

**Capturing Security Expertise
Concepts, Typologies, Practices, Power**

**1st Copenhagen International Forum on Security Expertise
Centre for Advanced Security Theory (CAST)
16-17 June 2011**

1. Outline

The question of how scholars and experts and their knowledge contribute to social and political transformations on a national, regional and global scale has attracted a growing number of researchers. Within this agenda, research on ‘security’ as a problem and as a political and academic field has so far been less developed. Given the dire consequences security advice may have, for instance in justifying the use of force, and the growth of the security studies profession in recent years this constitutes a major political and disciplinary oversight. This workshop investigates the specificity of the security expert’s contributions and interventions through the discussion of conceptual and empirical inquiries into the topic.

To do so, the workshop programme recognizes that the debates internal to Security Studies, while promising, are constraining in many ways. Insight from neighbouring discussions such as sociology of science, with its focus on relations between science, society and politics; the sociology of intellectuals, with its focus on the place and role of individual researchers in society; as well as social theory’s more general take on the politics of knowledge and academic reflexivity can bring important contributions to the debate.

The question of the power, status and responsibilities of academic knowledge production has long been recognized as a general problem in directing the future of humanity. The focus on security, however, adds a sense of urgency to the debate. Extra-ordinary, violent and often cruel practices are justified in the frame of security, as are measures constitutive for the survival and well-being of individuals and collectives. Given the high uncertainty as well as complexity the political and academic field of security has always dealt with, investigating expertise in this field is of relevance to other fields only recently submerged in profound academic uncertainty

and complexity. As such, an investigation of security expertise holds promise not only for the internal academic debate of International Relations/Security Studies, but also for the broader political-sociological debate about the role of expertise in society.

To investigate processes of expertise and to understand how expertise is constituted and recognized in lay-expert relationships, what expert knowledge consists of, and what consequences follow from expert interventions, we need to go beyond idealized, generalized and abstracted ascertainment of the relation between science and the world, and investigate the local practices and politics at play. The workshop takes a step in this direction.

2. Problems

What is an expert?

Speaking of an ‘expert’ or ‘expertise’ in a more general sense, raises the question of what is an expert? In the literature, no consensus on a definition of the concept exists. Experts are sometimes used as synonymous to ‘intellectuals’, ‘scientists’ or ‘professionals’ (Pels 1995), referring to a person who holds a certain type of knowledge which can be brought to bear on practical problems, whereas Jasanoff (2005: 211) holds that the rise in the use of the term ‘expert’ signifies a general development in (Western) society in which “[s]cientists instead are expected to function as experts, that is, as persons possessing analytical skills grounded in practice and experience, rather than as truth-tellers with unmediated access to ascertainable facts.” The move from an ideal of a science of absolute truths to a situation of uncertainty and complexity has created a demand for a scientist-turned-expert, who holds “the ability to size up heterogenous bodies of knowledge and to offer balanced opinions, based on less than perfect understanding, on issues that lie within nobody’s precise disciplinary competence.” (ibid.). In this understanding, the expert and the scientist differ markedly.

In our reading, the expert is an intermediary between the academic, the political and other fields (e.g. the journalistic or artistic one). He is sometimes the spokesperson speaking in the name of universality, sometimes in the name of particular collectives or in the name of multiple collectives (Bueger & Villumsen forthcoming). Experts

sometimes legislate, and sometimes interpret and mediate (Baumann 1987). Experts are sometimes individuals (the prototype being the intellectual), and sometimes institutions (the prototype being the think tank) or collectives (the prototype being the epistemic community). Central to all definitions is the interplay between (scientific) knowledge and the societal groups. The expert somehow occupies a boundary position between knowledge and power, science and practice. Looking into the question of what constitutes an expert will be a central question of the conference.

Who are the security experts?

Relying on the above discussion of the term 'expert' the next crucial question becomes: who is the security expert? And how is security expertise organised in practice? Security as a field of knowledge has had a rather peculiar history. It started as a form of expertise in the late 1940s and only later developed into a scientific discipline with academic positions and debates (Wæver and Buzan, 2007). In the US, a number of influential think tanks (such as the RAND cooperation) formed the discipline. Technical knowledge (e.g. of weapon systems and military logistics) formed an important part of what it meant to be a security expert in those early days. Today, knowledge of political processes, area studies, and scientific methods have been added to the cocktail of what makes for a security expert. But as the case of climate expertise reveals, technical knowledge is still crucial.

Seen from Europe, the development has been somewhat different. While think tanks have been scarce historically speaking, a rapid growth of think tanks seemed to coincide with the end of the Cold War, the number rising exponentially until the late 1990s and then evening out (Sherrington 2000; Stone & Denham 2004). Did security expertise see a similar development with the establishment of a number of new think tanks and other expert structures or has the development in this area been different (Villumsen 2007)? Further, are other practices of expertise emerging 'under the radar'? Are collectives of intellectuals seeking to enter the scene of security expertise, or are professionals of a non-scientific kind establishing themselves as security experts in the European area? (Bigo) Discussing and mapping the practices of expertise on a national (e.g. US), regional (Europe) and international level (e.g. UN) will be a second central objective of the conference and will contribute to a deeper understanding of experts and expertise.

What kind of practices constitutes expertise?

Expertise in its broadest sense is a practice of translation. As an intermediary expertise translates knowledge from the field of science to others, and reverse. Yet, which micro-practices are necessary to do so? Which practices of writing presenting knowledge, interacting, or listening are required in practices of security expertise? If practices are built from practical understandings, rules and shared projects, what are these elements for the case of security expertise?

To which publics do experts speak?

If expertise is a relationist term, not only the question of who are the experts requires our attention, but also whom does the expert speak to and who listens to him. This requires us to disaggregate ‘society’, and study the co-constitutive character of experts and their publics. Rather than speaking of ‘audiences’, a term assuming that there is a stable set of listener a priori to processes of expertise, we need to study listeners as ‘fields’, or as distinct ‘publics’ which are (re-)constructed in expertise processes. Such publics might be distinct social groups that the expert is ‘organic’ to, other experts, such as in the case of expert controversy, groups of specialists and activists, such as the non-proliferation movement, funding agencies, the man and woman in the streets, or more phantom-like groups as ethnicities, the “suppressed”, etc. Which are the security publics that become (re-)constructed in the process of security expertise?

What kind of power does the expert exercise?

“The essence of all power is the right to define with authority, and the major stake of power struggle is the appropriation or retaining of the right to define.” (Baumann 2000: 208).

When conceptualizing of the expert as a boundary function between knowledge and power, science and practice, a research question following logically is the question of the *consequences* of expert advice – and more generally the *power* of expertise. How can we understand this type of power? ‘Epistemic’ or ‘Cognitive authority’ (Geuss; Robin, Merton, Turner 2002) has been put forward as a concept of the power of science as has the term ‘Objectivation’ (Bourdieu) or the notion of ‘truth regimes’ developed by Foucault. Others speak of more general trends of ‘double hermeneutics’ (Giddens) and ‘Looping Effects’ (Hacking). But does science at all exercise power in

the field of security? Most scholars in the IR discipline have relied on the well-known image of a gap between theory and practice, and have asked (with a tone of worry) “Is anyone listening?” (Lepgold 1998) and have argued that the gap is “More a chasm than a gap” (Kruzel 1994) thereby signifying the detachment and irrelevance of most IR scholarship on IR practice. Is this an adequate image of the relationship? And does this go for security expertise as well?

3. Sessions

Following from these considerations, the workshop is structured into four core sessions and a roundtable.

Session one revisits the core results from the sociology of science, studies of expertise and intellectuals on the one side, and security studies and international relations on the other. The objective is to gather an elective body of knowledge which allows differentiating between the problems at stake in discussing security expertise and experts, and to allow for structural comparisons between different micro and macro understandings of expertise.

Session two discusses different aspects of what is considered important knowledge for a security expert. The session asks what is distinct to security think tanks, and how various forms of knowledge such as technical knowledge or distinct methods interfere to form security expertise.

Session three addresses the practices of being a security expert from the perspective of the practicing expert. It touches upon the micro-practices of networking, publishing, media appearances, and other forms of performing expert advice at the interface between science and practical politics. Is it still possible to be critical when performing problemsolving?

Session four addresses different aspects of what the power of expertise consists of and how experts are part of a play of power, hegemony and resistance. The contributions explore the sources of the authority and power of expertise and how

these relate to other forms of knowledge or face counter-expertise. The session concludes with considerations of the ethics of expertise.

A final roundtable addresses the more performative and/or prescriptive dimension of studies of expertise: What is the broader purpose of reflexivity towards expertise? What kind of prescriptions, organizational rules or rules of thumb can be subtracted from studies of expertise for everyday practice?

4. Outcome

The results of the workshop will be relevant to:

Academic Security Studies; Think Tank people; practicing experts; Actors drawing on security expertise; The broad science and society research agenda.

Selected manuscripts will be published as an edited volume.

5. Organizational details

Workshop Date: June 16-17, 2011

Deadline for papers: June 1, 2011

Deadline for abstracts: May 15, 2011

Final Program will be available: May, 1 2011

Workshop Venue

Centre for Advanced Security Theory (CAST),
Department of Political Science
University of Copenhagen
Denmark

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