178). This led Nasser, who told a Syrian delegation that “your talk about a popular war does not suit this time and place,” to try to reign in the Syrians through a mutual defense pact (p. 179). But instead of calming tensions, according to Laron, the disjuncture between Nasser and the Syrians helped set the scene for the Six Day War, as an emboldened Damascus began to encourage the al-Fatah movement to intensify its guerrilla campaign at the same time as Arab radio stations egged Nasser on by proclaiming Egypt’s feebleness with regard to Israel.

In the third chapter on the Middle East, Craig Daigle examines the major events of 1979: the rise of the Islamist regime in Iran, the Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel, and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which “launched a long and bloody war” that took the lives of more than one million Afghans and displaced another five million more to neighboring Iran and Pakistan (p. 246). For him these events together led, in just ten months, to a transformation of the primary conflict in the Middle East from an Arab-Israeli axis to an Islamist-secularist one. Daigle pays close attention to how the Soviet Union and the

United States tried to adjust their policies to these quickly changing regional realities. In particular, the Soviet Union was “desperate to maintain its sphere of influence in the region” (p. 256). The Politburo approved the provision of between \$350 and \$450 million in aid and \$1 billion in weapons help fight Islamists in Ethiopia beginning in 1977 and, more importantly, in December 1979 decided to invade Afghanistan. At the same time, Daigle notes that the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the turmoil in Iran provided Saddam Hussein with a chance “to fill the vacuum” in regional politics, an opportunity he took advantage of beginning on September 17, 1980, when he theatrically ripped apart the 1975 Algiers Accord with Iran on television and sent 50,000 troops across the border (p. 254). The rise of Iraq as a regional power and the Soviet push into the Horn of Africa and then Afghanistan led the United States to reassess its strategic position in the Middle East. The result, according to Daigle, was that President Jimmy Carter’s administration fast-tracked National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski’s new Persian Gulf Security Framework, an expansion of the United States’ military and strategic presence that set the immediate precedent for the creation of the US Central Command in 1983 and the wars in Iraq in 1990 and 2003.

It is common for reviewers of edited volumes to introduce a caveat about the uneven quality of essays in collected volumes. Fortunately, this is not the case here. The close examinations of the sort of interconnections described above pay equally high dividends for the regional cold wars in Europe and Asia. While there is not space in this review to discuss each of the nineteen essays, readers should note that these contributions also are of high quality, as are the conceptual essays introducing each section by Christopher Goscha, Andrew Preston, David Welch, and J. Simon Rofe.

In fact, the overall analysis of *The Regional Cold Wars* is most interesting in these short introductory essays, which attempt to describe how

system-wide changes in the Cold War set the context for the intra- and interregional interactions. Here, Lüthi might have pressed the regional contributors to more unequivocally address some of the key themes introduced in those essays. For example, Goscha reminds us that, for the period from 1953 to 1956, “it is worth asking what might have been some of the wider, deeper, *longue durée* historical shifts that formed the backdrop” of the reconfigurations that took place (p. 42). Of particular importance for him is decolonization and its intersection with the Cold War in the global South. This “explosive mix” led to the violent Korean War, which in turn led some states to turn to a neutralist position, some to an alliance with the United States, and others to join the Eurasian communist bloc. Yet there is not enough explicit discussion in the regional chapters of decolonization as a broader historical phenomenon that, as Goscha suggests, “afforded some new opportunities, closed off others, and realigned regional relations across the South” (p. 43).

Similarly, Preston argues that unprecedented pace of technological change caused a broader development in strategic thinking at all levels “of the systemic Cold War” in the second half of the 1960s, represented most clearly in the United States by a movement away from geopolitical thinking and towards “geo-economics” (pp. 111, 112). As détente slowly came to characterize systemic Cold War tensions, US policymakers recognized the rising intensity of conflict in subsystemic relations, even as they came to understand their inability to control those conflicts. In short, crises largely independent from the systemic Cold War ended up co-opting the superpowers even as difficulties within each set of Cold War alliances frustrated attempts to lead from Washington and Moscow. This set of dynamics resulted in what Preston describes as “the growing strength of multipolarity” and a decided “weariness with the systemic Cold War” (pp. 114, 115). At the same time, all parties faced the onset of the most important economic shift since the Industrial Revolu-

tion: the rise of the new postindustrial economies in North America and Europe, which initiated the boom of globalization that lasted into the twenty-first century. This wider context again raises questions that the other contributors might have explored more fruitfully. What was the relationship between regional diplomacy and economic policy? How exactly did economic policy shape or limit the options available to diplomats? Likewise, how did different power and investment currents shape deindustrialization in the global North and, as Laron has argued recently, programs of industrialization in the global South?[1]

More broadly, these questions point to the messiness of the links between Lüthi's systemic and subsystemic levels. That the volume's lattice-work emphasis on so many overlays and intersections tends toward the blurry raises one of the most interesting problems in the study of the Cold War. Lüthi is undoubtedly right that the history of twentieth-century international affairs cannot be easily divided into one world inside the Cold War and another outside of it. But at the same time the stories told in each chapter could easily be interpreted in a different light: the histories of national and regional experiences in the crucial moments of the Cold War often reveal more ruptures between and within the systemic and subsystemic cold wars than they do connections.

That invites a second, deeper observation about the place of the extended, dissected, and byzantine Cold War in international history. If scholars preserve a common understanding of the Cold War as an ideological, socioeconomic, and security conflict that, over time, expanded outward and became more diffuse, we risk thinning our notion of the conflict as a unified field of study. To put it bluntly, is this rigorous decentering of US-Soviet antagonism in Cold War scholarship the expansion of the study of the Cold War? Or, given the trend away from centralization, has this become the study of a period we should no longer call the Cold War era?

Some historians have argued that these questions point towards the inchmeal obsolescence of the Cold War as a guiding framework for diplomatic history. But the work of Lüthi and his contributors show the definite benefits of using the Cold War to try to understand a world that was at once interconnected and fragmented. Different webs of mutual influence and power in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East were wrapped up in the Cold War, as the many chapters in the book reveal. The descriptions of how Cold War perceptions of threat and interest interacted with these distinct and far-reaching processes of change are thoroughly researched and sharply described. It is for this reason, more than anything, that the volume's object of forging a systemic inquiry into the Cold War is laudable.

Lüthi merits praise for producing a volume that will encourage others to think precisely about how the trajectory of change—systemic, subsystemic, or somewhere in between—pulls in different directions. Only by attempting to put these parts together, rather than viewing them as singular, isolated events, can we understand the depth, pathos, and limits of the Cold War as an historical period and as a framework of analysis.

Note

[1]. Guy Laron, *Origins of the Suez Crisis: Postwar Development Diplomacy and the Struggle Over Third World Industrialization, 1945-1956* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

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