

The Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) and the Department of Political Science and International Studies (POLSI) present:



'Rethinking Benchmark Dates in International Relations'

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Muirhead Tower Room 121

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Abstract

International Relations (IR) has an 'orthodox set' of benchmark dates by which much of its research and teaching is organized: 1500, 1648, 1919, 1945 and 1989. This article argues that IR scholars need to question the ways in which these orthodox dates serve as internal and external points of reference, think more critically about how benchmark dates are established, and generate a revised set of benchmark dates that better reflects macro-historical international dynamics. The first part of the article questions the appropriateness of the orthodox set of benchmark dates as ways of framing the discipline's self-understanding. Sections two and three look at what counts as a benchmark date, and why. We systematise benchmark dates drawn from mainstream IR theories (realism, liberalism, constructivism/English School and sociological approaches) and then aggregate their criteria. Part four of the article uses this exercise to construct a revised set of benchmark dates which can widen the discipline's theoretical and historical scope. We outline a way of ranking benchmark dates and suggest a means of assessing recent candidates for benchmark status. Overall, the article delivers two main benefits: first, an improved heuristic by which to think critically about foundational dates in the discipline; second, a revised set of benchmark dates which can help shift IR's centre of gravity away from dynamics of war and peace, and towards a broader range of macro-historical dynamics.

Barry Buzan is the retiring Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and an Honorary Professor at the University of Copenhagen and Jilin University. He is perhaps best known for his pioneering work in both the field of security studies and, more recently, the English School in International Relations. His most recent work can be found at <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/Experts/b.g.buzan@lse.ac.uk>.

All Welcome