

Thinking the Future of War: Epistemology, Innovation, and Revolutions

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Military organization and warfare is all about preparing for, and shaping the future. Where the “Revolution in Military Affairs” of the 1990s suggested a radical change in the character (or even, for some, the nature) of war, the present of warfare has tended to get crowded out by expected coming military transformations. In what Marijn Huijtink termed “prototype warfare”, radical military innovation has become the very character of war, as warfare becomes a catalyst and testing ground for innovation. Conflicts such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Nagorno-Karabakh war are heralded as pointing to the dawn of new warfare, and as military organisations develop “Futures commands” and “next generation” or “future” combat air systems, scholars simultaneously point to a return to the past. For Patrick Porter, futurity might mask enduring trends, while Chiara Libiseller, Vladimir Rauta and others have analysed new concepts as “trends”, “buzzwords”, or “fads”. This panel, therefore, interrogates how military organisations think about, organize for, and represent the future of war. What knowledge serves the production of future war, and what relations exist between past experience, social change, and imagined military futures? The four contributions of this panel address different perceptions of future warfare and examine how those futures come to be, and how predictions concerning future war shape present military activity.

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