
On December 12, 1979, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) passed the so-called Double-Track Decision. If arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union were to fail, the West would station intermediate nuclear forces to provide a counterweight to the new Soviet SS-20 missiles. This momentous decision, alongside the almost simultaneous Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, directly affected international politics as well as domestic developments in Europe and North America, as the world moved from an era of détente to a newly heightened East-West confrontation.

The Nuclear Crisis: Cold War Cultures and the Politics of Peace and Security explores the discourse about atomic energy and weapons during the final decades of the Cold War from three distinct but interrelated angles:

1) Cultural Representations of the Nuclear Threat

The project looks at manifestations of the nuclear threat in popular culture (music, film, novels) as well as in high art, embedding them in larger transformational processes in the media landscape and new forms of political communication.

2) Changes in the Sociopolitical and Economic Spheres

The nuclear crisis is considered as an interrelated discourse that is both an expression and catalyst of structural transformations of the sociopolitical and economic sectors during the 1970s and 1980s, such as shifting value systems (e.g., postmodernism) and the transition from Keynesian global control to the liberalization of society and to economic and social policies that were critical of the role of government.

3) Transatlantic and Global Transformations

The project examines the diplomatic, political, and strategic debates surrounding nuclear power and nuclear armaments. Traditional actors such as political, diplomatic, and military elites carried these debates forward as did anti-establishment forces and non-state actors on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

By analyzing establishment perspectives in tandem with protest cultures, The Nuclear Crisis: Cold War Cultures and the Politics of Peace
and Security transcends the traditional East/West divide in Cold War history and brings non-state actors, intellectual discourses, and culture back into international history. Contextualizing an increasingly global debate, the project explores the crisis of détente from the mid-1970s, notions of Atlantic and European identities, Soviet policies in Afghanistan and Africa as well as transnational connections and imaginations based on peace and human rights and their impact on official decision-making.

A central element of The Nuclear Crisis: Cold War Cultures and the Politics of Peace and Security is a digital archive that will preserve and make easily accessible materials on this important chapter of contemporary history (www.nuclearcrisis.org). These materials available free of charge to scholars and teachers.

The Nuclear Crisis: Cold War Cultures and the Politics of Peace and Security is a joint venture of the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC, the University of Augsburg, and the Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA). It is directed by Philipp Gassert (Augsburg), Martin Klimke (GHI Research Fellow 2009–2011) and Wilfried Mausbach (HCA).

Conferences

Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung: Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive
Conference at the Hertie School of Governance, Berlin
March 26–28, 2009

Accidental Armageddons: The Nuclear Crisis and the Culture of the Second Cold War, 1975–1989
Conference at the GHI
November 4–6, 2010

“Trust, but Verify”: Confidence and Distrust from Détente to the End of the Cold War
Conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars and the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC
November 7–9, 2011