

Command as the Profession of Military Officers: Concepts, Components, Education and Training Principles

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Introduction

Military academies everywhere train commanders and military professionals, and their curricula of necessity reflect the following six considerations: the organization's needs, the learner's needs, the profession's knowledge structure, the abilities of the staff, commanders as well as teachers, the learning concept, and the learning environment. (Raviv 2000.)

The purpose of the present paper is to provide confirmation for the claim that command is a profession in the full meaning of the word, and also to propose a comprehensive model for training and educating commanders at the intermediate echelon. It enumerates the four knowledge components which make up the command entity: professionalism, leadership, management and ethics and describes the way training is structured around each of these components in the IDF General Command and Staff College.

What is the military profession?

A *profession* is an occupation which requires profound learning and training. Professionals can be distinguished from non-professionals (or from professionals in some other domain) by their theoretical knowledge in their chosen occupation and their practical skills in carrying out their professional functions. Since a specific professional milieu can only be joined by learning from other professionals, in time the members of a given profession tend to form a distinct group which can be identified by its specific perspective and work methods.

The military profession has always been perceived as expressing the trained application of the art of war by those chosen to lead the troops and manage their operations. (Hochbaum 2000; the following five

paragraphs are adapted from this article). The armed forces have traditionally provided societies and nations with protection from warfare.

The modern nation-state has been developing the various aspects of its strength since the mid-seventeenth century. One important facet has been the development of tools needed for education of military professionals, in view of the admitted uniqueness and complex needs of the army. The complexity of the military's needs derives from its two-faced yet unified nature, operational yet also professional, as well as the ever-accelerating discoveries in the field of scientific military research, which has been branching out into other disciplines: political science, communications, social science and economics.

The military profession is unique in that by its very definition it deals with "the art and science of war". The two domains of art and science express the dialectical character of the mental apparatus through which a commander makes his decisions when applying his art under the most difficult circumstances known to mankind.

Art and science, according to Hachbaum, stand in a relationship of mutual tension, between the intuitive and the analytical, between understanding and knowledge, between abstract and concrete, between the ability to explain and the ability to observe, between coming up with an idea and translating it into a task. The dialectical unity between the two can be seen in the philosophy according to which officers are trained and the course of their development. It is also responsible for defining the core issues of military education, imparted by means of a basic curriculum designed to constitute a microcosm of military knowledge.

However, although the art component is very important, the scientific component of warfare and command are also to be found at the center of military activity; the latter are domains which can be taught, measured, drilled and improved.

Both art and science also play a part in the changes which have taken place in modern warfare, especially the transition from high- to low-intensity conflicts, with large-scale national wars involving large territories and masses of organized, uniform troops giving way to the need to cope with a large variety of threats of different kinds, coming from different sources, including esoteric global groupings whose activities have a gangster-like subversive character.

The military profession has always been conceived of as of an interdisciplinary nature; this is true now more than ever, in these times when threats, the entities taking part in conflicts, the available weaponry and the character of the dialogue between the military and society are all undergoing change and becoming increasingly dynamic and complex. It is a profession which demands an understanding of a variety of knowledge structures: history, education, the natural sciences, social science, psychology, philosophy, political science, strategy and tactics. It is also a profession which requires abilities of analysis, forecasting and implementation, leadership, ethical and historical awareness, abstraction as well as application, planning and organization, investigation and self-criticism.

Like any other profession, the military profession is based on five fundamental components (Kasher 2003): *knowledge* – a systematic, theoretical, constantly evolving base of organized information; *skill* – a systematic "toolbox" for the successful solution of professional problems; *constant improvement* – updating one's knowledge through continuous learning from personal and group experience and RD processes; *local understanding* – the ability to enunciate the principles on which one's action is based and to find quality solutions to unusual and complex problems; *ethics* – global understanding, values and norms which regulate a professional's relations to others, including his peers, and the values of the social envelope inside which he operates.

To these one should add a number of components which are unique to the military profession: its totality, the requirement to lay down one's life if necessary and the responsibility for the lives of others in every moment of their professional lives (Amidror 2002); the paradox of training which rarely involves testing under true battleground conditions, since no previous experience can tell us what the war of the future will be like.

How can we define the essence of the profession of military command?

The core of the military command profession (Schwartz 2004) resides in officers destined to play command, staff, coordination and intelligence roles within a specific arm of the IDF or at the level of the General Staff.

Command as an assemblage refers to a set of rational and behavioral components which the commander uses in order to operate a force for

the purpose of achieving results and attaining an aim. Command consists of integrating a commander's patterns of thinking and behaving, and translating them into action patterns carried out by his troops and equipment, using principles of thought and application of force. Segal (2004) sees the essence of command as consists in a commander's effective utilization of the authority given to him, and requires an understanding of the operational whole. Out of his profound knowledge a commander can shape operational reality in a way that will lead to the achievement of victory.

In the *IDF Terminology Dictionary* "Command" is defined as "the authority vested in the holder of a military position with respect to a military unit and with respect to subordinates, to control them, direct them, and coordinate their activities in fulfillment of their tasks".

The commander is thus the military unit's backbone, and the concept of "command" refers to the *totality* of activities involved in the organization's operation.

The complexity of military command is reflected in the following words about the traits of a commander, written by Yigal Alon (1960):

An outstanding commander must embody in his personality, to some extent and in some proportion, a set of traits and skills which give him the ability to perform the many functions for which he is responsible. He must combine the roles of father and instructor, teacher and educator, leader and combat commander. He must show himself to be a man who thinks and carries out, plans and organizes, a man of reflection and determination.

Van Creveld (1985) views the concept of command as a system. It is a function to be constantly applied with respect to two domains of responsibility: the first is to organize and coordinate the military's needs, such as supplies, services, and military law enforcement; and the second is to enable the military to perform its tasks, that is to bring about a decisive victory over the enemy.

The command system operates a number of activities. One is the collection of precise and continuous information about one's own forces, the enemy and other relevant factors. Such information must be stored, sorted, distributed and presented in an appropriate manner. Decisions must then be reached by means of orderly staff work. Command also includes detailed planning, the formulation of orders which will be

understood properly by subordinates, and the operation of feedback and control systems.

Schematically one can identify four major components which affect the commanding action: *professionalism, leadership, management and values*.

The ideal commander possesses a full and balanced complement of all four components, although clearly different positions and different levels of command require different admixtures of these components. Thus, for example, senior commanders are more in need of management and thinking skills. The ideal admixture also changes in different battle environments and in different positions. However, the training and learning system which forms the foundation for a commander's development is similar in all cases.

Analyzing each component separately as well as the interrelationships between them results in a more profound understanding of the whole. But this understanding cannot be complete without an analysis of the traits and characteristics of the commander, which define the domains of knowledge and the educating challenges.

The traits and characteristics of a commander

The IDF Command and Staff College, charged with educating officers at the level of Lieutenant Colonel, has over time identified "ideal" traits which are vital for commanders at this level (Schwarz 2005). These traits help develop mechanisms of assortment, effective learning and evaluation. The list of traits includes cognitive, emotional and physical components, such as: curiosity and military intellectual abilities, an overall systemic, multi-perspective and multi-corps approach, initiative, delegation of authority and enforcement of discipline, awareness of subordinates and ability to arouse confidence and motivation, steadfastness, calm and civic courage, physical fitness, integrity and professional pride, critical attitude and a constant endeavor to improve.

At the same time, the importance of the commander's "personal voice", the unique command style possessed by every individual, must always be borne in mind, for it is this combination of characteristics which makes every commander different, both emotionally and intellectually, from every other. It is the scope for otherness within the profession's features which make possible an endless variety in the construction of heterogeneous teams and an endless variety of solutions to problems.

The way in which Israeli officers differ from their foreign counterparts can be clearly seen in various institutional arrangements (Gal 1988). Thus, for example, the IDF is led by officers and not by NCOs. Officers grow "from below", and carry out their functions in a characteristic style of authority and independence, improvisation, taking the lead and personal example.

Nevertheless, beyond whatever cultural differences there may be, educating an officer, any officer, needs to meet the following challenges, according to H. Schwarz:

To develop the professional intellectual awareness of an officer operating in an operational environment, to identify the enemy's combat system in order to overcome it by taking over the logic of its activity, to build up the logic of his own combat system and to operate warfare resources from single-corps and combined-force sources with a high degree of harmony in order to extract the greatest possible fighting strength out of relatively limited resources, to develop the ability to utilize the "personal staff" model (military academy graduate) and the "general and formation staff" model (staff college graduate) with multi-corps and multi-arms representatives, or to become integrated as a staff officer into any one of these models and attain a high level of professional competence.

In the cognitive sphere – to develop two professional ways of thinking that are unique to commanders: "systemic" or "heuristic-revelatory" thinking, by means of which new knowledge new theses are created, and its opposite, "retrieval" thinking, in which one uses existing information stored in memory. The latter type of thinking is particularly appropriate in technical professional settings.

In the sphere of character building – to develop two prominent professional traits: determination, in the sense of courage and taking personal responsibility for decisions which must be made quickly on the basis of an abstract picture of the situation which must of necessity be constructed by using a rich imagination and considerable creativity, since only preliminary, partial and sometimes contradictory information is available; and a critical faculty, demanding civic courage and the ability to criticize and to encourage others to criticize.

The above is in fact nothing else than educating the officer for professionalism, leadership, management and values, as pointed out above. All of these traits will help build a complete entity. For this reason it makes sense to discuss each of them in detail and to determine the main training and education principles involved in each.

Professionalism

There are those who claim (Amidror 2002) that five subjects are vital for training in the military profession: military history – learning the battles of the past; military theories – based on generalizations and historical experience; military doctrine – a concept suitable for a specific

army, based on military theory and perceptions of national security; operating instructions; thought experiments and battle laboratories.

Another way of looking at the military profession is through the domains of knowledge which it encompasses. These are, as pointed out at the outset, quite varied. We can, however, point to a number of generic domains of knowledge which every commander must master. These include the various command and combat disciplines: organization, tactics, operational art, and preparing one's unit for a specific mission (Segal 2003b), in addition to intelligence and various support disciplines such as military geography, military technology, military philosophy, terror and guerilla warfare, military ethics, and strategy. To this we must add the study of military and security issues in the political context: political science – Islam and the Arab world, international relations, government and politics, political philosophy; military aspects – society, military history and communications.

To these generic domains we must add some new disciplines which are needed for coping with the changing face of war: systemic thinking, network models of organization, concepts such as multi-dimensionality and simultaneity.

All these provide an officer with the broad theoretical and conceptual knowledge he will need in order to carry out a skilled and systematic analysis of novel situations. The knowledge which a commander creates is the source of his strength (Segal 2004).

Developing an officer at more senior echelons, at the level of military strategy, involves a profound intellectual and professional evolution, during which the generic contents of the military profession are both broadened and deepened. To conclude, the military profession is learned mainly through the acquisition of theoretical and conceptual knowledge, and the development of the mental capability to use it wisely and properly.

Leadership

There are many definitions of the concept of leadership. What all definitions have in common is that they speak of behavior directed towards motivating subordinates to pursue an aim, through influence and an emotional bond intended to achieve common goals.

Leadership involves motivating people to carry out tasks over time, with maximal use of means of motivation and minimal use of coercion. The *IDF Terminology Dictionary* conceives of leadership as personal traits which give a commander an ability and an authority which go beyond his formal authority to command his subordinates in battle. Military commanders at all levels should be leaders. Leadership can be recognized in the will to win; it provides aim, direction and motivation in battle. A leader's traits are both inborn and acquired, and require constant study and cultivation, in the form of learning from one's own experience and that of others.

Leadership learning deserves particular attention for a number of reasons. First of all, commanders in the IDF, as well as in other armies, are also educators. They help design the orientation of their post, shape their subordinates by helping them realize their potential and providing opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values. At the same time, a commander must himself constantly learn; he must observe and decipher processes, evolve as a human being and a professional, and improve the knowledge and skills on which he depends. This is a very important aspect of military leadership, and perhaps of the command profession as a whole.

Furthermore, leadership requires a variety of other skills: the ability to create an imprint and shape a vision, a desire to influence, personal fortitude, understanding group processes, an awareness of differences in organizational cultures and personal motivations, openness, initiative, self learning capabilities, introspection, motivation, the ability to motivate others and still function as an effective team player.

The battlefield of the future poses other complex challenges to military leaders: transportation of troops in an age of electronic digitization, leadership and control of the battlefield at a distance with the use of technology, inter-organizational and multi-national cooperation, peace-keeping and policing missions, and more. All of these pose new challenges for, and impose additional responsibility on military leaders.

Consequently, leadership involves a variety of different disciplines, among them: military psychology, military leadership, leadership styles, personal and team excellence, work on strength and limitations, authority, influence, dealing with conflicts, stages in the evolution of a group, development of vision, defining goals and, in modern times, also wise utilization of the media and communication.

Developing a commander's leadership qualities depends to a great extent also on processes of *emotional* development. This component is taught differently than the others, since an overly theoretical approach will not produce better leaders. Personal growth and tutoring, defining personal goals, using workshops in which emotional and group processes can be worked out, constitute a better way to achieve results in this domain.

Management

Management is a concept which describes the way the efforts of individuals in an organization and the available resources are directed towards achieving the organization's aims. The management process channels and transforms the resources needed for carrying out the required tasks. Early theories of management focused on precise definitions of tasks and on the most efficient way to carry them out; later theories dealt more with group influences, norms, intrinsic incentives, individual needs and informal leadership. The traditional model of management does not assume that the individuals in an organization are committed to its tasks, merely that they have a certain interest in their being carried out.

For many years management and leadership in the military were perceived as mutually incompatible. In the wake of the American army's failure in Vietnam it was commonly believed that the adoption of managerial habits and values (cost-effectiveness calculations, computerized decision-making, systems analysis, etc.) caused the military to become too much like a business corporation, thus reduction its combat strength, will to fight and unit cohesiveness. (Gabriel and Savage 1981). Business ethics paradigms, based on conceptions of profit and efficiency maximization were perceived as being inconsistent with identification with the organization's aims, partnership and comradeship.

Over the years, as defense budgets shrank and advanced management techniques evolved, armies adopted a more realistic, holistic approach, according to which "management" was a legitimate and necessary aspect of military command, certainly at intermediate and upper echelons. Commanders cannot do without management and planning processes as part of their job (Segal 2003a). These procedures include acts like combat time management, self time management, staff and unit management, independent resource management, efficient and orderly staff work, responsible and efficient use of resources and funds.

Good management requires abilities such as: planning, organization, control, supervision, setting priorities correctly, thoroughness and persistence, translation of tasks into resources and spreading them out in time according to a predetermined work plan, and of course the ability to work simultaneously on a number of different tasks.

Management can be taught from numerous theoretical perspectives: organizational behavior, decision making models, organizational diagnosis, management in conditions of uncertainty, information systems. This knowledge must be translated also to practical tools, such as: project management, negotiation, discussion leading, and conflict management.

Values and Norms - the Ethical Entity

Ethics is the branch of philosophy which deals with morality and, in particular, the different types of thinking which direct human behavior, and according to which the latter may be evaluated. Professional ethics frequently deals with practical rules needed for determining whether certain actions by members of the profession are right or wrong. A. Kasher (2003) views the ethical inquiry as the ultimate heart and core of the profession itself, since this process results in a profound understanding of professional deeds, attitudes and motives. Ethical principles are not sublime ideals, but rather rules which define desirable activities of people within their professions. Ethics as an assemblage of values and norms directs the professional as to how he should act within it. Consequently, ethics is in a sense equivalent to professionalism. Discussion of ethical issues in the profession constitutes a progressive step within it, which brings about an improvement in the skills of normative thinking.

The armed forces, however, are by definition a violent organization. Commanders have the clear duty to train their soldiers to kill in battle, and at the same time they are required to provide such killing with an ethical justification. The ethics of combat become more complex in the context of the fight against terror within a limited confrontation, because of a lack of universal legal and ethical principles dealing with military activity in a mixed environment in which there is not clear differentiation between civilians and combatants.

When is a targeted killing justified? At what price should the defense of the citizens of Israel be bought? Can one solve the contradiction, and if so how, among the four considerations which a soldier must take into

account when carrying out a military mission: performance of the mission according to its aim, preserving his troops' lives, preserving the lives and dignity of innocent civilians, and preserving the lives of the citizens of Israel? How should one react when the armed forces are required to carry out tasks which are not military by their nature, such as the evacuation of Israeli settlements?

We believe that a constant preoccupation with ethical and normative issues is vital for the armed forces in a democratic country. The development of an ethical doctrine provides the basis for creating a unique and separate identity which gives a deeper meaning and validity to the military profession.

Military ethics are derived from the interrelationship between members of the military and three other entities: the basic body which he serves, namely the state and its citizens; his professional colleagues: commanders, peers, subordinates; and the enemy: military entities or terrorists hiding among the civilian populace. Each of these entities clearly maintains interrelations and mutual dependencies with all the others.

The military profession involves, at any rate, the requirement that one do what is in fact forbidden, namely kill (Hochbaum 2000). This is the focal point of the military profession. Its practitioner must therefore study international law, constitutional law and military law, in addition to learning military ethics and the spirit of the IDF, and gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of the military in a democratic state, of Judaism and of Zionism.

Developing a commander's ethical awareness means making him capable of distinguishing actual from declared values, of engaging in self-criticism and of changing; he should internalize and pass on to others the habit of debriefing, develop an awareness of situations and conflicts with an ethical dimension, honesty and integrity, and a readiness to admit mistakes.

This domain, like that of leadership, requires an elaborated pedagogical concept (see also Raviv, 2005). Besides a solid theoretical base, the curriculum should give the officer the opportunity not just acquire knowledge, but also the invitation to pose questions which force one to deal with the difference between actual and declared values. This can evolve only from using dialogue approaches, continuous practice through discussions and an exchange of ideas.

Because of that military ethics is such a difficult subject to teach. It requires one to be constantly on the lookout, to engage in continuous practice, and to perform a personal and organizational analysis of motives, interests and failures. The assimilation of appropriate values also takes place through covert learning, over which the educating institution usually has no control. This is certainly true in cases where identification with a certain value does not necessarily imply behavior which is consistent with it. This statement is true for both instructors and trainees, and makes ethics a subject with an inherent contradictory yet complementary tension between the ideal and the real, between the explicit and the implicit, between the answer and the resounding question which leaves the dilemma in place.

A hypothetical commander who masters all three entities, i.e.: excels in military theories, has leadership charisma, good management skills, however lacks any moral backbone will never be the commander militaries wish to develop, promote or even be relied on. Therefore the fourth entity, ethics, is the one we should consider as the most important of all.

Conclusion

Given that the world today is dynamic, complex and rapidly changing, officers are required to be able to interpret reality and cope with complex problems and dilemmas which he has not encountered in his formal studies. Consequently, an orderly and sophisticated study of the four domains of knowledge using advanced methodologies no longer suffices. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion (1981), wrote:

Even a commander who graduated from the highest military schools does not have the right to consider himself as a master of military theory, for this theory can never, like other scientific theories, be complete. Only he who continuously follows the unending development of military research and the problems of war, and never stops learning about the theory of defense, can succeed.

Since an officer's professionalism combines theoretical with practical studies, academic with field subjects, lessons from military history with lessons from personal experience, formal studies combined with on the job training, these should all be viewed as one complete unity.

For the past fifty years the Command and Staff College has played an important part in developing the IDF officer corps and in expounding knowledge of commanding as a profession. If we combine the relevant

knowledge available in the academic world, foreign armies, the IDF and the College, we shall be able to promote a better, more profound and more professional training for the command profession and its components, challenges and evolution.

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