

Speaker Profile:

Dr. Philipp C. Bleek **Associate Professor, MIIS at Monterey**

Dr. Philipp C. Bleek is Associate Professor in the Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies Program and Fellow at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, both at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

Dr. Bleek's research and teaching focuses on the causes, consequences, and amelioration of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons proliferation to both states and non-state actors. He previously served as Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs.



He recently co-authored (with Zachary Kallenborn) "Swarming Destruction: Drone Swarms and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Weapons" *Nonproliferation Review* (January 2019) and related publications in *War on the Rocks* and *CBRNe World*. Those and additional publications, plus more information, available at <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/people/philipp-c-bleek>.

1. This is the 13th year of Convergence. What would you say has been the archetypal CBRN incident in that time?

What's fascinating about CBRN threats, especially from non-state actors is that to date they're (thankfully!) mostly notional. As a result, smart, well informed people can and do differ dramatically about how serious future CBRN threats might be. At the risk of being too cute, I'd say the archetypal - ie typical - CBRN incident to date has been a threat actor deciding not to pursue CBRN or doing it ineptly.

2. What do you see as the major improvement in terms of the CBRN mission? What has made the job easier?

As a higher level policy person, bridging the academic, thinktank, and government worlds, the biggest insight into operational CBRN response that I've gleaned over the years is that it's more generic than specific. There's lots of overlap between responding to C, B, R, and perhaps even N, and responding to all of those and lots of other contingencies. My sense is that over time we've become incrementally better at responding in general, though obviously there's still plenty of room for improvement.

3. How do we ensure that CBRN forces are appreciated post-Covid, and that once we have the vaccine there will be no return to obscurity?

It's my impression that CBRN response capabilities are mostly pretty obscure, which is not surprising and perhaps even desirable in some respects. Among the small subset of folks who pay attention to this domain, Covid-19 has sparked some useful reflection about the nature of these threats and our responses to them, but I don't see the pandemic as a critical driver of attention or resources.

4. What do you see as the greatest achievement in terms of the Covid response, either locally or globally?

I think what this crisis has starkly - and tragically - illustrated is that sound policy making and implementation yields results and its absence has consequences. I wish we didn't have to learn that lesson at the cost of the terrible morbidity and mortality we've seen. Having borne those costs, I hope we at least learn lessons from them; for example, I hope that in the US we have something like the commission we had for 9/11 to learn lessons from the failings, and successes, of our pandemic response.

5. What do you see as the major threat in the next five years?

There's always the possibility, even if remote, of large scale CBRN attacks, and we should be preparing, both to make them even less likely and to respond effectively. I worry at least as much about crude attack modes 'going viral'. For example, I worry about crude attacks with caustic chemicals, so-called acid attacks, which have already spread globally and which I think have a lot of potential to catch on as a terrorism tactic. That's what I'll be speaking about, alongside a colleague, at this year's meeting.