ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Preparing Military Professionals for the Moral Imperatives of 21st Century Warfare

John Abbatiello, United States Air Force Academy

Ervin Rokke, United States Air Force Academy

Introduction

The challenge of preparing our nation's military professionals to make correct moral choices is greater today than ever in the past and promises to become even more complex in the foreseeable future. The thread of continuity for the profession of arms, particularly since World War II, has been increased complexity. This trend continues at unprecedented velocity and our national security conflicts have become increasingly "battles of wits." As a result, moral decision-making is more vital in every career field, from personnel officers to drone pilots. During a 2011 International Institute for Strategic Studies conference, U.S. Air Force Predator expert Lt Col Bruce Black briefed that approximately 180 personnel take part in a single drone mission. "There is more ethical oversight involved with unmanned air vehicles," he asserted, "than with manned aircraft" (Pincus, 2011). A mid-April 2017 aborted airstrike represents the need for continuing moral choices with manned aircraft as well. In this case, a U.S. Navy F-18 aircrew member noticed unidentified personnel near a targeted building and issued an "abort" call on the radio, only seconds before the planned attack. Within minutes, hundreds of non-combatants streamed out of the targeted building, most of whom would have been killed had the strike continued as planned (Seck, 2017).

Twenty-first Century military professionals will increasingly face these sorts of choices and more when they enter active military service. As a result, important questions to consider are: What are the major trends challenging the military profession and how will the current and future operational environments affect the ability of its members to live honorably? This paper will examine these questions, offering a possible glimpse into the future.

Current Trends Impacting the Future of Warfare

The evolving world stage—with changes in technology, civil military relations, international actors, and societal norms—highlights the need to prepare future leaders for a dynamic set of challenges. The future environment

is difficult to predict with precision, but current trends suggest profound implications for agility on the part of all military professionals. As General Stanley McChrystal (U.S. Army, Retired) writes, "Adaptability, not efficiency, must become our central competency" (McChrystal, 2015).

Advanced Communications and Technology

Emerging technology and advances in communications have always been key drivers of change in the national security environment. Railways, steamships, telephone and telegraph capabilities, powered flight, and nuclear weapons are but a few noteworthy examples of innovations in military history during the last two centuries. Indeed, a dominant theme of the 21st Century is the democratization of science and technology. Accordingly, new capabilities by nation-states as well as a wide variety of non-state actors have emerged to implement – in very direct ways – the tenets of Sun Tzu concerning "getting into the heads" of opponents (Giles, 2015). The ethical and moral imperatives of these capabilities are even more complicated than those associated with kinetically inspired notions of Just War and the Laws of Armed Conflict. Military professionals will need to understand the science behind these new technologies as well as develop appropriate ethical and moral frameworks for assessing and legitimizing their use.

Innovations regarding robotics and unmanned air and sea systems also present a new set of moral, legal, and ethical challenges. Access to these new technologies by non-state actors complicates the environment even more. As Peter Singer and August Cole explain, competitors—whether state or non-state actors—often have the same access to advanced technologies as does the United States, reshaping "the nature of combat, the identity of combatants and the skills they need to bring to the fight." Additionally, though war is still a human endeavor at its core, artificial intelligence will continue to evolve in support of military operations (Singer & Cole, 2016, pp. 44-45).

Against this background, senior Department of Defense leaders have called for military professionals to develop a strategic "Offset" to follow the successful examples of the First Offset (battlefield nuclear weapons) and the Second Offset (precision guided

---

Dr. John J. Abbatiello is Chief of the Research and Scholarship Division at the U.S. Air Force Academy's Center for Character and Leadership Development. He received an undergraduate degree in history from the Academy in 1987 and completed his master's and doctoral degrees in War Studies from King's College London, UK. He is the author of Anti-Submarine Warfare in World War I: British Naval Aviation and the Defeat of the U-Boats (Routledge, 2006) and specializes in airpower and naval history. John served as a pilot and educator in the Air Force for twenty-five years; he culminated his active duty career in 2012 as the Deputy Head of the Academy's History Department. As a Department of the Air Force civilian, he directs research and assessment efforts for CCLD.

Dr. Ervin J. Rokke is a retired USAF Lieutenant General who recently served as the Air Force Academy's Center for Character and Leadership Development Senior Scholar. He is a 1962 graduate of the Academy and served as an intelligence officer in the Air Force. Erv earned his master's and doctoral degrees in political science at Harvard University. His senior military appointments included U.S. Air Force Academy Dean of the Faculty, Defense Attaché to the USSR, Director of Intelligence for HQ U.S. European Command and HQ U.S. Air Force, and President, National Defense University. After a 35-year military career, Erv served as President, Moravian College, and President of the U.S. Air Force Academy Endowment. As CCLD's Rokke-Fox Chair, he advised the Superintendent and other U.S. Air Force Academy senior leaders on character, leadership, and the military profession.

munitions) which enabled the United States to overcome quantitative advantages of our opponents during the Cold War period. This Third Offset will rely on the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of military professionals to craft disruptive and game changing force capabilities as well as associated operating concepts (US Department of Defense, 2017). The importance of moral and ethical preparation to meet this challenge is profound.

Civil-Military Relations

Within the arena of civil-military relations, the military profession will likely continue to enjoy the support of the American people. There are, however, a number of paradoxes that complicate this important relationship. As Rosa Brooks explains, "ordinary Americans support the military more than ever but know less about it than ever" (2016, p. 21). Citizens appreciate our military culture that prizes commitment and integrity but have mixed attitudes toward social justice issues as they relate to the profession of arms. An admiring Congress is often reluctant to make hard choices necessary to fund the military. The result is an evolution of the military profession away from the traditional corporate institution described by Professor Sam Huntington in his classic *The Soldier and the State* (1957).

This Third Offset will rely on the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of military professionals to craft disruptive and game changing force capabilities as well as associated operating concepts (US Department of Defense, 2017). The importance of moral and ethical preparation to meet this challenge is profound.

In addition, the boundaries between the military and the private sector are diminishing. Indeed, increased military-private sector partnerships are evident on the battlefield as well as in garrison with civilian contractors serving in combat zones and sometimes armed as well as the military personnel they support. Technological innovation increasingly requires collaboration between industry and the military. The Defense Innovation Unit Experimental (DIUx) and the Air Force's Cyberworx are two examples of such partnerships (DIUx, 2017), where the military leverages innovation from the corporate world to solve defense-related problems. In the cyber domain, a relative scarcity of military experience will require contractors and civil servants to play an active role in both offensive and defensive cyber operations. In short, the military will face the challenge of accommodating civilian colleagues with potentially divergent professional and cultural standards.

New Actors

A diverse set of actors has emerged across the foreign relations landscape. Peer competitors such as Russia and China continue to provide security challenges with their expected use of full spectrum operations, including anti-access technologies to minimize American advantages in conventional warfare. Space, cyber, and psychological operations also will likely play an important role in a potential conflict with these competitors. North Korea and Iran continue to fund terrorism and develop weapons of mass destruction that can threaten the Homeland once fully developed. Non-state, non-traditional adversaries such as Al Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, the Taliban, and the Islamic State (ISIS) will likely continue to search for American weaknesses and employ asymmetric capabilities against our forces. As military professionals deploy to new locations worldwide to counter these threats, appreciating foreign cultures and diverse viewpoints

becomes increasingly important to mission success. The DoD has made great strides in increasing cultural awareness education and training, as seen at the Defense Language Institute and within evolving service academy curricula. At the same time, maintaining an appropriate ethical and moral focus will become more challenging and more important for our future leaders.

Changing Personalities of Incoming Airmen

The final trend area for consideration is the changing personality of successive generations of young men and women who join the military each year. Millennials are different from previous generations in many ways (Deal & Levinson, 2016). The Millennials—loosely defined as those born in the 1980s and 1990s—are technically sophisticated and adhere to non-linear approaches to problem solving, both in their personal and professional lives. They are perhaps more serious about professional development than previous generations. At the same time, a majority of them acknowledge having cheated in high school and they come with less military familiarity. These trends are likely to continue with future generations, such as the new Generation Z. In short, developing in entering military personnel an appreciation for traditional military core values (Integrity, Excellence, Service, etc.) will not be getting easier.

How the Future Will Impact Living Honorably

And so it is that the rapidly increasing complexity of our national security environment puts a very different face on the challenges of living honorably. Future military leaders must somehow reconcile dramatic changes in the nature of our profession with the more constant parameters of traditional core values. For example, they must develop and preserve a professional appreciation for the moral and ethical dimensions of conflict that involve the new domain of cyber as well as an increasing assortment of both kinetic and non-kinetic instruments of power. Traditional notions of Just War and the Laws of Armed Conflict, which were designed primarily to accommodate the ethical and moral imperatives of kinetic warfare, may turn out to be inadequate.

The Challenge of Non-Linearity

The environmental trends mentioned above point to an increasingly non-linear world of surprise and wicked problem sets. In these circumstances, the universal core value for the profession of arms—Excellence—emerges with a vengeance, especially within a future "battle of wits" with adversaries possessing advanced conventional, space, cyber, and information warfare capabilities. Just as increasing complexity of industrialized warfare drove the need for general staffs in the late Nineteenth Century (Barnett, 2014), success in current and future conflicts will increasingly rely on the excellence of individuals throughout the entire chain of command who can function as a "Team." Traditional Western military approaches based on hierarchical structures projecting futures and developing strategic plans are giving way to "teams of teams" with resilience, agility, and "shared consciousness" (McChrystal, 2015). Within this new paradigm of planning and operations, military members' quest for professional excellence as team contributors assumes ethical and moral dimensions on par with long-standing traditional prohibitions against lying, stealing, and cheating. Increased emphasis on teams for resilience and timely agility means everyone must understand and support the essential mission—that is, McChrystal's "shared consciousness"—which, in turn, requires trust from the bottom to the top of rank hierarchy. In sum, success must rest on a foundation of the traditional military Core Values, which the Air Force defines as Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in all We Do.

Conclusion

And so it is that honorable living and professional success within the dynamic military environment of today and tomorrow necessitates new thinking as well as innovative new approaches to training and education. As we are reminded by General McChrystal and

others like Margaret Wheatley (2006), the traditional "hands-on" leader in a mechanistic organization with a reductionist approach to solving difficult problem sets can no longer keep pace with the rapidly changing and more complicated national security arena. The heroic leaders of the past must shift their focus from directing each move of the organization to crafting and enabling a culture of trust, common purpose, and shared consciousness. The end goal is empowered execution by teams of players. Such an environment can promote both professional success and traditional core values. It also plays to the strength of the Millennials and the emerging Generation Z. Given their affinity for technology and non-linear thinking, these generations will hopefully be more open to new ways of thinking and innovative approaches to learning. The moral imperative for the profession of arms is, then, to create "brilliant warriors" who are firmly grounded in core values, resilient, adaptable, and ready to serve in an uncertain future.

Honorable living for military professionals is becoming much more complicated as it moves away from the traditional approach of linear projection and planning toward resilience. The days of simply following rules and commands as a path to excellence are over. Resilience, increasingly, is a function of how well one knows themselves rather than familiarity with a checklist. Resilience is also a function of agility and being able to think creatively, flexibly, and independently.

The physical dimension of courage will continue to exist, but it will be increasingly complemented by the moral dimension of responding to core values that have been internalized over time. Though the distance to the target is greater and with less personal risk, the consequences of moral decision making always remain. Airmen, for example, have always killed, or trained to kill, at a distance, whether from high altitude bombers or from the missile silos of the Northern Tier. Today, it is possible to kill a terrorist with a drone strike, after watching that individual's pattern of life for weeks or months, and then drive home to the routine of their personal lives. In this context, honorable living becomes more complicated.

In addition, the conduct of future conflict will likely feature smaller fielded forces, increased authority and power from an individual sitting at a keyboard, and the increased use of automated systems and robotics, all of which will bring their own ethical challenges concerning responsibilities of operators, designers, engineers, and decisions-makers. Though policy, doctrine, education and training can relieve professional military from being overwhelmed by many such challenges, new technologies, new adversaries, and new social conditions will likely provide the fuel for still more ethical situations.

Commissioning education programs and professional military education must thus focus on new approaches to preparing military professionals for the ethical challenges they will face in the future environment. Institutions must leverage the best education and training techniques, such as adventure-based and experiential learning, to expose military professionals to these issues. Instead of stand-alone lessons on the Law of Armed Conflict and the Joint Ethics Regulations, most education and training programs should imbed discussions of ethical issues as part of their broader objectives. This ethical focus should be universal and synchronized across an individual's professional development from pre-commissioning to retirement.

The challenge to create ethical "brilliant warriors" is not insurmountable, but will require focused attention. We owe this to our military professionals before we send them into harms way.

◆ ◆ ◆

References

Barnett, C. (2014). *Leadership in war: from Lincoln to Churchill* (rev. ed.). Barnsley, UK: Praetorian Press.

Brooks, R. (2016). Civil-Military Paradoxes. In Kori Schake and Jim Mattis (Eds.), *Warriors and citizens: American views of our military*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.

Deal, J. & Levinson A. (2016). *What millennials want from work: how to maximize engagement in today's workforce*. New York: McGraw Hill.

DIUx Website. (2017). Retrieved 8 May 2017, from https://www.diux.mil; Cyberworx Website. (2017). Retrieved from http://c-trac.org/cyberworx/

Huntington, S. (1957). *The soldier and the state: the theory and politics of civil-military relations*. New York: Belknap Press.

McChrystal, S., Collins, T., Silverman, D. & Fussell, C. (2015). *Team of teams: new rules of engagement for a complex world*. New York: Penguin.

Moore, P. (2017). The selfish generation. *YouGov*. Retrieved 23 March 2017, from https://today.yougov.com/news/2016/07/19/the-selfish-generation/.

Pincus, W. (2011, 24 April). Are predator drones a technological tipping point in warfare? *Washington Post Online*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/are-predator-drones-a-technological-tipping-point-in-warfare/2011/04/19/AFmC6PdE_story.html?utm_term=.c47c820cd6b1.

Seck, H. (2017, 4 May). Navy pilot's gutsy last-second call saves civilian lives near Mosul. *Military.com*. Retrieved from http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/05/04/navy-pilots-gutsy-last-second-call-saves-civilian-lives-mosul.html.

Singer, P. & Cole, A. (2016). What we know about wars of the future. *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 44-45.

Sun Tzu. (2005) *The Art of war*. (L. Giles, Trans.) El Paso: El Paso Norte Press.

U.S. Department of Defense Website. (2016, 28 April). Remarks by Deputy Secretary Work on third offset strategy. Retrieved from https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/753482/remarks-by-d%20eputy-secretary-work-on-third-offset-strategy/.

Weisgerber, M. (2016, 23 February). Back to Iraq: U.S. military contractors return in droves. Defense One. Retrieved from https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2016/02/back-iraq-us-military-contractors-return-droves/126095/.

Wheatley, M. (2006). *Leadership and the new science: discovering order in a chaotic world* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.