

At the Frontiers of International Studies: the Emerging Prominence of Law, War Crimes and Genocide over 50 Year and New Research for the Future

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In 1975, law was barely noticed as feature of international life, although always a present condition for governments. The Helsinki Final Act that year resoundingly emphasised that political agreement was more possible and powerful than gaining a legal end to the Second World War. The My Lai massacre raised attention, but no real focus, on war crimes. The mass murder in Cambodia elevated use of the word 'genocide', but no more than that. Yet, 50 years later, every event involving political violence and armed conflict invokes calls 'war crimes' and 'genocide' by one side or both, or by observers, as well as calls for truth, reconciliation and peace and security through justice. And international criminal justice has not only been the most radical innovation of the era, making individual human beings subjects of international law for the first time, rather than states alone, but is has also become a major growth industry, both in the 'real' world, with tribunals, courts, cases and investigations ever more numerous (if challenged), and as a brand new branch of international studies. The roundtable will reflect on this historical evolution in practice, conceptualisation, theory and example, while also examining new research at the frontiers of knowledge and understanding on relevant issues and cases or mass atrocity, law, politics, investigations, contestations and reconciliation attempts, including Ukraine-Russia, the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Iraq and more, as well as key shifts in the broad focus of scholars.

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