University of Bristol, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law Strategic Research Initiatives Workshop

The Civil-Military Nuclear Distinction: Theory, Practice and Political Effects

Organised by the University of Bristol Global Insecurities Centre (GIC) Nuclear Insecurities Working Group (Dr John Downer; Professor Tim Edmunds; Dr Benoît Pelopidas; Dr Columba Peoples; Dr Elspeth Van Veeren; Professor Jutta Weldes).

External Participants: Professor Raminder Kaur Kahlon (University of Sussex); Dr Nick Ritchie (University of York); Professor Casper Sylvest (University of Southern Denmark); Dr Rens van Munster (Danish Institute for International Studies); Professor William Walker (University of St. Andrews).

Workshop Outline:

The distinction between 'civil' and 'military' applications of nuclear power and technology is fundamental to contemporary institutions and practices of global governance. It underpins the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a specialised agency of the United Nations, import and export regimes, and national regulatory frameworks. The distinction is also routinely employed to frame key contemporary debates on legitimate and illegitimate uses of nuclear power, and the nuclear ambitions of states such as Iran and North Korea. In those cases it is often argued that the pursuit of civil (or 'peaceful') nuclear power is simply a subterfuge for military nuclear programmes and hence deliberately and detrimentally erodes the civil-military nuclear distinction. Conversely, 'legitimate' nuclear-weapon states (those specified in the NPT) in large part gain that legitimacy by virtue of a commitment to uphold and promote the civil-military distinction globally: by promoting equal access to nuclear technology and preserving the right to peaceful uses of nuclear power, on the one hand, while committing to curtail the spread of nuclear weapons and to pursue nuclear disarmament on the other.

Yet while the civil-military distinction remains central to contemporary debates on nuclear power and its governance, little work has been done to assess the ways in which that distinction is and has been formulated over time in a multiplicity of different contexts. Popular and academic accounts alike commonly begin from the premise that 'the atom' holds an inherent double-edged potential for applications in 'peace' or 'war', but they rarely question the political effects of that how that distinction is maintained in practice. In short, no currently existing work has been done on *how*, in a context of shared nuclear materials, science and technology, *the distinction between 'civil' and 'military' uses of nuclear power has been constructed, developed, institutionalised, maintained and policed over time*.

This Strategic Research Initiative (SRI) will address this current gap in contemporary understandings of nuclear governance. By analysing the construction of the civil-military nuclear distinction across a diverse range of contexts it will provide enhanced understanding of how that distinction impacts upon the allocation of nuclear responsibilities in governmental and institutional terms; the nuclear vulnerabilities that are identified and those that are not in each context; and the goals that are set in the name of improved nuclear safety and security. To achieve this the SRI workshop will combine expertise at the University of Bristol (within the Nuclear Insecurities Working Group of the University's Global Insecurities Centre) with leading external scholars to critically assess constructions of the civil-military nuclear distinction and their political effects within a variety of empirical cases: global and national regulatory regimes; scientific and expert community discourses; media and popular representations; and specific national case studies.

Workshop Details: One-day workshop beginning at 10.30am, Tuesday 13 May 2014, to be held at the University of Bristol, UK. Spaces are limited, but anyone interested in attending the workshop should contact Columba Peoples, C.Peoples@bristol.ac.uk to request a place and for full details.