



Sophia Dafinger:

The Lessons of War in the Air

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At the beginning of the Second World War, air war was an unknown matter. By the conflict's end, however, it was clear that air power had revolutionized modern warfare. The boundary between military and civilian had blurred since, along with the enemy's war economy and infrastructure, warring societies had also become targets for attack. The population's "war morale" seemed to be the key to a quicker victory that would spare the lives of one's own troops.

In the US therefore, alliances emerged among social scientists, military officers and politicians that remained intact after the war's end and continued to decisively influence wars in the second half of the 20th century. Both continuities and fractures can be traced from the Second World War to the Second Gulf War having to do both with special-interest politics and technocratic tendencies as well as scientific innovation. The role played by the Cold War is a central issue of the project. The history of American defense intellectuals captures the military conflicts of this era in a completely novel manner and draws attention to styles of thinking, learning processes and forgotten knowledge in the second half of the 20th century.



The discussion identified four yet-unanswered questions for research. First, the demarcation line between "academic" social scientists and those "consulting" for political leaders has yet to be drawn. Who set what priorities in the course of their careers? Can the two fields of activity be distinguished at all meaningfully? Second: Along what routes and with what consequences was academic knowledge passed on to politicians and/or the military? What "translation problems" emerged in the process? Third: Was there a transatlantic transfer of "war- and conflict- knowledge" in the social sciences? And fourth: What can we say about the interpretive authority of defense intellectuals in academic and public political life? What influence did they have on inquiries, lines of argument and debate, on historical images and self-perceptions?

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