

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian subcontinent, 1945–1965**, by Paul M. McGarr, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, 391 pp., A\$145.00 (hardback)

Relations between the West and South Asia's two preeminent powers, India and Pakistan, have never been easy. Only too often have they been marred by mutual suspicion, misunderstandings and ultimately recriminations. The story of American and British attempts to engage India and Pakistan is, therefore, one of high aspirations but, correspondingly, low achievement. Paul McGarr recounts this story with flair, clarity and attention to the detail. Based on recently declassified American, British and Indian government files and other archival sources, McGarr's *Cold War in South Asia* is an important and much-welcomed addition to the still relatively slim historical literature on Anglo-American political relations with India and Pakistan.

Focused on the early Cold War, the book charts British and American efforts to draw India and Pakistan closer to the West in an era of rapidly escalating East–West tensions. In so doing, it also throws significant light on London and Washington's persistent (if not always successful) attempts to coordinate their respective regional strategies. Although it is no secret that British and American Cold War aims and interests were not always coincidental, McGarr's book has the unquestionable merit of bringing Anglo-American differences with regard to South Asia into the open. Obfuscated by the rhetoric of an Anglo-American "special relationship", it is often forgotten that relations between these two Western powers were often competitive and, at times, even inharmonious. Despite being a relative latecomer on the subcontinental scene (the Truman Administration had largely dismissed South Asia as a peripheral area of limited importance to US interests), the US rapidly made up for the lost ground and, under the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, it became increasingly involved in subcontinental politics. Concerned at the decline of British influence in South Asia and determined to prevent the Soviet Union and Red China from filling the vacuum, Washington began to defer less and less to British views and susceptibilities, and pursued a more assertive regional policy. Not surprisingly, London resented, at times, having to act as a proconsul of the US in South Asia.

That said, this book is much more than a detailed account of Western policy in South Asia between 1945 and 1965. McGarr also devotes significant space to Indian and Pakistani responses to Anglo-American initiatives. The picture that emerges from his analysis is that of two subcontinental countries not only "frustratingly resistant to external pressures and outside direction" (p. 363), but also ever so prone to reading Anglo-American intentions through the distorting prism of their mutual hostility. In this last respect, whereas British and American policymakers made sure that their regional policies responded to wider Cold War concerns, their Indian and Pakistani counterparts tended to interpret them in terms of their regional calculations and mutual rivalry. And as McGarr makes abundantly clear, Western policy was never able to overcome this basic disconnect between Anglo-American and South Asian perceptions.

McGarr's overall assessment of Anglo-American involvement in subcontinental affairs during the early Cold War is largely a negative one. In an attempt to neutralise what he regards as "a largely hollow communist threat" (p. 346), the US invested significant political, economic and military capital on India and Pakistan, but the return it received from such investment "was, at best, negligible" (p. 347). While Pakistan never became the reliable anti-communist ally that Washington had hoped for, relations with India remained prickly and never blossomed into a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship. Given these premises, it is no wonder that in the mid-1960s Lyndon Johnson's Democratic Administration downgraded the importance of South Asia in American Cold War strategic calculations. As for Britain, its ability to influence regional affairs and maintain an effective voice in both India and Pakistan was essentially undermined by

three factors: first, by its rapidly shrinking power in world affairs; second, by the eventual eclipse of the first generation of post-independence leaders (such as Nehru and Ayub Khan) who, as McGarr rightly points out, “were, for better or worse, products of the British colonial system” (p. 348); and, third, by Washington’s growing regional role between 1955 and 1965 – a role that further “contributed to the erosion of residual British influence in the region” (p. 347). In the end, however, when all is said and done, one wonders whether American and British interests in South Asia could not have been best served by a more detached Anglo-American attitude. McGarr clearly inclines towards this conclusion. He is probably right: after all, how much better were Moscow and Beijing likely to fare in their attempts to befriend the two quarrelsome giants of South Asia?

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**Cold War crucible: the Korean conflict and the postwar world**, by Masuda Hajimu, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2015, 400 pp., \$US39.95 (hardback)

According to this book, the Cold War was a “bipolar confrontation ... widely accepted as a substantial, irrefutable actuality” (p. 1); it was “different from other wars” (p. 2); it was “discourse”, a “reality” and a “constructed reality” (p. 3, p. 4). It was *not*, at least not solely, a “single, global conflict that divided the world in two, between the Eastern and Western camps” (p. 5); nor was it a “single, global confrontation, shaped through the conduct of elite policymakers and experienced in the same way across the world” (p. 6). This juxtaposition of positive and negative definitions establishes *Cold War Crucible’s* main motif and central problematic: even if traditional understandings of the Cold War are partly right, they are empirically insufficient, and so only through further empirical research can we understand “what the Cold War truly was” (p. 9).

So the Cold War was an “imagined reality ... solidified in the early postwar era, particularly during the Korean War” (p. 2). This reality was initially created in response to “social need” – not of policymakers and of intellectuals, but of “numerous” and “ordinary” people (p. 2, p. 4), who craved order above all, and utilised the “logic of East–West confrontation” (p. 7) to attain this order. Their behaviour was largely created not by the Cold War itself, but by experiences of social change leading up to the late 1940s and early 1950s. Inhabitants of the United States, Japan, China, Canada, Korea, Britain, Taiwan and the Philippines wanted little more than good and peaceful lives. The Korean War, however, foreclosed these opportunities. In response, the majority of these societies, both frustrated by the prolongation of wartime austerity and yet still hopeful for social stability, turned their inchoate energies on dissidents and the disorderly: communists and leftists, striking workers, opponents of racism, advocates of gender equality, and the underdeveloped and unhygienic. A binary and fundamentally agonistic Cold War logic (“us versus them”) coupled with repressive social policies stimulated these many, ordinary individuals to marginalise, persecute, inform on and press for the execution of those who could be most easily blamed for the perceived lack of normalcy in everyday life. Thus, Masuda Hajimu argues, what created the Cold War “at home [and] on a global scale” was the combination of social frustration, prior experiences of World War II and widespread acceptance, and internalisation, of categories derived from a new geopolitical confrontation and corresponding set of social policies: “a gigantic social construction of an imagined reality” (p. 286).

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