

## Book Review

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# All sails to the NDU wind? Review of *European Military Culture and Security Governance. Soldiers, Scholars and National Defence Universities* by Tamir Libel

<https://doi.org/10.2478/jobs-2018-0010>

received November 23, 2018; accepted December 2, 2018.

**Abstract:** Reviews European Military Culture and Security Governance. Soldiers, scholars and national defence universities by Tamir Libel.

**Keywords:** Book review; military culture; NDU.

Tamir Libel's book invites readers to delve into the discussion of changes in European strategic culture and its component, viz. military culture, through examination of the developments in the current professional military education (PME) institutions. The book starts by developing a theoretical model and goes on to analyse five case studies – British and German military education systems, Finnish National Defence University (NDU), Romanian Carol I NDU and the Baltic Defence College. The book concludes with the chapter comparing these case studies and discussing some avenues for further study.

The theoretical argument of the book is based on developments in the discussion of European strategic culture. The assumption is made that after the end of the Cold War, the 'European Cold War paradigm of "heroic warfare" has transformed into one of a "post-heroic" operation.' (p. 1) Societal change is at the heart of this transformation, and three of its elements are of particular importance: ageing European populations, declining military readiness and decreasing toleration of casualties in conflicts. This societal change has an impact on military culture, which is particularly observable in PME, where knowledge and values of the profession are transmitted to the new generations. The result of this process is the moving of PME institutions towards the NDU concept. Their convergence is facilitated by increasing collaboration among these institutions and forms the ground for the 'emergence of an epistemic community based on NDUs.' (p. 1)

As the assumptions and the book title already intimate, the book is based on the strategic culture literature and the author identifies with the 'fourth generation' of constructivist scholars 'who integrate positivist research design into a constructivist theoretical framework in order to design testable models of strategic behaviour and decision making' (p. 8–9). As such, it develops a hypothesis that societal pressures force military education systems to adapt to the new realities, and the result of this adaptation is the NDU concept of education. NDUs are expected to go beyond traditional military college training in emphasising academic–professional education focussed on wider security issues and delivered partially by civilian academics. It is expected that these institutions also produce research and maintain infrastructure conducive to such activity.

The following case chapters analyse the five cases along these lines and evaluate how much each of the institutions advanced towards the NDU model. The comparison chapter summarises these findings and analyses the additional dimension of professionalisation in the PME structures analysed.

The book points to a number of important developments in the PME: pressures to 'academise' and, at the same time, tensions between military and civilian cultures; struggles with diminishing budgets and lack of faculty from

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the officer corps in the shrunken armed forces. The argument itself, however – that the European military education is converging towards the NDU model as a part of a general move to the era of post-heroic operations – is not entirely convincing. Even the cases presented show mixed results, with some institutions adopting the NDU model (Finnish and Romanian), some partially moving there (British, Baltic Defence College [BALTDEFCOL]) and one staying firm in the ‘old’ college type.

The argument could be more convincing if one was persuaded by the structure of the analysis. First, the author adapts the criteria for analysis of PME institutions to look into the aim, governance, composition and selection of faculty; composition and selection of student body; curriculum and infrastructure to determine where (on the Military College or the NDU side) the institution should be positioned. As such, these criteria can easily lead to the positioning of institutions to one or the other side of the divide. Yet, it is a question whether the look at these formal aspects can show a change in (military) culture.

This is especially questionable when the notion of professionalisation and its criteria are added to the analysis of change in military education institutions. The criteria for professionalisation are taken from Davis Cross research and include the following: standards of selection and training; common culture; shared professional norms and the quality and frequency of meetings. These are analysed again using formal statements from the institutional documents. While a lot may be indeed gleaned from the institutional documents, which would allow to draw some conclusions about the institution, these can hardly be the only source of information about it. It is doubtful that ‘common culture’, ‘shared professional norms’ and ‘quality of meetings’ can be shown by discussion of the formal structures. The author does little to dispel these doubts. Only the number of fora in which the institutions cooperate are thrown into the mix. How those working in the area see their profession is not elaborated upon.

Furthermore, the notion that there is a move towards concentration on the post-heroic operations at the expense of the traditional warfighting in the PME institutions when examining only the cases of Staff colleges/universities is also problematic. The author writes ‘As a result, graduates are not only educated on how to refrain from killing or being killed, they are also expected to lead operations rather than fight.’ (p. 211) Given that the courses such as JCGSC in the BALTDEFCOL and its equivalents elsewhere, which are analysed in the book, focus on the development of staff officers exactly on the operational level and thus have as their aim precisely the development of skills of planning operations, it is hardly a very surprising result. For this statement to have a value of a paradox, not the staff colleges, but rather the military academies and their cadet-graduates should be examined.

Minor issues in the chapters on the cases are in the inconsistencies of the data provided, which make it more difficult to compare them. The structure of the organisation in a visual chart is provided in the chapters on Romanian and BALTDEFCOL cases, but not in others. The budget of the organisation is provided in some chapters but not in others (in the Romanian one, it is in Lei, which adds another difficulty, as one has to move away from the reading to check the Lei–Euro rate in order to grasp what is the size). Library size is discussed as an important factor, but the data on the library size is provided inconsistently throughout the chapters. Gender is mentioned in the chapter on Finnish institutions but ignored in others.

The style of the book itself is sometimes difficult, as it polemicalises with other authors, while not explaining to the reader the essence of the issue, or simply presents a number of facts without always explaining why they are there. For instance, the ‘Kosovo model’ of military education proposed by Peter Foot is mentioned and applied to the case of the Baltic Defence College, but it is not explained there what that model entails and why is it called the ‘Kosovo’ model. Or in the Finnish case, there is a discussion (p. 103) of the two audits that the university went through, but ‘in the first instance failed to grasp the significance of the feedback it received’ – why is this important and what exactly this is about remains unclear.

The structure of the book – going in depth into the case studies and later analysing and comparing them in more detail in light of the general argument – leads to a number of repetitions. While all chapters can be read as stand-alone chapters with the same table developed in the theoretical examination repeated in each of them, one could expect a little more from the comparison chapter in the end. Yet, once there, the reader has to go through, again, the same information, often in the same summarising words, as in the individual chapters.

All in all, the book provides an interesting starting point for the debate on the European military culture and the role that PME institutions play in it. The book ends with the suggestion of the use of various methods to examine these issues. It is to be hoped that the future employment of these methods results in a robust and convincing examination of the convergence (or lack thereof) of the European military and strategic cultures.