



Comments on Panel 26

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SHAFR Commentary

“Minds at War: Expertise and the National Security State”

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I. Intro.

--Welcome.

--Four interesting and insightful papers, all dealing with theme of expertise and national security in Cold War America.

--Topics ranging from NGO dealing with Asian-Pacific affairs, physical scientists debating dangers of atmospheric nuclear testing, social scientists engaged in attempts to predict and control revolution, and finally impact of military and diplomatic expertise in shaping Lyndon Johnson’s March 1968 decision on Vietnam.

--Problems of politics of knowledge production, objectivity claims, and relationships between Cold War demands and scientific authority.

--Speakers in order, Michael Anderson, Paul Rubinson, Joy Rhode, Lori Gronich.

--Each to speak for 15 minutes, I will deliver brief comments, and open session for questions from the audience and elaboration by presenters.

II. Introductions for each speaker.

1. Michael Anderson

--PhD Candidate in history, University of Texas

--Attending Seminar on Decolonization at National History Center next month.

--Research Grant from Rockefeller Archive Center.

--Fellowship from Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

--Paper today titled “Cold War Casualty: The Institute of Pacific Relations.”

2. Paul Rubinson

--PhD Candidate in history, University of Texas.

--Author of several reviews, articles for historical encyclopedias, conference papers at the British Society for the History of Science as well as SHAFR.

--Research and travel grants from the American Institute of Physics and British Society for History of Science.

--Paper today “Activism or Appeasement? Linus Pauling, Edward Teller, and the Battle for Cold War Science.”

3. Joy Rohde

--PhD Candidate in history and sociology of science, U. Pennsylvania. Done next week!

--Fellow at Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 2006-2007.

--Will be Visiting Scholar, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, MA 2007-2008.

--Articles in Richard Handler, ed., Significant Others: Interpersonal and Professional Commitments in Anthropology; Anthropology News; History of Anthropology Newsletter; and under consideration at Isis.

--Winner of Nathan Reingold Prize, best graduate student essay, History of Science Society.

4. Lori Helen Gronich

--Visiting Research Scholar and Adjunct Professor in Security Studies Program, Center for Peace and Security Studies, Edmund Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown.

--Former Director of the Office of Education and the Successor Generations at the Atlantic Council of the United States.

--Also served as Program Officer w/ MacArthur Foundation Cttee on International Peace and Security at the SSRC.

--Consultant to wide range of institutions, including International Peace Academy, US Defense Dept, State Dept, Rand Corp.

--Taught at Haverford College, Rutgers, JHU SAIS, National War College.

--Multiple grants for scholarship, winner of Best Faculty Paper Award by Foreign Policy Analysis Section of APSA.

--Paper today "Vietnam: The American Turn Toward Peace."

III. Commentary

--The Cold War, as Ira Katznelson argued, was a "mobilizer of purpose" for American scientists and social scientists. A nuclear arms race, decolonization, expanded communications technologies, tasks of economic development and the dilemmas of counterinsurgency all appeared to require a mobilization of the nation's expert knowledge.

--But relationship between scientific communities and the national security state, as these papers illustrate, was not always harmonious.

--If the Cold War provided great opportunities for producers of knowledge, it also raised pressing questions about objectivity and autonomy, the boundaries of academic inquiry, and the responsibility of intellectuals.

--Each of these papers analyzes and raises intriguing questions about the relationship between experts, knowledge, and the national security state.

1. Michael Anderson

--Value of studying an NGO, intersections of social research, culture, policy. Need more of this in USFR, as Akira Iriye and others have argued.

--Also a fascinating story:

--1920s IPR "proudly—even defiantly, private, non-state centered meetings"

--1930s shift to ambivalent position of asking US officials to join IPR but barring them from conferences.

--1940s IPR "went to work for the allies": OWI publications and conferences w/ State Dept participation discussing postwar world's future.

--For IPR, however, results of turning toward the state prove disastrous. US policymakers attack IPR when substance of its discussions and publications fail to conform w/ ideological orthodoxy of the early Cold War. Dissent defined as equal parts incompetence and disloyalty, lack of "effort to support the established policy of our govt" becomes "a line which could only have been of 'aid and comfort' to the Soviet Union."

--Part of the story here surely dramatic narrowing of range acceptable public debate and dissent as Cold War gets underway.

--More significantly though, focus on dilemmas of an organization seeking to promote independent expertise while, at the same time, seeking relationships with and influence upon the state.

--Several questions then arise:

1. IPR and objectivity claims. YMCA past of members, ideas of "new diplomacy." Did IPR entirely shed those seemingly idealist, even missionary visions in favor of claims to disinterested, scientific objectivity? I suspect not. How were those strains and tensions manifested w/in the organization and its sense of itself all along? How did the organization struggle to define its own purposes in that sense?

2. How to place IPR in context of other "knowledge communities" and their relationship to the Cold War state? Where other organizations seemed to thrive at the intersection of knowledge production and policymaking, what specific factors led to IPR's demise? Context re China and rise of McCarthyism clearly important.

--But perhaps IPR's own ambitions, moving beyond providing expertise to actually trying to reorient the nature of diplomacy itself made it even greater threat?

--i.e. is the problem only that IPR puts forward the "wrong" ideas, or that it also had aims of carving out its own diplomatic sphere, something State Dept wanted left to its own professionals?

2. Paul Rubinson

--Compelling analysis of opposing arguments and activism of Linus Pauling and Edward Teller.

--Striking contrast between Pauling's vision of broad community of scientists possessing superior knowledge on which to base moral objections to nuclear technology vs. Teller's linking of scientific expertise w/ personal attacks and appeals made within the scientific-military-industrial complex itself.

--Two broad issues arising in this paper, both of which I expect Rubinson explores in his wider work.

1. Nature of scientific community itself, and ways that scientists understood it. As Rubinson argues, "the choice of audience was crucial. While Pauling aimed at the vast viewpoints of some imagined scientific community, Teller aimed at the political and military elites most inclined to favor his views."

--Why does Pauling hold fast to ideal of objective, value-driven, disinterested scientific community holding esoteric knowledge that only it has authority to evaluate? Given the rise of "big science" in the Cold War, w/ capital intensive research and dependence on funding provided by a state w/ clear military and strategic priorities, Pauling's approach to political change, while admirable in intent, seems sadly naïve. Teller's deliberate political maneuvering, however, as abrasive as it was, seems far more sophisticated. Why did they hold such different approaches? How did they fit into way that scientists defined their professional identity at this time?

2. Science and Public Policy.

--Provocative questions here too. Rubinson concludes that scientists "not just victims of a Cold War consensus." Instead "actively struggled over the meaning of science and in the process helped triumph the idea that science is merely a tool that lends credibility to specific political arguments."

--A solid conclusion. Also raises a key question: What does it take for competing scientific claims to achieve authoritative status in public settings?

--Could part of the problem be, once more, rooted in perceptions of the scientific community? Public expects that "objective" science yields clear, precise answers, especially on seemingly technical matters as radiation levels and effects. When scientists present opposing truth claims, however, and defend them as the result of objective study, then the public assumes that all such differences must reflect political motivation instead of disputes within the profession which they assume should be empirically resolved?

--Once beyond the narrow realm of empirical claims, how effective are scientists in invoking moral argument as a political force?

3. Joy Rohde

--Paper returns to one of the most notorious and controversial episodes of collaboration between social scientists and the Cold War state. Project Camelot and ambitions for prediction and direction of global social change.

--Rohde also delivers an ironic argument about it. Where other scholars point to this as key crack in the structure that bound social scientists and the state, a crack that would later grow into deep fissure over Vietnam, she argues that exposure of the program itself was the result of turf battle between State and Defense. Its exposure, moreover, did not diminish the close ties between social science and the Cold War security establishment, instead it actually deepened and concealed them.

--A short paper with a fascinating and controversial argument. Two questions she might elaborate on more in our discussion:

1. How did social scientists react to the new restrictions? We learn that by mid-1960s they were “jealous of their scholarly autonomy” and worried about the prospect of State Dept oversight. Yet they wound up saddled with a series of sharp Pentagon controls, ranging from security classification, to bans on speech, and even military claims over the ownership of their research. How did they respond to this, and what lasting effects did it have on their relationship with government sponsors?

2. The question of “epistemological crisis” for social scientists. If Camelot debacle did not produce an “epistemological crisis,” then what allowed that debate to be sufficiently contained? Do you believe that an “epistemological crisis” did happen later around the war in Vietnam? If so, what accounts for it in that case, but not this one? What did it take for that to happen?

Lori Gronich

--In contrast to first three papers, which historicize scientific activism and politics, Lori Gronich’s paper offers a social scientific theory of its own.

--In particular, essay seeks to provide “a genuine theory of foreign policy choice,” by stressing a “cognitive calculus” model in which policymakers are cognitive misers, gravitating unconsciously toward “mental shortcuts to limit the cognitive energy expended in making judgments.”

--Gronich divides policymaking into “problem definition” and “solution definition” phases, and argues that policymakers act in one of two roles, as “judges (decision makers)” or “advocates (advisers).”

--She then argues that since “all people are cognitive misers, judges and advocates prefer different levels of knowledge for different tasks at different times.”

--In problem definition, judges are faced with the difficult task of identifying a threat and accordingly must rely on expert knowledge. Advocates, however, merely agree with a judge’s interpretation and can get by on novice understandings.

--In problem solving, however, the situation is reversed. Advocates have the daunting job of framing solutions, and must rely on expertise. Judges, however,

merely choose among the potential solutions, and often settle for novice understandings in doing so.

--The result is that, as she puts it, "judges will see what they know, but approve what they do not; whereas advocates will see what they must, but offer what they can."

--Hypothesis then that in situations of disagreement among decision-makers, civilian presidents, as judges, likely to make policy choices of force if advisers w/ military expertise recommend it.

An interesting and complex argument. Time short, so I'll offer 3 brief questions, one about the model and one about its application:

1. Idea of actors' discrete roles. Do only judges identify problems, don't advocates often do that too? Do judges merely "choose" among solutions, don't they shape process in which solutions are defined? Seems too dichotomous.

2. Idea of "cognitive miserliness" seems to make intuitive sense, but how well does its application fit here? LBJ doesn't look very "miserly" to me in this case. Instead appears to have expended enormous, exhaustive amounts of energy and anxiety trying to devise and choose among solutions. How "miserly" was Johnson's decision? True, he did announce two troop increases and pledged continued defense of South Vietnam. Yet the heart of the speech was a diplomatic overture in the form of the partial bombing halt, a gesture in the realm of negotiation, something that Johnson most likely considered himself highly skilled in, and something that he and others deliberated intensely about.

3. Role for ideology in this?

IV. Discussion.

--Thanks to panelists.

--Open directly to questions from the floor.

--Tell panelists that they can respond to my comments in course of responding to, and discussing issues with the audience.

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