
Reviewed by Daniel Castillo

Core Values and the Expeditionary Mindset: Armed Forces in Metamorphosis is a zealous anthology whose title and subtitle faithfully depict its contents. It probes the relationships of the two titular concepts as central notions in analyzing the transformation of armed forces around the world. The anthology originates from an international workshop hosted by the Swedish National Defence College (SNDC) in Stockholm in 2010, and it is extensive in terms of both perspectives and disciplines. The book is divided into two parts, concepts and cases, ranging from theoretical discussions to more practice-oriented studies. As it is obviously difficult, in a single review, to discuss each of its thirteen individual contributions in any depth, it is best to concentrate on the general theme of the book.

As often with interdisciplinary anthologies, while this valuable book offers the reader a wide understanding of the subjects it deals with, it also suffers from minor drawbacks in terms of consistency among its different approaches, as well as from what the present reviewer regards as slightly more serious weaknesses.

The editors open with a brief discussion of the elements of what they term a ‘metamorphosis’, which they present as stemming from the end of the Cold War. The identified transformation of the military is related to the general organizational structure of the armed forces, armament technology, the mindsets of military institutions with greater focus on expeditionary operations, as well as to the education and training required of officers and soldiers in such circumstances. One would expect an anthology to start with a generous and thorough introduction, if only to better justify its purposes and contribution to the debate. This collective volume does not boast one, and thus lacks a clear indication of why knowledge about the core values or the expeditionary mindset of contemporary armed forces is important – not that anyone can doubt the topic’s significance.

The structure of the book implicates that the first essay deal with conceptual issues: Patricia M. Shields, chief editor of Armed Forces & Society, fills that assignment by offering an elaborate inquiry into the concepts under consideration. She first notes that the literature has not so far paid much direct attention to either of them. Since the Cold War ended and policies premised on the possibility of large-scale conventional conflicts became a thing of the past, new challenges have surfaced that involve asymmetric environments and irregular enemy forces. These in turn imply preparation for short-notice deployments and call for an expeditionary mindset – defined as the mental orientation and critical thinking required of soldiers and their leaders for success in such contexts. To Shields,
based on her personal interest in ‘classical pragmatism’, this mindset should ideally consist of four related elements applying to expeditionary action the four pragmatic tenets of ‘practicality’, ‘pluralism’, ‘participation’ and ‘flux’: namely, practical problem-solving, critical thinking as a source of diverse views in need of harmonization, cooperative skills, and adaptability to volatile situations. This certainly accords with decentralized networks, devolution of decision-making to low tactical levels (cf. the “strategic corporal”), modular structures and mission terms of reference discovered at the last minute, that characterize many expeditionary operations.

Shields further notes that core values, the other central concept, are generally perceived as values that are stable over time and ideally unaffected by varying mindsets. Following Huntington, usual core values include loyalty, duty, integrity, courage, and also honour and discipline. In the contemporary literature though, the notion has emerged of a problematic, tense relation between core military values as traditionally defined and the democratic values put forward in the era of humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping operations. Shields ends with an interrogative note: are core values – as interpreted on new missions and in strange new environments – responsible for expeditionary mindsets, or vice versa, are changing values the effect of the transformation from a conventional to an expeditionary mindset? The same topic is also raised by Juha Mäkinen in his chapter on Finnish interpretations of ‘expeditionary’.

In relation to this question, the contribution penned by Eyal Ben-Ari, professor at Jerusalem’s Hebrew University, about the challenges of military leadership in expeditionary operations offers a model based on the introduction of new values as a cumulative process to better understand the contemporary armed forces. In this model, a growing complexity manifests itself on several levels, due to the “hyphenated roles” required by the multifunctional tasks often observed on post-Cold War military operations, as well as to the flexible division of labour and greater compositional (ethnic, racial, gender, status) diversity that now prevail among deployed soldiers.

In similar fashion, the late Donna Winslow (who probably wrote one of her very last precious pieces on that occasion) proposes that “tolerance” be added to the list of military values and that this be achieved through cultural training. In her eyes, tolerance is important since the anxiety soldiers encounter in present-day conflicts tend to lead to biases in how information is processed. Winslow also points to the fact that not taking new values into consideration, or leaning heavily on old core values, may cloud our view of current conflicts.

Following from the complexity topic raised by Ben-Ari, the chapter by SoWI’s Gerhard Kümmel advocates a four-dimensional model for analyzing the much broader and more complex role-sets of contemporary “democratic soldiers”. It sees an ambivalent international ‘risk society’ exhibiting both pre- and post-Westphalian elements, a broader definition of security, the globalization of tasks and a military under stress as crucial factors in forming the individual multifunctional soldier's identity.
The chapter by Prof. Asa Kasher, of Tel Aviv University, attempts to formulate an “ethical toolbox” for conducting military expeditionary operations. Kasher begins with an identification of the classical values of armed forces, and divides them into two categories: fixed and transformed classical values. ‘Fixed’ values (such as courage and comradeship) should remain constant regardless of the circumstances of war, whilst ‘transformed’ classical values (discipline, responsibility, professionalism) are prone to change according to circumstances, as for example when military expeditionary forces are deployed. Kasher further argues for an additional set of values to be considered by the armed forces of democratic regimes, namely protection of human dignity, sanctity of human life, and restraint in the use of force. Besides ideals, the ethical toolbox is also comprised of conceptions and doctrines, intended to serve as less abstract tools and help commanders and soldiers implement the values in performing their duties.

The last part of the book is dedicated to empirical cases – more often than not country-specific studies which use the themes of core values and the expeditionary mindset as analytical lenses. These case studies deal with the US Marine Corps and the importance of ethical actions on the battlefield (Tripodi/Connelley), the Canadian Forces promotion of core values abroad (Ford), multilateral military cooperation in South America (Kenkel), the transformation of the Norwegian military mindset during the last 20 years (Laugen Haaland), the core values of Danish expeditionary soldiers (Sørensen), the German army and its conscript system in relation to future expeditionary operations (Klein) and the development of an expeditionary mindset in the Singapore Armed Forces (Ong).

In the interests of conciseness, this reviewer will limit himself to Laugen Haaland’s and Sørensen’s studies as examples of what, in terms of insights and analytical value, integrating the concepts of expeditionary mindset and core values into empirical studies is apt to yield. Laugen Haaland starts from three different soldier ideal-types when analyzing the Norwegian military mindsets and core values over a 20 year period: the warrior (Huntington), the homeland defender (Janowitz) and the State employee (Moskos). According to Haaland, the contemporary Norwegian military mindset has characteristics of both stability and change. The expeditionary mindset is significant since troops are now willing to deploy at short notice, but the three classical roles also exist side by side. This is in evidence, for example, when skills acquired on expeditionary operations abroad are seen as instrumental in defending the homeland. Depending on the circumstances, one role will be more prominent than the others.

Sørensen’s study offers an actor-specific model of how to understand the Danish military’s contemporary core values and mindset. Sørensen argues that several factors should be taken into account to probe how core values are established and how they are apt to change: the functions of the soldier, the context, the type of conflict and the rank of the soldier. The study identifies four actual core values held by Danish military personnel: the group, the individual soldier, the enemy and the local community (in that order). Sørensen then draws some interesting conclusions when, comparing the value rankings set by the UN, the Danish Government, military field manuals and research reports with the order of
importance attached to the values by military personnel, he notes that the latter is the reverse of the former.

All in all, the book handles its central themes in a manner that is adequate, sound and fruitful, both theoretically and empirically. Still, what is missing is a discussion of those themes in a larger context. In more ways than one, the concepts of the expeditionary mindset and core values do resemble key elements often associated with the New Public Management model. The NPM is geared to the transformation of State bureaucracies in the context of rapid change in the organizational environment, rising complexity and need for new knowledge. The solution often suggested for the old bureaucratic organizations by NPM advocates was to become smaller, better adapted to the environment, better educated, and more flexible, as well as to cooperate with a larger number of stakeholders. Most likely, it would be beneficial to relate the military, its problems and transformation, to other sectors of the State that display similar tendencies. Institutional/organizational theory might be helpful in such an attempt.

Another strain of critique can be directed at the normative and policy-relevant approach adopted by many of the contributions. In the introduction already, it seems as if the point of departure resides in what is required of contemporary armed forces in order to round out their post-Cold War transformation, rather than what is needed in terms of research in the field. Similarly, Asa Kasher’s “ethical toolbox” is certainly a valuable guide for practitioners engaged in expeditionary operations; yet, it is at the same time difficult to discern what research needs or purposes it is meant to serve. Or again, Laugen Haaland expresses normative statements which, however sparse, we could do without. Much more than other research postures, policy-relevant research demands a carefully distanced scientific approach in order not to undermine the credibility of social science.

Nevertheless, Core Values and the Expeditionary Mindset amounts to a worthwhile, relevant and varied attempt to take stock of recent developments in the military field – of interest to both researchers and practitioners: no matter what aspects you are interested in, this book will definitely be a rewarding read.

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