This two-day workshop is divided into two interrelated but separate themes. Day one will address the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia, with particular focus on the legacies of the Cold War on political regimes and their development in the region, and related themes. The second day will focus on Sweden in Asia during the Cold War.

The Cold War was a period of intense and bloody conflict in East and Southeast Asia. Internal and interstate conflicts, civil wars and genocides – all added up to a most dangerous and disastrous period in terms of human suffering and lives wasted. Some have argued that given the level of violence in Cold War Asia, the term itself is a misnomer. Being right in the middle of, or just coming out of, more or less protracted national liberation struggles at the onset of the Cold War, the stage was set for new popular movements to emerge, partly sprung out of national liberation movements and other political forces whose formation preceded the onset of the Cold War. New nation-states emerged and their political regimes took form in a bewildering context of internal and external actors and pressure, all with the intent to shape politics, political forces and institutions for their advantage.

The Cold War was played out in domestic politics both at the level of the state and within civil society. International and transnational actors combined with internal actors to push their agendas in domestic politics. Western ‘domino theory’ and fear of communism translated into broad repression of almost any popular movement or dissent. The anti-Communism side of the conflict sought stable governments who could resist communism, even in cases they had to be backed up by military force against their own populations. The pro-Communist side also supported authoritarian but revolutionary governments and the establishment of party-states, who could guarantee the development of the national and international communist movement. Repression was intense on both sides of the conflict of emerging political and social actors such as political parties, trade unions, women’s organizations, student activism, ethnic, religious and peasant organizations, and social
movements. But in this restrictive environment some actors also gained support from either side of the conflict, often in an attempt to crowd out opposing alternatives. The unintentional effect of this strategy was the emergence of a limited civil society, sometimes in subnational geographic areas. Even so, the winner in this cruel regime game was the military that in several national contexts emerged as critically important political actors. How did the extensive Cold War and its ideological, economic and institutional dynamics structure politics and civil societies, affect the balance of power between civil society actors and the state, and what was the effect on political regimes? What are the legacies of the Cold War in Asian politics and society? What aspects of different pasts are utilised in contemporary Asian politics? The first day of the workshop aims to address these and other questions related to the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia. Papers can address a wide array of subjects, narrow in focus or broader analysis.

The second day of the workshop will deal with a related but distinct theme, Sweden’s engagement in Asia during the Cold War. Throughout the entire Cold War period, Sweden played a major role as an international mediator and bridge-builder in different crises all over the world. This policy was based on the traditional Swedish non-aligned policy that has its roots back in the 1900-century. During the Cold War this traditional mediating and bridge-building role was combined with a policy that was characterized by a strong economic and political support to the Third World and liberation movements in different continents. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Olof Palme this new orientation was called the activist foreign policy and gained a lot of support and criticism in Sweden and abroad. For example, the relations with the United States underwent a hard time during the 1960s and 1970s mainly due to the Swedish government’s vocal opposition to the Vietnam War.

Sweden during the Cold War period has resulted in many research projects and publications covering a vast field of topics from security policy, democratic reforms in Africa and Latin America, to economic assistance to different states and regions in the Third World. Sweden’s engagements in Asia during the Cold War is, however, still a gap in the historiography. The aim of the second day of the workshop is therefore to gather scholars, archivists and diplomats, to discuss Sweden’s role in Asia during the Cold War and what can be done to stimulate historical research in this field.

For more information about this workshop or if you want to take part in this workshop, please contact Eva Hansson, Forum for Asian Studies, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University: eva.hansson@statsvet.su.se or Thomas Jonter, Department of Economic History, Stockholm University: thomas.jonter@ekohist.su.se. For information about the Forum for Asian Studies, please www.asianstudies.su.se.