Marine Civil Affairs specialist interacts with Afghan children during medical outreach program in Marjah

U.S. Marine Corps (Shawn P. Coover)

A New Way of Understanding (Military) Professionalism

By THOMAS P. GALVIN

Colonel Thomas P. Galvin, USA, is Director of the Commander's Action Group at U.S. Africa Command.

n a previous edition of *Joint Force Quarterly*, Kevin Bond drew needed attention to the dialogue on the nature of professionalism within the U.S. Armed Forces.[1] In his article "Are We Professionals?" he raised important questions concerning our professional identity and addressed them in a fashion that begins useful dialogue.

This question has interested me since my time as an Army Reserve Officer Training Corps cadet nearly 30 years ago. There, I attended the required briefings and seminars promoting the U.S. military's status as a profession and answering criticisms by others that it was not. Ever since, the same themes expressed on both sides surfaced in one way or another, but it always seemed that the dialogue was disjointed and never led to a conclusion. Some observations follow.

First, some of the terminology used is ambiguous and needs clarification. For example, terms such as *society* and *the public* are used as though their meanings were assumed to be that of a single collective. Rather, there are multiple societies that are served (or not served) by professionals at global, national, local, and other levels. These relationships need to be well defined as they could impact how one might weigh professional behaviors.

Another ambiguous term is *profession*. It could mean lines of work, such as doctors, lawyers, and nurses. Field Manual (FM) 1, *The Army*, describes the concept more as a field of knowledge, such as "medicine" and "law," and this description is found under the subject heading of "The American Profession of Arms."[2] Unfortunately, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary accepts both interpretations, each of which can potentially lead to different analyses about professionals.

Another challenge concerns how determination of professional status, whether yes/no or to some "degree," could be affected by cultural choices rather than be a reflection of professional necessity. The successful efforts of nurses to achieve professional status bear this out. Physicians and nurses are both practitioners of the field of medicine, so why was one but not the other professional until now? Was the division of labor professionally necessary, such that the application of knowledge between the two vocations was utterly incompatible, or did it reflect a cultural choice that caused physicians to perform certain tasks and nurses others? Certainly, some nurses

exercise better professional behavior than some physicians. This should be explored in light of presumptions that professional activities tend to be white-collar or intellectual in nature. These characterizations may not be correct, which then sheds new light on vocations that have a heavier physical component, such as the military.

The third challenge concerned the promotion of military professionalism in FM 1, which promotes the profession of arms by describing it as "unlike other professions" such as medicine and law. This can be seen as an uncompelling apples-to-oranges comparison. A stronger argument would include fields whose functions have some overlap with those of the military or that currently perform roles previously belonging to the military. For example, militaries and police forces both exercise lethal force, and the U.S. military historically performed some functions now done by police.

These three challenges stem from a common root—that the approach to defining what is and is not professional has been based on an evaluation of what *is generally considered* professional, as opposed to what *should be*. This article proposes an alternative approach that centers professionalism in the context of fields of knowledge rather than lines of work. From this, we can look systematically at how such fields of knowledge are applied by professionals for the benefit of particular societies and the roles of the communities to which professionals belong. This approach addresses the ambiguities, provides a rational model for determining professionalism in general, and permits an apples-to-apples reevaluation of the fundamental question about the presence and nature of professionalism in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Domains

This approach begins with adding a new term to the lexicon, one borrowed from mathematics. *Domain* refers to a "field of knowledge" along with its purpose, associated sciences (data, analysis, and processes), and arts (application, attributes, and ethics). Domains are global, unitary, and dynamic, fed by the continuous discovery of new knowledge and the refutation or elimination of that which is obsolete or proven wrong.

Domains are defined by their purpose, and a quick review of the lines of work commonly identified as professional suggests that there is a small number of domains that cover

> *the approach to defining what is and is not professional has been based on an evaluation of what is generally considered professional, as opposed to what should be*

most of them. One possible set of definitions follows. The domain of *medicine* is the art and science of healing. Likewise, *law* serves as the art and science of regulating societies, *education* (for example, the work of teachers, professors, librarians) transmits knowledge and experience, *finance* (accountants, actuaries, statisticians) manages and regulates resources, *engineering* (architects, engineers) designs systems, structures, and processes that address a societal need, and *clergy* (leaders and providers of all religions) guides and administers religious beliefs and faith.

Initially, the domain related to the military is referred to as *arms*, defined as the art and science of employing violence to defend a society.

Most domains are aligned against multiple lines of work because each is too broad for individual practitioners to apply effectively. Societies have thus developed divisions of labor (vocations) in which individuals master a portion of the arts and sciences to perform specific applications. These portions will be called *subdomains*, which can overlap within a domain although they represent discrete applications that practitioners cannot readily migrate from one vocation to another. A pharmacist aspiring to become a physician may gain some educational credit for pharmaceutical training, but still must meet all other eligibility requirements of a physician.

Which domains should be considered as having the greatest potential for "professional" application? Domains considered important toward the functioning or stability of societies or the welfare of individuals, and that are complex, specialized, and outside the realm of knowledge ordinarily attained by the average person, ought to be considered suitable. The level of importance can also be measured in the results of misapplication, whether intentional or not. Can unprofessional activities cause indelible harm that should not be ignored? Analyzing domains against these criteria is straightforward. Medicine is unquestionably vital

Soldiers swear oath during reenlistment ceremony in Afghanistan

for individual and societal welfare, requires advanced education and training, and causes considerable harm to life and limb when misapplied. Law provides a foundation for stable and peaceful societies, but when misused can be a source of instability and strife. This is not to say that all application of the knowledge is professional in nature, only that vocations that apply the domain should be considered automatically eligible for professionalism.

On the other hand, some domains that have had the "professional" label applied might not satisfy these criteria. Musicians, athletes, and advocates have been traditionally considered as professionals as these domains of knowledge tend to be specialized and their application culturally enhancing, but harm attributed to unprofessional application in these domains is limited compared against medicine and law, and one could argue the extent to which their functions are vital to societies or individuals within them.

Entities

Interfacing with domains are three classes of entities—societies, practitioners,

and collectives of practitioners. These classes have attributes that generally apply to all specific instances of each class and relationships that are consistent among entities.

Societies can be any bodies of people. Those most relevant to this discussion fall into three overlapping categories—the "global commons" that include all people and societies, the "U.S. national" society that includes the citizenry of the United States, and the set of "U.S. state" societies that encompass the citizenries of each state. U.S. citizens therefore belong to an instance of all three. Where the interests of these societies differ can be sources of conflict.

The global commons is a special case of society and is greater than the largest multinational construct such as the European Union or United Nations. The global commons establishes a universal expectation that a domain of knowledge is available to all worldwide, and that what would be considered a professional application of that domain can reasonably be expected to be considered professional elsewhere. World travelers carry such expectations when they get sick away from home and seek foreign medical attention, for example.

Attributes and values held by individual *practitioners* include specialized education, certification, selfless service to others, ethical standards, and others that are above and beyond those of ordinary citizens. Pertinent to this discussion is how, in the abstract, practitioners:

■ acquire and sustain the art and science of a domain in ways beyond that of ordinary citizens

■ apply the domain in ways that contribute to the continued functioning and stability of societies or the welfare of their individuals, and not in ways that promote one's self-interests

■ show professional and personal character—exercise behaviors and attributes that reflect favorably on the community, avoid those that reflect negatively, and demonstrate moral courage when professional actions can carry good and bad consequences.

Collectives of practitioners form for three purposes. Associations bring practitioners together to further the knowledge of the domain, improve the arts and sciences,

U.S. Air Force (Katie Gieratz)

Air Force nurse prepares surgical equipment for operation

and advocate needs and positions to societies. Usually, membership in an association is voluntary. Enterprises are how practitioners organize to provide their services. These can range from individual practices such as clinics to large organizations such as hospitals. Communities are the most formalized, consisting of the regulatory bodies governing the domain within a society, and all constituent practitioners whether actively serving or inactive. The regulatory body, sometimes called a board, determines entry or certification requirements, metes out rewards and punishments, and adjudicates acceptable and unacceptable applications of the domain on behalf of the society. In the United States, communities of practitioners mainly exist at the state level, such as state boards of medical examiners with all licensed medical personnel. Although these are generally headquartered within the structure of a state government, they are still autonomous and are mostly comprised of other practitioners specifically selected to serve in regulatory roles.

Relationships

Relationships among various entities—practitioner to community, practitioner to the community's primary society, and community to its primary society—are constructed differently, so each should be considered separately.

The natures of these relationships are described through the presence of several mechanisms that constitute an agreement or contract between the entities. In the case of community and society, for example, the community ensures the application of the domain or subdomain in exchange for autonomy. The challenge has been to determine what would serve as an acceptable general-purpose checklist that a budding professional community must satisfy without introducing elements that presuppose cultural decisions unrelated to the domain of knowledge or its arts and sciences. For example, the public oath is a common means for a practitioner to express intent to provide faithful service as a member of a community in support of a society, upon which the society confers a

license that certifies the practitioner's ability to serve. Undertaking oaths and licensing are common practices, but not necessarily the only ones.

The relationship between practitioners and their communities has these essential mechanisms:

■ establish entry-level requirements—that is, what an individual must master of the domain to be considered worthy of entry into the community and therefore certifiable for service as a practitioner—such as formal education, training, examinations or other means of demonstrating sufficient mastery, and contractual requirements such as oaths that a practitioner promises to the community or society in exchange for membership and ability to practice

■ establish sustainment requirements—what the community provides to the practitioner to stay current in the domain—such as publications or other communications

■ establish controls over the application of knowledge, such as laws and ethics that

promote or prohibit certain activities, and attributes and values that describe the manner in which practitioners are expected to perform their services, which includes how practitioners are encouraged or required to work together

■ create systems of rewards and prestige and ensure that advances in the art and science or faithful service are appropriately recognized

■ create systems of censure and disrepute, such that practitioners who misuse or misapply knowledge, or whose activities reflect negatively on the community or fellow practitioners, are suitably punished.

The relationships between communities and their societies extend the above for three main purposes:

■ establish and sustain a contract between the community and society

■ advocate for the profession on behalf of their member practitioners

■ manage in autonomous fashion those controls that societies have yielded (for example, the application of censure and discipline by the community that reduces the need for societies to provide direct oversight in professional matters).

Relationships between practitioners and societies become matters of performance. Practitioners apply the knowledge in accordance with the norms and rules of their communities and in satisfaction of societal needs, whether that is the society as a whole or from specific clients. In matters of conflict between professional necessity and societal expectations, practitioners make decisions based on established ethics, challenge those ethics if they are inappropriate or inapplicable, or recuse themselves, even withdrawing from the profession if necessary.

Included in the course of defining these relationships are cultural factors that influence the decisions of practitioners and the expectations of society, but that are not of professional necessity, meaning they are not part of the knowledge, art, and science of the domain. Two relevant to the discussion of military professionalism are offered here.

Practitioner Duration of Service. This is a function of the relationship between communities and their practitioners. Because the domain is vital to society and the entry-level requirements fall above and beyond those of ordinary citizens, expectations may arise that practitioners have signed up to serve for lengthy periods of time. This is especially true if the society has devoted resources (for example, investment) to training and educating the budding practitioner. Although the choices of practitioners may reflect on their commitment to the profession, the duration of service does not directly bear on the successful application of knowledge. Rather, we expect that applications that put the practitioner personally at risk of physical or emotional harm would see a greater turnover of practitioners. Acceptability of the level of turnover becomes a matter of perception. Regardless, practitioners contemplating departure from the community are expected to perform professionally while still in service.

Global Access to Service. The vital importance of professional domains should mean that all members of society should be served equally and equally well. This is a matter of professional necessity, for any preferential treatment or lack of access has deleterious effects on any or all of the relationships described above. Yet factors unrelated to the domain are ever-present and affect access, such as politics, commercial influences, insufficient numbers of practitioners, practitioner self-interests, and others. How communities and practitioners apportion their services is therefore culturally influenced. For example, medical professionals must deal with the demand for emergency care, increasing costs, malpractice suits, and influence of insurance companies.

This manifests itself in the relationship between societies and their professional communities. Societies' expectations are that communities and practitioners minimize these influences as much as possible, even though the same societies may take actions that induce these complicating factors. Therefore, professionalism of the community means that it is upholding its contract with the society. Professionalism of the practitioner combines measures of performance that demonstrate competency in the domain and of behavior that reflect properly to society on the community.

The above suggests that being a professional is more of a binary (yes/no) proposition than a matter of degrees such as how doctors may be perceived as more innately professional than nurses due to higher entry-level requirements and greater prestige. Either all requirements and conditions are met as expressed in these relationships or they are not. Failing to meet or sustain even one requirement invalidates the contract and renders the

roles of militaries within societies have evolved since Samuel Huntington's seminal work on military professionalism from the 1950s

community or practitioner nonprofessional or unprofessional. Instead, degrees of professionalism are reflective of how strongly the contracts are honored as assessments of the health of relationships among societies, communities, and practitioners. High professionalism sees the proper and fair application of the domain by the community; continually reduced influence of external factors from the society; and the demonstrated and sustained competence, character, and quality of service provided by the practitioners.

The Domain of "Arms"

We should now reexamine what has been referred to as the profession of arms, specifically the American variety discussed in Army FM 1, in a modern context.

The first step is defining the domain. This is actually a complex undertaking for several reasons. The roles of militaries within societies have evolved since Samuel Huntington's seminal work on military professionalism from the 1950s. Some of that evolution resulted in the creation of new communities whose purposes overlapped with their respective militaries, and in some cases assumed, even duplicated, formerly military roles. So in practice the military is one of few (perhaps the only) communities that often exercises roles that fall outside what society (and indeed the military itself) might consider the military's role.

Traditionally, militaries were the societies' guarantors of security and the primary elements of the state that had the authority to wage war and use lethal force. Militaries often addressed both internal and external threats to societies. The Oath of Commissioning in the U.S. Armed Forces still makes reference to "defending the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

The American experience, stemming from the days of the Revolution and its culturally imbued distrust of standing armies, led to the growth and development over time of separate institutions to focus on external threats (armed forces) versus internal ones (law enforcement organizations such as police),

Navy chief trial judge addresses law students at moot court competition

U.S. Navy (Anthony Casullo)

each of which independently pursued and achieved professionalization. Each assumed some roles and authorities when it came to the use of lethal force—the military having greater freedom to exercise it in offensive means against external threats whereas the police were largely limited to self-defense.

As law enforcement requirements became more sophisticated and nuanced, new institutions arose. Two are particularly noteworthy. The first is the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which has responsibility to secure U.S. borders with its neighboring nations, Canada and Mexico. The other is the U.S. Coast Guard, which exercises maritime law enforcement and protects U.S. maritime borders. U.S. law delineates responsibilities between these agencies and the U.S. Army (especially U.S. State National Guards) and Navy; however, there are instances where these agencies cooperate with one another to deal with external threats, with the nature of the threat determining which agency has primary responsibility and therefore who determines the rules of engagement. Collectively, these agencies combine to protect the Nation's geographic territories and manage the use of lethal force.

This historical experience is common among other nations, but manifested differently. The formation of law enforcement institutions as separated from the military

was also found in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, other European nations created hybrid entities called gendarmeries that are essentially military units performing police duties. Other nations whose security institutions are less robust due to lack of need or limited resources have kept military and law enforcement organizations and missions combined, such as among some African nations whose navies perform both military and coast guard tasks.

The same threats that one nation perceives as external may be perceived by other nations as internal and therefore be handled by different communities within the nation. Countering the threat of violent extremist organizations (VEO) is an excellent example. In the United States, the military has a significant counter-VEO role as it is a threat largely emanating from outside the homeland. Other nations assign this role to its ministries of interior which, due to U.S. law, places restrictions on direct cooperation between the U.S. military and its most direct counterparts in key nations.

As FM 1 declares, "the profession of arms is global."[3] However, it is clear that there is not a direct one-to-one correspondence between any particular military community and the area of uniquely specialized knowledge that it applies in service to its society. That so many disparate communities

exercise overlapping knowledge suggests that the professional domain in question is much broader and more encompassing than the military alone.

This is the professional domain of *security*, which is the art and science of protection against danger, damage, or loss. The profession of *arms*, therefore, describes a subdomain, reflective of a division of labor preferred by American society that separates militaries from other security communities. Using FM 1 as a start point, we can define the subdomain as the art and science of defending the security of a nation or state—its geographic territory, its society and institutions, its people, and its way of life.

The U.S. military is both the community and the enterprise that apply this domain for U.S. society. This is an important distinction from communities associated with medicine and law, whose enterprises are largely independent from the regulatory body. But this is not unique. Other security professions such as police forces, border patrols, and coast guards similarly see the community and enterprise as one and the same, or very extensively overlapped.

The mechanisms employed by the U.S. military to regulate its practitioners are straightforward. For officers, warrant officers, and enlisted, there are entry-level requirements and sustainment requirements—such as professional military education, individual combat skills such as marksmanship, and oaths of service—that vary appropriately depending on the Service and rank. Awards, promotions, fitness reports, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and other mechanisms govern good and bad conduct or performance.

Some may look upon the Services as different communities, but these reflect divisions of labor, albeit with longstanding historical precedent. The overlap of functions and capabilities among the Services, particularly enablers such as communications and logistics, plus the increase in jointness seen in the force since the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, bears this out.

Similarly, the traditional stratification of officers and enlisted (junior and senior) reflects divisions of labor that are much more blended in today's environment than in times past. Senior enlisted are taking on roles and responsibilities once reserved exclusively for officers, and some are now attending officer professional education programs. Taken to

the traditional stratification o officers and enlisted (junior an senior) reflects divisions of labo that are much more blended in today's environment than in times past

an extreme, there is nothing inherent about the profession of arms that would preempt a move to make Officer Candidate School the sole accession means for new officers, essentially causing the military to resemble more closely the rank structure of police forces. This would likely never happen in the United States, but it shows how separating officers from enlisted for the purposes of comparing professionalism is not viable.

Bottom Line

So are the members of the U.S. military professionals?

The bottom line answer is yes. The U.S. military as a community applies the subdomain of arms for its primary society, the United States. It performs a vital function, mastery of the art and science of arms to protect the society in the manner that the society accepts: "defend the Constitution." The military has established the appropriate mechanisms for its practitioners, the Servicemembers, to achieve and sustain professional status, and the practitioners generally sustain the community norms and adhere to societal expectations.

Because the military is an organization, the actions of individual Servicemembers directly affect the actions of others, and in combat this can have significant consequences. This makes military professionalism at all levels vital, as the manner in which individual Servicemembers perform their duties is as important as the results that are achieved. Tactical successes that undermine our societies' confidence risk strategic failure and constitute a violation of the relationship between the U.S. military and American society. This is consistent with the qualifier in the Soldiers' Creed: "No one is more professional than I." It is a personal commitment to the U.S. military community, rather than a collective comparative stance against those of other professions.

On the surface, this countervails Dr. Bond's assertion that "it does a disservice to the very ideals of professionalism . . . to declare

that by virtue of membership in an organization a person is a professional."[4] However, the two positions are actually quite similar as all professionals are required to adhere to the entry-level and sustainment requirements of the community. Those who do not are subject to censure, such as revocation of their license to practice law or medicine, or less-than-honorable-discharge from the military.

Meanwhile, some concerns about the state of today's military—high turnover rates and erosion of a sense of professional commitment ("calling")—are indicative of unhealthiness among the relationships between the military and its Servicemembers that certainly needs to be addressed, but do not constitute the loss or reduction of professional status.

Although this article presents a different model of professionalism from the traditional views expressed elsewhere, its application is hardly complete, and there is further study to do. Important in today's context is the professional status of civilians and contractors performing functions once done by military members. This article assumes U.S. Service-members are volunteers, and conscription in an unknown future scenario might alter the professional status of the force.

Hopefully, the domain-based model offered in this article helps simplify and harmonize the terms and relationships so as to advance the dialogue. After all, the U.S. military's professional identity is important to its mission accomplishment and its longstanding honored relationship with the American people. **JFQ**
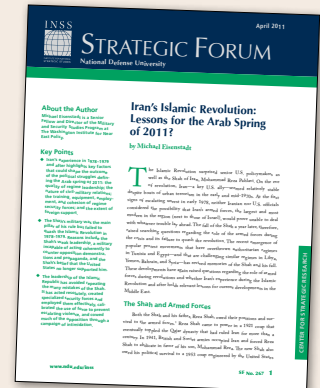
NOTES

[1] Kevin M. Bond, "Are We Professionals?" *Joint Force Quarterly* 58 (3d Quarter 2010), 62–68, available at <www.ndu.edu/press/are-we-professionals.html>.

[2] Field Manual 1, *The Army* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, June 2005), 1–10.

[3] Ibid., 1–11.

[4] Bond, 68.