

From the Managing Editor

From time to time, the *Journal of Defence Studies* has published articles on specific themes. In keeping with this tradition, the current issue dwells at length on the vital aspect of 'Ethics and Morals in the Indian Armed Forces'. This subject has always held relevance for militaries the world over. However, with increasing information flows and awareness amongst the citizenry about their right to information vis-à-vis the state's institutions and bureaucracy, the practice of morals and ethics in the armed forces is coming under closer scrutiny. The Indian armed forces have lost the high regard they once possessed, with a growing perception that the armed forces are going the civilian way. Yet another factor is the expanding deployment of the armed forces in aid to civil authority – particularly in counter insurgencies or counter terrorism operations during which time soldiers are exposed to the public on a day to day basis. Earlier, when soldiers were confined to well-maintained cantonments with restricted accessibility or deployed in inaccessible border areas, the public were barely exposed to them or their life. Soldiers were simply considered as the nation's protectors whose activities were not subjected to deep scrutiny. In the present day environment when people want to know everything and there is intense competition within the media for TRPs, the armed forces have also become a part of the societal critique along with other institutions of the state. They no longer find themselves on the high pedestal reserved for the saviours of the nation; hitherto beyond reproach.

Many reported cases of misdemeanours on the part of senior military leaders and the breakdown of discipline in combat units are symptomatic of a serious problem within the armed forces. The military hierarchy has an obvious vested interest in playing down the seriousness of such incidents. However, a large number of officers in the armed forces are concerned about the falling image of the services and realize that the maintenance of high morals and ethics is critical for ensuring combat effectiveness and cohesion. The armed forces have a social contract with the society at large wherein they get the trust and respect of the people in return for forsaking certain personal freedoms, risking their lives to

provide security to the citizens, and taking orders from the constitutional civilian authority. This social contract will retain equilibrium only if the armed forces maintain the expected standards of morals and ethics. Some facets of these intangible qualities have shaped the debate in this issue.

Ethical behaviour and moral sensibilities are necessary for a leader to succeed in any field, but these are *absolutely essential* for a military leader simply because his actions have a direct bearing on the conduct of his subordinates, who follow his orders and example. The subordinates leave their welfare, safety and comfort in the hands of their commander. They trust his judgement for employing them in pursuit of common goals for the good of the service and the security of their country. It is the moral obligation of a military leader to build, nurture and ethically employ the combat power that is placed at his disposal in the service of the nation. If the leader is not a moral exemplar, he will hardly beget the trust and confidence of his command and will, therefore, not be in a position to serve the common purpose.

The military ethos binds the military profession together. It is reflected through the conduct of officers and men of the armed forces—how they view their responsibilities, gain and apply their professional competence, and express their unique military identity. It is this ethos that sets them apart from their civilian counterparts, earns them the respect of their fellow citizens, and inculcates within them and their comrades, a sense of pride and confidence to win wars and live honourably. The obligation for following established ethics is higher on the leaders by virtue of their position and of the fact that a team is as good as its leader.

It is true that some soldierly qualities are inborn, yet most of these can be imbibed and inculcated given the right environment, training and example set by leaders. It is for the military leaders to train and groom their subordinates through painstaking efforts, setting personal examples, monitoring, encouraging, building organizational cohesion, and promoting those who learn to lead their subordinates with competence. Second-rate leaders can only promote third-rate leaders. India has an abundant human resource pool and officers in the armed forces are selected with utmost care. Undoubtedly, some of the very best young men and women do not join the armed forces because of the availability of better career opportunities outside. It is also true that every officer has personal aspirations which become difficult to realize in a steep pyramidal

structure of the armed forces officer hierarchy. The shortage of officers, however, is neither the cause nor justification for deviant conduct. This, in fact, calls for men and women of higher character and competence to lead the Indian armed forces. Only the very best need to rise in hierarchy: those who can risk their careers for the good of the organization and their subordinates, and resist the temptation of seeking personal gains or advancement at the cost of their subordinates.

Some of the attributes which go in the making of a good military leader are: putting the public and organizational interest ahead of personal interest; the ability to build and recognize talent in subordinates; moral and physical courage; high degree of integrity and self-discipline; commitment to the task and welfare of subordinates; the ability to maintain high standards of ethical behaviour and to demand the same of subordinates; the ability to adapt and be mindful of the prevailing national environment; calmness under extreme pressure; sobriety, compassion and humanity; and, the ability to build cohesiveness.

There are many more qualities which a leader should possess in order to be respected and obeyed unquestioningly by his subordinates. These traits have an impact on all matters related to military functioning, including making decisions on serious issues. Integrity, for example, is not restricted to financial probity but also involves truthfulness, especially when it might be easier to appease the hierarchy via distorted facts. Military ethics also dictate that a leader should display sincerity of purpose to train oneself and one's subordinates to the optimum level for achieving success on the battlefield, even when not under supervision.

A number of cases that have come to light over the last couple of years have projected the profession of arms and its leaders in poor light. On deeper examination, it can be concluded that even though the standards of conduct and accountability of military personnel are still higher than their counterparts in other professions, the deterioration in standards has harmed the organization and brought down the self-esteem of officers and enlisted personnel.

Many reasons have been attributed to the falling standards of morals and ethics in the armed forces. Amongst these is the comparison of past and existing moral values. It is not being argued that all military leaders in the past were virtuous, and that the moral decline is a recent phenomenon, even if one is tempted to link this to recent cases of unethical behaviour by some senior officers. In the past, perhaps, the armed forces were more

insulated from the society at large and safe from the prying eyes of the media. The sense of loyalty to the superiors and the organization kept many wrongdoings under wraps. It is also true that values and ethics in society as a whole have deteriorated and this has affected the services as well. But the larger issue is that the services have always considered their ethical and moral standards to be higher than the rest of society, and for valid reasons. The young officers and soldiers get influenced by their seniors and the military organization they are a part of. Their sense of commitment to the national cause and ability to sacrifice their own comforts, family life, and even their own life when required is predicated upon self-discipline, integrity, professional competence, esprit de corps, trust in their leaders and among themselves, respect from their fellow countrymen, and group cohesion, among other essential elements.

Some commentators attribute the uneven civil-military relations and the absence of service headquarters from the national security decision-making process for the loss of self-esteem among the officer corps. They fail to recognize that in a democratic set-up, the armed forces have to be subordinated to the political leadership. A military leader recognized for competence and character cannot be ignored by the political leadership. On the other hand, a military leader seeking personal advancement with weak leadership skills will hardly have any traction with the political leadership.

The tendency to justify unauthorised perks as the privileges of the position held is not an uncommon practice in the armed forces. Instead of being mindful of the self-esteem and pride of the subordinates, the command authority is often used to humiliate subordinates and blame them for the failings, even when such failings are the clear outcome of direction from above. Successful leaders in all spheres, and certainly in the armed forces, are required to channel their personal ego needs into institutional goals and accept blame for the failings of their command while passing on the credit to their subordinates and factors outside themselves. They fight for getting the needs of their subordinates met and only after that try to husband available resources to achieve the best possible results. The feedback system in the armed forces is inadequate, perhaps because commanders are fearful of receiving a less than flattering feedback from their subordinates.

Nowhere is ethical leadership required more than in the selection, development and advancement of competent leaders and placing them in

the position they are best suited for. Narrow regimental affiliations and service in the personal staff often become the ladders for some less than deserving officers to go up in the hierarchy. Some leaders go to the extent of discriminating in recommending cases of honours and awards based on affiliations. Confidential reports on officers, their postings, and course grading also sometimes get influenced by affiliations. It no more surprises one to find out that a disproportionately larger number of officers from an arm or regiment get nominated for higher-level career courses if the officers from the same service or regiment happen to be in their higher chain of command. The very best of officers may still be difficult to ignore under any circumstance, but the interests of some officers suffer because others benefit from such parochialism. This perhaps is the single most important reason for subordinates seeking safe postings and focusing on advancement without developing competence. Someone may be able to cite an isolated example of political or bureaucratic influence affecting promotions and appointments, but it is largely left to the services to manage the careers of their officers. The rot, therefore, lies within and goes a long way towards impacting organizational cohesion and faith in the system.

This issue of the *Journal of Defence Studies* carries 12 articles and commentaries covering some but not all aspects that we wished to address. An obvious shortcoming is the lack of articles giving an outsider's perspective. Many of the prospective contributors from the social sciences stream invited to share their perspectives indicated their inability to do so, for various reasons. Serving officers were also not very enthusiastic in participating though the subject is of the greatest importance to them.

Arun Prakash, in 'Roots of Moral Decline in the Armed Forces: Time to Reclaim our *Izzat*', is of the opinion that the precipitate decline in moral and ethical values as well as the steep fall in standards of private and public conduct, in recent years, has been accompanied by a concurrent erosion of values amongst India's military personnel. Consequently, he says, the armed forces, which were once considered exemplars of ethical conduct, discipline and decency, are rapidly slipping in the estimation of their countrymen. He points out that this moral decline could lead to a loss of cohesion and combat-effectiveness in the armed forces with deleterious implications, not just for national security but also for India's social fabric, of which the soldiers and veterans form an integral

constituent. Redemption of the military's honour and restoration to its earlier iconic status should, therefore, be considered a national imperative. He highlights specific ethical challenges that could confront officers during their careers and offers practical advice to the armed forces' leadership to tackle these challenges.

Mrinal Suman, in his article titled 'Falling Standard of Values in the Army: Dilution of Norms is the Root Cause', opines that human beings are a product of their environment and society, and that their interpretation of morals, ethics and value system differ. In a traditional culture like ours, attitudes are moulded by long-established practices, rituals and conventions. The Indian Army recruits officers and men from all parts of the country with diverse value systems and attitudes, and it is well nigh impossible to weave them into a cohesive group without bringing them on to a common grid of conduct. Instead of attempting to supplant their concepts of morality, ethics and righteousness, it would be wise to steer their conduct through a set of organizational norms.

In 'Ethics at the Grassroots: A Values-based Approach', Rahul K. Bhonsle addresses the declining standards of morality in the armed forces and suggests measures to correct this decline by undertaking appropriate interventions at the grassroots, unit or battalion level. Tracing the importance of ethics in the military, particularly in the context of the post-modern state, the article examines the state of ethics today and the challenges in codification to arrive at the basic ethical norms that need to be fostered in the military. The author highlights the context of ethics at the unit level, outlining the challenges faced, including in counter-insurgency operations, normal administrative functioning and the current approach to ethics training. He proposes three options as suggestions for building an ethical culture in the unit—the Kohlberg model, the Values and Virtues Approach, and a Code of Conduct.

Vivek Chadha's article—'Role of Morals, Ethics and Motivation in a Counter-insurgency Environment'—opines that morals, ethics and motivation are the bedrock of the Indian Army, since it is considered a way of life. These qualities are put to test under most conditions of soldiering; however, involvement in protracted counter-insurgency (CI) operations is one of the most difficult environments an army has to function in. The conditions faced pose peculiar challenges, which force a soldier to adapt. This adaptation can potentially become a morally corrupting influence unless the ethical standards of a force and its moral bearings continue to

guide actions. His article assesses the circumstances and peculiarities of CI operations, the linkage between morals, ethics and motivation, impact of poor implementation of these values, and the measures to sustain a high-value system. Finally, it analyses the impact of these factors on the realities of CI operations.

B.D. Jayal places the issue in a larger perspective in his article 'Institutional Challenges Confronting the Indian Armed Forces: The Moral and Ethical Dimension'. In his opinion, the phenomenon of the apparent lowering of both personal and institutional moral and ethical standards in the armed forces is not limited to India. What is missing, he feels, is an open debate on the complexities that drive the modern day profession of arms and the need for a mutually supporting relationship between the armed forces and the institutions of a democracy, especially at a time when newer forms of security threats are emerging. In this changing order, the society, Parliament, the government, media, and the armed forces need to look within with a view to restoring a healthy balance in this relationship in order to regain the moral and ethical high ground on which this relationship rests. He advocates the setting up of a Blue Ribbon Commission, which would serve the purpose of proposing a blueprint for further debate and adoption.

In 'Changing Socio-economic Norms and its Impact on India's Armed Forces', Nitin A. Gokhale opines that the Indian Army remains rooted in an outdated, British-inherited system that is struggling to cope with the combination of challenges posed by demands of modern warfare and a society that is undergoing a great churn. The greatest challenge, thus, has been to the officer-men relationship. Over the past decade, the armed forces have faced a new problem: increasing incidents of indiscipline, suicides and fratricide. The article examines the following questions: whether these incidents are happening because the traditional bond between officers and men, the bedrock on which the military functions, is fraying at the edges; and whether there are other external factors that are impinging upon the armed forces functioning and eroding some of its admirable values.

In 'Role of Military Culture and Traditions in Building Ethics, Morals and Combat Effectiveness in Fighting Units', V. Mahalingam says that developing culture and traditions is one of the pragmatic ways of breeding ethics and moral standards in the military. These moral issues are profoundly linked to the military's way of life and ethos, which includes

discipline and esprit de corps. Although issues like developing a sense of belonging may be the theme while creating cultures, the ultimate aim is to influence a soldier into becoming an ethical team player as an instrument for winning wars. The creation and pursuit of culture establishes common values and a sense of ownership amongst the troops. The military family thus created prevents individuals from doing the unethical. The pride in a soldier forces him to protect the honour of his military family, if need be, by making the supreme sacrifice. This article elucidates military culture and traditions besides explaining their relevance to ethics.

Ian Cardozo's article—'Professional Ethics for the Armed Forces in War and Peace'—looks at the current situation in the armed forces which has been in the news for all wrong reasons recently. The author undertakes an analysis of the causes of this state of affairs and suggests that the armed forces, which were well known for their ethics and code of conduct, need to review the situation and take radical steps to ensure a return to their ethics, values and traditions.

In 'Ethics and Military Leadership', S.R.R. Aiyengar defines ethics and highlights the importance of following an ethical way of life for the Armed Forces. Military Ethics applies to a specialized realm and has developed principles appropriate to it over time to help guide future operations. The armed forces must be always ethically led to uphold the defence of the nation and its national interests. Ethical leadership embodying the ideals of the profession of arms entails creating ethical command climates that set the conditions for positive outcomes and ethical behaviour. This article identifies commonly observed fault lines in the ethical conduct of a few members in the armed forces. Without being over-critical of ethical lapses in recent times, it suggests certain steps that could be emphasized to enhance the prevalent ethical climate.

In 'Needed: A Better Appraisal System for Better Leaders', Gurmeet Kanwal writes that there has been a palpable decline in the standards of morals, ethics and values as observed by officers in the armed forces; and the bond between officers and men has weakened. This could be because officers with the requisite qualities are not adequately groomed to rise to the level of battalion commanders. The present appraisal system is largely to blame for this, it being based on a single Annual Confidential Report. A further drawback is that only superior officers report on a ratee. Inputs for appraisal need to be drawn from multiple sources geared towards a '360 degree evaluation'. The appraisal system should enforce accountability

in officers, facilitate their continuous improvement, reward competence and sincerity, recognize efficiency, and confirm an officer's suitability for the post. It should encourage both an officer's career development as well as self-development linked to organizational goals. The system must thus evaluate both mission accomplishment and organizational development.

Dhruv C. Katoch's article, 'Ethics and Morals in the Armed Forces: A Framework for Positive Action', focuses on the centrality of value systems and the need to strengthen the ethical leadership within the armed forces. He opines that value systems form the spine of modern society, religion and every individual's conscience with moral codes defining 'appropriate' and 'expected' activity. Ethics refer to an individual's actions that are consistent with such value systems. While the former constitutes a basic human marker of right behaviour and conduct, the latter are a set of guidelines that define acceptable behaviour and practices for a certain group of individuals or society. Within this construct, this article traces the origin and growth of Indian and Western ideas on the subject and probes similarities between the two. The article thereafter dwells on the perceived decline in moral values in India—a widespread belief—even though no empirical study exists to substantiate this claim. The author then suggests that the focus needs to shift from a perceived 'ethics crisis' to how ethical leadership can be strengthened within the armed forces.

In "Strength One" on the Moral Highway', Vikram Taneja posits that the extent of erosion in moral values in the armed forces over the past few decades has left India's political and military leadership bewildered and befuddled. No amount of preventive or curative measures appear to be succeeding in arresting this fall, as day after day dawns with news of fresh instances of impropriety and indecorum. This article attempts to examine the issues of morals and ethics as relevant to the profession of arms across the time continuum. It dwells on the probable causes of the erosion of moral values and ethics in the Army. The article suggests certain fundamental approaches towards addressing this complex human issue albeit with immense prudence, as 'sometimes the remedy is more lethal than the disease'.

Finally, our readers would be aware that with the previous issue (Vol. 7, No. 1, January–March 2013), we instituted a 'Letters to the Editor' section in the journal. The idea is to engage with our readers, to know

what they think about the content of each issue as well as seek their help in making JDS into a world-renowned journal that appeals to the strategic community. We would like to hear from our readers on content in general as well as on specific articles/commentaries we carry in each issue. It is hoped that the current issue will generate some interest and feedback which will help us make the content more relevant. Details are available on the journal's homepage: <http://www.idsa.in/journalofdefencestudies>.

Brigadier Rumel Dahiya (Retd.)
Managing Editor

Acknowledgement

The armed forces across the world emphasize the need for their members to be ethical in their conduct and follow moral values. In some countries this issue has been codified by the issue of books and pamphlets. In 1950, Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall authored a seminal book, *Armed Forces Officer*, for the US Armed Forces. This book was subsequently updated and issued as pamphlets to all the services. The Canadian Armed Forces came out with a book titled *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*, in 2003, which was again updated in 2005. In India, Lieutenant General Mathew Thomas issued a brief booklet titled Honour Code at the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun. Some of the terms and ideas have been taken from these works.