

Donald Abenheim, Department of National Security Affairs and Center for Civil-Military Relations, Monterey

***Ethics and the Vocation of Arms —
A Transatlantic Comparison*³**

One awful thing about Partnership for Peace and the civil-military educational efforts is the Americans getting up and talking about their defense institutions without comparing them to others. I personally do not like this view: Here is the good American institution, and there is the bad post-communist, former Soviet, poor old Euro-victim of totalitarianism institution. I have fought against that tendency all my life, and I hope that our joint efforts will work in that direction.

There are three topics I would like to cover. Firstly, I want to do something that must appear quite radical, especially here in Austria, namely to make Germany a placeholder, a representative, an ideal-type for the European experience of ethics and soldiers. Secondly, I want to use the German model as a contrast for a comparison to the experience of the United States. In other words, I intend to interpret my institution and the ethical civil-military nexus through a central-European lens. And thirdly, I would simply like to pose the question rather than giving an answer to it, what does all of this mean now where my country finds itself amidst the great fear, “le grande peur”, as it was called in the French Revolution. We are into an extraordinary phase that requires thinking, reflection, and analysis. While the best my country and the West brought forward in the Cold War was the application of intellect and reason to the Atomic bomb, a few smart and sensible people engaged in a general effort with an ethical basis to try and analyze a way out of the Cold War. This worked very well, and we need to do the same now.

There is certain sets of ideas - political, civil-military, ethical concepts - that operate especially in my home institution that may or may not be helpful in this new age. My approach is entirely historical and civil-military, and I want to talk about the place where ethics and civil-military relations come together in a comparison of continental Europe and the United States.

The place to begin with such a comparison is in the true revolution of the end of the dynastic, absolutist state, taking place in the course of the eighteenth and into nineteenth century, and the military institutions that were born in that process. There is no doubt that one could begin with antiquity, but at least one must begin with modern history. The point of departure, then, is this revolutionary period in Europe and in North America that begins in the 1770ies and proceeds into the nineteenth century, in which an officer was linked to the dynasty, to the court, to the bond between aristocracy and king or emperor. The evolution of society and state and the international system in Europe begins to put that system under profound strain. The French Revolution and the rise of the citizen soldier in Europe as well as in North America marks the beginning. The development of this conflict between an idea of the soldier whose heritage is drawn from the ancient regime, the old regime of the continuity of an aristocratic, dynastic officer corps and how that continues to operate in a world in which citizen soldiers emerge, first as competitors and eventually as a dominant form of military organizations, forms the background against which we can locate many of the ethical conflicts that impacted the military world to this day.

In the initial period there is a conflict between aristocratic qualities, considered to be given by the grace of God and because of social organization making officers somehow better than citizens. An aristocrat is by his very nature better able to fight and to withstand the baptism of fire, the reality of the battlefield, than citizens who count things or people who work with money, because these things somehow destroy one's energy and are bad for war. That attitude begins to change in the

³ Article taken from the conference tape and edited by Edwin R. Micewski.

conflict ensuing from the French Revolution, especially here in Austria, in the Hapsburg Empire, but also in Prussia, as they adjust to the effects of the French Revolution. In the United States, of course, there is no real aristocracy on a central European basis. Thus, the form of soldier that comes about is one that comes from the enlightenment.

The citizen soldier and the militia idea that exist in feudalism, especially in the British Empire, is transformed to the citizen soldier of the United States constitution. The present representative of this historical development is the National Guard.

We can observe parallel or even identical developments on both sides of the Atlantic. Philosophically speaking I would dare to speak of dialectical developments, but since my knowledge of Hegel is not so profound, I confine myself to saying that a reciprocal relationship advances between the American and European idea of the citizen soldier concept on the one hand, and the continuation of a dynastic, absolutist, conservative idea of soldiering, on the other, as it goes through the nineteenth century.

This is the basis for the comparison and is exactly, in my view, where the ethical issues come along. A cornerstone of this development is the way in which Prussia is defeated, overwhelmed by citizen soldiers, in 1792. While Prussia reinvents and reforms itself, in the United States we recognize a tendency to speak of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), in which technology plays a major role. However, Clausewitz and Scharnhorst remind us that social and political factors and even ethical considerations are major in the invention or reinvention of the idea of a soldier identity that is based on citizenship and nation. There emerges from reform reaction and the desire to maintain privilege and social position, and what people honestly believe is inherent virtues and values in the face of forces in society that seem to be a threat to an elitist idea of soldiering. But there are also forces in society that intend to diminish military effectiveness, and this problem in central Europe gets worse and worse.

We all know this, as the world we live in is in part a product of that growing conflict between a rapidly changing society and the effect of how the spread of citizenship and the revolution worked by nations, the explosion of the nationalism, interacts with technology to create, in essence, the problems of the World Wars. Particularly in Germany, ethical problems of soldiering and civil-military relations come to effect far more than merely the relationship between a sergeant and a draftee, and assume significance on the strategic level.

The ethical dimension of military professionalism in Germany enters into a phase of profound crisis. Erich Ludendorff, a non-aristocratic General Staff officer, a genius of war on a modern, technological, national, mass-mobilization basis, who advances to military dictator in 1916, represents the extreme of the problem of military ethics and politico-military relations in central Europe. There is a line of decadence from Scharnhorst and Clausewitz leading to Ludendorff, who represents modernity in the degree to which he represents the epic in which we lived in the twentieth century. He stands for soldiering on a modern technological basis and believes that function determines 'being'. He reforms the German military from the ground up, and uses management principles that would be entirely familiar in an American business school of today. Nevertheless, his efforts are also associated with the idea that he turns Clausewitz on his head by saying that politics has to subordinate itself to the needs of war. The world that Ludendorff helps to create is a world in which the tactical level supplants the strategic level with utterly disastrous results.

This leads, of course, to several phases of debate in Germany in the intervening years from 1916 to up to our time, as important places to look for significant debates about ethics in the German military, and by that I mean ethical debates in Western militaries. Although Ludendorff spends the rest of his waking life to justify of what he has done, his work is a failure. Nonetheless, others take over his doctrine to very detrimental effects, as I will demonstrate presently.

In the interval, the 1920ies, the direct descendants of Ludendorff try to reinvent a German military from extraordinary defeat. The leading figure in this is Hans von Seeckt, who takes professionalism and confines it to an interesting entity by taking the military out of a defeated society. Yet, the defeated German society of Weimar Germany becomes a further modernizing central European society like its predecessor in Wilhelmina Germany. The monarchy of the last phase is a laboratory of the modern and the new, and Seeckt re-professionalizes and reforms the German army based on a synthesis of Ludendorff's idea of the General Staff, and his own idea of the guard regiments that were considered to be the toughest part of the German military. Thus, the military is reestablished on this interesting basis of elite general staff officers and guard officers, ignoring both democracy and defeat. The idea of reviving superficial aspects of tradition does not work and fails. Before it fails, however, there emerges in the middle of the 1920ies a debate in writing between generations in the Reichswehr represented by Ludendorff and Kurt Hesse. The latter publishes a book entitled "Feldherr Psychologus", in which he argues for an emphasis on psychology in war and the reinvention of the military establishment as an instrument better to use mass politics. Hesse's idea basically was that young officers, who somehow embrace socialist, disaffected left-wing values, help to create a kind of military republic. Although Ludendorff wins the theoretical debate, many of Hesse's ideas are taken up by the officers of the German Army in National Socialism, finally representing, at least among the senior military leadership, a cosmic collapse of ethics in the face of political reality. That is not meant to defame or generalize about all people serving in the German Wehrmacht, but nevertheless, when one considers the military institution in National Socialism, then one reviews a particular extreme example of how a distortion of Western ethical principles can bring about a real catastrophe.

The deed of Oberst von Stauffenberg by which he was trying to clean the ethical shield of the German military officer, who sacrifices himself in the military resistance to Hitler on July 20th 1944, marks the turn-around for another reform in German military history. This post-World War II modification of ethical values within the military should even have great impact upon Partnership for Peace. The concept of 'Innere Führung', an expression that can hardly be translated into English, is based upon a clear distinction between 'external leadership'—which is concerned with command and technical control, strategy and tactics, and the maneuvering of troops—and 'internal leadership'—the idea of intrinsic and internal human qualities that play a role when it comes to military leadership. This understanding goes far beyond the mere technical perception of the term 'leadership' in the American military parlance, and was designated to help integrating the German Armed Forces into post-World War II West German society.

'Innere Führung', especially throughout the 1960ies and 1970ies, is a constant debate about the ethical character and positioning of the German soldier. The concept, in essence, represents the idea of bringing to bear the first article of the German Basic Law within the armed forces. The first article is a refutation of the experience of the Third Reich, and stipulates the dignity of the human being and the purpose of the state to uphold this unviable characteristic of human existence.

'Innere Führung' has also been the attempt to strike a balance between ethical principles and the requirements of modern, military leadership. There has also been the dimension of civic education and the ideals that a soldier who defends democracy must, to some degree, be in himself or herself a democrat.

This idea was controversial from the beginning and entailed debate on various levels of society. The dispute was mainly circling around issues such as the ethical limits to soldiering and military duty, and how traditional forms of military virtues can be applied in the face of rapid technological change and overarching ideological war.

We can say that 'Innere Führung' was even essential for German unity in the sense that the Bundeswehr was the largest institution of the West German state to go into the territory of the former German Democratic Republic. In unification, the Bundeswehr assumed responsibility for the bodies and souls of almost one-hundred and seventy-thousand former soldiers of the National

Peoples Army. Overnight, the Bundeswehr had to come up with an idea of taking people from Central and Eastern Europe and bringing them into the camp of Western military thinking. Something nobody had ever seriously thought about much before the summer of 1990. What then happened was the first wave of enlargement of NATO and Western institutions, including also, on an ethical basis, the successful detoxification, and internationalization of military institutions in eastern and southeastern Europe.

For obvious reason, the debate in the United States is not as old and as intense as in Germany. The military experience in the United States up until now has generally been a fairly positive one. The debate has never affected society in the United States the way it has in Germany, partially because the United States constitution has been such an enduring and successful document, and also because the United States has been free of the conflict we could see in central Europe between the citizen soldier and a dynastic and aristocratic officer caste.

In the United States, to some extent, all soldiers are citizen soldiers, even those who consider themselves to come from traditional professional military families. The debate on ethics and the military, as it has an impact on the United States military in its recognized form, begins in the eighteenth century by reviewing the example of Great Britain. The founding fathers of the American constitution were seeking to eradicate the possibility of the creation of an army similar to the army created in the British Civil War during the long reign of Cromwell, which represented a kind of military dictatorship. They created the system of checks and balances and the profound emphasis upon the citizen soldier. It is only in the middle of the nineteenth century that a professional class of soldiers begins to emerge, represented by those people who went to WestPoint, the United States Military Academy. In this period, the citizen soldier begins to experience a kind of counterpoint with the armed forces that emerged from the United States Civil War.

In this regard, it is a graduate from WestPoint and a professional military officer, Emory Upton, who should become very influential up to our day, and who should have great bearing on the modern ethical, professional, and civil-military ideas that still operate today. As the United States military, in the Civil War, went from being a tiny institution to becoming a huge institution to again being a tiny institution, Upton becomes aware of the problems of demobilization of forces and the social integration of soldiers. His experiences and observations led him to the judgment that the constitution of the United States is basically the enemy of military effectiveness. If one looks at the history of the American constitution, the US Congress, and the American armed forces, he realizes that the civilian control over the armed forces and the instruments of American democracy are insufficient, destroying military effectiveness to the extent of even demolishing combat readiness and efficiency. What are needed are the brains of an army on a Prussian model, a General Staff and a cadre system, as well as a mobilization system. Upton stands at the beginning of a school of thought and practice, which has a very profound ethical implication about integration of soldiers into society, and the ethical expectations that professional soldiers bring to their craft, especially in the face of a pluralistic society.

In essence, the debate about civil-military relations and ethics in the military is a product of the Cold War. After American military institutions and civil-military relations undergo an extraordinary explosion in science, there unfolds a very fundamental debate between the Schools of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz. Huntington basically suggests that American democracy should establish an open space for military soldiers to have their own sphere of professionalism. Huntington argues that the civil-military gap was an ideological divide between a conservative officer corps, and a liberal, individualistic society. Consequently, any attempt by society to somehow impose liberal, civilian values on conservative officers would, in fact, diminish fighting power. For this reason, American democracy should embrace a conservative military culture, let soldiers be soldiers, and give them their world so that they can stay out of politics, can emphasize military efficiency, and their symbols and values and hierarchy. By no means new ideas in Europe, but in the American civil-military debate one associates those ideas with Huntington.

On the other hand, there is Morris Janowitz, who is the father of military sociology in the United States. He argues that in a democracy military culture must adapt to changes in civilian society, and to the technology of war. The gap is narrowed further, in Janowitz' view, as the military adjusts to the need and dictates of its civilian masters. In his opinion, if the gap is allowed to remain too large, the military will become unresponsive to civilian control.

The 1950ies, in which the major works on civil-military relations of both Huntington and Janowitz are published, are a time of civil-military strife and ethical debate in the United States. In the dispute on ethics, military professionalism, and civil-military relations, both thinkers took different courses, and both remained influential until our day. A debate triggered by the end of the Cold War in 1989/1990, however, a debate that is also a product of the presidency of Bill Clinton. This is due to the fact that Bill Clinton became a figure that polarized attitudes about civil-military relations in a democracy, and about ethics in a politico-military context.

There is a book out now that is an attempt to demonstrate by quantitative methods of the social sciences to look at the gap between the professional military and American society of today, and in retrospect back to the days of the Vietnam War. I may remind you that, thirty years ago, conscription ended in the United States because of the Vietnam War, and because conscription had never been a constant feature of American civil-military relations. In addition, the Republican Party at the end of the 1960ies made a triumphal march through the southern states, and became a leading political force. At the same time, in the last thirty years, various social forces have transformed the face of American society radically. Among those, just to mention as examples, the emancipation of women, the emancipation of homosexuals, the turning upside down of what is urban and what is rural, the impact of the information age, etc.

This book, edited by Peter Fever, a Harvard Professor, and Richard Cohen from the University of North Carolina, gives a highly interesting account of the development, rather departing from the approach of Janowitz that the gap between society and the military is a source of difficulty and friction and is essentially the result of the reasons outlined above. The implication, of course, is that a more diverse and heterogeneous American society vis-à-vis a more conservative officer corps has brought about a variety of political and ethical problems in the sense that ethics and politics were forced together.

Another, perhaps even more important, point is that armies are mainly there for war. Not exclusively and solely, but that is how we think about in very distinct terms. Elliot Cohen as a student of Samuel Huntington has now written a book, which basically refutes Huntington's 'The Soldier and the State'. This book came out this year and deals with one aspect of ethics and civil-military relations, which puts us in the mind of Stauffenberg and the proponents of *Innere Führung*. The volume introduces the subject of supreme command, which reminds us of the cosmic ethical success and failures of Ludendorff, and presents a series of case studies of soldiers and statesmen and leadership in wartime. One of the central ethical, strategic, and political dogmas and civil-military doctrines of this less diverse military, is the idea that the Vietnam War was lost by civilians. A new version of the idea, already propagated by Ludendorff, of the stab-in-the-back. This idea of the Vietnam stab-in-the-back has become a major political and civil-military doctrine in today's debates in the United States.

Cohen tries to take the civilian hand off the dagger that theoretically has been driven into the back of the American military since the mid Sixties. He argues that in a democracy the civilian leadership has a right and even obligation in its grand ethical dimension to intervene in the waging of war and military institutions. To underscore this point, Cohen mentions four remarkable Democratic figures - Abraham Lincoln, George Clemenceau, David Ben Gurion, and Winston Churchill. This very different selection of characters provides for a different message that has been operating in the political-ethical debate in the United States.

This is basically what the United States has brought to September 11. One might make the argument that everything has changed, that all is new, and that we start all over again, and

everything that came before is discarded. I strongly believe this is plainly untrue. Naturally, we in American civil-military institutions are not starting out afresh on September 11. We have only to look at the Revolution in Military Affairs and the leaked war-plans of a war against Iraq to come or not, to realize that many if not all elements of the past are operating.

However, the issue is that we are in a situation in which—irrespective of what others are saying—the Americans now strongly feel that they are in a war. President Bush said, within hours of the collapsing buildings in Washington and New York, that this is an act of war. In a campaign against terrorism, suddenly and literally overnight, Americans are now confronted with soldiers in airports, soldiers guarding national monuments, etc. This has extraordinary implications. For people from certain parts of Europe or from Asia for whom the presence of war has always been there, this change might be less radical. For my country, the alteration is radical.

We cannot be sure how the heritage of this set of debate about ethics and civil-military relations, the integration of the soldier into society, and the proper role of a Supreme Command will play out. One of the things from the old debate carried into the present era is this one issue.

The war against terrorism may revive some old bad habits, and it is our responsibility to keep the bad at bay after the eleventh of September. The best way to do that is to be with enlightened thought.

Donald Abenheim,
Prof., Dr., Department of National Security Affairs,
Center for Civil-Military Relations, Monterey