British
International
Studies
Association

Temporal Security in International Relations

Wednesday, 18 June 2025 16:45 (1h 30m)

Three days after the start of the Russian 'special military operation' in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave a speech in the Bundestag that described the Russian invasion of its neighbour as a historic turning point or Zeitenwende for European security, which necessitated a fundamental change in foreign, security and defence policy in response. Subsequently, the term Zeitenwende would enter the lexicon of German and international politics and media as shorthand for transformative change of national security and strategic culture, or at least the aspiration for such change.

This panel brings together researchers examining the role of temporality in international relations, and in particular how social constructs of time sustain or challenge narratives and practices of international security. Its conceptual starting point is the 'temporal turn' in IR, which seeks to examine and challenge the hegemonic foundations of the discipline and notions of the 'timelessness' of theoretical foundations and axiomatic assumptions, as well as the linearity of historical processes. Political constructs of time are inherently contested and as such can be subjected to revisionist challenges, while the timing of events and the imposing of chronological order in international relations, such as the 'unipolar moment', the 'end of history', the 'peace of Westphalia' or the 'rise of China', is in itself a political act.

We argue that the Russo-Ukrainian War not only violated Ukraine's territorial integrity and national sovereignty, but it fundamentally disrupted a sense of historical progress and chronological continuity in European security, characterized by an end of geopolitical division, a 'peace dividend' of substantial defence cuts, and the strategic assumption that interstate war and territorial conquest were relics of the past. This panel explores this ontological shock to temporal security in international politics and its wider implications for the study of time in IR.

Track Classification: Post-Structural Politics Working Group