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MILITARY LEADERSHIP – a different angle

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Abstract:

Leadership and especially military leadership were the faithful companions of mankind with the power to influence evolution, developing a common behavioral language. Being a permanent need but at the same time a product of civilization, military leaders had their share in shaping society as society was polishing the art of leadership. Complex in itself with glorious past and promising future, military leadership is one of the mankind valuable diamonds, therefore an organic element in building the modern society.

Key words: military, leadership, evolution

1. Origins – when and how?

Is leadership born same time with mankind? I shall express doubts by stating that leadership is evolving at same pace with life (therefore, in a primitive shape, it existed before, just waiting for mankind to take it to a different dimension). What should we call the animal ruling a pack? Shall we admit the idea that there is more than just sheer instinct in a predator leading its pack to the kill in a certain attack pattern? Looking at an elephant pack shall we overlook the matriarchal type of society? How about chimpanzees political hierarchy – tough yet dynamic, continuously shifting in a tune given by the latest alliance?

I do not know the answer to all the above questions, but it is impossible not to observe raw leadership elements floating around the mankind cradle. Does this mean that carnivore mammals are the leadership first practitioners (in its most primitive shape)? Would this be the answer to “*when*”? Looking into their pack life, one can see a mix of instincts generating learning, this leading to something that biologists call hunting tactics.

If biological intelligence appeared rather early along the evolutionary process of life on Earth, shall one disconnect the survival-instinct-intelligence-tactics-leadership chain?

Imagine *Homo habilis* taking a stone and chipping it to craft the first tool – tool that secured the step towards the hunter. At an increasing speed, life led Neanderthals into becoming *Homo sapiens*. All these steps were paralleled by the evolution of many features and skills but one aspect is certain: either migrating or settled later, the genus *Homo* lived (and evolved) in groups of various sizes. Should this be the answer to “*when*”?

Any given group will have a form of a leader: probably in the beginning was the skilled hunter, maybe the physically fit one or the tallest one. Groups got bigger, stronger and smarter with increased needs of various kinds. Survival got new elements related to territory, wealth, society, and later power and regional influence, therefore generating the need of new types of leaders. Kingdoms needed to become empires, empires needed more resources and subjects to maintain their survivability, all this redefining the long winding

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way from instinct to politics, from small tribes to multi-national alliances, from a stone-tipped spear to nuclear missiles and sophisticated hi-tech drones.

As far as to have a look into “*how*” it is tempting to say that the preservation instinct in early life forms evolved to become a need to organize populations, then to structure societies. The most used pattern when trying to describe a pack, a tribe or a modern society is the pyramidal one. But this is implicit recognition of an early companion along humankind evolution: leadership. Of course required skills for a leader evolved and multiplied along with the victorious journey from the “down from the tree” step until today. Of course there are similarities and translations of the type “then strong in arms – today strong in character” but this follows human society and civilization, with organizational and political needs. Economic growth has a lot to do with probably each and every step in defining leaders. Religious and later political systems have their share in shaping expectations. Preservation instinct got from small groups to nations and groups of nations transforming itself into a more refined and polished concept, coated with diplomacy. Therefore the answer for “*how*” can become a long discussion by itself.

2. Evolution

Either head of a migrating tribe, a king expanding his small kingdom, a pharaoh in need for immortality, an emperor willing to rule entire known world, a continent willing to defeat religious beliefs, a chancellor wishing a 1000 years national socialism, world divided in two halves defending political beliefs, a group of countries in need of more natural resources, or fighting against terrorism to preserve democracy, every known form of structure needed a leader. As tribes became kingdoms, empires and nowadays countries, human society produced various types of leaders and many definitions for leadership. Probably the military leader is the one lasting throughout entire documented history – the other types either faded or even disappeared while new ones were shaped by religion, economics or politics.

As early migrating tribes settled and started to produce more, initiating primitive forms of commerce, the need to attack for gaining new hunting territory became the need for goods security. Later when increased populations were in need for more land, more resources, more slaves or just regional influence, as becoming richer, the need of permanent military organizations seemed the adequate solution. Who to lead? The immediate solution was the ruler himself (probably a tribal reminiscence). Thus we are looking at the first multi-functional leader: spiritual, political and military. For centuries kings led troops in battles. Probably this was the most complex type in number of assumed tasks. History reveals the military natural evolution driven, among other factors, by production, technology, science. But the most spectacular contribution was brought by leaders themselves: techniques, tactics, strategies, concepts and doctrines, many of them transcending to or influencing civil society. Greeks introduced logistics, Romans built supply roads and developed new recruitment policies by using local population, Chinese brought black powder, French introduced canned food, military espionage forced miniaturization, Americans created Internet – just to have a brief enumeration. All these had a powerful influence over progress of civilization.

Ancient China was most likely the first to develop specialized military leadership (around 4th - 5th century BC). Europe having a different territorial and political evolution chose same solution later when rulers started to predominantly carry the domestic and foreign policy out of their capital cities.

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Being acknowledged as heroes in legends and written documents, military leaders were role models for the general population. They became inspirational subjects of songs, poems, hymns, sculptures and paintings.

Skills set got shaped along military history, under the lights of weaponry, technology, science, religion and politics. As war is an omnipresent element throughout mankind evolution, either territorial, expansionist, colonial or religious, it produced many military leaders that were admired, trusted and obeyed by followers. In time, driven by the environment to act within, elements that define the art of leading troops got multiplied, refined and polished, opening roads, building a visionary heritage and pioneering along new trails. In two words: building history.

3.Elements

Someone once described leadership as being one of the most observed but less understood phenomena, thus elegantly defining the art. As with all arts one can see tools, raw materials or ingredients used, without necessarily understanding the mechanism of releasing the miracle within. We all enjoy the view of a masterpiece of a sculptor but are we capable of reproducing it? And is it about reproducing? Will ever a copy capture the spirit, the essence? Or is it about originality, vision, courage, personality, character?

Does ego have something to do with it? Has pursue of fame been an ingredient at a time? To what extent could ego or dominance be taken into consideration when discussing military leadership? Or is it strong personality able to influence and guide others? How about vision? What are the ingredients used in the art of military leadership? It is in an obvious manner related to people, connected to people and for people.

After a long historical journey, nowadays military leadership is still having some of the ancient core elements as: bravery, strong will, attitude and strategy. Yet bravery is not as physical as it was, strong will is not about wining at all costs anymore, attitude is not about the boldness to dare anyone for the challenge sake and strategy got more complex driven by background changes.

What happened? Society, civilization, new values and new philosophies polished the gem called leadership into today's diamond. Economics, politics, modern democracy added new dimensions by dramatically changing the environment. Therefore some elements faded away, other evolved and new ones came on stage. Over time, dominance was replaced by creativity and vision in defining success. Actually, early and medieval military leadership encompassing ingredients like: formal or sacral appointment, absent or subjective selection criteria, position guaranteed for life, etc., helped mankind, through a simple comparison process, to define over time the necessary ingredients of leadership and what will define success.

Printed information spread knowledge reshaping values and beliefs, bringing large scale education on stage, handing out to leaders a new tool and a new type of audience. Military leadership was not anymore of harnessing sheer force and raw brutality, but of directing combatant skills to precise effects using limited-to-necessary force. Later principles of war acknowledged all this under concepts caught both in military doctrines and within international laws.

Determination, honor, dignity, personal excellence, transmitting a vision are the colors used in this painting and troops (people) are the canvas. Personality, integrity, adaptability, sound judgment and trust are chisels to carve the marble when unveiling the monument of military leadership.

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If in the beginning simple headcount was a determining factor on the battlefield, very soon leaders had the vision of effectiveness in developing new tactics and strategies.

Supported by science and technology, military leadership transformed conflict at the same pace with civilization.

By adapting leadership to economical and political factors and still pursuing a vision, new features were added by military leaders to this art.

Inspiring people, mobilizing people, showing the way ahead, understanding social, economical and political trends, driving operations to success will most likely remain key threads to build the fabric of military leadership.

4. Today

The end of the 20th century added new elements to military leadership as well as environment changes, new restraints, a different exposure to public and the most important: new types of threats to deal with.

Counter terrorism, counter insurgency, peace enforcing, peace keeping and many other new threats defined the asymmetric dimension of today operations. More than this, new tasks like humanitarian intervention or reconstruction added non-traditional military elements into the context to be addressed by military leaders, thus multiplying the tools at hand and increasing the complexity of the decisional process. Actually the genetics of military leadership got richer and better defined.

Public exposure got greater more complex than ever. Legends, songs and hymns have become news in visual and written media and got a different structure, bringing criticism to a permanent position. Building and preserving image are now factors that influence military decisions, especially in modern democracies where public opinion affects politics almost in real time, since media increased their speed in transmitting information.

Winning hearts and minds is a new permanent and critical battle for modern leaders in need to secure operational military results. Therefore new components were added as instruments and missions for today's commanders.

Politics and the two major types of societies: liberal and communist, generated two kinds of military leadership – not too different but with different tool sets and one can best observe this by looking into World War II at the two sides of the same alliance. Democratic military organizations became more refined and better connected to reality in all its dimensions, thus more complex.

Because it was not about pillaging new territories as a financial compensation to wars and warriors anymore, economics lead to a different approach on wars: limitation in time, less but more efficient weapons and better protection for own troops.

By emphasizing people as being in the center of the entire subject of leading, multiple facets were added by sciences like psychology, philosophy and sociology. Communication, motivation, reward, sanction and counseling were redefined; modeling military culture becoming a permanent task for leadership.

5. What's next?

Society is constantly evolving along with democracy models, politics, science and technology. Arts are in a permanent evolution driven by a perpetual shifting environment. The art of military leadership will not remain unaffected. Its constant increasing heritage will always be engraved in history and will contribute in shaping the future.

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Proved to be a fast adapting art with newborn scientific features, leading military organizations will continue to set milestones and to produce characters, populating the collective memory with updated sets of traits to define personality, success, strength.

Public opinion will continue to influence politics and as current democratic society trend is to not support armed conflicts of any type this will transform for sure military operations under all aspects.

Tomorrow will surely bring new challenges and constraints, new kinds of threats or hostile elements, probably new types of operations, all these taking military leadership to the next level. Will we see again military leaders in attrition conflicts? Will modern military be prepared to handle again total wars as history showed its ability to run in cycles? One reassuring fact is that military leadership constantly adapted and evolved fast enough to cope with a constant evolving battle environment. Therefore mankind will always have its leaders made of the right fabric and connected in the same time to reality yet not without a modern vision.

6. Conclusion

Military leadership is one additional feature to consistently define mankind evolution throughout its history and will further influence society, politics and economics. With continuous development driven by civilization, culture, philosophy, science, technology, leadership will be a constant ingredient in the permanently shifting picture of *Homo sapiens sapiens* and even beyond, since conflict is still built in the human nature as long as survival defines evolutionary life of man on Earth.

Because it is not about ego or power or wealth, and it is about people and operational success, about building strong values and organizations, military leadership is one of the most valuable possessions of current and future society, one of the diamonds to proudly shine on mankind's crown.