

# Call for proposals

## Proliferation Finance Observatoire

The Proliferation Finance Observatoire (PFO) is an initiative dedicated to addressing the challenges of proliferation financing (PF), which involves the provision of funds or services used to support the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and related materials, often in contravention of national and international laws. The PFO facilitates collaboration between a diverse community of stakeholders – including experts in security, finance, law, banking and regulation – to advance Counter Proliferation Finance (CPF) measures globally.

Its primary objectives include mapping and cataloguing existing training resources, identifying gaps in the CPF training landscape and developing a comprehensive CPF training framework. By fostering dialogue and sharing resources, the PFO aims to enhance policy research and capacity building to meet the specific needs of partner countries. This initiative serves as a platform for the CPF epistemic community to convene, exchange insights and strengthen global counter-proliferation efforts.

### **Why an academic conference?**

Recognising the interdisciplinary and evolving nature of CPF challenges, the PFO is hosting an academic conference to unite scholars and practitioners to explore new research, frameworks and policy solutions. The conference will provide a forum for critical analysis of existing CPF strategies, identification of emerging threats and exchange of innovative approaches. By bridging the gap between academia and practice, the PFO seeks to foster collaborative thinking, encourage evidence-based policymaking and drive advancements in global CPF measures. The conference also aims to expand the CPF epistemic community and create actionable outputs to guide international stakeholders.

## Aims

This call for proposals seeks to gather up to 12 discussion papers to address the multifaceted and evolving landscape. We aim to explore the conceptual, normative and innovative aspects of PF, with a focus on advancing academic understanding.

An honorarium of £500 will be allocated for each selected paper.

## Deadlines

Authors are advised to review the call's requirements thoroughly before submitting an expression of interest. The deadlines for the submission phase are:

- Submission for selection: 28 February 2025, 17.00 (GMT).
- Notification of acceptance: 29 March 2025, 17.00 (GMT).
- Full paper submission: 15 May 2025, 17.00 (GMT).
- Conference: 18 June 2025.

## Contact details

For queries regarding the process or content, please email Lydia Wright at [lydia.1.wright@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:lydia.1.wright@kcl.ac.uk)

## Details of the call

### Objectives

This Call for Proposals will fund 12 discussion papers. To respond to that call, authors should submit a detailed abstract of their intended contribution and a structure. Successful submissions will:

- Identify a clear research question, methodology and novel contribution.
- Highlight theoretical and conceptual perspectives on proliferation.
- Includes academic references in the abstract.

Authors must identify elements from the scope of the call their submission addresses. Submissions that do not align with these requirements will not be considered.

### Scope of the call

This call for proposals invites contributions that address the multifaceted and evolving landscape of proliferation finance (PF). We aim to explore the conceptual, normative and innovative aspects of PF, with a focus on advancing academic understanding. To help guide your submission, we have outlined the three primary

areas of exploration below, each aimed at fostering interdisciplinary dialogue between theory and practice.

### **Proliferation finance as a concept**

Proliferation finance, while recognised as a distinct phenomenon, remains under-theorised in the academic literature. This theme seeks to address foundational questions:

- What distinguishes proliferation finance as a concept?
- How does it differ from other illicit financial activities such as money laundering or terrorist financing?
- What theoretical frameworks can effectively capture its unique features?

Despite an abundance of empirical research, such as typologies, risk indicators and red flags, the academic discourse fails to synthesise and abstract these findings into a unifying framework. Authors are encouraged to employ novel methodologies, like bottom-up analysis using real-world examples, legal frameworks and financial industry data, to foster advancement in the field of PF studies.

We welcome proposals on the historical trajectory of financing for WMD proliferation, exploring how it has adapted to shifting world circumstances. We also seek proposals that examine the operational aspects of these networks, including the roles played by non-state entities, transitional nations and financial middlemen. Moreover, we strongly encourage submissions that place PF in a wider academic framework, considering perspectives like globalisation, international commerce, or economic development. For example, how does the enforcement of PF norms intersect with economic development challenges in vulnerable states? These questions aim to locate PF as both a standalone concept and a lens through which other global phenomena can be analysed.

### **The normative landscape of proliferation finance**

Proliferation finance occupies a unique normative space. Unlike broader non-proliferation efforts, which are anchored in well-established treaties (NPT) or conventions (CWC, BWC), PF lacks a formalised, legally binding framework. Instead, its governance relies on multiple norms derived from the UN Security Council, such as UNSCR 1540 (2004), international sanctions regimes and the standards set by organisations like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). This normative ambiguity presents an opportunity for authors to submit proposal into the following areas.

#### **The role of non-legal norms**

- How do informal norms and soft law instruments influence the global governance of PF?

- What are the implications of relying on non-legally binding mechanisms for enforcement and compliance?

#### Institutional and organisational roles

- What roles do international organisations, such as the UN and FATF, play as norm entrepreneurs in the proliferation finance space?
- How effective are these institutions in fostering cooperation among states, financial institutions and private actors?

#### International norm theory:

- How can existing theories of international norms and regime theory be applied to understand the PF regime?
- What does the lack of a dedicated PF treaty reveal about the evolution of international legal and normative frameworks?

Submissions under this theme may also explore the tensions between proliferation finance norms and competing priorities, such as economic sovereignty, trade liberalisation and development. The interplay between international and domestic pressures provides fertile ground for analysis.

#### **Innovation in proliferation finance**

The third theme focuses on the innovative dimensions of PF, particularly its capacity to redefine security studies and governance frameworks. Proliferation finance introduces new actors, technologies and practices, reshaping the ways in which states, organisations and private entities engage with security challenges.

#### The role of non-traditional actors

Financial institutions and corporate service providers have emerged as central players in detecting and preventing PF-related activities. This development challenges traditional notions of securitisation, where states have historically been the primary actors. How has the involvement of these private entities altered the governance of proliferation finance? What ethical and operational challenges arise from their expanded role?

#### Technological innovation

The field of PF is characterised by the adoption of cutting-edge tools, including artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and advanced algorithms designed to detect illicit transactions. Submissions are encouraged to examine the effectiveness, limitations and ethical implications of these technologies.

- How do these tools improve PF detection and mitigation?

- What risks arise from over-reliance on technology in addressing complex, context-dependent phenomena?

### Disruptive technologies and evolving risks

The proliferation finance landscape is increasingly shaped by disruptive technologies, such as virtual assets and cryptocurrencies. Papers might explore how these technologies facilitate illicit financial flows and what regulatory responses are needed to mitigate their misuse. Additionally, the intersection of PF with organised crime networks, illicit trade and other transnational threats presents a compelling area for investigation. We encourage submissions that:

- Provide interdisciplinary perspectives on proliferation finance.
- Use innovative methodologies, such as data-driven analyses, comparative studies, or historical approaches.

This call for proposals assumes that proliferation finance reflects broader proliferation trends and drives innovation in global governance and security studies. By contributing to these themes, authors will help shape the academic and policy discourse on one of the most pressing issues of our time.

### Audience

The discussion papers are aimed at practitioners and policymakers at national, regional and international levels.

In line with the King's style guide, submissions should be accessible, evidence-based and free from excessive academic jargon. They should employ clear language and relevant examples.

### Deliverable

Each paper should be up to 9,000 words (excluding references), well-referenced and policy oriented. The papers should include evidence-based analyses, case studies and actionable conclusions. Following peer review, the papers will be published in an edited journal.

### Expected author profile

Authors (including co-authors) must demonstrate expertise in academia, policy, or practice. This call for proposals welcomes contributions from individuals at all career stages, including independent researchers.

We especially welcome submissions from underserved communities or groups, including emerging and developing countries. We are interested in the regional diversity of authors.

### **Timeline and honorarium**

An honorarium of £500 will be offered to each selected author. The honorarium will be paid upon submission of the final contribution by the authors.

King's does not cover the cost of attending the conference. However, to facilitate participation, it will be held in a hybrid format.

### **Respond to this call**

Authors (including co-authors) must demonstrate expertise in academia, policy, or practice. This call for proposals welcomes contributions from individuals at all career stages, including independent researchers.

To apply, submit the following by email to [lydia.1.wright@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:lydia.1.wright@kcl.ac.uk)

1. A brief CV (maximum two pages).
2. A detailed abstract (600 words) of your intended contribution.
3. The planned structure of your contribution.

Applications must meet the requirements detailed in the objectives. They will be assessed on relevance, novelty, methodology, conceptual framework, geographic diversity of the authors and emerging voices.