THE LOW ARTS OF HIGH POLITICS: UNPACKING STATE-SPONSORED POISONING

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DMC Theater, LSU Digital Media Center

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ABSTRACT

States occasionally target perceived enemies with poison. This talk will unpack, and try to make sense of, the long, colorful, and sordid history of state poisoning. In comparison with other modes of violence, poisoning has both advantages and disadvantages, which help explain both why it sometimes occurs and also why it does not occur more frequently. Both first responders and policymakers face considerable challenges and dilemmas in responding effectively. The threat, and responses to it, are likely to evolve in response to shifting norms, technological developments, and/or new perpetrators, including proxy actors.

SPEAKER BIO

Dr. Philipp C. Bleek is a Professor in the Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, CA. His work focuses on the causes, consequences, and amelioration of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons threats, from both state and non-state actors, at the intersection of academia, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and government. Dr. Bleek served as an expert on the 2022-24 Congressionally-mandated, Department of Defense-sponsored, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine-convened study "Assessing and Improving Strategies for Preventing, Countering, and Responding to Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism: Chemical Threats." In 2012-13, he took a leave from his faculty position to serve as Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs. His most significant responsibility in that role was staffing the Syria Chemical Weapons Senior Integration Group, a Pentagon-based focal point for efforts to prepare for various chemical weapons-related contingencies in the Syrian civil war.

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