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Nichols, Thomas M. *Winning The World: Lessons for America's Future from the Cold War*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002.

With the end of the Cold War's bipolar political world, making sense of this new era means asking worthwhile questions about the past. In his third study, *Winning The World*, Thomas Nichols asks what Cold War strategies were effective, what policies and approaches failed, and what lessons are to be learned?

From the outset of this intriguing study Nichols takes no prisoners. He has little patience for those scholars who would choose to blur the history of the Cold War. He blames Western academics for not trying to set the Cold War record straight in the decade after 1991; their silence on the subject is duplicitous. Liberal thinkers are erroneous in believing that there were no clear winners as are other pundits who credit Gorbachev or the contradictions inherent in the Soviet system as being ultimately responsible for its demise. However, his most sustained opprobrium is reserved for "realists," a group which failed to understand the consequences of the truly "ideological" nature of the Soviet Union and historically asked the wrong questions of the former enemy during each phase of the conflict.

Any honest appraisal of the Cold War requires the up front formulation of several working definitions. Nichols does not shy away from this challenge and in the first two chapters he explains how the Cold War, as he defines it, emerged in the eight years between 1945 and the death of Stalin. What made it unique in history were essentially two facts: first, the presence of an ideological foe bent on total annihilation of the Western way of life so that surrender or coexistence was not a feasible option and; second, a new kind of technological "sponsor" – namely enough nuclear arms to insure that any direct and total war would surely mean the destruction of the entire hemisphere. The Western forces are the champions of freedom, the protectors of individual rights, and liberal democracy while communists are portrayed as freedom's enemies. The Soviet Union was entirely responsible for the Cold War, he argues, which ended in a clear and decisive Western victory.

Scholars who might take issue with Nichols on these points, or who would argue that the 1917-20 period (well before the arrival of nuclear arms) was when the Cold War began, will find the opening chapters in this study frustrating and his characterization of the USSR as an "ideological state" (and therefore significantly different from the US) unconvincing. As well, the realist versus "those who recognize the true ideological nature of the Soviet Union" dichotomy is not entirely satisfying. His overriding claim that Western victory was not preordained, that there is an obligation on the part of scholars to search for lessons, especially since other "cold wars" are likely to follow and they too will threaten humanity, is more than worthy of consideration. (p. 3)

With a theoretical framework established the story begins to unfold as Nichols next considers the Stalinist origins of the Cold War and in chapter three explains how the

"world divided" found its earliest expression in communist aggression against South Korea. Those who believe that the Cold War could have been avoided are mistaken. The Korean War was the first significant expression of ideological theory moving into practice. As a historical lesson for the West it suggests that any opponent harboring a revolutionary ideology will not value peace in the same way the "the status quo powers do" as their goal is to dismantle international structures, not to accommodate or bless them. (p. 68) Another lesson to be learned by the conflict was the danger inherent in "mirror imaging" an opponent's strategy and calculating an enemy's next move on the "raw logic of realism." From a realist position there was little to be gained in Korea by risking a large confrontation, a possible third world war, over such a small parcel of land. This event in history only makes sense if one recognizes the full ideological nature of the enemy. For the Soviet Union the early Korean lesson not learned was that there was likely no "conquest on the cheap" to be had.

Nichols' study gets stronger as his focus moves forward in time and concentrates on the Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and George Bush administrations. Likewise, the lessons he uncovers become more significant and perhaps more relevant for the present. In chapter four he asks the question whether or not contesting peripheral areas in the Third World with an ideological enemy is a reasonable strategy, or a waste of resources? He argues it is important to understand what motivates the enemy, because ideologically motivated aggression (rather than aggression driven over resources or military access) "presents a special danger for Western policymakers because it falls outside the kinds of more routine patterns of interstate conflict to which Westerners are accustomed." (p. 81) Understanding motivation makes clear the limits of settling disputes by diplomatic means. Furthermore, a realist cataloguing of the globe would also fail to take into account the full effect of losses for ideologically driven enemies in less important areas. (pp. 81-85)

In his exploration of the Vietnam War the USSR is North Vietnam's reluctant ally. Nichols is critical of Kissinger and those who are trying to rewrite the Vietnam conflict as a pointless adventure that inflicted a "cost out of proportion to any conceivable gain" or worse still, that see it as a civil war, a local matter, or an example of US imperial expansion. Rather it was simply a communist coalition struggle and worthy of full US intervention. A major lesson that Vietnam teaches the West is that it is possible to force an ideologically driven opponent to pay the costs of its policies. Another important lesson is that democracies are not alone in willing to pay high prices for their beliefs. (pp. 88-103)

In chapter five Nichols searches for the lessons of detente reached in the 1970s which was an attempt to "scale back tensions and increase communication and cooperation." (p. 109) Its fundamental reality was that both the US and the Soviet Union were forced to live with each other. For the US the one success of detente was that it enticed the Soviets to sign the Helsinki Accords, "an agreement that would hold the USSR to a standard of behavior that would inevitably conflict with both its revolutionary ideals and its more pragmatic need to maintain an empire by force." (p. 130) Henceforth, the Soviet Union agreed to treat human rights as a principle of East-West relations, something which

opened up possibilities that were exploited haphazardly by the Carter administration and then with greater coherence by Reagan.

Detente had its limits because it was a policy that "drifted in conflicting directions" and it had no clear goals other than a desire to avoid war. (p. 132) It could have been used as an effective asymmetrical strategy at junctures when military action is unfeasible or unpopular but this was not its primary role and therefore a missed opportunity. The major lesson detente holds for the West is to beware of imbalances and to "resist overselling what few benefits might be expected from a lull in political hostilities." (p. 136) It was a flawed program because it was a Western driven policy that was prejudicial in its belief that ideology is ultimately "no match for either the crushing realist pressures of the international system or the siren song of Western culture and material abundance." (p. 138)

The collapse of the "fiction of detente" in the early 1980s led to the acceptance by both sides of a "state of war"; this is the subject matter of chapter seven. By this point in the book Nichols has argued essentially that the differences between Carter's 1978 policies and Reagan's in 1981 are less than past scholars have led us to believe. Carter and early Reagan administrations were moving with the same sense of overriding moralism. The confrontational approach on all fronts the Reagan administration adopted in dealing with an ideological enemy was on balance a good thing, yet its major flaw Nichols believes was that US decision makers "took such little notice of the effect it was having on the opponent." (p. 196) In the 1980s as the Reagan doctrine unfolded the Soviets reasonably concluded that the "US was seeking complete annihilation of the socialist bloc, by means of nuclear war if necessary." (p. 199) Nichols argues that this was a step too far and the world is lucky that at that crucial moment Reagan was suddenly awakened to the impact of his policies. One lesson to be learned here is that it is easy to launch a strategy of confrontation but quite another to control its effects once it has begun. Americans engaged in "static modelling" believing that the more economic pressure placed on the USSR the more the Kremlin would pursue previous policies at an increased cost rather than reassess the nature of the conflict in light of new circumstances. Still the major lesson of the Carter and Reagan years is that "confrontational strategies are most effective when an ideological enemy is pressed to live with the consequences of its actions." (p. 198)

Confrontation on all fronts is required to defeat an ideological enemy. In chapter 8, "Managing the End," paramount importance is attached to convincing the adversary to abandon its hostile ideology. It required leadership in the form of Gorbachev being willing to disengage from combat, "both rhetorical and actual," (p. 210) and a capacity on the soon to be victors and their leader George Bush to recognize the right time to make peace with the enemy in the right manner. (p. 225) The biggest surprise was that given the failure of "realist aspirations" in the Nixon and Ford administrations, Bush's "brand of patient realism would be the approach best suited to the final days of the Cold War." (p. 227) The key recipe for success in cold war Nichols concludes is being consistent and avoiding self-doubt. The US and its allies must show confidence, offer up steady resolve, an unabashed belief in the strength of their own brand of democracy and free markets,

and exude the virtues of the "open society." The worst kind of self delusion, he asserts, is to begin by asking the question what it is "ideological opponents want." (p. 234) In any cold war the battle is not as realists would have it, a feud between large states, nor as revisionists believe, a needless conflict brought about by capitalism or imperialism, but rather at root it is a moral struggle. (p. 234) Staying in the fight is an essential requirement for Western success and the West must also in future learn not to overestimate the strength of the enemy nor fail to exploit the vulnerability of closed regimes. Victory over the enemies of liberty is inevitable as long as the commitment and promise to protect and defend freedom survives.

These are not the lessons that I would take away from a similar study. For example, the enormous inequities, contradictions, and paradoxes of liberal capitalist democracy are concealed to justify Western actions. Not until chapter four do we get even a whiff that some blame for the excesses of the Cold War might in fact lay partially with the US and its allies. (pp. 87-88) Furthermore, Nichols is convinced that more often US and allied actions were done out of "stupidity, desperation, or plain bad judgement," and that only occasionally were clear cut acts taken out of sheer malice like assassination attempts on Castro. Thus the atrocities that the US and its allies committed differed from those of the USSR. I am not entirely convinced that such was the case and yet it is this reasoning that affords him the opportunity to narrow the window of discourse to a more limited duel with the realists. However, I do think that Nichols has asked some very important and timely questions, and his work deserves a reading by those looking for other answers.

Michael Butt is a Fulbright Scholar who earned his PhD in History and graduated from Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2003. He currently teaches history part-time at Dalhousie University.