

***Innere Führung* – Leadership and Civic Education in the German Armed Forces**

By Martin Kutz*

1 Introduction

The German concept of *Innere Führung* is perhaps very difficult to translate but it is of great potential significance to European and other states wrestling with the future of the relationship between the nation and the military. *Innere Führung*, sometimes translated rather too briefly as ‘leadership and civic education’, is a particularity of the German Armed Forces, the Bundeswehr; it both shapes and derives from Germany’s postwar experience. It is better understood as ‘military leadership and conduct within a society where military forces, under civilian control, are democratically accountable to society as a whole’. It manifests itself in various institutional forms. There are directives on *Innere Führung* and in the legal provisions governing the military, we find many principles which directly or indirectly refer to *Innere Führung*. The German Parliament, for example, determines through its civilian Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces whether the principles of *Innere Führung* are adequately implemented within the Armed Forces. In any case where the principles of *Innere Führung* are not properly applied, individual soldiers in the Bundeswehr have the right to complain directly to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces - without following the military chain of command. Thus, *Innere Führung* plays a central role in the Bundeswehr and, in its specific, German form, it is unique in the whole of Europe.

There are three reasons why it seems to be worthwhile to discuss *Innere Führung*, and the question of whether it could be applied in other armed forces as well. The first is that I hope to be able to provide insight into this unique German phenomenon. Other European armies are more embedded in processes of historical continuity, and therefore significantly differ from the German pattern in terms of military culture. The second reason is that European armies are intensifying their level of cooperation, a fact that is made particularly evident by the rise of multinational units. Thus, we should know each other as well as possible. Thus, this paper can be considered an attempt to foster mutual understanding in terms of *Innere Führung*, which brings a special dimension to European military culture.

The third reason is that most European armies are faced with absolutely new challenges that affect all aspects of their structure, equipment, doctrine, and leadership. The German approach of *Innere Führung* offers the opportuni-

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ty to meet all these challenges in a way that is intellectually appropriate and can be implemented at the level of daily routine.

I have structured this essay as follows: first of all, I will ask whether these new challenges confronting European militaries require a reorientation. Second, I will address the military patterns of reaction. Third, I will discuss *Innere Führung* in the context of rearmament during the East-West conflict, followed by a more in-depth examination of the concept of *Innere Führung*. Finally, I will discuss a possible application of the patterns of logic “invented” by Count Baudissin.

2 Do the New Military Challenges Require a Reorientation?

For some years, the armed forces of European states have been confronted by a number of new, unforeseen challenges. Since the threat of total industrialized war – which was the primary danger during the Cold War era – was replaced by the specter of so-called “new” types of war, waged by non-state actors, it is no longer of primary importance for armies to defend a nation-state’s borders. Soldiers are now tasked with missions far away from national territory, including tasks they would not have considered a soldier’s duty some twenty years ago. Even in cases where soldiers are employed in traditional types of combat, as in the most recent war in Iraq, an asymmetric type of warfare prevails. Therefore, soldiers must expect to be confronted with partisan and terrorist methods of warfare.

The new situation forces us to reconsider four aspects of our military thinking. First of all, we have to rationally analyze what a future war might look like. The challenges of the new, asymmetric type of warfare – whether civil war, criminal gang war, warlordism, or economic war – must be considered to a hitherto unknown extent in terms of military organization, training, and operational concepts.

The second requirement is to review the basis on which a deployment of armed forces is legitimized. If we do not want to replace our citizens in uniform with mercenaries, we will have to master the difficult task of explaining to our soldiers the reasons that they have to perform tasks in Africa, in the Middle East, or some other place abroad. It is even more difficult, as the civilian population is becoming less and less interested in the missions of their national armed forces.

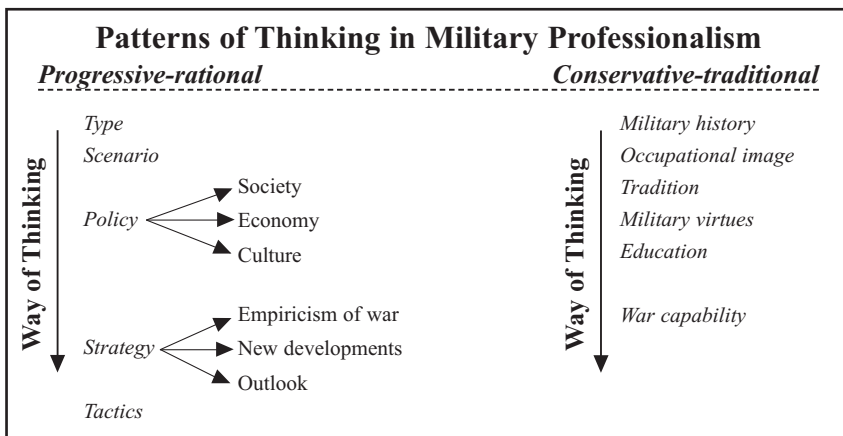
This leads us to the third point. If we do not want the armed forces to become extraterritorial in political terms, and if we want to maintain a level of connection between a nation’s armed forces and its society, soldiers must know what policies their national government pursues, what the political goals of military operations are, and they must basically accept these policies and goals. In Europe, there still prevails the opinion that soldiers have to remain apolitical and may not question the missions they are assigned. In the future, this

approach will become more and more obsolete and, without change, will present armies with serious problems.

Here we must address the fourth aspect of reevaluation. In view of the developments we are witnessing in the democratic societies of Europe, there will be increasingly fewer young people who want to pursue a soldier's career in the armed forces. One of the reasons is that military tradition and requirements of daily routine are no longer compatible with many young people's idea of an interesting and satisfying job. If we adhere to the traditional military style, the societal segment from which soldiers may be recruited will become smaller and smaller. The same holds true for the political side of the equation. As a consequence, military's compatibility with society and its development will be destroyed in the long term. This will be a slow but inevitable process. These are the problems that European armed forces are already confronted with or will have to face in the future.

3 The Military Patterns of Reaction

There are two types of reaction to these phenomena that we can currently witness within various armed forces, as shown in the following diagram.



The first reaction, and the most common one, is a technocratic response to the technical aspects of the new defense challenges. New tactical approaches are developed, and training and equipment are adjusted to the new requirements. In this approach, the underlying causes and possible complications of the new security environment are hardly taken into consideration. Here, conservative traditionalism dominates. This response is based on traditional notions about the soldier's profession. These notions are historically legitimized and manifest themselves as soldierly virtues in the consciousness of those who represent them. In this view, the presence of these virtues (alone) guarantees

war capability. In matters of discipline, the armed forces increasingly rely on traditional military patterns of behavior. Since in an operational environment this becomes more and more problematic, the gap between military standards and military practice increases.

The second kind of reaction is still confined to a rather small group of military planning staff and analysts. Currently, they discuss the new security challenges on a theoretical basis – which is of crucial importance – to try to increase their organization's (and nation's) receptivity to these ideas and concepts. Their starting point is a modern notion of the kind of war that is to be expected in the future. From this notion they derive concrete scenarios. In their political decisions they take social developments, economic parameters, and cultural factors into account, and use them as a basis for their strategies and tactics.

In the 1980s and 1990s, such ideas were all but invisible in the German Armed Forces. Thus, problems were ignored and changes impeded. In Germany, this has recently provided new fuel for the discussion about *Innere Führung*. However, the underlying reasons for this are born more out of political tradition than out of a theoretical understanding of the necessity. Here, the notions of the 1950s are taken up again. At that time, all the above-mentioned problems were thoroughly considered, albeit in a very different military-strategic, social, and political context. Although the effects of *Innere Führung* were rather limited at the time, as the political and above all military traditionalists strongly opposed this concept, key aspects of *Innere Führung* were implemented in the German Armed Forces in the 1970s. This was most beneficial to both the military and society. To describe this process of the slow and gradual implementation of the principles of *Innere Führung*, however, would be beyond the scope of this paper.

What is really important for my purposes here can be reduced to two main points. The first is that the concept was derived from general principles and tailored to the specific political, social, and military-strategic situation. As a consequence, people now tend to believe that the concept of *Innere Führung* may be historically obsolete and only applicable to the specific German situation. This perspective is too limited, as it prevents one from seeing that the foundations of the actual application of this concept are fundamental logical patterns of analysis. Actually, they are independent of any historical context and can also be applied in our times.

Secondly, we must be aware of the fact that, even in the German Armed Forces, the concept of *Innere Führung* is not fully understood by all military leaders. Some traditionalists even completely reject this concept, and for quite some time, particularly in the 1980s, it was reduced to a manipulative method of motivation. When I now refer to *Innere Führung*, I address the concept itself, leaving its inappropriate application and misinterpretation in daily military routine aside.

4 *Innere Führung* in the Context of Rearmament during the Cold War

The man credited with “inventing” the concept of *Innere Führung* was Wolf Graf von Baudissin,¹ a general staff officer who served under General Rommel in North Africa until he was captured near Tobruk in 1941. His initial formulations, made during his captivity during World War II, already show the basic characteristics of his later concept. The starting point of his thinking was his opposition to the Nazi regime, based on his moral and ethical convictions. After the war, he saw his oppositional stance fully justified when he became aware of all the political and military crimes committed by the regime. In his view, this regime’s path to power was the result of a historical misdevelopment in the military and in the relationship between the military and the political sector on the one hand and between the military and society on the other. As a result of this failure, there were only two legitimate models in Germany’s military history on which the new armed forces could be based: the first were the Prussian reforms of 1808–18, as interpreted by Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, and the second were the crippled forms which were actually implemented by the Nazi regime. The next point in the development of his ideas was the resistance against Hitler, which in his view had materialized in the attempted coup d’état of 10 July 1944. Many of Baudissin’s friends were actively involved in this attempted coup, and ultimately lost their lives because of it. Both historical references show that Baudissin had a rather conservative attitude, as he obviously thought that any politically legitimate action required a historically legitimate basis.

In 1951, he became a member of the German planning committee on rearmament. The precondition he set for his participation was that those parts of the Prussian reforms of 1808–18 that had not been successfully implemented would be the basis of his work²; those parts in which he was particularly interested addressed the role of the soldier as a citizen. In his entire work, he transferred the ethical, moral, and political principles of the 1808 reforms to the situation of the 1950s. What this meant in practice was that he developed an ethically and morally acceptable concept of armed forces that were compatible with democracy and able to face the strategic challenges of the Cold War, including the threat of a nuclear war. However, this is not entirely evident in his studies, since he concentrated on practical problems, which he addressed on

¹ Major parts of Baudissin’s overall work, which includes memoranda, speeches, essays, and staff-related research papers, can be found in the following publications: Wolf Graf von Baudissin, *Soldat für den Frieden. Entwürfe für eine zeitgemäße Bundeswehr* (Munich, 1969); von Baudissin, *Nie wieder Sieg! Programmatrische Schriften 1951–1981* (Munich, 1982); and von Baudissin and Dagmar Gräfin zu Dohna, ... *als wären wir nie getrennt gewesen. Briefe 1941–1947*, edited with an introduction by Elfriede Knoke (Bonn, 2001).

² Martin Kutz, “Reform als Weg aus der Katastrophe. Über den Vorbildcharakter der Preußischen Reformen 1808–1818 und die Vergleichbarkeit der Situationen von 1806 und 1945 für Arbeit und Denken Baudissins,” in *Innere Führung. Zum Gedenken an Wolf Graf Baudissin*, ed. H. Linnenkamp and D. S. Lutz (Baden-Baden, 1995).

various interconnected levels – he wrote no text that systematically describes his theoretical foundations. The system has to be extracted from numerous texts on various topics. What emerges turns out to be a logical system that is intellectually rooted in Clausewitz's famous work *On War*.³

5 The Concept of *Innere Führung*

Baudissin's concept is based on three premises. The first is that the military, military policy, and strategy must be all considered in terms of a modern, forward-looking notion of what wars a nation might face in the future. In the 1950s, he was one of the few military leaders who understood the epochal significance of nuclear weapons. He declared them to be political, strategic weapons. From this starting point he consistently deduced the idea of preventing war by military deterrence. According to this view, soldiers are not considered to be instruments of warfare but primarily instruments for maintaining peace.

Second, he deduced the idea that, in view of the nuclear threat, soldiers had to act extremely independently on the battlefield and therefore had to be intrinsically motivated. As a consequence, the traditional relationship between a soldier and his superior governed by obedience to orders was no longer adequate. It had to be replaced by a cooperative style of leadership.

From the strategic situation, Baudissin realized the need for Germany to orient itself toward Western Europe and the United States in terms of alliances. On the other hand, he saw the necessity to cooperate politically with Germany's opponents. Later, he promoted the concept of cooperative arms control.

According to Baudissin, the ethical foundation on which a German soldier performs his service is of a Christian (Protestant) and philosophical nature. Ultimately, this is the point where he linked his concept to human and civil rights, making a connection between this notion and the articles of the German Basic Law. From there he derived the understanding that a soldier's ultimate mission is to preserve peace. Thus he considered the prevention of war indispensable, and political cooperation a must, in order to ensure peace. In daily military routine, it would therefore be essential to adhere to democratic patterns of behavior – that is, to the principles of *Innere Führung*.

The third premise of his concept is that of a democratic society, which is more than the connection of a citizen to a democratic government (at least this was the case in Germany during the 1950s). He promoted a democratic, easily practicable mode of behavior, which he wanted the military to adopt as well. He pursued this approach at a time when German society still had a rather cautious stance towards democracy as such.

³ Cf. Martin Kutz, "Historische Wurzeln und historische Funktion des Konzeptes Innere Führung (1951–1961)," in *Staatsbürger in Uniform – Wunschbild oder gelebte Realität?*, eds. K. Kister and P. Klein (Baden-Baden, 1989).

In political terms, he promoted civilian control of the military, the protection of human and civil rights within the military itself, and the insight that a soldier's profession is a political profession. It is a profession that does not make any sense if it lacks a political foundation – this constitutes the fundamental difference between a soldier and a mercenary. The following table illustrates this formal structure with its logical links.

Table of Logical Interrelations in the Thinking of Wolf Graf von Baudissin

| <i>Specific Aspects</i> | <u>Warfare</u> | <u>Ethical Foundation</u> | <u>Democratic Society</u> |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| <i>Fields of Activity</i> | | | |
| <u>Policy</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oriented towards Western societies and alliances • Political cooperation • Cooperative arms control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peacekeeping • Political cooperation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic civilian control of the military • Protection of basic rights within the military • Being a soldier is a political profession |
| <u>Strategy</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of war • Strategy of deterrence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of war | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of war • Strategy of deterrence |
| <u>Military</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soldiers serving peace • <i>Innere Führung</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soldiers serving peace • <i>Innere Führung</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military in conformity with democratic values • Integration of the military into a democratic society • Citizen in uniform (soldier as citizen) • <i>Innere Führung</i> |

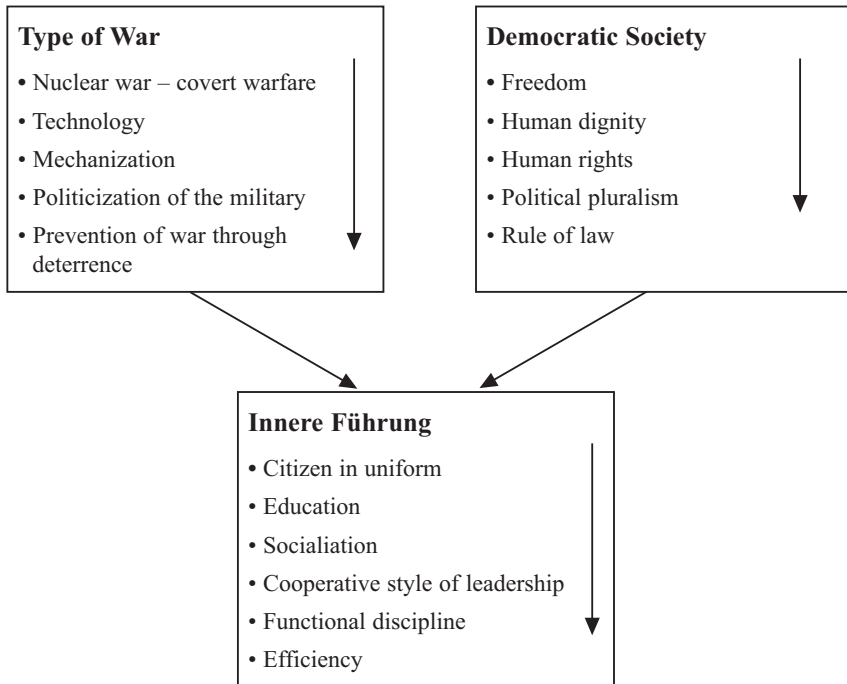
This overview also illustrates the fact that, in principle, it does not matter at what level a problem is located – it is always obvious how a specific problem is linked to the overall context of military security. To be aware of the relationships depicted in this framework means to consider problems not as isolated matters but as interrelated issues. One of the conclusions to be drawn from this overview is that *Innere Führung* is always a requirement within the military.

The term *Innere Führung* is somewhat misleading. Originally, the term used was *Inneres Gefüge* – that is, internal organization and cohesion. Baudissin's opponents – his fellow officers from *Wehrmacht* times, who did not consider a democratization of the armed forces feasible or desirable – tweaked the term, speaking of *Inneres Gewürge*, or retching, in order to make Baudissin's concept appear ridiculous. The term *Innere Führung* was therefore coined as a substitute.⁴

However, the original term is more adequate, since it makes clear that the concept includes more than just a philosophy of leadership. It rather refers to military structure and principles of behavior. Since Baudissin thought that his individual ethical convictions were reflected in the human and civil rights provisions of the German constitution, he felt that he could rationally deduce *Innere Führung* from the analysis of a specific perception of war and from the principles of a democratic society. The following overview of the key terms will give an idea of the logic of *Innere Führung* and the interconnections between its elements.

⁴ Details of the discussion can be found in Dietrich Genschel, *Wehrreform und Reaktion. Die Vorbereitung der Inneren Führung 1951–1956* (Hamburg, 1972).

Key Terms of Baudissin’s Logical System



From the contemporary perception of war and a comprehensive analysis of all types of war conceivable at that time – which were, by the way, all overshadowed by the threat of a nuclear war – he deduced that modern armed forces were technology-oriented, fully mechanized organizations. In his thinking, he took the latest technological trends into account. In view of the fact that nuclear weapons are strategic – that is, political – weapons, and in view of the Cold War conflict, Baudissin considered the military’s political reliability a precondition for its functioning. Due to the destructive potential of nuclear weapons, which threaten all of mankind, the military’s ultimate mission is to prevent a war. In consideration of the then-prevailing situation, this could only be achieved through military deterrence.

Civil rights – that is, human rights and dignity – are the principles on which a democratic society is based. In political terms, they materialize in the pluralism of competing political goals and social concepts. In organizational terms, they become evident in the rule of law. And in terms of the military organization and with regard to the individual soldier, this means *Innere*

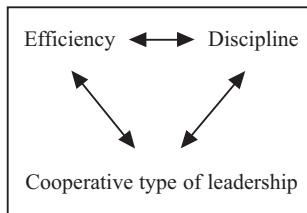
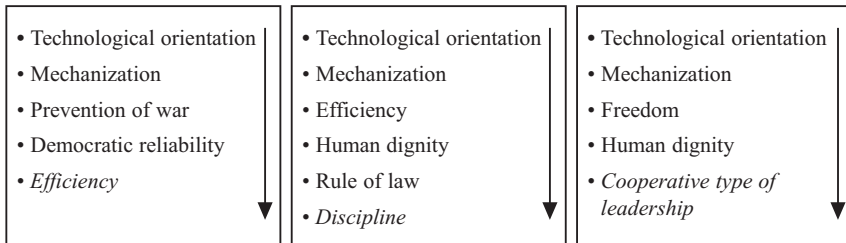
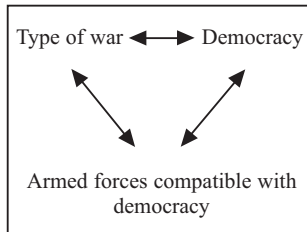
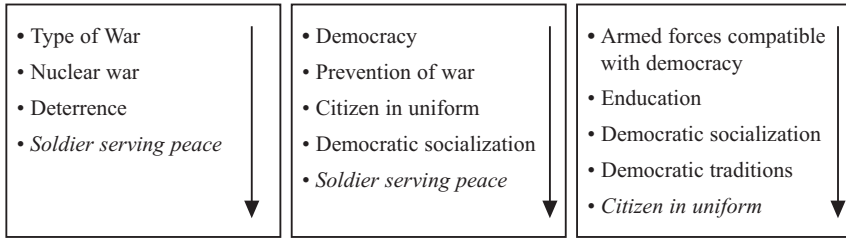
Führung. Innere Führung is based on the notion that a soldier is a citizen in uniform. This means that a soldier enjoys the same civil rights as any other citizen and still has the right to be politically active. In view of the fact that, fifty years ago, military leaders were democrats out of a certain professional necessity rather than conviction or inclination, a democratic orientation could be achieved only if there was some kind of education. The concept of education included traditional education, in German called *Bildung*, as well as civic education, which was being loudly called for. It was designed to produce behavior compatible with democracy. From such education, the recruits and all other soldiers could learn that the freedom they were to defend against the totalitarian threat was part of their daily military routine as well as their civilian life. This experience, it was hoped, would convert indifferent individuals into convinced democrats.

However, in practice, this goal could be obtained only if a cooperative type of leadership was applied, which takes into account the individual capabilities and interests of all concerned. Consequently, a type of discipline that was based on the technological requirements of modern times had to replace the traditional military model of iron discipline. According to this notion, armed forces can only be efficient if all these requirements are met.

Therefore, modern armed forces must be oriented towards meeting the challenges of future wars, instead of being too deeply rooted in tradition. They must be embedded in a democratic society, and it must be ensured that the individual soldier's democratic experience, ideas, and rights are considered in his daily military routine.

With the following clusters of terms, I would like to give an overview of Baudissin's concept and the interconnections between its elements. The key words listed refer to the strategic situation of the 1950s and 1960s, an era which was dominated by the conflict between East and West.

Baudissin's Clusters of Terms – Logical Structures



You can read this graphic in two directions: the political-strategic level is depicted horizontally. As stated above, the necessity to preserve peace is deduced from the prevailing type of war. If we take democracy as a starting point and consider it in conjunction with the prevailing type of war, it also leads us to the necessity to preserve peace. From these two elements – that is, type of war and democratic order – the concept of armed forces compatible with democracy is derived. This kind of military, which is in harmony with democracy, logically requires the notion of the citizen in uniform, the soldier as citizen. Therefore, the type of war, democracy, and a military embedded in democratic society are interdependent factors.

The second level reflected in this diagram describes the consequences for the military, or the organizational level. What is shown here are the consequences deriving from the military structures prevailing in Baudissin's time. This reveals another logical connection, which is depicted vertically.

The modern type of war resulted in armed forces that were technology-oriented and fully mechanized. However, they could accomplish their mission of preserving peace only if they were politically reliable. This was indispensable in view of the historical situation in Germany, where there were two armies under two different power blocs, and the country was riven by an ideological discussion of Communism, which was particularly intense due to the fact that Germany was a divided country. Taking all this into consideration, Baudissin deduced a new definition of efficient forces. According to him, armed forces are only efficient if they combine military functional tasks with political reliability. Thus, the profession of a soldier is a political profession.

This orientation towards technology is then considered in the context of the new notion of efficiency and against the background of human dignity and the rule of law. This forms the basis for a new definition of discipline in the armed forces, which is formulated with a view to the functions to be performed by the armed forces and in view of the technical and political requirements placed upon them. The traditional model of military discipline, which had been practiced in the pre-democratic military culture to enforce unquestioned obedience, is repudiated.

The third deduction from the orientation towards technology is reached when we add the element of soldiers' civil rights. We come to the conclusion that unquestioned obedience and, thus, the traditional authoritarian style of leadership must be replaced by cooperative patterns of behavior. There are two key reasons for this. The first is that a democratic order is incompatible with the old style of leadership, and the second is that modern technology is too complex to be efficiently used under authoritarian leadership. From a technical point of view, the main reason is that a military leader himself is no longer able to fully master all technical functions. Thus, he can no longer fully control his subordinates. He has to rely on the cooperation and loyalty of his personnel. On the level of military organization, there is, thus, a functional and logical aspect con-

tributing to a new notion of efficiency, a new idea of discipline, and a new style of military leadership.

6 The Application of Baudissin's Patterns of Logic in Our Time: A First Attempt

At the beginning of this essay, I said that *Innere Führung* is more than just a technique for motivating soldiers. As mentioned before, I consider the logical structure of this way of thinking well suited to describe the challenges currently confronting our armed forces and to draw the logically appropriate conclusions for military practice.⁵ The following patterns of logic will illustrate how the parameters are translated.

⁵ An attempt to reinterpret Baudissin's concept of *Innere Führung* against its historical background and in the light of future expectations can be found in Martin Kutz, ed., *Gesellschaft, Militär, Krieg und Frieden im Denken von Wolf Graf Baudissin* (Baden-Baden, 2004). This book comprises interpretations by thirteen authors, including the Chief of Staff, Bundeswehr.

Baudissin’s Patterns of Logic in Our Time

| <p style="text-align: center;">Type of war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic-religious civil wars • Terrorism • Warlordism • “New wars” • Weapons of mass destruction | <p style="text-align: center;">Society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-industrial society • Globalization • Individualization • Multiculturalism • Influence of the social environment | <p style="text-align: center;">Politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party democracy • Media democracy • Denationalization • Economization • Political fragmentation |
|--|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Military structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No longer a mass army • Orientation away from heavy weapons • High level of mobility • Extreme dependency on logistics • High-tech equipment • Electronic warfare | <p style="text-align: center;">Changes in the recruitment pool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New type of individuals • Danger that recruitment pool becomes smaller • New requirements in term of learning and flexibility • Extreme specialization | <p style="text-align: center;">Political legitimization of military action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omnipresent media • Approval by society • Soldiers aware of political background |
| <p><u>Result:</u> <u>New military structures</u></p> | <p><u>Result:</u> <u>New style of leadership</u></p> | <p><u>Result:</u> <u>Political education of soldiers</u></p> |

As in the past, the analysis starts with the three parameters: type of war, democratic society, and democratic state. I have broken down these three parameters into the factors that are to be newly considered. Each of these three parameters produces consequences that are logical necessities for the military. They affect the military's structure; they require changes in terms of personnel, since today's soldiers embody a type of socialization quite different from that which was dominant fifty or a hundred years ago; and they also require a new legitimation of the military and its missions.

When these considerations are actually put into practice, they will produce armed forces that differ considerably from those we are used to. They will have a new structure, and their military leaders – no matter what hierarchical level they belong to – will learn a new, cooperative, and democratic mode of leadership behavior. They will spare no effort to explain to their subordinates the political mission of both the armed forces in general and their specific operation.

However, there is one fact resulting from this development that must be recognized by both the military leadership as well as the political leadership: it will no longer be possible to deploy soldiers in a war for purely political reasons if we do not want to rely on mercenaries.

7 Conclusion

In Germany, we sometimes conceive of Anglo-Saxon ways of thinking and behavior in a way that seems somewhat prejudicial. This kind of prejudice says that the British are pragmatics who do what they consider to be reasonable at the moment. This includes the notion that theories are of minor importance when it comes to daily routine and specific problems. If this holds true, some readers will ask whether it makes sense to give this matter such far-reaching theoretical consideration with a view to military practice. Well, against the background of my experience with the *Bundeswehr*, I would like to answer as follows:

There is nothing more practical than a good theory.

However, the *Bundeswehr* has not always acted according to its theories, and many of the problems we nowadays face are the result of this negligence.