



By [Tony Ingesson](#) and [Ray Kimball](#)

Over fifty years have passed since the seminal texts that fundamentally changed the conversation on professional Western militaries were written. Samuel P. Huntington's [The Soldier and the State](#), Morris Janowitz's [The Professional Soldier](#), and Sir John Hackett's [Profession of Arms](#) quickly became benchmark publications that framed the discussion of the military as a profession, their place in Western societies, and modes of civil-military relations. These texts emerged during the brief window between the Korean and Vietnam Wars—the last two wars that America would fight with conscripted forces—a critical and opportune time for the American military.

First, these writers saw on the horizon great changes in the way America would lead, train, organize, and equip its military. Second, the deep introspection in the military following the

victories of the Second World War and, maybe more importantly, the perceived failures of the Korean War, helped shape Western militaries going forward. Finally, in the wake of the professional and ethical failures in Vietnam, these texts were well placed to help shape new, modern, professional militaries.

Following almost two decades in a protracted conflict, now is the perfect time to reassess the profession and the key elements of how we develop professionals. In our chapters of the forthcoming book, [Redefining the Modern Military: The Intersection of Profession and Ethics](#), we address issues of professional identity and mentoring in the military. Both of these topics are enduring and important aspects of the profession of arms and contribute to the ongoing discussion about military professionalism in ways that will resonate with junior officers, NCOs and PME students alike.

For starters, there are a number of problematic aspects with the concept of professions in general, and the military profession in particular which are addressed in chapter five of *Redefining the Modern Military*. Serving in a military organization is not comparable to the classic professions, most notably doctors and lawyers. While doctors and lawyers are subject to their respective universal timeless and non-contextual ethos, a military leader must deal with the added complexity of strategy. Since strategy is derived from politics, it is constantly changing and highly contextual in a way that the tasks of doctors and lawyers are not.

Furthermore, doctors and lawyers are protected by law from political interference in their core duties, which provides them with a high degree of autonomy. This is not the case with military organizations, which can, and often are, micromanaged from the political level. In addition, serving in the military frequently entails being part of a struggle against an enemy, which adds even more complexity and a need to be adaptable.

The concept of a military profession also threatens to either needlessly divide military organizations into professionals and non-professionals, or to include everyone, which stretches it to the point of being meaningless. Instead, military organizations should embrace their uniqueness. Rather than trying to emulate the traditional professions, military leaders should be proud to serve in a vocation that requires a particular skill set and talents, in order to cope with a much wider range of challenges than those encountered by the traditional professions.

As in other professions, the continued development of expert knowledge is a core task of the profession of arms. People are at the core of military service, and their personal and

professional development falls to the stewards of the profession of arms who are charged with maintaining the the culture and ethic of their respective services. Stewards are responsible for mentorship.

Mentoring, as a workplace practice, has a proven track record for developing professional identity. Unfortunately, too many people use “mentoring” as a shorthand for all forms of one-on-one professional development. To the contrary, mentoring is both much narrower and deeper than many military professionals perceive, an argument advanced in chapter nine of *Redefining the Modern Military*.

Aspiring military professionals are working on understanding what mentoring truly is and why it matters for the formation of professional identity. Professionals at all levels must understand the basic terms and definitions associated with mentoring before they can effectively pursue those relationships: What is mentoring, and how does it differ from counseling and coaching? What makes you a mentor or a protégé? How mentoring relationships form, how they end, and the benefits that all participants in the relationship derive from it are explored as well as some aspects of learning theory to show different ways that mentoring relationships directly contribute to the creation of professional identity.

These two aspects of the profession are just a sample of the topics discussed in *Redefining the Modern Military*, where the various authors offer a contemporary look at the profession of arms and the development of its ethic. Taken from different perspectives and based on varied experiences and education, the work as a whole provides a new starting point for discussing the future of the military profession. Though this discussion has encompassed an entire book, the conversation is far from over. That we have a collection of essays produced by company and field grade officers, as well as academics and civil servants from other branches of government, which spans three continents, is in our estimation a good thing. It indicates that the conversation is ongoing, it is broad, and that perhaps most importantly, it includes military members, other recognized professionals, and citizens from the societies they serve.

So long as the conversation exists, the pursuit of a military composed of individual professionals remains alive and the balance between civil authority and military capability is providing the maintenance and attention required within the tolerances of free and democratic societies.

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