BUNDESWEHR ABROAD - CONSENQUENCES FOR SOLDIER'S MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

The German Armed Forces Institute for Social Research had been charged by the Federal Ministry of Defence to research on the situation of German soldiers within the now enlarged task spectre. A longitudinal survey of the KFOR mission is intended to gather information on the soldier's situation before, during and after an assignment.

In order to ameliorate the measures of leadership and care to be taken, the soldiers' situation during an assignment abroad shall be recorded, and ways shall be explored to keep the theatre stress as low as possible, thus guaranteeing an optimum mission accomplishment.

Following these intentions, the mission commitment and motivation of the soldier is in the focus of our interest. With this study, we try to evaluate assignment motivation and its determinants.

The factors to be mainly surveyed will refer to both the service field and the private sphere. With different importance levels, they determine the soldier's feelings and attitudes on the theatre, i.e. his level of satisfaction and the motivation to accomplish his tasks.

The 'Rational Choice Approach' will constitute the theoretical base to explain changes of the assignment motivation as an outflow of a cost-benefit weighing. Here we start out from the supposition that the soldier's motivation will increase - or at least stay stable - as long as the benefits will be superior than the costs of the assignment.

The project aims at a panel survey of a KFOR contingent by means of specifically developed and already pre-tested standardised instruments.

Summary

The presented research project aims at surveying the assignment motivation of the German soldiers in the KFOR contingent as well as at defining the factors that determine assignment motivation. Here we could pick up a tradition of American military-related sociology. For more than 50 years, scientists there are dealing with the question why soldiers in wartime are ready to fight. In German military-related sociology, however, this problem was dealt with only sporadically, or seen just from purely academic aspects. This is not surprising at all, since military missions became not reality for the Bundeswehr during the era of the East-West conflict. Meanwhile, the German armed forces are engaged in peacekeeping missions abroad with a permanent volume counting about 8,000 soldiers. Thus, our formulation of the question gains in importance not only from the sociologic perspective, but also from the military-practical one.

We define assignment motivation as an attitude with the following components: identification with role and tasks, pride of the own active contribution, and the willingness to behave oneself in the sense and spirit of the organization. Based on the findings of empiric surveys from other nations, we generate various determining factors of assignment motivation. We can subdivide these explaining variables into two sectors: individual concerns and factors of duty interest. To ascertain their relative influence on the assignment motivation is the aim of our survey.

In order to deal with this question, a standardized questionnaire was used in a pre-test in August 2000 covering more than 2,100 soldiers of the German KFOR contingent (authorized strength: 5,400 soldiers). Seen the shortness of time, the results presented here are based on the valuation of 684 questionnaires.

The valuation up to now shows the following picture: The most important influence on the assignment motivation is given by the discernment of the mission's political support. The principal attitude of the soldier towards the Bundeswehr – his commitment – also coins his motivation during the assignment. We explain these results – deviating from American experience – by the particular politicization of the soldiers in the Bundeswehr which is the aim of the 'Innere Führung' philosophy on the one hand. On the other hand, this politicization certainly is backed by the discussions throughout the German population on the sense of the Bundeswehr's Kosovo mission. The relatively low risk level of this mission also contributes to these results.

Introduction

In this lecture we intend to present our research project striving for a survey of the soldiers' situation during assignments abroad. This is the first German study with such an orientation. This can be understood only before the particular historical background of our country: Missions abroad became reality for the Bundeswehr only in the 1990s. Under the roof of multinational operations, about 70,000 soldiers meanwhile had been assigned abroad in peacekeeping or peace enforcing missions. Particularly the participation in SFOR and KFOR – the current strength running up to about 8,000 soldiers – is belonging now to the 'standard missions' of the German armed forces. Assignments abroad thus nowadays are coining the professional and personal situation of Bundeswehr servicemen and servicewomen. But only few is known about how the soldiers are perceiving their assignment and which are their personal convictions to fulfill their duty tasks there. Also, the effects on the global attitudes towards being a soldier still are open to question. Moreover, the image of assignments abroad prevailing in Bundeswehr and throughout the civilian population will certainly have its medium-term and long-term effects on the recruitment in the armed forces.

Seen these reflections, the highest military command of the Bundeswehr charged our institute – SOWI – to lead a survey on the soldiers' assignment situation in the Kosovo.

To harmonize this need of information with our scientific interest of gaining knowledge – that is our concern. So this project is aimed at developing and testing a survey model for assignment motivation.

We lean upon the findings of military-related sociological research, and particularly on the surveys by scientists from the U.S. Army Medical Research Unit-Europe who are

experienced in interviewing troops during assignments abroad. We want to thank them here again for their helpful support.

Before presenting our research approach, we first want to clarify two focal questions:

1) What is assignment motivation?
2) Why is assignment motivation important?

1)   What is assignment motivation?

In the following, the term 'assignment motivation' is to be understood as an attitude of the individual towards its tasks, its organization and activities which is highly coining its behavior. In our apprehension, assignment motivation is not an unidimensional attitude but encompasses the following components:
Assignment motivation means

- to identify positively with one's role and the consigned tasks;
- to show one's willingness to put the own energy at the disposal of the main task and to act in the spirit of the organization;
- to develop a pride of the own activities.

This definition makes clear that our apprehension of motivation is partly corresponding with other constructs that are customary in military-related social research, such as commitment, combat morale and duty content. So we want to explain in brief which are the differences we see between these notions and the term 'assignment motivation' and why we do prefer the latter.

- Commitment evaluates the fundamental attitude towards an organization. We are concentrating our interest, however, on the attitude towards the assignment. The assignment will end after six month, the soldier nevertheless keeps on belonging to the military organization. From our point of view, commitment is a concept that is broader and more fundamental than assignment motivation, even if both notions are interacting.
- For opposed reasons we refuse duty content as an applicable construct. This notion – in civilian contexts certainly fruitful – is not appropriate to the assignment reality since here we find a more significant "contrast between requirements of the organization and individual interests" (Rothmann/Ziegler 1977; 171). In military contexts, content is a rather relative notion.
- Combat morale, on the other hand, does not reflect the reality of current assignment, at least in the German meaning of this term.

For these reasons, we do not use the above-mentioned terms – but why do we use 'assignment motivation'?

2)   Why 'assignment motivation'?

Assignment motivation is relevant for both the individual as well as the organization. For the individual applies that a high motivation is accompanied by a fundamentally positive attitude towards the own activities. The longing for such a relation nearly constitutes a basic need of the human being.
From the perspective of the organization, this leads to the necessity to take measures to increase the motivation of its members. In our context, this not only aims at a soldiers' pleasant feeling but first of all at a performance enhancing of the troops. But how to reach it?

We apprehend the following factors as decisive for the soldier's assignment motivation:
- Political support
- Commitment to the organization
- Commitment to the tasks
- Emotional strain caused by separation from the family
- Voluntary enlistment
- Trust in higher superiors

Studies that have been led in different temporary and military-cultural contexts did attribute a different significance to the factors. Whilst the older American military-related sociology did emphasize the importance of comradeship and the primary group, recent studies are pointing at the relevance of family and superiors. The only German empiric research, on the other hand, takes the evaluation of societal and political support for the key variable influencing the motivation of the soldier. With our study, we now want to examine how significant the different explanations are nowadays.

Method

Our study is based on a mix from three methods which are used with different weight for the hypothesis examination.

Before formulating the hypotheses, those spheres influencing assignment motivation had to be identified. For this aim, we led preparing profound interviews, analyzed and interpreted empiric studies from other nations as well as written reports by military leaders on their experience in missions abroad, and consulted the relevant regulations and directives.

A further step currently consists in examining our hypotheses and our main survey instrument – a quantitative questionnaire - in a pre-test.

From 18 July to 03 August, our project group stayed with the German KFOR troops in PRIZREN and surroundings for the pre-test and the participating observation. This participating observation covered all the German troop camps, participation in the essential tasks of the different units and subunits, and furthermore visits of German headquarters, KFOR headquarters at PRISTINA, the U.S. camp Bonsteel and the UK general hospital at PRISTINA.

We went two different ways to distribute the questionnaires among the soldiers. Some units and subunits were asked to assemble those soldiers willing to participate in the survey at a definite time and place. There, the soldiers filled in the questionnaires under the direction of a sociologist. The second way consisted in instructing the battalion commanders and unit leaders in the survey. They were asked for organizational support by ensuring that each and every soldier in their area of responsibility would receive a questionnaire and arranging for the – guaranteed anonymous – sending back of the filled-in questionnaires to the German Armed Forces Institute for Social Research.

It came out that the first procedure entailed high effort and low benefit (read returning questionnaires) whilst the second one turned out to be practicable and efficient. The return came up to 1,650 questionnaires what means a rate of 30 per cent of the German KFOR contingent. Seen the criterion 'rank category', the sample evaluated until now seems to be representative with a certain under-representation of rank and file.

Our real study will start in next October as a panel survey. Apart from an interview before the assignment – still in the home country – it is intended to lead two surveys during the assignment (in the beginning and towards the end) as well as an interview with returned soldiers. Thus it will be possible to register changes over the duration.

But now we want to present the results of our pre-test.

Results

1.   We measured 'assignment motivation' by means of the following scale:

   a)   I am proud of being a soldier within the German KFOR contingent.
   b)   I do identify with my field of duties.
   c)   I am essentially contributing to the mission accomplishment of my unit.
   d)   I like to be a soldier of the German KFOR contingent.
   e)   I do support the mission of the German KFOR contingent.
   f)   I could recommend a comrade to enlist in the Kosovo mission.
   g)   If possible, I would immediately return home (repatriation).
   h)   I would enlist as a volunteer in a prospective assignment.

It does not matter how we handle our motivation scale, whether we construct a Likert scale from these items, or calculate with the factor values of the rotated analysis of main components,

or enforce a unifactoral solution, or use the item 'your motivation' that is common in American surveys – our essential explaining factors constituting the base of our interpretation stay stable in the multivariate regression analysis.

2. For most of the tested explaining factors there is a pronounced correlation with assignment motivation. From our point of view, this results from the fact that most of the questions ask for 'weak' evaluations. There is not asked for 'hard' events or behaviors which are really examinable.

    For these reasons we go without a detailed presentation of bivariate relations but show immediately the multivariate regression analysis:

Table: Gradual regression

Dependent variable: Assignment motivation (unifactoral solution from motivation scale)

Influencing factor	Beta and significance
Political support	.34**
Commitment to the organization	.33**
Commitments to the tasks	.27**
Emotional strain caused by separation from the family	-.17**
Voluntary enlistment	.16**
Trust in higher superiors	.11**
Explained variance: corrected R^2	.59

Variables taken into consideration:
Infrastructure (factors: accommodation, leisure, communication); benefits (factors: economic and non-economic ones); success of the mission; support (by parents and acquaintances); society (factors: interest, support); care (factors: chaplaincy, medical service, psychological service, family care center); cohesion (factors: comradeship, superiors); training level of the unit; equipment; duty (factors: attractiveness, leaves of the camp, strain aspect, security of planning); age; service/department; rank category; gender; education; sexuality; emotional strain of the family by separation; physical reserves; mental weariness; trust in first-line superiors; number of assignments abroad

These results were surprising even for us, so we went to examine them by several experiments in data processing.

3. When going to the analysis without the factor 'political support', the factor 'trust in the success of the mission' will gain the highest explaining force. This result is backing our original result since the factor 'trust in the success' also contains elements that reflect political convictions.

4. When suppressing furthermore the factor 'commitment', those variables become dominant which are known from other surveys such as Segal/Rohall et al.: Meeting the Missions of the 1990s With a Downsized Force: Human Resource Management Lessons From the Deployment of Patriot Missile Units to Korea). These are on the one hand factors referring to duty such as trust in the common performance of the unit, trust in higher superiors, and on the other hand family aspects such as impairment of the family situation by duty.

Discussion

The evaluation of the political support of a mission obviously is of focal importance for the motivation of German soldiers who are engaged in this mission and identify with it. Thus, our result corresponds with a survey from 1985 where Klein/Lippert pointed at the supreme

importance of political legitimacy with their study "Morale and its Components in the German Bundeswehr".

The concept of 'Innere Führung' oriented at the citizen in uniform obviously comes to effect here. This concept destines the image of the politically informed and major citizen, capable of his own opinion of societal and political relations. During his assignment, the German soldier thinks in political dimensions. As it was destined by the leadership concept, he had been 'politicized' and gathers a great deal of his motivation from these convictions.

For the military organization this is a problem inasmuch as this organization is only conditionally in a position to influence the development of political opinions of its soldiers. Apart from the political indoctrination in the armed forces, the opinions among the comrades, among parents and acquaintances will certainly have their effects on the individual soldier, as well as public and published opinions.

It has to be underlined moreover that the Bundeswehr mission at the Kosovo was not at all unanimously supported by the German population. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the participation in NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia was the first combat mission of the Bundeswehr – and above all under the reign of a Red-Green government. Only a small majority of Germans supported the air strikes against Yugoslavia. In the Eastern part, the territory of former GDR, the majority of people even refused this NATO course of action. The KFOR mission also meets less support in the New Länder than it does in the original ones.

We only can presume here to which extent the dominance of political attitudes and opinions is due to the relative calm of the KFOR mission. Nevertheless it seems to be plausible that the higher the risk level would increase the more duty aspects would gain in influence on the soldiers' motivation.

We take the liberty to suggest here that future surveys should pay more attention to the soldiers' political convictions, thus enabling comparisons between the armed forces of different countries. The explanation approach presented here is probably not specific only for the German armed forces.

The importance of the variable 'commitment' measuring a long-term attitude, however, seems to be immediately plausible. Those with narrow ties to the Bundeswehr will not basically change their attitudes under assignment conditions. Thus, the Bundeswehr will have to take care that proven soldiers will be deployed to such missions.

There are still other influences. Seen the six months of separation from the family it is not surprising that an abortive family-army arrangement has negative influence on the soldier's motivation.

A German specific also is hidden beneath the category command/volunteer. Only temporary-career and regular soldiers currently are deployed by order. Draftees and reservists principally volunteer, but temporary-career and regular soldiers also have the possibility to volunteer. We ascertained that the volunteers to this mission are better motivated than the commanded ones. A result that does not surprise.

The trust in higher superiors is the sixth explaining factor, reflecting both the trust in the personalities concerned as well as in the military organization as a whole.

Nevertheless, it has to be underlined that the latter explaining factors in their weight stay obviously behind the evaluation of political support and individual commitment.

Our results will gain importance when comparative values will be available. Particularly international comparisons, comparisons with other KFOR contingents or comparisons with the German SFOR contingent in Bosnia should be striven for. We intend to do so, at least on the national scale.

These reflections close my lecture. I thank you for your attention. If there are any remarks or questions, do not hesitate. I am ready for discussion and answers.