

## Introduction to Volume III

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This third and final volume of *The Cambridge History of Communism* spans the period from the 1960s to the present. It is a period dominated by the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and beyond, the demise of the Soviet Union and the resurgence of China as a global power, and the emergence of a new post-Cold War era of global interdependence, competition and conflict. It also displays, however, certain surprising continuities with the past. Communism, declared dead twenty-five years ago, has left many legacies in the geopolitical, political, social and cultural spheres, which still inform both individual and collective identities all over the world and continue to shape the faultlines in an ever more integrated world. And yet, compared to the 1960s – when communist parties held power in half of Eurasia, communists were important players in Africa and Latin America, and communism was a feared spectre in the Western world – one hundred years after the Russian Revolution, communism is represented on the political stage only by the state capitalism of a nominally communist China, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba, an isolated authoritarian regime in North Korea, a number of backward-looking former ruling parties in Eastern Europe and Russia, and fragmented relics of communist parties elsewhere. In the new millennium, the communist project seems a thing of the past, while its old adversary, nationalism, is thriving under conditions of uncertainty and dissatisfaction with capitalism.

Francis Fukuyama famously proclaimed the demise of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s as “the end of history.” While history clearly has marched ahead steadily ever since, there is no doubt that an epoch did come to an end. Indeed, there is abundant evidence that things were “ending” long before the eventful years of the late 1980s, even predating

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the timeframe of our volume. And while few predicted the spectacularly swift demise of communist reality that took place within only a few years, many, including some communist officials and intellectuals, had long recognized the enormous challenges faced by communism and its multiple failings in all sectors of life throughout the postwar period.

The decades under investigation here also examine the multiple strategies advanced by communist rulers, economists, ideologues, intellectuals and activists to transform and reform communism. These attempts stretch from the largely unsuccessful Kosygin reforms in the Soviet Union in 1965 to the more successful market transformation of the Deng Xiaoping era in China in the 1980s and beyond, and from East European attempts to create “socialism with a human face” in the 1960s to the attempts by New Left forces worldwide in 1968 and its aftermath to rescue the lost radicalism of Marxist ideas, to the emergence of the Eurocommunist project from the mid 1970s. It includes the efforts of socialist elites to face up to their history as well as the deliberate obscuring of this history. It is visible in the many structures built since the 1960s which were meant to embody communist principles in everyday life as well as in many cultural policies appealing not only to those living within the communist sphere but also to a global audience. The failure of Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms marked the end of these diverse attempts in European and Soviet communism, while the “Chinese way” (including variants such as those in Vietnam, North Korea and perhaps Cuba) remained to suggest that communist regimes could survive and advance only by adapting to world capitalism – its historical antagonist. In certain ways the search for new applications of socialist ideas may still be ongoing, but nowadays these are rarely couched in communist terms.

It is communism’s late twentieth-century and, for China and Vietnam, even early 21st-century struggle to redefine itself in order to remain relevant – East and West, geopolitically as well as culturally, economically and ideologically, in the eyes of the world and in the hearts and minds of its subjects and its proponents – that provides the main narrative of this volume and the multiple perspectives of its contributions. All of these topics have been the subjects of innovative research in recent years. We draw on rapidly evolving historiographical and methodological approaches – notably in social, cultural, gender and transnational history – to transcend the old separation between communist studies and the broader field of contemporary history, particularly global history.

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Hindsight is a dangerous historical tool, but it is also one that cannot be ignored. We have titled our volume *Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*. We posit that we cannot overlook the fact that communism ended in Europe and the Soviet Union (and, de facto, economically and socially even in Asia), but we wish to avoid a definitive judgement, which in our opinion is still premature. Rather than labeling our volume “the end” we deliberately place the emphasis on “games.” The period 1960 to the present, rather than being exclusively one of decline or collapse, is multivalent. First of all, not only for those who lived under communism, but also for many avid Western observers and political actors, Alexei Yurchak’s title for his study of late Soviet society astutely captures the fact that “Everything was forever, until it was no more.”<sup>1</sup> Communism’s end as a political force in Europe paradoxically arrived both as a surprise and as a long-predicted event. Communist shortcomings were a favorite topic not only of the Western press, but also around East European and Soviet kitchen tables and among the intelligentsia – and not least in the ranks of the Chinese political elite during and after the Cultural Revolution. And yet, the effort to survive both within and with communism continued to the very end and, for some, beyond.

Second – and this was another reason why we felt the term “endgames” captured the spirit of the times well – the games could be seen as “endgames” with two possible outcomes. On the one hand, we now see that communism played its final games on numerous battlefields – not only in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union but also among Western sympathizers and Latin American and African revolutionaries and on several Asian fronts. In the 1960s and 1970s communism was fighting on more international fronts than ever before. It reached into the newly decolonized world in Africa and Asia, it attracted many Latin American rebels leading to revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador and elsewhere, and it found new credibility, though only in its Maoist or Castroist incarnations, among the young global counterculture and New Left protest movement in Europe, North America and beyond. On the other hand, for a while, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the West was battling with political upheaval and economic crisis, it appeared that the “endgames” could have resulted in very different outcomes – ones that left capitalism, not communism, in tatters.

<sup>1</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

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Finally, our narrative stresses the international and global aspects of the era. Not only the vision and ideology of communism but also the reality of diverse state socialisms were international phenomena that fueled transnational connections. As the contributions to this volume make clear, there were multiple ways in which people understood communism, what they hoped for, how they assessed their experiences and what they feared. This was true not only of those living under communist rule but also of people throughout the world.

This period also contains a narrative of divergence, not least symbolized by the different fates of the two main players in the communist “endgames” as they were earlier: The Soviet Union and China in the 1950s boasted of “the greatest friendship” and a productive alliance and aid relationship. Within a decade this turned into bitter rivalry fought out within the communist sphere and beyond. And yet this was also an age of solidarity and mutual support among people and causes that could loosely be defined as being on “the left.” The Soviet Union had long proclaimed decolonization, social rights and labor movements worldwide as communist causes, albeit not always priority issues. China too promoted Maoism across the globe at times, not merely competing with Western capitalism and imperialism, but from the 1960s above all challenging its one-time ally, the Soviet Union. In both East and West many people rallied in solidarity with the Vietnam revolutionaries and supported anti-colonial liberation movements throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America. They aligned with popular movements, striking workers and peasants everywhere, and some hailed China’s Red Guards (however hazy their idea about realities on the ground). At the same time, a predatory capitalist West was a constant presence in the mind of communist leaders and many communist subjects. “Those in authority taking the capitalist road” served as whipping boys in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, while the challenge of a vibrant but exploitative capitalism provided a constant catalyst for competition for communist rulers. Yet the powerful attractions of Western civilization throughout remained a benchmark for dreams and aspirations for many people in communist countries. In this global age, communism was an ideological and systemic challenge, one that was supported or rejected by diverse global players.

In short, for many reasons we decided to put a question mark after “Endgames.” This is not only because the world’s most populous country, and one of its most dynamic, is still nominally communist. It is also because much of what defined the period under discussion has left deep

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traces, despite the demise of the communist superstructure that once seemed so formidable. Not only are continuities of regimes in China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba noticeable, but it is important to recognize more subtle legacies in terms of social practices and habits, ways of thinking, power networks and institutional forms that have affected the evolution of postcommunist Russia and Eurasia.<sup>2</sup> Russia and the West, and China and the West, remain locked in power struggles that rest not only on political interests but also on deep mutual misunderstandings and different concepts of the relationship between democracy and sovereignty, the nature of power politics and interdependence, multipolarity and the international community. Many formerly communist countries are now pursuing neo-authoritarian politics under the mantle of nationalism and “managed” democracy, while many rights associated with civil society are sharply restricted. And the question that confronted communism (and indeed capitalism) in the later half of the twentieth century – how to keep ideas of social justice relevant while achieving economic success – remains unresolved.

It quickly became apparent that in the period covered by this study – possibly even more than at any other time – there was not one but multiple histories of communism. The very notion of communism never ceased presenting ambivalent and multifaceted meanings. What was communism? From the standpoint of Marxist utopian visions, communism never existed, never could exist, as a political and economic entity, but only as an ideology proclaiming a future prosperity for all and the end of class differentiation. While the Soviet Union declared on several occasions that socialism had been achieved and China claimed to be on the eve of communism during the Great Leap Forward, no communist leader dared to declare a society communist, which in Marxist-Leninist eschatology represented the end of struggle and the perfection of a classless society in an age of abundance for all. Yet, while this distinction was still used by Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, when promising communism “in our lifetime” or extolling the necessity of “developed socialism,” *de facto* in popular parlance in East and West “communism” and “socialism” were freely interchangeable and used for both ideological ascriptions as well as descriptions of social, economic and cultural policies and practices. The polarization of the Cold War did little to clarify the

<sup>2</sup> Mark R. Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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terms and much to blur the boundaries between aspiration and reality and endow the term “communism,” depending on the standpoint of the speaker, with a whole host of negative or positive associations. We have sought to illuminate the concepts of socialism and communism and commissioned work that ranges from the exploration of late twentieth-century communist political and socioeconomic praxis to essays on the lived reality of socialism, from communism as expressed not only verbally but also visually, to the transmuted and manipulated forms that existed over the past half-century.

Our awareness that the history of communism has to be told in multiple different yet interlinked registers, has led us to group the chapters into three parts, each of which conveys an important, yet not exclusive story. Following on from the second volume, which charts communism’s rise across the globe, we begin with a part on the new global role of communism in what, as is now apparent, was the heyday of its international reach. Communism shaped Cold War geopolitics, a significant part of the world economy and even a substantial part of global youth culture. The Soviet Union had apparently stabilized its East European sphere of influence after the repression of the Prague Spring in 1968, and competed with the West and China in the global South. Communist-inspired movements struggled and in some cases came to power in Asia, Africa and Latin America, while the West faced turmoil and predicament throughout the 1970s. Yet communism also confronted fractures and predicaments. Mao continued following the independent path he had taken from Moscow already in the 1950s, culminating in the Cultural Revolution, and then in the 1970s rapprochement with the United States. The Sino-Soviet conflict erupted everywhere, destroying the former unity of international communism. Western communist parties struggled for identity and legitimacy in this field of contention, distancing themselves from the Soviet Union after the crushing of the Prague Spring. The New Left and other left-leaning protest movements adopted elements of communist thought, but they also declared many of its state proponents (particularly the Soviet Union), and even communist parties, morally and politically bankrupt. Global presence entailed a global price in funds, arms and political capital. The Cold War created deep strains for the Soviet Union, particularly the war in Afghanistan and social turmoil in Poland. Western-led global economic expansion exacted a toll on stagnant Soviet-type economies as Eastern Europe became dependent on Western capital. In Europe, early attempts to construct new forms of legitimacy were confined to West European

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communism, and emerged in Moscow belatedly only under Gorbachev. Europe's 1989 was a global event in itself, leading shortly to the collapse of Soviet communism and amplifying its consequences.

At the same time, communism in its historical heartland was beset by other problems, which were consequences of the fact that communism existed not merely as an ideology and player on the global stage, but as a lived reality – what Rudolf Bahro has termed “actually existing socialism.”<sup>3</sup> In 1917 communism had established itself as the creed of the most revolutionary and radical party – the Bolsheviks, victors in the Russian Revolution. Half a century later, communist parties had seized power in countries ranging across Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, with robust communist parties vying for power in many other countries. Seventy years later, the labels of revolutionary and radical were in tatters as Soviet and East European realities suggested an aging bureaucracy fighting not only severe economic problems but also, most importantly, a general sense of ennui among communist subjects with the very ideology and praxis that were supposed to generate enthusiastic participation. Yet here too it would be wrong to assume a unidirectional trajectory. As our essays on the lived experience of communism demonstrate, late socialist life was not devoid of its own dynamics and movements, some of which were initiated by ruling communist parties, and some of which were the result of variations, subversion and autonomous action by various actors who would not be bound by Soviet orthodoxy and who sensed the weakening of Soviet power. Yet all of these aspects made up the world of late communism as played out on the ground, and it is at times hard to draw the line between its history and the history of the countries in which socialism provided not only the state system but the social, cultural and economic framework. In particular, Soviet and East European historiography has posed critical questions of the lived communist experience.

The diverging fates of Soviet and Chinese communism are at the center of our third part. Despite many similarities, communist policy as well as communist experience in China were always distinct from those of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. China's revolution emerged from protracted guerrilla warfare centered in revolutionary base areas and, with the subsequent Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, it embarked on its own distinctive path long before the final decades of communism in Europe. But at no time were differences more profound than in the late 1980s when

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: New Left Books, 1978).



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China's regime crushed student protests in Tiananmen Square and throughout the nation, while Gorbachev sought to reform the Soviet system with *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The results, however, were counterintuitive. As Gorbachev appeared to unintentionally instigate political collapse in the Soviet Union and the Soviet economy went into free fall, China's communist leaders engineered a top-down as well as market-driven transition in a postsocialist economy and society, which is best understood as state capitalism with Chinese characteristics. Continued communist party rule and maintenance of the Chinese empire, together with that country's dynamic economic, financial and geopolitical resurgence, contrast sharply with the experience of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. But it would also be premature to dismiss the significance of communist legacies in Europe or predict the "endgame" for either China or Russia.

## Contents

The first part of the volume deals with the impact of transnational events and processes from the 1960s onward, the gradual transformation of the Cold War order and major geopolitical factors resulting in the crisis and eventual demise of Soviet socialism and the collapse of the Soviet empire. The elements of strength and the expansive thrust of communism as they were long perceived by many contemporaries concealed profound contradictions and flaws culminating in the fissiparous events of 1989–91 in Europe and the Soviet Union. Severe international political and economic challenges had combined and surfaced by the early 1980s. The chapters in this part reveal multiple intertwined developments. Together they show how the "endgames" of communist history may be understood in a global context in which communist forces were less and less capable of decisively shaping outcomes.

The multiple ambivalent meanings of 1968 in communist history provide ample material for reflection and periodization. As Robert Gildea argues in "The Global 1968 and International Communism," by the end of the 1960s dominant cultural and political landscapes of the postwar era were profoundly changing. In particular, a new generation of young revolutionaries shared languages of anti-imperialism and Third Worldism with the communists, but identified most communist establishments in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and beyond with Stalinism and rejected their bureaucratic, dictatorial or imperialist evolution. Consequently, they created diverse revolutionary trajectories and political spaces, which diverged from



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dominant traditions – though some were inspired by new icons such as Mao, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh. The impact of 1968 was multidimensional and its meanings differed from the perspectives of the First, Second and Third Worlds. Disaffection created by the repression of the Prague Spring, penetration of countercultures beyond the Iron Curtain, China’s tumultuous Cultural Revolution and the development of new languages forged by social movements in capitalist countries in both core and periphery converged to displace orthodox communist beliefs and self-confidence.

Even the pivotal international event of the 1970s, the Vietnam War – which catalyzed the hopes and projects of global revolt – may be said to have left a contradictory legacy. Marilyn Young and Sophie Quinn-Judge show the far-reaching implications of Vietnam, beyond the war itself, both at the level of governments and people – as it was connected for many to “a shared sense of liberation from repressive social conventions.” The transnational antiwar movement had a worldwide impact and particularly stimulated anti-imperialist feelings throughout the Third World. Activists and militants saw the war as a prelude to revolutionary engagements from the Middle East to Latin America. However, the capacity of communists and revolutionaries to build on the symbolic effect of Vietnam was limited both because the Cambodian Revolution showed a very different face of communism and because a new intra-communist conflict arose in Indochina in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnamese victory. As Ben Kiernan puts it, “The Cambodia–Vietnam conflict that began in 1977–78 signaled a final collapse of the global communist vision,” a reference both to the massacres conducted by Cambodian forces led by Pol Pot and to the Cambodia–Vietnam–China wars that were among its legacies. The long-term legacy of the Vietnam War for international civil society was to underline the illegitimacy of violent interventions by the great powers to shape societies and politics in their own image, lessons that would reverberate into the new millennium.

Artemy Kalinovsky reflects on how Moscow’s policies shifted from strategies of modernization in the Third World – which pivoted on the attractiveness of the Soviet model – to military interventions in postcolonial conflicts. For a decade or more after Stalin’s death, the Soviets prioritized support for state-led development and state-socialist ideology in the decolonizing world. Military aid was a component of this strategy, but it increasingly became the focus of bipolar global confrontation in the era of détente with the West. A new wave of revolutionary movements in Africa after the fall of the Portuguese empire in 1974 was the turning point. Paradoxically, the

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peak of Soviet influence in the Third World coincided with the decline of its appeal as an economic and ideological model. Direct intervention in Ethiopia and Afghanistan had a ruinous effect, undermining the credibility of the Soviet Union as an anti-imperialist power. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Afghan War did not significantly weaken Moscow in economic terms, but it did lead to ideological retreat from the Third World, a course which Gorbachev completed. Piero Gleijeses integrates this picture by providing a perspective on the Cold War in Latin America and Africa. By the end of the 1960s, the ability of Cuba to mobilize revolutionary forces in Latin America and Africa had declined. However, by the mid 1970s new revolutionary upsurges were underway in Africa and then in Latin America. The Cuban internationalist initiative was crucial in Angola both to force Moscow's hand and to defeat South African subimperialism. Then Cuba and the Soviet Union coordinated their action in Ethiopia. A few months later, the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua secured Cuban help. In other words, Cuba played a role in promoting revolutionary actions that influenced and changed Cold War frameworks, particularly in Africa and Latin America – though only after earlier dreams of revolutionary independence and internationalism had been shattered.

At the same time, communist internationalism was unable to maintain its previous place in diverse global discourses. Mark Bradley shows that socialist advocacy for collective economic and social rights and the backing of postcolonial self-determination persisted in the 1970s, but the most radical change came with the development of human rights discourse, which challenged state-based politics and ideologies. In socialist societies, human rights as a moral language had an impact both through the official discourse on détente and the Helsinki agreements, and because dissidents had already forged a “repertoire of thought and action” which sought to deepen post-Stalin concerns with humanistic socialism. As Bradley remarks, the new human rights discourse established by dissidents such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov and Václav Havel transcended the boundaries of the Cold War to assume transnational significance for intellectuals and shape public opinion. They contributed to delegitimizing communism while ensuring the longlasting and universal influence of human rights perspectives even beyond the end of the Cold War. In the communist world, attempts were made to carry out reforms and redefine the terms of human rights. Michele Di Donato and Silvio Pons maintain that “reform communism” was a reactive component of communist political culture whose legacy crucially influenced Gorbachev's *perestroika*.