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Book Review


Based inter alia on use of hitherto unused archival materials, the book synthesizes influencing today’s politics developments in East Asia during the Cold War, focusing on the periods of 1945-56 (the beginning of the Cold War), 1956-73 (multipolarization), and 1973-91 (détente, the New Cold War, Gorbachev’s Perestroika) consisting of a scholarly introduction adding toward balancing of the US policies with regard to the SU, China, Japan, South Korea and North Korea, and on Southeast Asia, including Vietnam and the relationship between the Vietnam War and the East Asian Cold War (Hasegawa), and eleven thematic chapters written by historians on interrelations between the quadrangular powers, Seoul, and Pyongyang, mostly focusing on the SU policies and strategies toward the West and Asia through specific areas such as the Chinese Revolution, the Korean War, the Sino-Soviet conflict, the US-Japanese relations, the territorial dispute between the SU and Japan, the strategic triangle (Westad, Gaiduk, Jian, Lee, Shimotomai, Lüthi, Togo, Hasegawa, Brazinsky, Zubok, Radchenko).

Odd Arne Westad writes in chapter 1: “Struggles for Modernity: The Golden Years of the Sino-Soviet Alliance” about statebuilding by the Chinese leaders during the Sino-Soviet alliance (1945 up to some point in the mid-1960s) focusing on the beyond Western imperialism and corrupt Chinese traditions through four key areas – military organization, education, urban planning, and minority policies, stressing China’s search for modernity. Westad demonstrates how the alliance with China “established Moscow as the centre of global anti-hegemonic system of States” (p.35) and how the Soviet model for modernity that was a political example for the Chinese Communist Party’s understanding of modernity, served dual and often contradictory purposes – “plan” and “leap” that “increasingly clashed each other in 1950s China” (p.36).
Ilya Gaiduk discusses in chapter 2: “The Second Front of the Soviet Cold War: Asia in the System of Moscow’s Foreign Policy Priorities, 1945-1956” that while at that period the SU stood in the background focusing mainly on Europe, communist China after the Korean War moved under Stalin at the forefront of the Asian communist movement, finally challenging the supremacy of the SU. Gaiduk supports the view of the historians who identify the years 1948-50 as the starting point of Asia’s transformation of the Cold War.

Chen Jian argues in chapter 3: “Reorienting the Cold War: The Implications of China’s Early Cold War Experience, Taking Korea as a Central Test Case” that although the global Cold War has been characterized as confrontation of the US-SU and their allies, in several key aspects China’s position has been central, included regarding the Chinese Revolution as a defining moment for the structure of the global Cold War. Jian demonstrates how Mao’s policy “redefined ideology” (p.92) excluding realpolitik, how the Korean War changed the management of the SU alliance more difficult, and how China’s “Korean War-centred” early Cold War experience helped the Cold War remain “cold”.

Steven Hugh Lee approaches in chapter 4: “Military Occupation and Empire Building in Cold War Asia: The United States and Korea, 1945-1955” a certain period in South Korean history in novel ways - as extended dual American occupation, contrasting the occupation’s first phase 1945-1948 with its second phase 1950-1954. Lee also contrasts American occupation with formal colonial rule; and refers to a change in the US policy after the Korean War – Korea which in 1947 was peripheral to American strategic thinking became “a frontline state in the containment strategy” (p.116) of the US by 1953, and by 1958 the US had positioned atomic weapons on the Korean Peninsula.

Nobuo Shimotomai examines in chapter 5: “Kim II Sung’s Balancing Act between Moscow and Beijing, 1956-1972” how Kim II Sung used the ever-deepening Sino-Soviet split and balanced between the two “Big Brothers” (p.123) “leaning toward one side at the expense of the other depending on the circumstances” (ibid.) motivated by nationalism, aiming at consolidating his own foreign policy and his power expecting to win also the real and potential domestic power struggle. Allegedly such was the case with the confederation with South Korea formed in 1954, 1960, and 1972, the alliance treaty with the USSR in 1961, and the Declaration on the Confederation with the ROK in 1972 never abandoning the goal for unification.

Lorenz Lüthi reflects in chapter 6: “Chinese Foreign Policy, 1960-1979” the analyses of the reasons for the that period’s shift in China’s foreign policy development from that of a pariah nation to a respected world power focusing on ideology and modernization, covering the conflict between revolutionary and modernizing impulses that by 1966-76 had led the State to international political isolation and global economic integration, China’s rapid emergence in international relations from 1968 to 1972, and the success of modernization.

Kazuhiko Togo examines in chapter 7: “Japan’s Foreign Policy under Détente: Relations with China and the Soviet Union, 1971-1973” firstly, Prime Minister Sato Eisaku’s intention to overcome unresolved issues from WW II by seeking rapprochement with China (diplomatic relations with mainland China) and the SU (conclusion of a peace treaty with the SU,
diplomatic relations) illustrating that with Nixon-Kissinger rapprochement with Beijing without consulting Japan as quest for geopolitically superior-oriented US-China foreign policy independent of Japan (Nixon shock); and secondly, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei’s attempt at independent of the US foreign policy, culminating with establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and China that required solving the important issues of the status of Taiwan and the US-Japanese Security Treaty, but also failure of Japan’s rapprochement with the SU.

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa examines in chapter 8: “A Strategic Quadrangle: The Superpowers and the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1977-1978” the changing relations between the US, Japan, the SU, and China, and thus the Cold War’s structure in the light of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship (PFT). Arguing that Japan had no other alternatives than it chose, Hasegawa demonstrates that although with the PFT Japan established foundation for further expansion of economic relations with China by accepting the hegemony clause, “it failed to maintain an omnidirectional foreign policy” (p.15) manoeuvring between “entente with China against the SU and contributing to the crisis of détente” (ibid.).

Gregg Brazinsky explains in chapter 9: “Korea’s Great Divergence: North and South Korea between 1972 and 1987” contrast between Korean versions of capitalism and communism - how from the similar stage of economic development interactive South Korea rapidly developed into modern economics at the time when North Korea became gradually more dependent on Soviet and Chinese assistance and economically stagnant, indicating the difference in reaction of the two Koreas to the economic challenge of the 1970s – while South Korea used Japanese credit and capital, followed the new global capitalism’s effective development strategy, North Korea remained isolated from the entire global economic system.

Vladislav Zubok describes in chapter 10: “Gorbachev’s Policy toward East Asia, 1985-1991” Gorbachev’s contribution to Soviet security and peace through his inconsistent, gradualist, conservative, primarily security-oriented, impressive, and lasting approach to Asia, referring to Gorbachev’s Vladivostok speech revealing Gorbachev’s intention to initiate a new Asian policy, still not proposing common Asian house while referring to common European house. While Zubok argues that Gorbachev’s policy toward Asia remained only a secondary priority after his US and Western European policy, he demonstrates how Gorbachev was active and achieved rapprochement with China thus ending the Sino-Soviet conflict, still failing to accomplish reconciliation with Japan.

Sergey Radchenko demonstrates in chapter 11: “Inertia and Change: Soviet Policy toward Korea, 1985-1991” confronting the US and its allies (named “Washington-Tokyo-Seoul axis” at p.290) Soviet policy toward the two Koreas during the perestroika period - how North Korea became more isolated, and how Soviet interests in South Korea improved in 1988 under Nordpolitik as “a kind of a South Korean version of West Germany’s Ostpolitik” (p.297). Radchenko distinguishes between Gorbachev’s liberal policy (indicating even its ad hoc nature at p.305), and the Soviet military and KGB that allegedly influenced the Foreign Ministry headed by Eduard Shevardnadze.
Considering the following issues crucial but not sufficiently covered in this book, Hasegawa himself also explains the shift in the end of 1950s marking how China become the US’s most dangerous enemy instead of the SU, and the developments toward American War against Vietnam, how Johnson viewed North Vietnam as China’s proxy although he moved toward an “open door” policy toward China, how Nixon and Kissinger played of the “China card”, Carter’s and his security adviser Brzezinski’s China policy, Reagan’s pro-Taiwan policy, and how Gorbachev’s perestroika challenged the US. With regard to the Vietnam War and its aftermath Hasegawa stresses their tremendous impact on the dynamics of Cold War in Asia, posing a question of how did the US place its role in Vietnam in the overall context of the Cold War in East Asia and its global strategy?

Generally, Hasegawa introduces the Cold War as a global conflict between the SU (“the East” or socialist side) and the US (“the West” or capitalist side) - as a contest recognizable also as the primary front in structure of the NATO and WPO, division of Germany and its capital Berlin, and division of Europe generally, as the secondary front in divisions in Asia in Korea and Vietnam (but also the Kurili Islands), as the tertiary front in the developing world or “Third World” with its post-colonial inner divisions in Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, and as the fourth front as inner division of each nation.

Although the year of 1989 is regarded as collapse of communism, and 1991 as end of the SU, these developments characterize developments in Eastern Europe while the communist regimes continued their existence in China and North Korea in East Asia, and in Vietnam and Laos in Southeast Asia. These developments can be illustrated by reunification of the two Germanys while two Koreas remained separated. On the other hand, the US in Europe formed a security alliance with liberal democracies, while the US in Asia created a network of bilateral dominant security alliances with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and South Vietnam.

Hasegawa argues that still absent is an authoritative synthesis of interconnected attention to Japan and Korea such as the origins of the Korean War, the conclusion and evolution of the US-Japan security treaty, the Okinawa reversion, the Northern Territories dispute, US-Japanese trade friction, and deeper insight into the role of the SU and the US.