

Cold Wars, Old and New

Boston College
POLI 2508
Spring 2025

Professor: Joshua Byun

Time: Tuesday & Thursday, 3:00 – 4:15 pm

Room: Campion 9

Office Hours: Thursday, 12:30 pm—2:30 pm

Course Description: This course investigates how International Relations (IR) theory can illuminate key episodes in the great power politics of the Cold War, paying close attention to how lessons from this period can inform contemporary debates on the “return of great power politics” and U.S. foreign policy.

In each session, we will delve into critical puzzles of the Cold War era, treating them as instantiations of broader theoretical puzzles in the study of international security. For example, why did hopes for a “spheres of influence peace” between the two superpowers after World War II come to naught? Why did the United States end up on a collision course with communist China during the early Cold War despite initial interest on both sides for cordial relations? What accounts for the failure of U.S.-led plans to build an integrated European army as a counterweight to Soviet power during the early 1950s? And why did the United States and the Soviet Union continue to engage in costly military competition after the early 1960s despite the emergence of “strategic stability”?

We will analyze these and other important questions through the lens of IR theory, distilling lessons in each session for 21st-century great-power relations. The problems implicated in today’s great power politics are very difficult, but we can get a handle on them by appreciating how they are not entirely new—people and governments had to tackle similar problems in a relatively recent past.

Course Requirements: *This is a reading-intensive course.* Every student is expected to do all assigned readings, attend every class, and actively participate in the classroom discussions. The final grade will be based on attendance/classroom participation (33%), a midterm exam (33%), and a final exam (33%).

Required Readings: The following books are assigned in their entirety, or close to it. I recommend purchasing them through the Boston College Bookstore.

- Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

- Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

I will provide PDFs when discrete book chapters or unpublished manuscripts are assigned. All remaining material should be available through the Boston College library resources.

Participation: My lectures will comprise the bulk of each session. That said, I will incorporate short discussions to encourage student participation and close engagement with the readings. At minimum, students should come to class ready to share their views on the following questions:

- What is the research question or puzzle of each reading?
- What is the central argument?
- What kind of evidence is presented in support of this argument? Is it convincing?
- What are the major competing arguments? Is the author's research design able to properly adjudicate between these and the central argument?

A Note on Content: In addition to this seminar, students are encouraged to explore courses such as "Introduction to International Politics (POLI108101)," "Seminar: Institutions in International Politics (POLI356301)," "International Political Economy (POLI780201)," and "Seminar on International Security (POLI4598)" to develop a broad-based understanding of the study of International Relations.

Email Policy: I may not read or respond to student emails in the evenings or on weekends. Do not expect immediate replies.

Academic Integrity: Any form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with, and following, [university policies](#) on this matter. Being found guilty of academic dishonesty is a serious offense and may result in a failing grade for the assignment in question, and possibly for the entire course.

Disability Accommodations: If you feel you may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs after obtaining requisite documentation from the BC Disability Services Office (disabsrv@bc.edu).

Course Outline:

Week 1. Introduction: The Cold War and Great Power Politics in the 21st Century

Session 1-1 (Tuesday, January 14): The Cold War and IR Theory

- John Lewis Gaddis, “The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System,” *International Security* 10, no. 4 (Spring 1986): 99-142.

Session 1-2 (Thursday, January 16): The Cold War and Contemporary U.S. Foreign Policy

- John J. Mearsheimer, “The Inevitable Rivalry: America, China, and the Tragedy of Great-Power Politics,” *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 6 (November/December 2021): 48-58.
- Jessica Chen Weiss, “The China Trap: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Perilous Logic of Zero-Sum Competition,” *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 5 (September-October 2022): 40-58.
- Marc Trachtenberg, “The Question of Realism: An Historian’s View,” *Security Studies* 13, no. 1 (2003): 156-194.

Week 2. Origins of the Cold War in Europe I: America’s “Open-Door” Obsession?

Session 2-1 (Tuesday, January 21): The Puzzle of U.S. Foreign Policy During the Cold War

- Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), Preface and ch. 1.
- William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 50th Anniversary Edition (1959; repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), Introduction and chs. 6-7.

Session 2-2 (Thursday, January 23): The United States and the Security Dilemma in Western Europe

- Melvyn P. Leffler, “The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-48,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1984): 346-381.
- Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), chs. 2; 6.

Week 3. Origins of the Cold War in Europe II: The Centrality of the German Problem

Session 3-1 (Tuesday, January 28): The Centrality of the German Problem

- Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), chs. 2-3.
- Paul C. Avey, “Confronting Soviet Power: U.S. Policy during the Early Cold War,” *International Security* 36, no. 4 (Spring 2012): 151-188.

Session 3-2 (Thursday, January 30): Guest lecture on Spheres of Influence by Ph.D. Candidate Sean Henninger

Week 4. Origins of the Cold War in Asia: The Rise of Sino-U.S. Antagonism

Session 4-1 (Tuesday, February 4): Domestic Mobilization and America’s “Overactive” Policies in East Asia

- Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), chs. 1-4.

Session 4-2 (Thursday, February 6): The Korean War

- Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), ch. 5.
- Dan Reiter and Paul Poast, “The Truth about Tripwires: Why Small Force Deployments do not Deter Aggression,” *Texas National Security Review* 4, no. 3 (2021): 34-53.

Week 5. Why America Could Not Get Out I: The European Army Debacle

Session 5-1 (Tuesday, February 11): U.S. Plans for Retrenchment and the Push for European Integration

- Mark S. Sheetz, “Exit Strategies: American Grand Designs for Postwar European Security,” *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 1-43.
- Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), ch. 4.
- Sebastian Rosato, “Europe’s Troubles: Power Politics and the State of the European Project,” *International Security* 35, no. 4 (2011): 45-86.

Session 5-2 (Thursday, February 13): Why the European Army Plan Failed

- Joshua Byun, “Regional Security Cooperation against Hegemonic Threats: Theory and Evidence from France and West Germany (1945-1965),” *European Journal of International Security* 7, no. 2 (May 2022): 143-162.
- Joshua Byun, “Stuck Onshore: Why the United States Failed to Retrench from Europe during the Early Cold War,” *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2024): 9-36.

Week 6. Why America Could Not Get Out II: The Failure of Nuclear Sharing

Session 6-1 (Tuesday, February 18): The Nuclear Pathway to Retrenchment

- Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), ch. 8.
- Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), ch. 5.

Session 6-2 (Thursday, February 20): Why Nuclear Sharing Failed

- Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), chs. 6-7.
- Joshua Byun, *Making Grand Strategy Work: How Allies Sustain or Foil Strategic Plans in Great Power Competition*, Book Manuscript, ch. 3.
- **Contemporary Application:** Joshua Byun and Do Young Lee, “The Case Against Nuclear Sharing in East Asia,” *Washington Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 67-87.

Week 7. Transition to “Deep Engagement”: The Settlement of 1963

Session 7-1 (Tuesday, February 25): The Shadow of Strategic Parity, Leaders, and Grand Strategic Transition

- Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), chs. 8-9.
- Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition,” *International Security* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 9-43.

Session 7-2 (Thursday, February 27): The Counterproliferation Imperative (?)

- Kenneth N. Waltz, “More May be Better,” in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, eds. Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), ch. 1.

- Francis J. Gavin, “Strategies of Inhibition: U.S. Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nonproliferation,” *International Security* 40, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 9-46.

Week 8. The Puzzle of Nuclear Arms Racing in the “Late” Cold War

Session 8-1 (Tuesday, March 11): The Case against Military Competition under MAD

- Robert Jervis, “Why Nuclear Superiority Doesn’t Matter,” *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (Winter 1979-1980): 617-633.

Session 8-2 (Thursday, March 13): Why Competition Continued

- Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1-2 (2015): 38-73.
- **Contemporary Application:** Charles L. Glaser and Steve Fetter, “Should the United States Reject MAD? Damage Limitation and U.S. Nuclear Strategy toward China,” *International Security* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 49-98.

Week 9. Midterm Exam Week

Session 9-1 (Tuesday, March 18): Midterm review session

Session 9-2 (Thursday, March 20): Midterm Exam

Week 10. War in the Strategic Periphery I: The Credibility Obsession and Vietnam

Session 10-1 (Tuesday, March 25): The Credibility Obsession and Vietnam

- Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (1979, repr., Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2016), chs. 1; 6; 8.
- Daryl G. Press, “The Credibility of Power: Assessing Threats during the ‘Appeasement’ Crises of the 1930s,” *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/2005): 136-169.
- Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, “Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics,” *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 473-495.

Session 10-2 (Thursday, March 27): Rethinking Reputation and Credibility

- Ronald R. Krebs and Jennifer Spindel, “Divided Priorities: Why and When Allies Differ Over Military Intervention,” *Security Studies* 27, no. 4 (2018): 575-606.
- **Contemporary Application:** D.G. Kim, Joshua Byun, and Jiyoung Ko, “Remember Kabul? Reputation, Strategic Contexts, and American Credibility after the Afghanistan Withdrawal” *Contemporary Security Policy* 45, no. 2 (2024): 265-297.

Week 11. War in the Strategic Periphery II: Conduct of the War in Vietnam

Session 11-1 (Tuesday, April 1): Why U.S. Strategy was Bound to Fail

- Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr. *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), chs. 6-7.
- Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 63, no. 1 (January 2009): 67-106.

Session 11-2 (Thursday, April 3): Air Power and Civilian Victimization in Vietnam

- Robert A. Pape, “Coercive Air Power in the Vietnam War,” *International Security* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 103-146.
- Matthew Adam Kocher, Thomas B. Pepinsky, and Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War,” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2 (April 2011): 201-208.

Week 12. Selective Accommodation and the Sino-U.S. Rapprochement

Session 12-1 (Tuesday, April 8): The Strategic Setting and the Role of Leaders

- Eoin F. McGuirk, Nathaniel Hilger, and Nicholas Miller, “No Kin in the Game: Moral Hazard and War in the U.S. Congress,” *Journal of Political Economy* 131, no. 9 (September 2023): 2370-2401.
- Thomas J. Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), chs. 1; 5-6.
- Michaela Mattes and Jessica L.P. Weeks, “Hawks, Doves, and Peace: An Experimental Approach,” *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 1 (January 2019): 53-66.

Session 12-2 (Thursday, April 10): Guest seminar by U.S. Army War College Eisenhower Series Fellows

Week 13. The End of the Cold War I: Ideas, Power, and Soviet Policy

Session 13-1 (Tuesday, April 15): New Thinking, Power, and the End of the Cold War

- Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 391-425.
- Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas,” *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000-2001): 5-53.
- Sebastian Rosato, *Intentions in Great Power Politics: Uncertainty and the Roots of Conflict* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2021), Introduction and chs. 1; 6-7.

Session 13-2 (Thursday, April 17): No class—Easter holidays

Week 14. The End of the Cold War II: NATO Enlargement and its Consequences

Session 14-1 (Tuesday, April 22): No Class—“Substitute Monday Class Schedule” Day

Session 14-2 (Thursday, April 24): NATO Expansion and the Broken Promise Debate

- Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion,” *International Security* 40, no. 4 (Spring 2016): 7-44.
- Marc Trachtenberg, “The United States and the NATO Non-extension Assurances of 1990: New Light on an Old Problem?” *International Security* 45, no. 3 (Winter 2020/2021): 162-203.
 - c.f., Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book #613, December 12, 2017, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>; Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard,” National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book #621, March 16, 2018, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard>.
- John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014): 77-89.

Week 15. The Return of Great Power Competition and Cold War Lessons

Session 15-1 (Tuesday, April 29): China’s Rise and its Implications

- Jennifer Lind, “Back to Bipolarity: How China’s Rise Transformed the Balance of Power,” *International Security* 49, no. 2 (Fall 2024): 7-55.
- Brendan Rittenhouse Green and Caitlin Talmadge, “Then What? Assessing the Military Implications of Chinese Control of Taiwan,” *International Security* 47, no. 1 (Summer 2022): 7-45.
- M. Taylor Fravel and Charles L. Glaser, “How Much Risk Should the United States Run in the South China Sea?” *International Security* 47, no. 2 (Fall 2022): 88-134.

Session 15-2 (Thursday, May 1): Final Review Session

Week 16. Final Exam Week

Final Exam: Date and Time TBD