

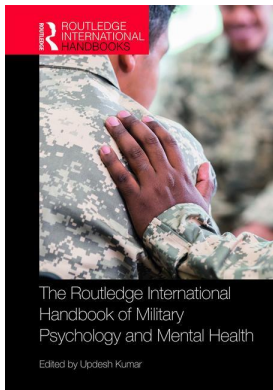
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MILITARY PSYCHOLOGY IN WAR AND PEACE

An appraisal

Swati Mukherjee and Updesh Kumar

Psychology as a modern ‘scientific’ discipline has been a close ally of modern warfare, the two having established a mutually beneficial relationship, especially during the first half of the twentieth century and since. Military psychology has over the years established itself as a unique sub-discipline that determines its boundaries not through methodological concerns or subject content, but rather through its ability to optimally fulfil the requirements of the Armed Forces in specific contexts and under unique circumstances, making use of the advancements in the broader discipline of psychology. And in the endeavour, psychology has visibly made significant contributions to the military. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say, as Matthews says, ‘psychology is more relevant and viable today for the military, than at any point in history.’ (Matthews, 2014, P. 215). The growth of the sub-discipline of military psychology has been in tandem with the developments in the art and science of warfare. However, in the post–Cold War era with the international political equations rapidly changing, and in view of the unprecedented technological developments in the mechanics of warfare, the fundamental nature of war itself has undergone a metamorphosis. In this context, it becomes imperative for military psychologists to take stock of the discipline by asking the eternal question, as Bingham asked while striving to discern the pressing problems of military psychology, in the ‘chaotic days between war and peace’ after the Second World War – ‘What are the continuing problems of military psychology?’ (Bingham, 1947, P. 155). It is the same question that military psychology is faced with today even after the passage of half a century. The question seems to be gaining more relevance with increasing ambiguities and complexities of warfare, and the blurring boundaries between war and endeavours for peace. The present chapter begins by delineating the current standards of research and practice in military psychology in the context of the major historical trends in the discipline. Subsequently, it engages with the quintessential question of the dynamics between war and peace, and the precarious balance between the two, seeking to emphasise the need to enhance interaction between the domains of peace psychology and military psychology. The chapter concludes with an argument for structuring a nuanced ethical framework for research and practice of military psychology in order to prevent the discipline from becoming a mere cog in the machineries of war.

Psychology during the World Wars

The primary role of psychology in the military is to support and assist the armed forces in achieving their goals by ensuring fitness of selection, capability building through training and sustained mental fitness for effective operation under varied circumstances. And in this vein, beginning from the days of the First World War, military psychologists have been consistently working in tandem with the militaries of the countries on both sides of the Atlantic, although some of the authors reviewing the development of the discipline are of the opinion that psychology had a very limited scope in the military in the early years of the twentieth century. Reviewing the role psychologists played during the Great War (1914–1918), Shephard (2015), for example, says that the military scarcely knew about psychology, especially in Britain. Providing a succinct account of contributions of psychology to the war effort during the First World War, Shephard (2015) says that in Britain the role of civilian psychologists was limited mostly to treating ‘shell-shocked’ soldiers in military hospitals, drawing on their medical expertise and experience. Dr. Charles Meyers, for example, was appointed the Consultant Psychologist to the first Royal Army Medical Corps, and established mental health hospitals in tents behind the enemy lines in France. It was only in the later years of the war that some of these pioneering psychologists (e.g. Myers, Rivers, Spearman) could find some more significant and relevant applications of psychology in various branches of the military. No attempt, however, was made to apply psychology to the testing of military recruits (Shephard, 2015, P. 944). At the same time, psychologists in Europe had a better say in military matters. Shephard (2015) describes how Wilhelm Wundt, among other prominent cultural and academic figures, supported the German army’s stance against Belgium. Many of those involved in war were students of Wundt, due to which greater relevance was accorded to psychology in the war efforts on both shores of the Atlantic. Germany was a pioneer in establishing the discipline of psychology, and the German military benefitted from the industrial expertise gained by psychologists in the pre-war years. As a result, Germany started using aptitude tests for the selection of pilots, truck drivers, radio operators and other specialists as early as 1915. Psychologists performed many specified tasks for the German military, which did not have any long-term impact on the discipline – for example, a ‘listening device’ developed by Max Wertheimer for locating enemy artillery. On the other hand, certain explorations by psychologists while serving in uniform laid the foundations of later research in the fields of leadership, combat motivation, fatalism among soldiers and the like. Psychologists can be credited with making the German war effort ‘more scientific, rational and modern’ (Shephard, 2015, P. 945), and for demonstrating to the state the practical usefulness and applicability of the discipline, resulting in the creation of new positions of psychology in technology institutes and commercial academies (Geuter, 1992). Akin to Britain, France too had minimal involvement of psychologists in the war effort, wherein they devised some psycho-physical measurements of heart rate and respiration of machine gunners, but none of these countries employed large-scale military testing.

On the other side of the Atlantic, as the United States of America entered the war in the year 1917, psychologists with industry experience found useful employment in the military. The contributions of Walter Dill Scott and Robert M. Yerkes are remarkable in this era of early development of psychology in the military. By the end of the war, the Committee on the Classification of Personnel in the Army, which tested men for their aptitude in various fields of the military using Scott’s techniques, had interviewed and classified thousands of men. Yerkes was a pioneer in initiating a more formal association of psychology with the military, and, along with Terman, Goddard and a few others, is credited with the development of Army General Classification Tests (Army Alpha and Army Beta), measures that allowed for testing of large samples simultaneously. Reviewing the status of military psychology, Melton (1957) remarks that

during the First World War, psychologists also engaged in development of job-knowledge tests, training of naval gunners, analysis of aircraft pilot ability and perhaps many other areas, of which written records no longer exist. Among other consequences, the implementation of large-scale testing in the military gave impetus to psychology in the United States and eventually led to the establishment of the Division of Psychology in the office of the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army in the year 1917 (Mangelsdorff & Gal, 1991). On the whole, while some researchers go to the extent of claiming that 'social and clinical psychology received a significant boost from the First World War and a new branch of the profession emerged in the shape of military psychology' (Bourke, 2001), it is reasonable to conclude that the First World War at the minimum provided for conditions where psychology could envisage a new role for itself in the military.

The Second World War witnessed exponential expansion of the applications of psychology in the military, both in Britain and in the United States. Britain recruited a large number of psychologists in various branches of the armed forces, including the areas of personnel selection and health care systems (Hughes, McCauley, & Wilson, 2019). Significant contributions were made by psychology to the military efforts, and in recognition, the American Psychological Association (APA) included the Division of Military Psychology (Division 19) among its first group of formal subdivisions in the year 1945. A committee to evaluate the work of psychologists and psychiatrists in the armed forces during the war years was set up by the then-prime minister Winston Churchill. The committee reported upon the vital role played by the group in war, and as a result psychologists gained an official entry in the British civil services post war. Similarly, remarkable progress was being made in Germany in finding applications of psychology to military settings. Germany had made preliminary beginnings in this area during the First World War, wherein psychological technique was being applied for selection of drivers, pilots, wireless operators, sound detector operators and anti-aircraft personnel. After the war ended, the war ministry issued orders for development of psychology in the army, leading to rapid developments in the areas of personnel selection, resulting eventually in mandatory psychological testing using the 'whole personality approach' for selection of all armed forces officers (Fitts, 1946). Also, while much attention was given to selection in the armed forces by the German psychologists, not much contribution was made towards using psychology for structuring training. Similarly, clinical psychology found very limited application in an environment where decisions regarding psychogenic problems of soldiers were governed by military policy, rather than psychological advice. German psychologists differed significantly in their methods of analysis, as their focus was more on subjective analysis rather than objective testing.

Meanwhile, in the United States of America, with the beginning of the Second World War, a large number of psychologists were recruited into the Armed Forces for research studies and technical applications. The single largest programme implemented by the Army Air Force focused primarily on psychological selection of personnel, and in the later years included problems of training and proficiency measurement (Melton, 1957). Research programmes in other domains of the military were also focused primarily upon personnel selection. Utilisation of the expertise and services of psychologists was on a piecemeal basis, and was yet to find a systematic application in military operations. Over the years, psychology gradually made a valued place for itself within the military sciences, finding vast and varied applications across domains. Personnel selection by ensuring person-job fit continues to be a prime focus in general in most of the nations, while clinical intervention, man-machine interface and human factors engineering have expanded to study adaptations to complex machine environments. With ever-newer applications of information technology, especially in the domain of artificial intelligence, cognitive-behavioural applications of psychology have expanded immensely. Along with personnel selection, training, leadership and maintaining the morale of the troops continue to be core areas of research in conventional units as well as in non-conventional military formations and deployments.

Post–World War military psychology

The world plunged into a prolonged era of uneasy peace post the Second World War. International relations remained tense and nations continually strived to achieve a balance. As war was replaced by diplomacy, the nations strived to find alternative means of attaining and defending national interests. As the distinction between wartime and peacetime targets got blurred, so did the distinction between civil and military targets. As the boundaries became fuzzy, the services of experts, including the psychologists utilised by the military, were deemed indispensable (Herman, 1995). With innovative research paradigms emerging in the broader subject domain of psychology, and with the emergence of a dynamic interface between social and behavioural sciences, military psychology rapidly expanded its horizons and created an important space for itself in military policy in the context of changed geo-political global arrangements. Postwar years produced newer kinds of warfare, e.g. guerrilla or jungle warfare and countless insurgencies across many Third-World nations. Psychology emerged as a mainstay for formulation of policies and strategies in this context. As Herman (1995) puts it, ‘the combination of unchecked weapons of technology and underdeveloped social technology was poisonous. Psychological expertise was among the only antidotes’ (P. 125). Psychological research flourished during these years, especially in the United States, where the military wholeheartedly supported it. A major domain of psychological research effort in the military was dedicated to the designing of an ideological war against perceived enemies, and psychology increasingly became an essential component in military strategy and foreign policy. Lessons and insights learnt from the experiences of the U.S. military during the Korean war in 1950 had reiterated the usefulness and reliability of the military-psychology combination owing to research in domains such as brainwashing, mass communication, persuasive communication and the like. The U.S. military reemphasised the definition of war as a psychological struggle, where victory depended not only on military superiority, but also on psychological strategising to weaken the enemy, and a laboratory that provided for ever-newer opportunities for testing psychological theories and propositions. (Herman, 1995). Military research support to psychology in the Cold War years and the resultant unflinching support of psychology to the American military, though immensely beneficial and boosting for the development of the discipline, also drew strong criticism on moral and ethical grounds, especially after the Department of Defense’s Project Camelot came to light in the shape of an international scandal in the year 1965. Project Camelot was a major plan with a strong psychology component to involve behavioural experts in predicting and controlling Third-World revolutions and development in order to gain an upper hand internationally (Herman, 1995).

The recent years have seen major changes not only in the nature and techniques of warfare, but also in the very paradigm of war. With the rise of terrorism and the ‘war on terror’ in the post-9/11 years, the concept of war has undergone a metamorphosis. Conventional warfare that had a definitive enemy force as the opponent, most often controlled by another nation-state, is being replaced by an ambiguous enemy and non-state actors controlling these forces across international borders. Military forces of most developed nations and many of the developing nations are involved in or are contributing towards engaging these non-state actors in controlling most acts of terrorist violence. This involvement is either direct (e.g. U.S. military forces in the Middle-East or Asia) or as a part of the United Nations Peace Keeping contingent (e.g. Indian Armed Forces deployed in South Sudan). In both instances, the stated purpose of military action is to establish or maintain peace by defeating or subduing the violence perpetuated by non-state actors. The world has been witnessing perpetual and multiple armed conflicts in recent years. At the time of the present lines being written, there are at least 25 armed conflicts taking place across the world, as reported by the Council of Foreign Relations, an American non-partisan think

tank. Changing rules of engagement and increasing ambiguities have resulted in innumerable controversies and contentions regarding the role of the military in dealing with terror groups and organisations, insurgents and non-state actors. Under the circumstances, two major themes need to be highlighted and deliberated upon in order to structure the future directions the discipline of military psychology would take.

The first theme pertains to the need to evolve a perspective stance for military psychology, and the nature of its contributions towards military endeavours. Although it is rational to assert that 'Supporting the military's understanding of human behaviour is not tantamount to advocating war' (Laurence & Matthews, 2012, P. 3), the increasingly complex definition of warfare and the ambiguity of sociopolitical environments inherent in most contemporary conflicts make it imperative for the discipline of military psychology to be well informed about the ethical pitfalls of advocating value-free scientific knowledge. The second equally pertinent theme that demands attention of contemporary military psychologists across nations is regarding the scope and nature of the subject matter of military psychology. Though defined and usually delimited by the operational concerns of the militaries of the home countries, the scope and applications of military psychology must be expanded beyond understanding war. As Matthews (2014) says, both war and peace are essentially human phenomena, and scientific understanding of human behaviour can help explain and structure both the conditions. As psychology has made a move from understanding disease and pathology to understanding resilience and positive behaviour, in the same vein military psychology can no longer ignore making a move from understanding war to understanding peace.

Military as a peace-builder: Role of psychology

About a century ago, Clausewitz (1918) famously defined war as continuation of politics by other means, and viewed it as an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our view. In the contemporary world scenario, with ever-increasing ambiguities in making a distinction between friend and foe, psychology has found a renewed relevance owing to its potential to influence policy and politics. As it is true for the present epoch that it is a period of perpetual conflicts, so it is also true that never before have so many nations and groups come together in the pursuit of world peace. Peace is not mere absence of conflict, but is marked by combined effort of people and nations in working towards common good, social cooperation, empathy and pro-social behaviour (Matthews, 2014). Matthews (2014), in his aptly titled book *Head Strong*, emphasises the potential of psychology in bringing about this shift from war to peace. He describes in some detail the increasing interface between the APA division of Military Psychology (Division 19) and the APA division for Peace (Division 48 – Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict and Violence), and the shared vision of a peaceful world by the members of both divisions. Emphasising the need to recognise the significance of resolving disputes and conflicts through peaceful dialogue and negotiations, he also questions the disparities in the funding of military research and research on peace psychology. Extending his argument and calling for action in the same direction, he suggests certain concrete domains where military psychology can contribute in order to facilitate the move from war to peace. Quoting from Matthews (2014, Pp. 217–221), some such domains are: changing mindsets of populations to replace 'fixed' mindsets with 'growth' mindsets that have been shown to promote favourable intergroup relations and amenability to negotiation; facilitating intergroup cooperation using social psychological techniques of common goals, as demonstrated by the classic Robber's Cave experiments done by Sherif and colleagues (1988); using the operant conditioning paradigm of rewards and punishments to enhance the likelihood of desirable political behaviour and furthering peaceful behaviour by using tools developed by social psychology over the years.

In the years after the Second World War, the United Nations (UN) organisation has played a significant role in delimiting conflicts across the globe. Along with using military force drawn from its member nations for peacekeeping, a few years ago, the UN called for a greater willingness on the part of the international community to address the basic economic, social, political and ethnic causes of conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). This implied recognising the structural forms of violence that lie at the roots of most violent conflicts. An ideological understanding of the structural roots of violence can be facilitated through psychological research in the domains of relative deprivation, intergroup dynamics, prejudice and stereotypes and identity dynamics.

One of the most significant domains where psychology has grown in the post-World War years, especially during the Cold War era, is the use of cognitive and social psychological research for designing and disseminating publicity material and propaganda for influencing public opinions in favourable directions, initially by the American military, and subsequently by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Though being utilised since the days of the First World War, these psychological operations (psy-ops) reached their peak propensity during the Cold War years, when a bipartisan agreement was reached among U.S. political leaders about the essentiality of beating the Soviet Union and countering its communist propaganda using any means possible (Wolfe, 2018). These vast array of intellectual and cultural instruments being utilised for spreading 'American values' in countries with potential communist influence during the Cold War years were largely discontinued by the United States after the fall of communism in the post-1991 world (Leonard, 2002). However, in view of the 'war on terror' in the post-9/11 world, need for 'public diplomacy', i.e. persuasive communication (or propaganda) with the populations overseas for the purpose of convincing them of the legitimacy of the U.S. military actions against terror outfits, has gained ever more importance. Leonard (2002) provides many examples across nations (e.g. governments in Kosovo, Greece and Italy faced uncertainty in the face of volatile public opinions) in recent decades, where popular public perceptions rather than governments set the pace for international diplomacy. In this context, international public diplomacy has attained a new perspective and significance, though in the current era of easily accessible information, a much greater finesse would be required to make an impact on public perceptions and opinions. Military psychology thus has a potent area of renewed research and application open to its efforts in making a move from assisting war to building peace by finding the psychological process of 'building relationships, starting from understanding other countries' needs, cultures, and peoples, and then looking for areas to make common cause' (Leonard, 2002, P. 50).

A related area of concern while military psychology looks forward to expanding its scope to influence peace processes is evolving a critical and nuanced awareness of desirable ethical standards of research and application.

Psychology for the military: Focus on ethics of the profession

Ethics have been defined as 'the agreed upon standards of aspirational and mandatory behaviours and practices' (Leong, Altmaier, & Johnson, 2008, P. 182) by the members of a specific group. Professional ethics set the aspirational standard of behaviour for the member of a profession in a manner that distinguishes the *malum in se* (bad in itself) from *malum prohibitum* (wrong only because law prohibits it). In simple words, this means that the members of the group are expected to internalise the prescribed standards of professional practice as inherent values of the group and adhere to these under all circumstances, and not only in order to avoid punishment. In this sense ethics are placed on a higher level than law, as ethical practice implies unflinching adherence to the 'good' and refraining from the 'bad' voluntarily, without any external influence or compulsion. The crucial question of defining the 'good' and the 'bad' in professional contexts lies upon the professional body and the ideological stance taken by it.

While many researchers recognise and elaborate upon the ethical issues and dilemmas in the field of research and applications of military psychology (e.g. Frey, 2017; Johnson & Landsinger, 2017; Staal & King, 2000), most discussions pertain to the ground-level problems of practicing psychology in clinical or organisational settings within complex operational environments. Looking for a broader ideological stance for the discipline, that would define and shape the research endeavours and delimit the contours of scientific application of knowledge thus generated, one comes across a void. There are hardly any discussions on the ontology of military psychology, though the apparent epistemological stance it takes is largely positivist. Devoid of philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge and lacking any critical examination of assumptions underlying theories and constructs, military psychology in its current form exemplifies stark positivist science, that is unambiguously based on observation of ‘facts’ or ‘data’, linked by rigorous logic to hypotheses or theories (Manicas & Secord, 1983). Military psychology as a part of the traditional field of military studies has always stood as an apolitical, atheoretical and largely quantitative approach to scientific understanding (Basham, Belkin, & Gifkins, 2015).

Military psychology has grown exponentially in the last century as a discipline majorly rooted in the American ethos. Despite a declared adherence to the highest American values of freedom and democracy and bound by the professional ethic of protecting and promoting the mental health and well-being of those they serve, military psychologists (as represented by the APA) have faced severe criticism in recent years for certain stark actions and decisions taken in apparent disregard of any critical self-appraisal. Murray, Lyubansky, Miller and Ortega (2014) have critically examined the APA’s refusal to condemn the use of torture or of acknowledging the involvement of its members in designing and implementing abusive interrogation and detention techniques used by the military and CIA against terror suspects. Though they attribute this blind adherence of the APA with the military to the historical closeness of American psychology with the military, it is also reflective of the ideological shortsightedness of the discipline. While looking for friends and allies in the ‘global war against terror’ to achieve the elusive target of a peaceful world, such ideological unawareness is proving detrimental.

In order to break out of the current mould and move towards peace building, the discipline of military psychology needs to evolve a reflexive and critical awareness of its ideological positioning and value preferences. The first and foremost requirement in this regard is to develop an acceptance of the inherently interpretive nature of the peace-building ventures, which must rely upon understanding cultural diversities and co-constructing peace as an ongoing process. A value-based perspective rooted in critical self awareness is the first step towards developing a psychology for the military that truly serves the purpose of making the world a more peaceful place. The Herculean but essential task of evolving a psychology for the military that goes beyond finding utilitarian solutions for the forces and helps in creating a value-based critical awareness of actions and decisions in an environment of perpetual ambiguities might be the stepping stone of the path that leads towards a peaceful world. A move from militarism to peace building would inevitably rely upon an ideologically aware and critically reflexive avatar of military psychology that accepts the simultaneous existence of multiple perspectives, does not divide the world into dichotomies and breaks down hierarchies to minimise power asymmetries and perceived moral superiorities of certain groups and nations.

Conclusion

The present chapter focuses upon the need for reconceptualizing the role and subject matter of military psychology in the context of the contemporary socio-political realities fraught with perpetual violence and multilayered conflicts. It situates the discipline in historical context by

tracing its major developments since the First World War up until the present era. It highlights the intertwined nature of military and the discipline of psychology especially in the USA. As the discipline of military psychology has come to be dominated by the American perspectives, these historical influences are now shaping the structure and ideological stance of the discipline in general. The chapter concludes by highlighting the anomalies in two concomitant domains where the authors see possibilities for change in the positive direction. First domain is about redrawing disciplinary boundaries and redesignating disciplinary priorities in order to make a move from facilitating war to establishing peace as the ultimate aim. The second domain which arises from this shift, both as a prerequisite and as an outcome of the same, is the grave need for the discipline to achieve clarity about its ideological positioning.

The idea of replacing war with an alternative is not new. William James (1910/1995, p. 17), questioning the necessity of war says, “The war against war is going to be no holiday excursion or camping party. The military feelings are too deeply grounded to abdicate their place among our ideals until better substitutes are offered than shame and glory that come to nations as well as to individuals from the ups and downs of politics and the vicissitudes of trade.” It is heartening to note that even in the early days of psychology he saw a potent role for the discipline for making a transition from war to peace. Realising that militarism is too deeply rooted in the psyche of the individual and the society to even imagine a military-less world, he emphasises the need to find an alternative that would create opportunities for the human virtues to emerge and shine, as militarism does. This goal of finding a substitute for militarism that creates opportunities for a goal-oriented, hardy, selfless and resolute human character to emerge can very well be fulfilled by psychologists by creating alternative pathways that channel human energies in a positive and constructive manner.

The core point propagated by the present chapter, thus, is that the discipline of military psychology inherently holds the potential for transforming the very nature of war to the extent of eliminating it altogether at some point in the future, replacing it with peaceful cooperative striving. Such transitions have become imperative, and psychology with its immense propensity to bring about change can become the flag bearer in transforming the world altogether.

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