

Commanders of the 21st Century: Different Skills of Today Commanders

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Received 2016 May 03; Accepted 2016 May 03.

Keywords: Health, Military Medicine, Leadership Skills

Dear Editor,

Military leadership is a combination of science and art. Armed forces systematically develop commanders and warriors for progressively more stressful positions. Senior commanders are responsible for thousands of humans, manage large budgets, and make decisions that in times of armed conflicts have dramatic impact on both the warriors who serve under their command and the strategic goals of their nation (1, 2).

Military leadership is historically hierarchical naturally and, compared to other fields (industry, education, etc.) very authoritarian. Traditionally, this central authority operating in this heavily hierarchical organization tends to guarantee fast and perfect transmission of orders and other communications. Armed forces traditionally exert military force - in the form of various weapons - on a target and destroy it. But in this setting a commander needs to know how to exert force and maintain focus on a well-defined goal (defeating an enemy target). Therefore, characteristics of the competent 20th century (and before) commander include technical capability, decisiveness and strong goal-directed behavior (2, 3).

Wonderful progresses in information and communication technologies with changes in the nature of warfare expanded the skills that are essential for commanders competence. Although armed forces maintain their traditional and hierarchical structure, this structure is not essential for perfect and fast communication within and between units now. By one mouse click, the 1st person of the armed forces can communicate with everyone in the service (2, 4).

More interesting, modern armed conflicts differ from the past wars. War traditionally occurs between the nations. There were well defined military and nonmilitary targets. Commander knew exactly what his mission was in the war and the operations essential to terminate that mission. Modern armed conflicts are naturally different. Iraq and Syria Islamic state (ISIS) is the best example. It has not a

country state, has a universal and expanded force structure and can only be successful by asymmetric tactics (inflicting military and political damage, without facing them in direct military action that would lead to their defeat). Under such circumstances, commanders must know the enemy, the social geography of the fighting area, technics of effective negotiation with local leaders, how to use social media to take local support for their operations, and many other skills and capabilities (2, 5).

The global military strategy is shifting from preparing only to fight and win traditional wars to focusing on preventing (shaping) and discouraging (detering) armed conflict broadly defined to include war between nations and irregular war, exemplified by ISIS and related threats of non-state entities intent on achieving their political goals through violence. It may be odd, but destroying a factory or an enemy base is a more definable and probably easier objective than working proactively through military, diplomatic and economic strategies to prevent war in the first place (2, 6).

Future commanders must have a skill set that is much more expanded compared to their predecessors. Here is summarized some key commander attributes and skills that should guarantee the competence of the future commanders. Commanders should be technically proficient, understand the theory and practice of war, and understand how to lead and inspire those they command to achieve the mission (2, 7).

A, Develop an egalitarian instead of an authoritarian style and philosophy. Competent armed forces require smart and well educated warriors. Simply ordering people to do things because I said so may work in the short run, but in the long run this approach will fail. This is also true since commanders, from sergeants to generals, will interact with civilians, non-government agencies, and a host of other formal and informal groups to achieve their objectives. Egalitarian commanders genuinely see all people

as important in terms of getting the job done, issue clear guidance to others, and demonstrate high social intelligence. An authoritarian commander is never especially effective (2, 8).

B, Modern commander should be a transformational, not transactional, leadership philosophy. This is somewhat related to the traits. The transformational commander empowers subordinates to achieve the organization's goals. They see developing and growing others as more important than micromanaging schedules, doling out rewards and punishments and enforcing standards (2, 9).

C, Commanders should be culturally clever. To win hearts and minds, and to prevent armed conflicts instead of fighting them, they should be skillful at understanding the culture in which they are deployed, and adept at working with people from diverse backgrounds and cultural practices (2, 10).

D, They should quickly adapt to new technology. Information technology evolves ever more rapidly. Knowing how to harness the power of social media, for instance, enables communication within and outside the leader's own organization. It can be used to reach out the local population in which they are deployed. They should fully understand the technology of their command and control systems, and of weapon systems they may need to employ if military force is required (2, 11).

E, The rules of engagement have changed. Successful military operations minimize killing or being killed. Knowing how to leverage their military power to achieve objectives without injuring or killing others is crucial to long term strategic success.

F, Finally, the successful military leader should be clever at working with other government and non-government agencies to accomplish their mission. Modern armed forces have a unique culture and even their own language (in the form of acronyms and slangs). Developing an environment of true cooperation, basically

acting well with others, is essential if armed forces want to help avoid armed conflicts (2).

Armed forces, given their importance to a nation, should be a forerunner in developing better ways to learn leading others.

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