

David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)

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David Ekbladh's first book, *The Great American Mission*, deals with the role of development policy in American foreign relations during the Cold War. More specifically, it discusses modernization as a developmental approach, tracing its rise and fall over a period of about forty years. In Ekbladh's view, modernization theory fused political, ideological and strategic objectives at a time when the United States waged what was, in essence, a global struggle over ideas.

Yet ideas about modernization did not emerge as a consequence of the Cold War, Ekbladh argues. Rather they were an outgrowth of liberal ideas that germinated in the 1930s in response to the Great Depression and the rise of fascist and communist ideologies. The Depression brought state planning into fashion but the onset of ideologies that rivalled American liberalism saw that, in the United States, an approach to planning devoid of ideology was sought. This came to be called modernization. The approach was undergirded by a belief in technology, reflected a superiority of Western values and could trace its roots back to Reconstruction in the 1860s. In its early days, it was mostly pushed by Christian missionaries and non-governmental groups, one target being the turn-of-the-century Philippines.

Only after the Depression did modernization become embedded in official American government policy. It found concrete shape in the New Deal Programs, most conspicuously that of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). In Ekbladh's words, the TVA was "the grand synecdoche, standing for a wider liberal approach to economic and social development both domestically and internationally." (p. 8) Indeed, it was "so influential globally that it would become nearly synonymous with liberal development

itself". (p. 48) The book's first three chapters are taken up with a detailed discussion of how the TVA came to be the signature project that provided a model for America's subsequent development policy. Further chapters then look in great detail at how this philosophy came to be applied in North-East Asia (China, and more extensively in South Korea) and then more widely in Latin-America, Africa and Asia.

The last three chapters trace the demise of modernization, arguing that the Vietnam debacle was principally to blame for its fall. The chapter on the war itself focuses mainly on the effort to create a "TVA on the Mekong River" in the 1960s. However, says Ekbladh, it got nowhere since "the Tet Offensive in January 1968 smashed assumptions guiding development work." (p. 217) What is more, under pressure from both the left and the right, the consensus around modernization at home also began to dissolve, ushering in the arrival of dependency theory, environmental concerns and approaches focusing on sustainability and targeting poverty reduction. Only in the wake of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars did some of the discredited notions about modernization begin to re-emerge, the author argues.

While not taking anything away from the book's impressively researched and documented argument, some criticisms can be noted. One is that when probing the roots of modernization, Ekbladh chooses, for unknown reasons, to skip over the intellectual contributions of Talcott Parsons and A.F.K. Organski, who furnished the notion with a full-fledged theoretical framework. Another is that the overwhelming focus on modernization leads to diminishing other approaches to development. Ideas such as "trade not aid", a focus on investment, education or debt relief as ways to development get only little discussion. The last chapter, which deals with "new developments" in development policy from the Cold War to today, discusses subsequent rival approaches in a mere seventeen pages, meandering through sometimes tangential discussions on Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis (claiming that this entailed "a modernization argument", p. 260), globalization and criticisms of World Bank policies.

In a way, this last chapter points to a somewhat more serious problem with the book, namely the interchangeable use of modernization and development. Ekbladh defends this choice by saying that in the post-WW II period, these were used as “nearly synonymous terms.” (p. 12). However, by not distinguishing between modernization -which could be conceived of as large-scale planning for the sake of development – and development in general, Ekbladh runs into some methodological and argumentative problems.

On the first point, the author's argument that Vietnam sounded the death knell for modernization would logically also imply that there also came an end to American development assistance. In this respect, Ekbladh's claim that “the concept of modernization fell out of fashion, because of its close associations with Cold War thinking, ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism” (p. 12) can certainly be defended. And of course, it is eminently plausible that in the wake of the Vietnam War, American development activities came to be viewed with much more suspicion, but this is not the same as suggesting that American development assistance as a whole came to a halt thereafter.

This critique would also lead to the need to revisit the contended causal link between Vietnam and the fall of modernization theory worldwide. Ekbladh's claim is that “[i]n the United States and internationally, the war in Vietnam helped undermine the broad consensus that had supported modernization since the 1940s.” (p. 224). However, this claim is not being backed up with analysis of development policies of countries other than the United States. Furthermore, most development economists would probably maintain that the demise of modernization had more to do with economic logic – that large-scale projects turned out to be ineffective in fostering long-term growth- and that the timing with the Vietnam War was therefore perhaps a coincidence.

Finally, the author sometimes seems to want to fit too much into his argumentative framework, whereby he comes to stretch his argument on various occasions. For example, he claims that

Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's inability to freely walk the campus of Columbia University during a visit in 1970 "provides insight into the connection between the war in Vietnam and shifts in thinking about development that came in the late 1960s and early 1970s." (p. 226) Other examples appear in the final chapter, in which Ekbladh discusses the 2002 National Security Strategy, the Sachs-Easterly debate on development aid and Fukuyama's doubts about the neocon movement, all with relatively little relevance for his thesis, and all summarized rather than discussed on their merits. In the absence of a real conclusion, it leaves the reader somewhat dissatisfied, especially in light of the detailed and interesting discussions in the preceding chapters.

But while the book leaves something to be desired in terms of its argument, as a historical narrative it constitutes a very valuable and thorough contribution to understanding how modernization ideas furnished the foundations of American post-war development policy, whilst also supplying a series of interesting portraits of almost-forgotten figures who were intimately associated with this enterprise, such as David Lilienthal, Eugene Staley and Walt Rostow. As such, the book is a substantial contribution both to the literatures on the Cold War as well as the history of Western development policy, making it a worthwhile book for the specialist and the interested general reader alike.

Perez Zagorin, *Hobbes and the Law of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

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Hobbes and the Law of Nature constitutes the final monograph by the late historian Perez Zagorin, who was a specialist in the field of early modern European and English political thought. Zagorin died in April 2009 at the age of 88 and in this last work he presents his assessment of Thomas Hobbes as a political and