

Call for Papers:

Norm Contestation and Compliance:

The Prohibition of Chemical and Biological Weapons

Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 22 and 23 October 2025

Organized by PRIF and IFSH, on behalf of CBWNet, an interdisciplinary research project of four German research institutions: the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), the Chair for Public Law and International Law at the University of Gießen, the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) and the Carl Friedrich Weizsäcker-Centre for Science and Peace Research (ZNF) at the University of Hamburg.

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Norm Contestation and Compliance:

The Prohibition of Chemical and Biological Weapons

The prohibition of chemical and biological weapons (CBW) has been codified in the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) form the core of the international prohibition regimes. These two treaties and their implementation during the last few decades form the core of the global prohibition regimes against CBW. They express standards of behavior in the form of norms, rules and procedures for states parties to implement, who are also expected to translate the global prohibitions into their domestic spheres.

However, the norms against CBW have been contested in a number of ways and in some instances outright violated. Over the past decade chemical weapons have been used in Syria as a tool of warfare and in Europe as a tool of assassination. More recent challenges include the Russian war against Ukraine, which has led to further violations of the non-use norm for chemical weapons and a massive Russian disinformation campaign regarding CBW. These challenges are part of a broader, more general deterioration of the security situation in recent years and the change in international actor constellations and patterns of influence. Another open question at present is whether and how the fall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad at the end of 2024 will affect the future handling of Syrian violations of the CWC under his government and the penalisation of CW use in the Syrian civil war. Initial indications suggest that there is an opportunity here for the disarmament of the remaining Syrian CW program and that it might be possible to deal with the Syrian CWC non-compliance under the Assad government. In addition, a decision by the BWC states parties in 2022 to set up a new working group to strengthen the BWC and to resume official talks on verification of and compliance with the BWC after a 20 year hiatus has opened up an important new field for empirical and theoretical analysis.

Against this background of challenges to the norms against CBW, the conference will focus on two main thematic areas: contestation of and compliance with relevant norms.

Norm contestation

CBW prohibition norms are subject to constant contestation and either subsequent confirmation or further development. Paper proposals should focus on an analysis of norm contestations, which can take place on both a rhetorical and a practical-political level, as well as their effects on the larger institutional contexts of the CBW prohibition regimes. Papers should also take into account recent contributions to the literature on norm

contestation, employing a differentiated view when analysing the contestation of prohibitory norms.

Norm compliance

Compliance with the CBW norms is at the core of the prohibition of these weapons and the basis for mutual trust and cooperation in the CBW regimes. Paper proposals could address conceptual and policy-related aspects of norm compliance, including for example its interrelation with norm robustness and contestation. Contributions could be theoretical as well as empirical, based on past or current case studies.

Although paper proposals with a focus on the CBW prohibition regimes will be given priority in both sections, adjacent issue areas, such as nuclear nonproliferation or broader arms control and disarmament topics will be considered as well. Likewise, we invite and will consider proposals from different academic disciplines.

Paper proposals should be no longer than 250 words in length. All submissions should be sent through by 31 August 2025 and may be submitted by email to: veronika.klymova@prif.org.

The conference organizers plan to publish proceedings in a peer-reviewed edited volume shortly after the conference.

Travel and accommodation expenses for a limited number of accepted panelists can be provided by CBWNet, with priority being given to junior researchers as well as scholars situated in the Global South and at lower resourced institutions. Paper submissions should be accompanied by a statement whether travel support is applied for.