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Legacy Concepts: A Sociology of Command in Central and Eastern Europe

Thomas-Durell Young

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ABSTRACT: Elements of the Communist concept of command continue to ramify throughout Central and Eastern European armed forces. They inhibit the orderly delegation of command, the consistent creation of defense capabilities, and the professional development of commanders and managers; they also impede these armed services from adopting the concepts of authority, accountability, and responsibility—concepts taken for granted in Western defense institutions.

An optimistic view of military leadership in the defense institutions of Central and Eastern European post-Communist countries prevails among Western officials and influences many of their decisions to support new allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Since most of these European countries have deployed forces in combat and peace-support operations with NATO after the Cold War, and many have received positive reviews, these assumptions are understandable.¹ Many Western leaders also presume commanders of post-Communist nations who have been exposed to Western philosophies of command during combined operations and the introduction of modern Western combat platforms and systems will naturally adopt similar practices of accountability and responsibility in their own organizations. This article examines the contrast of such contemporary expectations in the context of a trinity of Communist legacy command concepts: collective decision-making to avoid personal responsibility; conflating leadership, command, and management; and hypercentralized decision-making.²

Leaders in Central and Eastern Europe have yet to appreciate the effects of this trinity on the adoption of delegated decision-making on the development of a merit-based officer and noncommissioned officer corps and on the sustenance of Central and Eastern European military capabilities when they assess the viability of their armed forces under the shadow of Russia's new adventurism. Interest also piques when discerning the challenges that have occurred during recent modernization

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1 James S. Corum, *Development of the Baltic Armed Forces in Light of Multinational Deployments* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2013), 34–38.

2 See Thomas-Durell Young, *Anatomy of Post-Communist European Defense Institutions: The Mirage of Military Modernity* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Thomas-Durell Young, "The Challenge of Reforming European Communist Legacy 'Logistics,'" *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 3 (2016): 352–70, doi:10.1080/13518046.2016.1200376; and Thomas-Durell Young, "Impediments to Reform in European Post-Communist Defense Institutions: Addressing the Conceptual Divide," *Problems of Post-Communism* (2016): 1–14, doi:10.1080/10758216.2016.1220256.

efforts. With some exceptions such as Yugoslavia's republic-based territorial defense forces, post-Communist defense organizations come from a conceptual legacy whereby all decision-making was highly centralized and quite different from Western mission command philosophies.³ Thus, integrating Western weapons systems and platforms, designed to require critical thinking and decentralized operation, is formidable. The Polish Air Force provides an apt example: they acquired F-16s in 2006, declared them operational in 2012, deployed them on operations for the first time during the summer of 2016, and scheduled their first Baltic Air Policing mission for May 2017.⁴

The omission of similar Central and Eastern European defense institutions' preparedness to absorb more Western equipment, training, and exercises, let alone effectively use such resources, is not fully appreciated by Western leaders. In March 2016, for instance, US Air Force General Philip M. Breedlove, who was then commander of the US European Command, presented a comprehensive review of the state of security and defense in Europe to the US Senate Armed Services Committee.⁵ Yet, his testimony in no way suggested a need to address the conceptual and philosophical foundations of these defense institutions. Thus, one can only conclude US planning and managing of military and defense advice and assistance to these critical allies is premised on the unchallenged, and indeed dubious, assumption that these organizations hold Western philosophies of command and governance.

The anatomy of post-Communist defense institutions in the context of organizational sociology, however, reveals strong political, institutional, cultural, and indeed, sociological influences that inhibit the adoption of basic Western concepts of defense governance. These legacy practices produce organizational pathologies which prevent delegating command authority in a planned and predictable fashion, producing defense capabilities, and developing commanders and managers at all levels. Although, these challenges cannot be solved using Western technical and educational programs alone, ignoring these command pathologies perpetuates Central and Eastern European military weaknesses and makes them vulnerable to opportunistic Russian mischief.

3 For more on mission command, see Headquarters, US Department of the Army (HQDA), *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, Field Manual (FM) 6-0 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2015).

4 Lukáš Dyčka and Miroslav Mareš, "The Development and Future of Fighter Planes Acquisitions in Countries of the Visegrad Group," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, no. 4 (2012): 544–46, 555, doi:10.1080/13518046.2012.730370; Remigiusz Wilk, "Polish F-16s Deploy for First-Ever Combat Operation," IHS Jane's 360, July 7, 2016, <http://www.janes.com/article/62046/polish-f-16s-deploy-for-first-ever-combat-operation>; and Jacek Siminski, "Polish F-16s Prepare To Take Part in NATO Baltic Air Patrol Mission for the Very First Time," *Aviationist*, February 23, 2017, <https://theaviationist.com/2017/02/23/polish-f-16s-prepare-to-take-part-in-nato-baltic-air-patrol-mission-for-the-very-first-time/>.

5 *Hearing to Receive Testimony on Department of Defense Security Cooperation and Assistance Programs and Authorities, Before the US Senate Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats*, 114th Congress (March 9, 2016) (statement of General Philip M. Breedlove, commander US Forces Europe); and *Examining DOD Security Cooperation: When It Works and When It Doesn't Before the US House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services*, 114th Congress (October 21, 2015).

Table 1. Understanding Western and Communist Legacy Command Concepts⁶

Mission Command	Versus	Detailed Command
Unpredictable	Assumes war is	Predictable
Disorder/Uncertainty	Accepts	Order/Certainty
Decentralization Informality Loose rein on subordinates Self-discipline Initiative Cooperation Ability at all echelons Higher tempo	Tends to lead to	Centralization Formality Tight rein on subordinates Imposed discipline Obedience Compliance Ability only at the top Stasis
Implicit Vertical/Horizontal Interactive and Networked	Types of communications	Explicit Vertical Reactive and Linear
Organic Ad hoc	Organization types fostered	Hierarchic Bureaucratic
Delegate	Leadership styles	Disempower and Direct
Art of war	Appropriate to	Science of war

Collective Decision-Making

Communist governance separated decision-making from accountability via collectivization. Various ministries actualized this managerial practice by forming collegia. These groups were perfect ideological expressions of collectivization as they removed an individual from any responsibility for the collegium's decisions. In addition to removing the principle of individual accountability from governance and management, these bodies facilitated anonymous, arbitrary meddling at the expert level. In contrast, Western organizations encourage staffs to consult, coordinate, and recommend, while only senior officials, or commanders, make decisions.

Despite their dubious political provenance, collegia such as Ukraine's military collegium and Moldova's military council persist throughout former Soviet republics.⁷ Rarer in former Warsaw Pact defense institutions, such governing organizations existed until recently in Slovakia and Hungary, and arguably still exist in Bulgaria.⁸ These bodies still

6 I am indebted to Major General Walter Holmes, Canadian Army (Ret), for permission to use the chart he developed, which also appears in Young, "Impediments to Reform."

7 Ben Lombardi, "Ukrainian Armed Forces: Defence Expenditure and Military Reform," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 14, no. 3 (2001): 32, doi:10.1080/13518040108430487.

8 A Slovakian think tank advocated for regular consultations between the president and the chief of defense, as well as the minister of defense's collegium to enable more informed decision-making. See Jaroslav Nad', Marian Majer and Milan Šuplata, *75 Solutions for Slovakia's Defence* (Bratislava: Central European Policy Institute, 2015), 2; and Réka Szemerényi, *Central European Civil-Military Reforms at Risk*, Adelphi Paper 306 (Oxford: Oxford University Press / International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), 13, 15. The Collegium of the Minister began during the Communist period. As the membership of that body and the current defense council remain essentially the same, arguably, its purpose to depersonalize decision-making and escape from responsibility has not changed.

function extensively, sometimes under disguise or mutation as in the former Yugoslav Republics.⁹

In Serbia, for instance, matériel requirement proposals are reviewed by the minister of defense's collegium. In the case of Macedonia, its collegium comprises the chief of the general staff, his deputy, the director of the staff, and the heads of staff directorates and can include representatives from units and, at one point, even the resident NATO training team. Moreover, many of these countries practice joint meetings of the collegia of the ministry of defense and general staff or, alternately, the chief of defense or chief of the general staff attends the minister of defense's collegium either regularly or by invitation.

Although not secretive, these bodies obscure senior-level decision-making and thereby violate basic Western governance concepts such as the alignment of authority with accountability. Despite their prevalence, printed details regarding the constitution of these bodies is difficult to find, which could explain why some collegia, such as Montenegro's do not formally exist by law. Yet, one can gain an appreciation of the scope of these bodies' responsibilities in the case of the General Staff collegium of the *Vojska Srbije i Crne Gore* (Armed Forces of Serbia and Montenegro), circa 2002, which were based on the practice of the Yugoslav People's Army:

- Analyze the outcome of the general staff's monthly work plan.
- Analyze combat readiness and determine causation of shortcomings.
- Assess the regional intelligence and security situation and determine implications for the country.
- Assess the regional security situation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and analyze its possible implications for the combat readiness of the armed forces and the defense of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
- Analyze the financial situation in the armed forces.
- Determine whether there is a need for organizational changes within the armed forces.
- Manage personnel issues:
 - Regulate the condition in the service, promotions, termination of service, and retention in the service for professional soldiers of the general's rank.
 - Review and approve the colonel's promotion list.
 - Select candidates for professional military education courses.
 - Assign postings of officers completing professional military education.
 - Assign postings of colonels and lieutenant colonels.
 - Manage regular promotion in the rank of colonel and all extraordinary promotions for all professional soldiers.

⁹ While the title collegium is eschewed, Slovenia continues using boards or committees, some of which are related to the collegia functions in all but name.

- Oversee the condition of the service for colonels who are assigned to mobilization units.
 - Determine who should be retained in service as distinguished experts who meet the requirements for retirement.
 - Approve release from service.
 - Analyze the personnel management of the armed forces.
- Propose other issues for the attention of the chief of the general staff at his request.¹⁰

Based upon interviews with officials from numerous defense institutions throughout the region, these terms of reference clearly represent the responsibilities of their own collegium, or defense councils. When examining the strengths and weaknesses of these bodies, an inevitable explanation for their continued utilization is that they provide useful coordination in the absence of the chief of staff concept yet to be fully embraced throughout the region. Another argument is the group's ability to obviate subjectivity, which is important to decision-making such as assignments and promotions.

What should surprise and disturb Western observers is the power *collegia* continue to hold over essentially all aspects of planning and managing Central and Eastern European armed forces. Notably, decision-making is limited to colonels and general officers; the views of others, no matter how well-informed, are not considered. Also vexing is the continued domination of these ranks in human resource management decisions, which violates Western defense governance principles. Coming from a tradition of conscription and an oversized officer corps based on mobilization, those transitioning and newly formed defense institutions lack centralized or integrated human resource structures. Except for the Yugoslav People's Army, these services also lack noncommissioned officers with leadership responsibilities.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, these factors contribute to the legacy practice of using *collegia* for personnel decision-making that extends from individual units up to the general staffs and the ministries of defense.

Fundamentally, this form of collective decision-making undermines commanders' authority to provide professional advice on individuals' performance and prospects for growth and promotion—inherent responsibilities of commanders in Western armed forces. In the West, commanders' recommendations weigh heavily in independent selection board processes to mitigate against favoritism, let alone nepotism. Moreover, as Central and Eastern European defense institutions continue to struggle to adopt Western concepts of defense governance, *collegia* have not been identified for elimination. By continuing the practice of collective decision-making, they release senior officials from accountability and responsibility for their decisions.

One should never underestimate the strength of bureaucratic inertia, and clearly *collegia* are unlikely to be retired without considerable

10 General Staff of the Armed Forces of Yugoslavia, *Order on Authorities of the Organizational Units of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Sector for Manning, Mobilization and Systems Issues, March 20, 2002), section IV (nota bene, translated text).

11 Robert Niebuhr, "Death of the Yugoslav People's Army and the Wars of Succession," *Polemos* 7, no. 13/14 (January 2004): 93.

political pressure. Perhaps a first step would be to assess the function of, and justification for, collegia—for example, Macedonia adopted the chief of staff principle, which should enable objective evaluation of the effectiveness of the director of staff function thereby removing a justification for the continued use of its collegia.

A final concern with collegium is most Western officials and analysts are unaware of their existence, which leads to misunderstandings of the decision-making process, particularly regarding key human resource management functions. As the underlying organization's sociology of decision-making remains misunderstood, Western officials have misdiagnosed the human resource management challenges faced by these organizations. By superficially defining weak personnel structures and processes as the challenges, Western officials and analysts have missed the key organizational sociology cause. The reason human resource management directorates appear to be underperforming by Western expectations is due to these relatively new bureaucratic bodies existing in a parallel bureaucratic universe where power continues to be exercised by collegia.

Accordingly, human resource management directorates concern themselves with administration and the exercise of negative control with hardly any consistent, constructive influence on personnel decisions. Thus, when reforming this key aspect of management, officials need to identify collegia as a reality that can only be addressed within the political context of democratic defense governance. In other words, a bottom-up, technical approach without strong, supportive messaging from national leaders will always be stillborn. Within the legacy of detailed command structures, a directive approach is likely to be much more effective than using Western national models and modeling delegation.

Even more pressing, Western and allied officials must acknowledge the deleterious effect collegia have on developing commanders. The importance of basing performance assessments on the objective assessments by field commanders should be incorporated in efforts to develop leadership, command, management, and decision-making capabilities of partner nations. These efforts should encourage serving in units as a necessary step toward overcoming the current professional strategy of seeking permanent postings on staffs, where decisions are made and power over personnel management decisions is highly concentrated. These current incentives are so misaligned that in some countries, such as Hungary, officers serving on the general staff are better paid than those commanding units.¹² This perverse incentive discourages officers from serving in units, ensuring an institutional disconnect among the general staff, units, and commanders.

Conflating Command and Management

Defense institutions which continue the legacy practice of collective decision-making suffer from another institutional lacuna within the context of the Western concept of defense governance. Whereas all of the Baltic States' divided leadership and command from management—the ministries of defense adopted posts for permanent under-secretaries

¹² Act CCV of 2012 on the Status of Military Personnel, Hungarian Civil Code, 5th Appendix, http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1200205.TV (accessed October 27, 2016).

and the armed forces have directors of staff—this practice is rare, even in Western-leaning Georgia.¹³

By conflating leadership and command with management, it is essentially impossible for a policy framework that drives defense institutions to develop. Rather, power is concentrated in a small body of officials, thereby precluding critical thinking, effective coordination, and consensus-building. Due to centralized decision-making without a designated official whose sole function is to optimize daily functioning of civilian or military organizations, these organizations are also all but incapable of performing effective staff work when judged by Western standards. As James Sherr of Chatham House so presciently observes:

As in other post-communist states, few and far between are those who ask themselves how policies, programmes and directives should be implemented. The vastly safer and almost universal practice is to await orders about how orders should be implemented. If directives are not to become conversation pieces, their authors must walk them through the system themselves. Not surprisingly, the result is a system overmanned, overworked and largely inert.¹⁴

As a result, there is no consistent management to ensure staff coordination, press decision-making downwards, and allow only the most critical policy issues to be addressed at the minister or the chief of defense level. By allowing, and indeed encouraging, all decision-making to remain with the minister, the chief of defense, and within their collegia, no decision is too minor to be raised to them and modern command and management concepts cannot take hold.

Even the widespread practice of designating deputy ministers and deputy chiefs of defense to run the organization still breaks this principle. These individuals cannot be honest brokers in the staffing process while being members of the leadership team. On the military side of the equation, even the seemingly advanced and reformed Polish defense institution has yet to embrace this concept: two deputies support the Polish chief of defense, but there is no chief of staff. This inability to divide command from management in Poland is remarkable considering it was a key reform principle identified as early as 1992.¹⁵ Confusing hybrid models, such as the Czech armed forces who have both a first deputy chief of defense as well as a deputy chief of defense and chief of staff, also exist.

Conflating these two responsibilities produces yet another practice whereby commanders and staff officers are not allowed to develop properly. While the concentration of power may suggest an illusion of control, in reality, the system incentivizes officers to become micromanagers. Officers are taught by examples of senior officers to focus inward

13 Regarding the Lithuanian Ministry of Defense see, Vaidotas Urbelis and Tomas Urbanas, “The Challenges of Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Control of Armed Forces: The Case of Lithuania,” in *Democratic Control of the Military in Postcommunist Europe: Guarding the Guards*, eds. Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds, and Anthony Forster (London: Palgrave, 2002), 117–18. For more on Georgia’s structure of the ministry of defence and joint staff, see Ministry of Defence of Georgia, *Georgia, Strategic Defence Review, 2013–2016* (Tbilisi: Ministry of Defence, 2013), 22, 23.

14 James Sherr, “Civil-Democratic Control of Ukraine’s Armed Forces: To What End? By What Means?,” in *Army and State in Postcommunist Europe*, eds. David Betz and John Löwenhardt (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 74.

15 Andrew A. Michta, *The Soldier-Citizen: The Politics of the Polish Army after Communism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 50–53.

on the organization as opposed to looking outward and thinking critically and creatively.¹⁶ These expectations cripple strategic-level thinking, thereby inhibiting thoughts of creating a future for the organization and dooming the armed services to live always in the past.¹⁷

Centralizing Financial Decision-Making

When the Cold War ended, every former post-Communist country found itself in a state of economic crisis. Strong pressure to decrease defense spending was accompanied by an outbreak of conflicts in Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, and Bessarabia, which further stressed defense budgets. None of these defense institutions, with the exception of the Yugoslav Territorial Defense Force, found themselves with a heritage of a modern defense planning nor a financial management system that would enable them to conduct even the most rudimentary defense planning.¹⁸

With a universal focus on effecting civilian control and shrinking bloated Communist-era defense budgets, the fastest way to seize civilian control of the armed forces was by removing budget responsibilities from general staffs. Newly elected political leaders and civilian defense officials centralized all financial decision-making within ministries of defense. In the case of the Yugoslav armed forces, whose commanders possessed their own budgets and spending authorities, the subsequent centralization of finances constituted a major step backwards. Conversely, the Czech defense budget circa 1993 was almost incomprehensible to civilian government officials who were challenged to ascertain actual spending. In 1996, then-Czech Minister of Defense Vilem Holan launched a major reform that included the introduction of the “revolutionary” concept of double-entry bookkeeping management.¹⁹

Thus, the immediate task confronting early democratic reformers was to find effective financial management methods to stop defense institutions from spending public funds needed elsewhere. What began in the early years of democracy to make defense “fit” its budget has become an all but impossible task. Notwithstanding reductions in force structure and personnel, retaining needless infrastructure continues to waste money. To appreciate the enormity of this task, upon independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 2006, Montenegro took possession of 12,000 tons of munitions and 242 pieces of real estate and 1,450 buildings it still owned in 2013.²⁰

Established with Western technical assistance, planning, programming, and budgeting system directorates placed unrelenting pressure on centralizing financial decision-making that has only increased following

16 Agnieszka Gogolewska, “Problems Confronting Civilian Democratic Control in Poland,” in *Civil-Military Relations in Europe: Learning from Crisis and Institutional Change*, eds. Hans Born, Marina Caparini, Karl W. Haltiner, and Jürgen Kuhlmann (New York: Routledge, 2006), 101.

17 The author is indebted to retired Colonel Vladimir Milenski, Bulgarian Army, for suggesting this most insightful observation.

18 See Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Yugoslavia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1992), 252; and Milojica Pantelic, “The System and Organization of National Defense,” *Yugoslav Survey* 10, no. 2 (1969): 6.

19 Jeffrey Simon, *NATO and the Czech and Slovak Republics: A Comparative Study in Civil-Military Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 35.

20 Montenegro Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review 2013* (Podgorica: Ministry of Defence, 2013), 19.

the 2008 crisis—for example, Slovenia’s defense budget was savaged by a 34.6 percent reduction from 2007 to 2015.²¹ Historically, these directorates have effectively maintained their own bureaucratic autonomy, though they have been particularly ineffective at translating any existing defense policy priorities and plans into measurable defense outcomes.²² This hypercentralized financial decision-making has produced practices in which the general staffs of such nations as Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Serbia conduct force planning absent financial inputs.

It is not surprising that few of these defense institutions have been capable of producing or executing viable defense plans. Thus, a unique managerial pathology has emerged throughout the region: ministries of defense not only manage all aspects of finances but also do so without considering whether outcomes are achievable. Instead, salaries, pensions, military hospitals, and social welfare benefits—such as spas and even a ski resort in Bulgaria—have become default priorities that have produced under-staffed units, limited flying hours, and reduced ship days at sea.

Undermining Commanders

The confluence of the Communist trinity of legacy concepts inhibits armed forces from developing leaders and fostering an environment for encouraging well-rounded, professional commanders to emerge. Even in reformed defense institutions, such as in Slovenia, the chief of defense controls no more than five percent of the force’s budget and the midterm defense program restricts battalion commanders’ abilities to manage finances to meet assigned missions and tasks.²³ Thus, junior leaders are not expected nor groomed to understand the relationship between fiscal management and force outcomes necessary for mid- and senior-grade postings.

Ministries of defense even determine personnel numbers and present them to chiefs of services as de facto decisions as well as regularly prohibit these senior leaders from moving money from one category to another to produce outcomes. Even worse, commanders who should have the best appreciation of which leaders have both performed well in stressful command postings and have the potential for succeeding in more challenging command environments are not permitted to influence personnel management decisions comparable to Western practices.

Such decision-making, again, is highly centralized in general staffs and ministries of defense. Arguably, the authority of the chief of defense in Slovenia is diluted since his list of officer promotion recommendations is first vetted by the Intelligence and Security Service before being forwarded to the human resource management directorate, a practice one Slovenian general associates with control mechanisms and an ignorance of military advice. Legislation even enables untrained and

21 Slovenia Ministry of Defense, *NATO Defence Planning Capability Review 2015/16*, ANNEX 1. AC/281-WP(2016)0024 (R), (Ljubljana: Ministry of Defense, n.d.), 1–4. For more on US assistance programs in the area, see US Department of Defense, *FY 2010 Annual Report on Cost Assessment Activities* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2011), 20, appendix 2.

22 Thomas-Durell Young, “Is the US’s PPBS Applicable to European Post-Communist Defense Institutions?” *RUSI Journal* 161, no. 5 (October–November 2016): 68–77, doi:10.1080/03071847.2016.1253382.

23 Branimir Furlan, “Civilian Control and Military Effectiveness: Slovenian Case,” *Armed Forces and Society* 39, no. 3 (2012): 442, doi:10.1177/0095327X12459167.

unqualified individuals to become commanders or take staff postings thereby undermining the basic concept of military professionalism.²⁴

This pervasive practice of negative civilian control undermines the professional growth of the officer corps by denying demanding command and staff postings. Equally, these practices preclude officers from acquiring a full appreciation of all aspects of the operation of the armed forces, particularly their financial implications and realities. In short, *management* of the armed forces is really a misnomer while *administrating* is clearly observable in the absence of experienced, professional military advice. The persistence of the Communist trinity of legacy concepts is nothing short of scandalous.

Despite the claim that such legacy practices constitute “national business” exempt from allied discussions, these practices produce senior leaders who have not been exposed to the same professionally challenging assignments as their Western counterparts: this fact ultimately creates problems in allied commands and multinational forces. Succinctly, the alliance should be interested in developing senior commanders who are capable of controlling the financial and human resources necessary for combined operations.

To be sure, there are always exceptions to the rule, but one cannot ignore the possibility that limiting these officers from the same professional challenges enjoyed by their Western counterparts produces an officer corps with stunted professionalism. Equally, in lieu of healthy civil-military relations, one finds an unbalanced relationship substituting uninformed and risk-adverse administration for military professionalism.

Implications and Solutions

Arguably, Western and legacy command concepts are antithetical; however, the Communist trinity of legacy concepts—collective decision-making; conflating leadership, command, and management; and hypercentralized decision-making—undermines the very basis of the Western definition of command. Absent a change in alliance policy and the selection of allied commanders, only time will tell how the stark conceptual rift between Western and residual legacy practices will affect the ability of commanders from these armed forces to operate within the alliance’s integrated military command structure. How have 25 years of cooperation with NATO and its nations’ armed forces missed addressing this important challenge? Answers to this question are more easily found in both Western and Eastern *policy* failures.

The Western approach of providing assistance to new partners and allies has stressed technical solutions, often using Western models that have failed to address the two antithetical concepts of command. Moreover, Western nations’ training and professional military educational courses, which expose students to modern warfare, leadership, and management approaches, have only been partially successful. Appreciation (and one wonders, recognition) that this knowledge is highly contextualized and cannot easily be exported to different national and organizational environments has been lacking. As David Ralston

²⁴ Ibid., 441–42.

writes in the context of exporting European army models in the nineteenth century, “The reformers were to learn, often to their dismay, that the introduction of European forms and methods into their military establishments would sooner or later oblige their societies to undergo internal adjustments which were by no means trivial.”²⁵

Simply put, the conceptual difference between Western and Eastern defense and military concepts are so antithetical the adoption of the former is all but impossible without retiring the entire conceptual basis of legacy defense institutions. Even when legacy armed forces adopt some key Western-influenced reforms, junior and noncommissioned officers voice complaints that NATO procedures are faithfully followed during operations but legacy concepts prevail at home. Many young officers and NCOs, including many with operations experience, chafe at this reality.

The existence of this major differentiation in the concept of command clearly needs wider understanding and attention by all NATO nations. The traditional solution of “reform” needs to be rethought. Like it or not, past assistance policies and programs have neither identified this conceptual command divide nor produced any effective methods to address it. This challenge to the Western alliance simply cannot be addressed at the technical level alone. To be sure, Western training and professional military education courses have their place. What needs to be acknowledged by senior officials in both Western and Eastern capitals is the conceptual divide in command, as well as other areas, is due to subtle factors that can only be addressed with a deep understanding of organizational sociological, conceptual, and political characteristics.

To be blunt, only Eastern allies at the level of presidents and prime ministers—officials who need to accept the urgency of effecting changes in how commanders are groomed, are selected for stressful and growing assignments, and are expected to command—can successfully address the contrast. After all, in any military organization, command is the “coin of the realm” and changing its basic characteristic will strike at the very institutional soul and enabling culture of an armed force. Such an initiative will not be easily accepted, particularly in the more profound legacy-leaning defense institutions where Western and legacy concepts of professionalism are antithetical and therefore incapable of coexisting (see table 2).²⁶ Thus, senior Western political and military officials need to be prepared to exert sharp and consistent political pressure on their counterparts for the comprehensive exculpation of legacy concepts and assumptions as well as their replacement with modern Western concepts. Assuredly, these will be politically painful, fundamental changes.

25 David B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions into the Extra-European World, 1600–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 173.

26 Michael H. Clemmesen, “Integration of New Alliance Members: The Intellectual-Cultural Dimension,” *Defense Analysis* 15, no. 3 (December 1999): 261–72, doi:10.1080/713604685; and Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Case of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 108–53.

Table 2. The Professional Conceptual Divide²⁷

Western concepts	Eastern concepts
Practical	Theoretical
Critical thinking is required	Iron discipline rules
Decentralized execution	Centralized execution
Commanders are empowered	Commanders only execute
Results oriented	Process oriented
Future oriented	Past obsessed
Low social context	High social context
Serve the troops	Mistreat soldiers (Dedovshchina)
Low power distance	High power distance
Low uncertainty avoidance	High uncertainty avoidance
Lying is unacceptable	Lying is not a sin
Failure is part of learning	Failure is never an option, but a shame and disgrace

Conclusion

In summary, command as defined and practiced in many Central and Eastern European defense institutions, and expressed as a Communist trinity of legacy concepts, could not be more foreign and antithetical to Western approaches. This premise should come as no surprise since communism's absolute centralization of power never entrusted lower officials with decision-making authority. Bereft of responsibility and accountability, the legacy definition of command constitutes absolute power over individuals, which likely explains why most newly independent republics systematically compromise commanders' abilities to command. Largely absent in the region is a timely evolution of laws, policies, incentives, and control mechanisms that ensure the responsible exercise of command.

Yet, these concepts and practices are too limited by the continued practices of collective decision-making; conflating leadership, command, and management; and hypercentralized decision-making to be effectively adopted, particularly regarding financial authorities and human resource management. Overcoming these legacy concepts and comprehensively replacing them with their Western counterparts presents no small challenge. An encouraging first step would be NATO nations' universal and honest acknowledgement of the challenge and their commitment to addressing these atavistic legacies with deliberate and systematic new methods to effect change.

The only way to undertake this challenge is to place the solution where it belongs, at the highest political level. Thus, the default of long-standing policies and programs that address defense reform as a military problem addressed via technical assistance programs alone needs to be fundamentally reviewed to develop new approaches based on a deep understanding of individual cultures and organizational sociologies. The solution to reforming legacy command concepts will be found in growing and empowering commanders.

²⁷ Adapted from Young, "Impediments to Reform."