

Call for Papers

“Divided Together?” International Organizations and the Cold War

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Workshop Organizers:

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Since the beginning of the 21st century, both Cold War studies and histories of internationalism have seen a tremendous renewal. It is now widely acknowledged that the Cold War cannot be reduced to a mere confrontation between the two superpowers and the ideologies that they have promoted. Small and mid-sized European powers, and neutral as well as recently decolonized countries pursued specific goals that escaped Cold War oppositions. Various actors worldwide promoted exchanges between the two blocs and offered challenging and rich alternatives to the ideological dichotomy between state socialism and liberal capitalism. Internationalism, moreover, reached its peak as both an ideological value and a political practice in the decades that followed the Second World War.

For these reasons, we believe that international organizations, both inter- and non-governmental, are exceptionally fruitful starting points for rethinking Cold War history. How did international organizations affect the evolution and nature of the superpower confrontation and vice versa? At a time in which the importance and usefulness of multilateralism and international regulations are strongly called into question, this conference aims to understand the role that IOs have played as sites of superpower confrontation, but also highlight their role as spaces for mediation and negotiation, from which new paradigms have emerged and spread internationally.

The United Nations, as the most important international organization, provides a good example. The UN is a complicated and ambiguous organization. It was founded during the war as an antifascist alliance in an internationalist spirit. At the same time, it was designed to protect great power interests. Smaller and middling powers nevertheless became important players in the UN system. To what extent did Cold War antagonisms shape the founding of the organization? Did efforts to set up a common world organization produce lasting strife between the two blocs? How were such tendencies supported or challenged by smaller and middling powers?

As an intergovernmental organization, the UN functions as a diplomatic forum where government representatives can publicly formulate their political goals and stage propaganda battles. Did this serve to “blow off steam” or did it in fact deepen the Cold War divide? At the same time, the UN provided a meeting space for the exchange of ideas and the negotiation of common knowledge, norms and practices. Did such exchanges promote a degree of cooperation and mutual understanding or did they further animosities during the Cold War?

As an international bureaucracy, the UN aspires to stand above the ideological differences of its member states. At the same time, Western powers were the main sponsors of the organization both in terms of funding and personnel. How did this shape the outlook and practice of UN personnel? How did international civil servants conceive of their organization's role in the defining conflict of the era? To what extent did government representatives try to influence the international civil servants and experts? How did it change over time?

This conference wishes to study the role of IOs more generally as actors and platforms of the Cold War and investigate how superpower competition as well as superpower cooperation affected the evolution and practice of international organizations. Proposals may address, but should not limit themselves to the following themes:

Security and Regulatory Practices

1/ When the United Nations was established, the later Cold War rivals were still partners within the grand alliance that aimed to institutionalize great power cooperation in the postwar world, especially in the field of international security. But very soon economic, social and environmental issues were put at the international agenda. The UN and other international organisations became places where some pressing issues were acknowledged. In the 1970s, a time of renewed cooperation, some regulatory practices were discussed. We look forward to proposals that ask about the UN's role in matters of peace and war; humanitarian and ecological intervention, regulation of global capitalism.

International Bureaucracies

2/ The work developed in the secretariat of IOs allows us to examine the reality of exchanges of knowledge, as well as the production of shared expertise during the Cold War. We encourage applicants to select precise international sites in which these mechanisms and actors can be closely studied. Highlighting continuities from the interwar years and even before is particularly encouraged.

New International Paradigms

3/ The Cold War was also the time during which some paradigms and topics common to several international organizations emerged, such as development or human rights. We welcome contributions that trace the evolution of these international paradigms and how they have been appropriated at the national or local level by various actors.

Sites of International Cooperation

4/ There are several privileged sites where these international discussions and exchanges were taking place: cities like Geneva, Vienna, Helsinki were places of particular international relevance during the Cold War. We encourage proposals, which would look at some of these international and bridge building sites.

Science and Technology

5/ The history of international organizations is closely linked to the history of science and technology. The first international organizations in the 19th century were created in response to the development of new technologies in fields such as transport and communication, and this trend continued during the Cold War. We are interested in receiving proposals that look into the role of functional organizations, such as the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the UN Development Program, during the Cold War and that examine how these organizations tried to manage the distinction between politics and science.

Scientific committee

Madeleine Herren (Institute for European Global Studies, University of Basel) tbc

Jessica Reinisch (Birkbeck College, London)

Federico Romero (European University Institute, Florence)

Glenda Sluga (University of Sydney/European University Institute, Florence)

If you are interested in participating, please send a short CV (including affiliation and latest publications), a title and an abstract (no more than 300 words) by May 15th 2020 to the following address: ios_coldwar2021@univie.ac.at

The language of the conference will be English.

Travel and accommodation support will depend on the funding we will be able to raise.