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Technological Innovation and national security: Variations in public-private relations in the defense and cybersecurity sectors

In liberal market economies like the US and UK, private actors have come to play an indispensable role in the emergence of robust defense industries and the provision of security. States particularly rely on the private sector in areas of high technological innovation, such as arms production and cybersecurity. While technological innovation and the resulting public reliance on private expertise has been a common denominator, the emergence of public-private relations has been inconsistent across security sectors. Despite ideological parallels between the US and the UK, public-private relationships differ in the degree of consolidation or autonomy, and standardization of practices, between the state and private actors. In this study, we map these variations in the consolidation of relationships between public and private actors, attributing it to differences in institutional legacies and security pressures.

Through case studies on the US and the UK, we trace the evolution of public-private dynamics in two security sectors, defense industry and cybersecurity, since end of the Cold War. We find that more entrenched institutional legacies in the military industry have led to a closer, less market-oriented position of private actors and greater dependence on the state through contractual relationships. Conversely, less entrenched institutional legacies in the nascent cybersecurity sector have contributed to a more market-oriented, stronger position of private actors vis a vis the state, as evidenced by ongoing challenges in regulating the private tech industry. Furthermore, we find that the changing nature of security pressures in the cyberspace could push states towards a (re-)integration of this sector into more consolidated defense military pipelines. This paper contributes to the growing literature on public-private-partnerships in security governance and offers insight into the nexus of state security and technological innovation in two historically different, yet connected security policy fields.

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Primary authors: KODARU, Yagnyashri (GSI, LMU); Mr SOMMER, Lorenz (GSI, LMU)

Presenters: KODARU, Yagnyashri (GSI, LMU); Mr SOMMER, Lorenz (GSI, LMU)

