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Professional Soldiers and Citizens in Uniform: Some Thoughts on *Innere Führung* from a Transatlantic Perspective

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Innere Führung is not outdated

Innere Führung should remain the professional code of all German soldiers especially at a time of upheaval in the German nation, on the European continent, and beyond. The record of leadership, command, morale, ethics, and obedience among the soldiers of the Western alliance since September 11, 2001, has become ensnarled in various civil-military interpretations of how soldiers have managed irregular warfare and counterinsurgency campaigns now and in the past. This debate gives rise to the well-meaning, if frequently facile, arguments by some who, in the face of jihadist violence and “hybrid war,” would junk *Innere Führung* as a nostalgic absurdity. Instead, the times call for more, not less, *Innere Führung*, adapted and modernized to continue the German legacy of soldiers in democracy among young combat veterans unsure of their place in state and society in the wake of their experience of irregular warfare in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

For anyone familiar with the history of the *Bundeswehr* and its almost forgotten origins, the story of *Innere Führung* comprises the accounts of its critics and the misunderstandings that either consciously or unconsciously surround this ideal of soldierly professionalism in the FRG. These core principles of command, obedience, and ethics rightly emphasize the remarkable trinity of political purpose, constitutional essentials, and soldierly command and discipline in the blast of fighting, anger, and hatred native to war and political violence in its variety.

The citizen in uniform and the military professional – a German-American comparison, why bother?

German military professionalism forms a unique case in its civil-military aspect as well as its ethical refinement that can be better understood by comparison to other nations and across the history of the *Bundeswehr* itself. The German institutions at arms of command, obedience, and morale have evolved from the trinity of the people, the government, and the army, itself, which are poorly served by tendentious polemics, military romanticism, and cultural pessimism.

Although German and American soldiers no longer serve together in the depth and breadth of the Cold War, this professional bond endures, albeit in altered form, despite the vogue of anti-Americanism prevailing on German talk shows and in *Alternative für Deutschland* campaign umbrage. It has been present in SFOR and ISAF campaigns and is undergoing a revival with NATO’s Article V response on the eastern border of the alliance with the rapid reaction VJTF. Today the chief of staff at the US Army Europe in Wiesbaden is a senior German officer, while the very best German officers still attend training and education in the professional military education of the US armed forces.

Constitution, militia, and the regulars

The story of the soldier in America and their ideals of command have long existed between the constitutional pole of the militia man-at-arms (and now also woman-at arms), on the one hand, and the regular soldier as heir to the European dynastic tradition of arms, on the other. Since the rise of the all-volunteer force in the early 1970s, the latter ideal of the professional has predominated in the self-image of the American soldier and the practice of command. This doctrine of the professional soldier has also become internalized in American society, while the heritage of the citizen soldier as a product of conscription has faded in its attraction without this widely shared rite of citizenship, service, and obedience.

The American birthright of the citizen-at-arms owes much to the heritage of medieval England, where the impact of the wars of religion and the Enlightenment transformed this institution within a national army and also led the authors of the US constitution to embrace it. In this respect, the militia, that is, today's National Guard, has long formed the heart of the US military. Since the American Civil War, it has been subject to much greater federal control than in its earlier iterations. The tradition of the citizen-at-arms, and an American version of the citizen in uniform, is, in this sense, the original American ideal of the soldier.

The competing model – of an elite corps of soldierly professionals – was founded in the US Military Academy in the 19th century and refined in line with the growth of the military during the 20th century in the age of total war. This now-legendary place was originally patterned after the model of an early 19th-century French military school for applied military engineering and siege warfare. An ample dose of management science was then added to this foundation in the 20th century. The professionalization, specialization, and self-differentiation of the US military began, and the tension between the citizen soldier and the military professional that describes these divergent developments thus arose.

Duty, honor, country

Nowhere is this professional ideal of “Duty, Honor, Country” better codified than in Samuel Huntington's still widely cited volume of the mid-20th century, “The Soldier and the State.” Based on how West Point imagines itself as the thin gray line between order and anarchy, the volume contains an interpretation of the ethos of the professional soldier in a democracy with Prussian overtones. Most significantly, the core of US soldierly professionalism resides in exemplary conservative social and political values. The regular American soldier should embrace a strictly neutral posture toward partisan politics and arm themselves against the weakening influences of pluralist society. The soldier, in turn, demands of civilian political authority that the cabinet and the legislature provide specialized military forces with a kind of depoliticized professional dominion. This arena of the professional soldier should be untrammelled by too many civilians and their ceaseless disorder, so as to preclude the politicization of the soldier, as the well as to prevent the pollution of this realm by hedonism, materialism, and pacifism. Although this formulation is 60 years old, it more than coincides with aspects of the contemporary debate in Germany about how, in the view of critics, *Innere Führung* has gone *kaputt* while German soldiers have defended the nation on the Hindu Kush.

Contemporary conflict and idea of the “stab in the back”

Irregular warfare as waged by Western democracies in distant lands, nonetheless, harbors an inherent danger for which *Innere Führung*, as the core of a soldierly code, offers an excellent defense: the danger of the blowback when the distant battlefield comes home to the detriment of society and the constitution in the face of domestic turmoil as well as the rise of fringe political movements hostile to the fundamentals of German politics and society as they have existed in peace and security for decades.

All too common, particularly among disgruntled ex-soldiers and nervous civilians, is the civil-military syndrome in which internal conflict, radical ideology, and lack of an obvious front line deeply burden conventions of military action, even when such action concerns security building in the face of variously hostile local populations. The “stab in the back” myth has been the response to this phenomenon in such democracies as France, Great Britain, and the United States. It also has a particularly – and particularly unfortunate – role in Germany's early and embattled mass politics in the age of total war.

The “stab in the back” has no place in today's German military *Innere Führung*, with its emphasis on the primacy of constitutionally validated statecraft and a code of command and obedience anchored in constitutional norms, shows its enduring strength in just this circumstance.

At the same time, even the most peace-minded society must react with a disciplined measure of understanding and support for the soldier's need for the sense that their service is not demonized for domestic political advantage or simply ignored in the pursuit of profit or pleasure. Slogans about civil society and a superior German moral political

culture are so easily voiced, but they may not dominate the public discussion to the exclusion of any gradations of debate or otherwise exacerbate the tendency of soldiers to see themselves as ignored and shunted aside for the glories of lifestyle and ecological excellence.

Drones, computers, anger, and hatred in warfare

Has the need to defend democracy with soldiers grounded in duties and rights of the Western democracies become any less urgent in the face of special warfare irregulars without collar patches amid a barrage of digital chaos and psychological operations of special refinement? Have the principles of an army in a democracy been eradicated by those blood-thirsty men and women with their black flag of death who want nothing else but to destroy the rule of law and replace it with an orgy of pseudo-religious violence? Can the ballistic progress of weapons from crossbow to H-bomb and now to UAVs/drones and the digital grand slam of Stuxnet eclipse the human element in war altogether? How will this process eclipse and/or eradicate the essentials of human genius, character, intellect, and discipline in the soldier? These imponderables of machines and society confront German and American soldiers, and how they answer these questions also derives from a shared experience of ideas, government, military institutions, weapons, and combat.

Weapons in their variety are always tools wielded by human beings. The human element remains constant and dominant. Men- and women-at-arms will always be compelled to grapple with the actual forces of real war described by Clausewitz: chance, political purpose, and the combination of anger and hatred in the use of force on a limited or unlimited scale to some coherent end. Via the forces of acceleration and compression, the digital age has augmented the dynamic of anger and hatred in human affairs in a manner that should cause anyone interested in the ideals of the soldier to pause and reflect with great care. As Carl Schmitt noted with a frightening brilliance in an earlier crisis that warns our epoch, technology cannot erase or neutralize conflicts that are inherent to society and politics. The reality of artificially intelligent machines in combat hardly upends war as a political process or that genius and friction remain features of conflict which should adhere to some coherent, limited political goal.

The *fata morgana* of science-fiction conflict only waged by computers, without the need for a conventional army, cannot mask the incontrovertible fact that the contemporary transformation of irredentist and revanchist warfare as well as the revival or paramilitary formations in Europe itself are changing the face of organized violence in ways poorly apprehended by technology-first partisans in the self-image of soldiers. One response, as visible in the revival of total defense doctrines, is an armed citizenry in northern Europe, and the realization that the lack of a mobilization base on the traditional pattern in Western armies, to include that of the United States, constitutes a significant problem of escalation dominance in the snarling maw of great power conflict. What are the implications of this startling and unforeseen process as concerns the ideal of the citizen in uniform and the role of men and women with arms in contemporary conflict?

All these things in their dizzying variety argue for the revitalization of *Innere Führung* as an ideal and practice of the integration of the soldier into democracy at home and in the Euro-Atlantic world. This requirement is especially urgent as a variety of new foes of this order have embarked on a violent and persuasive campaign to junk the post-1945 system in Europe and beyond with catastrophic consequences. We in the United States would do well to emulate many of the principles of *Innere Führung* in the ongoing life of the US soldier, whether a professional or a citizen one. As part of *Innere Führung*, the education of officers and soldiers as well as defense civilians remains an imperative not only for the requirements of professional excellence, but for effective democratic civil military relations in the higher aspects of conflict and defense institutions. Ignorance forms no basis to make the kind of subtle comparison of the respective record of the soldier, command, and society in allied nations as attempted in this essay.

The critics of *Innere Führung* in this writer's country as well as among NATO and EU allies, who see this institution of integration, command, obedience, and morale as either irrelevant or outdated, are making an old mistake from the 1950s and 1960s that has lost none of its harmful nature in the present century. Those who hold in their hands the levers and pulleys of security and defense must answer this old error with clarity – and refute it, not the least because Germany's role in the 21st century assigns special meaning to the nature of power in all its facets, even in a nation that celebrates the primacy of civil power. Members of society cannot blindly neglect this requirement and hope to keep

enjoying healthy and peaceful civil-military relations. This society has the most to gain from “rediscovering” *Innere Führung* – and the most to lose from failing to understand its enduring relevance to Germany, both today and tomorrow.

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