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Richard Sakwa, *The Lost Peace: How the West Failed to Prevent a Second Cold War*, Yale University Press: New Haven & London 2023 433pp £25

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The Soviet-Western cold war is typically viewed as combining inter-systemic ideological rivalries with a global power struggle between the USSR and the United States. But, as Richard Sakwa demonstrates, that cold war conflict was also underpinned by a more enduring and consequential contradiction: the tension between the 'sovereign internationalism' espoused by the Soviet Union and Communist China and the 'democratic internationalism' or liberal hegemony pursued by the United States.

While the proximate cause of the post-cold war era's lost peace was the failure to create an inclusive system of European security extending from Lisbon to Vladivostok, the underlying dynamic was the continuing struggle between sovereign and democratic internationalism. The result, argues Sakwa, has been a new, more dangerous, cold war, one that has spawned a Russo-Western proxy war in Ukraine and threatens a rupture in international politics that could destroy the United Nations and its 'Charter system'.

Sovereign internationalism is Sakwa's name for a system of state sovereignty tempered by multilateralism and in-principle support for the peace and human rights values of the United Nations charter. Its key values are pluralism of political forms and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.

Democratic internationalism denotes the liberal project to universalise western values and political systems – to domesticate international relations, to remake the world in its own image. While sovereign internationalists extol International Law, liberals demand a rules-based order of freedom, democracy and human rights.

For sovereign internationalists the protection of human rights is a state-level prerogative – a privilege that liberals seek to over-ride by mobilising the 'international community' against authoritarian powers who oppress their citizens.

During the first cold war, sovereignty and human rights issues functioned as political cudgels. The end of that conflict promised a harmonisation of those two perspectives on the basis of convergent values and shared security aspirations. Such hopes were dashed by what Sakwa calls the 'great substitution' – the United States' use of its unipolar power to impose a global liberal hegemony that eroded state sovereignty and de-stabilised a centuries-old international society.

Key players in consolidating sovereign internationalism in the mid-20th century were the Soviets and the Chinese communists, both of whom saw state sovereignty as a protective mechanism in a world of hostile capitalist states. But they were far from alone in defending such a system. Sovereign internationalism was embraced enthusiastically by the newly independent states of the post-Second World War era. The assertion of sovereign independence was at the heart of the Bandung Movement in the 1950s and remains central to the political identity of global south countries.

Ironically, the two communist champions of sovereign internationalism compounded the liberal drift to moral absolutism in international affairs. Communists as well as the liberals wanted to remake the world in their own image. But, as Sakwa highlights, there was a crucial difference between the communists' revolutionary internationalism and the liberals' democratic internationalism: the Reds' imagined socialist world order was deemed fully compatible with a state sovereignty system. Communists sought to overturn the capitalist order, not international society itself. Today's China and Russia Sakwa dubs 'neo-revisionist' powers: resistant to Western universalism but defenders of sovereignty and the Charter system, though he also detects a drift away from international institutions that Moscow considers suborned by liberal hegemony.

This is a book of advocacy as well as analysis. Professor Sakwa much prefers the pragmatism and practicality of sovereign internationalism to the moral certainty of liberal hegemony. The problem with the liberals is their anti-pluralism, which fosters an 'anti-diplomacy' in world politics. The problem with their liberal order is not its values but its attachment to American geopolitical power and ambitions, which entails a Western-dominated global politics that is not to everyone's taste or interests. The pursuit of liberal hegemony has alienated two great powers and civilisations (China and Russia) and trampled on the rights of many other states and peoples. Democratic internationalism has also proved inimical to that most fundamental international political value – peace.

Was the lost peace an inevitable result of a post-cold war constellation of power in which the United States ruled supreme while Russia was weak and divided and China not yet fully risen? "There is no escape from cold war, warns Sakwa. "Whatever the outcome of current confrontations, one thing is certain: there will be costly and prolonged global conflicts along multiple dimensions."

In conclusion, Sakwa asks if during the post-cold war period there ever was "an opportunity to manage great-power relations to ensure that peace and development took priority over conflict and hierarchy?" Somewhat surprisingly, his answer is no. His greatest fear is that the Ukraine war will prompt the Western bloc to break completely with Charter multilateralism and establish some sort of 'Union of Democracies' as an alternative to the United Nations. In that light, he writes, the prospects for a 'positive peace', as opposed to the mere absence of war, look "more unrealistic than ever".

Sakwa's pessimism is perfectly understandable but the detailed analyses of his book actually reveal a litany of missed opportunities to secure a meaningful post-cold war peace.

Had Gorbachev bargained harder in the late '80s and early '90s he might have come closer to realising his vision of a Europe reunited as a community of free nations based on sovereign internationalism. The NATO-Russia collaboration of the 1990s was not destined to flounder in the face of Western bloc expansion eastwards. In the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, Putin's early pro-Westernism warranted a greater welcome in Washington than the

grudging response it actually received. The Iraq War's damage to Russo-American relations may have been unavoidable but the same was not true of the disastrous Western intervention in Libya in 2011. Even so, President Obama's attempted reset of relations with Moscow had its merits, as did Russia's many proposals for pan-European collective security structures.

Crucially, there was more than one chance to avert the Ukraine war. But while the West's rejection of Moscow's security proposals of December 2021 was a decisive, negative turning-point, it was Putin who actually plunged into war in February 2022, thereby, as Sakwa states "undermining the Charter international system and jeopardising the future of humanity".

Sakwa's book is packed with information, analysis, insight and deep thinking about the sources of our current precarity. It makes a compelling case that the failure to prevent a second cold war was primarily, if not solely, the West's responsibility.