

The politics, legality and ethicality of non-state actors in war

Friday, 19 June 2020 16:15 (1h 30m)

Although uneven across time and space, war is a constant in human history. War, however, is constantly changing. Not only are its ends and means in flux, war's sites and its labourers are expanding and shifting. It is now commonly accepted that state hegemony in warfare is decreasing and that the role of non-state actors in violent inter- and intra-state conflicts are increasingly important in terms of the academic analysis of war. This panel seeks to explore two, although often neglected, non-state actors in war, namely volunteer fighters and mercenaries. Building on existing work in the field, the panel turns towards just war thinking as the most appropriate lens through which to explore the politics, legality and ethicality of non-state actors in violent conflict. In particular, presenters on the panel will address two principal themes. First, how do non-state actors complicate just war thinking. Second, and moreover, what are the political, legal and ethical implications of non-state actors in war.

The proposed panel has four presenters and one discussant. Helene Olsen (King's College London) looks at how mercenaries are constructed as illegitimate actors in war, and the underlying rationale for this political move. Fletch Williams (London School of Economics) problematises current legal frameworks surrounding private security and military companies by focusing on the question of accountability. Keith Smith (King's College London) explores the historical memories and the underpinning political visions that transnational volunteer fighters employ to provide an ethical dimension to their volunteer fighting. Thomas Hooper (Queen Mary University London) employs the transnational fighting phenomenon as means to make ethical claims against revisionist just war theory.

Track Classification: War Studies Working Group