

## **WHAT IS MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM AND ARGUE WHETHER OR NOT IT GUARANTEES PRODUCTIVE CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS?**

Rising political tensions across the world are increasing the complexities of national security matters and continuously demonstrates the importance of civil-military relations (CMR). A core component of CMR is the concept of military professionalism, but despite its evolving nature, policymakers still approach the military profession with Samuel Huntington's traditional views. The aim of this essay is, therefore, to contextualize and redefine Huntington's military professionalism in contemporary times, to answer the question of what military professionalism is and whether it guarantees productive civil-military relations. After briefly revisiting Huntington's arguments, the role of military professionalism today will initially be examined in the context of government-military interactions. Using examples from the UK, political knowledge as part of military professionalism will be studied, together with the implications of an expanding military expertise. Then, to address military professionalism in societal-military relations, Sweden will serve as a case in point, where the liberal development and increasing transparency of the military profession will be accentuated, to investigate how this better aligns civil-military interests. A conclusion will be reached that, in having evolved beyond Huntington, the modern military professionalism facilitates the integration of the civil and military spheres and, thus, improves the environment in which productive CMR can emerge.

Throughout the arguments below, one should remember two conceptual outlooks which shape the scope of this essay. First, is a strong conviction that military professionalism, despite traditional notions of its universalism, is a highly contextual concept that influences CMR differently from state to state, depending on cultural norms and systems of government (Feaver et al. 2005, 233). Yet, in aiming to produce a wide analysis with multiple empirical cases whilst, nevertheless, avoiding significant cultural and conceptual generalizations, the following

arguments have been confined to the, here, sufficiently homogenous environment of Western liberal democracies (Bieliński 2017, 267). A liberal democracy is understood to be a sovereign state shaped by common liberal values, such as progressive individualism and institutional cooperation, within which the society is protected by state-recognized armed forces that adhere to the rule of law (Kundnani 2017, 2-4). Secondly, the orientation of this essay is, further, defined by an objection against the conventional leader-centric understanding of CMR, that focuses on interactions between military and civilian *authorities*. In a democratic setting where civilian authorities are appointed by the public, the term civil-military relations, arguably, lacks a second ‘civil’ in recognition of the interplay between ‘ordinary’ civilians and the military, as well as between civilians and the government in military matters (Sarkesian 1981, 297). The arguments below will thus be formed by this broader sociopolitical perception of the ‘civil’, to highlight underexplored yet critical dimensions of modern CMR.

Before engaging with military professionalism and CMR in contemporary times, one must first identify the foundation from which both concepts have evolved. This allows for a critical dissection of some of the traditional thoughts that still inform civil-military debates and prompts a recognition of their inevitable shortcomings when applied in the context of modern security environments. Samuel Huntington’s *The Soldier and The State* is one of such enduring works which transformed policymakers’ understanding of CMR and military professionalism (Nielsen 2012, 369). In essence, Huntington argued for a conservative realist understanding of military professionalism, where he outlines expertise, responsibility and corporateness as the principal cornerstones of a professional officer corps. For, commissioned officers are the only military personnel which Huntington regards as professionals. Their profession-specific expertise, he states, is the ability to ‘manage violence’, their responsibility is a loyal service to civilian authorities, and their corporateness a unity that forms from the isolationist professionalism and collectivist ideals that underpins it (Huntington 1957, 8-18). Accordingly,

Huntington assumed a 'separation-of-spheres' model, in which the 'military mind' emerges as inherently incompatible with civilian liberal ideologies and, thus, requires a system of objective civilian control to safeguard the superiority of civilian policymaking. The premise of objective control is that, through respecting the strength and weaknesses of each other's professional expertise, civil and military leaders retain autonomous power in the decisions most important to them and, thereby, ensure effective CMR (Huntington 1957, 83-85). However, as formative as Huntington's work has been to our understanding of military professionalism, one cannot ignore that liberal democracies today have evolved to outgrow several of Huntington's ideals. Thus, it is necessary to expand on Huntington's narrow leader-centric theories and explore the complex realities of modern CMR, shaped by a more progressive military professionalism.

To advance upon defining this progressive military professionalism and its impact on productive CMR, one must recall the twofold understanding of 'civil' and begin by examining the role of military professionalism in the political context of government affairs. As the traditional arena of CMR, government-military cooperation has long been approached with Huntington's apolitical definition of professionalism but, arguably, this belittles the professional services which the military provides to policymakers (Nix 2012, 92-100). For, if it is the military's professional responsibility to provide expert advice on the management of violence, officers would actively undermine the value of their professionalism and expertise by refusing to consider the political context in which violence must be managed. Especially in a globalized world with intertwined political tensions, an understanding of both domestic and foreign implications of military actions is required to effectively advise civilian authorities on tactical operations that align with their political aims (Brookes 2020, 34-44).

Whilst political knowledge as a modern attribute of military professionalism, thus, heightens long-term effective CMR, by bringing the military and civil interest spheres closer together it,

nevertheless, carries the short-term risk of poor policymaking by actors growing too confident in the realms of each other's expertise. An example of such confusion between common interests and common expertise is the detrimental military involvement in judging the political motives of the Taliban during the UK withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 (Morgan-Owen and Gould 2022, 561). The answer to avoiding such unproductive civil-military interactions, however, is not to return to Huntington's 'separation-of-spheres' approach and objective control as that, simply, is to disregard the inevitable political context in which military operations occur. Instead, for the politically aware military professional to assist CMR, there needs to be a system of civilian control which structurally recognizes the overlap of military and civil interests and, thereby, allows for a controlled and beneficial integration of expertise. This resonates with the arguments of Peter Feaver and his principal-agent framework (Feaver 2003, 75-80). Still, according to Feaver, the civilian principal can only count on the military agent's full professional potential when civil and military preferences align (Shields 2006, 295). Therefore, civilian appreciation of the political considerations embedded within the modern military profession is vital to ensure maximization of aligned interest and, thus, effective CMR in the complex security environments of today.

In contradicting Huntington and recognizing the 'integration-of-spheres' as a condition for military professionalism, government-military cooperation has, further, heightened as the military expertise of 'managing violence' becomes applicable to political warfare. Most evidently, this is demonstrated by the UK's development of cyber security in the face of contemporary Russian disinformation campaigns, where military specialist expertise is being employed to protect the government and the nation's democratic rights (Kondratov and Johansson-Nogués 2023, 2169-2180). The notion of specialist military expertise, to begin with, is an important aspect to consider, as it challenges the working assumption of Huntington, and Feaver to an extent, that military professionalism is a universal norm and a privilege reserved

for commissioned officers. Cyber security, with its reliance on unit-specific technical expertise found mostly within the ranks of specialist non-commissioned officers, provides striking evidence against this traditional belief, and portrays military professionalism as an umbrella term that encompasses a range of expertise across all ranks (Dandeker and Ydén 2022, 1-9). Not only does this wider understanding of military professionalism enhance productive CMR by multiplying the domains in which military expertise can assist civilian authorities, but it also provides increasingly focused missions for the military to engage in, which has been shown to produce more effective CMR (Burk 2005, 164).

However, as the complexities of the military profession grow with additions such as cyber security, so does the challenge for civilian authorities to understand the operations within the 'military sphere'. This understanding, though, is vital to ensure Huntington's essential element of mutual respect in CMR. Feaver's agency-theory response to this dilemma is to implement a structure of civilian monitoring of the military (Feaver 2003, 2-3). However, monitoring runs the risk of becoming intrusive and signaling mistrust from the government, which would reduce the military's willingness to engage in civil-military cooperation. Establishing mutual respect in modern CMR must, instead, come from a common understanding that it is the military's professional responsibility to be transparent in their work so that the government can fulfil their responsibility of respecting the military's interests and expertise. In other words, transparency as part of modern military professionalism, arguably, is one of the most effective ways of managing the 'civil-military problematique' and to ensure that both military and government can hold each other accountable and, thus, trust each other's expertise and intentions in CMR (Feaver 1999, 214).

When moving beyond government-military relations to consider the societal meaning of 'civil' in CMR, the 'integration-of-spheres' and professional transparency remains instrumental

aspects of modern military professionalism. An interesting case to follow, is the culture of ‘total defense’ in Sweden, and how this notably disputes Huntington’s arguments regarding the purely collectivist ‘military mind’ that stands in isolation from the liberal individualist society. In Sweden, ‘total defense’ has materialized through the establishment of the Swedish Civil Contingency Agency, known as MSB, which is tasked with combining the efforts of military services, civilian agencies and societal actors to heighten a multi-levelled national preparedness for external sabotage and attacks (Sundelius and Eldeblad 2023, 98). The work of MSB aims to highlight individual resilience and solidarity in society as central components of a strong collective defense force, spearheaded by military expertise (MSB 2022). Military and civil actors alike are, thus, cooperating to promote individual development amongst ‘ordinary civilians’ for a greater collectivist good. Not only does this reject Huntington’s isolationist idea of the military profession in society, but also suggests a transformation from his conservative ‘military mind’, towards a more progressive professional mindset. In recognizing common ground for joint societal-military efforts and the benefits of individualism for a better equipped collective, the modern military profession has become increasingly compatible with the liberal democratic society (Strand and Kehl 2019, 295-300).

Ultimately, this liberal compatibility extends Feaver’s argument of ‘integration-of-spheres’ for better CMR to the societal-military level which, subsequently, redefines the premises of CMR, and reduces the normative barriers to more frequent and productive civil-military cooperation across societal and military spheres. It has, in fact, been argued that the biggest challenge to effective societal-military cooperation is not CMR itself, but rather the civil-civil coordination. Highlighted once again is the importance of understanding the interplay between the wide range of civil actors in contact with military professionals, so as not to overlook opportunities for effective CMR (Sundelius and Eldeblad 2023, 99). Finally, this example of Sweden’s ‘total defense’ strategy shows how Huntington’s professional criteria of loyal service to civilian

authorities have expanded to encompass a service to society which, as Morris Janowitz suggests, has tailored the expertise of military professionals towards peacekeeping and national defense (Burk 2005, 156). This, further, aligns the services of the military profession with the interests of the contemporary liberal democratic nation, which increases the likelihood for public support of the armed forces, and productive CMR as a result.

Nonetheless, such public democratic support that produces effective CMR will only stem from a significant public awareness and appreciation for the military profession and their interests. Here, transparency emerges, again, as a virtue of modern military professionalism and emphasizes the importance of creating a public image of the military that resonates with societal values and priorities. Sweden continues to be a good case in point, where the military's extensive use of documentary media and liberal advertisement campaigns has fueled public insight into military operations and created new platforms for societal-military interactions (Juvan and Svete 2020, 227-238). The wish of the Swedish military profession to be portrayed as a defender of liberal values and rights calls to attention the sociological concept of the 'citizen soldier', where soldiers are recognized to be civilian's first (Moskos 1976, 64). This heightens the abovementioned incentive to incorporate democratic rights of liberal individualism into the military professional values, as one then, by aligning the interest of the civilian and the military professional, creates a more willing, effective, and diverse military profession for stronger and increasingly innovative CMR. Some examples of recent motifs in Swedish military media campaigns that accentuates this argument is the feminist and queer narratives, which aims at erasing the narrow Huntingtonian stereotypes of who fits the mold of the military professional 'corporateness', to highlight the societal contributions that each individual can make as a military professional (Stern and Strand 2022, 1-4).

Such modern efforts by the Swedish Armed Forces creates a strong public image of the military profession as a protector of democracy and civil rights, which allows civilians to take greater interest in the military and the functions they provide to them as individuals in their everyday lives. Furthermore, extensive media campaigns grant the public a more transparent insight into the operations and responsibilities of the armed forces which will heighten their understanding of military interests and, thereby, result in more productive civil engagement in political debates on military affairs (Juvan and Svete 2020, 227-238). For, as per definition of a democracy, no governmental decisions are made without engaging the civilian voter. This alludes back to Feaver's agency-theory argument, where he expands his framework to say that that the principal, in fact, is the civilian voter, who appoints the government as an agent who, in turn, controls the military as a specialist agent (Feaver 2003, 5). Consequently, by adopting professional transparency to increase public awareness and appreciation of military expertise and interest, the military can rely on the voter to hold the government accountable to respect the military in their policymaking. This, ultimately, allows the military to better accept the superiority of civilian authorities, based on a strong relationship with society. As a result, more productive CMR will emerge, where civil, societal, and military spheres share the responsibility of protecting and representing each other's expertise.

To conclude, by examining the meaning of military professionalism in contemporary liberal democracies, it has become evident how Huntington's traditional definition of the concept has evolved into a more modern military professionalism, that serves to facilitate productive CMR today. In seeking to define this 'new professionalism', recent UK government-military interactions have made it apparent how the military profession has become more politically aware and increasingly diverse in their expertise. Such a wider understanding of military expertise prompts the recognition of how modern military professionalism is less officer-centric and, rather, encompasses the performance of the military organization as a whole.



Sweden, then, offers a helpful insight into societal-military relations, and highlights how a growing appreciation for liberal individualism has been embedded into the modern 'military mind', and where the professional transparency in media is used to bridge the civil-military gap. This has tailored the professional expertise of the military towards a focus on peacekeeping and the protection of civil rights. Altogether, the modern military professionalism, thus, better integrates the military and civil 'interest spheres' both on a governmental and societal level, and thereby improves contemporary CMR. However, even such a contextualized modern military professionalism inevitably poses its challenges and uncertainties. Therefore, it is important to remember that whilst the military professionalism we see today significantly increases the chances of productive civil-military relations in liberal democracies, such successful relations can never be fully *guaranteed* due to the range of complex sociopolitical variables that influence civil-military environments.

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