



Contribution ID: 217

Type: **Paper Abstract (Closed Panels)**

Business power and the quiet politics of military innovation in cyberspace

This paper seeks to investigate whether and how cybersecurity firms have possibly gained business power over democratic governments in the digital age? First, we propose an interaction-oriented view to approach the public-private coordination of how to secure cyberspace. Public and private actors need to agree on policies; and the one with lower costs of non-agreement arguably achieves the more desired outcomes. Second, we suggest a baseline model that combines two conditions shaping these costs of non-agreement and thus business power: (I) Do cybersecurity firms have either a specific expertise or a large amount of general resources at their disposal? (II) Is power bargaining either exercised through more formalized coordination (e.g. civilian markets) or rather through informal arrangements (e.g. military markets)? Third, we engage in an empirical stock-taking exercise of mapping the private suppliers of USCYBERCOM since 2018. We gathered more than 250 contracts from <https://www.usaspending.gov/> to reveal USCYBERCOM's most important contractors; to identify the most relevant services and to assess the extent of competition on these markets. Moreover, we explored the suppliers' geographical location as well as their attributes and the primary markets that they were involved in. By drawing on this extensive empirical evidence, we suggest that the substantial share of non-competitive tendering increasingly normalizes quiet politics; and, therefore, provides manifold opportunities for the possibly 'unwarranted influence' of business power on how to secure cyberspace. In sum, this paper seeks to contribute to both the better understanding of funding innovative military technologies and the more generalizable politics of public-private coordination in international security in the digital age.

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No

Primary author: WEISS, Moritz (LMU Munich)

Co-author: Mr KRIEGER, Nico (LMU Munich)

Presenter: WEISS, Moritz (LMU Munich)

Session Classification: Military Technology

