

## Introduction

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Almost a decade ago, when I attended a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *Die Walküre* in Berlin, the narrative structure of this book emerged before my eyes. Wagner's idea of a network of stories that intersect and influence each other has fascinated me since the early 1990s when I first saw the complete performance of his four-part operatic cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Its second part, *Die Walküre*, sparked my vision of writing a reinterpretation of the Cold War as an interconnected set of narratives that focuses on how middle and smaller actors at the regional level shaped that global conflict.

What was the Cold War that shook world politics for the second half of the twentieth century? When did it start? How did it transform over time? And when did it end? The standard answers focus on the start of the Cold War in Europe in the period between 1917 and 1947, and its development as a Soviet–American rivalry. In this version, narratives in the rest of the world are generally secondary to the main story of Soviet–American conflict over the continent of Europe. The predominant focus on the bilateral global conflict has led historians to write interpretations of each side's policies and of vertical relations between one of them and a middle power or smaller actor. Only a few books on the global Cold War focus on multiple continents. *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* sprang from my growing unease about the sporadic attention that Cold War scholarship has paid to structural change at the regional and national levels, and to horizontal interconnections among different world regions, as if only the superpowers were the exclusive driving forces of change in the international system.<sup>1</sup> The regional focus, which I advocate, reveals that events in several world regions significantly affected structural change, and thus critically shaped the course of the global Cold War itself.

*Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* pursues four interrelated goals. *First*, it aims to redirect the interpretative focus from the global, or systemic, Cold War to the regional, sub-systemic, Cold Wars. Returning agency to middle powers such as China and smaller actors such as the Vatican enables us to appreciate better two obscured facets in

the global Cold War. One is that the global Cold War did not cause *all* regional conflicts of the period. Often, the great powers co-opted pre-existing regional or national developments and tried to nudge them in their favor. The other, even more important, facet is that the *reverse* often happened! The great powers might have believed that they were puppet masters pulling strings across the world, but the puppets had their own agendas and frequently pulled at their end of the strings to make the self-declared puppeteers dance. Concentrating on regional and national developments illuminates their impact on structural change in the international system over the course of the whole global Cold War. Ultimately, without the structural changes at the sub-systemic level, the end of the systemic Cold War would not have been possible in the late 1980s.

*Second*, focusing on regional conflicts forces us to reintegrate decolonization into the Cold War narrative. Nation-state formation in Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine/Israel all had roots in the pre-1945 period. A historical account that takes the drivers of regional conflicts seriously allows us to acknowledge different starting points of the ideological rivalry, which dominated the global Cold War after 1945, in different regions of the world. Consequently, the chapters on Asia and the Middle East occur before those on Europe, because conflicts in Asia, as for example the Chinese Civil War that started in 1927, generally preceded those in Europe.

*Third*, the dynamic nature of the global Cold War enabled regional and national developments to exert a substantial impact on structural change. In 1945, the world was run by the Big Three. The United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States were great powers in a *league of their own* even if their respective strengths were not equal to each other. Each of them had acquired a sphere of influence in the mid and late 1940s – the Arab League, the Socialist Camp, and the Free World – that was hard to control and riven with internal conflict. In parallel to the transformation of the triangular relationship of the Big Three into a *nuclear superpower duopoly* without the United Kingdom by the 1960s, the internal weaknesses of the three spheres precipitated the *diffusion of power at the regional and national levels*. This double development entailed the simultaneous concentration of the superpower rivalry at the top and the decentering of power at the lower levels of the international system.

*Fourth*, the book also focuses on interconnections and spillover effects within and among the three world regions of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Events within each of them often were interconnected, which is why Parts II to VII (Chapters 5–22) are organized along geographical lines. Furthermore, events in one world region often influenced developments in the other two. In general, such influence flowed from Asia

toward the Middle East and Europe, and from the Middle East toward Europe. This is yet another good reason to position the chapters on Asia ahead of those on the Middle East and Europe. A fitting example is the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, which affected China, Vietnam, India, the Arab League, Europe, and Germany. Although less frequently, spillover effects also went the other way. For example, the triple crisis in Poland, Hungary, and Egypt in the fall of 1956 had an impact on China, and the Afghanistan War and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 influenced Asia.

Although I am proposing that historians of international relations collectively step outside the well-established paradigm of Cold War superpower bipolarity, I do not argue that the Soviet Union and the United States did not matter at all. Still, we need to change the focus – or better adopt multiple foci – in order to decenter the Cold War in a systematic fashion, to move structural developments into the foreground, to restore middle powers and smaller actors to visibility, and to link events horizontally to each other (and not only vertically to the great powers). Only then can we reintegrate the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States at their proper places in the overall Cold War narrative again. As mentioned above, this requires the incorporation of conflicts and developments that pre-dated and interacted with the global Cold War – such as decolonization, nation-state formation, the Arab–Israeli conflict, and even Western European integration. Ultimately, this approach substantially revises the Eurocentric standard interpretation of the Cold War.

For almost fifty years after World War I, the world experienced a three-way ideological conflict between imperialism, communism, and liberal democracy/capitalism. Throughout the interwar period, it was dominated by European imperial powers and a rising Imperial Japan. London, Paris, Rome, and Tokyo all continued to increase territorial control in the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia after World War I. By the end of World War II, the United Kingdom was about to lose its colonial possessions in South Asia, but it was still the world's foremost imperial power, dominating East Africa, the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia while having just established preponderance in the Middle East through the Arab League. In 1945, Italy and Japan ceased being colonial powers as the result of defeat in World War II. France tried to re-establish control in Indochina and cling to its possessions in Africa. In comparison, since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Soviet Russia / the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had aimed at the revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist–capitalist world system and the establishment of a stateless and classless society across the globe. For that purpose, it

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established a network of communist parties throughout the world in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution and, during most of its existence, used military force to create and maintain the Socialist Camp. Finally, the United States sought both decolonization and the containment of communism. During both world wars, it had developed reformist ideas aimed at the overhaul of the international system. The United States thereby attempted to make the world less prone to radical challenges from the extreme right and the extreme left, establishing the self-described Free World after 1945 in the process. In the two decades after World War II, worldwide decolonization ended most colonial empires, including the British Empire. The United Kingdom ceased being one of the Big Three in the Cold War, though it continued to participate as an ally of the United States. In the 1960s, the USSR and the United States maintained the ideological conflict in the form of the newly established nuclear superpower duopoly.

Thus, the Cold War occurred in multiple incarnations at different levels in the international system and in different geographical areas of the world. It raged at the global level between the Big Three until the 1960s and between the Soviet–American superpowers afterward. Yet, at the regional level, the Cold War spawned only a few conflicts exclusively by itself – most notably in Korea, Germany, and Afghanistan. In most cases, the Cold War interacted with pre-existing developments – be they domestic conflicts like in China since 1927 and Vietnam since 1945, or in regional confrontations such as the Arab–Israeli conflict, or in spin-off conflicts as for instance Sino–Indian hostility. Regional actors – middle and small alike – were not just lifeless punching bags that only responded to the strikes of the Big Three or the two superpowers. On the contrary, they possessed agency – i.e. the ability to shape their own future through their own actions.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the degree of agency spanned a wide range of capabilities – from a rising communist China, at one extreme, to the dispersed Palestinians, at the other. Still, these different assertions of agency cumulatively caused structural change to the global system over the course of the Cold War. Hence, just as the Soviet Union and the United States reached a nuclear superpower duopoly in the 1960s, the *diffusion of military, political, and economic power* was under way at the regional and national levels of the Cold War.

Furthermore, the regional Cold Wars emerged at different times, depending on specific preconditions. In Asia (defined as East, Southeast, and South Asia), the Chinese Civil War that started in 1927 was the first major regional Cold War even before the global conflict had started. In Europe, ideologically motivated tensions briefly emerged after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, but major conflict arose only by the mid 1940s. In the Middle East

(defined as the area stretching from Morocco to Pakistan and from the Arabian peninsula to Turkey), the Cold War entered tentatively by the mid 1950s and then definitely by the mid 1960s. Regional actors not only had agency to respond to particular context-specific developments, but they also formulated alternatives to the ideological conflict. India spawned Asian–African Internationalism and Non-Alignment in the 1940s. Communist China tried to promote anti-Western and anti-Soviet agendas in the 1960s. Muslim nations produced competing pan-Islamist conceptions between the 1930s and the 1970s. Christian democrats in Europe, together with the Vatican, pursued policies situated in between the revolutionary left and unfettered capitalism. Western European communists formulated a Eurocommunist alternative to Soviet-style communism in the 1970s. Not all these alternatives survived into the post-Cold War period, but most exerted major influence on structural change during the Cold War. In short, the regional Cold Wars emerged in different world regions at different times, and the various regional actors shaped them in parallel and sometimes interrelated fashion.

Since the Cold War was a dynamically developing global system with distinctive regional incarnations, it ended in different ways in various parts of the world. In order to determine the end of a specific regional Cold War, it is necessary to define its principal characteristics. In Asia, the Cold War primarily was a combination of decolonization and ideological conflict. On the one side were the communist-dominated national liberation movements in China and Vietnam that had emerged in close cooperation with each other since the 1920s. On the other side stood the US allied non-communist states from South Korea to South Asia. The regional Cold War ended structurally in Asia in the late 1970s with the Sino–Vietnamese conflict and the rapprochement between the People’s Republic of China, the United States, and anti-communist Southeast Asian states. In the Middle East, none of the regional Cold War conflicts – bar the Afghanistan War in 1979–89 – stemmed from the global conflict, but all had local roots dating back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and the Arab–Zionist/Israeli conflict that arose afterward. The global Cold War was drawn into the Middle East by the 1950s and then imposed itself on the region by the mid 1960s. It mostly ended with structural changes in the late 1970s, i.e. when the region transcended the global Cold War with the Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty and the rise to power of pan-Islamist movements that rejected the East–West conflict. In comparison, conflict in Europe was mainly a result of the global Cold War. Still, the regional Cold War faltered in the late 1970s, too, with the advent of major structural transformations, such as the economic decline and ideological exhaustion of the Socialist Camp, the

increasing economic integration of socialist Eastern Europe into the world economy, the rise of a civil society in Poland challenging the status quo, and the economic rebound of Western Europe after the crises of the 1970s. As the three world regions underwent structural changes and, in the process, weakened or even severed their links to the global ideological clash, the superpower Cold War was the only major conflict that remained. It took Moscow and Washington until the late 1980s to understand this.

The literature on the Cold War is so vast that it deserves its own book-length treatment. Dominated by American-based authors during the Cold War, the first four decades of scholarly production mainly focused on the United States and its conflict with the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> The collapse of the Socialist Camp in the late 1980s offered access to hitherto closed archives, opening up new avenues of historical inquiry. As more and more primary evidence became available, historians found new answers to old questions. Who started the Korean War in 1950? Was Stalin serious when he offered a peace treaty to a unified Germany in 1952? Were the Vietnamese communists essentially nationalists or genuine communists? Furthermore, much of the historiography produced during the Cold War focused on Europe and, though to a much lesser degree, on East Asia, Indochina, and the Arab–Israeli conflict. The unlocking of archives after the end of the Cold War inspired research in previously neglected areas, such as Southeast Asia beyond Indochina, South Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>4</sup>

After the end of the Soviet–American conflict in 1989, Cold War historians, who often were based outside the United States, insisted on decentering the Cold War and even on replacing the superpower lens. Area specialists further pointed to the phenomenon of “the tail wagging the dog,” i.e. the phenomenon of a smaller ally forcing the hand of a superpower.<sup>5</sup> In short, they all called for the equitable inclusion of middle powers and smaller actors in the historical inquiry. A quarter of a century later, the state of historiographical affairs in this regard is mixed at best. On the basis of newly available sources, area specialists have written remarkable pieces on China, Vietnam, India, the Palestinians, Yemen, Algeria, and Germany, for example.<sup>6</sup> Even historians of the global Cold War have increasingly included the Global South in their interpretations.<sup>7</sup> But, in general, decentering the Cold War was more successful in fields other than diplomatic and political history, such as cultural studies or political science.<sup>8</sup>

The strange bifurcation between international history and regional studies continues to this day. Most historians writing general interpretations of the global Cold War still use the Soviet–American conflict as the primary interpretative lens without systematically integrating the findings

of area specialists, or even re-examining their own choice of approach.<sup>9</sup> This kind of interpretative schism is replicated in several, though not all, subfields. The Vietnam War attracts a vast number of historians who write exclusively on the American side, but they rarely incorporate – though with a few notable exceptions – what area specialists have written on the basis of Vietnamese-language sources.<sup>10</sup> Since the publication of Edward Said's famous book on Orientalism in the late 1970s, the historiography on the Middle East is, broadly speaking, actually split into three interpretative clusters that barely converse with each other: intellectual, cultural and social historians working with Arab language sources, diplomatic historians mainly tied to an American-centric or bipolar Cold War frame of interpretation, and Israeli scholars working on Israeli–Arab relations.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, books on the Cold War in Europe are focusing on individual events or are national case studies, often in relation to one or both superpowers.<sup>12</sup> With a few exceptions, historians of Germany have failed to produce integrated interpretations of the divided past between 1945 and 1990.<sup>13</sup> Instead, they either continue to treat the two Germanys as separate entities, or consider the East German experience an outright aberration.<sup>14</sup> In many subfields of Cold War studies, the often-heard calls for decentering or for adopting new approaches have gone mostly unheard.

*Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* resurrects these calls by integrating different experiences and multiple viewpoints. Based on the synthesis of publications from numerous fields of area and Cold War studies and on primary research in archives on four continents, the book restores middle powers and smaller actors to their actual role in the structural evolution of the Cold War. But it does not follow a rigid pattern of applying identical approaches in each chapter. On the contrary, the interpretative lens chosen in each case varies from the global to the regional and the national. Ultimately, the choice of lens depended on my personal judgment as to what approach would be the most fruitful in understanding the topic under investigation. Despite this eclectic method, the book pursues a larger, integrated question: how did regional and national actors – collectively and individually – influence and transform the structure of the global Cold War, and thereby produce the necessary conditions for its end?

No book is a comprehensive treatment of the historical past. I decided to focus on Asia, the Middle East, and Europe for two basic reasons. First, these three regions stood at the geographic frontline of the Cold War, where the largest number of conflicts and the most lethal ones occurred between the 1940s and the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Second, it was primarily these three regions that generated the structural changes which enabled the



superpowers to end the global Cold War in the late 1980s. Developments in Africa and Latin America appear in several chapters when they connect to the larger themes of the book.<sup>16</sup> But even with this reduced focus on three world regions, I needed to take decisions on what to include and what to leave out. Various notable countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe thus do not appear prominently in the book, mainly because they did not contribute to structural change over time. And while China, Vietnam, India, the Palestinians, Germany, and the Vatican all receive chapter-length treatments, Indonesia, Pakistan, Algeria, France, and Poland do not, though their stories appear in several sections of various chapters.

*Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* employs the literary technique of the frame story – i.e. the device of using a general story to set the stage for detailed narrative strings within it. This book in effect is a *double frame story* with fifteen narrative strings in between. The *outer* frame (Chapters 1 and 23) provides the structural support for the book’s overall argument. It consists of the emergence of the systemic Cold War from 1917 to 1957 and its end with the termination of the superpower clash in the late 1980s. The *inner* frame comprises the beginning of the regional Cold Wars after World War II (Part I) and their end at the turn of the 1970s/1980s (Part VII). This *inner* frame supports fifteen narrative threads (Parts II to VI). These fifteen chapters describe how middle powers and smaller actors shaped their own fate. Collectively, the developments in Parts II to VI caused structural change to the global system over the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, which led to the end of the regional (sub-systemic) Cold Wars, as covered in Part VII. As these fifteen narratives (Chapters 5 to 19) unfold in the center section of the book, they produce a colorful tapestry – a *network of narratives interconnected at multiple knots*.

Chapter 1 “From High Imperialism to Cold War Division” sets the stage for the remaining chapters. The period from 1917 to 1957 witnessed the transformation of the world from one dominated by European imperial states into one divided between the two ideological blocs – the USSR and the Anglo-American powers. The 1950 outbreak of the Korean War, which was merely a local conflict, triggered the spread of Cold War division from Europe and East Asia to Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. With the Suez Crisis of 1956, the United Kingdom lost its international influence outside Europe.

Part I on *Elusive Unities* explores the international system after World War II. The Big Three monopolized most of the influence in the world. Although not a Cold War creation, the “Arab League” (Chapter 2) was a British attempt to fortify its imperial influence in the Middle East, Africa, and the Asian world beyond World War II. But the internal



unity of the Arab League was weak, and British leadership collapsed during the Suez Crisis in late 1956. Stalin's Soviet Union ran the "Socialist Camp" (Chapter 3), which emerged over the period from 1944 to 1949 and included Eastern Europe and parts of mainland East Asia. Yet the inner strength of the Socialist Camp was brittle, particularly after Stalin's death. The self-described "Free World" (Chapter 4) consisted of two American spheres of influence, one in democratic Western Europe and the other among mostly authoritarian allies in Asia and the Middle East. Its internal unity faced serious tests during Charles de Gaulle's decade-long rule in France and the parallel domestic conflicts in multiple countries during the 1960s.

Part II on *Asia* focuses on three countries emerging from the colonial period. Chapter 5 on China explores the civil war from 1927 to 1949 as an early Cold War conflict, and communist China as a revolutionary pariah from 1949 to 1971. Once the People's Republic of China (PRC) joined the United Nations in 1971, however, it became a status quo power. Chapter 6 on Vietnam sketches the long path of the Vietnamese Communist Party from a peripheral group in the 1930s to the hegemon of Indochina in the 1970s. Its anti-colonial struggle against France after World War II turned into a 25-year-long Cold War conflict by early 1950. Chapter 7 covers India's unsuccessful struggle to prevent the Cold War from entering South Asia. Because of a series of military conflicts with its neighbors Pakistan and China, India declined from a position of widespread international admiration to pariah status. The developments of these three states were closely interconnected – in the form of the faltering Sino-Vietnamese relationship, the collapse of Sino-Indian friendship, and the emerging Indo-Vietnamese partnership.

Part III on the *Middle East* stands at the intersection of the successive collapses of Ottoman, French, and British imperialism in the region and the rise of the Zionist project in Palestine. The resulting clashes – the Arab-Israeli War in 1948 and the Suez Crisis in 1956 – were not Cold War conflicts (Chapter 8). On the contrary, both the USSR and the United States supported Israel in the first conflict and Egypt in the second. Still, their antagonism made its first tentative entry into the Middle East in the wake of the Korean War. Only in the period from 1964 to 1974 (Chapter 9), however, did the global Cold War fully enter the Middle East when the superpowers lined up behind the opposite sides in the June War of 1967. Yet, by the early 1970s, Egypt and Saudi Arabia tried to push the global Cold War out of the region, with the October War of 1973 being an important watershed. The conflict of the Arab states with Israel affected the fate of Palestinians in their quest to establish their own state (Chapter 10). The Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionary

experiences, as described in Part II, had a major impact on developments in the Middle East, particularly before the Suez Crisis and between the June and the October Wars.

Part IV on *Alternative World Visions* addresses three transnational phenomena that weave together developments from Parts II and III. Asian–African Internationalism (Chapter 11) originally emerged as India’s response to decolonization immediately after World War II. In 1955, the Cold War imposed itself on the movement at the famous Bandung Conference, which was simultaneously the movement’s endpoint. The concept of Non-Alignment (Chapter 12) was an Indian invention as well, although Yugoslavia and Egypt forged it into a movement by 1961 with the intent of providing a global voice to unaligned middle powers and smaller countries. Yet it soon fell victim to the June War of 1967 and the Indochina conflict. Finally, various forms of competing pan-Islamisms (Chapter 13) emerged during the Cold War – in Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

Part V on *Europe between the Superpowers* turns from Asia and the Middle East to Europe. Chapter 14 on nuclear weapons links a multitude of developments from all three world regions and thus serves as a transition from Parts II–IV to Parts V–VI. It brings together the transformation of Soviet–American–British post-World War II dominance into the nuclear superpower duopoly since the 1960s, and nuclear proliferation to China, France, Israel, India, and Pakistan. Chapters 15 and 16 describe the competitive economic integration in Western and Eastern Europe from the late 1940s to the 1970s, disclosing, in the process, the different degree of American and Soviet influence in the continent. Part VI on *European Détente* explores divided Germany (Chapter 17), the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE; Chapter 18), and the Vatican’s relations with the Socialist Camp (Chapter 19). The uniting theme among these three chapters is how the two Germans and Poland managed to come to terms with each other by the early 1970s.

Part VII on the *End of the Regional Cold Wars* weaves together the structural transformations described in Parts II–VI, and the manner by which this development produced the termination of the regional Cold Wars in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe at the turn of the 1970s/1980s. Chapter 20 focuses on how the Middle East transcended the global Cold War with the Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty and the rise of Islamic movements to influence and even state power. Chapter 21 starts with the final collapse of long-standing communist unity among the national liberation movements of China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and continues with India’s brief but aborted attempts to escape its isolation in the region