

The Slavery-War Nexus: New Understandings of the History and Future of Slavery and War

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As many as 90% of contemporary conflicts have featured modern slavery practices, yet the profound links between slavery and war remain critically underexplored within International Studies. As BISA looks ahead to the next fifty years, this roundtable addresses a crucial gap in war studies scholarship and practice: understanding slavery not as peripheral to conflict, but as central to its dynamics and impacts.

With more active conflicts globally than at any time since the Second World War, the prevalence of slavery is increasing as well. From forced labour and child soldiers to sexual exploitation and trafficking, slavery is weaponised in war, shaping societies, economies, and legal frameworks across historical and contemporary contexts. Yet governments, international institutions, and humanitarian actors remain ill-prepared to respond effectively.

This panel brings together scholars from the Leverhulme Centre for Research on Slavery in War –the world’s first major initiative dedicated to the slavery-war nexus –to discuss how integrating slavery into war studies not only creates a new sub-discipline, but transforms our analytical frameworks. Panellists will present the innovative interdisciplinary methodologies being developed (spanning historical analysis, survivor narratives, satellite imagery, AI-powered forecasting and peacegaming) that will reveal patterns previously obscured by disciplinary silos and facilitate new strategies for eliminating conflict-related slavery worldwide. By bridging war studies, slavery studies, law, political theory, and data science, this panel exemplifies the disciplinary evolution necessary for International Studies to meet future global challenges –advancing both theoretical innovation and real-world impact.

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