Conclusion

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During the several decades of the Cold War, scholarship on U.S. foreign relations concentrated on the political, strategic, and economic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. By comparison, U.S. policy toward the Third World paled in popularity. Some peripheral areas, such as Latin America and East Asia, attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention, in the case of the former because of traditional U.S. dominance but in the case of the latter because Cold War tensions were played out in China, Korea, and Vietnam. Diplomatic historians showed much less interest in the Middle East and especially Africa, and much of the limited research done on such areas considered the unfolding of the Cold War there.¹

The end of the Cold War in 1991 stimulated new approaches to the study of diplomatic history. While some scholars anticipated that the opening of Soviet, Chinese, and East European archives would shed new light on the traditional questions about the origins and duration of the Cold War, others adopted new methodologies and borrowed approaches from related disciplines to examine U.S. foreign experiences in fresh light. Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman observed the emergence in the 1990s of a “new diplomatic history” that examined the U.S. national experience in a global context on the basis of multinational research. The new diplomatic history also widened the scope of research beyond the Cold War and national security issues into matters of race, culture, gender, and other issues to a degree unprecedented in the history of the field. These innovations in scholarly research have deeply affected the study of U.S. policy in the Third World.²

The essays in this volume demonstrate the breadth, depth, and range of recent scholarship on U.S. relations with the Third World. Collectively, the
essays include traditional accounts of diplomacy and policy making and
innovative studies based on culture, gender, labor activism, economic devel-
opment, and international reformism. They examine policy-making elites
based in Washington, government officials assigned to overseas posts, pri-
ivate citizens who became involved in shaping foreign relations, and the
officials and citizens of foreign states, and they place the evolution of U.S.
policy in the context of local, regional, and domestic circumstances. Geo-
graphically, three essays deal with the Middle East, three with Asia, two with
Latin America, one with Africa, and one with the Third World as a whole. All
focus on the 1940s through the 1960s—the decades in which the United
States first faced the challenge of decolonization and Cold War in the Third
World, and the decades for which sufficient documentary sources are avail-
able—although some essays examine small spans of time with acute preci-
sion while others reveal trends that unfolded over longer time periods. In
short, the scholarship in this volume shows that the study of U.S. relations
with the Third World, if a bit eclectic, is also innovative and vibrant.

Despite the diverse approaches, several major and unifying themes
emerge from the essays in this volume. The Cold War, for example, recurs
frequently, not surprisingly given the extent to which it remained the domi-
nant issue in international relations in the 1940s–1960s. Robert Buzzanco
finds that U.S. officials shaped policy toward Vietnam primarily on the basis
of Cold War considerations. Importantly, however, the other essays collec-
tively provide a more nuanced view than the traditional notion that U.S.
officials always followed Cold War dictates when making decisions about the
Third World. To be sure, the Cold War figured prominently in U.S. thinking
about certain issues, but in other situations the Cold War actually faded in
importance in the determination of U.S. policy.

At times, for example, U.S. policy was primarily designed to support pro-
U.S. regimes in other countries or to thwart potentially dangerous Third
World nationalism. As Piero Gleijeses acknowledges, U.S. officials were deter-
mined to preserve a friendly government in the Congo in large part to deny
open and easy access to that strategically important land to Cold War adver-
saries. Chinese and Soviet intervention in the Congo, however, followed
rather than preceded U.S. involvement, which, in Gleijeses's judgment,
stemmed from the calculation that the United States could help preserve a
friendly regime at minimal cost or risk. In a similar vein, Douglas Little
views the Cold War as a driving force in some U.S. policies in the Middle East,
such as arms supply, but finds that U.S. officials formulated the Eisenhower
Doctrine as an antinationalist measure unrelated to their concerns with
communist expansionism, despite their public rationalization of it on anti-
communist grounds.
CONCLUSION

Other essays in this volume also suggest that U.S. policy was motivated by more than simply Cold War considerations. Stephen Rabe concedes that anticommunism became a crucial factor in U.S. decisions between democracy and dictatorship as the best means to thwart Castroism, but he contends that U.S. policies were deeply rooted in traditional concerns—such as maintaining closed-door, sphere-of-influence economic opportunity for U.S. business interests—that had long antedated the communist threat. Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman acknowledges that the Peace Corps was designed to project a favorable image of the United States on the global screen, and she places in it a historical context of U.S. psychological warfare operations designed to advance national security aims. But she argues that the impact of the Cold War is often exaggerated by historians who cynically consider the Peace Corps a Cold War measure. In Cobbs Hoffman’s view, the Peace Corps reflected John F. Kennedy’s genuinely idealistic drive to improve the world. It would have developed even without the Cold War, she contends, as a mechanism by which colonial powers would have tried to manage the transition from empire to independence in the Third World.

Some of the contributors to this volume suggest that the Cold War remained in the shadows for many officials who participated in the formulation of U.S. policy. Darlene Rivas detects a tendency in the years immediately following World War II for U.S. officials and businessmen to mesh their own New Deal reformism with the nationalist impulses of Venezuelans, with little regard for the Cold War emerging in the Eastern Hemisphere. Nick Cullather downplays the importance of the great power confrontation in the worldviews of U.S. officials stationed in Taiwan. Rather than reflexively opposing socialism, communism, and Soviet or Chinese communist power, aid officials in Taiwan promoted economic development models with statist controls and encouraged the Nationalist Chinese to demobilize their enormous military force for economic reasons. Cullather even ascribes to Eisenhower the attitude that the United States should not uniformly oppose socialism but should encourage it where useful in containing Soviet power. (Ironically, the studies by Mary Ann Heiss, Andrew Rotter, and Peter L. Hahn, which focus the least on political, economic, and security issues, concede that Cold War security concerns formed an integral part of policy making before they explore hidden dimensions of U.S. foreign relations.)

A second common theme that runs through this volume is the way in which allied states complicated U.S. policy in the Third World. As the world’s greatest prewar empire and the United States’s closest partner in the Cold War, Britain figured prominently in U.S. deliberations about the dynamics of the Cold War and decolonization in the Third World. Little finds that Eisenhower consulted closely with officials in London while planning military
interventions in Lebanon and Jordan and positioning warships near Kuwait. Heiss observes that Truman abandoned his early, moderate position of playing honest broker between Iran and Britain and sided with his ally as the Anglo-Iranian oil deadlock hardened and that Eisenhower embraced a full partnership with Britain, including collaboration to overthrow Mossadeq. Heiss and Rotter suggest that U.S. and British officials made many similar, culture-bound assumptions and observations about Iranians and Indians. In Rotter’s view, decades of British Orientalism profoundly shaped official and private U.S. views of India.

Britain was not the only allied power to appear in U.S. thinking. Buzzanco suggests that U.S. calculations about the economic livelihood of all European allies and Japan drove U.S. officials to intervene in Indochina. In the case of the Congo, Gleijeses reveals, the United States pressured Belgium, as the former colonial power, to defend the government in Leopoldville (Kinshasa) by approving a mercenary initiative, allowing Belgian citizens to serve as combatants, dispatching Belgian paratroopers to rescue Western hostages, and maintaining a vast personnel force to supervise the overt side of the mercenary initiative. Cobbs Hoffman details in great depth the official cooperation and the unofficial symmetry between the Peace Corps and the overseas service programs of other countries. Numerous Western allies joined the international voluntary movement in response to U.S. leadership, and even states like the Philippines and Israel found reasons to participate in programs resembling the Peace Corps.

The U.S. response to the rise of revolutionary nationalism in the Third World forms a third major theme of this volume. Scholars critical of U.S. policy in the Third World have traditionally advanced the notion that U.S. officials frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted Third World nationalism and blindly and errantly equated it with communism.3

To a certain extent, evidence presented in this volume confirms this critical interpretation of U.S. policy. In one sense, U.S. officials of the 1950s and 1960s displayed symptoms of what might be called “democratophobia.” While espousing democratic ideology, they feared the rise of mass-based revolutions targeting conservative national regimes that advanced U.S. interests in the Third World. On occasion, U.S. officials feared that new-style democratic leaders were at worst closet communists or at best novices who were naive about communism’s sinister ability to take over their countries once they uprooted older regimes. Unlike the conservative, wealthy, older men with whom the United States had grown comfortable, the new leaders were often young radicals who commanded enormous popular appeal. Such fears drove U.S. officials to oppose Ho Chi Minh, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Mo-
hammed Mossadeq, Patrice Lumumba, Fidel Castro, and, briefly, Rómulo Betancourt. Kennedy refrained from pushing for full democratic reform in the Dominican Republic after the assassination of Trujillo, Rabe suggests, because he feared that Castroism might take hold there.

On balance, however, the essays in this volume present a more nuanced assessment of the U.S. response to nationalism than the traditional, critical interpretation. They posit that U.S. officials fairly accurately perceived nationalism, understood its differences from communism, and took steps to mollify it on terms consistent with important U.S. objectives. They also detail important and distinctive features of nationalism and suggest that leaders of Third World states often responded to it more conservatively than U.S. officials.

According to Little, for example, officials of the Eisenhower administration correctly perceived the powerful appeal of nationalism among Arab peoples, understood that masses of them endorsed Nasserism, and accurately anticipated the likely nationalistic reactions to gunboat diplomacy. Moreover, conservative regimes in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco clamored for Western military intervention in Iraq and Lebanon even in the face of U.S. reluctance. Eisenhower privately distinguished nationalism from communism, Little contends, and publicly associated the two phenomena only when necessary to build consensus at home sufficient to support his reluctant military interventionism in Lebanon.

Rabe concedes that U.S. officials were originally ignorant about Latin American nationalism and dismissed it as communist inspired. By the late 1950s, however, officials in Washington realized that a tide of nationalism was sweeping the region and challenging the dominant constellation of rightist, pro-U.S., authoritarian regimes. Eisenhower consciously decided to embrace democracy with a leftist slant, as manifest in Betancourt’s Venezuela, over rightist dictatorship as practiced in Trujillo’s Dominican Republic, if he could do so without risking extreme leftist revolution as evident in Castro’s Cuba.

Other examples abound. Gleijeses discovers an awareness among U.S. officials that nationalism burned brightly in the Congo and that the anti-Mobutu revolt was a Congolese movement lacking a strong leaning toward communism or Communist China. In Cobbs Hoffman’s judgment, Peace Corps officers successfully mitigated the more hostile anti-U.S. impulses of nationalism in the Third World by co-opting the people of the beneficiary nations, requiring volunteers to learn the languages and cultures of their host states, promoting a universalist sense of international connectedness, downplaying anticommunism as a political weapon, and assiduously
avoiding connections to intelligence agencies. Before Cold War security concerns forced them to take extreme measures against Mossadeq, Heiss suggests, U.S. officials initially recognized that Iranian nationalism had deep and legitimate aspirations to which Britain should make concessions.

Evidence emerges in this volume that some Third World nations actually welcomed U.S. involvement. In Venezuela, Rivas notes, economic nationalists encouraged foreign capital investment under certain conditions as the best means to modernize and stabilize their economy. Private businessman Nelson Rockefeller showed sensitivity to nationalist concerns by modifying his capitalist practices to promote popular welfare (and thereby stabilize Venezuela and preserve capitalism there). State Department officials likewise believed it prudent to make some concessions to economic nationalists. Rockefeller collaborated with a government led by a democratic leftist party to build a postwar economy featuring private capital investment, technical expertise, pragmatism, and diversification. Similarly, Cullather finds that Taiwanese leaders eagerly welcomed U.S. officials, who provided not only a security shield against attack from mainland China but also the economic aid and expertise needed to invigorate their infant economy. By the early 1950s, Taiwan accepted U.S. advisers in all major branches of government and industry and resisted only when the advisers urged sharp and prompt reductions in the size of the nation’s military.

Several essays in this volume also reveal that concern among U.S. officials and citizens with the “Other” occasionally shaped their perceptions of the Third World. Most noticeably, Rotter finds that U.S. officials consistently characterized Indian leaders as feminine, weak, passive, and unmanly, traits that were opposite to the qualities they attributed to themselves. For such cultural reasons, U.S. officials found it difficult, during decades of crucial political change, to relate to Indian leaders or to understand policies that emanated from long-held Indian cultural values. According to Heiss, Western officials who dealt with Mossadeq drew similar distinctions between the Iranian leader and themselves. U.S. officials judged Mossadeq by Western instead of Iranian standards and therefore found disreputable certain of his behaviors that Iranian culture viewed in a positive light.

Although it is probably not intended, other contributors present evidence of similar modes of thinking among U.S. officials dealing with other states. U.S. attitudes toward the Congo, in light of Gleijeses’s findings, appear to have been shaped by perceptions that the Congolese were ignorant and unskilled bush people under the sway of witchcraft and superstition and by subconscious fears that mass black rebellion in the Congo portended a mass black movement within the United States. The instinctive dislike of
communists, nationalists, and anti-Zionists, as portrayed in several other essays, reveals that U.S. policy makers possessed irrational fears of people different from themselves.

U.S. officials often showed a propensity to view Third World leaders in metaphors based on gender and strength. According to Little and Rabe, U.S. leaders worried about “weak-kneed” leaders in the Middle East and Lebanon, and Gleijeses finds that U.S. officials denounced Europeans who refused to send mercenaries to the Congo as “gutless.” U.S. and British officials spoke dismissively of their adversary Mossadeq in gendered terms, Heiss argues. They denigrated his dress, behavior, conduct, temperament, strength, maturity, and mental health, and they characterized him in feminine terms, not only to show their disdain but also to justify their determination to oust him from power. Rotter argues that U.S. perceptions of passivity, emotionalism, and femininity among Indian men contributed to U.S. distaste for Indian neutralism. U.S. officials also made clear what type of foreign figures they preferred. They liked the “zest and dynamism” of Congolese Prime Minister Moise Tshombe, Gleijeses finds, and celebrated the mercenaries, despite their frequent excesses such as murder, rape, and robbery, as “tall, vigorous Boers from South Africa,” “long-legged, slim, and muscular Englishmen from Rhodesia,” and “rough-hewn college boys.” Rotter and Heiss discover that U.S. officials preferred leaders in Pakistan and Iran who dressed, behaved, and consumed whiskey like Western men.

Collectively, the essays in this volume also present evidence that U.S. officials frequently tried to export their own cultural values and institutions to other nations in the Third World. According to Little, U.S. officials spoke of implementing a new deal for the Arab states, and according to Rivas, the State Department endorsed Rockefeller’s initiatives to create a reformist capitalism in Venezuela, with the state harnessing capitalism for public good on the model of the New Deal. While U.S. economic aid officials in Taiwan showed flexibility in adapting to local circumstances, Cullather contends, they also followed economic development models that had worked well in the United States and in Europe under the Marshall Plan. Cobbs Hoffman argues thematically that Peace Corps volunteers sought to export their cultural values and institutions for the benefit of Third World peoples, while Hahn suggests that leaders of private U.S. labor unions intended to preserve and promote in Israel a political economy that was democratic and sympathetic to labor, like the one they aspired to establish in the United States.

The essays in this volume also find that a common theme of U.S. policy in the Third World was the propensity of officials to engage in covert operations. Little uncovers evidence of the CIA spending cash to influence
Lebanon’s elections and attempting some kind of undercover operation in Syria. Rabe recounts how the CIA offered money to Betancourt in Venezuelan elections, delivered arms to dissidents in the Dominican Republic, launched the Bay of Pigs invasion, and apparently tried to discredit Castro by planting Cuban weapons in Venezuela. In the Congo, according to Gleijeses, the CIA interfered in elections in 1961; supervised, armed, transported, and paid hundreds of mercenaries from Europe and southern Africa; and established an air force and a naval patrol on Lake Tanganyika. In Iran, the CIA partnered with British intelligence to overthrow Mossadeq.

Lest it appear that only the CIA conducted such activities, Rabe observes that Trujillo engaged in covert operations against Venezuela and that Betancourt worked overtly to undermine Castro. Hahn finds that Israeli government officials and U.S. labor leaders engaged in secret initiatives to change U.S. official policy, albeit without the sinister dimension of cloak-and-dagger operations. And lest it appear that the CIA was omnipresent, Cobbs Hoffman maintains that the Peace Corps assiduously avoided any taint of intelligence work, and Rivas asserts that the United States was not involved in the coup in Venezuela in November 1948.

The essays in this volume reach a range of conclusions on the degree of success U.S. officials achieved in the Third World. Some contributors portray U.S. officials as achieving their goals at what they considered to be tolerable cost. Gleijeses believes that the United States accomplished its objective of crushing a rebellion against the government of the Congo without substantial detriment to itself. Cobbs Hoffman credits the Peace Corps with dramatic success at its stated mission of earning for the United States universal admiration, evident in the extent to which many other states tried to replicate the U.S. program and in the worldwide mourning at the death of Kennedy. Cullather credits U.S. economic aid officials stationed in Taiwan for showing the innovation, wisdom, and flexibility needed to adapt their ideology of private development to actual circumstances in Taiwan. By practicing “situational economics” in Taiwan, they created an infrastructure and a corporatist conglomerate of public-private enterprises that produced an economic miracle. In the private realm, in Hahn’s analysis, U.S. labor leaders usually got what they wanted in regard to Washington’s official policy toward Israel.

Other scholars more critically conclude that U.S. policy in the Third World produced failures. Buzzanco concludes that the American experience in Vietnam failed militarily and politically and caused unprecedented dislocation to the U.S. economy. Little finds that short-term achievement in Lebanon was offset by long-term costs, including the provocation of Arab
nationalism and the dangerous precedent of deploying troops without congressional consent. To stabilize the Dominican Republic, Rabe suggests, the United States backed a dictator, engaged in covert operations, and discouraged democracy. Rivas finds that Rockefeller’s private initiatives fell short of their target, the result of poor business decisions on his part and the collapse of the centrist government that had welcomed him. Heiss censures U.S. policy in Iran as a complete failure featuring a morally questionable covert operation that was driven in part by cultural misperceptions, ignorance, and arrogance. Likewise, Rotter concludes that U.S. officials failed to understand the culture of India and made policy choices on the basis of subjective feelings.

After 1945, the Third World experienced the momentous processes of decolonization and modernization. Drawn to Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America by various factors, the United States interacted with the governments and peoples of these regions in a variety of ways. Recently, scholars have used both traditional and pioneering methodologies to capture the U.S. experience in the Third World in all its breadth and diversity. Although not in complete agreement on conceptual, methodological, and interpretive issues, the essays in this volume collectively reveal the dynamism and innovation of recent scholarship. By representing various, viable modes of inquiry, these essays should serve as models and stimuli for further research on U.S. policy in the Third World.

After the end of the Cold War, some scholars escaped the common fixation on the Cold War and examined U.S. foreign policy in the Third World on its own merits. Their scholarship recognizes that U.S. officials and citizens confronted a special set of challenges and opportunities in the Third World that were influenced only in part by the Cold War. This realization would not have surprised some practitioners of U.S. foreign policy, such as Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson. “The collapse of colonialism had been too rapid,” he observed to the National Security Council in August 1956, “and was having as much effect on the world as the rise of Communism.”

This volume has sought to reveal how the government, institutions, and people of the United States reacted to the “collapse of colonialism” and to the other dynamics of change in the Third World since 1945.

Notes

