Despite changes that war and militaries have undergone during the past decades, conventional wars continue to somehow enchant professional soldiers. These kinds of wars provide templates for understanding conflict, prescriptions for proper soldierly conduct and bases for motivating troops. The strength of these templates is expressed in basic training, appraisals of “irregular warfare,” or the allocation of prestige among soldiers. I examine the continued appeal of conventional wars through a focus on social imaginaries: how people imagine their social existence.

I do not argue that the armed forces are not changing (clearly they are), nor do we deny that they are marked by significant internal variety (for example, in terms of military roles, ideals of professionalism or types of units). I contend, however, that the power of imaginaries of conventional wars (themselves social and historical creations) center on the following seven interrelated points: their conceptual clarity (such as clear boundaries between us and them, the front and the rear), narrative coherence (they have clear beginnings, middle and ends), emotional resonance (with manhood and heroism), motivational simplicity (such as camaraderie and caring within and between ranks), moral legitimacy (ideas about “good” and “just” wars), diagnostic utility (for evaluating military achievements) and prescriptive straightforwardness (for soldierly action).

I end by suggesting the wider implications of my analysis for changing military professionalism.
Sweden’s military finds itself in a transitional situation for a number of reasons. It became an all-volunteer force in 2010 and now has re-introduced the conscription that was abandoned before. The purpose of its use has altered as well. It has gone from a military conceived of as defense of the home country with an international peace-keeping mission to, for a time, a combat-oriented constituent of international incursions such as Afghanistan, and then in yet another alteration, to becoming once again a credible national defense against increased sabre-rattling from Moscow. In addition, in its gender-neutral conscription politics, it finds itself in the avant-garde of change for what have typically been seen as male roles. As a result, the military in Sweden, as well as in other Western countries, finds itself in troubling times with respect to its understanding of its own purpose, and hence of how to understand and achieve military professionalism. How much training do members need (technical how-to skills) vs. how much education (ability to reason in unfamiliar circumstances/big picture thinking)? In addition, there is something that must underpin all decisions regarding the nature of military raining/education and its content. This thing is a mindset that we must remain focused on while we consider the nuts and bolts of more precise questions regarding how to achieve it, what I call Pride Without Arrogance.

The Scylla of the military in democratic societies is a lack of sense of purpose: why am I doing what I do? The Charybdis of the military, however, is overweening arrogance, something that is a problem both in the US military (currently the most-esteemed US institution according to surveys, well beyond political ones) and at my home institution, the US Naval Academy. The military needs a sense of self-worth, but we can’t give it to them by telling them they are better than the civilians they defend—though in the US and at USNA, we do precisely this. The Swedish military, like every military in a democracy, needs a sense of self-worth and purpose that does not depend on denigrating the civilians it serves. In the US we have failed to articulate or inculcate this sense; perhaps a clearer articulation of it in the midst of Sweden’s transitional times would be helpful as well.
The military and family institutions are inextricably linked and the military family harbors specific demands that collectively set it apart from other professions. Modern military families have consistently struggled with the greediness of both work and the family and research confirmed that when military families suffer, military service members’ readiness is greatly eroded. In the post-9/11 era, both the greediness and demands of the military family lifestyle are hypermagnified and labored. More compelling, the post-9/11 military family is more diverse, generationally distinct, and inundated with social and mass media. I have conducted 200 interviews with Army spouses across the past 15 years whose uniformed partner experienced one or more deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan. Salient topics include mass and social media, interpersonal communication, the deployment cycle, children and adolescents, stress, coping, and (in)formal support services. Despite difficulties, there are a number of positive attributes associated with military family life in the face of multiple deployments. Post-9/11 military families may be settling into a norm of nonresidential partners and parent(s)—a commuter Army.
Making Military Professionalism Great
Again and Again and Again ... 
by
Anders Mc Sookermany, PhD, LTC and Senior Researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies in Oslo

There is an everyday understanding of military professionalism that it is built on a kind of everlasting solidity made up of unbiased knowledge, established skills and a communal shared behavior. In fact, to some extent we can argue that professional practice, as an organized activity, is an expression of modernity’s inherent will to structure, systematize and standardize its practice in hope of eternal progress. As such, the grand narrative of military professionalism exemplifies a typical story of modern mainstreaming. Progress, within such a framework, is perhaps best viewed as a further almost linear development in continuation of earlier activities, practices or even achievements. Hence, we could assert that progress is described, understood and explained within an evolutionary developmental framework.

Nonetheless, there are numerous examples of improvements in regards to the military profession, both on and off the battlefield, implying that progress is not linear, but rather signifies a break with the past. This could be the introduction of technological inventions (gunpowder, airplanes, night vision, GPS), societal change (industrialization, globalization), political reorientation (end of the Cold War, Out of Area operations), tactical developments (mission-oriented tactics, lean manning concepts), organizational and managerial transformation (New Public Management) and much more. Accordingly, progress may better be described, understood and explained outside of the existing interpretive framework, hence, within a revolutionary developmental framework.

In this talk I will make an effort to look underneath the surface of modern military professionalism, as in an effort to challenge the things we take for granted in the development of Military Professionalism. In doing so I will build on earlier work on developing postmodern soldiers by adding new insight from my later works on gamechangers, learning under risk and the handbook of military Sciences.

In essence, I will make the case that for military professionalism to continuously be relevant it need to be adaptable in the sense that it should foster a developmental mindset based on open-mindedness, curiosity, and critical thinking.
“Not just fun and trickery”
the significance of Excitement Motivation when deploying to war
a case study of Danish Soldiers in Afghanistan

by

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Why do soldiers deploy to war? Often, the answer to that question relies on a perception of motivation as a cost/benefit-calculus. In light of the heavy "costs", that is in light of the fact that going to war is one of the most dangerous things you can do, the "benefits" required, that is the reasons for going, should be substantial. However, findings from recent studies seem to short-circuit this perception as they suggest that soldiers do not deploy in spite of the danger, but because of the danger. By using quantitative and qualitative data, collected with Danish combat troops before and after their tour to Afghanistan in 2011, this study shows that although excitement plays an important role when soldiers deploy, excitement is not seen as a "fun and trickery", as a way of transgressing of social boundaries. On the contrary, these soldiers regard excitement-seeking as something that can only legitimately take place within the boundaries of the military profession.

He is heading the Working Group on the Military Profession in the European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS), and has published work on military sociology in numerous journals including Armed Forces & Society, Qualitative Psychology, and Public Administration Review.