

## Review - East, West, North, South: International Relations since 1945

Written by John Kent

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JOHN KENT, JUN 11 2014

East, West, North, South: International Relations since 1945 (7th edition)

By: Geir Lundestad

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The latest edition of this work has added more material, albeit primarily of a factually descriptive nature, to cover events after 1986, which was when the first edition concluded. Some alterations have also been made to the sections and the order in which they appear, although much of the overall structure is unchanged. The demand for new editions of the book bears witness to the continuing strength of Cold War orthodoxy about US policy, often dressed up as post-revisionism or linked to Soviet and Eastern bloc archives. The book has, however, always contained flashes of useful and interesting interpretations, which brighten up the more traditional and sometimes highly dubious assumptions that still dominate this latest edition.

Thus, while some of the initial concepts and coverage have clear and valid attractions, by linking a number of global regions and phenomena, which are not always tackled in a work of this kind, reservations remain. There is a significant concentration on East-West relations in the period up to the early 1960s (118 pages out of the first 236 for under twenty years), as compared to the same amount for the period covering the next fifty years. Despite the justifiable merits of parts of the earlier editions on arms and US relations with Western Europe after the 1950s, there is a strong sense of regret that the 'new' of this edition does not apply to a wider range of issues and interpretations, which challenge some conventional interpretations. Unfortunately the post-revisionist Cold War focus, initially on Europe, still creates the feel that the geographic extensions involved in decolonisation, and issues of non-European and non-North American importance never assume an equal role in the analysis. This is despite the addition of a largely new chapter on the Rise of East Asia (Chap. 11), extending the earlier, now somewhat questionable interpretation of the Cold War beginning in Europe and becoming global.

Some of the strengths and weaknesses from the earlier editions are extended and developed into the period from 1986-2013. The use of online resources, especially the World Development Report, is particularly important and provides a different tool for general assessments of economic and social developments. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute is used in a similar way for a valuable history of the arms race. The end of the Cold War receives a separate added chapter, although Gorbachev's unilateral concessions on arms are included in the extended arms race chapter. The reluctance to distinguish between the separate, if connected, hot war and Cold War requirements was a feature of the first edition and remains so. One result is that the myth that NATO was formed because of the immediate Soviet military threat, as opposed to the ideological threat inherent in the influence of Soviet communism, is also maintained. Interestingly the Lisbon force goals of 1952 are still portrayed as embodying the reality of defending Western Europe with conventional forces. Actually the ninety-two divisions deemed necessary would, if they were raised, also have involved the destruction of any prospect of a stable peacetime economy. The British military were keen to produce the 'I told you so' card after Lisbon since, for the first three years after the shift in US global strategy (and indeed before), they had been telling the Americans that Europe could not be defended with conventional forces. And the 'stop lines' had only ever been devised for political reasons, not the military need to defend Western Europe. There is also no overall attempt to examine the ways in which military

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strategy was connected to, or disconnected from, foreign policy; nor to define propaganda, covert operations, or psychological warfare as important components of the early Cold War. Furthermore, in this edition, there is no sign of any influence from newer historians on both sides of the Atlantic, who have been writing with a focus on the US and without the language skills to access the new sources being revealed behind the former Iron Curtain (for example: Kenneth Osgood, Scott Lucas, Greg Mitrovich, Jonathan Haslam; and on the topic of decolonisation: Steve Ashton, Sarah Stockwell, Larry Butler, Ronald Hyam, Tony Stockwell).

The sense of a small amount of new wine in old bottles is reinforced by the short bibliographies, now included at the end of each chapter rather than in bibliographical sections at the end of the book. A large amount of recommended material is between thirty and forty years old, and outweighs some of the more recent works, which are all the more neglected if they undermine the already received and widely accepted wisdom. In the decolonisation section this is particularly noticeable, with six books noted from the 1960s and 1970s, four from the 1980s, and only four more from the 1990s onwards. Nothing is produced in the recommended reading on the French Empire by French historians, or on the Portuguese Empire arising from the growing interest of Portuguese historians. Nor is the multi-volumed forty-book series of the *British Documents of the End of Empire Project*, with their hundreds of page introductions mentioned, despite having begun twenty-five years ago. Neither here, nor in the literature related to the chapter on the global Cold War conflict, does the Non-Aligned World of the 1960s significantly feature. The important book, authored by the less well known Robert Rakove (2013), on Kennedy's and Johnson's different policies towards the non-aligned world, and which would have added significance for a work with a title of *East, West, North, South*, is also not mentioned.

The chapter on the economic relations between North and South has been extended both through chronological coverage and by transferring the theories of development and underdevelopment into the new chapter on economic relations between North and South (Chap. 13). As with revisionism, orthodoxy, and post-revisionism, there is a similar general interpretative framework provided through which economic development is discussed. In the case of Chapters 13 and 14, liberalism and structuralism provide the core framework of analysis, although the weaknesses of structuralism, as evidenced by events in the 1990s, are more noticeable than the problems of liberalism and the Washington Consensus, as laid bare by the 2007-08 crisis of deregulated financial capitalism.

There is an additional, more interesting, and completely new chapter on Globalisation and Fragmentation (Chap. 15), even if the questions arising from it are less troublesome for the liberal democratic capitalist order than those raised by the recent financial crisis, or Thomas Piketty's (2014) analysis of capitalism and the data he uses to show when and how, in the last three centuries greater inequalities of wealth have been created or reduced. This is achieved by examining data from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards from the US, France, Great Britain, Japan, Canada, Spain, Argentina, Switzerland, India, Portugal, and China, showing wealth levels generated by earned income (wages salaries and wage related income) and that from capital (rents, dividends, capital gains, profits, and royalties). Thus, the economic reasons why historical periods produced or reduced greater inequality between states and individuals can be economically tested for the first time (if not perfectly) without any focus on theoretical modelling on Marxist or neo-liberal lines. Hence, some of the current theoretical assumptions can be fundamentally challenged empirically and some of their ideological fallacies exposed.

The conclusion of this new edition is also an interesting updated section looking to the future through patterns of broad developments and some intriguing possibilities, such as the impact of the checks on US global dominance by numerous regional powers. In a sense, once the orthodox post-revisionism has been superseded, this is a book characterised by possibilities, which epitomise both its strengths and its weaknesses. In what is essentially a demanding task, inevitably open to particular criticisms, the broad patterns of change during this period have been clearly identified, but once they are related to more specific events in reality, while there are many questions and possibilities identified and noted here, they are not always fully resolved. Interesting patterns in the book tend to run into the sands of the myriad alternative possibilities that are thrown up when they confront the uniqueness of particular events. These patterns include the growing links between the US and Western Europe in the immediate years after World War II, which have been confounded by the specific circumstances required to defend Western Europe; the general changes brought about in the Middle East by the Arab Spring, which have produced different outcomes in different countries as 'local circumstances and US policies varied considerably from country to country'

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(p.134). There is thus a sense of regret that more has not been done by the author to try and tie the broader patterns of these periods of history more firmly and critically to their historical specificities.

### References

Rakove, R.B. (2013), *Kennedy, Johnson and the Non-Aligned World*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Piketty, T. (2014), *Capital in the twenty first century*. USA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

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### About the author:

**John Kent** has taught at the Universities of Aberdeen and Strathclyde and, for the last 27 years, at the London School of Economics. He has been an editor in the major research project undertaken by the British Documents on the End of Empire Project, in which he was responsible for the three-part set of volumes on Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East. He has written research monographs on British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War, and on British, American, French, and Belgian policy to West Africa and the Congo from 1939-64. He is also the co-author, with John Young, of *International Relations since 1945: A Global History* (Oxford University Press, 2013).