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## Achieving Organizational Flexibility through Ambidexterity

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Patricia M. Shields and Donald S. Travis

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**ABSTRACT:** This article introduces the concept of organizational ambidexterity and explains its value to military planning and problem-solving from the tactical to strategic levels.

In 2005, as the US military waged numerous armed conflicts around the world, Army Chief of Staff General Peter J. Schoomaker was confronted with a serious troop shortage. In an interview with *Time*, he explained not only how he would overcome the shortage but also why there was no need to institute a draft: “We are developing a modular Army force that gives us much more rapidly deployable, much more capable organizations. . . . What you will have is a team of pentathletes. I want a whole team of Michael Jordans who can play any position. We must . . . have this pentathlete team better organized, better led, better trained, better equipped, and more strategically agile.”<sup>1</sup>

It is not a stretch of imagination to anticipate future troop shortages, especially for an all-volunteer Army required to sustain numerous small wars across several regions of the world simultaneously. Thus, the concept of the pentathlete soldier—multifaceted and agile, proficient in a broad range of tasks, and capable of accomplishing a variety of missions—is key to sustaining Schoomaker’s vision of flexible, multifunctional Army units that effectively operate in complex environments.

While US Army strategists were devising more efficient and effective ways to train and employ soldiers to meet this vision, Joseph Soeters, then-dean of management studies at the Netherlands Defense Academy, was exploring organizational ambidexterity.<sup>2</sup> Arguably, he identified and extended the philosophy of pragmatism practiced by Morris Janowitz, a pioneer of military sociology, to examine the changing nature of Cold War and post-Cold War civil-military relations.<sup>3</sup> The passage below introduces Soeter’s perspective:

Peace operations are often mixed military and civilian and led by military forces, which bring a warrior ethos to the task. The warrior ethos includes rigid dichotomies such as friend/enemy, victory/defeat, strength/weakness, good/evil, and life/death. The seeming contradiction of

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1 Sally B. Donnelly and Douglas Waller, “Ten Questions with Peter Schoomaker,” *Time*, April 22, 2005. Later in the interview Schoomaker was asked if America needed a draft. His answer: “No . . . because it takes too long to train people as pentathletes.”

2 Soeters won the Morris Janowitz Career Achievement Award for excellence in the study of armed forces and society. For more information on this award, see “The Morris Janowitz Career Achievement Award,” Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, <http://www.iusafs.org/janowitzAward.asp> (accessed April 21, 2017).

3 Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: Free Press, 1971), 264–77, 303–20. Also see Donald S. Travis, “Saving Samuel Huntington and the Need for Pragmatic Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces and Society*, August 30, 2016, doi:10.1177/0095327X16667287.

warriors administering peace poses challenges for the administration of a positive peace.<sup>4</sup>

Soeter's pragmatic approach to ambidexterity, which implies something exceptional such as a soccer player's skillful use of both feet, can impact warfighting and peacekeeping in many ways. This versatility can address seemingly contradictory goals imbedded in international peacekeeping operations that often employ military skill sets concurrently to carry out other operations. As a pragmatic approach, ambidexterity recognizes a problematic situation facing leaders of such missions and suggests a strategy to resolve the problem. The approach deals with the time-honored culture of the warrior and the need to adapt in the face of new or evolving missions. The concept also represents an adaptable and useful cross-disciplinary practice of excelling at seemingly contradictory skills that is applicable in medicine, business, and many organizations, including those involved in military affairs. This article addresses each of these applications and explains several implications of pragmatism and ambidexterity for the military environment.

### **Ambidexterity**

In 1997 Michael L. Tushman, a leading organizational behavior theorist from the Harvard Business School, along with his associates Philip Anderson and Charles A. O'Reilly examined the problem of ensuring ongoing organizational innovation. They identified two types of innovation—incremental and discontinuous. Incremental innovations occur during routine business activities. Discontinuous innovations are needed to prepare for fundamental changes in technology or the market. Notably, the team determined “ambidextrous organizations have multiple organizational architectures to concurrently nurture these diverse innovation requirements.”<sup>5</sup>

O'Reilly and Tushman subsequently brought widespread recognition to the concept of ambidexterity after examining the challenges of attending to routine matters or exploiting the current business environment while also exploring opportunities to ensure future success. Considering how managers maintain stability and prepare for inevitable changes, they noted the difficulty of attending to exploitation and exploration simultaneously. Typically, a manager's attention focuses on pressing daily activities, which leaves little time for contemplating future promises and pitfalls.<sup>6</sup> This widespread management conundrum is endemic to the military.

The friction between current operations and the need to improve capabilities can result in organizations being ill-prepared for the future; ambidexterity is a way to resolve this competition. Successful organizations meet this challenge by placing these functions in

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4 Patricia M. Shields and Joseph L. Soeters, “Peaceweaving: Jane Addams, Positive Peace, and Public Administration,” *American Review of Public Administration* 47, no. 3 (April 2017): 325, doi:10.1177/0275074015589629.

5 Michael L. Tushman, Philip Anderson, and Charles A. O'Reilly, “Technology Cycles, Innovation Streams and Ambidextrous Organizations,” in *Managing Strategic Innovation and Change: A Collection of Readings*, ed. Michael L. Tushman and Philip Anderson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.

6 Charles A. O'Reilly and Michael L. Tushman, “The Ambidextrous Organization,” *Harvard Business Review* 82 (April 2004): 74–81.

separate divisions that report to a single supervisor—these firms are ambidextrous.<sup>7</sup> Ambidexterity is a way for military leaders to cope with contradictory demands when carrying out missions that rely upon cooperation and collaboration with joint forces and nonmilitary organizations. This represents an example of a pragmatic organizational culture that can improve organizational effectiveness.<sup>8</sup> The pragmatic approach will be discussed further.

### Military Operations and Ambidexterity

The concept of ambidexterity is applied to contemporary military organizations by examining seemingly intractable dualisms. Take, for example, a pair of concepts known as bonding and bridging. By drawing on a common experiential reference, such as traveling, the relevance of these concepts can be explained for postmodern military operations. If a person is traveling in a group, interactions establish friendships and reinforce strong ties—bonding occurs within the community. On the other hand, if a person is traveling alone, efforts focus on bridging language and cultural differences to develop acquaintances that can help the traveler successfully navigate the journey.<sup>9</sup> Thus, bonding and bridging are viewed as a mutually exclusive, fixed dichotomy.<sup>10</sup>

As a feature of ambidexterity, bonding and bridging can occur simultaneously: unit cohesion is built while coordinating and collaborating with other units or organizations.<sup>11</sup> Bonding “implies that servicemen do not want to have anything to do with people outside their own unit.”<sup>12</sup> This is logical when enemies are clearly defined and understood, but can be problematic in the presence of ambiguity during complex operations. Further, traditional combat units take orders and respond in predictable ways; they are not supposed to demonstrate innovative ideas. Likewise, groups formed with strong ties generally have “limited cognitive flexibility” and are “less receptive to innovative ideas.”<sup>13</sup> These fundamentals of ambidexterity explain why units must develop the ability to learn and adapt, especially during complex multinational operations.

Nevertheless, cohesion is not as essential during a crisis situation absent a clear friend-and-foe relationship. In these instances, the ability to bridge—collaborate with other civilian and military organizations—becomes a necessity.<sup>14</sup> This need, however, does not reduce the importance of internal military cohesion: “Bonding and bridging are required during multinational non-Article 5 crisis-response operations. . . . Under those circumstances, the pattern of bonding without bridging clearly

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7 Ibid.

8 Joseph L. Soeters, “Ambidextrous Military: Coping with Contradictions of New Security Policies,” in *The Viability of Human Security*, ed. Monica den Boer and Jaap de Wilde (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 109–124.

9 Ibid.

10 Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (May 1973): 1360–80; and Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited,” *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983): 201–33.

11 Guy L. Siebold, “Key Questions and Challenges to the Standard Model of Military Group Cohesion,” *Armed Forces & Society* 37, no. 3 (July 2011): 448–68, doi:10.1177/0095327X11398451.

12 Soeters, “Ambidextrous Military,” 115.

13 Ibid., 113.

14 Ibid., 115.

does not work as well.”<sup>15</sup> So, there is an inherent contradiction: bonding and bridging appear to be more or less mutually exclusive, yet groups and people strongly gravitate toward one connection or the other. Military organizations dealing with diverse cultures in the uncertain postmodern environment need to be able to do both. Soeters interprets recent literature to suggest bonding and bridging can be compatible by applying the concept of ambidexterity.<sup>16</sup>

Similar to the soccer player who learns to develop a weak leg, organizations can learn to deal with the contradictory demands of bridging and bonding required for joint force operations.<sup>17</sup> One technique to accomplish this proficiency involves structural ambidexterity, which would involve assigning units varied but distinct roles and missions such that one unit might orient more on bonding and focus on “war-fighting, terrorist hunting and other activities that imply the use of violence.”<sup>18</sup> Tasks for another unit might involve bridging and focus on peacekeeping, civil-military cooperation, humanitarian relief, and nation-building.<sup>19</sup> In this manner, military organizations develop the operational capacity to respond to a variety of contexts quickly and effectively.

An additional approach is contextual ambidexterity where commanders would develop both bonding and bridging skills to strengthen relationships with other policymakers and joint force leaders. As Soeters explains, leaders “need to have a broad view of their work, being culturally intelligent as well as being alert to opportunities and challenges beyond the confines of their jobs. They need to act like brokers, always looking to build internal and external linkages, and if needed they have to be comfortable wearing more than one ‘hat.’ Most of all they need to be able to immediately switch from communicating and negotiating to the actual repelling and use of violence.”<sup>20</sup>

Ambidexterity also applies to the challenge of defining and achieving peace—negative peace as the absence of violence and positive peace as the incorporation of social justice and equality.<sup>21</sup> Functioning societies work to achieve a positive peace knowing it is perhaps an impermanent goal requiring diligence. To move a society from the sphere of negative peace to positive peace during turbulent transitions such as those accompanying peacekeeping operations, soldiers need to use ways of thinking and skills that are seemingly contradictory. In the pragmatic sense, ambidexterity helps a soldier to reconcile some of the contradictions, such as the need

15 Ibid.

16 O’Reilly and Tushman, “Ambidextrous Organization.”

17 Soeters, “Ambidextrous Military,” 120.

18 Ibid., 121.

19 Thomas P. M. Barnett recognized the dual role of military forces and called for organizing them into two functions or types of units: the leviathan specializing in “high-tech big violence war” and the system administrator specializing in “low-tech security generation and routine crisis response.” Thomas P. M. Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2004), 299–302.

20 Soeters, “Ambidextrous Military,” 122. This kind of challenge was recognized by the US Marines and codified in General Charles C. Krulak’s article “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999. Also see US Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), *A Concept for Future Military Operations in Urbanized Terrain* (Quantico, VA: MCCDC, 1997).

21 Shields & Soeters, “Peaceweaving”; and Nils Petter Gleditsch, Jonas Nordkvelle and Håvard Strand, “Peace Research—Just the Study of War?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 2014): 145–58, doi:10.1177/0022343313514074.

to be a shooter and a talker that is associated with the uneven process of moving from negative to positive peace.<sup>22</sup>

It is not enough to simply recognize the dualisms fraught in warfare. Ambidexterity addresses dichotomies that appear to confound both theory and practice: it can clarify the fog and friction of bureaucratic inertia. When applied to military operations, pragmatism orients thinking to improve national security practitioners' thinking. It can also affect approaches for achieving peace and stability while striving to maintain our humanity.

### Pragmatism Underlying Ambidexterity

Pragmatism, a philosophy of common sense born in the United States soon after the Civil War, was a response to dogmatic thinking that propelled the bloody conflict.<sup>23</sup> Using purposeful human inquiry as a focal point, pragmatism represents a continual process of discovery and doubt that acknowledges the qualitative nature of human experience as problematic situations emerge and are recognized.<sup>24</sup> Pragmatism embraces doubt and uncertainty and focuses attention on practical effects.<sup>25</sup> Janowitz employed it to challenge military problems.

The uncertainties of warfare are so great that the most elaborate peacetime planning and the most realistic exercises are at best weak indicators of emerging imponderables. Dogmatic doctrine is a typical organizational reflex reaction to future uncertainties . . . The constabulary concept provides a continuity with past military experiences and traditions, but also offers a basis for the radical adaptation of the profession. The military establishment becomes a constabulary force when it is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks viable international relations, rather than victory . . . The constabulary outlook is ground in, and extends pragmatic doctrine."<sup>26</sup>

Pragmatists such as Janowitz approach challenges with a spirit of inquiry, critical optimism, and cooperation by using an experimental logic—or purposeful human inquiry grounded in a problematic situation.<sup>27</sup> Problems are situated in experience and culture; problematic situations often challenge existing belief systems and ways of doing things. Accounting for the qualitative nature of human experience, the uneasy, doubtful feeling preceding problem recognition and the problematic situation are recognized and reconciled through the transformations of inquiry, which involve “critical reasoning, empirical investigation and actions that are assessed in light of practical consequences.”<sup>28</sup>

22 Shields and Soeters, “Peaceweaving.”

23 Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: The Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001).

24 Patricia M. Shields, “Using Pragmatism to Bridge the Gap between Academe and Practice” (presentation, Conference of the American Society for Public Administration, Denver, CO, April 1–4, 2006), 7, <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/3955>.

25 Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief,” *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (November 1877): 1–15; and Charles Sanders Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (January 1878): 286–302.

26 Janowitz, *Professional Soldier*, 24, 418.

27 John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938).

28 Patricia M. Shields, “Rediscovering the Taproot: Is Classical Pragmatism the Route to Renew Public Administration,” *Public Administration Review* 68, no. 2 (March/April 2008): 206, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00856.x.

Inquiry reduces uncertainty, facilitates the next steps, and links the problematic situation to an end-in-view—a flexible, practical goal with meaning in the real world that cannot be separated from human experience. With a goal of continually adapting plans based upon practicality, a “social component” generally accompanies the curiosity of this approach, which helps the decision-maker expand information on a topic of interest through community input.<sup>29</sup> Thus, pragmatism approaches all problematic situations with a spirit of critical optimism—“the belief that the specific conditions which exist at one moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered.”<sup>30</sup> Critical optimism recognizes evil yet never becomes stuck in the paralysis of pessimism.<sup>31</sup>

As forerunners to Janowitz, John Dewey and Jane Addams pioneered a sophisticated theory of participatory democracy where a diverse community is involved in shaping or characterizing a problematic situation, developing approaches to resolve the problem, defining and refining the end-in-view, and potentially, being transformed in the process. Their pragmatic vision is embraced by Janowitz in his book *The Professional Soldier*, where the constabulary concept depends on cooperation, collaboration, and critical optimism. Whether any Army can build and sustain a cadre of pentathletes will impact military planning from the tactical to grand-strategic levels. Developing valid assumptions and feasible objectives, which is the primary building blocks of any plan, could benefit from practical inquiry, critical optimism, and cooperation.

## Resolving Dualisms

Resolving two seemingly intractable dualisms central to many human problematic situations can help postmodern militaries develop ambidexterity. Psycho-philosophical dualisms deal with the separation of mind and body and incorporate dichotomies such as theory/practice and thought/action. Moral dualisms take into account notions of good and evil such as friend/enemy and oppressed/oppressor. Rigid moral dualisms mentioned in this section can also be an ongoing impetus to violent conflict.

### *Psycho-Philosophical*

Dewey’s perspective on psycho-philosophical dichotomy arose from his organic and holistic model of experience.<sup>32</sup> He criticized the reflex arc, a model that reduces behavior to discrete and separate stimulus and response observed in situations similar to a child quickly withdrawing (response) his or her hand from a flame (stimulus). Dewey disagreed with the model’s artificial detachment of sensory stimulus, central response, and action into discrete components. He also declared the reflex arc misrepresents how people interact with their environs, explaining how organisms do not “passively receive a stimulus and then become active

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29 Ibid.

30 John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press 1957), 179.

31 Patricia M. Shields, “The Community of Inquiry: Classical Pragmatism and Public Administration,” *Administration & Society* 35, no. 5 (2003): 510–38, doi:10.1177/0095399703256160.

32 David L. Hildebrand, *Dewey: A Beginners Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 12.

responders.”<sup>33</sup> Concluding organisms interact continuously with their environment in a cumulative and mutually modifying manner, Dewey argued the arc too rigidly identifies a clear starting and ending point when “both stimulus and response are enmeshed in an ongoing matrix of sensory and motor activities. A stimulus comes from somewhere and a response leads elsewhere—to further coordination and integration of both sensory and motor responses.”<sup>34</sup>

Importantly, stimulus and response occur “in a wider dynamic context” (culture) that incorporates aims and interests as well as “an environment, which contains the problems and surprises that spur us on to grow.”<sup>35</sup> Dewey suggested an alternative coordinated circuit illustrating dichotomies similar to stimulus and response that cloaks “ancient psychophysical dualisms” such as mind/body, thought/action, ends/means, and theory/practice.<sup>36</sup>

These common dualisms are rooted in an erroneous and radical separation of the perceiver from the world: “Dewey’s model rejects this inner/outer model from the start. His is an ecological model—mind, body and world are mutually created by their ongoing interaction.”<sup>37</sup> Dewey’s model focuses on relationships: instead of viewing stimulus and response as discrete disconnected components, he shows their relationship within a larger environment. Soeters applies this concept to the relation of culture to human interaction and shows how bonding and bridging can be applied to complicated, multinational, postmodern military missions.<sup>38</sup>

### *Moral Dualisms*

As mentioned earlier, pragmatism was partly a reaction to rigid moral positions that propelled the US Civil War—for example, Southern honor was tied to a devotion to the slave system. To threaten slavery threatened honor, which justified and compelled a violent response.<sup>39</sup>

Jane Addams, another pioneer of pragmatism and a philosopher of peace, clearly articulated problems with rigid moral perspectives. She reacted to the moral paternalism that bound women to the home and excluded them from the public sphere.<sup>40</sup> Notably, such rigid moralisms contain implicit dualisms because for each right there is a contrasting wrong; each enemy has corresponding friends. Addams posits “life itself teaches us nothing more inevitable than that right and wrong are most confusedly mixed: That the blackest wrong is by our side and within our own motives; that right does not dazzle our eyes with its radiant shining, but has to be found by exerting patience, discrimination and

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33 John Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,” *Psychological Review* 3, no. 4 (July 1896): 359.

34 Hildebrand, *Dewey*, 15–16.

35 Ibid.

36 Dewey, “Reflex Arc”; and Hildebrand, *Dewey*, 16–17.

37 Hildebrand, *Dewey*, 21.

38 Soeters, “Ambidextrous Military.”

39 Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

40 Patricia M. Shields, “Democracy and the Social Feminist Ethics of Jane Addams: A Vision for Public Administration,” *Administrative Theory and Praxis* 28, no. 3 (September 2006): 418–43.



impartiality.<sup>41</sup> In this manner, rigid moral perspectives carry the weight of moral superiority with little room for human frailty or weakness. As a result, the concerns of the weak and dispossessed can be marginalized, offering the seeds of terrorism.<sup>42</sup>

### Sympathy as Remedy

As an alternative to inflexible moral certainty, Addams offered sympathetic knowledge explained as a willingness to suspend judgment, listen, “see the size of one another’s burden,” and “a determination to enter into lives that [are] not one’s own, without falling into the arrogant pretense that one [understand] the lives of others better than they [do].”<sup>43</sup> Addams believed “when we sympathetically and affectively understand the plight of others, we are more likely to care and act in their behalf.”<sup>44</sup> Armed with this perspective, leaders can incorporate emotions into their sense of knowledge to bring emotional kindness and imagination to interpersonal encounters.<sup>45</sup> By applying this practice to the intractable, opposing moral narratives, such as friend/enemy, oppressed/oppressor, capitalism/communism, and Muslim/Christian, that are inevitably present in violent conflict, postmodern militaries can contribute to the puzzle of ending violence.<sup>46</sup>

### Soeters’s Pragmatism

Soeters recognized reciprocal stereotyping between groups who believe opposing poles of moral dualisms resulted in the groups assigning greater values to self-associated qualities and increasing requirements on those with opposing views, which is a “self-propelling process of ideological escalation” referred to as ethnic outbidding.<sup>47</sup> This concept arose from Soeters’s search for a “coherent set of thematic concerns and common logic of inquiry” consistent with philosophical pragmatism that can be traced from Dewey to Janowitz.<sup>48</sup> Samuel P. Huntington focused on this separation between civilian and military groups and the paradoxes that emerge from that detachment.<sup>49</sup>

One notion, which acknowledged the separation but accentuated the societal interpenetration and societal context of the civil-military environment, veered away from absolutism.<sup>50</sup> The pragmatic analysis

41 Jane Addams, “The Settlement as a Factor in the Labor Movement,” in *Hull House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago* (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1895), 199.

42 Jean B. Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

43 Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 6; and Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*, 122.

44 Maurice Hamington, *The Social Philosophy of Jane Addams* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 74.

45 Patricia M. Shields, “Jane Addams: Peace Activist and Peace Theorist” in *Jane Addams Progressive Pioneer of Peace Philosophy, Sociology, Social Work and Public Administration*, ed. Patricia M. Shields (New York: Springer, 2017), 31–42.

46 Joseph L. Soeters, *Ethnic Conflict and Terrorism: The Origins and Dynamics of Civil Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005).

47 *Ibid.*, 84.

48 James Burk, “Introduction: A Pragmatic Sociology,” in *On Social Organization and Social Control*, by Morris Janowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1, 3.

49 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957).

50 Janowitz, *Professional Soldier*, 264–77.

of military and society leading to this concept ended during the Cold War, but not before bearing the notion of constabulary force, which is visible in peacekeeping operations.<sup>51</sup> Recent scholarship likewise emphasizes “inflexible or absolutist doctrine can no longer effectively address the needs of people in turmoil. A flexible or pragmatic approach to peacekeeping, on the other hand, offers a way to achieve this critically important end-in-view.”<sup>52</sup>

## Dualisms

Recognizing the civilian/military dualism overlaying the study of military affairs, Soeters explored multinational peacekeeping operations, where the inherent contradictions and tensions are not only a ripe source for research but also predisposed to deeper implications. Such peacekeeping operations exist at all levels of war and during all phases of military operations, and Soeters discovered a way that pragmatism as a way of thinking could help achieve better results. He came to understand the methods armies use to defeat enemies and to set the conditions for peace is a reflection of the values inherent in the societies they serve, through research involving interpreters, strategic flexibility, demobilization and transition of soldiers, and operational planning in Afghanistan.

In a mechanical sense, interpreters, such as those who conducted peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Afghanistan, are tools to translate words across different languages. Familiar military slang—translations machines—captures this role and the active/passive dualism perfectly: the military officer actively communicates with host nationals, the interpreter passively relays the words.<sup>53</sup> But Soeters’s research on translators challenges this metaphor. Harkening back to Dewey’s criticism of the reflex arc isolating stimulus-response events, a more organic model of experience developed in which interpreters and others engaged in negotiations by continuously interacting with their environment were integrated in a cumulative and mutually modifying way to prevent strategic faux pas.<sup>54</sup>

Because something as basic as interpretation could significantly impact peacekeeping operations, the resolution of the dualism of close/distant relationships between local interpreters and their military units must be achieved. Military leaders must facilitate effective communication in these situations by building cohesion within the team as well as supporting the ability of the unit’s interpreters to assimilate messages to cultural differences. The interpreters must likewise accommodate characteristics of other groups, such as the Dutch military’s direct

51 Travis, “Saving Samuel Huntington,” 2, 5, 7.

52 Patricia M. Shields and Joseph L. Soeters, “Pragmatism, Peacekeeping, and the Constabulary Force,” in *Philosophical Pragmatism and International Relations: Essays for a Bold New World*, ed. Shane Ralston (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 105.

53 Geesje Bos and Joseph L. Soeters, “Interpreters at Work: Experiences from Dutch and Belgian Peace Operations,” *International Peacekeeping* 13, no. 2 (2006): 264, doi:10.1080/13533310500437662.

54 Bos and Soeters, “Interpreters at Work”; Andrea van Dijk, Joseph L. Soeters, and Richard de Ridder, “Smooth Translation? A Research Note on the Cooperation between Dutch Service Personnel and Local Interpreters in Afghanistan,” *Armed Forces & Society* 36, no. 5 (2010): 917–25, doi:10.1177/0095327X10379732; and Iris Hoedemackers and Joseph L. Soeters, “Interaction Rituals and Language Mediation during Peace Missions: Experiences from Afghanistan,” in *Advances in Military Sociology: Essays in Honor of Charles C. Moskos*, ed. Giuseppe Caforio (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2009), 329–52, doi:10.1108/S1572-8323(2009)000012A024.

communication style and the Afghan military's less explicit and more ambiguous style, to build trust among joint forces. Addressing this dualism simultaneously resolves the tension from the trust/distrust dualism interpreters experience when their interpretations are relied upon, but they are excluded from other activities.<sup>55</sup>

The dualism of large, mechanized forces/small, expeditionary units associated with Western militaries' transition from defending a relatively ordered world to responding to regional instability crises also vexes military leaders. Given the nature of organizational flexibility and the ways military organizations could adapt, a problematic paradox of duality is identified: too much flexibility causes chaos and too much rigidity prohibits adaptation.<sup>56</sup> Organizations often face a power struggle between stability and change, but organizational sensing enhances functional flexibility.

A case study involving the Netherlands' armed forces found "within highly turbulent crisis response missions, organizational sensing becomes the predominant driver, stimulating ad hoc solutions that challenge existing structures, available technology and standard procedures."<sup>57</sup> This observation certainly resonates with insights from pragmatic inquiry much like the research on demobilizing and integrating Eritrean fighters into civil service rolls identified a dualism of fighter/nonfighter.<sup>58</sup> The ambidexterity displayed during this transition can also be applied: "Military leaders should be ready for action, violent action if need be. At the same time they are requested to hold their fire when they operate in peacekeeping missions in which talking to people is more important than shooting."<sup>59</sup>

Other research on an effects-based approach to operations identified seemingly contradictory intuition driven/assessment driven approaches to leadership as an implementation challenge to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> Although the researchers' metaphor described the culture of the mind as software and the organization (or body) as hardware, Soeters provided a perfect rejection of the psycho-philosophical dualism: "The implicit body versus mind analysis doesn't work out because culture comprises body, soul and mind."<sup>61</sup>

When contemplating the source of violent ethnic conflicts, Soeters notes "there is no simple emotional or rational understanding of the

55 Bos and Soeters, "Interpreters at Work," 266.

56 Erik de Waard, Henk W. Volberda, and Joseph L. Soeters, "Engaging Environmental Turbulence: Drivers of Organizational Flexibility in the Armed Forces," *European Security* 22, no. 4 (2013): 579, doi:10.1080/09662839.2013.822367.

57 *Ibid.*, 577.

58 Mussie T. Tessema and Joseph L. Soeters, "Practices and Challenges of Converting Former Fighters into Civil Servants: The Case of Eritrea," *Public Administration and Development* 26, no. 4 (2006): 359–71, doi:10.1002/pad.402.

59 Erik de Waard, E and Joseph L. Soeters, "How the Military Can Profit from Management and Organization Science," in *Social Sciences and the Military: An Interdisciplinary Overview*, ed. Giuseppe Caforio (New York: Routledge, 2007), 191.

60 Sebastiaan Rietjens, Joseph L. Soeters, and Willem Klumper, "Measuring the Immeasurable? The Effects-Based Approach in Comprehensive Peace Operations," *International Journal of Public Administration* 34, no. 5 (2011): 329–38, doi:10.1080/01900692.2011.557816.

61 Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005); and Ulrich vom Hagen, René Moelker, and Joseph L. Soeters, "Introduction: Cultural Interoperability" in *Cultural Interoperability: Ten Years of Research into Co-operation in the First German-Netherlands Corps*, ed. Ulrich vom Hagen, René Moelker, and Joseph L. Soeters (Strausberg: Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Bundeswehr, 2006), 7.

incredible events taking place around the world.”<sup>62</sup> He delves into dichotomies such as micro/macro factors, grid/group, us/them, tough/soft, male/female cultures, economic growth/environment, collectivism/individualism, victim/perpetrator, and identification/disidentification. These dichotomies provide frameworks for useful analytical distinctions and illustrative examples. These and other dualisms depict cultural rigidities that contribute to violence.

The American Civil War sheds an example of the problems with moral dualisms associated with rigid belief systems where unwavering cultural conceptions of honor can contribute to violence. Offended by events that could be trifling or profound, people retaliate against perpetrators for revenge or as an effort to restore others’ perceptions of a valuable self-associated characteristic.<sup>63</sup> A contrasting approach to influence others’ perceptions during dysfunctional conflicts applies sympathetic knowledge or empathy to “cement” relationships, which can also enhance cooperation and promote peacekeeping.<sup>64</sup> Dutch Muslim servicemen are particularly effective working with host nationals because of their ability “to approach the local population in an empathetic and trustworthy manner.”<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Soeters first employed the tenets of classical pragmatism to analyze peacekeeping operations during the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). By studying the strained relationships among the peacekeepers and the populace, in the context of institutional theory related to gaining public acceptance and legitimacy, Soeters found the four P’s of pragmatism—practical, pluralism, participatory, and provisional—particularly useful to identifying “the sore spots of MONUC’s reputation and legitimacy.”<sup>66</sup> Such an approach can be useful to examine the second Iraq war. Beginning with the December 2003 troop rotation, combat, stability, and enabling civil authority operations were intermingled, forcing Commanders and soldiers to step outside of their comfort zones. Artillery batteries performed military police duties. Armor companies became scouts and infantryman. Transportation units fought running battles along main supply routes, and nearly every soldier assumed advise and assist roles to support the fledgling Iraqi military. When developing war plans, going in with an Army of pentathletes might be better than

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62 Soeters, *Ethnic Conflict*, vii.

63 *Ibid.*, 63.

64 René Moelker, Joseph L. Soeters, and Ulrich vom Hagen, “Sympathy, the Cement of Interoperability,” *Armed Forces & Society* 33, no. 4 (July 2007): 496–517.

65 Femke Bosman, Joseph L. Soeters, and Fatima Ait Bari, “Dutch Muslim Soldiers during Peace Operations in Muslim Societies,” *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 5 (2008): 695–705, doi:10.1080/13533310802396376.

66 Ingrid van Osch and Joseph L. Soeters, “Fragile Support: MONUC’s Reputation and Legitimacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” in *Mission Critical: Smaller Democracies’ Role in Global Stability Operations*, ed. Christian Leuprecht, Jodok Troy, and David Last (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 78, 79; and David Brendel, *Healing Psychiatry: Bridging the Science/Humanism Divide* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

creating pentathletes ad hoc.<sup>67</sup> This type of force would add needed flexibility and resilience.

Thus, Soeters' approach represents a fusion of European perspectives with American pragmatism that can be helpful for today's American military thinkers who dichotomize military challenges. In the spirit of Janowitz, Soeter's willingness to embrace uncertainty illustrates his understanding of the provisional nature of not only social science scholarship but also of the real world, where theory can be tested to optimize organizational effectiveness.<sup>68</sup> The practical problems associated with managing and leading military organizations calls leaders to recognize and work with inherent contradictions and to develop ambidexterity within the force structure.<sup>69</sup> Through inquiry, critical optimism, cooperation, and sympathetic knowledge, commanders, their staffs, and the soldiers they lead, as pentathletes, can more fully understand the operational environment, identify valid assumptions and appropriate objectives, and develop strategies and plans to optimize the effectiveness of military operations in complex environments.

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67 The 1st battalion 107th field artillery regiment performed military police duties, a pervasive practice in 2004. The authors personally observed similar adaptations from May to July 2004 in FOB Baker-Golf at An Najaf and in South Baghdad. For more examples, see "US Forces Order of Battle—21 May 2004," Global Security.org, May 7, 2011, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq\\_orbat\\_040521.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_orbat_040521.htm).

68 Shields and Soeters, "Pragmatism, Peacekeeping," 105.

69 This requires militaries to broaden their approach to warfighting and peacekeeping. See Jason W. Warren, "The Centurion Mindset and the Army's Strategic Leader Paradigm," *Parameters* 45, no. 3, (Autumn 2015): 27–38.