Mediation and the Military

Operational Readiness by Means of Task and Objective-oriented Cooperation

By Elvira Hauska/Oliver Jeschonek/Bernhard Penz

Military forces exist to overcome conflicts. For that, they have various instruments and weapons at their disposal. Unfortunately, their public image is still largely limited to the role armed forces were having in the past, i.e. to be an organisation that uses force. However, military tasks comprise a lot of other activities. The military operation per se, used as a security political method, does not exist anymore. Especially in terms of a cooperative understanding of security, soldiers are increasingly challenged to do their job amidst the civilian society. In order to meet these challenges, the military needs sufficient understanding, capabilities, and possibilities. Mediation can provide support to deduce those changes from conflicts arising in everyday professional situations that are necessary to cope with tasks of security political relevance.

A Prize for Applied Conflict Culture

Military leadership behaviour is not a cemented topic that has been covered exhaustively so far. Even in the 21st century, we need to strive for a constant improvement of leadership training provided to the members of armed forces. Such training does not only contain professional and methodological skills, but also social competence.

In 2015, the IRIS non-profit society awarded the Austrian Joint Forces Command with the prize for "Applied Conflict Culture in the Public Sector."[1]

The laudation, given by the Styrian professor of law and IRIS expert juror, Sascha Ferz, justifies this award with the structured fostering of mission and target-oriented cooperation:

"Since 2009 ..., the 'Personnel Coaching, Mediation, and Team Development' Task Force has been intensively testing (based on proven leadership training methods) new personnel and team development instruments. ... Thus, the Austrian Armed Forces have created new methods ... to efficiently combine hierarchically structured 'organisational elements' in a team. [2] Michael Brandstätter, a communications officer, additionally underlines in 'Wir Streitkräfte' that the aim of the award is to remove the taboos from the 'conflict' topic and to establish a constructive conflict culture.[3]

Figure 1: The 2015 IRIS Prize Award for "Applied Conflict Culture" (Foto: Christine Kipper)

Mediation fosters the handling of conflicts in the sense that everyday professional problems create further approaches for the accomplishment of basic military tasks. Lieutenant-general Franz Reißner, who attended the awarding ceremony in person, puts it into the following words:

Mediation and its interlocking and linkage with other disciplines have an enormous potential. They enable new views from which new approaches to real or supposed problems can evolve. Especially in a military environment that is becoming increasingly cooperative with non-military personnel and organisations, such a method makes sense. At the same time, we should refrain from a blame culture. We need solutions, not culprits. Closely related to that is the identification of problematic situations in order to be able to avoid them in the future.

Abandoning the blame culture is also of military strategic importance. In fact, we can see that results that are achieved by means of mission tactics are of higher quality than those achieved by detailed order tactics. The precondition for that is a higher education of the leaders involved to make them able to deal with a higher degree of freedom of action. However, such a method needs learning processes which do not condemn mistakes but see them as part of an intended solution.

Changes of the Security Culture

In the past, one of the most important tasks of the military was to deter or destroy declared enemies by means of offensive and defensive force. An important milestone for the European Security Policy was the Peace of Westphalia, which brought an end to the Thirty Years' War. The accords negotiated for this Treaty, dating from 1648, were meant to enable 'permanent peace and true and sincere friendship! The Westphalian System was borne, equating sovereignty with national state power.

Linked to that was the intent to enclose conflicts and wars, because only states were given the legitimacy to use force in the form of a war. Thereby, the nations were given the freedom to decide whether they wanted to make war or not.[4]

This concept of national security, however, led to an increased insecurity among potential opponents. The amount of national securities reduced the international security and resulted in a global arms race. The fact that, today, we have nations able to destroy one another, shows that security can only be achieved together with and not against the others. The ancient principle of 'if you want peace, prepare for war' is herewith given new perspectives.[5]

The end of World War II and, as a consequence, the foundation of the United Nations, constitutes an important break for the security policy.

Within this context, the international condemnation of war as a means to settle a conflict, was the most important innovation, in order to '… *save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind …'.* It is the aim of the United Nations to '… take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace'.[6]

As a result of that, war lost its legitimacy and was limited to defensive action in case of an attack. Consequently, systems of collective security and collective defence were created. Besides that, military alliances were formed, meant to apply defensive methods against attacks from outside. It is the collective who decides how to settle a conflict together. The use of collective force, e.g. by the United Nations, needs decisions made by the appropriate committees in advance. In the overarching system of the United Nations, the ideas of conflict resolution are not based on deterrence and prevention, but on negotiation, compromise and mutual understanding. However, there will also be sanctions for peace breaches.

In case of a massive threat against individuals and communities, it may also be necessary to interfere with sovereign rights. Often, conflicts do not have their origins in states any more, but in single groupings. Therefore, such proceedings constitute a clear deviation from the rules of the Westphalian System.

The most recent development is the establishment of a cooperative security. There are various conditions that have fostered these changes:

1. Threats against the security do not any longer emerge from national states but from situations like instability, loss of economic capacity, a lack of sufficient development, or hardly available efficient and value-oriented institutions. Thus, security organisations do not see any longer threats being caused by 'someone', but by 'something'.

The isolated activities of soldiers, activities that are out of touch with the society, can have a strategically and politically counterproductive effect even though such isolation is necessary from the military point of view. All international operations in which Austria is participating are more than purely military activities. A military operation that is not accepted by the population can create a negative effect, even if it is intended to serve a 'good cause'. Thus, the military is increasingly challenged, within various approaches like for example homeland security operations, to do its job amidst the civilian society. Civil-military activities require an interdisciplinary method.[7]

1. Military forces of western democracies see themselves as conflict solution organisations. The Austrian sociologist Klas Zapotoczky writes that male and female soldiers no longer only have to be trained to fight, but also to make peace.[8]

It is therefore a logical consequence that need-oriented methods like mediation are more and more becoming part of armed forces activities, thus complementing their traditional instruments.

Mediational Thinking

The basic idea of mediation in terms of arbitration is several thousand years old. Already the ancient Greek Solon, who settled Greece's debt crisis, was given the status of a mediator. During the last third of the 20th century, the 'Alternative Dispute Resolutions Movement' was borne because of uncertainties in the American judiciary. Parallel to that, new negotiation concepts like the Harvard Method were created. However, it turned out soon that even well-trained negotiation experts had difficulties in finding solutions that were able to meet the interests of all parties involved in highly escalated conflicts. Mediation as a service and a profession for all aspects of life was born.[9]

In general, mediation is defined as an intervention into a negotiation or conflict situation. An outside third party, which is accepted by the negotiating/conflicting parties, provides support for the creation of accords on contentious points. Besides that, mediation can also improve relations between conflicting parties by creating trust among them. Since the end of the Cold War, mediation was used for about 50% of all international crises. In fact, the probability to achieve an accord by using an independent mediator was 5 times higher that without one.[10] The United Nations guidelines see mediation as one of the best ways for the prevention, management and peaceful solution of conflicts, provided its proper use.[11] However, this requires that conflicts are seen as a link between peace and war and that conflicts are not put on an equal footing with wars. Only then a conflict can also bring advantages to a society that bans war as a means of conflict settlement. In this sense, Elvira Hauska sees mediation, contrary to force, which constitutes a coercive way of peace-making, as a need-oriented way of peace-making.[12]
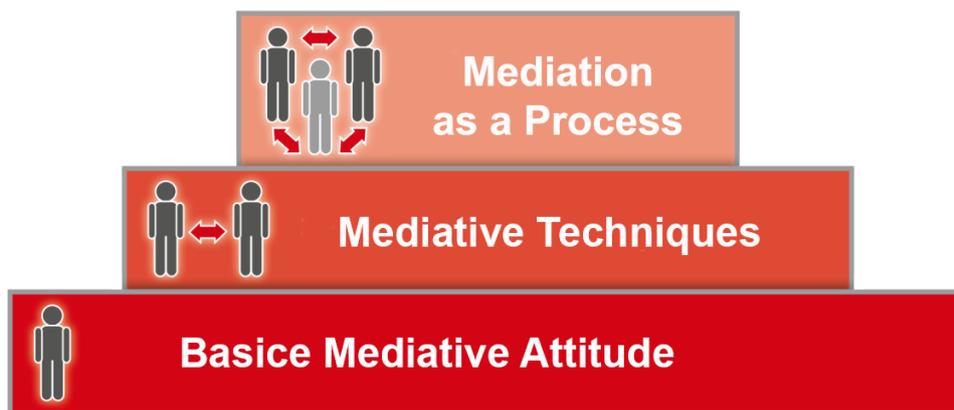
Figure 2: Levels of mediation (based on the Austrian Federal Society for Mediation)

The Austrian Federal Society for Mediation distinguishes between three levels of mediation:

The first level sees mediation as a process in the sense of the above-mentioned general definition, i.e. an intervention by an independent third party.

The second level constitutes the mediative techniques, which can be learned by everyone interested in them and can be used in the everyday professional and private life.

The third level sees mediation as a basic attitude. This level assumes that there are conflicts that can be solved in a way that everyone profits from the solution.[13]

Mediation as a process mainly wants to support conflicting parties by third parties from outside. This means that mediators work at eye level with the parties, enabling them to achieve accords on controversial points autonomously. Austria is a pioneer in terms of mediation bound by law. The Civil Mediation Act of 2013[14] has introduced the term of "registered mediator" for those who execute mediation as a profession. Registered mediators distinguish themselves from other mediators by the fact that they have to undergo standardized regular training. On the other hand, their registration in the list of the Federal Ministry of Justice makes them liable to certain rights and obligations, of which secrecy and confidentiality are the most important ones. Thus, mediators are not allowed to be interrogated as witnesses on topics related to a mediation provided by them in support of a possible subsequent trial.

Mediative techniques are approved and tested instruments which can be used to foster consensual and cooperative accords. These methods do not necessarily require the use of mediators; they can be learned and used by everyone who is interested in them. The basis of all mediatory activities it the basic attitude, which assumes that conflicts are something normal in the everyday life. Thus, the basic mediative attitude postulates an active approach to conflicts. The intention of that is not to deny or to push aside conflicts, but to use them for changes from which all parties involved can profit.

Mediation as an Instrument of the International Security Policy

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon was putting a big effort on the establishment of mediation within the international security policy. In 2008, he appointed an interdisciplinary, intercultural team of mediation experts for peace-making. (14). Already in 2009, the International Peace Institute (IP) was dealing with the challenges of mediation operations in war scenarios. In doing so, they identified, among others, the following focal points[15]:

- Strengthening of the UN peacemaker partnerships
- Coordination of various participants within the mediation process
- Access to various topics within the expertise of mediators
- Search for and expansion of former entry points for mediation

Especially in a UN report dating from 2012, Ban Ki Moon clearly demands to further strengthen the role of mediation.[16] The annual report of the UN Mediation Support Union of the year 2014 shows that mediation teams were providing support in more than 15 countries, including the Ukraine, Syria, and Burkina Faso.[17]

The practice of mediative conflict settlement by third parties shows that very often international diplomats are providing such support as part of their job. In this regard, the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Lady Catherine Ashton, can be mentioned as an example. Her mediatory support for an approach in the Serbian-Kosovan conflict started in October 2012.

In April 2013, the top politicians signed a normalisation agreement as a basis for the coexistence of Serbs and Kosovars. The first Kosovarian municipal elections of November 2013 and the first parliamentary elections of April 2014 were signs of an approach of both states, even though the State of Serbia has not recognised the State of Kosovo so far. The probably biggest incentive within this process was the prospect of an EU membership.[18]

Mediation as a Strategic Topic within the Austrian Armed Forces

The Austrian Armed Forces (AAF) have a long tradition in cooperation, i.e. the integration of soldiers into the civilian life. Soldiers are not forming their own caste staying in barracks and living there, as we can still see it with professional armies of various other states. For the soldiers of such armies, the barracks are a home within which even their children are given school lessons. All this seals them off from the civilian society.

Career soldiers of the Austrian Armed Forces, however, are actively participating in municipalities and associations, e.g. the municipal council or the volunteer fire brigade. All this gives them a totally different social awareness which can be positively implemented during national but also international operations. Thus, the Austrian soldiers are not afraid to approach various representatives of groupings and to form a cooperation that allows an open atmosphere.

Already in the late 1970ies, there was an office in the Federal Chancellery of Austria which was responsible for the interministerial coordination concerning Comprehensive Homeland Defence. Its activities were covering horizontal coordination beyond the ministries on the one hand and vertical communication with the Austrian provinces, districts and municipalities on the other hand. In order to overcome the security political challenges of the late 1970ies and 1980ies, so-called coordination boards were installed at provincial and district levels, but also in larger towns and municipalities. There, a dialogue took place between various institutions on how to fulfil certain military tasks.

Currently, the Austrian Armed Forces, like all other western Forces, are undergoing a considerable change of their image. Starting in 2005 and based on a study of the GFK-Fessel Institute, they have set themselves the goal of becoming stronger, more modern, and faster. The first phase of the ensuing Corporate Identity Project (a top-down process) started in 2007. In mid-2007, it became clear that it was not possible to achieve the original goals by using this process. Due to the initiative of the then Austrian Joint Forces Commander LTG Günter Höfler, a further phase was started, this time in the form of an internally created and internally implemented bottom-up process. During this phase, Oliver Jeschonek was the head coach.[19]

In parallel to the Corporate Identity Project, a "Coaching, Mediation and Team Development Task Force" was formed in 2009. The reasons for that were requests forwarded to the Military Psychological Service that could not be met with the resources available. The then Austrian Chief of Defence Staff, General Edmund Entacher, approved this project, appointing the Chief of the AAF Personnel Management Section, Andreas Safranmüller, as its officer in charge, and Bernhard Penz, the Chief Psychologist of the Austrian Joint Forces Command, as its general manager. The task force staff was recruited from the team trainer pool of the ASF: Oliver Jeschonek, Gerald Hansmann, and Friedrich Steiner for the first phase. They were later on joined by Eduard Horwarth and Karl Ebster-Schwarzenberger.

A core task of this task force was to provide support by at the same time maintaining and, if needed, restoring of a positive working atmosphere. In this regard, it is essential to create a synopsis and an interconnection between the various offers for support like personnel coaching, mediation, moderation during team training events, but also to cooperate with military psychologists. Due to different approaches, it is possible to provide the kind of support that offers the optimal solution for a pending problem.

In 2013, the Cooperative Behaviour Process replaced the Search for Identity Programme. The current Joint Forces Commander, LTG Franz Reißner, initiated this process due to feedbacks received from the public referendum on the military system (conscript army versus professional army) of 2013. In this context, three stages of training sessions were held in order to improve the cooperation within the Austrian Joint Forces. The members of the Coaching, Mediation, and Team Development Task Force were providing the means for these sessions. Within the Joint Forces, three series of events were organised in the form of so-called "Cadre Conferences", uniting a representative cross-section of the military career personnel.

In a second step, so-called "Conferences on the Training within the Joint Forces" were held in order to address people charged with the training of conscripts. The third step comprised the seminar series on "controlling - leading - guiding".

The key to success was the invitation issued to company and battalion commanders to elaborate their own procedures for an improvement of their working atmosphere. In parallel to that, a feedback system for conscripts was introduced, giving them the possibility to answer questions on their compulsory military service two weeks and two months after its start and shortly before its end.

The latest results of this evaluation have shown a considerable improvement, compared with the initial situation. Thus, various key questions like the "meaningfulness of the military training received", the "respectful treatment of conscripts", and "conscripts' confidence in their superiors" have shown an upward trend. This positive development can be seen as a success based on coaching, mediation and team development systematics as well as the participative processes enabled during conferences and meetings. In autumn 2005, the "Coaching, Mediation, and Team Development Task Force" was transformed to the "Centre for Human-Oriented Leadership". In doing so, the Austrian Armed Forces have accorded mediation a strategic role.

From Culprits to Solutions

'This is a bad mistake' – an statement that has accompanied Christian Langer, the chief psychologist of the Austrian Armed Forces for 30 years. [20] Statements like this leave ample space for interpretations and speculations. In any case it is very important within which mistake culture these words are used. If there are known and unknown mistake tolerances, this culture can be a door to innovations, motivated co-workers or other positive trends. If, however, it meets employees looking for guilt among the colleagues affected by the mistake or among the managers, such a culture may be counterproductive.

Mistake culture is like conflict culture. It has to evolve and cannot be ordered.[21] When people see that something that has affected them could become a general problem, they should speak about it.

Realizing and allowing all that will promote the awareness that mistakes also can do some good in terms of finding the reasons for them, and ways to avoid them in future. In parallel to that, there is normally a culture evolving which does not see conflicts any longer as a mistake but as a possibility for changes and development. Such an attitude allows people affected by conflict find solutions which can be profitable for all of them.

In order to be able to handle this process efficiently also in the future, we especially need coordination within mediation, and we need interfaces between research and practical application. As to pedagogics, it is asked to process the most important experiences from both fields in a way that they are accessible for the largest public possible – within the Armed Forces as well as outside of them.

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