

Strategies for Promoting Professionalism in Organizations to Reduce Moral Injury: The U.S. Army and Learning from My Lai

Richard A. Lacquement Jr., Ph.D.*

Research Professor of the Military Profession,
US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute

9 May 2023

****The views expressed are the presenter's and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.***

Agenda

- Introduction
- A dreadful and tragic vignette: My Lai
- Professions and society
 - Societal Responsibility
 - Expertise
 - Jurisdictions of practice
- U.S. Army/Military Professionalism
- Threats to professionalism
- Concluding thoughts
- Discussion/Questions

My Lai: 1968

- 16 March 1968: US Army soldiers killed at least 175 and possibly more than 400 Vietnamese civilians—mainly old men, women and children—during a daylight combat(?!?) operation *[official report: 128 enemy body count, 3 weapons captured]*
- Military leaders cover up the incident for a year.
- 29 March 1969: Former soldier Ronald Ridenhour letter to Secretary of Defense and other military leaders
- November 1969: 1st Public report (Seymore Hersh article)
- Lieutenant General Peers Commission report: 24 March 1970
- Army Professionalism study: April-June 1970

Bottom Line: Individual and institutional failures

For an overview, with additional links to documents and other sources, see:

Richard Lacquement, "My Lai: A Stain on the U.S. Army," War Room, June 27, 2018.

<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/special-series/anniversaries/my-lai-a-stain-on-the-army/>

My Lai:

Partial Diagnosis and Treatment

Degraded Professionalism

- Training and education shortcuts
 - Draftees
 - Uneven quality NCOs
 - Officer '90-day wonders'
- Body counts and other metrics
- Degraded moral standards
- "Ticket punching"
- Careerism



Restoring Professionalism

- Training and education improved
 - All Volunteer Force (1973)
 - NCO education system
 - More robust officer standards
- Professional judgment, legal support
- Army values, Laws of armed conflict
- Centralized selection of key leaders
- Improved talent management



Professions and Society

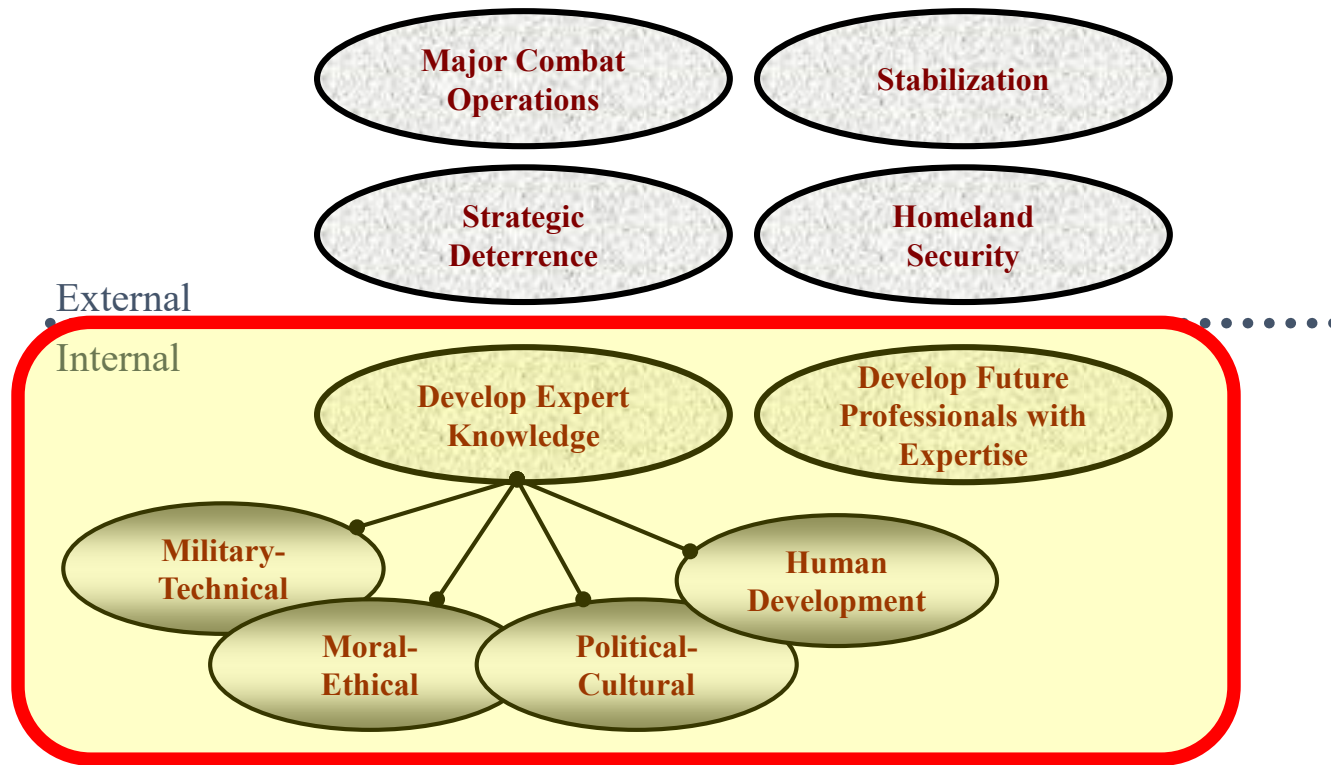
- Defining element of a profession is expertise in a distinct, usually abstract or esoteric, body of knowledge [such as medicine, law, spirituality/religion, warfare, education]
- Professions negotiate definitions of expertise and jurisdictions with society and in competition with other professions (Andrew Abbott – System of Professions, 1988)
 - Expertise: “The tasks of professions are human problems amenable to expert service.” (Abbott, p. 35) includes diagnoses, inference, and treatment based on abstract knowledge
 - Jurisdiction of practice: “the link between a profession and its work...” (Abbott, p. 20)
 - Human Development of professionals

U.S. Army/Military Professionalism

...Refined to reflect this quintessentially human endeavor, the core expertise of American officers can be restated as follows: **The peculiar skill of the military officer is the development, operation, and leadership of a human organization—a profession—whose primary expertise is the application of coercive force on behalf of the American people;** for the Army officer, such development, operation, and leadership occurs incidentally to sustaining America's dominance in land warfare. In abbreviated form, ... **“Leadership of Army soldiers in the organized application of coercive force.”**

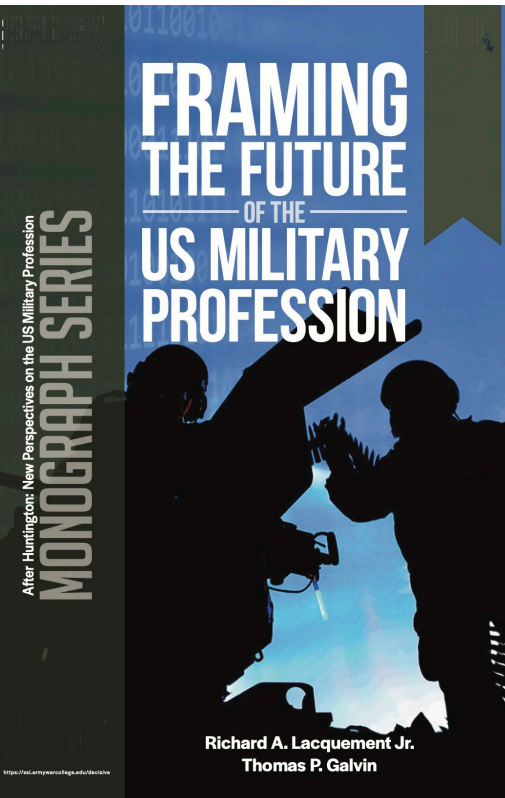
Future of the Army Profession, p. 215

Clarifying Competitive Jurisdictions of American Military Profession



Contemporary US Military Challenges

- Changing character of war (to include the significance of new domains such as space and cyberspace that are underpinned by advanced technology)
- Expansive view of the applicability of military capabilities (such as the potential over-militarization of US foreign policy and use of the military in circumstances where non-military expertise and capabilities might be more appropriate)
- Lack of strategic effectiveness in recent conflicts (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria) despite strong operational and tactical performance
- Pressures on the military to adapt and conform to emerging societal norms, such as areas of diversity and inclusion
- Risks of politicization of the armed forces
- Growing societal rejection of professionalism that has accelerated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic



US Military Profession Leadership Insights

- Relevant expertise at various levels of leadership is not necessarily the same
- Leadership needs of a profession whose highest practitioners must be generalists...but whose career paths favor tactical combat expertise or other specialization
- System of competing national security related professions (service, joint, intelligence, foreign service, development, and...)
- National security—most acutely war—as complex, integrated and interdisciplinary by nature: requires leaders' familiarization with many aspects of society and a daunting demand for discretionary judgment as to how they should be connected

Threats to Professionalism

- Unprofessionalism (scandal, incompetence)
- De-professionalism (laicization, commodification)
- Anti-professionalism (anti-intellectualism/rejection of expertise, bureaucratization)

- Indicators of lack of trust in a profession:
 - Client/societal efforts to seek alternate remedies (friends, neighbors, web pages)
 - Increases in laws/regulations circumscribing a profession's activity
 - Increased competition from other organizations/professions

Concluding thoughts

- How are professions led? (leaders' expertise, selection, authority, organizations, hierarchy, bureaucracy, etc.)
- Professional stewardship: responsibility to sustain, maintain vigilance through individual and institutional development.
- Develop and refine expertise to meet enduring, changing, and new/emerging professional challenges (e.g., national security for military, health for medical doctors).
- Set professional context for individual professionals and associated institutions/organizations to serve ethically in meeting societal needs.

Discussion/Questions

Back Up Slides

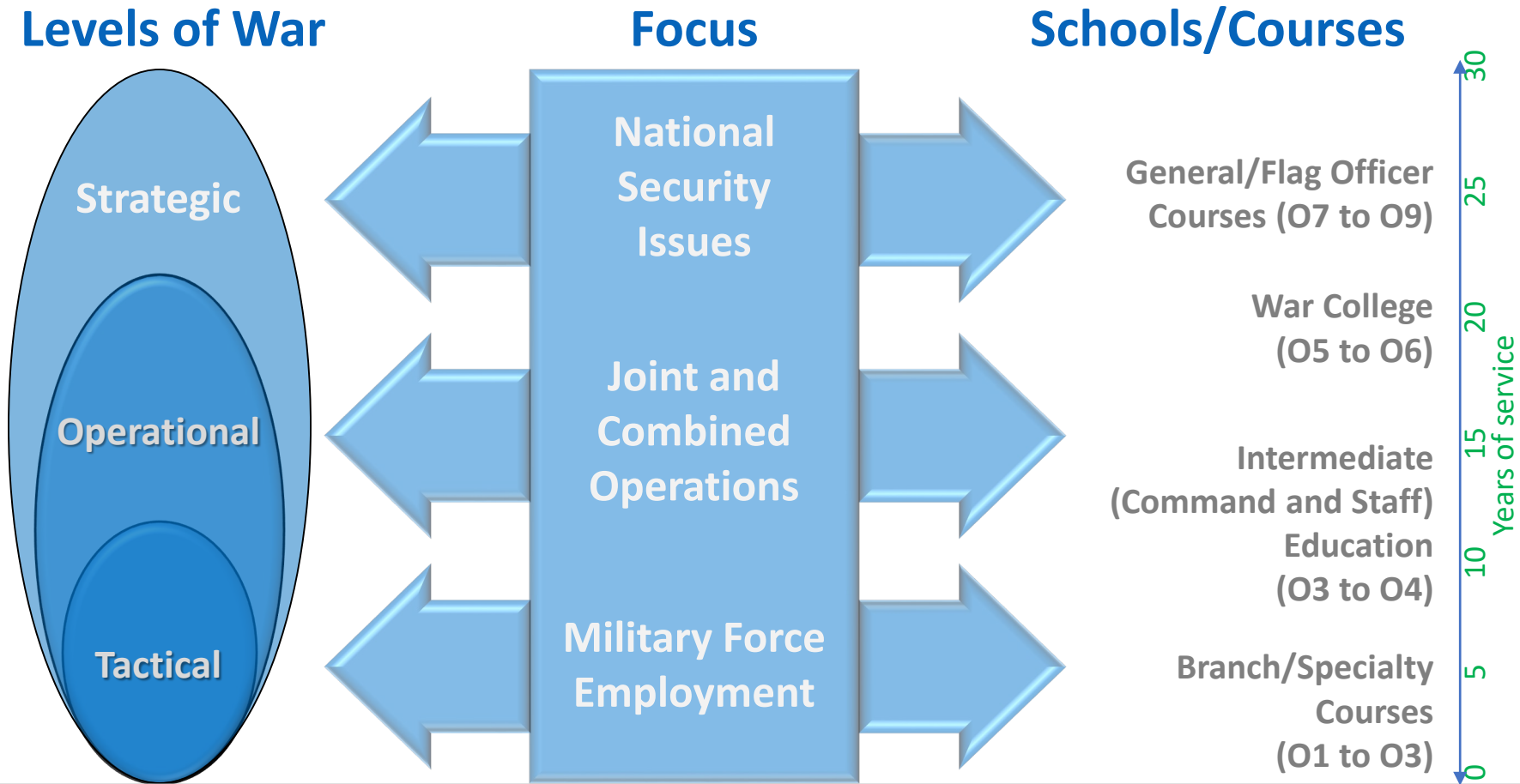
Map of Expert Knowledge (Army)

Expertise Applicability and Priority →		Ia. Army Primacy	Ib. Army and Other Services Share Unique Expertise	II. Army Adapts Civilian Professional Expertise	III. Army may Adapt Civilian Professional Expertise or Hire Civilian Professionals	IV. Army Hires Civilian Professionals
Character of Expertise →		Core	Core	Core Support Army and Society	Acquired	Borrowed
How Acquired →		Army Exclusive Army	Military Exclusive Military	Society with Army Component Army	Contract in from society	Contract out to society
Developmental Responsibility →		Army	Military	Society with Army Component Army	Society with Army Quality Control Army and Society	Society
Certification →		Army	Military	Army	Army and Society	Society
Military Technical Expert Knowledge	Leadership of Human Organizations in Application of Coercive Force	X (sustained land warfare)	X (general warfare)			
	Land Combat	X				
	Land Combat Support	X				
	Joint Operations		X			
	Combined Operations		X			
	Admin/Logistics			X		
	Engineering/Science			X		
Cyber/info operations			X			
Human Development Expert Knowledge	Leadership	X				
	Human Behavior			X		
	Physical Fitness			X		
	Education			X		
	Combat Medicine			X		
	Family Medicine				X	
Social Work				X		
Moral-Ethical Expert Knowledge	Military Ethics	X	X			
	Character Development	X	X			
	Legal/Just war			X		
	Soldier Spirituality			X		
Political-Cultural Expert Knowledge	Advice on Behalf of and Representation of the Profession	X	X			
	Military Governance	X				
	Political Negotiation			X		
	Diplomacy (attachés)		X	X		
	Resource Acquisition & Management				X	X
Other	Basic Research					X

Army Jurisdictional Claims

Jurisdictions	Army Negotiation Claims	
	Expert Knowledge (internal)	Expert Work/Priority (high, medium, low)
Army Tasks		
Major Combat Operations		
OFFENSIVE <i>LAND</i> OPERATIONS "Aim at destroying or defeating an enemy."	FULL	HIGH
Defeat/destroy the enemy decisively	FULL	HIGH
Disrupt enemy defenses/coherence	FULL	HIGH
Secure or seize terrain	FULL	HIGH
Deny enemy resources	FULL	HIGH
Fix the enemy	FULL	HIGH
Gain information	FULL	HIGH
DEFENSIVE <i>LAND</i> OPERATIONS	FULL	HIGH
Defeat enemy attacks	FULL	HIGH
Defend terrain (including homeland)	FULL	HIGH
Develop conditions favorable for resuming offense	FULL	HIGH
Stability Operations "promote and protect U.S. national interests"		
Peace Operations (peacekeeping, peace enforcement, support of diplomatic efforts)	FULL	HIGH
Foreign Internal Defense (includes counterinsurgency combat)	FULL	HIGH
Security assistance	SHARED	MEDIUM
Support to insurgencies	FULL	HIGH
Combating terrorism	SHARED	HIGH
Noncombatant evacuation	SHARED	HIGH
Humanitarian and civic assistance	SUBORDINATE	LOW
Relief operations (foreign)	SUBORDINATE	LOW
Arms control	SUBORDINATE	LOW
Strategic Deterrence (Deter adversaries; Assure allies)		
Global situational awareness (intelligence)	SHARED	HIGH
Presence and deterrence	SHARED	HIGH
Peacetime military engagement (mil-to-mil contacts—exercises, training, education, visits)	SHARED	HIGH
Rapid response and preclusion	SHARED	HIGH
Deterrence information operations	SHARED	HIGH
Show of force	SHARED	HIGH
Homeland Security		
Defeat threats in forward regions	SHARED	HIGH
Defeat land threats to the homeland	FULL	HIGH
Relief operations (domestic)	SUBORDINATE	LOW
Support to domestic consequence management	ADVISORY	MEDIUM
Support to counter drug operations	SUBORDINATE	LOW
Support to civil law enforcement	SUBORDINATE	LOW
Community Assistance/Emergency preparedness	SUBORDINATE	LOW

Officer Professional Military Education (PME) Concept



Pre-Commissioning: Service Academies, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), Officer Candidate School (OCS)

Enduring the physical hardship, danger, and uncertainty of combat requires an Army that is professionally committed, and guided by an ethic that motivates and guides its forces in the conduct of missions, duty performance, and all aspects of life.

The Army profession

A trusted vocation of Soldiers and Army civilians whose collective expertise is the ethical design, generation, support, and application of landpower; serving under civilian authority; and entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people.

Consists of...

Profession of Arms

Soldiers of the Regular Army, Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve

Army Civilian Corps

Army civilians serving in the Department of the Army

With a shared identity of...

Trusted Army professional

Honorable servants in defense of the nation—Experts in the performance of duty
Responsible stewards of the Army profession.

All decisions and actions are guided by...

The Army ethic

The set of enduring moral principles, values, beliefs, and laws that guide the Army profession and create the culture of trust essential to Army professionals in the conduct of missions, performance of duty, and all aspects of life.

The Army profession and ethic guide trusted Army professionals as they exercise...

Leadership

The activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.

The leadership requirements model establishes a core set of requirements that inform leaders of the expectations for what they need to be, know, and do.

Combat power unifier and multiplier

Enables exercise of command; supports control through guidance

Establishes framework for leader development



The Army leadership requirements model

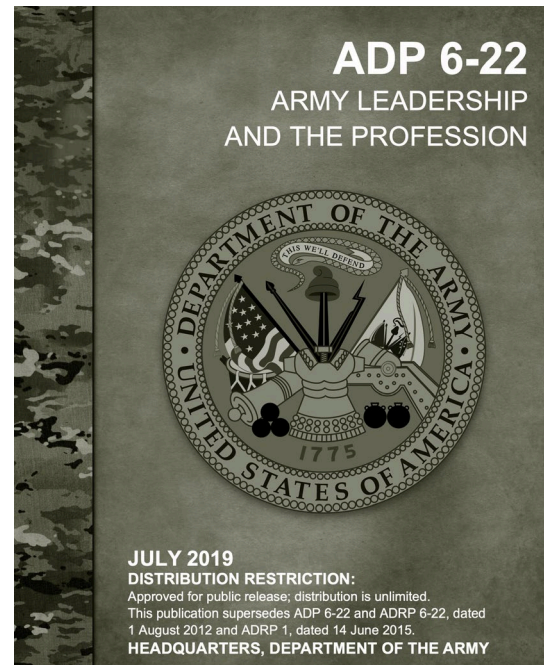
Outcomes

Highly trained Soldiers
Mission accomplishment
Subordinate development

Skilled, empowered leaders
Improved readiness
Mission command culture
Healthy organization climates

Committed DA civilians
Organizational cohesion
Stewardship of resources

ADP 6-22 Logic Map



USMA Core Curriculum

37 Core Course Curriculum

1	Chemistry 1
2	Physics 1
3	Chem 2 / Physics 2 / Bio
4	Math (Modeling)
5	Math (Calculus)
6	Math (Statistics)
7	Cyber 1 (IT)
8	Cyber 2 / STEM Depth
9	Physical Geography
10	Eng Sequence course 1
11	Eng Sequence course 2
12	Eng Sequence course 3
13	Economics
14	Political Science
15	International Relations
16	History 1 (Mil His)
17	History 2 (U.S. or Regional)
18	History 3 (Mil Art)
19	Composition

20	Literature
21	Philosophy & Ethical Reasoning
22	Foreign Language 1
23	Foreign Language 2
24	Psychology
25	Constitutional/Military Law
26	Military Leadership
27	Military Science 1
28	Military Science 2
29	Military Science 3
30	Officership (MX400)
31	DPE 1 Boxing
32	DPE 2 Military Movement
33	DPE 3 Personal Fitness
34	DPE 4 Survival Swimming
35	DPE 5 Combat Apps
36	DPE 6 Army Fitness
37	DPE 7 Lifetime Sport

13 Courses for the Major

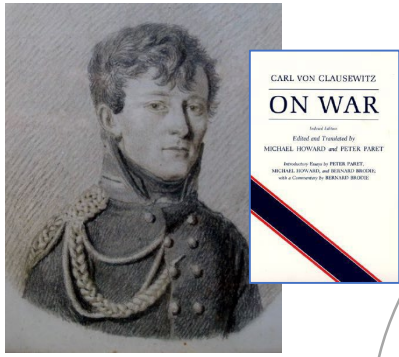
38	Major course 1
39	Major course 2
40	Major course 3
41	Major course 4
42	Major course 5
43	Major course 6
44	Major course 7
45	Major course 8
46	Major course 9
47	Complementary Support Course
48	Complementary Support Course
49	Complementary Support Course
50	Capstone

Integrative Curricular Components

- Human Condition Thread
- Study of War Thread
- West Point Writing Program
- MX400
- Three-Course Engineering Sequence

**Courses in blue are Math, Science and Engineering (MSE) courses. Courses in red are Humanities and Social Science (HSS) courses. Courses in black are courses affiliated with each academic major. Courses in green are credit bearing courses from the Military and Physical Programs.

War & Strategy: Clausewitzian Trinity



“War is a [remarkable] trinity...composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.”

“...Our task therefore is to develop a theory [of war] that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.”

Carl von Clausewitz
On War (1830)

Strategic Leaders

“Strategic leaders represent a finely balanced combination of **high-level thinkers**, accomplished **Soldiers**, and **military experts**. Strategic leaders simultaneously sustain what is necessary within current conditions, **envision the future**, and convey that vision to a wide audience. They often personally **spearhead change**. Their policies guide lifecycles and talent management of all Army personnel. They guide the design and employment of technological advances and establish programs that care for Army families. They secure resources for facilities and infrastructure, weapons and equipment, supply and maintenance, and manpower and force structure. America’s complex national security conditions require strategic leaders with an in-depth knowledge of the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of national power.”

- ADP 6-22 (2019)

Evolution of Military Professional Identity

Embrace a new identity as senior national security leader at the strategic level: master peer leadership; reflective thinking & visioning; courageous communications; leading and stewarding the profession of arms, serving as its exemplar; and self-actualizing.

Mission Specific Roles

(based on assigned duties)

Strategic Advisor &
Communicator

Strategic Theorist

Strategic Planner

Senior, Strategic Leader

Persistent Roles

(expected)

Critical & Reflective Thinker

Steward of the Profession

Networked Leader

Resilient Leader

Required Knowledge by Role

Strategic Advisor	Strategic Theorist	Strategic Planner	Strategic Leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic thinking • Frame of reference • Problem management • Strategic decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic theory • Theory of warfare (Landpower emphasis) • Intl Relations (IR) theory • Civ-mil relations • Strategic Culture • Military history • Economics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic & operational art (Landpower emphasis) • Strategic thinking • Frame of reference • Problem Management • Strategic decision making • Joint & Combined ops • Military history • Economics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic thinking • Frame of reference • Problem management • Strategic decision making
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional ethics • Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS) • Regional Expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Policy processes • Interagency processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Policy processes • Interagency processes • JSPS • Op Design, JOPP as methods of applying strat/op art • Regional Expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a vision • Organizational change/culture • Innovation • Leadership of profession • Professional ethics • Negotiations • DOD Process (JSPS, DM)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications • Team building • Civ-mil relations • Basic research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications • Peer leadership • Team building • Civ-mil relations • Basic research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications • Peer leadership • Team building • Civ-mil relations • Basic research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications • Peer leadership • Team building • Civ-mil relations • Combat leadership • Basic research