The Other Cold War

Lecturer: Dr. Brendan Wright
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Session: Fall Session I
Dates: Fridays, September 15th – October 20th
Time: 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Schedule of topics:

Week One: Course Introduction/The Chinese Civil War and Revolution (1912-1979)

In 1949, China ended it’s so-called “century of humiliation” by achieving a unitary nation state under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (Taiwan being the exception). However, this was an incredibly long and violent process, and one that did not end the communist victory. In the first half, students are introduced to the long civil war between the Nationalists and Communists over control of China. The second half, will discuss calamitous events such as the “Great Leap Forward” and the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”.

Week Two: The Korean Civil War (1948-1953)

Often dubbed the “Forgotten War”, the Korean civil war resulted in the loss of millions of lives, millions of refugees, and the indefinite division of the Korean peninsula. The first half of the lecture will explore the background causes and trajectory of this tragic and poorly understood conflict. The second half will explore the social and cultural history of each Koreas’ Cold War universe. In particular, Dr. Wright will discuss how successive governments in both of the Koreas exploited Cold War tensions to maintain control over their domestic populations.

Week Three: Revolutionary and Counter-Revolutionary Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Cambodian Examples (1945-1975).

For much of its Cold War history, Southeast Asia was embroiled in a drawn out and pitiless regional civil war between left and right and the various politicized ethnicities that mobilized around these ideologies. This lecture will principally focus on the Vietnamese Revolution in its local, regional, and global Cold War context. Throughout this narrative, other regional episodes of mass violence, such as the 1965 Indonesian “politicide” and the Cambodia genocide will be discussed.

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**Week Four: Cold War in South and Central America (1950s-1980s)**

Throughout the Cold War, Latin America was a major site of tension and violence as domestic forces mobilized Cold War ideologies and their patrons to suit their local agendas. The first half explores real and aborted left-wing revolutions in 1950s central America, such as those in Guatemala and Cuba, and closes with a discussion of the Cuban missile crisis. The second will examine what scholars call the US-led “rightist counter-revolution” which began in Chile in 1973 and was waged throughout the 1980s. A common thread linking this lecture will be the role of political violence in shaping these societies.

**Week Five: The Middle East’s Cold War, the Islamist Defiance, and the Making of our Political Present (1979-Present).** From 1979 until the present, the Persian Gulf and the surrounding area have been in a state of perpetual civil war and American intervention. How did this happen? What is the relationship to the domestic and global Cold War? This lecture will explore this history by primarily focusing on the Iranian Revolution and the seemingly unending war in Afghanistan. Throughout the lecture, the class will be encouraged to think about how this late Cold War history has come to define our present.

**Week Six: In the Shadow of the Cold War: Traumatic Memories and Contested Memorialization of the Cold War.**

This concluding lecture examines the afterlives of the Cold War. We will pick up some of the stories opened up in the first five lectures and examine their contemporary implications. Dr. Wright will also discuss the phenomenon of “transitional justice” and its impact on how societies work through and make sense of the traumatic past. We will reflect on how these stories challenge conventional understandings of the Cold War and peaceful era of stability.