Panel proposal

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**Knowledge Production on War**

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The outbreak of a war on European territory in 2022 has rather suddenly created a high demand for expertise on war and strategy in Europe – a demand that has since been further fed by the war in Gaza, its impact on neighboring countries, as well as heightened tensions between the United States and China. At the same time, new technological developments, such as the reliance on AI or the cyber realm more generally, have increased demand for expert contributions to the public debate.

As expertise on war becomes more sought after and scholars become regular commentators and explainers of ongoing conflicts, deeper reflection on the underlying assumptions of this expertise often gets lost in the urgency to answer seemingly more pressing questions. It is, therefore, necessary to understand what this knowledge hides and highlights, and what/whose views, hierarchies and assumptions it reproduces.

The purpose of this panel is to investigate how knowledge on war is produced. It offers both long-term and macro-level studies of existing scholarship in Security and Strategic Studies as well as zooming in on the co-production of expertise by humans and technology in the domains of artificial intelligence and cyber. Leveraging historical, philosophical, psychological as well as political science approaches, each paper starts by fundamentally questioning what we know and how we know, to then highlight marginalized perspectives and open up avenues for further research. Whereas this panel primarily discusses knowledge production on war, its insights on how expertise is fundamentally shaped by how, where, by whom, and for what purposes it is produced also aim to stimulate and contribute to ontological and epistemological discussions within other panels. This panel brings together scholars from the humanities and social sciences from three different countries. Five of the six speakers are early-career scholars.

Papers:

**Exploring how the emotion of interest shapes strategic studies scholarship (and how we can make the most of it)**

Samuel Zilincik [early-career scholar] and Dagmar Ludackova [MA student]

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Emotional influence on academic knowledge production is a pervasive but overlooked phenomenon. Like all academics, strategic studies scholars generate knowledge through thinking. Contemporary psychological and neuroscientific research indicates that all thinking is, for better or worse, influenced by emotions. Recent research from across different fields indicates that scholarly thinking is not an exception in this regard. Emotions as diverse as fear, anxiety, wonder, awe, and anger accompany scholars in their everyday investigations and shape how and what academics think about their subjects of inquiry. Building upon this previous research, this paper investigates how the emotion of interest matters to the development of strategic studies scholarship. In our field, we usually treat interest in a rationalistic manner; almost as a manifestation of a cost/benefit calculation. The infamous trinity of “fear, honour, and interest”, unfairly ascribed to Thucydides, is perhaps the most popular example of this tendency. However, there are other ways to think about interest. Specifically, contemporary psychological literature shows that interest can also be understood as an emotion. This literature allows us to understand how interest emerges, how it influences our thinking, how it motivates behavior, and how it can be regulated. Accordingly, this paper combines this emotional perspective with abductive logic and selected examples of contemporary strategic studies scholarship to illustrate how interest shapes knowledge production in our field. The paper further discusses some notable implications of interest’s influence on strategic studies scholarship. In particular, it highlights certain positive and negative aspects of interest’s influence and elaborates on the possibility of regulating interest for the purpose of improving the quality of thinking in strategic studies.

**Envisioning Critical Strategic Studies**

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After the outbreak of a new war in Europe, the field of Strategic Studies is enjoying renewed attention and relevance. While this field, situated between history and political science, offers a wealth of knowledge on war, the field lacks ontological and epistemological diversity. Specifically, it lacks a critical tradition, akin to Critical Security Studies. The lack of such a tradition has meant that scholars pursuing constructivist or critical approaches tend to self-identify with (Critical) Security and thus are unable to make a mark on Strategic Studies. As a consequence, the ontological and epistemological foundations of the field have never been fundamentally questioned. The Western-centrism and state-centrism of the field have largely gone unchallenged, leaving the field ill-prepared to offer a deep and global understanding of war. In this paper, we develop a research agenda and an argument for the necessity of Critical Strategic Studies. We first offer an in-depth investigation of the state of Strategic Studies, analysing its research strands and traditions and assessing the extent of its ontological and epistemological diversity. Based on the limitations, gaps, and opportunities identified in this review as well as established critical traditions in Security Studies, Terrorism Studies and Intelligence Studies, the paper sketches a research agenda for Critical Strategic Studies. We argue that CSS is necessary to interrogate how the field produces knowledge, to provide alternatives to the hitherto hegemonic approaches, and to ensure that Strategic Studies is sufficiently diverse to allow for an in-depth understanding of war.

**Virtually inconceivable? Foregrounding the ontological dimension to cyber strategic studies**

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How can an ontological framework help us to better understand strategic behaviour in cyberspace? Characterized by low entry barriers, fluid borders, and networked hierarchies, cyberspace presents opportunities for us to problematize classical assumptions about power projection and their implications for how we conceive of strategic behaviour in the digital age. However, present literature has largely overlooked the ontological dimension to cyberspace, focusing instead upon the production and consequences of cyber effects. This oversight is particularly stark in debates about how global actors have engaged in ‘cyber-geopolitics’, which seem to rely on–and simultaneously eschew–territorial sovereignty to explain strategic behaviour. This paper argues that the field’s failure to take ontology seriously has resulted in inadequate assumptions and explanations about contemporary strategic behaviour. To advance this claim, I make two analytical moves. First, I interrogate scholarly assumptions about what makes certain cyber capabilities ‘matter’ for producing effects in the first place. Building on these findings, I then demonstrate the utility of ontological security theory for explaining how and why policymakers have pursued geopolitical objectives in cyberspace through particular discourses and practices. The European Union’s cyber-foreign policy development from 2013-2022, which has thus far escaped pure realist and materialist-oriented expectations, is leveraged as an illustrative case. Overall, the paper reveals the co-constitutive relationship between cyberspace as an environment and foreign policy actors’ self-construction within it through discourses and practices, contributing to an emerging research agenda on this subject (e.g. Lupovici, 2022).

**Changing Expertise: Knowledge Production through Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain**

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The use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to help policy makers and military officers navigate the battlefield in Gaza and Ukraine has often made headlines in the past months. Rather than fully autonomous applications of AI, the technologies are reported to be used to quickly perceive, evaluate, and act upon battlefield information. Among scholars of security and strategic studies, the use of AI in the military domain has raised many questions on the ethical, legal, political, tactical and strategic implications of this development. Pivotal to this debate is the question if and to what extent decision-making can be outsourced to machines and which tasks require human expertise. However, what human expertise is and how this notion of expertise changed over time since the early uses of computer models for military purposes is not well studied. This paper therefore investigates how the relation between humans and machines in the production of expert knowledge has transformed. More specifically, it will adopt a historical approach to analyse how early computational programs, developed for a military purpose, balanced mechanically processed data with human judgment to create expert knowledge.