

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXII-44

*A Teaching Roundtable*

## Teaching Roundtable on the Cold War and History

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### Contents

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Introduction by Fritz Bartel, The Bush School, Texas A&M University .....	2
Essay by Corina Mavrodin, Utrecht University.....	6
Essay by Alanna O'Malley, Leiden University .....	9
Essay by B. Jared Pack, University of Arkansas.....	12
Essay by Marek W. Rutkowski, Monash University Malaysia .....	17

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INTRODUCTION BY FRITZ BARTEL, THE BUSH SCHOOL, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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If there was a financial market for geopolitical buzzwords like there is for cryptocurrencies or GameStop stock, the time to put all your money into the phrase “new Cold War” would have arrived in 2010. At that time, two decades of imperfect, but apparently interminable, American unipolarity had depressed the price of Cold War assets on the buzzword marketplace. The stark ideological differences, arms racing, and open-ended competition of the Cold War’s connotation did not yet fit the times. To be sure, a decade of American misadventure in the greater Middle East had dented the United States’ global authority, and the Global Financial Crisis had damaged the legitimacy of the American economic model. But the historic election of Barack Obama appeared to signal that these were unfortunate blips on History’s radar and that the arc of the geopolitical universe still bent toward perpetual U.S. hegemony.

Moreover, alternatives to the U.S.-led liberal international order - another catchphrase worth investing in - remained inchoate. Yes, President Vladimir Putin had demonstrated his rhetorical opposition to armed American arrogance, but he had yet to prove that Russia was anything more than a ‘regional power’ unworthy of Obama’s concern.<sup>1</sup> And yes, the Chinese economic juggernaut continued apace, but the country remained under the outwardly innocuous leadership of Hu Jintao’s stiff collar rather than Xi Jinping’s iron fist. Any talk of belts and roads in Beijing provoked no fear in Washington, and great power conflict over Crimea remained a topic for academic seminars on nineteenth-century empires.

A decade later, the skyrocketing fortunes of the phrase “new Cold War” on Google N-Gram could give bitcoin or GameStop a run for their money.<sup>2</sup> As global confidence in the durability and desirability of U.S. leadership has waned, talk of new Cold Wars with Russia and China has waxed in equal measure. Historians have issued numerous warnings about the dangers of simplistic Cold War analogies, but their admonitions have largely fallen on deaf ears.<sup>3</sup> Though President Joe Biden avoided the words “Cold War” in his first address to Congress in April, he fully embraced the idea that the United States is now in a long-term competition with China to “win the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”<sup>4</sup>

It is, therefore, a vitally important time to be teaching Cold War history. If the Cold War is to be more than a totem for the burgeoning anxieties and antagonisms of the present day, then citizens and students must know its history. But as the four contributors to this roundtable make clear, today’s students know less and less about the Cold War when they enter our classrooms, even as the world talks more and more about a new Cold War outside of them. This is, in some ways, a natural product of the passage of time, but it leaves our pedagogical opportunities and responsibilities ever larger.

Those opportunities and responsibilities are highly dependent on context. “Who we are and where we are matter when we teach the Cold War,” Corina Mavrodin writes below, in a passage that echoes the convictions of all the contributors. Such a sentiment is, I suppose, true about any historical subject, but it seems particularly important for a grand narrative of

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<sup>1</sup> Michael D. Shear and Peter Baker, “Obama Answers Critics, Dismissing Russia as a ‘Regional Power,’” March 24, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/europe/hague-summit-focuses-on-preventing-trafficking-of-nuclear-materials.html>. Accessed May 19, 2021.

<sup>2</sup>Google N-Gram, Accessed May 19, 2021, [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%22new+Cold+War%22&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2019&corpus=26&smooth=3&direct\\_url=t1%3B%2C%22%20new%20Cold%20War%20%22%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2C%22%20new%20Cold%20War%20%22%3B%2Cc0](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%22new+Cold+War%22&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smooth=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2C%22%20new%20Cold%20War%20%22%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2C%22%20new%20Cold%20War%20%22%3B%2Cc0).

<sup>3</sup> To take one example: Melvyn Leffler, “China Isn’t the Soviet Union. Confusing the Two is Dangerous,” *The Atlantic*, December 2, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/cold-war-china-purely-optional/601969/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Remarks by President Biden in Address to a Joint Session of Congress,” April 28, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/04/29/remarks-by-president-biden-in-address-to-a-joint-session-of-congress/>.

international politics like the Cold War, whose meaning and memory have always been refracted through personal experience and national conditions. It is those experiences and conditions, the contributors collectively suggest, that should determine how one teaches the Cold War because it is those conditions that allow us as teachers to connect with and then transform our students' perspectives.

The contributors to this roundtable come from a variety of backgrounds and teach in a wide array of settings scattered around the globe, so readers are likely to find an enlightening mix of both familiar and unfamiliar pedagogical experiences in the essays that follow. I certainly attempt, for instance, to introduce my own students at Texas A&M to the full gamut of North-South and East-West dynamics at work in the global Cold War, but I have never done so in Malaysia, as Marek Rutkowski has for the past three years at Monash University Malaysia. Because his students come from throughout South and Southeast Asia, he has firmly situated his course on the Cold War within the context of decolonization. For much of the course, his focus is not even "on the Cold War per se," but rather on how "decolonization and the Cold War were parallel processes with the latter complicating the former."

In any Cold War course, there will be – or should be – topics that are difficult to discuss because they force students to confront challenging questions of their own nation's history and memory. In Malaysia, the controversial history and starkly anti-Communist public memory of the Malayan Emergency hangs over all discussions of decolonization and the Cold War, so Rutkowski confronts the topic head on in his classes. Through "nuanced discussion" that debunks popular myths and sets "aside the question of moral judgement," he attempts to create space for his students to understand the history of the Emergency before they draw conclusions about it. In this effort to place understanding before judgment, he has no doubt engaged with a perennial challenge of teaching the Cold War.

Half a world away, Jared Pack has been teaching the Cold War to American undergraduates at the University of Arkansas for the past six years. For them, he writes, "the Cold War is nothing more than a vague and abstract concept," so his first challenge is to provide them with a cohesive explanation of the conflict in his U.S. history survey course. Explaining the underpinnings of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation and the thinking behind containment make American actions around the world "seem less strange" to students with little historical background, Pack writes. From that foundation, Pack has developed a series of upper-level undergraduate courses that allow students to engage more deeply with the Cold War's sources, more comprehensively with its actors, and more critically with its themes. At each level, his ultimate purpose echoes Rutkowski's: to allow students "to reckon with the past honestly" so that they "can see the national failures of the past...and instead strive to create a better tomorrow."

While Pack aims to provide his American initiates into Cold War history with a cohesive narrative of the conflict, Alanna O'Malley stresses the limits of any comprehensive account of the Cold War in her master's seminar at Leiden University in the Netherlands. O'Malley uses her students' previous historical training as a launching pad to encourage them "to question what they know (or think they know) about the Cold War." A rigorous semester of deconstruction ensues as the students pick "apart the traditional chronology, actors, containers, perspectives, and consequences of the Cold War." In O'Malley's reflections – as in all the essays – we can see how the vibrant historiography on the global Cold War that has developed over the last two decades is now serving educators well and delivering a tangibly different experience for students in the classroom. O'Malley presents the Cold War to her students as one of many forces that determined international history after 1945, and she concludes that the conflict "changed the global order" but "was not the only process to do so, and arguably, perhaps not the most momentous." Clearly, then, the dominant "Cold War lens" that Matthew Connelly called on scholars to remove from their analysis in 2000 is now just one among many lenses that educators and students can use to enhance their view of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence," *The American Historical Review* 105:3 (2000): 739-769.

Down the road from Leiden, Corina Mavrodin has been seeking out new forms of synthesis in Cold War history in her classes at Utrecht University. Teaching the Cold War, Mavrodin believes, “entails a constant effort to build bridges – geographical, generational, historiographical, and interdisciplinary.” Only by building bridges across time and space can we help students move beyond their national histories to see the Cold War from many perspectives. Seeing things from other vantage points should not require, however, checking one’s own identity at the door. Indeed, Mavrodin insightfully argues that even though historians have been trained as researchers “to be ruthless in dodging subjectivity,” they must lean into their background and identity in the classroom and encourage students to explore their own family’s history in the Cold War. Through this bridge-building to places far outside our students’ perspective and to times within their own past, Mavrodin suggests that we as educators can make Cold War history “come alive” for them.

This is a goal that all of the contributors share. Throughout the essays, readers will find very useful discussions of readings, classroom activities, and assignments that are designed to make the vitality of the Cold War tangible for students with no personal memory of the twentieth century. Whether it is Rutkowski asking his students to persuade a hypothetical newly decolonized state to choose a Communist, pro-Western, or nonaligned posture in the Cold War, or Mavrodin tasking her students with interviewing family members about their experiences during Cold War crises, it is clear that the Cold War is anything but a dead letter in these classrooms.

When viewed in total, then, these contributions suggest that the Cold War as a historical subject has at last become what it was as a global process: many different things to many different people around the world. Historians’ collective efforts to globalize the Cold War in historiography have now allowed them to customize the Cold War in the classroom. One comes away from this roundtable with the sense that the Cold War is most effectively presented to students not as a definitive narrative (least of all as one of simple bipolar competition), but rather as a set of questions. To teach and learn about the Cold War is to ask how power operates across the many domains of modern international relations, to examine whose voice has counted and should count in domestic and international affairs, and to question whether government actions taken in the name of security or idealism have furthered the cause of either. There may be more money in bitcoin or GameStop, but the value in tackling the Cold War’s questions is skyrocketing.

### Participants:

**Fritz Bartel** is an Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Texas A&M’s Bush School of Government and Public Service, and a faculty member in the School’s Albritton Center for Grand Strategy. His book, *The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism* is forthcoming with Harvard University Press in the spring of 2022, and a volume he co-edited with Nuno P. Monteiro, *Before and After the Fall: World Politics and the End of the Cold War*, is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press in the fall of 2021. His publications have appeared in *Diplomatic History* and *Enterprise & Society*.

**Corina Mavrodin** is Lecturer in the History of International Relations at Utrecht University. She specializes in modern European history, with emphasis on Eastern Europe within the context of the global Cold War. Her book, *Romania and the Cold War: The Roots of Exceptionalism, 1953-63* will soon be published by Palgrave Macmillan (London).

**Alanna O’Malley** is Professor of United Nations Studies in Peace and Justice at Leiden University in The Netherlands. She is a historian of the UN, decolonization, Congo and the Cold War. From 2020 she had been the Principal Investigator of ‘Challenging the Liberal World Order from Within, the Invisible History of the United Nations and the Global South’ funded by a Starting Grant from the European Research Council in 2019.

**B. Jared Pack** is an instructor in the Department of History at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. His research focuses on national security theory, grand strategy, transatlantic relations, and inter-American relations. He is currently working on a book project that examines Anglo-American involvement in Latin America's Southern Cone from 1969-1982.

**Marek W. Rutkowski** is Lecturer in Global Studies at Monash University Malaysia, where he teaches courses on the Cold War, global political economy and crisis simulation. His research focuses on the Cold War politics in Asia with a particular interest in middle power diplomacy, development and Eastern European involvement. Marek has published research on Poland's Cold War foreign policy in Asia and is currently working on a book manuscript exploring the role of the International Control Commission in Vietnam.

ESSAY BY CORINA MAVRODIN, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

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The first time I ever set foot in a classroom as a teacher of the Cold War it was in 2013 at Peking University, where my doctoral institution (the London School of Economics), was co-organizing a summer school program. The course I was teaching was on 'power shifts' and it aimed to bridge the gap between Cold War history and contemporary IR preoccupations with geopolitical fluxes of power - economic, political, military etc. - from West to (far) East. There was no better place to study this than in Beijing; and the approach to link Cold War history to contemporary IR has proved to be formative. On my way to class each and every day, I would have to pass hundreds of people neatly lined up in unbearable heat outside the guarded entrance. Most were national tourists, all hoping to visit the university library where Chairman Mao Zedong once worked and – importantly - forged his own and very distinctive interpretation of Communist ideology. Their 'pilgrimage' signaled that in China, just as in Eastern Europe (where I was born), the Cold War still has a far-reaching influence on collective memory and experience. Outside the university gates I stuck out like a sore thumb, so I was asked on countless occasions to pose with strangers; sometimes, with entire families. Inside the classroom, however, diversity was the norm, so I blended in more easily among my students - a very motley bunch gathered from 23 countries and 3 continents. That summer in Beijing I was forced to navigate a very steep learning curve about teaching: each student came from a different education system, each with a completely different set of knowledge. National histories often obscured global perspectives, and national rivalries sometimes heated class debates a bit too much for comfort. Eight years and several equally diverse classrooms later, the most valuable thing I've come to understand is that, essentially, teaching the Cold War entails a constant effort to build bridges – geographical, generational, historiographical, and interdisciplinary.

Who we are and where we are matter when we teach the Cold War. In my experience, the personal and the academic are closely intertwined - I was born in Communist Romania, into a family that had been blacklisted by the Ceaușescu regime; I was educated in the United States, at the height of triumphalist rhetoric; and I started doctoral studies in the UK at a time when bipolar approaches to the Cold War felt redundant, and global perspectives started taking root. Initially, my intimate connections to the Cold War filtered my own understanding of the academic subject perhaps too narrowly; but by reflecting on all these seemingly disjointed experiences together, I have been able to make connections that hopefully enhance my students' understanding of the topic, while at the same time perhaps bringing more cohesion to highly diverse classrooms.

Take 1968, for example. In Eastern Europe, where we lived the Cold War daily and generationally, and in every aspect of our lives, '68 was synonymous to the Prague Spring. It was about the hope and bravery of believing the Communist system could be reformed being crushed by the Soviet tanks (in class, I use Josef Koudelka's stunningly expressive photography to illustrate just this).<sup>6</sup> But because in Eastern Europe 1968 is unmistakably a Cold War moment, I did for a long time mistakenly assume that it was also a unifying East-West moment; in other words, I thought that the simultaneous social upheavals taking place in the West were, to a large extent, a manifestation of solidarity with the Czechoslovak cause. As Tony Judt so convincingly explains, however, not only did these movements mostly have their backs towards one another; but in the West, they manifested differently and were shaped by very distinctive national factors – issues of race, class, or historical memory weighed differently on streets of Chicago, Paris or Frankfurt.<sup>7</sup> 1968 is therefore often taught as national history. To the extent that these movements were, in a broad sense, anti-establishment, they were also connected as part of international history. And while '68 in the West may not have been about the Cold War per se, there were elements within these movements – be they anti-NATO or nuclear proliferation, or even pro-Mao – that were inextricably linked to the East-West dynamic. Crucially, however, 1968 was not exclusive to the North. Scholars from Latin American are now also highlighting '68 as a pivotal revolutionary- and reform-oriented moment in which regional actors, such as Marxist guerilla leader Ernesto 'Che' Guevara or Catholic progressives, linked their movements to broader global currents along both the

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<sup>6</sup> Josef Koudelka, *Invasion 68: Prague* (New York: Aperture, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010).

East-West and North-South axes.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, the Czechoslovak example illustrates that we can, arguably, take international history out of the Cold War. On the other hand, however, the Western and Latin American experiences with 1968 show that we cannot really take the Cold War out of international history. Connecting these ideas in the classroom has shown students not only how relative historical emphasis can be, but also how the Cold War can be a useful lens through which to understand broader historical currents.

Ask any Eastern European what the phrase ‘wind of change’ means to them. A vast majority – myself included - will refer to the rock ballad which became the unofficial soundtrack to the fall of the Berlin Wall, a generational anthem that signaled the end of our collective experience under Communism. (Somewhat ironically, a new theory now explores the possibility that the song itself, as well as its wide dissemination, might have been part of a CIA propaganda campaign).<sup>9</sup> Ask any of my former students in London what the same phrase means to them. Unequivocally, they will recall British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan’s ‘wind of change’ speech in 1960, which acknowledged the beginning of the end of British empire in Africa. Broadly speaking, both ‘winds’ refer to liberation, be it from Communism or colonialism. One of them is unequivocally a part of Cold War history – the demise of an ideology and its system, the collapse of the bipolar order. The other is disputably less so - while some scholars argue that the newly decolonized Third World became inadvertently caught up in the bipolar struggle, being forced to choose sides, others claim that the East-West ideological conflict was less relevant to the Global South, where national and regional actors had their own visions of modernity.<sup>10</sup> Scholars may disagree on the extent to which the decolonization process and Cold War history overlap, but they all likely agree that the two are connected, and neither can be more comprehensively understood without the other. Exposing students to these historiographical debates adds depth and nuance to how they see the bipolar conflict. Bringing the global element into the classroom has therefore become an inexorable necessity, as has the need to address some of the glaring blind-spots. Why is Latin America, for example, often not included in these broader, more global discussions on the Cold War? In order to address these needs more concretely, my colleagues at Utrecht University and I are currently working on a textbook for teaching the Global Cold War, on which we will also tailor a jointly taught course.

One of the biggest advantages attached to teaching such a recent part of contemporary history, is that we can directly connect our students to it, and to thus create an affinity for the subject matter both intellectually and personally. This is not only a privilege, but also a responsibility - we need to emphasize the relevance of history to contemporary issues by showing students, for instance, that we cannot fully understand the flawed democracies in Eastern Europe without looking at their Communist past; or the complexity of the Taliban threat to international security without considering the superpower interests and interventions in Afghanistan during and after the Cold War. Teaching the Cold War is therefore an excellent opportunity to help address the rising concerns over ahistorical thinking – the growing disconnect between citizens and the recent history which may provide them with a useful context for making better, more informed decisions.<sup>11</sup> In the era of fake news, sensationalism, and increasing democratic fragility, we have a shared responsibility to use history as a vehicle for developing the analytical and critical thinking skills of the next generations of voters, professionals and decision-makers – of citizens in an increasingly more globalized world. Within my Department we aim to do just that - highlight the historical roots of current challenges – through a Master’s program in International Relations in Historical Perspective. Of course,

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<sup>8</sup> Aldo Marchesi, “The May ’68 That Was Not May ’68: Latin America in the Global Sixties,” Verso Books Blog (blog), May 24, 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3846-the-may-68-that-was-not-may-68-latin-america-in-the-global-sixties>.

<sup>9</sup> Stevie Chick, “Wind of Change: Did the CIA Write the Cold War’s Biggest Anthem?,” *The Guardian*, May 15, 2020. <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/may/15/wind-of-change-did-the-cia-write-the-cold-wars-biggest-anthem>.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Gerits, “‘When the Bull Elephants Fight’: Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957-66),” *International History Review* 37:5 (2015): 951–969, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2015.1064465>; Lorenz Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Eric Alterman, “The Decline of Historical Thinking,” *The New Yorker*, February 4, 2019.

these links can – and should be – made outside such highly specialized frameworks; every course in contemporary history, be it required or elective, should provide students with a better understanding of and a more thoughtful approach to the present.

Linking students personally to historical events has been another effective method of bringing the past closer to their present. The more the generational gap grows, the more important this will become. My first political memory, for example, is the fall of the Berlin Wall; when I first started teaching, my students' was 9/11. By now it's probably the 2008 economic crisis or Barack Obama's presidential election. Initially I found it beneficial to narrow this ever-growing gap by recounting some of my own experiences of life under Communism – I noticed that this personal link to history instantly sparked curiosity, as more hands went up and more questions were asked in class. However, a far more effective method of connecting students to Cold War history has been to ask them to interview members of their own family about specific moments – the Cuban missile crisis, 1968, the fall of the Berlin Wall. When they return to class, there is an unmistakable feeling that history has come alive for this younger generation.

I believe that bridging these gaps – generational, geographical, historiographical, etc.- is essential not only to teaching the Cold War as history, but also to understanding it as an integral – even if increasingly smaller – part of our present. Over time and through self-reflection, I have come to understand not only my own subjectivity towards this topic, but also how to leverage it in the classroom for more effective teaching. Again, whether we like it or not, who we are and where we are matter when we teach. Most of us might not readily admit this – as researchers, we have been conditioned to be ruthless in dodging subjectivity. But as teachers, it is precisely our personal experience with this part of contemporary history – both geographical and biographical – that can help us better connect with our students by linking events, ideas and processes as a way to create comprehensive cohesion in diverse classrooms.



ESSAY BY ALANNA O'MALLEY, LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

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One morning at an early point in my doctoral studies, in a wooden seminar room at the European University Institute in Florence, the renowned international relations theorist Friedrich Kratochwil declared George Kennan's 'long telegram' the most important diplomatic cable of the twentieth century. In the discussion that followed, my fellow researchers debated this statement, discussing how this document and its impact weighed up against other treaties and agreements including the Treaty of Versailles, the UN Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights among others. Kratochwil's main argument was that the long telegram had presaged one of the major ideological battles of the twentieth century which had essentially conditioned U.S. foreign policy for almost fifty years. Although I had studied the Cold War and the importance of the long telegram in my undergraduate years, I realised that I had not appreciated the importance of Kennan's communication in shaping not just American impressions of the Soviet Union, but in actually chiseling the bedrock of the U.S. role in the world: the struggle against Communism. His argument led me to question other assumptions and classic conceptions of the Cold War as I had understood it as a feature of international history.

Curiously, the Cold War appears to be simultaneously ubiquitous, appearing in the syllabi and programs of history departments around the world and yet broadly illusive, as our understandings of its scope, impact and long-term effects continue to evolve. To a large extent it has been widely taught, and arguably misconceived by many, as a simple story of super-power rivalry. Traditional histories of the Cold War tend to teach its evolution in a straight, teleological line, book-ended neatly between 1945 with the emergence of tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States and 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-emergence of formerly subjugated Eastern European states. This teleology contains well-known twists and turns including the arms race, the Berlin Crisis of 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis of the following year, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the fall of the Berlin Wall a decade later. This rather linear trajectory was certainly my view of the Cold War until that insightful statement in 2008. As I came to understand subsequently, this view of the Cold War is limited both in scope and perspective, leading to a rather one-sided impression of not just the role of hegemonic actors but the shaping of the global order as a whole.

It is precisely reckoning with existing presumptions and conceptions of the Cold War that has subsequently guided my pedagogical activities on this issue. In developing an elective entitled "Cold War, Hot Tempers, A History of Twentieth Century International Relations," as part of the MA International Relations at Leiden University, I encourage students to question what they know (or think they know) about the Cold War. In various iterations of the course since 2014, we have picked apart the traditional chronology, actors, containers, perspectives and consequences of the Cold War. In challenging these various parameters, we have worked towards the hypothesis that 'The' Cold War was not one long series of interlinked events, but rather, that many of the major political and economic developments and violent conflicts of the latter half of the twentieth century have Cold War dimensions. In this way it becomes clear that the Cold War was not an easily identifiable, time-limited, all-encompassing set of incidents, but that in the intermingling of various forces of capitalism, communism, decolonization, and imperialism since 1945, Cold War ideas *sometimes* impacted upon processes of nationalism and internationalism in spaces far beyond the Soviet Union and the United States. This approach is structured by taking the various elements separately and opening up the themes and features of what constitutes the Cold War.

### *Chronology*

One of the most contested elements of the Cold War is the debate over its origins and its endings. On origins, in order to engage a range of different perspective about how and when tensions between the superpowers began to be referred to as a 'Cold War, the students read Warren F. Kimball's "The Incredible Shrinking War: The Second World War, Not (just) the Origins of the Cold War," William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, and the Truman Doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Warren F. Kimball, "The Incredible Shrinking War: The Second World War, Not (Just) the Origins of the Cold War, So What the Hell were we Fighting for, such a Long, Long Time Ago?" *Diplomatic History* 25:3 (Summer 2001): 347-365; William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988).

The class is structured chronologically but moves the traditional timeline forward into the 1990s and up to the War on Terror and the events of 9/11, thereby overtaking 1989 as the classic moment of the ‘end’ of the Cold War. The students are asked to submit weekly literature reviews comparing and contrasting the main arguments of the various readings, but also to work with different definitions. How, for instance, do they define the Cold War as a process? What evidence do they provide for their identification of 1945 as a beginning? Or 1989 as an ending? This leads us to question how the Cold War is defined. It is certainly the case that the Cold War had different dimensions; cultural, economic, ideational and of course geopolitical, but what defines an event as being part of the Cold War? In order to answer these questions, we read the context broadly.

The idea is to deconstruct the static view of the Cold War as being neatly squared off in the traditional timeframe by examining the forces of international relations around these pivotal moments and tracing the longer roots and effects of previous attempts to identify an event as being of the Cold War or not. To start this exercise, we draw out the ‘traditional’ timeframe on a whiteboard and I ask students what events they would include as ‘Cold War’ conflicts between 1945 and 1989. At the end of the course, we go back and draw a new timeline, devised entirely by their ideas of what events and moments precluded 1945, and where they identify the end of superpower hostilities. Invariably, we construct a far longer timeline, with some students reaching back to the 1920s and others arguing for the continuation of Cold War hostilities and enmity in the 2000s. Not only is this a useful exercise in pedagogy by encouraging students to question what they know about the Cold War, but it also introduces them to the idea that chronological starting points and ending points are not definitive and should be challenged.

### *Turning Points*

Thinking about the possible chronologies of the Cold War leads the class to discuss how moments or events are framed as having Cold War dimensions or elements and what are the key turning points of the conflict. There are two ways in which we question what events comprise the Cold War. First, the syllabus contains both moments that are traditionally viewed as being part of the evolution of the Cold War such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, but also others such as the role ping-pong diplomacy in the 1970s and the role of China that are not always considered part of the standard historiography. We examine other crises, conflicts, and incidents to ask why they are not considered as key to the Cold War. For example, the Congo crisis 1960-1964 has often been described as a Cold War episode in Africa, but when we look more closely at the crisis, it becomes clear that this was much more a transformative moment of decolonization, which had some Cold War dimensions.

Second, in looking at the more ‘classic’ Cold War chapters such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, we engage with new materials to engage with different views. In their article “Unsung Mediator: U Thant and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” A. Walter Dorn and Robert Pauk offer a different view of the Cuban episode in which the UN plays a crucial role in negotiating between the superpowers.<sup>13</sup> This adds another dimension, diluting the idea that the Cold War was fought only between the Soviet Union and the United States and that other actors never played a role. In this case, the UN Secretary-General U Thant used his good offices to facilitate monitoring of the quarantine agreement, adding a multilateral element to what is most commonly portrayed as a bilateral interaction. In this way, we open up new layers of the ways in which the Cold War played out, even at moments of high tension. This encourages students to think about the Cold War as a layered, multilateral conflict which effected, and was affected by other actors and institutions.

### *Perspectives*

This leads us to consider different perspectives of the Cold War. By including other moments of conflict and crisis, I encourage students to challenge the way that the Cold War has been framed as an east-west conflict. In 2000, Matthew

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<sup>13</sup> A. Walter Dorn and Robert Pauk, “Unsung Mediator: U Thant and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Diplomatic History* 33:2 (April 2009): 261-292.

Connelly called historians to “take off the Cold War lens,” by which he argued that for too long, historians saw the Cold War everywhere.<sup>14</sup> Rather, he maintained, it is important to de-center the way the Cold War has been framed as a predominantly East-West conflict which had several tangential ‘hot wars’ in other parts of the world. In more recent years, historians such as Odd Arne Westad have further argued that the Cold War was in fact a global conflict which encompassed also North-South tensions.<sup>15</sup>

I try to strike a balance between these two perspectives. On the one hand, I frame the Cold War as a conflict which certainly spread to other wars and interceded different crises around the world from Congo to Vietnam. But on the other hand, a careful analysis of many other moments such as the Algerian Revolution 1954-1962, the ‘Dirty War’ in Argentina 1976-1983, and the 1973 *coup d’état* in Chile reveals that there were few if any Cold War considerations among the actors concerned. Rather, it becomes evident that the Cold War loomed in the background of many of these conflicts and at certain moments it was invoked by actors who perceived that needling one or other of the superpowers would have specific benefits for their own struggle. What becomes evident then, is that the Cold War was not an over-arching conflict which conditioned all other insurrections and struggles in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was a series of crises between the super-powers which interacted with other wars to accelerate insurrections and wars that were fought as part of independence struggles, nationalist tensions, civil wars, the contestation of nationalism vs. imperialism, decolonization, and the ending of empire.

### *Global Order*

At the center of the debate then, is the question to which extent the Cold War shaped or transformed the global order of the latter half of the twentieth century. Ultimately the course is aimed to leave the students with two conclusions. First, in terms of methodology, the class encourages them to re-think conventional chronologies, perspectives and events of the Cold War, to reconsider how this process has been conceived. Second, I pose the question of whether or not the Cold War was as transformative for global order as we have always been led to believe or whether other, more powerful shake-ups of the international system such as the process of decolonization ultimately proved more transformative? If so, why does the Cold War remain such a dominant feature of twentieth century history? Is this because the field has been dominated by American historians who have told the story in terms of the evolution of American foreign policy? Or is it because, with political, ideological, economic and social dimensions, the Cold War and Kennan’s telegram were the most transformative process of the twentieth century? What is evident is that the Cold War changed the global order, but it was not the only process to do so, and arguably, perhaps not the most momentous. Fundamentally, what it shows us most clearly is that the Cold War did not have a static impact but waxed and waned in confluence with other forces of international relations across the latter half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence,” *The American Historical Review* 105:3 (June 2000): 739-769.

<sup>15</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Westad, *The Cold War, A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

ESSAY BY B. JARED PACK, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

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The Cold War seems at first glance to be an easy enough topic to teach. It offers an ample amount of material to pick from and contains some of the most dramatic and exciting narratives in recent history. In reflecting upon my own experience teaching the Cold War to undergraduates at the University of Arkansas, however, it has become clear to me that for students in the twenty-first century, the Cold War is nothing more than a vague and abstract concept. They are in the freshman history survey course and have never been taught about the Cold War in any meaningful way. As educators, it is critical that we understand our students and meet them where they are if we are going to be effective. As such, it is critical that we teach the Cold War cohesively, rather than approaching it as a highlight reel of isolated events. In doing so, the Cold War becomes much more than just a historical period; it becomes a vehicle for student engagement and a useful tool for exposing students to the historical craft and profession. In what follows, I will discuss these contentions in more detail and offer suggestions from my own experience as to what that looks like in practice.

*Understanding the Twenty-First Century Student*

When I taught my first U.S. history survey course six years ago, it did not take me very long to realize that my students had almost no concept of the Cold War when they arrived in my classroom. Here I was—a millennial professor in a room full of Gen Z students. The Cold War was a historically past event for all of us. It was not a contemporary issue, and even if it had been for me, it was never going to be for my students. It was a historical event that needed to be taught as such. Most students, however, get to college with a poor understanding of history in general thanks to “coach,” the history buff who is more interested in his football team’s record than effective classroom teaching. The vast majority my students (primarily from Arkansas and Texas) are products of a standard K-12 public education in the U.S. south and seem to have received a sub-par training in history compared to other disciplines.<sup>16</sup> Semester after semester, students arrive in my classroom with next-to-no knowledge of the Cold War, or much of anything after World War II in general. At the beginning of the course, if asked to define the Cold War many of them would struggle to do so.

Additionally, after several semesters of teaching, I noticed that students struggled to read for the course and engage with the monographs and articles I had selected. I was struggling to motivate my students to read. In an effort to better meet them where they were, I switched to using a selection of the small books from the *Very Short Introductions* series from Oxford University Press and other similarly sized books in my survey classes.<sup>17</sup> This change to the assigned reading has proven to be a much more successful model over the last four years. The small books allow me an opportunity to introduce major ideas and connect major themes and periods, while seeming accessible and easy for students. While often containing ideas and contents that are as equally complex as larger works, the small stature of these short books makes them seem more approachable to students who are accustomed to getting information 320 characters at a time.

As someone born as the Cold War was ending, being closer in age to my students than many other professors can be a double-edged sword at times, but it has also undoubtedly helped me understand them better, because it was not very long ago that I was where they were. When I arrived for my first semester of graduate school in Fall 2012, I enrolled in a reading seminar on the Cold War with my soon-to-be advisor and mentor. For me, however, that was really my first foray into the

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<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that *all* high school history teachers are this way. There are indeed many wonderful history educators in high schools across America. Unfortunately, in my experience, those teachers tend to be the exception rather than the norm, particularly in the southern United States where football and other sports remain king. As one of my late-undergraduate professors used to say, “There are two kinds of history majors: those who love history and those who want their first name to be coach.”

<sup>17</sup> Among other books, I use Walter Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). The Hill and Wang “Critical Issues” series also features a number of great, short books. From that series I frequently use Morton Horowitz, *The Warren Court and the Pursuit of Justice* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

wide world that is the Cold War. As an undergraduate, I attended a small, private school with a history department of three faculty members. The only in-depth exposure I got to the Cold War was in an independent reading course on diplomatic history, but it was directed by an early Americanist. My honors thesis, again directed by our early Americanist department chair, had examined the role of John F. Kennedy's presidential leadership during the Cuban Missile Crisis, but that represented the extent of my Cold War knowledge.<sup>18</sup> So as a first-semester masters student entering a graduate reading seminar on the Cold War, I was working from little more than an armchair familiarity of the Cold War, composed of the arms race (in some vaguely conceptualized way), the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Berlin Wall, and Vietnam.

In reflecting upon my background, I encountered myself in my students. I was able to meet them where they were from a place of experience and understanding. While I am aware that I am not the norm in this regard, each of us must strive to understand our students. Until we understand that the Cold War is a historically past event for our students about which they have little knowledge, we cannot begin to appropriately teach it. Once we do, however, a wide avenue for learning and engagement unfolds.

### *Toward a Cohesive Cold War*

While it can be a bit disheartening to discover that our students know nothing about the Cold War, it also represents an exciting opportunity. I want my students to experience the excitement and drama of the Cold War in the same way I did when I first really learned about this global conflict. In order to succeed in that endeavor, I have to help my students see the Cold War for what it actually was—an overarching, all-encompassing period of recent, global history. Students deserve more than a few Cold War explosions, especially in the survey course. Without such an approach, things like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War seem like aberrations—unexpected interruptions to the narrative of standard American history classes. Acknowledging that the Cold War is more than a collection of randomly inserted greatest hits has shaped my most significant pedagogical conviction—the Cold War must be taught cohesively.

Looking back, I realize I struggled to understand the Cold War because in my mind, it had never been a cohesive whole. It was a few random things that were not related to each other in any way other than that they both involved in some way the U.S. and the Soviet Union. As an educator, I make an active commitment to tell much more of the Cold War story, and to weave it together as one of my major threads of my courses. When we commit to teaching the Cold War cohesively rather than as randomly inserted vignettes, the Cold War offers us a great many uses. The simple reality is that the Cold War has everything we could ask for in terms of a great story—intrigue, drama, independence movements, underdog victories, space, rockets, bombs, spies, etc. As a teacher, when I step to the front of a classroom, my goal is to simply tell a good story, and the Cold War is full of them. It becomes a powerful vehicle to help draw students into the stories of the past.

A cohesive approach to reaching the Cold War also offers us ample opportunities to talk about the good, the bad, and the ugly of the past. When the stories of the Cold War are put on display, we can reckon with the past honestly—not for the purpose of teaching our students to “to hate their own country” as former-President Donald Trump alleged, but to do so in such a way that our students can see the national failures of the past (such as U.S. support for human rights atrocities by authoritarian dictatorships in Latin America) and instead strive to create a better tomorrow.<sup>19</sup> This is one of the things that we all strive to do as educators.

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<sup>18</sup> I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the many valuable things I learned in that small department as an undergraduate. I will forever be indebted to them for providing me a solid historical foundation and teaching me how to write and conduct primary source research like a historian. I was far more prepared for the rigors and demands of graduate school than I realized at the time.

<sup>19</sup> Donald J. Trump, “Remarks at Salute to America,” (speech, Mt. Rushmore, SD, July 4, 2020), Miller Center at the University of Virginia. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-4-2020-remarks-salute-america>.

The Cold War is also an easy way to introduce students to historiography. In my survey classes, I do two historiographical discussion days—one on the New Deal and another on the Cold War. I break my students into four groups and assign each group a different reading on the Cold War, each with a different historiographical viewpoint.<sup>20</sup> I move them into their groups for the first half of class to discuss the main ideas from their particular reading before bringing them back to together as a class. In the second half of the class, the various groups share their perspectives of their readings and begin to see that the answer to questions like, “Who was responsible for starting the Cold War?” depend upon whom you ask. This allows them to see how historians approach a topic and differ in their interpretations.

It is also worth noting that teaching the Cold War cohesively and expanding our discussions of it does not require us to leave other things out. If the last thirty years of Cold War historiography have shown us anything, it is that the Cold War affected the entirety of global history, from civil rights to counterculture and international athletics to jazz.<sup>21</sup> Integrating a cohesive picture of the Cold War should easily flow through the post-1945 narrative, which itself is reflective of the extent to which the Cold War infiltrated every aspect of life in the period.

### *A Cohesive Cold War in Application*

The way in which I approach teaching the Cold War cohesively varies in my courses, beginning with the U.S. survey. As a core requirement, students from all majors, paths, and walks of life take the survey course. The survey also represents the basic building block of their historical literacy and knowledge. It is critical that in this environment, especially, we give them more than a scattershot account of the Cold War. The simplest way I do this is by using Robert McMahon’s *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction*.<sup>22</sup> Coming in at just 168 small pages, the book does not overwhelm students or seem to be daunting so as to turn them off, while succinctly and effectively walking them through the entirety of the Cold War.

In addition to the reading, I also ensure that students receive a fully developed Cold War narrative. I do a foreign policy/Cold War lecture in each decade post-1945, beginning with my Origins of the Cold War lecture, and moving through Europe, Korea, the New Look, Cuba, Vietnam, Détente, Reagan, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union. Over the course of three total weeks of class, the Cold War becomes integrated into the chronological narrative, but also codified within its own story. Discussions of containment make American actions across the globe seem less strange. Understanding alliance politics and the rise of China makes the American presence in Vietnam seem less like an interruption to an otherwise American narrative. Highlighting the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on America’s image abroad helps expand the conversation about civil rights in the United States. The net result of these efforts is that students leave the class with a much more complete picture of the Cold War and its relevance to American and global history.

Beyond the survey, as a historian of transatlantic involvement in Latin America during the Cold War, I frequently teach our 3000-level Modern Latin America and Twentieth Century Europe courses at Arkansas. These courses allow for a different

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<sup>20</sup> The four readings I use in class are Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “Origins of the Cold War,” *Foreign Affairs* 46:1 (October 1967): 22-52; Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–2006* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 1–7, 57–80; John Lewis Gaddis, “The New Cold War History: First Impressions,” *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 281–295; and Melynn Leffler, “Introduction,” *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 1–24.

<sup>21</sup> Some examples of the wide-ranging impacts of the Cold War include Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Nicholas Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Audra J. Wolfe, *Freedom’s Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War*.

approach and engagement with the Cold War. For most students, this is the first time they have learned about the significance of powers other than the U.S. or USSR in the global conflict. In the upper division courses, I replace the small books with longer, more specialized books and memoirs.<sup>23</sup> Through research papers, students are able to engage with the historiography surrounding the Cold War in more direct ways and get their first exposure to the primary sources that were produced from the Cold War. Additionally, the narrative of the Cold War also changes, focusing on the specific geographic locales of the course. Diving into the Cold War in Latin America allows me to introduce new events like the assassination of Chilean President Salvador Allende and ideas like liberation theology and National Security Doctrine. In Europe, I focus much more extensively on the experience in the Soviet sphere and highlight the complexities of life on the front line of the bipolar world. Thus, these classes offer the opportunity to integrate the Cold War at a deeper and more specialized level, while still using the same basic components through reading, historiography, and narratives.

This approach to the cohesive Cold War has culminated in my current senior capstone seminar on the Global Cold War—a specialized methods/topical course that varies based upon the specialization of the professor. In the second week of class, I had the group of 15 seniors who are set to graduate this semester read the same McMahon book I use in my surveys, except that this time it served as a jumping off point rather than a comprehensive introduction. Students also read Odd Arne Westad's *The Cold War: A World History* and other books and articles.<sup>24</sup> As we work through the conflict in a more comprehensive way, the students encounter the detailed narrative of the Global Cold War in a series of region-by-region lectures that walk through the “theaters” of war. The most exciting component of the course is that they are encountering sources and making original arguments in their capstone papers. Many of these students have taken the survey and upper division courses with me, and now I have the joy of seeing my students do great research with the same spark for the Cold War that I have. As I meet with them to discuss their paper topics, they are looking at subjects they would have never considered several years ago, for example, the Olympics as a Cold War Battleground. I am not concerned that they will approach the Cold War as I had as an undergraduate and write on such a common topic like Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis because they know something I did not as an undergrad—that the Cold War is so much more than a highlight reel.

### *Conclusion*

As I reflect upon my efforts to teach the Cold War to students in the twenty-first century, the last six years have left me confident that when students leave my classroom, they have a fuller understanding of the Cold War and its significance than they did when they entered. We owe that to our students. The Cold War was not a series of random, isolated conflicts or eruptions, and allowing our students to believe that does them a disservice. Teaching the Cold War cohesively and comprehensively does not inherently require a complete overhaul of our courses; it can often be accomplished in small pieces here and there. Small changes on our parts, though, can have a tremendous impact for our students and their understanding of the past. In this regard, we all face the same realities. Our students are products of the current century. Some of them have no knowledge of 9/11, let alone the Cold War. It is our job to teach them and to help them put the pieces together. In doing so, I have seen my own students get caught up in the excitement and intrigue of the story. I have watched them

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<sup>23</sup> In my Modern Latin America Class, I assign Stephen Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) and in the Twentieth Century Europe class (which emphasizes memoirs), I use Bommi Baumann, *How It All Began: The Personal Account of a West German Urban Guerrilla* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2006) to highlight the dynamics at work in West Germany in the Cold War.

<sup>24</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2019). In addition to the Westad and McMahon books, I also assign Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) as well as chapters from Robert J. McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

experience the wonder of learning things for the first time and the shock and dismay of things they believed should not have been possible. Those moments are what teaching is all about. So, when I stand before a classroom, I remember that it was not long ago I too was where they are, and I try to offer them the story I wished I had gotten myself—the dramatic story of the global Cold War.



ESSAY BY MAREK W. RUTKOWSKI, MONASH UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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“Why was Communism so vehemently opposed? Didn’t it stand for human rights?” I was asked by a student during a consultation hour sometime in 2019. For a person hailing from Eastern Europe like myself, such question may sound rather naive, but the Malaysian Chinese student was genuinely puzzled and seeking answers. For me, this event was perhaps the most memorable reminder that teaching the Cold War needs to take into account the local circumstances and the state of public memory, especially when taught outside of Europe or North America. As scholars have argued, the Cold War experience played out differently in different parts of the world. Especially in Asia, the period of “long peace” is remembered as a time of violent hot wars fought along ideological lines at the time of decolonization.<sup>25</sup> My student was likely using the label of “human rights” to refer to the Marxist exposé of the oppression of the working class. However, it would not be unthinkable if she referred to the activities of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which was viewed by a portion of the population as a protector of the rights of ethnic Chinese in colonial Malaya.

I have been teaching a survey Cold War course at Monash University Malaysia for three years to the body of students composed mostly of Malaysians, but with a significant minority of international students mainly from other South and Southeast Asian countries. As the course serves as a gateway to an interdisciplinary major, Global Studies, many of them lack significant background in international history. In Malaysia, the Cold War is mostly remembered through the history of the Malayan Emergency, an undeclared war between colonial and post-colonial governments and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). To this day, the official narrative remains strongly anti-Communist, despite some efforts at reclaiming MCP as an anticolonial nationalist force. A recent controversy over the return of ashes of Chin Peng, the Communist leader who died in exile in 2013, is the case in point.<sup>26</sup>

The principle of my pedagogical approach is that students need to be able to engage with the subject and relate it to their own experiences. Looking at the Cold War purely as a big power confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union would be insufficient and irrelevant in the Malaysian context. My course is thus designed to emphasize the interconnection between the Cold War and decolonization processes with a strong focus on the developments in the Third World that happened in the shadow of the big power struggle.<sup>27</sup>

### *Situating the Cold War within the Context of Decolonization*

Since the publication of Odd Arne Westad’s influential *The Global Cold War* in 2005, historians have looked at global repercussions of the US-Soviet Cold War rivalry and the decolonizing Third World as a primary arena of this confrontation.<sup>28</sup> I chose to incorporate this approach in my teaching to allow students to make connections between the

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<sup>25</sup> For the most direct articulation of this viewpoint, see: Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> For a news story on the controversy, see: Tashny Sukumaran, “In Malaysia, politicians spar after return of communist leader Chin Peng’s remains,” *South China Morning Post*, 27 November 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3039631/malaysia-politicians-spar-after-return-communist-leader-chin>.

<sup>27</sup> The author would like to thank Helen Nesadurai, Marco Buente and Helen Jambunathan, whose design and delivery of the course in previous years was a foundation for its present format.

<sup>28</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Other important publications following this approach include *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia*, Edited by Christopher E. Goscha and Christian Ostermann (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009) and Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Split and the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Cold War politics and the local histories of their home countries and regions. I begin the course with a rather conventional Cold War narrative emphasizing the events in Europe, from the breakdown of the World War II Grand Alliance to the emergence of containment and the Berlin Blockade as the first Cold War crisis. The goal is to explain the ideological foundations of the Cold War confrontation and establish the U.S.-Soviet rivalry as an overarching framework that influenced events across different geographical locations.

Later in the course, however, I take students on a journey across various locales through weekly topics focused on South Asia, China, Southeast Asia, Africa, Iran, and Japan to explore different experiences in the Cold War period. The focus is not on the Cold War per se. In most cases we explore the colonial or semi-colonial past and focus on the dynamics of the decolonization processes. My goal is to impress upon the students that decolonization and the Cold War were parallel processes with the latter complicating the former. In South Asia we look at the partition of India and the ensuing Indo-Pakistani conflict and its Cold War dimension; in China we focus on the Communist revolution and the uneasy Sino-Soviet relationship; in Southeast Asia we explore the hot war in Vietnam and in Africa we look at the Congo Crisis and the first Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba's unwitting involvement in the global confrontation. Even without direct colonial history to speak of, the topics on Iran and Japan are structured in a similar way with an emphasis on Western involvement and Cold War intervention in the trajectory of both countries' development, leading to the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the period of economic prosperity under the American umbrella in Japan. A recent addition to the course is a topic on the Third World internationalism, which looks at the efforts at Third World unity from the Bandung Conference to the rise and fall of the Nonaligned Movement in opposition to Cold War polarization. Only in recent years seriously explored by scholars, "the Third World as a project" approach is useful in presenting the Global South as being not merely at the receiving end of the Cold War politics, but also as an originator of alternative political vision.<sup>29</sup>

The overall organization of the course allows students to look at the Cold War from the perspective of the Global South and through the lens of postcolonial nations. While the Cold War was a global conflict, its influence on the Third World needs to be taught in the context of decolonization since the way it was experienced varied greatly from place to place.

### *Teaching the Malayan Emergency*

One of my aspirations while redesigning the course was to include a nuanced discussion on the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) within the topic on Southeast Asia. Not only is the subject controversial due to the highly anti-Communist official narrative in Malaysia (including in school curricula),<sup>30</sup> but also due to the predominantly ethnic Chinese composition of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the majority Malay country. My approach is to situate the topic in the context of British colonialism and within the anticolonial sentiments in Southeast Asia. I make a point to debunk the popular myth that the MCP was closely guided by orders from Moscow, even though the party's aim was to establish a Communist state in Malaya.<sup>31</sup> Leaving aside the question of moral judgment, I would like the students to see the MCP as a political actor that proposed an alternative vision for a postcolonial Malaya, one that ultimately failed when the independence was granted by

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<sup>29</sup> The key text here is Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> For a news story on the controversy surrounding history curriculum, see: Zurairi AR, "After Forum Hijacked by Communist Bogeyman, Activist Says Can't Erase our History," *Malay Mail*, 29 July 2018, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/07/29/after-forum-hijacked-by-communist-bogeyman-activist-says-cant-erase-our-his/1657223>.

<sup>31</sup> Larisa Efimova, "Did the Soviet Union Instruct Southeast Asian Communists to Revolt? New Russian Evidence on the Calcutta Youth Conference of February 1948," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40:3 (2009): 449-69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463409990026>.

the British in 1957. I let the students decide for themselves whether the brutal guerrilla warfare of the Malayan Communists was justified or excusable, especially since it continued after the independence.

For students who are interested in delving into the topic further, I offer an option to write a research essay exploring whether or not the MCP should be credited for the independence of Malaya/Malaysia. To date, I have run this assignment twice and each time only a small minority of students chose to engage with the topic, perhaps testifying to the still controversial nature of the subject. Nevertheless, the quality of submissions has been impressive and majority of those who worked on the topic showed strong critical engagement, made an effort to locate primary sources, and presented multifaceted discussion, usually choosing to credit the MCP in the conclusion.

### *Engaging students with limited history background*

One of the challenges that I encounter while teaching the Cold War course is related to the fact that students come from diverse backgrounds and some have limited experience and interest in learning history. I decided early on that my classes need to be highly interactive and approachable to keep students engaged. A simple decision to turn traditional PowerPoint slides into interactive Prezi presentations has come a long way in getting students' attention. Until now this is the most highly praised element of the course when it comes to student evaluations.

A similar principle guides my tutorial classes. Instead of traditional discussions based on readings, I practice active learning strategies to maintain high level of interaction between students and lecturer. Examples include a role playing activity on the partition of British India with students impersonating South Asian statesmen Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a group debate on the superiority of Chinese leader Mao Zedong over his successor Deng Xiaoping and an in-class analysis of the *Persepolis*<sup>32</sup> comic strip when discussing Iran. My personal favorite is a group activity where students are tasked to persuade a newly decolonized state to choose either Communist, pro-Western, or nonaligned political stance in the Cold War environment. All of these tasks are approachable, interactive and fun, but require a considerable engagement with the subject and absorption of knowledge from the lectures and assigned readings. Since most of them are group-based, it is easier to engage students without substantial background or unsure of the quality of their contributions.

Since this is a first year gateway course, my objective is not to overload students with dense weekly readings. I do assign a textbook as a reference for lecture content. *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond* by Antony Best et al. has been well-received by the students, but they could use any other similar textbook of their choice.<sup>33</sup> Topic-specific weekly readings are essential for meaningful engagement in the tutorials. I favor a mixture of primary and secondary sources. Chapters from *The Cold War in the Third World* edited by Robert McMahon have been particularly effective in my experience.<sup>34</sup> *The World Since 1945* by Wayne McWilliams and Harry Piotrowski is another go-to publication with concise and approachable chapters suitable for undergraduates.<sup>35</sup> For those who would like to delve deeper into the topics, I provide weekly suggestions of further readings as well as podcasts and videos.<sup>36</sup> These were particularly well received during the

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<sup>32</sup> Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Antony Best, Jussi Hanhimaki, Joseph A. Maiolo and Kirsten E. Schulze, *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> *The Cold War in the Third World*, Edited by Robert J. McMahon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Wayne C. McWilliams and Harry Piotrowski, *The World since 1945: A History of International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> I find the following podcast series produced by BBC particularly suitable for undergraduates: "Incarnations: India in 50 Lives," "Chinese Characters" and "Witness History."

online teaching at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Students have commented that the interactive approach was “interesting” and made “history...not...boring at all,” which is a considerable achievement when it comes to a diverse group of first year undergraduates.

### *Conclusions*

Teaching the Cold War needs to take into account the background of the students and the public memory of the conflict, which varies from region to region. In my teaching of the entry level Cold War course in Malaysia, I chose to look at the subject from the perspective of the Global South and with emphasis on the parallel process of decolonization. These efforts have so far been largely successful, as evidenced by encouraging evaluation scores in the past three years. One student commented that “the broad coverage...was very satisfying” since “it was always just European history” at school. Another praised “excellent organization” of weekly topics. Similarly, the weekly tutorial activities need to be tailored to students’ level of background knowledge. In my course, I chose to opt for activities emphasizing interaction and engagement to encourage involvement even from the students with limited background. This strategy seems to have paid off as students commented that the interactive tutorials “helped expand on each week’s topic and make them more tangible in a way that regular classroom teaching cannot” and that “the debates...helped [them] understand certain concepts and see different viewpoints.” With this promising start, my new goal is to bring the interaction to the next level by incorporating the Reacting to the Past pedagogy for the next offering of the course in 2021.