The unique contribution of Fred Halliday’s work to the study and teaching of International Relations (IR)—in the areas of gender, IR theory, revolutions and the Middle East—has been well documented. However, it is in his work on the Cold War that Halliday arguably made his most significant and sustained contribution to the study of international relations. In the numerous monographs he published over the course of his career, the Cold War was to feature as the dominant empirical and theoretical concern. Indeed, when considered in relation to Halliday’s general contribution to theoretical debates within IR, it is his theory of Cold War as ‘intersystemic conflict’ that perhaps stands as his clearest, most developed and most impressive theoretical intervention.

Halliday’s writing on the Cold War offers a distinct contribution to its theorization in two ways that provide for an ontology of the Cold War radically different from prevailing views. The first is his attempt to incorporate the Third World—as a field of geopolitical confrontation, and through the agencies of states, revolutionary movements and political leaders—into the narrative and theory of the Cold War; in this regard, Halliday’s work goes against the rather Eurocentric grain of both the theorization of the Cold War within the academic discipline of IR and the diplomatic history of the Cold War. With respect to the latter, while the empirical terrain of conflict in the Third World has been an important area of Cold War history it has also, largely, been seen as of secondary concern with respect to the origins (and ending) of the Cold War and the causal logics associated with the superpowers, centred on developments on the European continent. While...
this Eurocentric bias is being rectified in the work of a number of international historians who have sought to de-centre the history of the Cold War through a shift away from Europe and the analytical concerns with superpowers and logics of arms races and strategic calculation to the autonomous agency of states and movements in the Third World, arguably Halliday got there first. Furthermore, his work has the added value of a more developed theoretical framework within which to make sense of the history of the Third World in the Cold War.

The second area where intersystemic conflict has offered a distinct explanation of the Cold War is through Halliday’s emphasis on the international conflict derived from the contrasting, indeed antagonistic, socio-economic and class-related properties of the superpowers and the wider social systems of which they were part. While he did not overlook the significance of what he came to regard as the autonomy of geopolitics, as evidenced in the arms race and strategic competition, or the fissures and fractures within each bloc, Halliday’s theorization maintained an insistence on the distinct and opposing qualities of the two blocs as the key driver of the evolution of the Cold War.

My concern here is not to offer a general survey and critique of Halliday’s theorization of the Cold War but, rather, to focus on the way in which he incorporated the Third World into it; and, in doing so, I question the degree to which Halliday offers a global theory of the Cold War. This article will assess Fred Halliday’s contribution to the theorization of the Cold War through the prism of the global Cold War, understood as the dialectical relationship between, on the one hand, conflict and social revolution in the global South and, on the other, geopolitical confrontations involving the superpowers in the overall dynamic and working out of the Cold War. I will offer a critical assessment of Halliday’s theory of the global Cold War and, in doing so, outline an alternative framework that builds on Halliday’s work but addresses the theoretical problems that my assessment will identify. For, in spite of reorientating the scholarly gaze on the Cold War towards empirical developments in the Third World and the socio-economic properties of its key protagonists, Halliday’s theorization ultimately fails to fulfil its promise of providing a basis for a global theory of the Cold War. However, before I move to discuss Halliday’s work I will first turn to a brief discussion of the ways in which the agency of the Third World has been—or has not been, as in the mainstream IR debate—incorporated into different theorizations of the Cold War.


5 In referring to ‘global Cold War’, while my aim is to decentre the Cold War from European developments by emphasizing its global spatial dimensions, my main concerns are to emphasize (1) the way in which the global-systemic character of the Cold War (e.g. the systemic properties of capitalism and communism) conditioned the development of particular regions and states, and (2) how developments at a local and regional level were articulated through the global, and how the former conditioned—in an uneven manner—the constitution of the global. In sum, it is not enough to extend the geographical focus of the Cold War; we need also to register the causal impact of global developments on the core superpower axis of the Cold War. I am grateful to Alejandro Colás for raising this issue with me.
The Third World in the theorization of the Cold War

I have mentioned above the Eurocentric tendencies in the scholarly writing on both the theory and the history of the Cold War. In short, this writing has privileged the agency of the superpowers and the terrain of Europe in the Cold War from its origin in 1945 to its termination in 1989. Within IR theory the clearest demonstration of this Eurocentric orientation is Kenneth Waltz’s rendering of the Cold War international system as bipolarity, which—though theoretically elegant—erases the space and agency of the Third World from the Cold War.6

While Waltz’s neo-realism is an extreme example of a parsimonious theory that empties out much of the historical and empirical content of the Cold War, other approaches to the subject within IR do not significantly differ in their ontology. This is highlighted in the debate on the end of the Cold War between realists and social constructivists, which revolves around the relative explanatory powers of, respectively, ideas and material interests in accounting for the changes in Soviet foreign policy in the late 1980s.7 Here, the orthodox history of the Cold War comes full circle with the ‘ideas vs interest’ debate maintaining a geographical/temporal focus on Europe in 1989. In these contrasting accounts the movements and states of the global South are ignored as active and autonomous agents in determining the end of the Cold War; and where the South does feature—as in the case of the conflict in Afghanistan—it is subordinated as a factor that facilitates Gorbachev’s foreign policy rethinking in respect of bilateral relations with Washington.

I have criticized this mainstream Cold War ontology elsewhere.8 However, while the dominant theoretical debate within the discipline of IR has tended to marginalize the significance of the global South in accounts of the Cold War and its ending, an important strand of Marxist-informed historical scholarship on the Cold War—Cold War revisionism—has offered a theorization that does incorporate the global South as the most important geopolitical space of the Cold War and, in consequence, many states, leaders and political movements therein as active agents in its dynamic. I will spend a moment discussing this perspective before turning my attention to my main concern in this article, the work of Fred Halliday.

Emerging in the American academy in the politically febrile context of the 1960s, revisionists sought to critique the orthodox account of the origins of the Cold War by emphasizing the imperialistic dimensions of American foreign

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policy in contrast to what they regarded as an inert and inward-looking USSR, preoccupied with its domestic postwar reconstruction and eclipsed in its military and economic power by the United States. This analysis produced a view of the USSR as a marginal global competitor to the United States and, at best, a hesitant and reluctant supporter of international revolution in the Third World.9

From this perspective, the Cold War was explained as the result of attempts by the American imperium to recast the capitalist world after 1945, first settling accounts with the other major capitalist powers, and the British Empire in particular, as the European-centred formal imperial order was dismantled, and then opposing efforts by revolutionary movements and states to craft non-capitalist socio-economic paths out of the decaying corpse of European colonialism. Thus the Cold War was viewed not as a conflict between Moscow and Washington, but rather as a global conflict waged by the United States as the leading imperial power against social revolution.10 The connection between Third World revolution and US imperialism was less about the spread of communist/revolutionary states adopting the Soviet model, as suggested by American Cold War ideologues, and more about the challenges posed by revolutionary states to the generalized reproduction of a US-centred global liberal capitalist world economic order and, more specifically, US control of and access to markets and strategic materials necessary for the continued health of the US economy.

As should be clear from this summary, Cold War revisionism offers a radically different ontology of the Cold War from the dominant account of Cold War in the discipline of IR. In doing so it places the global South at centre stage and recognizes the autonomous agency of Third World revolutionary movements and states, as well as offering a political economy of the Cold War through its focus on the revolutionary consequences of uneven global capitalist development. However, it does not provide a global theory of Cold War because it fails to recognize and account for the agency of the USSR in causing and sustaining the Cold War—both bilaterally in its relations with the United States and as a global actor that supported international revolution.11 Cold War revisionists ‘over-egg’ the North–South axis of the Cold War as a historical continuation of western/American imperialism dating from the establishment of capitalist–imperialist forms of domination in the eighteenth century to the postwar era and beyond. This fails not only to differentiate adequately the evolving uneven geographical complexion of capitalist development after 1945—both between metropolitan capitalist states and between North and South—but also to attend properly to the way in which revolutionary states in the Third World shared domestic properties, institutional arrangements and forms of foreign relations in common with the USSR.

I will now turn to my main focus, Fred Halliday’s theorization of the Cold War and the place of the Third World within it, to assess the degree to which it provides a global theory of Cold War.

**Intersystemic conflict, the Third World and the global Cold War**

Influenced by the writings of the Polish Marxist Isaac Deutscher, Halliday’s theorization of the Cold War saw the contrasting and antagonistic socio-economic properties of the two superpowers and the struggle between them for dominance across the world as the main driving force propelling geopolitical competition between them, and between their respective allies. In consequence, while Halliday recognized the socio-economic—as much as the ideological and geopolitical—centrality of the superpowers in the evolution of the Cold War, his (and Deutscher’s) emphasis on the socio-economic realm of how societies were organized to meet their respective social needs, and the configuration of social classes and role of state authorities in such arrangements, opened up the empirical panorama of the Cold War beyond the reification of the arms race and bipolar conflict, to encompass those areas of the world where the competition between the two socio-economic systems was at its most intense—in the Third World.

In short, then, Halliday’s theorization of the Cold War as intersystemic conflict consisted of the following three propositions: (1) the Cold War was a product of conflict between two distinct socio-economic systems; (2) the driving force of the Cold War derived from the ‘competitive and universalizing dynamic’ within each system; and (3) the Cold War could only end with the vanquishing of one system/superpower by the other. More specifically, intersystemic conflict was driven by the evolving relative and comparative strengths of each socio-economic system—both within its core/extant states (the metropolitan West and the USSR/Soviet bloc) and the wider world—most notably through the impact of the periodic episodes of social revolution that overthrew capitalist states in the Third World to realize an international expansion of statist/neo-Soviet models. It was through such developments that Soviet/communist power spread internationally and geopolitical confrontations arose between the newly emerged revolutionary states and the US. Revolutionary change—an outcome of uneven capitalist development—was the spark that ignited the superpower confrontations in the Third World that dominated the Cold War. Without the kindling provided by the shifting moments of socio-economic crisis and political instability derived from the structural tendencies associated with the location of many of the states of the post-colonial world in the global capitalist order, the dynamic of the Cold War

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14 Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations*, p. 175. For the most developed statements on Halliday’s theoretical position on the Cold War, see Halliday, *Making of the second Cold War*, pp. 1–45, and *Rethinking International Relations*, pp. 170–90.
and its development into a global conflict would have been very different and, arguably, much less profound.

It is clear that, like the revisionists, Halliday centres the Cold War on the contradictions and crises associated with capitalist development, as it was from the revolutionary transformations generated by such crises in the localized reproduction of capitalist states that the Cold War became globalized and geopolitical confrontations between the superpowers developed.\(^{15}\) Hence his well-made comment that US presidential national security doctrines—from Truman to Reagan—were less about responding to Soviet geopolitical manoeuvring and more concerned with responding to the geopolitical consequences of localized revolutionary crises.\(^{16}\)

However, Halliday goes further than the revisionists in his assessment of the connections between capitalist development and the Cold War. In recognizing the differentiated character of the Cold War, most notably in the contrast between the relatively successful stabilization and legitimization of capitalism within and across the advanced capitalist world after 1945 and the conflicts, crises and contestations associated with its reproduction across the Third World, he offers a distinct geography of the Cold War.\(^{17}\) Implicit within this is a recognition by Halliday that whereas the advanced capitalist world had been the cauldron of crisis and conflict—out of which revolutionary crises approximating Cold War and ‘hot’ war had emerged in the decades leading up to 1945—the stabilization and strengthening of the metropolitan capitalist order under the liberal hegemonic arrangements of the US after 1945 effectively terminated the internal logic of Cold War within the metropolitan zone.\(^{18}\)

Though the point is not made explicitly by Halliday, the upshot of this is that the Cold War has a combined spatial and temporal unevenness, such that the dynamics within the reproduction of a constantly developing (and changing) capitalist order bring about crisis in one geographical locale, involving specific revolutionary agents, while at the same time the reproduction of capitalism in a different locale proceeds in a much less contested fashion. Geographically speaking, while capitalist development within Europe between 1917 and 1945 was both crisis-ridden and fuelled with revolutionary possibilities, ultimately degenerating into war, such tendencies were much less pronounced in the colonial world at that time. The ‘weakest links’ at this time were, then, in the metropolitan zone with respect to the combined structural tendencies within metropolitan capitalist development and the revolutionary movements active on the ground in Germany, Italy, Spain and elsewhere.\(^{19}\) This geography of Cold War was inverted after 1945, such that the internal/local dynamics of Cold War—understood as moments of


revolutionary crisis opening up possibilities for the international expansion of communist revolution allied to Moscow—effectively ceased and, in doing so, terminated Cold War in (western) Europe, while at the same time the politics of Cold War spread and intensified—if unevenly—across the rest of the world. Capitalist development, then, contributed to both stabilization and a rolling series of revolutionary crises and conflicts. What this also means is that although the Cold War had a globalizing logic it was never a global conflict in time and space because of the uneven and varied way in which the contexts, agents and crises associated with it were produced.20

The correspondence between intersystemic conflict as a theory of the Cold War and the revisionists’ political economy of Cold War only goes so far, however; and it is in the discussion of the relationship between developments in the Third World and the Cold War that Halliday most clearly distinguishes himself from the revisionists and offers a more advanced and convincing theorization of the Cold War. First, he recognizes the similar structural socio-economic contexts from which the Bolshevik, Chinese and Third World social revolutions emerged.21 Second, he also identifies the comparable social and political agencies involved in revolutionary transformations in the USSR and later revolutions, and in the objectives—domestic and international—that they sought to achieve.22 In doing so, Halliday correctly gives analytical focus to the collective agency of the Third World, where the competition and conflict between the two ‘models’ of socio-economic order—liberal capitalist and communist—was played out in the fluctuating political fortunes of different social and political movements and states after 1945. However, this collective agency is not separate—at least, not in ideological, socio-economic and political terms—from the systemic qualities of the USSR that came into being after 1917. Thus, for Halliday, ‘the very social interests embodied in the leading capitalist and communist states are present, in a fluid and conflicting manner in the Third World; the result is that the clash of the two blocs is constantly reanimated and sustained by developments in these other states.’23

It follows from this that the Cold War is understood—echoing Deutscher’s idea of the ‘Great Contest’—as being about the expansion and retraction of each form of state and society. Though Third World social revolutions were not ‘conspiracies of Moscow’, and were not always carried out by ‘card-carrying communists’, the state–society forms that were created from them, the ideological frameworks of the respective revolutionary leaderships, the social forces mobilized in them and the aspirations—both domestic and international—that fuelled them had much more in common with corresponding elements in the USSR than they differed from them. For these reasons, Halliday rightly argues that they were reflective of systemic qualities; hence their inclusion as agents involved in intersystemic conflict with the United States and the wider international capitalist order.

22 Halliday, Making of the second Cold War, pp. 81–104; Rethinking International Relations, pp. 170–90.
23 Halliday, Making of the second Cold War, p. 33.
Further, while the Soviet system had expanded through war into Eastern and Central Europe, its extraregional expansion occurred only through revolutionary transformations across the Third World after 1945. Without these ‘autonomous’ developments—where the Soviet political form was internationalized, thus undermining the international consolidation and reproduction of capitalist state forms tied into the US-led international order—there would not have been a global Cold War. The significance of this—and here again Halliday departs from the revisionist (and wider Marxist) analyses—is that he recognizes that the USSR did (though not always consistently) provide forms of support to advance the interests of international revolution, even if doing so meant taking risks by exposing itself to intensified geopolitical confrontations with the US.\(^{24}\) The connection between social revolution in the Third World and geopolitical confrontations after 1945 was, then, structural in two senses: first, in that the socio-economic fabric out of which revolutions derived was located within an international structure of uneven capitalist development; and second, in that the USSR sought to support newly emergent revolutionary states by providing diplomatic and material support—without which many, if not most, would not have survived—and by trying (with varying degrees of success) to incorporate these states into the political–ideological and geopolitical framework and discipline of the Soviet bloc. This latter point is important, as we need to recognize not only Soviet revolutionary internationalism but also its contradictory, hierarchical and coercive dimensions.\(^{25}\)

It seems clear, then, from this exegesis of intersystemic conflict that Halliday’s theorization of the Cold War is a global one that tries to incorporate the South by centring the Cold War on socio-economic conflict derived from capitalist development, thus overcoming the Eurocentrism of more traditional perspectives. However, Halliday’s theory is more qualified than it would appear in its emphasis on the geopolitical conflicts derived from shifting bouts of revolutionary crisis. There are three reasons for this: (1) his temporalization of the Cold War as moments of conflict covering the postwar era from 1947 to 1989; (2) his related identification of the arms race and the militarization of the Cold War as operating according to a separate logic from that of intersystemic conflict; and (3) the problems in his conceptualization of uneven capitalist development and social revolution. I will now look at each of these in turn, beginning with Halliday’s temporalization of the Cold War.

There are two issues associated with Halliday’s temporalization of the Cold War that undermine the ‘global’ aspects of his theory and hence the proper incorporation of the Third World into the study of the Cold War. The upshot of these problems is a lingering trace of Eurocentrism. While Halliday refers to the Cold War as a period stretching from the late 1940s to the dissolution of the Soviet bloc in 1989, he more precisely identifies Cold War as those specific moments of

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\(^{24}\) Halliday, *Revolution in world politics*, p. 110. The documentary record seems to support such a view. See the published documents from the Soviet foreign policy archives and commentaries published by the Wilson Center Cold War international history project: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/cold-war-international-history-project, accessed 12 May 2011; Westad, *Global Cold War*.

ideological and geopolitical antagonism between the superpowers at which the world came closest to direct military conflict between Moscow and Washington. From this viewpoint, he identifies two periods of Cold War: 1946–53 and 1979–86. The remaining periods of postwar history are referred to as ones of ‘oscillatory antagonism’ (1953–69) and detente (1969–79 and 1987–9). In doing this, Halliday, in effect, marginalizes conflict and transformation in the Third World as a source of Cold War.

The period between 1953 and 1969—what he seems to regard as a ‘half-way house’ between Cold War and detente—was a period dominated by two of the arguably defining moments of the Cold War: the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and subsequent missile crisis of 1962, which brought the superpowers as close as they ever came to direct nuclear conflict; and the Vietnam War. Halliday’s questioning of the logic of continuous Cold War after 1946 privileges the bipolar geopolitical relationship reflected in the relative intensification of hostility between Moscow and Washington after preceding periods of negotiation. In doing so, it ends up reducing the Cold War to the superpowers and, in particular, the revolutionary challenge to the US-centred international capitalist order posed by the USSR. However, this sits quite uncomfortably with his insistence on intersystemic conflict, particularly when the actual political challenges to the reproduction of capitalism did not derive from Soviet actions—at least, not from the USSR acting in isolation—but, rather, from the moments of revolutionary crisis seized upon and taken advantage of by extra-Soviet agency. As the two examples just referred to testify, the agents that the US and its allies confronted on the ground were non-Soviet and, on occasion, acted independently of Soviet advice and material support. This was the case in Korea between 1950 and 1953, where it was the newly created People’s Republic of China under Mao that took the lead in the confrontation with the United States, and in North Vietnam, where until the late 1960s China was also the mainstay of North Vietnam in its struggle with the US. There are multiple other examples of revolutionary agency that confronted the US and contributed to the evolution of the Cold War without directly involving Moscow.

Halliday’s temporalization can also be found wanting from a global perspective through his dating of Cold War history from 1946 to 1989. This logically follows his differentiation of Cold War from other periods of postwar history. Thus, while recognizing the global significance of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the emergence of an international communist movement under Moscow’s tutelage soon after, Halliday does not regard the armed intervention by the western powers to destroy Bolshevism at birth and the subsequent anxieties on the part of the major capitalist powers about the geopolitical threat posed by the USSR and the international communist movement as amounting to Cold War. For Halliday, the defining geopolitical contradiction of world politics was that between fascism and the liberal powers on the one hand, and the USSR on the other. Such a conceptualization of the period between 1917 and 1945 is problematic as it severs the link

26 Halliday, *Making of the second Cold War*, p. 3; *From Kabul to Managua*, pp. 9–23.
between the continuities of Soviet foreign policy and the simmering moments of revolutionary crisis across the capitalist world both after 1917 (and western counter-revolutionary responses) and after the Second World War. Indeed, the roots of Third World revolution in East Asia and Latin America were actually sown at this time. Further, with regard to the defining geopolitical schism provided by fascism, we need to make clear that fascism was generated by the confluence of intense international capitalist crisis and revolutionary communist threat. Indeed, as a recent article has demonstrated, in the 1930s the British ruling class viewed the world through a distinctly Cold War prism in the sense that it continued to perceive the USSR as the primary geopolitical threat to British imperial and capitalist interests—even after the debacle of Munich—and communists as the gravest internal threat to the existing social order within Britain and the wider empire.

There were, then, continuities—at a number of levels—between the early Cold War, dating from 1917, and the post-1945 era: in the form and substance of Soviet foreign policy, in the suspicions and hostility of the major capitalist powers towards the USSR and the activities of the wider international communist movement, and in the revolutionary consequences of international capitalist crisis, which arguably constituted the most important, indeed, the defining causal dynamic of the Cold War. In this respect the outbreak of the Second World War was such a crisis, reflecting the explosion of the internal contradictions of the post-1918 international capitalist order. World war unleashed revolutionary forces across the world, bringing about socio-economic and geopolitical change, realizing the extension of Soviet geopolitical power and structurally weakening the institutions of international capitalist/imperialist power. These revolutionary forces persisted in subsequent decades with the post-colonial challenges to the reconfiguration of an international capitalist order after 1945. While the war pitched the USSR and the liberal powers against fascism it was also, fundamentally, about the dialectic of revolution and counter-revolution: a dynamic unleashed by the Revolution of 1917 which continued in a liberal and illiberal, if not quite fascist, form after 1945, until the extinguishing of the flames of communist revolution by the 1980s. While the geopolitical consequences of the Second World War assisted the forces of social revolution, the causal dynamic of social revolution lay in the combination of the structural properties of uneven capitalist development and the revolutionary social forces of the global South.

Halliday’s temporalization of Cold War is explained by his ontology of Cold War. Thus, while he centres the Cold War on the Third World and social revolu-

28 Saull, Cold War and after, pp. 16–48; Horowitz, Imperialism and revolution.
31 Some far-right Third World authoritarian dictatorships in East Asia and Latin America did practise policies of extreme nationalism and terror that approximated the politics of fascist states. See Ariel C. Armony, Argentina, the United States, and the anti-communist crusade in Central America, 1977–1984 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997).
tion within his theoretical framework of intersystemic conflict, he also identifies the autonomous logic of the arms race and strategic conflict as a defining characteristic of Cold War. This is the second theoretical problem with intersystemic conflict as a theory of global Cold War. Consequently, Halliday sees the Second World War as necessary for the Cold War, as it was this conflict that redraw the geopolitical and military–technological framework of world politics.\textsuperscript{32} Further, the logic of the arms race and strategic competition—in the form of nuclear weapons—provided a distinct bipolar dynamic to Cold War, ensuring an analytical privileging of the superpowers and the field in which the geopolitical schism between them was most stark—namely, in the postwar division of Europe. In distinguishing the arms race and bipolar strategic competition as determinants of Cold War, Halliday ends up having to subordinate social revolution to the geopolitical manoeuvring of the superpowers; as a result, intersystemic conflict is decoupled from interstate conflict, giving the latter explanatory autonomy. The significance of this is that, implicitly, it rests on acceptance of a realist ontology of the international whereby the geopolitical and strategic properties of states—in this case the superpowers—are seen as distinct from those of other states, and whereby the different socio-economic and political–ideological properties of the superpowers are given less weight in establishing their respective analytical significance. In short, Halliday separates social conflict and the socio-economic constitution of each superpower from geopolitics.

The problem with this analysis is that it fails to theorize adequately the connection between the domestic socio-economic properties of the state/society forms that populated the two blocs on the one hand and on the other how military/geopolitical power was involved in the wider international reproduction and expansion of each bloc/system. I will return to this point in the concluding section of the article.

The final element of my critique of Halliday’s theorization of Cold War concerns the problem of matching the temporal and geopolitical ontology just described with that of the history and trajectory of social revolution within the Cold War. In recognizing the (socio-economic) ‘systemic’ qualities of the revolutionary states that emerged after 1917 as well as the presence of those qualities in the ideologies, organization and strategies of revolutionary movements, Halliday extends the spaces and agents of Cold War beyond the traditional European centre. Implicitly he also recognizes the asynchronous temporality of Cold War or, more precisely, Cold Wars. What this means is that though newly emerged revolutionary states (and revolutionary guerrilla movements besieging pro-western states) were soon incorporated into the bipolar geopolitical logic of the Cold War, their respective histories were not reducible to the bipolar rendering of the Cold War as they also involved domestic and regional dimensions. The most important case in this respect was the Middle East, where the Cold War was grafted onto the defining conflicts within the region—the Arab/Palestinian–Israeli conflict, and

the intra-Arab conflict between revolutionaries and conservatives—and where local and regionally generated conflicts contributed to the wider reproduction of a global Cold War.33 The Cold War, then, had a generalized logic whereby socio-economic conflict and revolutionary transformation triggered geopolitical crises and conflicts involving the superpowers; but it also consisted of the particularities of specific temporal conjunctures of Cold War and geographical locales involving socio-economic, political and, at times, military struggles on the ground which were marked by a ‘relative autonomy’ from the superpowers.

The significance of this point is that while we can use the term Cold War to refer to the general historical period characterized by global social conflict dating from 1917 (or 1945), we also need to refer to the specificity of local and particular Cold Wars, which reflects—more accurately—the shifting and uneven entrance of particular states/areas into the conflict of the Cold War and their uneven—in both form and temporality—exit from it, which in a number of significant cases predated the end of the Cold War division of Europe in 1989. In short, Halliday’s ontology of Cold War, and particularly his emphasis on Europe in 1989 as the focus for his consideration of the end of the Cold War,34 is inconsistent with his general approach to the Cold War as intersystemic conflict and, further, does not adequately recognize the autonomous domestic and international trajectories of a number of regions and states that were once part of the Cold War.

The Cold War, then, had shifting and uneven beginnings and endings based on the historical experiences of particular revolutionary movements and states. Thus, China effectively entered the Cold War in 1949 with the communist revolution and exited it in 1978 with its domestic socio-economic reorientation away from the communist model of economic development and towards integration into the international capitalist economy—and, internationally, by turning away from ideological and geopolitical confrontation with the United States through diplomatic rapprochement. The pattern of China’s example can be applied to the trajectories of many other (revolutionary) states.

Towards a theory of global Cold War

So what would a theory of global Cold War look like? In this final section of the article I want to develop elements of the critical assessment of Fred Halliday’s theory of the Cold War by mapping out an alternative theorization that builds on the theory of intersystemic conflict but overcomes the problems with it I have identified. On the basis of the discussion above, I will focus on two major issues derived from my critique of Halliday’s theorization of the Cold War. The first is the causal dynamic of Cold War, originating in uneven and differentiated capitalist development, and how this led to seizures of state power by


revolutionary movements out of which geopolitical confrontations emerged. The second concerns the domestic socio-economic properties of the superpowers and other Cold War states and, specifically, the contrasting and antagonistic geopolitical dimensions of particular forms of political economy. Here the arms race and superpower strategic competition are conceived of not as ‘ontologically autonomous’ but, rather, as derivative of the domestic socio-economic constitution of states. Both these elements are constitutive of a theory of global Cold War: the former in the sense of providing a spatial and temporal globalizing logic rooted in the contradictions of capitalist development; the latter in explaining the linkage between the level of domestically engineered revolutionary socio-economic and political change and that of geopolitics, both in general and of the superpowers in particular.

While the Cold War was most visible in the strategic–military competition between the superpowers, both the emergence and the globalization of US–Soviet geopolitical rivalry derived from the proliferation of new bouts of revolutionary struggle and the establishment of revolutionary states. The Cold War was only globalized, then, to the extent that new (communist/revolutionary) state forms could emerge that both contested the local and regional reproduction of a political order of capitalist states and articulated an alternative path of socio-economic development that offered a geographical avenue for the spread of Soviet influence and power. While the precise form of transformation varied—there were no repeats of the Bolshevik model, strictly defined, after 1917—the forms of state and the revolutionary agents that established them had enough in common in terms of their socio-economic properties, the means with which they attempted the construction of revolutionary states, and the aims and objectives (domestic and international) they were preoccupied with realizing for them to be collectively recognized as a shared social and political grouping.

If we accept this—that the geographical spread and temporal momentum of the Cold War derived from localized revolutionary transformations emerging from crises associated with the reproduction of subaltern developing capitalist states—then what follows, surely, is that a theory of global Cold War is to be found in the societal domain. More precisely, the Cold War was the product of a specific phase or phases of capitalist development that occurred as structural tendencies—based on the dominant mode of accumulation—within capitalism (associated with, initially, the crisis of the inter-imperial system and then the transition to a post-colonial liberal international capitalist order) created revolutionary openings that combined with the development of specific social and political forces to secure revolutionary victories. Clearly, this was not a unilinear process, but reflected the interconnections between the specificities of the local context—in the form of the configurations of class and political relations associated with the material organization of social life—and the international structure of capitalist development, and the shifting nodes of contradiction and crisis within this domestic–international matrix. While crisis and the possibility of revolutionary transformation were—

the final instance—always about the playing out of (and consequences of the crisis for the political fortunes of rival sets of) social forces within states, such developments were not separate from the broader international structural context of capitalist development.

Indeed, we are able to identify three conjunctures of crisis in the reproduction of the international structure of capitalist development as contributing to the shifting ruptures of revolutionary crisis that came to punctuate the history of the Cold War. In all three cases the precise dynamic of capitalist crisis was sourced in a crisis of the political ordering of international capitalist accumulation. This was in each case evident in the breakdown of the existing political (interstate) framework of its organization, demonstrated in the intensification of political and geopolitical conflict among metropolitan capitalist states and the incomplete or partial transition to new ‘governance’ arrangements centred on a new mode of accumulation associated with a different political and geopolitical framework.36 Further, such structural tendencies had a localized agential dimension in the development of revolutionary social and political forces committed to particular kinds of transformation at the domestic and international levels. As long as this combination prevailed—structural crisis and revolutionary agency committed to a particular vision of transformation associated with the Soviet model—the Cold War would continue.

The three conjunctures of structural crisis were: (1) the inter-imperial crisis of the First World War and the subsequent revolutionary upheavals in (mainly) Europe, centred on the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution; (2) the crisis of the Second World War and the establishment of a liberal, as opposed to an imperial, form of international capitalist accumulation after 1945, which saw a momentary revolutionary crisis situation in Western Europe, the imposition of state-socialist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, and a series of revolutions across the Third World; and (3) the breakdown in the geopolitical and socio-economic pillars of the postwar liberal international capitalist order in the 1970s, evidenced in the US defeat in South-East Asia and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, which provided a benign context for the revolutionary ‘arc of crises’ across many Third World locations between 1973 and 1980. Viewed from this perspective, it was the international structural context of transition and crisis over the ordering of the reproduction of capitalism at a systemic and international level that provided the key context for the evolution of the Cold War in the form of the proliferation of international revolution.

This ontological framing of the Cold War permits an explanation of the motives and dynamic of Cold War whereby the collective actions of individuals, social classes, popular movements and revolutionary guerrillas can be connected to the traditional conception of the Cold War as US–Soviet strategic rivalry through the (communist) revolutionary consequences of socio-economic and political struggles on the ground in various geographical locations. It also recognizes that the Cold War was present in the minds and actions of men and women in a range of social

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36 See Saull, ‘Locating the global South in the theorisation of the Cold War’, p. 260 and n. 28.
domains—not just in the superpower summit room or on the terrain of revolutionary warfare. Furthermore, it demonstrates the shifting continuity of Cold War, manifested in a variety of ways all connected by a logic of social conflict. In this sense Halliday’s reduction of the Cold War to the years 1946–53 and 1979–86 can be recognized as reflecting an intensification or, better, strategic militarization of social conflict at the geopolitical level; but this itself derived from a deeper logic of social conflict that revealed itself in a range of forms not reducible to superpower strategic antagonism. The dynamic of Cold War continued on the ground across shifting locales as the social and political forces associated with each social system engaged in struggle and conflict and, in consequence, as each system expanded and/or retracted. In short, the Cold War continued even if it was not always discernible in the kind of international relations that characterized these two periods, as its spread was caused by successive waves of revolutionary struggle that originated at the micro-level within particular societal contexts and spread across the world unevenly—in Cuba in the early 1930s and then the mid-1950s, China in the early 1920s through to the late 1940s, Vietnam in the 1930s and then from the mid-1940s up to the 1970s, Egypt in the early 1950s through to the 1970s—ultimately serving to light the fuse for geopolitical conflict involving the superpowers.

Arguably, then, the trajectories of capitalist development explain both the shifting nodes of geographical spread of Cold War and its varied ends. Yet the realization of Cold War—revolutionary state formation from localized crises in the reproduction of capitalist states triggering geopolitical tension and conflict—emerged from a very uneven spatial and temporal context. How else are we to explain the coexistence of socio-economic and geopolitical stasis between the two blocs within Europe between 1945 and 1989 with the flux of crises, revolutions, wars and geopolitical advance and retreat across the rest of the world over the same period? This suggests two different theatres of Cold War motivated by two different evolutionary logics.

A key difference was obviously the way in which the contrasting socio-economic properties of the divided postwar Europe were tightly embedded within geopolitical and military structures, such that the possibilities for (in 1954, 1956, 1968 and 1980–81) and reality of (in 1989–91) local socio-economic and political transformation had direct military and geopolitical repercussions. Further, with the introduction of nuclear bipolarity after 1949 the socio-economic divide became directly connected to the superpower nuclear relationship. In short, the social antagonism between the two systems was highly militarized to such a degree that any successful ‘overthrow’ of existing socio-economic arrangements—on either side—had the potential to trigger superpower war. This was much less so in the rest of the world because of the more fluid and shifting connections between domestic political change and superpower military—strategic installations, largely as a result of the uneven geographical spread of the Cold War.

The militarization of the superpower/systemic social antagonism within

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37 For examples in the realms of culture and representation see Joseph and Spenser, eds, In from the cold, pp. 171–380.
Europe focuses attention on the question of the extent to which the geopolitical conflict of the Cold War—centred on the bipolar relationship—was independent of the socio-economic systems prevailing within and across each set of states, as suggested by Halliday. This question in turn points to the differing ways in which each set of states—not just the superpowers—internally reproduced themselves both as individual states and wider systemic blocs, as well as how they expanded, internationally. The key issue in this respect was the difference—based on the defining role of coercive and militarized institutions and relations—between the respective internal constitution and reproduction of the two systemic state forms: communist and (liberal) capitalist.

With respect to the United States, its domestic socio-economic and political characteristics were replicated in its relations across the metropolitan capitalist world, producing a liberal hegemonic order after 1945, and facilitating the international expansion of an American-led international social order without recourse to the systematic deployment of military power. While the United States deployed military force across the world after 1945 against revolutionary movements and states, such military action did not define the international social order among capitalist states. The significance of this was, and is, that geopolitical relations over the metropolitan capitalist world have been much more stable and harmonious than at any other time. This was not only beneficial to the internal coherence of the US-led ‘system’—reinforcing its hegemonic rather than imperial characteristics—but directly undermined the prospects for the long-term durability of the Soviet system, premised and politically configured, as it was, on the basis of another round of inter-capitalist crisis and geopolitical conflict replicating the two earlier cases in 1914–18 and 1939–45.

In contrast to the metropolitan capitalist order, the internal constitution of most revolutionary states paralleled that of the Soviet experience: the rapid and coercive destruction of the old social and political order and the creation of a new one based on a much more authoritarian and militarized state form. Further, and following the Soviet experience, the international context—in the form of counter-revolutionary interventions—skewed domestic processes of revolutionary transformation in a militarized direction. The highly coercive and militarized character of most revolutionary states in the Soviet mould had two geopolitical consequences determining for Cold War. First, their coercive and militarized complexion triggered hostile geopolitical responses from capitalist powers, in that their internal and systemic reproduction (not just across the Soviet bloc) rested on the maintenance of coercive and militarized state forms in which ‘autonomous’ societal relations were absorbed and subordinated into the logic of the coercive authoritarian state. This meant that domestic/intrasystemic politics

38 Mark Rupert, Producing hegemony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
39 As an internal systemic political property of the United States, coercive militarized power was not a prerequisite for the maintenance of domestic and international capitalist order, achieved most notably through the relative autonomy of capitalist social relations in the reproduction of American global power. See Alejandro Colás, ‘Open doors and closed frontiers: the limits of American empire’, European Journal of International Relations 14: 4, 2008, pp. 619–43; Ray Kiely, Rethinking imperialism (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).
had geopolitical consequences very different from the kind that characterized inter-capitalist relations. At issue was not just the closing off of large areas of social space from capitalist development, but the confining of social and political relations of neo-Soviet states to a militarized/geopolitical logic at odds with the international relations of capitalist states.

Second, any international expansion of this form of politics necessitated the destruction of existing socio-economic and political arrangements through conflict. The inability of Soviet-type state forms to expand as a socio-economic system without the destruction of existing state forms—from within (revolution) or without (war)—not only triggered geopolitical containment but also severely limited their potential as a rival form of international system to that of the US-led international capitalist order. Consequently, revolutionary change produced geopolitical conflict, and the reproduction of these states and their wider system helped promote the continuation of geopolitical rivalry.

However, we can only explain the contrasting zones—Europe and the rest of the world—and their distinct geopolitical dynamics as a consequence of the working out of crises of uneven capitalist development. Thus the geopolitical configuration of postwar Europe was a consequence of war, social conflict and revolution over the period 1939–45. War facilitated a paradoxical social restructuring that laid the foundations for a successful liberal capitalist restabilization in Western Europe, with the defeat of fascism and the strengthening of revolutionary movements and the geopolitical spread of ‘revolutionary’ states in Eastern and Central Europe. Moreover, the Second World War was a consequence of a breakdown in the post-1918 international capitalist order, which had been plagued by both a structural crisis in the reproduction of a political order of capitalist states and revolutionary possibilities linked to the fortunes of the communist left. What was to plague the non-European world after 1945 was precisely what had characterized European international relations between 1917 and the late 1940s. In this respect a fixation with Europe as the ‘centre’ of the Cold War is misplaced—at least theoretically—as while we can consider the Cold War to be a global conflict, this was never in a synchronized or spatial sense. Instead, the currents and agents of Cold War emerged and determined the development of politics within and across states in different locales at different times. What the different spatial and temporal expressions had in common, however, was the structural context of crisis in the local reproduction of capitalist states and revolutionary agents aligned—to varying degrees—with the USSR and the revolutionary legacy of 1917.

Consequently, the end of the Cold War is better understood as the ending of Cold Wars that defy a particular geographical or temporal moment in spite of the global significance of the European 1989. As the spread of the Cold War, through momentary and shifting revolutionary transformations, brought different locales

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40 Though its potential was not realized, the combined collapse of Portugal’s right-wing dictatorship and its colonial empire in 1974 opened up the most significant revolutionary possibility in Western Europe after the late 1940s and, in doing so, broke the post-1949 stasis, raising once more the spectre of social revolution and bringing the politics of the global South back to the metropolitan zone. See Roland Chilcote, *The Portuguese revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).
into the Cold War, so the varied trajectories of post-revolutionary states ultimately determined the progress of the Cold War within each particular locale and, in a cumulative sense, at a global level. The paradox here is that while the Cold War in the period covering the final conjuncture of social revolution between 1973 and 1979 spread to its widest geographical scope, this was also a period when the logic of Cold War as the determining factor in domestic and international politics was coming to an end in parts of the Middle East and, more importantly, China. The significance of this reading, which gives greater recognition to the local dimensions of Cold War and its asynchronous temporality, is that it offers a more measured verdict on 1989. Thus, both as a global event and with regard to the political–ideological currents that have come to the fore across the world since that year, it is particular Cold War endings—in form and timing—which best explain the logics and conflicts of post-Cold War world politics; and some of these were operative before 1989.

However, while the geographical and temporal dynamics of the Cold War derived from a structural tendency within capitalist development after 1917, the Cold War is not reducible to this structural tendency, for two reasons. The first is that capitalist development was differentiated between North and South and, especially by the 1980s, increasingly within the South, which resulted in more varied political and fewer (communist) revolutionary outcomes. Thus, while capitalist development caused crises from which Cold War developed after 1917 and after 1945, this was no longer so after 1980. Instead, while the neo-liberal era has been plagued by financial crises that have shaken the socio-economic and ideological foundations of many states across much of the global South (and now the metropolitan zones), paradoxically this has not resulted in any revolutionary advances or major geopolitical realignments. The second reason is that the continuation of Cold War—especially in the geopolitical domain—was conditional on the political and economic trajectories of existing revolutionary states including the USSR. Just because a revolutionary state implemented neo-Soviet domestic transformations and embedded itself within the USSR’s geopolitical orbit did not mean that this would continue over the long term. These two issues were obviously interlinked—Soviet geopolitical autonomy and expansion could come about only through the spread of international revolution—but also distinct, particularly with regard to the geopolitical vulnerabilities of Soviet-type regimes.

Intersystemic conflict takes us only so far in opening up our ontological horizons to a theory of global Cold War; but in emphasizing the international currency of revolution and its connection to the socio-economic dimensions of international relations Fred Halliday offered a unique and innovative theory of the Cold War. More than that, the critical tensions within his work also offer scholarly openings for further development. I hope that this article has managed to provide an example of such an opening and, in doing so, a contribution to the continuing debate about the global properties of the Cold War.