Note on the text

All three volumes use the simplified form of the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Cyrillic alphabets (without diacritics, except for Serbian and Macedonian), Arabic, and Japanese (modified Hepburn), Pinyin (without diacritics) for Chinese, and McCune-Reischauer (with diacritics) for Korean. Translations within the text are those of the individual contributors to this volume unless otherwise specified in the footnotes.

Historians have always believed that good sources make for good studies. When Lord Acton was planning the *Cambridge Modern History* a hundred years ago, his view of the massive enterprise was much influenced by the sudden and extraordinary access to historical archives that came about in the 1890s. In his instructions for contributors to the vast effort which he organized but never saw completed, Acton wrote:

> In our own time, within the last few years, most of the official collections in Europe have been made public, and nearly all the evidence that will ever appear is accessible now. As archives are meant to be explored, and are not meant to be printed, we approach the final stage in the conditions of historical learning. The long conspiracy against the knowledge of truth has been practically abandoned, and competing scholars all over the civilised world are taking advantage of the change.¹

Many optimistic historians of and in the twentieth century believed that the events of the 1990s made for a breakthrough in historical knowledge similar to that which Lord Acton and his colleagues had perceived a hundred years before. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars began gaining access to the formerly secret archives of states and governments all over the world – not just because of the fall of authoritarian and secretive Communist regimes, but also because many political leaders in many parts of the world believed that "freedom of information," as it is now often called, had become an integral part of good governance. While very often producing as selective and partial a documentation as that of the nineteenth century had turned out to be, the new access to information in the 1990s meant real advances for historians, especially those attempting to understand events of the late twentieth century.

¹ Lord Acton to contributors to the *Cambridge Modern History*, March 12, 1898, Acton Archives, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, UK.
But while John Acton believed in a progressive and positivist version of history, which met “the scientific demand for completeness and certainty,” the blood-soaked trail of the past hundred years has led scholars toward more skeptical attitudes in their research. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, historians’ evidence tends to be more multiform and their research questions more varied than could have been imagined four generations ago. Fields of human activity and sections of humanity that merited barely a mention in the first edition of the Cambridge Modern History have now become large fields of study in their own right. Some of the boundaries of class, ethnicity, and gender are being dismantled. The methodologies for the study of history have become more diverse and its communities more international. As a result of this increasing diversity, knowledge has become less certain, and the space for conflicting interpretations much broader.

The Cambridge History of the Cold War is defined by such skepticism and contention. Very few of our contributors believe that a “definitive” history of the Cold War is possible (or indeed that it should be possible). But a heterogeneous approach creates a strong need for contextualization, what Acton thought of when he called upon his team to “describe the ruling currents, to interpret the sovereign forces, that still govern and divide the world.” We need to place the Cold War in the larger context of chronological time and geographical space, within the web that ties the neverending threads of history together. First and foremost we need to situate the Cold War within the wider history of the twentieth century in a global perspective. We need to indicate how Cold War conflicts connect to broader trends in social, economic, and intellectual history as well as to the political and military developments of the longer term of which it forms a part.

This chapter attempts to position the Cold War in the history of the twentieth century along some of its main axes: political and economic history, the history of science and technology, and intellectual and cultural history. It is not an extensive placing of the period within the greater whole—for that, one needs to continue reading until one has finished the last chapter in volume III.

By looking at the Cold War in its multiple contexts, we hope to better understand its long-term causes and also, perhaps, to get a better grasp of its outcome and consequences. But, in order to do so, it is necessary to begin with a look at that small patch of the century’s intellectual history that the study of the Cold War itself has tried to fill.

History and historians

The term “Cold War” was first used by the British writer George Orwell in 1945 to deplore the worldview, beliefs, and social structure of both the Soviet Union and the United States, and the undeclared state of war that would come to exist between them after the end of World War II. “The atomic bomb,” Orwell found, may be “robbing the exploited classes and peoples of all power to revolt, and at the same time putting the possessors of the bomb on a basis of equality. Unable to conquer one another they are likely to continue ruling the world between them.”

It was a new world system, Orwell found, dualistic, technology-based, in which nuclear terror could be used against those who dared rebel. To the author of 1984, the systemic aspects of the Cold War showed dark portents of the future.

Historians first took up the term “Cold War” in the late 1940s when attempting to explain how the wartime alliance between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union had collapsed. In the first postwar decade, the term was mostly used by American historians as a synonym for what they saw as Soviet leader Josif Stalin’s confrontational policies from the latter stages of World War II on. The Soviet Union waged cold war against the West (meaning, mostly, the United States and Britain), while the West was seen as defending itself and the values it believed in. The Cold War, in other words, was imposed on the rest of the world by the Soviet leader and the tyrannical Communist system he had created.

Throughout the Cold War, the main view of the conflict among historians both in the United States and in Western Europe remained colored by the anti-Stalinist approach. Deeply influenced by the wars against other authoritarian collectivist projects—Germany, Italy, Japan— that had just ended, this orthodox Western interpretation of the causes of the Cold War contains both a definition and a timeline. The Cold War means a period of Soviet

2 For some of these discussions, see Odd Arne Westad (ed.), Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory (London: Frank Cass, 2000).
3 Acton to contributors to the Cambridge Modern History, March 12, 1948, Acton Archives, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, UK. Acton, who has sometimes been lampooned as a very English academic—one who sought contributors to his Modern History primarily from the senior common rooms of Oxbridge colleges—was in fact among the most international historians of his time both in terms of orientation and background (he was born in Naples of a French mother and did most of his training in Munich, thereby speaking four languages with ease).
5 For key accounts representative of these various interpretations, see the bibliographical essay.
aggression that was initiated by its growing power in the latter stages of the war and which had become doctrine by 1947. Most early historians, not only in the United States, but also in Western Europe, believed that this period would last as long as Stalinists were in command in Moscow. Though in no way uncritical of Western policies—both the United States and Britain were often blamed for not confronting Soviet policies strongly and early enough on the main issues and for inflexibility and lack of cooperation on minor points—the anti-Stalinist interpretation places the blame for the Cold War squarely on the Soviet Union and, increasingly from the early 1950s, on what is termed “Communist ideology” (meaning, in most cases, the anticapitalist agenda of the Soviet state).

The change from emphasizing Stalin to emphasizing Communism as the main cause of the Cold War can easily be seen as part of the rollback of the wartime cooperation between Right and Left inside the West itself. While the Cold War was initially viewed as a security emergency, by the 1950s it had become a battle of global alliances and of political ideas. Wartime cooperation had been an aberration, many historians working in the 1950s thought. The normal pattern was one of confrontation between Communism and its enemies, as had been the case in the interwar period. Even among the few left-wing historians writing on the Cold War in the 1950s—more in Europe than in the United States—the breakdown of the wartime alliance had become a confrontation of superpowers, each imposing their will and their political systems on Europe.6

With the expansion of the Cold War to the Third World in the 1960s—and especially with the American defeat in Vietnam—radical historians in the West gained a wider audience for their critique of the US role in the conflict. Still staying within the original political agendas of interpretation, these critics argued that the United States, with its increasingly global anticollectivist agenda, had caused and perpetuated the Cold War to at least as high a degree as the Soviet Union had. To some of them, the American government’s motives were driven by the economic needs of the United States as the global capitalist superpower. To others, Vietnam proved that the United States was simply not suited to pursue change abroad, and that it should rather concentrate on a progressive political agenda at home, rectifying injustices based on race, gender, education, and income levels. Though always a small minority among historians, these anti-imperialist revisionists managed to shift the debate somewhat back in the direction of Orwell’s initial idea of the Cold War as a globalizing system.7

By the mid-1970s, as superpower détente seemed to take hold, the view of the Cold War as a system had a breakthrough among Western historians. The most comprehensive challenge to the anticollectivist approach during all of the Cold War was the “realist” approach, which—inspired both by Realist thinking in the social sciences and by the evident longevity of the conflict—saw Soviet-American rivalry primarily as an interest-driven clash of the strategic security needs of great powers. In their behavior, the Soviet and American governments were not strikingly different from each other or from other great powers in history. The key concept for Cold War realists was “power,” and, implicitly at least, “balance of power”—a global system in which the strategic arms race and formal or informal alliances had moved the Soviet-American relationship toward a high degree of stability and predictability.8

Always more popular in Western Europe than in the United States, Cold War realism foundered—as did its Realist cousin in the theory of international relations—on the way the Cold War ended. Instead of slow, gradual change or war—the two outcomes of the conflict that Cold War realism seemed to point toward—the “balance of power” itself collapsed as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the disappearance of the Communist “pole” seemingly happened mostly because of domestic political changes in the late 1980s. With the Soviet-American confrontation ended and the ideological civil wars in the West during the Reagan/Thatcher era fading, historians for the first time began studying the Cold War as a distinct period of history.9

Helped by their own training and by the widening access to source materials, the cohort of historians who came of age in the 1990s began

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8 It is easy to see how the deemphasizing of ideological conflicts is connected to the emergence of détente in superpower relations; see Jan-Werner Müller’s chapter in volume III. For the most influential statement of Realist principles, see Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), and, for a discussion, Campbell Craig, Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

emphasizing a more international and multidisciplinary approach to Cold War history. Very often—in spite of varying overall interpretations—they focused on the role of ideas, ideologies, and culture, in stark and deliberate contrast to the approach of their realist predecessors. While undoubtedly an intellectual response to the new knowledge of how the Cold War ended, this focus was also highly influenced by changes in the national historiographies, especially in the United States, where cultural and social studies had been ascendancy for more than a generation.10

A significant subset of the international post-1991 historiography is what one could possibly call Cold War “conceptualism,” from the belief that each group involved in the conflict had sets of concepts or ideas which defined and constituted them.11 These notions, Cold War conceptualists think, were very much products of the minds that shaped them, but they were not mere words or empty phrases, as the more extreme relativists claim. The key concepts in the Cold War had deep significance for the participants in the conflict. Often (though not exclusively) focusing on ideologies and patterns of thought, conceptualist historians tend to see a much wider variety of human agendas and processes of change intermingled in the conflict we now call the Cold War.12 These agendas and processes center most often on domestic developments, but also on generational experience and, in some cases, on international or even transnational or “imagined” communities.13 In a manifestation pleasing to those who look for historiographical dialectics, some Cold War conceptualists have a sharp reductionist approach to the larger role played by the conflict, seeing it as one of several “grand events” of the late twentieth century, linked to—but perhaps not as important as—decolonization and Asian economic resurgence. If the Cold War was ever a hegemonic discourse, then the reduction of it by historians who still claim to study the conflict is a nice twist of the historiographical tail.14

Among students of the Cold War outside Europe and North America, new perspectives are emerging, which will—eventually—merge with the historiographical debates in and on the West (here, of course, including Russia). As much of this work turns out to be undertaken by social scientists as by historians. In China, for instance, a popular world-history approach sees the Cold War as part of a long-term “Europeanization” of the world, as a period in which international rules and regulations were set up to preserve the global predominance of Europeans after they had taken control of the globe by force over the span of three centuries, setting three continents in the process. In Africa (and in parts of the Middle East), some scholars see the popularity of socialism and a Soviet alliance after independence first and foremost as a means to protect the patterns of the past from an onslaught by the ideas, and the economic practices, of the West. At the local level, at least, the language of Marxism was sometimes used to justify established customs and practices; it was a defensive measure more than a revolutionary one.15


When being tempted by the term “conceptualism” I am thinking more of Immanuel Kant than of art history (even though Christos’s Iron Curtain [1992] may be relevant: it consisted of a barricade of oil barrels in a narrow Paris street which held up traffic, the artwork was of course not the barricade itself but the resulting traffic jams).


The latter expression, of course, is Benedict Anderson’s, from Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983).

For examples emphasizing demographics and food, see Matthew Connelly, Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), and Nick Cullather, “The Foreign Policy of the Calorie,” American Historical Review, 112 (2007), 537–56. See also Matthew Connelly’s chapter in volume III.

It has been clear for some time that the world regions in which there were clear connections between Cold War issues and other definitory contests – the Arab–Israeli conflict in the Middle East, the India–Pakistan tug-of-war in South Asia, and the contention created by US dominance in Latin America – are where the fluidity and hybridity of Cold War ideologies are easiest to observe. Perhaps, over time, historians of these parts who are not primarily preoccupied with studying the Cold War (or its immediate effects) will help develop patterns for how the different segments of twentieth-century international history can be put together in ways that incorporate the Cold War but do not attempt to subsume all other incongruities under it. Like some newer approaches to studying the contest itself from within, such attempts at seeing the conflict from its edges, as one part of much bigger histories, is perhaps the best way for the future to make sense of it all.16

Given the uncertainties that still surround the study of the Cold War, any placing of it within its wider context must be cautious and careful. In the three sections that follow, the main issue is therefore to suggest ways in which the wider implications of the Cold War may more readily be seen, along the axes of politics and economics, science and technology, and culture and ideas. The account is undoubtedly influenced by where the historiography stands today (not least because its author has helped edit the seventy-two contributions to this Cambridge History), but also by a need to see connections and relationships between the literature on the Cold War and the wider historical literature at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Politics and economics

The historical background for the Cold War was created by the expansion of capitalist economies in ever-widening circles from the West European and North American cities in the nineteenth century. While offering plentiful opportunities for people to change their own lives, the new economic system also created recurrent social and political crises, such as the depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, which were followed by World Wars I and II. Given the many underlying strengths of the economic system, it is reasonable to believe that the utopian and authoritarian alternatives to liberal capitalism – such as National Socialism, Fascism, and Communism – would not have stood a chance of mass popular support if not for these crises. Instead, by the middle of the twentieth century, for many people capitalism had become synonymous not with progress, but with wars and economic collapse.

The effects of the two great wars of the twentieth century did more than anything else to shape the Cold War. In addition to the impression of systemic crisis that the wars created, they removed, through the destruction and economic decline that they caused, much of the primacy that the main West and Central European powers had held in international affairs. The wars also led to an unprecedented emphasis on national security, in which domestic surveillance and international intelligence gained a significance never seen before. Perhaps most important of all, the losses suffered by the powers involved in the wars convinced two generations of leaders that lack of military preparedness and political determination in the future had to be avoided at all costs. After World War II, especially, the lesson many statesmen and ordinary people believed they had learned was that weakness and irresolution unavoidably lead to war.

The great wars of the twentieth century contributed decisively to the creation of the modern state. Without the increase in the cohesion, the strength, and the reach of the state that took place in the first half of the century, the form of rivalry that the Cold War took would have been impossible. The sheer expense of the conflict, both military and civilian, would have destroyed states if they had not already been primed for the effort. Also, without the experience of two world wars, states would not have been able to mobilize their citizens for a war that had few big battles and little visible heroism. The extraordinary loyalty to the state was primarily based on the measures governments had taken to curtail the chaos of the market and provide some form of security for its citizens. For all countries, including the United States, which saw fewer such efforts than other nations, the acceptance of the sacrifices that were needed to fight the Cold War was contingent on the social services and educational opportunities offered by the state.

While similar in terms of the state emphasis on big projects, civilian as well as military, the United States and the Soviet Union symbolized two modern extremes in the way politics was conducted domestically. In the United States there were many centers of power, and even though the president's administration always held the upper hand, the legislature, the courts, and the state governments had significant autonomous influence both on specific decisions and on how politics was conducted. In addition, military leaders and the heads of big companies had their own voice in decisionmaking. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, politics was extremely centralized, in theory and

very often also in fact. Intended from the very beginning to be a one-party dictatorship, the Soviet system during Stalin's terror of the 1930s developed only one universal center of power: the Communist Party Politburo and its general secretary. In most periods, except in the late 1960s and again in the late 1970s, one man at the top had the final say in all matters that were presented to the party leadership. With the abolition of the market and with no independent seats of power, the Soviet Union deliberately presented itself as the antidote to capitalist chaos and confusion. All countries that had to reestablish themselves after the cataclysms of the first half of the century were presented with these two forms of government as ultimate alternatives.

The combination of capitalist crises and world wars was a key factor in the collapse of the European colonial empires, a chain of events that decisively influenced the Cold War, especially in its later stages. By 1945, it had become clear both in the colonial periphery and in the capitals of the imperial centers that colonialism in its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century form had to go: in Europe, there was neither the political will nor the economic strength to keep it going, and in the colonized countries resistance was on the rise. The United States took a strong interest in what should happen in the colonial territories right from the beginning of the Cold War era. Its purpose was both to abolish European colonialism - a form of government that most Americans found objectionable - and to influence the Third World to follow the US example in politics and economics. Increasingly, in the 1950s, with the strengthening of the radical Left and of Soviet influence in the Third World, a key US motive also became to secure these countries against Communism and alliances with the Soviet Union.

By the 1960s, the emergence of new states had done much to intensify the rivalry between the superpowers, and for the rest of the Cold War Asia, Africa, and Latin America stood at the center of the conflict - a key reason, in the view of many historians, why the Cold War lasted as long as it did. The Cold War in the Third World was not just a battle for influence between Washington and Moscow; it was a struggle within the new states for the future direction of their politics and their societies, a conflict between the two versions of Western modernity that socialism and liberal capitalism seemed to offer. The globalization of the Cold War that these struggles led to both intensified the superpower conflict through international interventions and increased the cost of the competition, while destroying many of the societies in which the battles were carried out.

As was shown in the Third World throughout the Cold War, the military power and the international involvement of the United States always far exceeded that of the Soviet Union. The whole of the twentieth century - the Cold War included - was characterized by the rise of the United States, as it gradually became the key state in the international system of states. In terms of its economy, already by the late 1940s the United States produced fully half of the world's manufactured goods, was the world's largest capital exporter, and dominated the world's financial markets. And even though its relative economic position was never again as supreme as it had been right after the end of World War II, the centrality of its role became increasingly obvious toward the end of the Cold War. It is hard to exaggerate the consequences of this US ascendancy: for the first time in more than three hundred years the most powerful country on earth was located outside Europe, with values and ideas that in most cases originated in the "old world," but which still - over time - had become recognizably different from their source.

As we have seen, this consistent US preponderance has led some historians to conclude that the Cold War was really an American project for achieving global hegemony, rather than a competition between two superpowers. But even though Soviet capabilities overall were more on the scale of Britain and France than on those of the United States, the militarization of the Soviet economy and its society made it a formidable opponent in international affairs. First and foremost it constituted the other superpower as a result of its oppositional ideology: it was the only great power that throughout the Cold War steadfastly opposed US objectives and refused to be integrated into the global capitalist economy. By doing so it carved out a primary role for itself in international affairs, at great expense to its own development over time.

Science and technology

The growth of science and of technological knowhow throughout the twentieth century shaped much of the format for the Cold War. To many people, the conflict was about the products of the new science, and first and foremost about nuclear weapons and the threat their use posed to all humanity. The remarkable level of investment both superpowers made into research and technology gives credence to this view. But, as in the earlier conflicts of the century, the relationship between science, political ideology, and social structure is a complex one, in which these fields of human activity influence each other. Science did not create the Cold War, but it helped shape it into a distinctive conflict, and into one that was more dangerous and harder to end than other great-power rivalries in history.
Most Cold War science has its starting point in one of the two main discoveries of the early twentieth century: the Cambridge physicist Ernest Rutherford’s reporting on the structure of the atom in 1911 and the Columbia University biologist Thomas Morgan’s outline of the hereditary role of genes the following year. Together with breakthroughs in technological innovation, such as Guglielmo Marconi’s sending radio signals across the Atlantic in 1901 and Orville and Wilbur Wright’s flying of the first aircraft on the beaches of North Carolina in 1903, the beginning of atomic and genetic science furnished many of the means of competition that fueled the Cold War and made it into a global phenomenon. By 1945, all of the basic building blocks for the scientific cultivation of the Cold War were in place and already fitted into the political purposes for which the American and Soviet systems wanted to use them.

The increase in energy supplies available for industrial production and industrial-scale destruction was at the core of the Cold War; it could be said that energy drove the conflict in more than one sense. Oil and nuclear power increased the potential for military production, but cheap energy also promised a new life for ordinary people, by making industrial jobs more widely available and less burdensome, and by making goods cheaper. For the United States, especially, access to inexpensive energy became both a Cold War aim (through US control of the Middle East oil supplies) and an aim of the development of science. For both superpowers, the production of nuclear weapons defined their military capabilities and the state of the rivalry between them. While the Cold War arms race was not structurally different from earlier arms races between great powers, the destructive energy that it quite literally contained made its significance greater relative to diplomacy and strategy.

Other main applications of the advances in science and technology in the early part of the century were in transport and communication. By the 1940s, the United States could project its military power over the globe through its navy and its air force. Twenty years later the Soviet Union could do the same. The combination of cheap energy and radio communications allowed the superpowers to keep large navies at sea at any time, or in bases abroad. It also, of course, allowed them to build nuclear missiles and guidance systems to train on each other and each other’s allies. But, especially in the capitalist world, many of the advances in transport and communication were also put to civilian use, such as in the globalization of air traffic, entertainment through television, and the internet. The global market revolution of the late twentieth century, which did much to end the Cold War, would have been impossible without these advances.

Third, the advances in biology and medicine contributed strongly to the Cold War competition of social systems. The twentieth-century invention of health care that influenced people’s daily lives—such as vaccinations, reproductive health, and infant care—meant that achieving the right form of modernity was literally a matter of life or death. In Europe in the 1940s and 1950s, and later on in the Third World, the competition between socialism and capitalism was as much about which system could deliver better health care as about principles of liberty or justice. In agricultural production, most countries were eager to replicate the gains made by the Soviet Union and the United States in the early part of the Cold War through crossbreeding and artificial selection, even though the Soviets were long held back in genetics by the politically motivated resistance against “Mendel-Morganism.”

The expansion of science and technology motivated the unprecedented increase in school and university education that took place during the Cold War. Both the United States and the Soviet Union placed education at the center of their social systems in a way never before seen among great powers. Instead of educating just an elite, both countries tried to achieve a higher level of modernity—and advantages in their Cold War competition—by educating more of their populations to a high level of knowledge. By the 1960s, they also educated large numbers of young people from other countries, especially from Europe and the Third World. Even though many of these students returned to their countries with social and political ideas that were very different from the ones their hosts had intended, the expansion and internationalization of education helped create a global intellectual agenda, in which ideas were more easily transferable—and transmutable—than ever before.
Much of the reason why such a faith could persist for as long as it did (or does, in the American case) has to do with the common lineage that the two ideologies represent. Against traditions of privilege, heritage, family, and locality, both Soviets and Americans offered a modern and revolutionary alternative, in which people could reinvent themselves and help create a new world. In the American case, this alternative meant the globalization of the US immigrant perspective, in which people could choose the communities to which they wished to belong. On the Soviet side, it globalized the Bolsheviks' hatred for "old Russia," which they considered backward and underdeveloped. For Americans and Russians—and for many people around the world who came to share one or the other of these visions—the global Cold War agenda was to change the world in the image of their ideas.

Many of the core ideas of the Cold War originated with two of the great thinkers of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Charles Darwin (albeit often in a form that neither would have recognized as his own). From the reading of Marx came the idea that the development of societies was hierarchical and that the struggle between social classes was a fundamental aspect of the "old societies" the moderns wanted to leave behind. These concepts of historical transcendence had a remarkable degree of influence on politicians and social scientists East and West during the Cold War, be it as a promise or as a specter. Darwin's biological philosophy was in the twentieth century twisted even further from its origin than was Marx's social philosophy. To many, Darwin's theory of natural selection could be thought to mean that human society operated according to the same rules as nature—that societies which filled the biological and ecological space open to them would thrive, while those that did not would fail. The struggle to produce more and better goods as well as the faith in continuous growth and expansion for one's own society (or form thereof) were based on the pseudo-Darwinian approaches of the early twentieth century.

The political principle of the developmental hierarchy of societies and the economic principle of maximizing industrial production were the twin ideas that connected Soviet and American modernity. The responses to these Marxian and Darwinian challenges were, however, as distinct as they could possibly be between states that shared a common background. Not only were the state formations themselves very different, as noted above, but the ideologies that drove them in some cases emphasized the opposite responses to the challenges of modernity. In the perception of American elites, a modern society based on individual opportunity and the market represented the top of the hierarchy of societies, while the struggle between classes was seen as a thing of the past, and domestic attempts at returning to class-based politics were feared as anachronistic attempts at polluting American freedom. Success in production was dependent on the defense of that freedom against trade unions, recent immigrants, and the political Left. In the Soviet Union, class struggle was also seen as having come to an end, but only because the Communist Party elites believed that the working class had taken political power and begun creating its own state based on social justice and collective enterprise. While in other countries the struggle between classes was still the vehicle of progress, the advances in production that had taken place inside the Soviet Union had been dependent on the masses being led by the Communist Party within the framework set by the socialist state.

While the ideologies of American and Soviet elites stayed remarkably intact during the Cold War, entry into the elites was probably more open in social terms in these two countries than in most others. The domestic ideological hegemony that the elites preserved may in part explain the social inclusivity—it made it easier for individuals to willingly seek inclusion and it made the entry ticket in many cases no more than political and social conformity. But while American elites had to seek a wider legitimacy for their projects within a democratic political system, Soviet elites of course had no such constraints, meaning that over time they became increasingly removed from their country at large. While both sets of elites at times feared the people they were at the helm of, the Soviet elites undoubtedly feared their people more. And while elites in both countries saw themselves as managing the troublesome transition to full-fledged industrial societies on behalf of the people, the Soviet Communists mistrusted their countrymen to the extent that they regularly resorted to terror in fulfilling their mission.

These differences in domestic roles and methods were of crucial importance when Soviet and American elites were spreading their message of progress abroad. While the United States, because of its democratic politics at home, was able to forge diverse and pluralistic alliances with elites in Europe and East Asia— alliances that contributed decisively to its predominance during the Cold War—the Soviet alliances failed spectacularly, from Germany to China to Eastern Europe. While American leaders managed to develop strong and functioning transnational institutions together with European Social Democrats or Christian Democrats, and with Japanese conservatives, the Soviets could not even manage links with foreign Communist Parties. In the postcolonial countries these differences played less of a role, since neither Moscow nor Washington—except in their most messianic moments—foresaw real alliances growing out of their links with weak,
underdeveloped states. In such relationships the superpowers should lead by the strength of their ideals and by their power to intervene when necessary.

Since the beginning of the Soviet–American rivalry, the main imagined competitors of both ideologies were constructed as “narrow” nationalism and “unreasonable” religion. While advancing modernity would, over time, do away with these relics of the past, the Soviet and American role was to identify and support those local elites that would help abolish local concepts of nation and religion the fastest. Ironically, since toward the end of the Cold War the Soviet Union was increasingly fueled by Russian particularism and the United States by American evangelicism, their support for the steamroller of modernization in the Third World (capitalist or socialist) never faltered as the number of its enemies increased. In countries such as Ethiopia or Iran, the superpower interventions supported wars against the identities and beliefs of the great majority of the local population.

Some of this warfare took place on screens or through the airwaves. The Cold War influenced all forms of popular culture, film, and television. By implicitly portraying their own societies as victors in a global struggle, US and Soviet films had a significant influence on the views of their own populations and those of people abroad. By the 1980s, this particular contest for hearts and minds was won by the United States, as US programming filled television schedules across the world. Especially in those states where access to US television programs and film was somehow restricted – by state control or by lack of means – accidental or illicit viewing gave an even stronger sense than in other circumstances of the plenty and beauty of life in the United States. Contrasting the image of a fictional United States with known repression and poverty at home was one of the main inspirations in the rebellions against Communism in 1989.

The cultural Cold War also influenced the physical organization of people's lives, through the schemes intellectuals designed for the social control and improvement of the populations at large. Both suburbia and the collective farm resulted from ideas of better ways of organizing society, through moving people away from the identities they had grown up with, be it among immigrants in American working-class neighborhoods or peasants in Russian villages. Likewise, Soviet and US city planning took on striking similarities in architecture and planning ideals as a result of the need to regularize and quantify. In linking high modernism in architecture and city planning to defense needs and mobilization of labor resources, the Cold War became the apotheosis of twentieth-century modernity, visually as well as socially.

While Cold War projects promised progress, their politics in many cases meant rule by experts. In both East and West, national security and national development were regarded as far too important to be left to democratic control. In its Stalinist perversion, the very term “democracy” came to mean party domination. But in the West, too, key projects integral to the Cold War were exempt from democratic control: bases, bombs, shelters, and surveillance were the domains of unelected officials or officers. In many countries this rule by experts extended far into the civilian sector: dams, bridges, highways, and border zones had plans and purposes that were withheld from parliaments and local authorities. While political participation expanded in the West – and in parts of the Third World too – Cold War elites often constituted themselves as representatives of the people's interests, thereby subverting the very ideals that they claimed to fight for. This abrogation is one legacy of the Cold War that people in the twenty-first century will struggle with for some time to come.

Change

Understanding the place of the Cold War within the overall history of the twentieth century is very much about understanding global processes of change. The latter half of the century, in which Soviet–American rivalry shaped the international system of states, grew out of a first half during which wars and crises had made many question the very promise of modernity. The superpowers' post-1945 models of development seemed, each in its own way, to rescue two key aspects of that promise: individual freedom and social justice. Indeed, the attempts of the superpowers to go beyond control of the international system and toward influencing global social and economic change bear witness to the centrality, for each of them, of changing other people's lives into an image of their own. The intensity of the conflict between them was created by each side's (and its supporters') conviction that they represented the last, best hope for the rescue of a rational, transcending modernity from the horrors of war and nationalist conflict.

But at the same time as the placing of the Cold War within a larger twentieth-century context helps explain the centrality of the conflict during its heyday, it also helps in understanding its demise. Three key shifts in human societies originated in the first decades of the century, but were coming to

\[17\] See Nicholas Cull's chapter in volume III.
fruition only in its final decades. Together, these shifts changed the world to a sufficient degree for the Cold War to become obsolescent.

The first, quite simply, is the right to vote. Restricted by gender, privilege, and race in the nineteenth century, by the late twentieth century voting rights had spread to a very large number of people across the globe, most often followed by widening political participation and the building of democratic institutions. Even though constricted and often undermined by economic forces, the vote is a powerful weapon of the weak, which can transform states and societies (although not always—as one could have wished for—in the direction of less conflict and more cooperation). The attainment and exercise of voting rights undid Communism in Eastern Europe, and continue to break systems of control and servitude on a global scale.

The second, plainly put, is the triumph of the capitalist market. As Karl Marx foresaw in the middle of the nineteenth century, the expansion of capitalism has led to an increase in both conflict and cooperation on a global scale. Alongside the worldwide growth of industrial society throughout the twentieth century, the centers for capital and production have shifted from Europe to the United States to East Asia, widening the stakes of everyone involved in the global economy. Economic globalization, developing throughout the twentieth century (though, tellingly, with its most rapid expansion at the beginning and the end thereof), led to the gradual integration of global elites in the quest for economic gain. Tied to the centers by similar patterns of consumption, information, and communication, the Third World outpost of this system created a potential both for further economic growth and for growth in global social inequality.

The third fundamental change that defeated the Cold War was the end of colonialism. Although resistance to colonial rule was on the increase throughout the century (the first nationalist organizations in the main Third World countries were all formed between 1900 and 1914), it was in the aftermath of World War II that the system as such broke down. In the thirty years after 1945, seventy-five new countries were created out of colonial territories, a process that changed international politics forever. While the final battles against colonialism and the first attempts at constructing new states sometimes favored oppositional ideologies and alliances with the Soviet Union, by the late twentieth century most newly independent countries were moving toward market economies and more inclusive political systems.

These changes privileged those societies that were poised to take advantage of them, but seriously challenged those that were not. The Soviet Union, in this sense, was among history’s losers, as was the Cold War international system itself. Even though the attempts in the 1990s at strengthening international society and preventing unilateral interventions ultimately failed, numerous trends from the late Cold War era point toward such attempts being relaunched in the future. One is the continued growth of nationalism, which makes understandings between states a sine qua non for the absence of war. Another is the changing role of the state itself in a world increasingly dominated by markets. And a third is demographic and ecological changes, in which the combination of an aging population in the industrialized world and a mounting number of global ecological challenges pushes us toward a policy of compromise.

The Cold War conflict forms a significant part of the history of the twentieth century and is an important ingredient in most of its other parts. Its course and content were shaped by a continuum of international history reaching even further back in time, certainly to the social upheavals of the middle of the nineteenth century and perhaps to the French and American Revolutions two generations earlier. As an ideological confrontation with two powerful states at its center, the Cold War defined patterns of alliance, models of state-building, and discourses on society on a global scale during the fifty years between the US entry into World War II and the Soviet collapse in 1991. And, by threatening the world with annihilation through massive use of nuclear weapons, it created one of the most fundamental aspects of the human condition toward the end of the century: fear of the future and a rising uncertainty about that perfectibility of humankind which the opening of the twentieth century had seemed to promise. The end of the Cold War provided an opportunity for dealing with some of these fears and uncertainties. But it did not end history, or even that part of it which the bloody twentieth century had birthed.