

**The Changing Nature of
Civil-Military Relations and Military Leadership**

Leadership Responsibility in Postmodern Armed Forces

by Edwin R. Micewski

Why does leadership responsibility run under the headline of (military) ethics? It is appropriate because responsibility in itself bears ethical quality as it resides in the ontological capability of man to choose among alternatives to act. When we presuppose that man has freedom to act, then he assumes responsibility for his actions. In this sense, responsibility is a complementary to freedom, or an inference of freedom, something inextricably linked to freedom. And if somebody assumes leadership responsibility the ethical weight somehow increases, as his actions do not only carry responsibility for himself, but for all others who are subjected to his “sense of responsibility”.¹ Taking on the specific kind of military leadership responsibility in a pluralistic and ambiguous postmodern environment appears to be a particularly challenging task since it is affected by all the features of a significantly altered security environment, the social and societal developments, the values and attitudes of a critical public, the conditions of public discourse and media relations in communication societies, and many more. It seems, thus, to be worthwhile to examine how the essentially ethical task of leadership plays out under the circumstances of a postmodern environment with particular respect to the military world and the politico-military context of civil-military relations.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is no period or era but rather a way of thinking and habits. In the Western world postmodernism manifests itself in difference and deregulation. No final norms and unconditional value

¹ For more on this: Micewski, E. R., “Ethics and Politics – Some Thoughts on the History of Ideas and Today’s Challenges,” in: Micewski, E. R. et al, *Ethics and International Politics*, (Vienna: Literas 2001), 1-17.

systems are to be found, no communicatively elaborated morale in the meaning of Habermas' discourse ethics is accepted, rather, the tendency has to be recognized to acknowledge all manifestations of life forms. For this reasons, the operative terms used to describe postmodernist circumstances are pluralism, fragmentation, heterogeneity, deconstruction, permeability, and ambiguity.²

In the military context, however, the term has been applied in order to depict the development of armed forces after the end of the Cold War. Postmodern military is a development construct based upon observation of the past. According to Harold Lasswell, who introduced the idea in 1935, a development construct posits an ideal-type at some future point by which past and present trends can be identified and appraised. As a model, it helps to recognize trends and to explain what happened or what is likely to happen.

Whereas the *Postmodern* paradigm stands for the epoch since the end of the Cold War, the *Late Modern* paradigm characterizes the age of the Cold war as it emerged out of the *Modern* era, the time between the end of the 30-Year War until the end of World War II. The Modern era was associated with the rise of the nation-state and found its military format in “*a combination of conscripted lower ranks or militia and a professional officer corps, war-oriented in mission, masculine in makeup and ethos, and sharply differentiated in structure and culture from civilian society*”.³ While the Late Modern military basically followed the modern format it was particularly characterized by what Wolfgang Royl termed the deconstruction of the military. The dominance of nuclear weapons as well as the cultural development prevailing in Western societies after the end of World War II and in the aftermath of Vietnam reduced the image of armed forces in general, but belittled specifically the importance and excellence military leadership had enjoyed in former times. After nationalism and bipolarism the

² For more on the issue of Postmodernism see Micewski, Edwin R., “The Education of (Military) Leadership Personnel in a Postmodern World,” in: *Connections Quarterly Journal*, Volume 3, Number 1, March 2004 (also available at www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co_mar04f.pdf)

³ Moskos, Charles C./Williams, John A./Segal, David R., *The Postmodern Military. Armed Forces after the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2000), 1.

world entered into the era of mondialism, comprising the elements of globalization, transnationalization, and internationalization as the prime movers in international relations. This “complex interdependence”, as Keohane and Nye have put it, bring about the postmodern paradigm for the military that “*shifts toward a volunteer force, more multipurpose in mission, increasingly androgynous in make up and ethos, and with a greater permeability with civilian society*”.⁴ However, the modern, late-modern, and postmodern paradigms represent basic formats, ideal and pure types of military images that can never empirically be encountered in all purity. While, for instance, elements of postmodern armed forces identity started to emerge clearly in the Late Modern era, the postmodern military carries along traits of the Modern paradigm, wherefore “*the roles of combat leader, manager/technician, and soldier statesman/soldier-scholar are added rather than substituted as the international environment changes ... all roles remain necessary*”.⁵

Nonetheless, already at this point, the immense scope of new challenges to (military) leadership and Professional Military Education (PME) as well as civil-military relations can be anticipated.

Postmodernism and Armed Forces

The core idea about postmodern military forces is that the end of the Cold War ushered the armed services of most nations in a period of transition, meaning that the traditional and conventional Modern and Late Modern forms of military organization give way to new postmodern forms. Viewed from the core of soldier’s identity, we see the predominance of the fighter image featuring the “management and application of violence” (Samuel Huntington) give way to the protector image where we find peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks at the center of military identity. The core missions of military organizations shift from primarily warfighting or war deterrence to military deployments for peace and humanitarian purposes.

⁴ Moskos et al, *The Postmodern Military*, 1.

⁵ Moskos et al, *The Postmodern Military*, 268.

This shift in the identity of armed forces from instruments for national defense to means of international prevention and de-escalation, featuring Peace Support Operations (PSO) and Military Operations other than War (MOOTW) entail a profound alteration in the soldierly self-awareness. Exterritorial missions aiming at worldwide stabilization and humanitarian contributions give even rise to the idea of the citizen in uniform becoming a world-citizen in uniform. Along with this development, as again Wolfgang Royl has astutely foreseen, a reconstruction of military identity and public image appears to be attainable.

According to Moskos and his co-authors the postmodern military is characterized by five major organizational changes. First, an increasing interpenetrability of civilian and military spheres; second, a profound diminution of internal differentiations within the armed forces based on branch of service, rank, and combat versus support roles; third, a change in the military purpose from fighting wars to non-traditional missions, bringing about the need for increased professionalization of armed forces; fourth, armed forces are more used in international missions authorized or at least legitimated by entities beyond the nation-state; and fifth, the multinational composition of forces as a result of a general internationalization of military forces (as, for instance, can be seen in the transatlantic arena with the Eurocorps and other bi-national or multinational divisions in NATO, etc.).

These organizational changes result in a phenomenon we might call the postmodern paradox – proximity and distance of armed forces to society emerging at the same time. While the former is caused by the mingling of internal and external threats to security and the increasing cooperation between military and civil authorities, the latter is caused by the inevitable professionalization of the military and its move toward international tasks. In this sense, again, Moskos brings it down to the point: *“The perception of the threats and opportunities presented by the international situation shape military forces, military missions, and the relationship of the military to society”*.⁶

⁶ Moskos et al, *The Postmodern Military*, 11.

It is the way, however, by which the transnational factors become apparent in a specific national setting that decides on how national security is adjusted and to which extent a country's military can assume the shape of postmodern forces. In order to systematize research findings the authors of the "Postmodern Military" suggest a typology that is also suitable for cross-national research in Western type societies. These typological trends, used as variables for assessment along the lines of the modern, late modern, and postmodern paradigm, are: Perceived threat; force structure; major mission definitions; dominant military professionalism; public attitude toward the military; media relations; civilian employees; women's role; spouse and military; homosexuals in the military; conscientious objection.

The authors give the example of the US military in the three eras, pointing out for instance that in the typology variable "Dominant Military Professional" turned out as "combat leader" in the Modern era, as "manager or technician" in the Late Modern period, and as "soldier-statesman and soldier-scholar" in the Postmodern period.⁷ It serves as an appropriate basis for further and more detailed research in the national context to define how and to what extent the typology variables apply to the military establishments of one's own country.

Postmodernism and (Military) Leadership

It appears worthwhile to note that the postmodern challenges of a world in transformation are not reserved to the military establishments alone. Christopher Dandeker lists six dimensions that help explain the ongoing processes challenging private sector organizations, and the striking parallels facing armed forces.

First, the diminished threat to national territorial sovereignty is paralleled by the lack of stable markets for business. Second, company downsizing is paralleled by significant reductions in the size of military establishments. Third, while companies and enterprises have to respond to an increasingly global market, the military has to address a range of

⁷ For the entire image of the US typology see Moskos et al, *The Postmodern Military*, 15.

missions involving extraterritorial missions other than war. Fourth, military organizations are expected to take on practices that echo civilian business models, such as contracting out functions and restructuring their hierarchies. Fifth, both military and civilian organizations have to react and find answers to the social and cultural challenges of dynamically changing societies. Sixth, both sets of organizations have to make the best use of new information technologies at all levels, from operational areas to personnel functions, including all dimensions of offensive and defensive “information warfare.”

Regarding leadership competence in a postmodern military, I propose the following pyramid of capability in order to identify the scope of demands and requirements. At the bottom the capability to manage and apply violence as well as to sustain under battle conditions remains vital; based on that, something I would like to call *Peace Ability* has to be added to the combat ability of military leadership personnel; and lastly, on the top of the pyramid, the necessities of the manifold requirements of interoperability have to be attached, ranging from military operational and tactical practices to language skills and intercultural understanding.

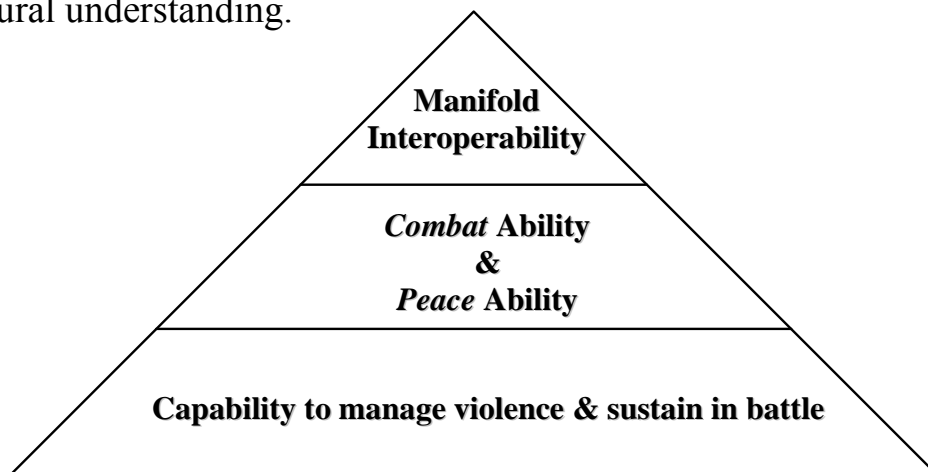


Fig. 1: Leadership Capability Pyramid

But apart from the scope of leadership competence, the overall understanding of the leadership task appears perhaps to be even more important. The emerging postmodern security environment confronts military officers in an even more internationalized mode with complex, interrelated security challenges. These challenges will only be

successfully met when flexible strategic thinking can be assured on all levels of military leadership and civil and military cooperation.

In our time Carl von Clausewitz' dictum that military leadership bears creative rather than mere technical-scientific character and that, consequently, we should speak of the "art of war" rather than of the "science of war" appears to be more topical than ever.

Leadership involves recognizing and concentrating on issues and events that are of core importance and it includes awareness of interconnections and systematic properties of the situation, requiring a thorough understanding of both the situation and its larger context. In this holistic sense, appropriate leadership incorporates the appreciation of potential implications and consequences of actions and, last but not least, the moral courage to acknowledge problems and to change for an alternative to be favored at a given moment.

In our joint publication on Ethics, Identity and Action Competence, Dexter Fletcher puts these thoughts in a more pragmatic contemporary format: "*In the current operational environment ... officers must deal face-to-face with aid workers, other military personnel, irregular forces, and local civilians alike*"; and he continues on: "*They must make rapid decisions with severe strategic consequences and with little or no opportunity to consult with their military superiors ... The need for ethical, cognitive preparedness extends as much to our corporals as to our senior officers*".⁸

What Fletcher designates Cognitive Readiness sums up the three classical ingredients of education - knowledge, capabilities, and virtues - that have to be combined in an exemplary manner when today's leaders should meet the challenges of tomorrow's security environment.

Good leadership is about integrating both logical and rational thinking on the one hand, and creative, generative thinking on the other. This allows understanding and anticipating how a situation might change

⁸ Fletcher, Dexter, "Cognitive Readiness: Preparing for the Unexpected," in: Toiskallio, Jarmo (ed.), *Identity, Ethics, and Soldiership* (Helsinki: Finnish National Defence College 2004), 131-142.

over time, to recognize the significance of maneuvering for a superior position, and promotes the flexibility to deal with turbulence and to keep ahead of the competition (the opponent, adversary, enemy, the strategic counterpart of whatever kind).

Present-day leadership education has to lead the individual beyond the confinements of immediate occupational necessities by encouraging and promoting freely available knowledge and understanding, including particularly the issue of self-reliance and personal accountability that comes along with true leadership on every level.

This approach will generate the manifold modes of social competence and interoperability that are also embraced by a persistent sense of moral responsibility that can never be relinquished from proper leadership.