Importing the American Way of War? The Adoption of Network-Centric Warfare by the British and German Armed Forces

Ina Wiesner

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the adoption of network-centric warfare (NCW) by two military organisations – the British and the German Armed Forces – in the first decade of the 21st century.

NCW stands for the belief that through the extended application of information technologies and the integration of intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance, command and control systems and weapons into one single network, military organisations will be able to better collect crucial military information, thus reduce operational uncertainty and gain a decisive information advantage over their enemies, which thus would translate into superiority over the enemy on the battlefield. NCW was invented by U.S. senior military officers and Pentagon officials and was introduced into the U.S. Armed Forces as part of the U.S. military transformation during the tenure of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (2001-2006). Although NCW had been criticised from the beginning, initial military accomplishments in the Afghanistan war (2001) and the invasion in Iraq (2003) have been widely interpreted as success stories for NCW.

Since 2001, a number of U.S. military allies and partners – among them the United Kingdom and Germany – have started to adopt this U.S. innovation. Yet, in a number of cases the adopted national versions of NCW diverged considerably from the original U.S. concept. This study seeks to uncover the reasons for the variation in concept adoption.

Building upon an organisational institutionalist framework, I argue that, in the United Kingdom, NCW was adopted to increase the military effectiveness and efficiency of the armed forces, whereas the adoption in Germany was mainly driven by the aim to maintain the armed forces' institutional legitimacy. Thus, in the case of NCW adoption, the British military was an efficiency maximiser whereas the German military was a legitimacy maximiser.

Jury: Gerhard Kümmel (Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Bundeswehr), Pascal Vennesson (EUI/RSCAS) (Supervisor), Ina Wiesner (Ph.D. candidate), Adrienne Héritier (EUI/RSCAS), Theo Farrell (King's College, London)

Bio: Ina Wiesner studied political sciences at Potsdam University, Germany, and Aarhus University, Denmark. She received her Diploma in the social sciences from Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, in 2006. She joined the European University Institute in 2007 to work on her PhD. During 2008 and 2011 she has been a visiting researcher at the George C. Marshall Centre in Garmisch-Patenkirchen, the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs - SWP) in Berlin, Cranfield University/UK Defence Academy in Shrivenham as well as Kings's College London (Department of War Studies). Also, she spent some time in uniform, working on the conceptualisation of network-centric warfare for the German Federal Armed Forces. Publications include book reviews, journal articles and book chapters on the topic of network-centric warfare and German military transformation. Currently, she is a lecturer at Potsdam University (M.A. Military Studies) and a research associate at the Bundeswehr Academy for Information and Communication in Strausberg, Germany. Ina's current research focuses on German military transformation and the technical sociology of military concepts.