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MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR COMPARATIVE PUBLIC LAW
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW



Call for Papers: Crisis, War, Critique

Annual Conference of the “Critical Security Studies” Working Group of the German Political Science Association (DVPW), 5-6 November 2026, in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg

The field of Critical Security Studies (CSS) brings together diverse perspectives on the politics and practices of (in)security. What these approaches share is, above all, a commitment to moving beyond classical, often narrow frameworks that focus on military (national) security alone. Taking up a critical impetus, a central epistemological interest often lies in examining how social and political power relations produce and reconfigure the form and function of security institutions and security discourses, and the normative implications arising thereby. The field is inherently interdisciplinary; contributions stem not only from International Relations and other subfields of political science, but also from criminology, sociology, law, geography, or history.

Against this backdrop, contemporary dynamics of (in)security can be productively approached through the lenses of crisis, war, and critique. On the one hand, current geopolitical ruptures and the return of major interstate wars challenge core assumptions of critical security studies. After all, this field of research emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War, when the end of the bloc confrontation and its immediate military risks led to the expansion of security discourses and practices into other areas – from the environment, to development, and migration. On the other hand, these concepts not only capture key contemporary empirical developments but also serve as analytical entry points for interrogating how security is constructed, contested, and transformed. Crisis, for example, has become a central frame through which a wide range of developments are interpreted, from migration and climate change to economic instability and democratic backsliding. Critical security perspectives examine how labeling situations as “crises” shapes political responses, enables exceptional measures, and redistributes attention and resources, often with uneven effects across different populations. Such exceptional measures like war – currently most visible in Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine, but also in other conflicts that receive less international attention – are embedded in broader social, political, and economic dynamics such as sanctions regimes, humanitarian governance, the use of AI and media representations, and shifting security alignments within and beyond Europe. To scrutinize the practices in crisis and war becomes particularly relevant, as both are contexts within which security claims are increasingly invoked to justify far-reaching policies, from military spending to border controls and surveillance. Critique raises questions about whose insecurities are addressed, whose are overlooked, and how alternative responses might be imagined in the face of intersecting global challenges.

Key questions that emerge from these considerations are:

- How are contemporary “crises” mobilized in political discourse to legitimize specific security practices, and what are the consequences for different social groups?
- What are critical methodologies in CSS today?
- How do CSS scholars conceive of “crises” in conceptual terms (i.e., multispecies politics and planetary dimensions)? Which role do scale and temporalities play therein?
- How do the wars in Ukraine, Gaza or Iran – and their global repercussions – reshape understandings of security, solidarity, and exclusion in Europe and beyond?

- How do we conceive of critical theorizing and critique in times of war and crisis? What are the potentials and limits of critique in times of war and crisis? How may it risk being sidelined, co-opted, or instrumentalized within prevailing security discourses?

While we particularly welcome contributions that reflect on crisis, war, and critique from a critical security perspective, contributions may address a wide range of topics and perspectives and explore innovative approaches or intersections with other fields and disciplines, since the conference seeks to foster exchange and networking within the broader field. We explicitly encourage early career scholars to apply. Conference presentations may be based on papers / chapters addressing specific research questions; however, a full traditional academic conference paper is not required. Papers may be presented in German or English. **Please submit proposals for conference contributions (max. 200 words) by June 16, 2026 to: kritischesicherheitsstudien@dvpw.de.**

The thematic group aims to provide a forum within the German debate that brings together different (sub-)disciplinary discussions and enables exchange on the development of inter- and transdisciplinary research agendas in this field. It explicitly understands itself as “an open forum, not bound to a specific paradigm, for scholars from various areas of political science and related disciplines to exchange ideas on shared interests and questions concerning the ‘politics of (in)security’” (<https://www.dvpw.de/gliederung/themengruppen/kritische-sicherheitsstudien/ueber-uns/>).

Membership in the thematic group or in the German Political Science Association (DVPW) is not required for participation; the event is open to all interested scholars.

The conference will take place **from November 5-6, 2026, at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg**. On-site catering with snacks and beverages will be provided, but participants must cover their costs for lunch and dinner as well as travel and accommodation costs. The program will be organized to allow arrival on November 5 and departure on November 6.

Organizing team:

- Magdalena König (Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht, Heidelberg)
- Eva Herschinger (Center for Intelligence and Security Studies/Universität der Bundeswehr München)
- Matthias Leese (ETH Zürich & Universität Zürich)
- Delf Rothe (IFSH Hamburg)
- Katharina Wezel (Universität Tübingen/Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)