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The elite politics of deterrence: elite practices and the making of deterrence strategy and policy

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Deterrence is not a mass sport. It usually involves military and political elites communicating among each other's, beyond and within national boundaries. This panel scrutinizes the social practices of those elites to understand how they shape the politics of deterrence. How do elites ritualize certain practices so as to communicate particular meanings through routine activities? How does their definition of self affect deterrence practices or adversary perceptions? How do practices of deterrence serve in promoting certain security professionals as state elites? How does the elitist nature of deterrence practice affect the possibility for communication with culturally estranged adversaries?

Adopting a broad view, by looking both at contemporary and historical cases, and at Western and non-Western cases, this panel aims to contribute not to deterrence theory, but to the study of deterrence as a social practice. In doing so, it highlights the performative, symbolic, and identity-based dimensions of deterrence interactions, revealing how meaning-making, professional hierarchies, and cultural context shape strategic communication and the reproduction of security orders across time and space.

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