Holding Hands

Swedish officers' professional autonomy in Afghanistan

by Caroline Trulsson[1]

Resumé

Vad det innebär att vara svensk yrkesofficer har förändrats radikalt under de senaste decennierna. I samband med denna utveckling talas det om begreppet professionell autonomi, det handlingsutrymme politikerna ger officerarna att utföra sina uppgifter. I denna artikel undersöks svenska officerares upplevda professionella autonomi i deras arbete under det svenska bidraget i samband med Afghanistaninsatsen med stöd i två idealtyper utvecklade från idéer av Julia Evetts. Resultatet visar att när officerarna reflekterar kring organisatoriska spörsmål kan deras professionalism beskrivas som motiverad från politikerna. Däremot, när de reflekterar kring genomförandet av uppgifter är det de själva som kontrollerar de professionella normerna.

We had been at the ISAF headquarters and were going home that night. The Belgians had a video camera mounted on the car, they put a lot of effort in photography. But it might not be very clever, being in those kinds of zones. We arrived at a Check Point and the car in front of mine gets pulled over. The Afghans at the Check Point claimed that we had been filming, but the guys in the car in front of us claimed they had not. The Afghans had their weapons showing. The Belgians called my vehicle and asked me to go out and talk to them since I could speak some Dari. I only took my light gun with me and said hello fellows what's up. And they responded 'how in hell do you know our language?' After that we started chatting and it turned out that one of them had family in Sweden. We could talk to each other in a way that we could understand each other after that. They said that we Afghans are not stupid, we can see that the camera is twinkling, the Belgians admitted eventually. I stood there talking with the Afghans about the security situation in Afghanistan and stuff like that for a while. Then we left. It felt quite good.

Story told by Interviewee 3

DURING THE RECENT decades, the role of the professions in modern society has been intensely discussed, in Sweden particularly regarding their role in the Swedish government. Traditionally, a profession has generally been held to be an occupation like physician, teacher or lawyer. The common criteria for the identification of a profession have been a jurisdiction, the right to control access to the profession, and a long education controlled by the profession. These facts guarantee the specific knowledge required in the profession and lead to legitimation, corporatism and a shared value system or a professional code of conduct.[2] But discussions about what it entails to be a profession, what is required for an occupation to be regarded as a profession, and the rights and obligations of professions, have also changed and shifted focus over time.

Julia Evetts writes that the military is interesting to study from a professionalism perspective, since it has experienced extensive transformations and developments after the end of the Cold War era, especially since today the concept of professionalism is used in many countries as a way to "capture both a necessary and desirable modernization of the armed forces".[3] Sweden is no exception, as the Swedish armed forces have undergone a number of adaptions and developments that have dramatically transformed them. More Swedish officers than ever before have experienced combat and critical situations in service on missions abroad. However, there are few studies that deal with the professional knowledge of Swedish officers and with their perceived professional autonomy. Existing studies that deal with the Swedish armed forces tend to focus on conditions and situations within Sweden.[4]

The Swedish military mission in Afghanistan is a typical example of how officers of today execute these new and complex tasks, which is one of the main reasons why their experiences were chosen as a case to study. Apart from traditional military operations, a special and distinguishing task was the officer's contribution to combating the Taliban with alternative procedures aimed at diminishing their influence and reducing their presence, alongside the overall strategy of counter-insurgency (COIN).[5]

This paper is a descriptive and exploratory case-study based on semi-structured in-depth interviews and studies of relevant literature. Two different types of professionalization discourses described by Julia Evetts[6] are operationalized and used to analyse the reasoning of Swedish officers who have been on missions in Afghanistan. These are used to examine to what extent their reasoning can be seen to belong to either of the two ideal types, which later will be described. The primary aim is to examine how professional autonomy is experienced at an individual level and how it is actually expressed in the officers' exercise of their profession. At an individual level, professional autonomy is understood as the set of actions officers can choose between in a given, concrete situation. This room to manoeuvre is categorized as discretionary authority in this paper. To examine this, descriptions of what the officers actually do, their practice, are needed rather than descriptions of what they ought to do or of the goals and ambitions of their work. This approach is driven by the observation that it is of interest how officers motivate and describe their actions in different situations and their reflections on the consequences of their actions.

To accomplish the aim of this paper, the remainder of it is structured as follows. The first section provides the relevant background, focusing on theories of military professionalism and military autonomy. The second section establishes two different types of

organisation between which the perceived autonomy can vary as a model for analysis, and the methodological approach used to address the issue at hand. In the third section, the empirical results of the study are presented in a discussion of how the officers' reasoning can be understood in the context of military professionalism. The section is structured by categories taken from characteristics of the two operationalized ideal types. A fourth section summarizes the results.

Background and Theory

The theoretical discussion concerning the meaning of professionalism, what the requirements are for an occupation to be counted as a profession and what rights and obligations a profession has to different authorities have changed and shifted its focus during recent decades. The discussion of professionalism and the military[7] has at times been part of this larger discussion, but it has also at time been lacking. Julia Evetts has in a number of papers written about how professionalism has been analysed in the sociology of professional groups, and, particularly in one paper, of how the application of this analysis has been carried out during the changes and transformations of the armed forces since World War II. It has for varying reasons during past times not always been self-evident to see the military as a profession. Evetts identifies different types of questions that have been posed in the analysis of professions and professionalism.[8] Although these questions have not been directly tied to specific time periods, they have been more or less dominating theoretical discussions.

In her article "Explaining the Construction of Professionalism in the Military: History, Concepts and Theories",[9] Evetts discusses whether the theoretical development of professionalism has been relevant or not regarding the military profession. She divides this development into different clusters of questions with the last cluster of questions being of relevance for this paper. This concerns professionalism seen as a discourse. This theme appeared in the 1990s and was a return to seeing it as a normative value system but with the addition of a number of new directions that are of special interest to discussions about the military. These new ways of approaching professionalism involve the use of seeing it as a discourse to describe motives for change and control in different occupations. The focus of interest is on how the concept of professionalism is used in the analysis of change, how it is talked about and what mechanisms govern the control of the occupational group.

Professionalism has now become a popular, positive and political concept. In the military, this has meant that the concept has been used to push for desired changes in the officer corps and its organisation. In a Swedish context, this has taken the form of a professionalization of the officer corps.[10] The analysis here is concerned with this discourse both at an organisational (macro) and an individual (micro) level.[11]

Two Types of Professionalism

In addition to describing the development of research on and analysis of professionalism, Julia Evetts formulates two different types of professionalism as ways of describing organisations in her paper "The Sociological Analysis of Professionalism". She argues here that these types can help us understand why it today is such a positively charged concept.[12]

The first type is organisational professionalism. Different attributes and values are here forced upon the profession (top-down) and thereby using professionalization as an

ideological instrument and a mechanism for changing and developing an occupational group. Ultimately, it is a way to make the group act in a way that the authority deems suitable and effective.[13] Accordingly, professionalism in this case doesn't mean that the professional group is a profession based on self-chosen criteria. Evetts further argues that the occupational group in question nevertheless accepts this type of professionalism since it is seen as a way for the group to achieve higher status; "in other words, those who as workers act like 'professionals', are self-controlled and self-motivated to perform in ways the organisation defines as appropriate. In return, those who achieve the designated targets will be rewarded with career promotion and progress".[14]

Evetts states that when you talk about professionalism as a way to exert social control at a systems level, it's more of a myth of professionalism, where the emphasis has been on exclusive ownership of an area of expertise, autonomy and with that the freedom of a practitioner to choose between different actions and last an occupational control of work. In reality however, this has often meant: the substitution of organisational for professional values; bureaucratic, hierarchical and managerial controls rather than collegial relations; budgetary restrictions and rationalizations; performance targets, accountability and increased political control.[15]

Evetts argues that this is motivated "external" or "from above" and is an effective way for an authority to use this concept as a mechanism for social control at both micro, meso and macro levels.[16]

The other type of professionalism, which Evetts calls occupational professionalism, is characterised by the fact that professional values are developed within the occupation itself (i.e. bottom-up), primarily through education, experiences and expertise. Social control is here exercised by the practitioners (professionals) themselves, which makes control more informal and collegial. Evetts argues that the normative aspects are strongest when the profession is controlled from "within" and at the same time is in accord with the requirements of the state and its expectation that the profession in question acts in accordance with the interests of the state.[17] At a micro level this type of professionalism can be seen as a common or shared professional identity. It is made up of shared and common experiences, shared ways of approaching and solving problems, and a common work culture and work identity. This shared identity is created by common experiences of education and training, a solid process of socialisation and a common work-ethic enforced by institutions and associations within the profession. In this way Evetts writes that 'the normative value system of professionalism in work, and how to behave, respond and advise, is reproduced at the micro level in individual practitioners and in the work places in which they work'.[18]

The two types of professionalism are summarised in table 1.

Evetts argues that the kind of professionalism that is relevant for many armed forces today is organisational professionalism. Thus, it is controlled "from above" by politicians and is accepted by military officers in the belief that it will give them a higher status. Evetts adds that military professionalism should be examined further, as she sees a need to examine this on at least two different levels, on the one hand an institutional level, on the other an individual level. At the institutional level Evetts posits that there are a number of different areas that are important to investigate further, such as the organisational arrangements and career routes in military management and/or

Table 1. A framework for a comparison between occupational professionalism and organisational professionalism

Occupational professionalism (discourse constructed within the profession)	**Organisational professionalism (discourse constructed "from above", by politicians)**
Collegial structure	Hierarchical decision-making structure
The professional practitioners have discretion to act in complex cases	Rational-bureaucratic forms for decision-making
The profession is trusted by its principal, the state	Standardisation of work practices
The professionals are in control of their work	Accountability, performance management, political control

operational specialisms.[19] These areas of research have dominated Swedish studies of military professionalism.[20] Evetts also argues that there is a need for research on an individual level as it is closely connected with the institutional level. This is because the officers, the individual practitioners, act professionally within military institutions with professional structures and frameworks and therefore are supported by these in their work. In this paper, it is the individual level that is of principal interest.

A consequence of the above thesis is that it is not that easy to define the concept "profession". However, for the purpose of this paper the following definition, from Julia Evetts' "The Sociological Analysis of Professionalism" (2003), is used, as it covers the central characteristics from general studies of professions and includes the military profession:

A shared professional identity is associated with a sense of common experiences, understandings and expertise, shared ways of perceiving problems and their possible solutions. This common identity is produced and reproduced through occupational and professional socialization by means of shared and common educational backgrounds, professional training and vocational experiences and by membership of professional associations.[21]

Autonomy is often used as a criterion or characteristic for what a profession is. This is not included in the above definition of a profession, and that is an active choice that is discussed in the next section.

Military Professional Autonomy

Within political science and sociology, the current discussion regarding the military profession – the concept – and how it relates to its authority – the civilian state – has its origin in Samuel P. Huntington's theoretical framework which he developed in his *The Soldier and the State* (1957).[22] Huntington's ideas are still commonly used as references and starting points for theories of civil-military relations and perhaps above all for the discussion of military professional autonomy.

Sofia Ledberg Knöchel challenges in her doctoral thesis *Governing the Military* (2014) the continuing tradition to start from Huntington and his theoretical framework by formulating new ideas of how the concept of control in the discourse of civil-military relations should be discussed. She argues that today it is assumed that an understanding of control is primarily relevant for states that have been stricken by military coups or military revolts against political decisions. That implies that the sole question

of control chiefly is about preventing the military from usurping the politicians' role as policy-makers. In states with more solid civil-military relations this aspect of control is not then that poignant, as instead it should be more interesting to examine the control and encroachment of the political authorities on the military exercise of power. This means to study to what extent the military is allowed to be autonomous in the exercise of their profession.[23]

Ledberg Knöchel chooses to use the concept "professional autonomy" as a tool rather than trying to examine to what degree the Chinese military, on which her research is based, can be seen as autonomous on a numerical scale according to some formalised criteria. Thus, she is seeking a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the political control of the military. To the extent that a certain degree of autonomy in the exercise of the profession is interesting, it is internal to the military profession rather than in relation to the civilian state.[24]

According to Ledberg Knöchel, autonomy should not be included in a definition of professionalism, which would then make it taken for granted, but instead autonomy should be seen as an important subject to be analysed on its own when researching civil-military relations. The degree of autonomy exercised by the military should be seen as a consequence of how the status of that profession is restricted by political authorities.[25] She instead chooses to study professional autonomy rather than institutional autonomy, though the latter is the more usual subject in the discourse of the politics of public administration.[26] In this way, focus is shifted towards actors rather than institutions and structures. To study professional autonomy in the military as an expression of power relations instead of as a component in the definition of professionalism is therefore also a way to challenge the common understanding of military professionalism.[27]

In this paper the following definition of professional autonomy, taken from Ledberg Knöchel, will be used: The right of the profession as a collective, and its members as individuals, to exercise professional competence and judgement in the execution of its work and in decision-making processes regarding matters of central importance to it.[28]

The aim in the paper is not to examine parts of the military institution, such as education or career paths, but rather, through a focus on the individual, to take the experiences of some officers as the starting point to examine how military autonomy is expressed in their descriptions of their work. What military autonomy means on an individual level will thus have to be clarified.

Julia Evetts writes that some aspects in the study of professionalism as an ideology are professional autonomy in decision-making and discretion in work practices.[29] The first of these, professional autonomy, thus treats an organisational level and the second, discretion, the level of the practitioner, an individual level. Because of this division I have chosen to examine the officers' work at an individual level in order to understand how they perceive their professional autonomy.

How this discretion can be understood is described by Anders Molander, who in the article "Efter eget skön: om beslutsfattande i professionellt arbete" (2011) (Discretionary reasoning: decision making in professional work), writes: A decision maker has discretion [….] 'whenever the effective limits on his power leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action or inaction' (translation by the author).[30]

This range of "possible courses of action or inaction" wherein prudential choices can be made, is described by Molander as the

structural dimension of discretion and is called discretionary power. This discretionary power is always given by an authority and is governed by rules set up by the authority in question. Molander goes on to say:

Someone with discretionary powers can be held responsible and be requested to justify her judgments and decisions. She has been trusted to make certain types of decisions within certain restricted frames (translation by the author).[31]

This concept of discretionary power will be used as an analytical tool in this paper.

The Swedish Military Mission with the ISAF in Afghanistan

The Swedish military mission in Afghanistan was established in 2001 with the stated objective of leaving only "a light footprint" by entering quickly, defeating the Taliban and then withdrawing. The US mission at the time, was named "Operation Enduring Freedom" (OEF). Later in 2001 the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission began in which, after a decision in the Swedish Parliament in the autumn of 2001, Sweden participated with 45 persons.[32] The initial aim of leaving just "a light footprint" turned out to be difficult to fulfil due to how the conflict was developing. The internal conflict in Afghanistan had been going on for some decades and could not be easily summarised or understood, as the Taliban were part of a bigger, more complex set of problems. This was a clear example of a conflict which seemed to demand "irregular warfare". The scope of the mission grew over time as did the Swedish contribution. Moreover, the aim and goals of the mission also changed with the overall objective becoming a more ambitious reconstruction and rebuilding of Afghan society.

In March 2006 Sweden took over the command of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan after the United Kingdom. In general, a PRT was a regional unit with the responsibility to uphold security and to support reconstruction in a specific region.[33] The command over the PRT in the designated area meant responsibility for four Afghan provinces with an area larger than Switzerland and a total population of about 2,5 million. Such an onerous responsibility drew much criticism from the Swedish media.[34] With responsibility for this PRT, Sweden's operations were to drive efforts in three different areas; security, development, and governance which were NATO's tools for the so-called Comprehensive Approach. It meant, therefore, for the Swedish military, to succeed in the conflict they would have to take initiatives in areas other than the traditional military ones of combat.[35]

Wilhelm Agrell writes in the first Swedish historical overview over the conflict in Afghanistan, *Ett krig här och nu* (2013), about the Swedish mission's idiosyncratic and special responsibility. Besides using traditional military means, different tactics were used to combat the Taliban which, above all, entailed the use of the strategy of Counterinsurgency (COIN). The main tenets in COIN were to emphasise the importance of "winning hearts and minds" which should be executed by "shape, clear, hold and build". The first two dealt with the creation of conditions to make it possible to secure an area, and the latter two to uphold and develop this security. To succeed in this aim more than traditional military force was needed, so personnel had to work on gaining the trust of the Afghans, and to work with non-military actors.[36]

The ultimate goal was for the Afghan police and military themselves to be able

to control the region and thus both protect civilians and counteract the insurgents. To achieve this the Swedish mission contributed with mentoring. The mentoring of the Afghans mainly took place through Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT) that consisted of officers and soldiers from the ISAF. In 2008 the Swedish Parliament decided that the OMLT mission should be increased from 10 to 50 personnel. Critical for these tasks (especially at the Kandak level which is similar to the Swedish Battalion level) was that the mentors themselves had previous experiences working at corresponding level, so they could be seen as trustworthy by the Afghans.[37] OMLT was obviously an important tool for the military forces in the complex work in the PRT in the Comprehensive Approach.[38]

Model and Method

Operationalisation and Tools of Analysis

Julia Evetts' two types of professionalism, *organisational professionalism* and *occupational professionalism,* will here be used as two ideal types, in Weber's meaning, with their central characteristics being presented in table 1 in the preceding section. The degree of professional autonomy an officer can exercise may vary. If and how much it varies will be evident in two different ways; first in how decision-making is seen, whether in occupational professionalism where "the professional practitioners have discretion to act in complex cases", or in organisational professionalism where the decision-making is governed by "rational-bureaucratic forms".

In occupational professionalism, the professional practitioners are thus seen to be autonomous, whereas they are not in organisational professionalism. And second, professional autonomy is seen as a form of power and can therefore be expected to influence the power games between politicians and military and accordingly also the politicians' possibilities to control the military. If the officers' reasoning about their professionalism is best described as an occupational professionalism, then the officers have an advantage in this power game. If their reasoning, however, is best described as governed by the politicians, then their professionalism is constructed "from above" as the politicians here have the advantage in the power game. And this can be seen to affect all aspects of the two types of professionalism.

As seen in table 1, the central characteristics and ideal types have been operationalised, so that they can be used as a tool for the analysis of this paper. Every post in the columns in table 1 is in the analysis a category, used to sort the empirical material. Every category contains the respective characteristics for the two ideal types. These categories act as sub-headings in the discussion section of this paper, where the empirical material is sorted and analysed.

In the first category "Perceived organisation of work", the question of whether the officers think that their work is organised hierarchically or if it is characterised by collegial work relations is analysed. The amount of discretion the officers have in their work is analysed in the category "Type of decision-making".

The next category is called "The importance of trust" and here the analysis is concerned with whether the officers' work practices are standardised or if they are built on trust.

The final category is "Perceived motive for work" where the type of authority the officers refer to is analysed. Are factors like accountability, performance management

and political control important, therefore motivated externally, or rather factors like professional norms and occupational control, motivated internally.

According to Evetts, this study ought to show that Swedish officers could be described as being governed and driven by externally formulated ideals and values and thus accord to organisational professionalism. Traditionally what is characteristic of organisational professionalism has been highly valued by the Swedish officer corps, which has held values like tough drill, uniformity and the importance of following rules in a hierarchical organisation in high esteem. In that kind of organisation, officers certainly faced situations that are unexpected, uncertain and unclear, but within a more closely defined spectrum of tasks. The officers interviewed for this paper, however, in many ways now act in a changed organisation and daily faced situations in their international assignments that were unexpected, uncertain and unclear as well as morally and ethically more complex.

In addition, Evetts explains that military organisations and officers' occupations have changed due to the new security situation in the 2000s,

Effective interventions, or indeed non-interventions, to combat terrorism, or to police inter-ethnic conflict cannot be conducted through traditional military structures of strict rules and group action. The technologically sophisticated, autonomous, self-regulating professional, sensitive to the needs and perceptions of local cultures, is now portrayed by the armed forces as the key to precise, effective, and damage- limiting intervention in these new security situations that typify the twenty- first century.[39]

In line with this, my paper will examine how Swedish officers in international assignments perceive their work and try to estimate what degree of discretionary power they can be seen to have and to what extent they are governed by an externally formulated professionalism. If their descriptions of the situations and their choice of action are more in accordance with occupational professionalism this will show that they have much discretionary power and thus perceive themselves to be autonomous in their occupational practice. If their descriptions, on the other hand, are more in accordance with organisational professionalism, they have a less, or perhaps no discretionary power, implying that they do not perceive themselves to be autonomous in their occupational practice. The operationalised tool of analysis is described in table 2.

Study Design

The paper is a case study of the Swedish contribution to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. This case was chosen for several reasons; the ISAF mission exposed the Swedish officers to several severe combat contacts which is not normally the case in most international Swedish missions, the mission is one of the largest as well as the longest contributions that the Swedish Armed Forces have made to an international mission, the mission has affected the Armed Forces' development regarding, for example, its operational capacity (the Armed Forces' ability to solve the tasks assigned, given the resources provided)and last but not least it is an interesting case since the mission lasted during a period when the Swedish military organisation was fundamentally changed.

The material that forms the basis of this study was collected partly by five semi-structured interviews with four Swedish officers and partly through studies of the literature on the Swedish military organisation, as well as on the directing of the Swedish contribu-

Table 2. An operationalized framework for a comparison between occupational professionalism and organisational professionalism.

	Occupational professionalism (discourse constructed within the profession)	**Organisational professionalism (discourse constructed "from above", from politicians)**
Perceived organisation of work	In the officers' reasoning, they indicate that collegiality is important for how a situation is handled or why a phenomenon is important rather than a hierarchical order. This might mean that the officer prioritizes how his/her colleagues would have handled a situation and that what some superior thinks is right is not as important.	The hierarchical decision-making order is important for how decisions are made and how different situations are to be handled. This might mean that the officer talks about how his/her superiors' decisions are crucial to what it is reasonable to do.
Type of decision-making	What was reasonable to do in the situation is justified by the officer as an assessment based on expertise and previous experience, irrespective of whether the rules were followed or not. The officers' reasoning is situational and is about professional ethics rather than rules.	To follow the rules is important for how the officer chooses to act. In how the officers reason, the formal part of the work clearly is important for how the situation is handled. Though the situation may be unique, it is subordinated the following of rules.
The importance of trust	The officer perceives that he/she has the trust of the state to make appropriate judgments when choosing an action in a given situation. The officer feels, therefore, that there isn't any imperative prototype for what he/she should do in each situation.	The officer feels that there is *one* right way to handle a situation. Rules are often referred to. Selecting the action is justified with the argument that it is what should be done when you find yourself in such a situation and because that's what has been learnt in training. That's what the rules permit or that's what the organisation is expecting you to do.
Perceived motive for work	The officer justifies the choice of action with professional norms and professional ethics at the local level. This is more important than rules and performance expectations. The key is to see what you do as subordinated to your vocation and understand how any task will be resolved in the best way possible based on professional norms.	The officer's choice of action is motivated by external demands (from the political / military strategic level) rather than norms. To perform a task is justified by the results to be pursued and formally given target images are referred to as crucial to how tasks are solved in the best way.

tion to international missions and finally about the Swedish mission itself. The empirical data gathered is a unique collection of military practice gained from personal and sensitive stories.

Regarding the sample for this study there can be questions of the representativeness of the result. The four officers should be seen as appropriate representatives of officers operating in international missions. Of interest here

is their role as examples and the situations they are in and how they handle them, it is the individual and personal impressions that are being sought. The results of the interviews are used as illustrative examples in order to describe variations around experiences of professional autonomy. The number of interviews were sufficient to find, describe and analyse such variations.

Results and Discussion

Perceived Organisation of Work

In examples about how the officers prepared themselves, what hopes and uncertainties they had prior to their work in Afghanistan, it is clear that they needed to feel secure in their military expertise. They also needed to feel that they would be able to solve the assigned tasks together with their colleagues. However, no specific distinction was made between colleagues with the same job and their superiors. They must accomplish the tasks as a group and so all individuals in the group are important, regardless of position or military rank. Interviewed person # 4 (Ip 4) trusts the colleagues with whom he works. Together, they should handle the tasks, and he expects them to make use of the training they have had in Sweden:

> I have friends and colleagues who are mentors in Afghanistan. We talked a lot and care about each other. What is playing a major role in the work as a mentor is that you are not on your own but have colleagues who can support and inspire you both in the same unit but also outside of the unit.[40]

Ip 4 further describes how no one goes to Afghanistan in the belief that you will just carry out the tasks given in advance. Most important is their responsibility as civil servants, that they all are governed by.[41] This means that they will have to handle situations that arise together, rather than that formal assignments and hierarchical control are exhaustive for what they will have to agree to do or be limited by. A strong collegiality can be seen in Ip 4's descriptions. However, this is not an argument that collegiality would go against what superiors would give orders to do. Based on the respondents' answers, I do not see that there were any situations where collegial motives were decisive for the choice of action rather than orders from above.

The attitude towards the hierarchical structure was instead rather prominent in several of the officers' arguments. Ip 3, who was stationed at a signal school in Kabul, says that he often received criticism for his work from his Belgian superiors, who thought he was having relationships too "close" with the Afghan officers and soldiers. The officer often took part in the education and training of the Afghans and "circulated" among the Afghan troops. The Belgian superior did not think it was appropriate that an officer should talk with soldiers in this manner (that is with those of lower military rank). It was thus not ethically correct for a captain to interact with the Afghan soldiers in this way. The officer's superiors also saw it as a security risk; he should stick to his tasks and not get involved in the training of the Afghans in the way he did.

The officer in question, however, opposed this and justified his action by stating that it would have gone against his past experiences. He had been on international duty several times before and said that he knew he did not have to be worried about it. It was also in his opinion a way for him to perform his assigned duties better "But I know that people were hesitant about it, as it was not considered to be really OK."[42]

In his answers, he shows that the hierarchy is clear about guiding the work and how he handles his tasks. It is something that he has to relate to. At the same time, he does not accept the Belgian superiors' approach to the work, nor his demands and orders, as these go against his previous experience. He therefore opposes his superior's instructions in order to perform his work according in what is, in his opinion, the best way. In this case, this does not seem to have meant that he necessarily broke the rules, rather that he did not follow an approach to work that his superior considered morally acceptable. It is possible that this had consequences in the officer's later work. The hierarchy is clear in the officer's reasons for how he behaved, but not conclusive. Regarding the category from the analytical tool, "the perceived organisation of work", the officers' experiences told in this section seem possible to describe as that the hierarchical decision-making structure was important for how different situations should be handled. Although it was not always clear in the officers' stories that the superiors' decisions were crucial for what should be done, it's something that they related to. This reasoning was more evident than that their experiences showed that they perceived their organisation as flat and collegial.

Type of Decision-making

During the interviews, all the officers told of difficult situations they had been in. The situations were difficult in different ways; for example, morally difficult to manage, or complex, threatening or unexpected. The often uncertain environment they were in required a more active and resourceful participation. For the officers, it was nothing new being faced with unexpected and difficult situations that required the ability to make independent judgments. Ip 3 tells about a situation where social skills and ingenuity were as critical.

The story is reproduced on the first page at the beginning of this paper where Ip3 gets pulled over at a check point and asked to go out of the vehicle and talk to the Afghans standing there in order to get through. He went out of the vehicle with only light weapons to face upset Afghans who probably felt threatened and jittery. This is courageous, and probably neither morally nor ethically correct professionally. In spite of this, the officer does not report any concern about the situation. He feels confident in himself as a person and as a professional. He seems driven by what he thinks he knows about how this situation could be resolved in the best way and curious about what the Afghans had to say. Since the Belgians with his superiors had asked him to go out and talk to the Afghans, and indirectly resolve the situation, the officer felt that the Belgians saw him as someone who could handle the situation, and probably someone who was knowledgeable and competent at his work.

The situation could have had a completely different outcome if the Afghans had not chosen to listen to him, had they not been ready to listen to what he wanted to say and to treat him as an equal. Ip 3 states that this was in large part probably due to the fact that he wasn't carrying heavy weapons and that he addressed them with confidence and was quite relaxed.[43] He showed good character in getting them out of the check point, his social skills helped him succeed in managing it. Because the officer did not feel any concern about to handle the talk with the Afghans, it is obvious that he was confident in his craft, his military expertise, and in his belief that he is knowledgeable and clear about his role. He seems to have perceived the discretionary space to be wide

and this was also clear from the leeway given by his Belgian superiors.

The officer did not mention any concerns about breaking the rules or disobeying orders in his description. Primarily he had to find a way to resolve the situation, which he did. Justifications based on rational-bureaucratic forms of decision-making or any stress on the importance of regulations could not be found in Ip 3's discussion, instead he emphasized that the situation was indeed unique.

Ip 1 describes how the Swedish mentors may have decided on different objectives and goals for the mentoring of both quantitative and qualitative characteristics before leaving for Afghanistan, but unless the Afghan officers shared these visions, they would have been difficult to implement, in which case one would have to be prepared to be creative and not be limited by predetermined structures and policies in too high a degree.[44] The formal part of the work could thus not be allowed to have too much importance, which is what organisational professionalism would demand. The important thing is that each situation is unique rather than that directives and guidelines should limit the solution of tasks.

The majority of the cases the officers described during the interviews were handled on the basis of assessments based on their expertise and previous experience, whether the rules were followed or not was not decisive but rather what was "the right thing to do". This can be considered as a strong result; the officers' reasoning was situational and more in the line of professional ethics than strictly following rules. These examples show that the officers intentionally or unintentionally had been assigned a discretionary power. The results support the tendency for professional professionalism. The hard drill and uniformity traditionally associated with the officers' credo do not appear in these examples. It is also noteworthy that Evetts' assertion, that the profession of officer requires autonomous, self-regulating professional individuals who are skilled at identifying the needs of a context they might find themselves in, is evident in the officers' own reasoning.

The Importance of Trust

This matter was the one most difficult to capture in the interviews. It might be a particularly sensitive issue whether the officers feel that they are trusted or not by their principal, the state, to perform the tasks they are assigned. It can, however, be claimed that this kind of reasoning is indirectly described in several of the examples given by them. In the previous section, it was clear that they feel that they do have discretionary powers in their decision making. This can also be interpreted to mean that they feel they are trusted to make the right choices in different situations and therefore have wide discretion. The results of the previous section also showed that discretionary power may have been given unintentionally by the state, possibly through the not very clear objectives and tasks that they had to confront during the operation. Criticism has been levelled at the lack of clearly defined goals and objectives of the joint operation as given by parliamentary decisions.

The National Audit Office's report *The Swedish contribution to international efforts* shows that there were general foreign and defence policy motives for Swedish participation in international operations, as mentioned in various government bills. It has, however, not been clearly expressed that Sweden will be expected to contribute to achieve goals for the Afghanistan mission established by NATO (Swedish contributions to international operations).[45] The political objectives

also varied in their degree of detail; Swedish forces should rebuild Afghan society, combat corruption, combat terrorism as well as combat illegal drug trafficking.[46] The argument is strengthened by the fact that the Armed Forces requested clarification about its participation in the ISAF mission regarding its purpose and objectives in the medium term.[47]

With vague directives from the Swedish government, even concerning the military-strategic level of what the task actually was and how it should be interpreted, one can argue that it is likely that there were no clear standards of how the tasks were to be performed. It is however not possible to say that this implies that the Swedish state and the military-strategic command had full confidence that the officers would perform their duties in the best possible way. Yet, it is likely that the many uncertainties with the directives had an impact on the officers. Since there were no clear directives for how the tasks were to be performed this opened up for their own interpretations leading to the officers formulating their own ways of how to solve the tasks assigned. An example of this can be seen in the reasoning of Ip 4 as he described how he, before leaving for Afghanistan with his battalion FS 28, reflected on what kind of accountability the political powers have towards the officers in Afghanistan. He says that he felt that there is a large gap between the directives that the Armed Forces get from the politicians and how their practical work has to be done:

> They write that there should be no fighting now. But as advisors, we have to do that also ... as an advisor you have to carry the same weapons as other fighting ISAF soldiers...[48]

Here is expressed a concern that the politicians might not know what really is going on on the ground and don't want to take the responsibility that is required if something should happen to him. Because there is no media interest, and as the threat is worsening, he is now more worried when he is due to leave for Afghanistan. He feels uncertain whether the people in Sweden really know about the conditions prevailing in this theatre of operations.[49]

There are no clear arguments for either occupational professionalism or organisational professionalism regarding this matter of "importance of trust". However, it can be argued that the vague directives from the Swedish government and the lack of clarity at the military-strategic level of what the tasks actually were and why the troops were in Afghanistan in the first place, could suggest that it is unlikely there were clear standards of how the tasks were to be performed. This might be an expression of how the officers felt that they were trusted by the government, such that the Swedish state and the military-strategic command trusted the officers to perform their duties in the best possible way. But there are no clear arguments in the interviews for this reasoning.

Perceived Motive for Work

As described earlier, the ambitions of the mission were not clearly formulated and it was difficult to see how such tasks as fighting terrorism and rebuilding Afghan society could be interpreted in practice, as feasible tasks. Despite this, there are examples and stories from the officers' work that show how they perceive the motives for their work and where it is possible to see examples of how the officers stand in relation to the demands for results that their tasks have.

There is an example in which Ip 1 describes different approaches to the work. It was widely known that the Germans were

only interested in getting "checks in boxes"[50] and not in their actual work as mentors to the Afghans. One of his examples describes how they "swept the streets even though they did not have to be swept".[51] Ip 1 instead chose not to sweep streets that did not need to be swept. As a result, he could not always "check the box" and deliver results in accordance with the requirements set by ISAF. However, he believes that he actually achieved the more abstract goals their work aspired to fulfill; to rebuild Afghan society. It seems to be important to him that he performed his duties in accordance with his professional judgment, which in this case might mean that ISAF and the Swedish government would think that he hadn't succeeded with his tasks. Ip 1 further says that he believes that work as a mentor is hard to measure in the manner which might be expected by ISAF, the Armed Forces and Swedish politicians. The reason for this is his belief that to work as a mentor in the OMLT is of a different character from more traditional military tasks and also in comparison with other units within the mission.

Another example of how performance management affects the work and what the consequences are is described by Ip 2 concerning how he felt about the fact that the international forces brought in ideas without any kind of sensitivity to Afghan traditions and ways. To organize meetings for Afghan troops was formulated as a necessity for the accomplishment of the task to develop the Afghan forces.

> The meetings were only there to please us. They have other ways to coordinate their work. In Sweden there is a widespread culture that everything can be solved in meetings. In Afghanistan, it does not work the same way. They do not coordinate at all. But they manage to complete their tasks anyway.[52]

The structure of these meetings was decided at a high staff level within ISAF and because they had to show results, the meetings went ahead, even though the Swedish officer himself felt that this was the wrong approach. To arrange meetings was thus more important than thinking about whether meetings were necessary to achieve the objective of developing the Afghan forces, according to ISAF directives. It is clear that Ip 2 was questioning the given tasks, the interpretation of them and the results that should be aimed for. But it also shows how performance management clearly controls work and supplies a clear justification for how tasks are done. Ip 1 thinks that it is important to respect the Afghan military organisation and that Afghan officers know "the Afghan Game," something that the international officers did not. This makes it necessary to start from the Afghan officers' knowledge, instead of having the Swedish officer acting only out of his own previous knowledge.[53]

The above-mentioned example was something that Ip 1 often thought about when he wanted to try to understand how he managed to do his work, what was important in the work he performed, what role he played and how hard it was to understand each other. During his time in Afghanistan, he came to realize the importance of being able to hold hands with Afghan officers, which initially had been difficult for him to manage. Afghan officers whom he worked with during his time in Afghanistan repeatedly wanted to hold hands at ceremonial events and in key situations to show that they had confidence in the Swedish officer. Afghan officers revealed that the gesture meant a lot to them and the officer quickly realized that this was something he had to take seriously. He also realized that holding hands was something he could use to show that he

had confidence in those Afghans who were his colleagues.[54]

In all the examples in this section, it is clear that the officers relate to the external requirements of monitoring and rationale for the tasks they were given. At the same time, they describe how wrong it was to think that you should blindly perform what you were told and to see your work only in relation to these targets. Instead, several instances are described wherein the officers rather let professional standards and professional ethics justify their work.

Summary and In-depth Discussion

In this study, the aim has been to examine how much discretionary power officers have on an individual level in their work in the Afghanistan mission. The aim is to see to what extent professionalism, seen as a discourse, is used to motivate the modernisation and development of the military organisation either externally (through the political authority) or internally (by the officers themselves). If the results show that the officers are guided by an occupational professionalism, it is to be expected that the power-game is to the officers' advantage and they can be seen to have greater autonomy. If they however can be seen to be controlled by the politicians, then the power-game can be seen to be to the politicians' advantage and the officers will be seen to have less autonomy.

The analysis of the empirical material shows that the "perceived organisation of work" gave arguments for the assumption that the Swedish officers' perception of their professionalism can be described as what Evetts calls organisational professionalism. The "type of decision-making" that the officers' perceive themselves having on the other hand, contains strong arguments for the officers' claim to have discretionary power, an argument implying that the officers belong to an internally defined profession, i.e. an example of occupational professionalism.

The last two categories were for various reasons more difficult to assess. As for "the importance of trust" it is obvious that it is unlikely that there were clear standards for how the tasks were to be performed. This might be how the officers perceived the trust that was shown in them by the government, i.e. the Swedish state and the military-strategic command had confidence that the officers performed their duties in the best possible way. But there are no clear arguments in the results from the interviews that strengthen this argument. The "perceived motive for work" was hard to find arguments for in the officers' reasoning since the ambitions of the mission were not clearly formulated and therefore hard to interpret in practice, as feasible tasks. In the officers' reasoning, it is however clear that they relate to the external requirements of monitoring and rationale for the tasks they were given. This would therefore signify organisational professionalism, as that is the only way to understand the perceived motive for work. At the same time, it is clear that the officers oppose this, and instead try to perform tasks based on their professional norms.

Based on these results it can be seen that half of the categories show that the officers feel that they are controlled "from above", by politicians, in their work when they reflect on organisational matters. They are well aware of the limitations and attitudes of their work in so far as these are the results of commands and directives. This favours Evetts' argument that the officers' professionalism is motivated externally as a desirable way for the profession to develop. The "type of decision" shows instead the large extent to which the officers have discretionary

power. This is an example of an internally constructed professionalism which as such is both interesting and noteworthy.

The analysis shows that the officers were guided by several ideals that are consistent with organisational professionalism while not being guided by values implemented from the top down as organisational professionalism actually would entail. That the politicians and the military-strategic command would motivate and control the officers' professionalism, cannot be substantiated from the officers' professional practice on an individual level in this study.

They are rather being controlled by and applying their "old" values, the ones they have been taught during their education and which have been a part of their whole career. There are several ideals and factors being shown in the officers' handling of the situations they were in, that in the operationalized tool of analysis belong to occupational professionalism. To be an officer seems to be more a certain lifestyle or a specific attitude to life. It is clear that the officers in question have a strong set of values and that they are reflective human beings with good judgment. One way to understand this, following Evetts, is the claim that occupational professionalism at micro level is reflected in a common or shared professional identity. It consists of shared and common experiences, understanding and expertise, as well as shared ways to approach and solve problems. In their reflections about the execution of their work, arguments have been found for the claim that the officers are an example of occupational professionalism on an individual level.

One conclusion is that both ideal types are evident in the results from the interviews, and that both co-exist in the Swedish military organisation. They are therefore both needed to describe what a military profession means today.

The interviews that were used as the empirical material are unique and both enable and constrain the results of this study, and what is now possible to assert about its results. For us to say that the results strengthen occupational professionalism depends on how the officers reflected, deliberated and ultimately chose to act in different situations. It is however possible that those who were interviewed are different from a "typical" Swedish officer. The following discusses this.

Although the interviewed officers belong to different parts of the army it is considered unlikely that this would affect the results of this study. It is, however, of major importance for the purpose of this paper that all of them were at such an organisational level that they had experience of work on the ground in the operations theatre with Afghans and not only doing the staff or administrative work. In addition to belonging to different parts of the army and their military rank and position varied. This may be of significance because otherwise they would not have ended up in the same sort of situations, but because what is of interest is their handling of the situations and not the situations they find themselves in, this should not be a problem.

That these four officers actively chose to be interviewed might mean that they have a special interest in the type of issues raised. They knew beforehand what my interest was and the kind of issues CSMS deal with. It is likely that, through participating in CSMS seminars, they have learned to reflect on what they have experienced to a greater degree than other officers, as this might not usually be a part of their work in the military. This fact is deemed to be of an advantage for this paper since reflecting on one's experiences is

necessary in order to understand how one perceives one's professional role.

One can speculate about how their interests influenced their work in Afghanistan. Since it is not mandatory for the officers interviewed for this paper to participate in international operations, it is possible that they might have sought to work in Afghanistan because they are interested in developing themselves personally and professionally, and that this is a context where they can put into practice what they train for in the national organisation. It is possible that the way they acted in many of the situations they experienced was due to them being open to the possibilities of the situation and the chance to test their understanding and their limits, and that they thus more often than others engaged in morally complicated and complex situations. This is also deemed to be to an advantage for this study as its aim is to analyse how they understood their work in Afghanistan and what they have been through. If they were in Afghanistan due to motives of their own, they had probably reflected afterwards about what they had been through only to have it more explicitly formulated in the CSMS seminars.

To participate in the Afghanistan mission required courage. The officers who took part knew that they would expose themselves to a lot of uncertainty and unexpected situations that could well be morally complex and difficult. In situations like these, it is often difficult to make a distinction between decisions based on professional guidelines and values, and others based on personal opinion. Dilemmas like that often came up during the interviews. The study has focused upon the kind of discretion officers feel they might have, what sort of actions they feel they may be able to choose from. But what also seems to be important, perhaps crucial for their handling of different situations, their work and how they relate to their actions, is how they decide what type of action they should actually perform. This discretion in fact determines what the officers can relate to, but this space is not neutral in relation to the choices they actually make. Their room for action and for deliberation is interdependent. Their discretionary power does set limits to their choice of action but within this framework they have freedom to choose. Within this framework, as became evident in the interviews, it was their professional judgment that governed their conduct.

One conclusion is therefore that discretionary power and the structural dimension of discretion are not enough to describe everything which is important if we want to understand professional autonomy and officers' discretion. It is also important to know what officers are doing with the autonomy they get assigned. However, the structural dimension of discretion must be elucidated if the purpose is to understand officers' professional autonomy, because it sets the framework for their actions. This study has additionally shown some of the capabilities that are used and of importance for officers' professional autonomy. Among other things it has been shown how all the officers interviewed said that something they had discovered during their time in Afghanistan was that it sometimes was necessary for them to go beyond their intended professional role to do their job or to be able to develop on-site what they realized was possible and necessary to do. Both regarding what they themselves thought, and also what other officers from other nations felt and what they think was expected of them based on the views of their Swedish organisation. To cope with this, it was important for them to find their own way and make the best of the situation.

Difficult situations seem to be characterized by the fact that the officers do not feel

that there is just one right way to handle them. It seems that it is precisely in such situations, where they worry whether what they do is right or not, that several of the officers feel that they have done something worth paying attention to. This conclusion is a step beyond Evetts' ideas of military professionalism. What is crucial for understanding the kind of professionalism that changes and develops the officer, is to understand the capacities they use and how they use the autonomy that is assigned to them.

Conclusion

This study is a contribution to the discourse on Swedish military professionalism and how Swedish officers perceive their professional autonomy on an individual level. It is further a theoretical contribution to the development of Julia Evetts' theories and as such can be of use for further study.

The aim of the study has been to study how professional autonomy is experienced and expressed on an individual level and how it manifests itself in the officers' professional practice. This was examined with the support of two ideal types, occupational professionalism and organisational professionalism, which were developed from the theories of Evetts. Based on the results of the analysis it was found that half of the categories speak in favor of the externally controlled professionalism. When the officers were reflecting on the execution of their work, however, the results suggest that the officers themselves have control over professional standards. Especially regarding the type of decision-making, where professional autonomy could vary between the two ideal types, the results decisively pointed towards occupational professionalism.

Even in the other categories occupational professionalism was obvious in the officers' reasoning. This argues for internally motivated professionalism and is both an interesting and remarkable result since it goes against Evetts' theory that military professionalism ought to be externally motivated. A conclusion is that both ideal types are evident in the interview results, that they both exist in the Swedish military organisation. Therefore, both are needed to describe what the military profession means today. However, a further finding of the analysis is that if we want to understand what the military profession entails and what is driving the military professions' development and modernisation we need more than the two different types that Evetts formulates; Swedish reality is more complex than that. A further conclusion is that what is decisive for the officers' discretionary powers is the ability they have given the action space they have. This study is therefore a development of Evetts' ideas.

The author holds a master in political science and a bachelor with majors in political science and philosophy.

Notes

1. This paper is a revised version of the authors' master thesis "*Att hålla handen; svenska officerares professionella autonomi under ISAF-insatsen i Afghanistan*" (Holding Hands; Swedish officers' professional autonomy during the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, 2016) in political science at the Department of Government at Uppsala University.
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5. See Agrell, Wilhelm: *Ett krig här och nu,* Atlantis, Stockholm 2013, p. 220.
6. Op. cit., Evetts, Julia, see note 3.
7. The military profession is in this paper limited to commissioned officers, and thus does not include the conscript personnel. In the literature referred to in this paper, this is the category being studied.
8. Op. cit., Evetts, Julia, see note 3.
9. Ibid.
10. Op. cit., Bolin, Anna, see note 4.
11. Op. cit., Evetts, Julia, see note 3, p. 766.
12. Evetts, Julia: "The Sociological Analysis of Professionalism", *International Sociology* 18, 2003, p. 410.
13. Ibid., p. 409.
14. Ibid., p. 407.
15. Ibid., pp. 406-407.
16. Ibid., pp. 405-406.
17. Ibid., pp. 408-409.
18. Ibid., p. 400.
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24. Ibid., p. 19.
25. Ibid., p. 21.
26. Ibid., p. 19.
27. Ibid., pp. 23-24.
28. Ibid., p. 20.
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31. Op. cit., Molander, Anders, see note 30, p. 3.
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35. *Svenska bidrag till internationella insatser*, RiR 2011:14, p 73.
36. Op. cit., Agrell, Wilhelm, see note 5, p. 220.
37. *Sveriges bidrag till ISAF 2002–2014 – en insatshistorik* [FM2015-181:4], p. 53.
38. Op. cit., Agrell, Wilhelm, see note 5, p. 311.
39. Op. cit., Evetts, Julia, see note 12, p. 759.
40. Ip 4, 30th October 2014. Captain with background in the Armoured troops. FS 21 (2011), Commander Infantry Platoon, supporting Afghan troops with complementary capabilities. FS 28 (2014–015), Military advisor. All quotations from the interviews are translated by the author.
41. Ibid.
42. Ip 3, 4th November 2014. Background in the Armoured troops. FS 24 (2012–2013) Stationed at signal school in Kabul.
43. Ibid.

44. Ip 1, 28th October 2014. Captain in the Command and Control Regiment. FS 20 (2010–2011) OMLT Kandak as mentor XO. On battalion level mentor to an Afghan officer.
45. Op. cit., *Svenska bidrag* …, se not 35, p. 25.
46. In particular prop. 2008/09: 69, bet. 2008/09: UFöU1, Parliamentary Communication 2009/10: 146; prop. 2012 / 13:41, bet. 2012/13: UFöU1 and prop. 2013/14: 33.
47. *FM Annual Report 2007*, att.4.
48. Ip 4, 30th October 2014.
49. Ibid.
50. Expression used by Ip1 to describe how the Germans only did what was required, to follow order in a literal way.
51. Ip 1, 28th October 2014.
52. Ip 2, 29th October 2014. Captain in the Lifeguards. FS 20 (2010–2011) Mentor on Company level in OMLT. Commander mentoring team with the task to support the Company command working in Darsab, Afghanistan.
53. Ip 1, 12th October 2014.
54. Ibid.