New Bottles for New Wine:  
A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War

Why pay so much attention to Albania? Can it seriously be maintained that this smallest, poorest, most isolated, most Balkan, most primitive of all the East European communist states has played any significant independent role in the continuing struggle between the two Communist giants? In my view it can, nor is this the first time it has been true.


It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.

– popular American saying

To many students of the Cold War, it may appear that despite the abundant new documentation we have on the period from recently opened Communist archives, there is remarkably little original to be said in terms of rethinking the basic categories by which we conceptualize that epic struggle. To be sure, the evidence that is now emerging is frequently fascinating, often giving us surprising new insights into why events occurred as they did. And it is natural that scholars would want to use this information to settle accounts in terms of who got it right and who did not in the voluminous writing already published on the period. Yet in terms of the analytical frameworks that explain the basic dynamic of the contest, little has changed.

Thus, in stylized terms, we have gone from “orthodoxy” (or “traditionalism”) in the 1950s and early 1960s, a perspective that saw Soviet expansionism as forcing the pace of world events; to “revisionism” in the late 1960s and 1970s that saw U.S. imperialism as essentially responsible for the character of the global struggle between East and West; to “postrevisionism” in the late 1970s and through the 1980s that saw the logic of the structure of the international system...
and the nuclear arms race in the aftermath of World War II as a sufficient explanation for why Washington and Moscow acted as they did.

But if an analytical framework is understood as a self-contained set of propositions that can explain essential recurrent (or patterned) features of a complex, long-term historical process involving either a finite set of actors or the entire world system, then indeed it may appear we have only come full circle in our attempt to understand the logic of the Cold War. For despite the treasure trove of new material from Soviet, East European, and Chinese sources that sheds new light on old issues, we have apparently moved forward only to move back, to what one scholar has called “orthodoxy plus archives,” meaning that the new evidence available argues best that the Soviet Union did indeed start the Cold War and that its conduct determined the principal dynamic of its evolution. “The big surprise is that there was no big surprise,” declared still another distinguished historian of the period after reviewing the new sources. New wine in old bottles is thus the best we can hope to provide from the flood of new information now circulating.¹

The purpose of this essay is to attempt to enliven current debates stimulated by the availability of new evidence now available from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Cuba, and China by adding yet another analytical framework for the study of the period for the dual purpose of providing a fresh perspective on the struggle and also to aid in the synthesis of these rival interpretations. Thus, to the approaches variously labeled orthodoxy, revisionism, and postrevisionism, I propose we add the insights offered by “pericentrism.”

My essential argument is that while junior members in the international system at times took actions that tried to block, moderate, and end the epic contest, they also took actions that played a key role in expanding, intensifying, and prolonging the struggle between East and West. My point is not simply that any history of the Cold War that neglects these actors is incomplete, but to argue more forcefully that in critical ways, fundamental features of this epic contest can only be understood by seeing the governments of countries such as North Korea and China, East and West Germany, Great Britain and Israel, Egypt and Cuba (as well as movements as different as the PLO and the Sandinistas) as having had principal roles to play that gave the Cold War the character it came to have. Establishing a set of propositions as to why and how these agents acted

as they did provides a new approach to the study of the Cold War, allowing us
to pour into new bottles at least a part of the new wine that is coming to us from
the recently released resources, and in the process establish the credentials of
yet a fourth framework for analysis of the period.

Historians have already indicated part of the argument. It has long been part
of the narrative of the period to see how junior actors in the international system
contributed to blocking, moderating, or ending the struggle—whether it was
de Gaulle trying to evict the Soviet Union and the United States from Europe;
or Mao trying to end the domination of the “two hegemonies”; or the Non-
Aligned Movement insisting that its members refuse to be pawns in the
superpower contest; or West Germany attempting with its Ostpolitik to become
a bridge between the global rivals; or nationalist forces in Vietnam, Poland, or
Afghanistan sapping the strength and self-confidence of the imperialists. And
political scientists have long been aware that once an alliance is formed, weaker
members may be better able to determine the conduct of stronger actors than
common sense might immediately understand. 

Still, the difficulty with crediting too much significance to these efforts to
shape fundamentally the East-West struggle was largely that observers felt
events to be in the iron grip of a contest whose major features were essentially
determined in Moscow or Washington, whose nuclear capability alone gave
them the power to determine the fate of the planet. No other states, whether
alone or in alliance, could question their superpower status. As a result, the
character of the period was essentially the story of their epic contest. Hence,
to read the history of this period is largely to read of the way the superpowers
determined the destiny of the globe while the weaker actors of the international
system were consigned to the roles of pawns or hapless victims, unable to
control the forces set in motion by the titanic struggle.

Such an account of the role of the periphery in the Cold War needs to be
rectified by a history of the struggle that shows the periphery feeding on and
contributing to the central dynamics of the East-West contest—centers of
action far from Moscow and Washington, in Bonn and Berlin, Pyongyang and
Havana, Guatemala City and Tehran, Cairo and Tel Aviv, Luanda and Addis
Ababa—a history where these peoples are seen more as effective subjects, and
less as manipulated objects, of the course of events. What emerges is not only
a “history from below” written out of sympathy for the underdogs—victims,

2. The literature on the way smaller powers tried to sap the energy of the Cold War is
voluminous with respect to individual cases but has yet to be put together into a single narrative.
The way smaller powers may have encouraged the struggle similarly lacks a single narrative, but
see Geir Lundestad, The American “Empire” and Other Studies of U.S. Foreign Policy in a Comparative
Perspective (New York, 1992) talking about a U.S. “empire by invitation,” 54ff. For alliance literature
see Robert O. Keohane, “The Big Influence of Small Allies,” Foreign Policy 2 (Spring 1971): 161–84;
Glenn H. Snyder, “Alliance Politics and the Security Dilemma” (The Woodrow Wilson Inter-
national Center for Scholars, Washington, Working Paper, 1982); Stephen M. Walt, The Origin of
Alliances (Ithaca, 1987), 41ff, 242ff; and Abraham Ben-Zvi, The United States and Israel: The Limits of
the Special Relationship (New York, 1993), 7ff.
pawns, proxies of the Cold War struggling against their fate – but as well an account of these actors as sometimes fearful and defensive but just as often as determined nationalists, hardened realists, principled idealists, high-rolling risk takers, committed ideologues, brazen manipulators and opportunists able to use the world crisis for their own ends. Their names alone suggest we should expect no less: Bevin and DeGasperi, Kim and Mao, Fidel and Che, Somoza and the Ortegas, Ben Gurion and Nasser, Ulbricht and Adenauer, Ayub Khan and the Bothas, Mandela and Walesa.

Should such a perspective prove rich enough, it might constitute an analytical framework for the study of this period that might be called “pericentrism” in acknowledgment of the fundamental contribution of these actors to the making of history. But let us not commit the sins of our fathers: an analytical framework need not have an exclusive monopoly on our understanding of a matter as complicated as the character of the Cold War – although proponents of orthodoxy, revisionism, and postrevisionism have at times made fatuous claims that their approach alone reveals the true dynamic underlying the course of events. My claim is more modest. I assume that by studying the junior actors of the international system in terms of some essential premises concerning their conduct, we can arrive at a better explanation of key features of the Cold War than other analytical frameworks have heretofore been able to provide. The result should be a perspective that complements the others and aids in their eventual synthesis. One outcome might be a spate of books on what hitherto seemed marginal actors in the Cold War – leaders, movements, and states whose behavior may now be seen to relate more directly to our understanding of the period.¹

Given the limitations of space and the literature that already exists documenting how minor actors tried to have a major impact on world events by blocking, moderating, or ending the Cold War, I will attempt here to develop a hitherto little explored – and arguably more important and certainly more counter intuitive – aspect of these junior powers’ efforts: their deliberate attempts to expand, intensify, and prolong the conflict. Whatever other differences might have existed among them, these junior actors in the world arena shared in their way in the spirit of the times. In reaction to the trauma of the war, the pulverization of Europe, and the rise of superpowers relatively new to world affairs, there was a generalized sense of arriving at a historical watershed, a new beginning that offered opportunity for mass movements and bold leadership at the domestic, regional, and world level. In these circumstances, a

potent mixture of nationalism and ideology (which included not only communism but also Pan-Arabism, Zionism, the apartheid movement in South Africa, and religious fundamentalism in Iran) gave groups a sense of unity and purpose. Given the widespread absence of effective political institutions and the need to create them, charismatic individuals of heroic proportion determined to put their stamp on history. Small wonder, then, with the convergence of these forces, that a pericentric approach to the study of the Cold War can promise to provide telling new insights.

The test of an analytical framework is whether it allows us to see history as having a logic based on patterns we could not have perceived without adopting its assumptions. In order to establish the bona fides of pericentrism for the study of the Cold War, let us look as I have suggested at three major questions that scholars have often raised about the period: why the struggle expanded out of its original base in Europe; why it intensified at particular moments; and why it lasted so long. Focusing only on Moscow, Washington, or the imperatives of the structure of power internationally conceived cannot provide fully satisfying answers to these three critical questions.

To examine these issues, pericentrism does not question the utility of the analytical frameworks already in existence so much as it shows Washington and Moscow in a somewhat new light. Thus, on important occasions, the superpowers may now be seen as much played upon as players, as much pulled into situations not of their own devising as pushing themselves in on the basis of their overweening power and ambition. Indeed, realizing the limits of their interests and their power, Moscow and Washington may now often be heard calling for compromise, moderation, and restraint when their junior partners were hell-bent on more aggressive action. Pericentrism thus provides an explanation in its own right of cardinal features of the Cold War while forcing us to recast our formulation of other frameworks of analysis. And by avoiding any claims to being the sole, or even dominant, perspective on the period, we may hope to encourage a synthesis in place of the often fruitless quarrels that have marked the literature.

EXPANSION:

Why the Cold War expanded to cover the globe is obviously a key concern to students of the period. Although the U.S.-Soviet rivalry began in terms of the postwar settlement in Europe, it then spread, first to East and Southeast Asia, thence to Latin America and at about the same time to the Middle East, and finally to Africa. The challenge is to explain why the Cold War did not remain contained in Europe where it began but instead spread to involve every region of the planet.

Orthodox theory points to the insidious expansionism of Soviet communism, concerned to complete the “world revolution” Bolshevism had originally promised its followers. By contrast, revisionism lays responsibility for globalizing the struggle on U.S. imperialism’s need for world markets disguised by
the universalist rhetoric of Wilsonian internationalism. Finally, postrevisionism sees “power vacuums” in the overall international configuration of power in the international system as pulling the superpowers into efforts to control affairs in regions where state authority was weak but Washington and Moscow might want to dominate matters.

What none of these perspectives posits— but what pericentrism asserts—is that an important reason the superpowers extended their involvement around the globe was because of the deliberate policies of junior actors in the international system, which in effect pulled Moscow and Washington into situations they might otherwise have avoided. To be sure, postrevisionism sees the instability in many parts of the globe as an invitation to struggle. But its emphasis is invariably on how the superpowers came rather naturally to fish in troubled waters, so moving the question of agency from actors who are linguistically demoted to existing in a “power vacuum” to how Moscow or Washington viewed its interest in these regions.

For their part, orthodoxy and revisionism suggest what might be the stakes of the struggle—ideological and power concerns—but now the question of agency is not so much unanswered as it is misattributed. For its part, pericentrism can point to efforts of actors on the periphery—India and Yugoslavia especially, and the Non-Aligned Movement they founded in 1955—to keep the Cold War bottled up in Europe. Yet what is so striking about the struggle’s expansion is that it virtually never occurred at the instigation of the superpowers themselves but instead at the invitation of local actors. “Pull” from the periphery, not “push” from the core, usually best describes what happened.

The motivations for junior actors to pull their regions into the Cold War varied. The Iranians encouraged the Anglo-American rivalry with the Soviet Union in 1945–46 in the belief that it would lead to their own independence of maneuver. More important early initiatives came from West Europeans, especially British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, whose primary concerns were defensive. While the European origins of the integration of the Western zones of Germany and the formation of NATO have long been mooted as a part of the story, in the last few years, accounts have appeared based on new European archives downplaying still more what had been the accepted preeminence of the United States in these two important developments.4

As the story now emerges with greater clarity, Secretary of State Dean Acheson was at first hesitant as to how to proceed on the question of a postwar settlement on Germany. As early as 3 May 1946, Bevin had presented a policy paper to the Cabinet calling for the consolidation of the Western zones into a

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4. Stephen L. McFarland, “A Peripheral View of the Origins of the Cold War: The Crises in Iran, 1941–47,” Diplomatic History 4 (Fall 1980): 331–51; David Reynolds, ed., The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives (New Haven, 1994), where several chapters underscore the way European actors were determined to use the Cold War for their own domestic or global purposes. See also James Chace, Acheson: The Secretary of State Who Created the American World (New York, 1998), chap. 22.
single economic unit. He of course recognized that “full American support would be essential” and that the “Americans are probably not ready for this.” Even after the Communist coup in Prague in February 1948, Acheson remained willing to entertain George Kennan's argument that Germany should be reunified as a neutral and demilitarized state. Although many U.S. officials like General Lucius Clay opposed Kennan's recommendation, it was the British who were the most outspoken, insisting to Acheson that the three Western occupation zones should be united, that no U.S. military withdrawal should be contemplated, and that the option to remilitarize West Germany should be retained. Only in April 1948 was Acheson finally persuaded.

Similarly, the Western Europeans played a leading role in the creation of NATO – a role beautifully revealed in the celebrated comment of Lord Ismay, the organization's first secretary general, that NATO was intended “to keep Russia out, Germany down, and the United States in.” As early as January 1948, Bevin had told Secretary of State George Marshall that he wanted U.S. “power, money, and resolution” to block Soviet infiltration of Western Europe, threatening “the piecemeal collapse of one Western bastion after another.” It was at Bevin's initiative that the Brussels Pact was set up in March 1948 as a security agreement among France, Britain, and the Benelux countries. Underpinning this union was a common concern that the United States might lapse into its traditional isolationism, leaving these peoples alone to deal with the Soviet Union and Germany in the aftermath of the war.

West European leaders were also thinking in domestic as well as international terms of what benefits opposition to communism might bring them. In Italy, the Christian Democrats used the coming of the Cold War as a chance both to consolidate their party's hold on the country and thereby end the antifascist coalition in which it had been obliged to share power, and to move in world affairs from enemy to cobelligerent with the United States and so gain in international prestige as well. Similarly, Konrad Adenauer and the Christian Democrats saw Germany take a major step forward in its return to international respectability when it achieved membership in NATO in 1955. For its part, while France at first resisted the Cold War, continuing to see the possibility of the rebirth of German power as its key threat, Paris nonetheless saw in the growing tensions between Washington and Moscow the possibility to get outside help to retain its imperial holdings in Indochina.

In Eastern Europe, the Soviet role was more assertive in its determination that only governments favorable to Moscow would exist in the region and thus in its recognition that the Soviet Union needed to stay engaged in the region. Nevertheless, Communist parties throughout the area were willing collaborators in Soviet control. Whether from personal ambition or ideological conviction, the members of these parties clearly understood that without strong support from Moscow, they otherwise lacked the ability to rule the peoples of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. If many of the leaders of Western Europe feared that without American support
they might fall prey to the ambitions of their regional or domestic enemies, such concerns were even more acute among the leaders of the Soviet empire to the East. It might be objected that the Cold War did not expand so much as it had its origins in Europe, where the superpowers were already involved by virtue of the war effort. The question of the Cold War’s expansion, therefore, more obviously concerns other parts of the globe, where Soviet and U.S. involvement had less of a historical legacy and the stakes were lower. Northeast Asia was the first area outside Europe where the Cold War surfaced. New archival sources underscore the importance of local actors in the expansion of the East-West conflict. Here the motivation was not so much defensive (as it is fair to say it primarily was in Europe) as expansionist, and the active agent was not Stalin but Kim Il Sung. Impressed with Mao’s victory in China in 1949, Kim conceived of the idea of reuniting the two Koreas by force. Initially, Stalin was hesitant, unsure that Kim could win and not wanting to risk a direct Soviet clash with the United States. Kathryn Weathersby has documented forty-eight appeals by telegram from Kim to Stalin before the Kremlin leader finally gave a green light in early 1950. Even then, Stalin insisted that Mao give his approval as well, presumably to underscore that one of his major preoccupations was to avoid the commitment of Soviet troops to the struggle.

Here with the Korean War in June 1950 was the watershed event that carried the Cold War into East Asia. Gone was any hope of a Sino-American rapprochement; now the stage was set for the increasing involvement of the United States in Southeast Asia that would lead in due course to the disastrous intervention in Indochina. From this moment, the logic of thinking in Washington does become important. But for our purposes, the point is that no amount of analysis of Moscow’s or Washington’s calculations, or of the structure of world power relations, will tell us how the East-West struggle expanded to Asia. For the primary force underlying this expansion was pericentric: the passionate conviction of Communist nationalism in a North Korea under charismatic leadership that here was a struggle it could win.

In Latin America, too, a Communist nationalist charismatic leader played the decisive role in the expansion of the Cold War. Well before Washington decided to oust him, Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz saw himself aligning with the Soviet Union and world communism in a struggle against the forces of international capitalist imperialism led by the United States. The same

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conviction lay at the roots of the Cuban revolution, which self-consciously took off where the Guatemalan revolution failed, proclaiming in Che Guevara’s famous phrase, that Cuba would sponsor “two, three, many Vietnams” throughout Latin America.7

While Kim waited for Stalin’s approval before launching his attack against South Korea in 1950, a decade later Castro failed to heed the Kremlin’s call to act prudently in Latin America. Instead, after launching guerrilla efforts as early as the summer of 1959 that failed in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, Cuba by 1966 was actually calling for a split in the Soviet-oriented Communist parties in the hemisphere, hoping thereby to promote Communist takeovers based on a poorly conceived Cuban model of revolution.

Cuban efforts failed resoundingly before the 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, of course, but the consequence of Castro’s initiative was to spread the Cold War root and branch throughout Latin America. The initial U.S. effort to counter the Cuban Revolution was through the Alliance for Progress, with its call for a combination of social reforms and democratization to head off the Communist challenge. Washington’s appeal was in vain. Latin American middle classes backed the decision of the region’s elite and militaries to crack down on popular movements throughout the continent in the name of saving the hemisphere from communism. By the time of Kennedy’s assassination less than five years after Castro came to power, virtually all of Latin America was firmly in the grip of the Cold War.8

This fact is worth dwelling on for a moment in terms of other explanations of the Cold War, for laying so much importance on Castro and the Cuban revolution (and the regional reaction to it) for the expansion of the Cold War in Latin America contradicts a generation of writing on the Cold War there. For some (chiefly the revisionists noted above), it was U.S. imperialism that was responsible for polarizing politics in Latin America and making it a theater of the Cold War, in effect pushing Castro into the Kremlin’s arms. That Castro was a revolutionary for his own reasons disturbs their thinking. For others (chiefly the orthodox noted above), Cuba was a pawn or proxy of Moscow’s design. That Castro had an ego quite strong enough on its own to engage the United States was not an idea that suited their own political agenda. By contrast, postrevisionism has no explanation whatsoever of how a country as small as Cuba could have such a large influence on world affairs.9

To be sure, there were moments when Castro was brought to heel. His revolutionary charisma began to fade with Che’s death while fomenting revolution in Bolivia late in 1967; and with the failure of the ten-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970 (the Cuban attempt at a Great Leap Forward), Castro had to

acknowledge his dependence on the Soviet Union (most graphically evident in the re-creation of the Cuban Communist party, now given a leadership role in Cuban political life). But to underestimate the influence of the Cuban revolution – its ideological passion, its nationalist bravado, its challenge to the hemisphere, and above all the egomania of its leader – to study instead what was going on in Moscow or Washington is simply to miss what the expansion of the Cold War into Latin America was all about.

Indeed, the Cold War came to Africa in something of the same way that it came to Latin America: under the auspices of the Cuban spin on Communist ideology and of actual Cuban leadership. As early as 1961, following their injunction to make Cuba the vanguard of world revolution, the Cubans were supplying such aid as they could to the Algerian revolution (and in 1963 actually sent 686 heavily armed soldiers to help Algeria against threats from Morocco). As in much of Latin America, Che led the vanguard: in late 1964 he visited the two Congos, Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea; and in April 1965, he was in charge of some 400 Cuban troops fighting (unsuccessfully) with the rebels in what was then called Zaire against a Western-backed government.

Of course, communism in Africa had its own pedigree independent of Cuban influence. The point, however, is that Moscow was long doubtful that Africa was an interesting place for it to pursue its interests, and it took Castro – not Africans – to persuade Moscow it should become involved there, something that did not occur until 1975.10

The United States was also hesitant to see the Cold War expand into Africa. But as early as 1948, the Union of South Africa saw the Soviet Union behind black demands for freedom and justice in Africa and appealed to Washington to oppose such claims. Pretoria suggested an African defense system as an auxiliary of NATO and sent troops for the Berlin airlift and the Korean War as a way of symbolizing its solidarity with the global struggle.11

But Washington did not respond positively. Before the collapse of the Portuguese empire in Africa in 1974, the Communist threat to Western interests in the region seemed minor. In 1961, Western operatives encouraged Patrice Lumumba’s murder in the Congo, leading by 1965 to the emergence of Mobutu Sese Seko as that country’s ruler.12 But for another decade, greater involvement did not seem necessary.

While Cuban initiatives of the 1960s bore little fruit, they did establish the contacts that led to full-scale Cuban involvement in Angola in 1975 in the

11. James Barber and John Barratt, South Africa’s Foreign Policy: The Search for Status and Security, 1945–1980 (New York, 1990). On the period after 1948, see 7ff, 27, 56f, on repeated concerns in the 1950s about the Communist menace in Africa, see chap. 4; on concerns after the Cuban arrival in Angola (late 1975) and Soweto (June 1976), see 12ff and 244.
12. Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, The Rise and Decline of the Zaïrian State (Madison, 1985). On the ability of Mobutu to act as an agent in his own right, see chap. 11.
aftermath of the collapse of Portuguese control there. It is generally agreed that Cuban troops were critical to the success of the communist MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) in its struggle not only against domestic rivals but also against South African efforts to destroy it. While Soviet logistic support was eventually to become critically important to the Cuban effort, the point to underscore here is that the Cubans took the initiative on their own and without Moscow's initial approval. To understand the expansion of the Cold War into Africa it is thus necessary to understand nationalist and ideological commitments and decision making independent of the superpowers and located instead with charismatic leaders on a small Caribbean island and in scattered movements in sub-Saharan Africa.

With the independence of Angola and Mozambique, the question of Communist control of southern Africa did finally come to a head, with right-wing South Africans particularly insisting that most in the West did not understand the stakes in the issue, that this was the prelude of “total onslaught.” But Vietnam was just coming to its disastrous conclusion; the racist character of the apartheid regime in Pretoria made substantial military initiatives in South Africa’s defense impossible to contemplate short of massive, direct Soviet involvement; and in any case, with some covert help in Angola from Washington, Pretoria seemed quite able to defend itself militarily so far as the regional balance of power was concerned. In short, the United States would not heed South Africa’s counsel in the manner the Soviet Union was following that of Cuba.

A third region into which the Cold War expanded was the Middle East. Once again, as a pericentric approach would expect, the passion of nationalism and ideology held by local actors – and not only forceful agendas pushed by the superpowers – explains a good part of the eventual involvement of Washington and Moscow in the dangerous political machinations of this troubled region. One may, of course, give ample reasons that the United States and the Soviet Union each wanted to dominate the region; but unless priority attention is given to the policy decisions of the regional players – Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq – no amount of analysis of the superpowers alone will explain how Moscow and Washington came to be so deeply – and at times so dangerously – involved in Middle East politics.

Thus, before the Cold War even entered the area, both Israel and Jordan hoped for a security treaty with the United States to protect them from their regional enemies. Egypt, too, hoped for support from Washington – leading to repeated Israeli efforts to keep them apart. At important moments, Gamal Abdel Nasser was quite willing to work with the United States, which at points (like 1958–1963, from the pro-Soviet coup in Iraq to the Baathist takeovers in Syria and Iraq) even supported his regional ambitions. But Nasser’s hostility to Israel, his threats to Saudi power, his challenge to the Hashemites, and his willingness to recognize “Red China” and to work in tandem with the Soviet

Union (despite his domestic anticommunism) made Washington nervous. And then there was the matter of Nasser’s personality: he had an ego the size of Castro’s and plans to pull the Sudan, if not much more of Africa, under Egyptian suzerainty. Given these considerations, after the 1967 war, Israel was able to make the case stand that in regional matters it was the “strategic asset” Washington should count on.

On balance, then, Egypt cooperated far more with Moscow than with Washington until Anwar el-Sadat’s famous realignment of 1972, which expelled the Soviet Union from his country. Perhaps prompted by Nasser’s example, Syria and Yemen in 1966 made claims on Soviet sponsorship, which were accepted. Again, in 1978, the Iraqis invited Soviet support for a coup that had overthrown the Western-oriented monarchy there. Yet while the Soviets responded favorably to these requests, the point to underscore is that the initiative typically came from the Arabs and that repeatedly one finds Moscow either trying to restrain its clients from provocative attacks on Israel or encouraging them to overcome their enmity toward each other. A major concern was that the Soviet Union not to be drawn in too deeply. At one point, Egypt offered to turn its army over to Soviet officers. Under Muammar Qaddafi, Libya actually once offered to join the Warsaw Pact. Moscow politely declined each proposition. And again and again Moscow’s hopes were disappointed: Israel repeatedly humiliated Moscow’s Arab allies while inter-Arab conflict repeatedly defied Soviet interests in achieving more cooperative behavior.

Consider, for example, Moscow’s relationship with Cairo. Stephen Walt notes that while from 1955 to 1970, the Soviet Union was Egypt’s main source of military and economic aid, “Soviet leverage on Egypt was slight.” Among Nasser’s many acts of independence,

The Soviets opposed the union with Syria in 1958, Nasser imprisoned Egyptian Communists despite Moscow’s repeated protests, and Egypt’s relations with the rest of the Arab world evolved independently of Soviet preferences. Nasser quarreled with Qassem of Iraq (at that time a promising Soviet ally) and either attacked or accommodated the conservative Arab states as it suited his purposes. . . . In short, the Soviet relationship between 1955 and 1967 was almost entirely one-sided; Egypt took and gave relatively little in return.14

Sadat followed Nasser’s example.

Israel was also a land of strong political leaders. To be sure, it was not enough for Tel Aviv to will the Cold War to come to the Middle East for it to happen. After all, it was the United States that sponsored (albeit behind the scenes) the

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Baghdad Pact in 1955, which worried not only the Soviet Union but also Egypt (as well as Israel and Saudi Arabia). And it was Egypt’s decision after the creation of CENTO and the Israeli raids of early 1955 to turn to Moscow for arms (after having been turned down by the United States) that for the first time made the Soviet Union a significant actor in Middle East affairs, inviting a U.S. response.

Undoubtedly, therefore, the Soviet Union would have found a role to play in the Middle East even had Israel never existed. Rivalries among and within Arab countries were so great that there was room aplenty for Moscow to find clients for itself in the region. Yet Israel deliberately and repeatedly showed itself willing to militarize tensions in order to resolve them. No later than 1951, Israel had decided to reject neutrality and align itself with Washington. Some say that with the Gaza raids of 1955, Israel hoped to drive Egypt toward the Soviets, calculating that Nasser would request arms from the United States, be denied, and turn to Moscow. Again in 1955, when the Israelis conducted a major raid against Syrian positions, the U.S. ambassador in Damascus noted that Tel Aviv “had acted in full knowledge that Syria would turn to Russia for help. Israel, then, could justify its request for Western arms as anti-communist rather than anti-Arab.”

Still again, in August 1957, the U.S. ambassador to Israel wrote to Dulles that David Ben Gurion had told him that “it is impossible to distinguish between Syria and Russia” and the Israeli prime minister wanted to know what Washington would do “if Israel is attacked by Russia through Syria.” Less than a year later, Ben Gurion had found a new danger in Nasser and was writing to President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the need for “establishing a strong dam against the Nasserist-Soviet torrent.”

In the course of his imaginings about the Middle East in 1958, Ben Gurion let loose a stream of possibilities that might follow for the United States if it did not extend a security guarantee to Israel. The immediate danger, the Israeli prime minister maintained, were Nasserites who were close to taking power in Lebanon and Iraq, and who had the capacity to undermine the government of Ethiopia and gain dominion over the Sudan and Libya. Meanwhile, both Jordan and Saudi Arabia were disintegrating. Moreover, a Communist coup was possible in Iran. But the ultimate danger was not so much Nasser as the Soviet Union:

The domination of the Arab Middle East by Nasser with the support of the vast power of the Soviet Union would have certain grave consequences for the Western world. . . . It would be dangerous to attach importance to the

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16. David Ben Gurion cited by the U.S. ambassador to Israel in a letter to Secretary Dulles, 1957, Eisenhower Papers, MR 78-193-8, box 16. I would like to thank professor Mufti for furnishing me with this material and that in the following note.
anti-communist declarations of Nasser... The Soviet Union knows clearly what it is doing. It is not precipitate in its actions and advances systematically towards its aim – to dominate the Middle East with the assistance of factors which are not communist in themselves, but which serve Soviet purposes. Nasser pre-eminently falls into this category. When the time comes, the Soviets, should they find it necessary, will not hesitate to dispense with Nasser and to replace him by men more devoted and subordinate to the Kremlin.17

What we see in the Middle East is a classic case of the tail trying to wag the dog. Arab and Israeli clients of Moscow and Washington were continually telling their superpower patrons they urgently needed support to struggle against the great power adversary or its local proxy, when in fact the greatest part of their passion really went to the prosecution of local struggles, which they camouflaged (although at times they surely believed it) in global terms. Whereas orthodoxy, revisionism, and postrevisionism are likely to disregard this point, pericentrism spots it easily for it flows from its basic assumptions.

This same logic of argument can be seen in the last part of the globe to be considered, South Asia. Here the Cold War had the least influence of any major part of the world, yet here too we find local actors – especially Pakistanis – eager to play a role in a greater struggle for the advantages it might confer on them in regional terms.

The origins of the eventual U.S. connection with Pakistan lie in Washington’s decision to underwrite the creation of a military alliance, a “northern tier” of states to the south of the Soviet Union. Hence, viewed from the perspective of 1953, it might appear that Washington had taken the initiative. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles determined that Pakistan had a moral seriousness and martial willingness that India conspicuously lacked, and pushed hard that year for military aid for Islamabad, in return for which Pakistan would join the Baghdad Pact and later SEATO.

Yet as a pericentrist might not be surprised to learn, the Pakistanis had long wanted such ties with Washington; in fact, a security pact against India would have pleased them the most. Within weeks of the birth of their new state in 1947, they asked Washington for some $2 billion in economic and military aid. When the request was rejected, Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan declared his unhappiness to the U.S. representative in words that were often to be repeated, namely that the “well-known friendship of Pakistan toward the US and Pakistan’s obvious antipathy to the Russian ideology would seem to justify serious consideration by the US Government of the defense requirements of Pakistan.” Again in 1948 and 1949, Pakistan asked for arms, underscoring its strategic

importance in the global containment of communism. As a Pakistani diplomatic
note put it late in 1948,

In a period of emergency, Pakistan can form a base both for military and air
operations. It is therefore in the interest of other nations that Pakistan should
remain well equipped and strong, ready to meet any emergency which the
international situation may hurl upon the world. . . . Although communist
ideology is foreign to Islam . . . it nevertheless becomes necessary to guard
against its inroads into Pakistan.  

The local, as opposed to global, dimension of Pakistan’s concerns were never
well disguised, however. Asked by the United States to join the war effort in
Korea in 1950, Pakistan elected to stay out. In 1951, when the request was
repeated, Pakistan replied it would become involved so long as it had U.S.
support on Kashmir and with respect to Afghan agitation on Pushtaanistan.

Despite these warnings, Dulles went ahead in creating military ties with
Pakistan after 1953. The price was high. First, there was the matter of dealing
with the fact that both Afghanistan and India tilted toward the Soviet Union.
Then there was the military cost: what Washington originally expected to
amount to some $20–30 million annually turned out to have a price tag that
would start at about $170 million annually. Finally, Washington felt itself hostage
to the regime in Islamabad, for once the deal was consummated whoever was
in power might plausibly claim that if they fell, the tie with the United States
would be severed.

So, once involved, Washington was stuck, and a real dilemma emerged that
rather than Pakistan helping to stop the spread of communism, the United
States would be committed to keeping India at bay, keeping Afghanistan out
of Soviet hands, and maintaining a particular regime-type in Islamabad.
“Our tendency to rush out and seek allies” was not very sensible, President
Eisenhower lamented at a January 1957 meeting of the National Security
Council: “We had decided some time ago that we wanted Pakistan as a military
ally. Obviously it has proved costly to achieve this objective. . . . This was the
worst kind of a plan and decision we could have made. It was a terrible error,
but now we seem hopelessly involved in it.”

Analyses of the Cold War that focus on Washington or Moscow or the
structure of the international system can offer only partial, and thus often
misleading, explanations for why the East-West struggle became global. By
contrast, pericentrism gives agency to junior actors motivated by fear, ambition,
nationalist passion, ideological convictions, and charismatic heroics, estab-
lishing that superpowers were at least as much pulled as they themselves pushed

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18. See the discussion in Robert M. McMahon, The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States,
India, and Pakistan (New York, 1994), chap. 4.
825f.
into the globalization of their contest. Deliberately omitted from this discussion were the earnest efforts of local actors to block the coming of the Cold War to their regions (Jawaharlal Nehru in India, for example). A complete pericentric analysis should credit where it may these usually futile efforts. What is more striking with respect to the expansion of the struggle, however, is the major role of minor actors. Here is what is meant in common speech by phrases like “the tyranny of the weak” or “the tail wagging the dog” or “it’s not the size of the dog in the fight, it’s the size of the fight in the dog.”

intensification:

That the intensification – defined as the militarization – of the Cold War should proceed hand in hand with its expansion should come as no surprise. As the superpower contest spilled into the Far East and later into Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, Moscow and Washington had to reformulate their understanding of the global balance of power in ways that were always complex and often unsettling. The Korean War; CIA-sponsored coups in Iran and Guatemala; the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis; the Berlin crisis of 1958–1961; Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia; Vietnam; wars between Israel and the Arabs in 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982; the civil war in Angola and war between Ethiopia and Somalia – all of these were aspects of the “hot war” on the periphery that accompanied the “Cold War” stalemate along the central divide in Europe.

Once again, the traditional frameworks of analysis give us an incomplete, and thus misleading, picture of what was occurring. The orthodox and the revisionist explanations of these struggles are right to see the superpowers striving to score points against each other by treating smaller powers as proxies and pawns. Postrevisionism’s emphasis on the fluidity of the international system and the struggles this was sure to breed also has its insights, especially as junior actors in the international system came to be seen as stakes in the superpower contest, so that a “loss” by one side automatically was a “win” by the other. Yet ultimately these accounts lack a sense of the extraordinary energy imparted to the Cold War by agents usually treated as marginal to the superpower struggle, little more than pieces on a chess board, just as they correspondingly overlook superpower efforts to restrain their clients’ actions.

Pericentric analyses have shown how various actors other than the superpowers tried to moderate the Cold War. The West German left was particularly outspoken in this regard, and its policy (under Willy Brandt) of Ostpolitik, which intended to reduce the tensions in East-West relations, has repeatedly been noted. But pericentrism may also point out the intensity junior actors gave to the Cold War stemming from their ideological convictions. The United States was in many respects a status-quo power after 1945, and with Stalin’s death in 1953, the Soviet Union moved to a second generation of leaders less ideologically committed than those of an earlier time. But in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East especially, the postwar era saw the rise of leaders
whose combination of nationalist and ideological convictions could only mean trouble, not only regionally but for the superpowers as well.

The most obvious way to illustrate this contention is to consider Mao and Fidel's reactions to the likelihood of nuclear war when it presented itself. Perhaps these Soviet clients were persuaded by Moscow's claims that its ICBMs were superior to those of the United States and that hence, as Mao put it in November 1957, well before the Sino-Soviet split developed, “the East wind is now stronger than the West wind.” It is nonetheless astonishing that Mao could talk with equanimity of a nuclear exchange in which one hundred million Chinese might die and assert that this was a justifiable means to the end of securing world communism. Accordingly, Mao reported to the Soviets in 1958 at the time of the Quemoy–Matsu crisis that he would welcome a U.S. invasion of his country for the opportunity it would give Moscow to use its nuclear weapons! It is equally extraordinary that during the October 1962 missile crisis, Castro would tell Khrushchev that in the event of a U.S. invasion of Cuba, Moscow should initiate a nuclear attack on the United States. In each case, it was the Soviet Union that acted to restrain its headstrong client. It was the junior actor, not the superpower, that sought to intensify the Cold War.

A similar argument can be made with respect to East Germany. Although this country was utterly dependent militarily and economically on the Soviet Union, its ideological extremism led it to take radical measures internally that ultimately resulted in the tragic workers' strike of June 1953, and its repression. Thereafter, the regime of Walter Ulbricht, and later Erich Honecker, remained the watchdogs of ideological purity and the bastion of “internationalist proletarian solidarity” in Eastern Europe – playing somewhat the same role within the Soviet empire that China or Cuba played without.

Thus, we find East Germany calling in no uncertain terms on the Soviet Union to crack down on dissident regimes in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and in Poland in 1980, in each case arguing that successful reform would ultimately undo communism throughout the region. What is most important about these new findings, however, is that they reveal a Soviet hesitation, indeed reluctance, to act forcibly to save the empire. Here East Germany played the role of Lady MacBeth, again and again urging her wavering husband to strike the fatal blow.


Moreover, new evidence suggests that Ulbricht was far more ambitious in his designs on West Germany than was Khrushchev at the inception of the Berlin crisis of 1958. Hope M. Harrison even argues that Khrushchev’s ultimate decision to build the Berlin Wall in August 1961 was intended in good part to restrain Ulbricht’s repeated demands that something more forceful be done to bring West Berlin under his control. As with China, Cuba, and its Arab clients so then with East Germany: again and again, Moscow had to call on the junior partner, whose own preferences lay in ratcheting up the Cold War struggle, for restraint.22

This list of efforts by Moscow’s clients to push it to more aggressive action than it was inclined to take can be extended at great length. So in 1956, the Chinese first hesitated, then strongly pushed for a Soviet invasion of Hungary. New archival material suggests that given Soviet wavering, the insistence of the Chinese comrades had special importance. Again, in 1958, when the United States and Britain landed troops in the Middle East in response to a leftist takeover in Iraq, China called for Soviet countermoves. To demonstrate his own readiness, Mao attacked Quemoy-Matsu in response to the landing. Beijing was also disappointed a year later when Moscow did not support Chinese use of force against India. In a word, China did not lambaste the Soviet Union for its “revisionism” (meaning its moderation, prudence, restraint, and reluctance to use military force) only after these two countries turned antagonistic; rather, it was the indictment of revisionism (in domestic as well as international affairs) that Mao used to make the break in the first place.

Indeed, a principal reason for the Sino-Soviet split was Mao’s fear that a U.S.-Soviet rapprochement might come at the expense of Beijing’s hopes for world revolution (or, more modestly, for control of at least Taiwan). Once that split had occurred, China promoted itself as the sole possessor of revolutionary virtue and so championed national liberation struggles, as in Algeria, and leftist leaders, as in Indonesia, while after 1962 giving unstinting aid to North Vietnam in its aggression against the South. But a Chinese concern with intensifying the Cold War handily predates the split with Moscow in the early 1960s.23

Part of China’s popularity in many parts of the Third World – including Cuba – was precisely its radical stance on world affairs relative to Moscow’s, its


willingness, that is, to intensify the Cold War. Here was that part of the world going through its nationalist Great Awakening with its implicit rejection not only of the ancien régime but of all that had held these countries to the past, and so especially to Western imperialism. As the Cold War moved into these regions, therefore, it could be anticipated that local passions would be heightened, making the superpowers appear conservative by comparison. Accordingly, Vietnamese impatience with the Soviet Union made it align more willingly with Chinese perceptions of world affairs.

Of course, given time Moscow’s conservatism could be brought ‘round. In the 1960s, the Soviet Union may have disapproved of Castro’s “adventurism” in Latin America; but by 1975, when Castro had shown what Cuba was capable of accomplishing in Angola, Moscow moved to second its client’s initiative. Consequently, in 1977, what many once again thought might be a détente in the Cold War was put on hold when the Soviet Union moved troops to Ethiopia to help the government of Haile Mengistu Mariam fight Somali efforts to capture the Ogaden. Here again, it is now apparent that Cuba played a leading role. Castro was the first Communist leader to visit Mengistu, after which he traveled to East Germany and the Soviet Union to give his approval to an all-out effort to back the Ethiopian leader. Later, the Cubans claimed credit for having done for Ethiopia what they had done earlier for Angola. While their military role in the Horn was less decisive, their political role was at least as critical, for it was Castro’s vision of things as he described it to Honecker in April 1977 that ultimately determined policy: “In Africa we can inflict a severe defeat on the entire reactionary imperialist policy. We can free Africa from the influence of the USA and of the Chinese… Ethiopia has a great revolutionary potential…. We must have an integrated strategy for the whole African continent.” Included in this “integrated strategy” was cooperation with Yemen, Libya, Algeria, and the PLO – the whole adding up to “a great counterweight to Sadat’s betrayal in Egypt,” the Cuban leader grandly concluded.

In Central America, too, Castro was pushing boldly ahead, contributing to the reintensification of the Cold War. Thanks to his help, in the summer of 1979, the Sandinistas brought down Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. In short order, they canceled the elections they had promised to hold, invited Soviet and Cuban advisers in, and began to support revolutionary movements elsewhere in the region.

When, then, in 1981 Secretary of State Alexander Haig talked about “going to the source” of U.S. problems in Central America by dealing with Cuba, there was an important element of truth to his argument, as even the Cubans agreed. In November of that year, Haig met in Mexico with Cuban Vice President and Communist party boss Carlos Rafael Rodriguez. Rodriguez proudly announced

his country’s independence from Moscow in Cuba’s undertakings in Africa and Latin America: “Many of the conflicts that we have had with the Soviet Union were occasioned by the acts, words, and positions of Cuba, which did not correspond with the intentions of the Soviet Union in this portion of the world. . . History will bring all of this to light.”

Of course, we must beware of assigning too much agency to Havana. However instrumental the Cubans surely were in bringing about a Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in July 1979, the FSLN was in many ways its own authority (just as Cuba was independent of the Soviet Union, whatever its reliance on Soviet aid). Thus, it was surely a Sandinista (not a Cuban) decision to cancel elections they promised after taking power and to seek to export their revolution to fraternal movements in El Salvador and Guatemala. Here, then, was yet another theater of the Cold War, one in which hundreds of thousands of mostly poor peasants were to die as the result of decisions taken for the most part locally even if subsequently backed by Cuban and Soviet power.

Détente was also undermined by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979. While the onus of this tragic miscalculation must clearly be laid on Moscow, Selig Harrison has nonetheless established that Afghan factions wanted such an occupation and deliberately misled Soviet decision makers as to what was occurring so as to manipulate events. And they were successful.

With the exception of Israel and perhaps Pakistan, allies of the United States did not try to take advantage of the Cold War to spread their influence regionally. Yet the case of Israel does illustrate the general proposition quite well. In 1956, 1967, 1973, and again in 1982, Israel took belligerent initiatives that brought both superpowers not only more deeply into the region but, in the case of the 1973 war especially, to the brink of conflict with each other. Israel was characteristically unrepentant about its conduct with respect to involving Washington—just as Cuba or East Germany were about the complications their demands made for Moscow.

As early as 1972, Jewish activists in the United States began to undermine détente by attacking Soviet emigration practices and successfully tying U.S. trade policy to a more liberal emigration policy. Again, in 1977, Israel scotched Soviet-U.S. announced plans for a summit to resolve the Middle East imbroglio, thereby putting yet another important nail into the coffin of East-West détente. Not for a second would Israel let the superpowers decide the basis of peace in the Middle East.

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The nub of the argument was that Washington was always more confident of Israel’s relative strength and the Arabs’ willingness to make peace than were many (usually right-wing) Israelis. As Menachem Begin put it when criticized by the Reagan administration for annexing the Golan Heights in December 1981, “Are we a vassal state of yours? Are we a Banana Republic? Are we fourteen-year olds who, if we misbehave, we get our wrists slapped?” Nine months later, when Israel expanded its attack on southern Lebanon into an assault on Beirut with U.S. weapons, Washington again protested a violation of Tel Aviv’s agreement with the United States. Begin replied, “Nobody, nobody is going to bring Israel to her knees. You must have forgotten that the Jews kneel but to God.”

While with the exception of Israel U.S. clients were generally content with the status quo in world affairs during the Cold War, the same cannot be said of their behavior in domestic politics. Here U.S.-backed elites often took advantage of the global struggle to mold society to their will—often by trumping up an internal Communist challenge, a phenomenon parodied by Leonard Wibberly in his 1956 book *The Mouse That Roared*. Accordingly, Washington lent its support to crackdowns on “communists,” often a code word for any group pressing for progressive reforms, in countries as different as Greece, Brazil, Chile, South Africa, and Iran, when the United States might otherwise have withheld its support altogether, counseling instead a more open political system to resolve disputes.

These essentially domestic acts of repression played their role internationally in intensifying the Cold War. Thus, in the 1960s, the Alliance for Progress failed not because Washington was insincere in wanting to combat communism in the Western Hemisphere through political and socioeconomic reforms, but because local elites and their middle-class supporters were not interested in such measures. The problem had already been made apparent with U.S. policy in Greece in the late 1940s. There is good reason to think that Washington hoped to avert the civil war that broke out there in 1949 by bringing to power a stable centrist government that would keep the king in his palace and the army in its barracks at the same time that the Communists were held in check politically. But the Greek right was unfortunately not interested in testing the U.S. hypothesis that the best way to counter communism was through democratic, republican government. Instead, the right acted as it saw fit, terrorizing the Communists and repressing the democrats, as it girded for an implacable civil war. That the United States became a party to these activities cannot be denied; that therefore it is enough to study the superpowers to understand counter-revolution in Greece or Latin America is a dubious hypothesis, however popular it has been to many (particularly to revisionists).

The Cold War intensified as it expanded, principally, therefore, because of the fierce nationalist and ideological passions loose in so much of Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, and because of the willingness of strong (often charismatic) leaders to take calculated risks that involved engaging themselves in the global struggle. The obvious conclusion for the study of the period is that these forces and actors must be studied in their own right if we are to understand how the East-West struggle developed the character that it did. To reduce the political leaders of these regions to mere pawns and proxies, surrogates and puppets of superpower interests, is to misunderstand by a good measure what actually was under way. Seen rightly, these stand-ins become star actors, consumed by fears, hopes, and ambitions that were in important ways independent of Washington and Moscow, emotions and convictions that often led them to manipulate and even to defy their great power patrons, who often found themselves counseling restraint and moderation to leaders like Nasser and Arafat, Ben Gurion and Begin, Mao and Fidel, Ulbricht and Kim — men who were in no mood at all to listen.

Prolonging:
The established analytical frameworks of the Cold War give two fundamental reasons for its longevity. First, it simply took time for the Soviet Union to recognize that its economic and political organization, both domestically and as a hegemon, was clearly unequal to the U.S. system and that basic reform (which ultimately led to its undoing) was necessary to survive. Second, the dynamics of the arms race, which may have provided a certain stability to the confrontation, came at the price of its rigidity, and hence contributed to its duration.

Without disputing the validity of these explanations, the account provided in this essay suggests the addition of another set of considerations: that the same dynamic that expanded the struggle around the globe meant it was unlikely soon to be ended. For to expand and to intensify the Cold War, as actors on its periphery proved quite able to do, was rather automatically to prolong it as well. The expansion took time as the conflict spread from region to region, and the recurrent bursts of intensity that were sure to be generated by the expansion of East-West differences into arenas where stakes were different and rules of conduct unformulated, was likely to postpone the final day of reckoning by creating yet more disagreements that called for settlement. The growing variety of “hot spots” and “flash points” that occurred as the Cold War became globalized is reason enough it took so long to come to an end.

More, the Cold War gave birth to vested interests who wanted it to endure. Hard-liners there most certainly were in Moscow and Washington, officials who never thought the contest would end and who acted in ways that made their convictions self-fulfilling prophecies. But there were hard-liners as well in South Africa and Israel, Cuba and East Germany, Nicaragua and Syria, men
who had their own reasons to keep the conflict burning even bright and who contributed their part to the forty-year struggle.

During the Cold War, these clients had obtained valuable resources that might be lost should the superpowers come to terms. Soviet allies had the most to fear once the implosion of their patron became likely. Accordingly, it was because of his awareness of what would occur should Mikhail Gorbachev’s renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine be realized, that Erich Honecker so strongly opposed the Soviet leader’s reforms and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall – even to the point of banning most glasnost-prone Soviet publications in East Germany. When the war is over, the vassals of the defeated party may be among the first to lose their heads.31

Soviet clients were not the only casualties of peace between the superpowers. It is not wholly coincidental that Yugoslavia imploded in the aftermath of the Cold War. And whatever the roots of the domestic strife in so much of Africa today, the withdrawal of international support in Angola, Zaire, Liberia, and Somalia (to name only the most obvious) also has contributed to the region’s terrible hardships by undermining established governments there.

Even close U.S. clients may have their regrets at the Cold War’s end. Their role over as preservers of order against Communist takeovers, Washington might leave them to their own devices. The effort of the Israeli right led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to find in “Muslim terrorism” a threat to the entire West would appear in good measure to be an effort to retain a security guarantee from Washington based on a sense of common danger now that Soviet communism no longer fulfills that function. Similarly, Selig Harrison points out that in South Korea today the observation of former U.S. ambassador William Porter remains valid: “they’ve got hold of our big fat udder and they won’t let go.”32

Of course, pericentric analysis can also demonstrate the enormous contribution of minor actors on the world’s scale to the eventual end of the superpower contest. Vietnam in the 1960s made Washington far more prudent in the 1970s and 1980s than it had been in the 1950s. Similarly, Afghan and Polish nationalism made an essential contribution to Moscow’s decision to reform through retrenchment (a decision that quickly led to the unraveling of the empire and the implosion of the Soviet Union itself). A complete account of the periphery’s role in the Cold War should surely take into account the extraordinary efforts of small powers to end great power imperialism and thus to end the superpower struggle. This story is more familiar to students of the period, however, so that the effort here (respecting the limitations of space and so focusing especially largely on the conflict’s expansion) has been to put forth

a less generally accepted view of the results of efforts by minor powers to keep the East-West struggle at full boil.

CONCLUSION:
To date, analyses guiding the study of the history of the Cold War have been content with analyzing policy in Washington and Moscow, as well as the overall configuration of power in the international system, to provide the basic framework for explaining the character of the Cold War. Needed to complement these perspectives are studies that look at the history of the Cold War from the point of view of its junior allies and actors and that appreciate the major importance of minor powers. The result should be not simply fuller, more complete accounts of what happened in history but also better answers as to the dynamics of the struggle’s basic identity.

The test of an analytic framework is whether it gets us to see the logic of events differently, in ways we would not see if we did not depend on the perspective’s leading assumptions. What emerges from a pericentric analysis that focuses on junior actors and allies, partners and clients, in the Cold War is that here there were states to be born and institutions to be built. Hence, it was no accident that here there were charismatic nationalist ideologues with ambitions and fears that played a fundamental role in using the energy of the Cold War in ways that made it expand (although sometimes they blocked it), that intensified it (although sometimes they moderated it), and that prolonged it (although they ultimately contributed mightily to ending it). Nationalist communism in China, Cuba, North Korea, Indochina, East Germany, and Nicaragua, or again Zionism, Pan-Arabism, Islamic fundamentalism in Iran and Afghanistan, Afrikandom, Negritude, and Pan-Africanism, the birth of Pakistan and India: no amount of analysis of Washington, Moscow, or the international system taken as a whole — each of which tends to reduce these junior actors to following the logic of some script other than their own — can hope to capture their contribution to the making of history.

Indeed, the effort to explain everything important in terms of superpower decisions or the logic of the international system may actually turn out to be significantly misleading when it misreads casual agency. Thus, Washington is often blamed for the terrible repressions of governments beholden to it in Asia and Latin America while Moscow is held responsible for all manner of efforts to “export revolution.” On closer inspection, the superpowers were often regretting domestic repressions or regional expansions undertaken by their clients, who were hell-bent on policies that the superpowers frequently could at best only hope to moderate. Perhaps the result would be a condominium to divide the globe, or more likely what George Breslauer called “collaborative competition” that would keep the peace.

The historical situation of the countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa after 1945 explains a good part of the particularly intense feelings that underlay politics there. Nationalism had proved a solvent of empire, but modern governments based on stable connections between the state and the people had not yet been developed (and today, nearly a decade after the Cold War has ended, still have not in many areas). Wounded national pride, historically conditioned fears, radical ideologies, and demagogic leaders looking to solve deeply felt problems interacted with the superpower struggle in complex and deadly ways. But the major shortcoming of frameworks analyzing the period to date has been their predilection not simply to avoid, but actually to discount, actors other than those in Washington and Moscow (and at times Beijing) for being able to mold events to the degree that they could.

Pericentrism thus redefines the expansionary efforts that orthodoxy attributes to the Soviet Union as characteristic of nationalist communism more generally and underscores the volatility of this ideology's appeal, often quite independent of Moscow's will, in parts of the world where nationalism was young and Western imperialism old. Similarly, pericentrism criticizes revisionism for exaggerating the activism of U.S. imperialism, for failing to see how it was pulled, every bit as much as it pushed, into every corner of the globe. Again, pericentrism sees postrevisionism as failing to see the type and degree of agency that alleged power vacuums actually possessed, for pericentrism asserts that junior actors may have interests, passions, and types of leaders wanting to take advantage of what they perceive to be an international contest to give shape to domestic, or regional, or even global organizations of power that they conceive of in their own nationalist or ideological terms. Especially when it came to ending a Cold War it had once encouraged to expand (a paradox of the pericentric impact) through a nationalist rejection of imperialist control – in Indochina, Afghanistan, and Poland especially – the role of these actors was decisive. Chinese and North Koreans, Vietnamese and Afghans, Cubans and Nicaraguans, Israelis and Egyptians, Germans East or West, Poles and Angolans obviously display enormous differences among themselves. What they nonetheless had in common was the will and the ability to use their position in the superpower contest to leave their own mark on global history.