

# STRATEGIC RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ARMED FORCES WHEN MAKING A POLITICAL DECISION ON MILITARY NEUTRALITY

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The objective of this paper is to define the existence of a special type of responsibility, "strategic" responsibility, within the Armed Forces for incomplete and inaccurate reporting on real capacities and capabilities for deterrence and protection of neutrality. Analysing the impact of the evaluation of the Armed Forces' capabilities by military officers on potential making a political decision on neutrality, the author indicates the need to recognize strategic responsibility within the military for the defined phenomenon. By analysing the phenomenon of incomplete and inaccurate reporting, he identifies and defines two main causes of this phenomenon – insufficiently developed moral awareness of potential far-reaching implications of such an act and irrational attribution of responsibility in the Armed Forces. The author proposes mechanisms for the optimal removal of the mentioned causes of this problem - adequate ethical education and continuous ethical training of military officers and a review of the institutional culture of attribution of unlimited and irrational responsibility of military officers for phenomena and practices that they logically cannot bear responsibility for, and therefore no justified sanctions. By implementing these mechanisms, the much-needed strategic culture within the Armed Forces is strengthened and further develop.

*Key words: neutrality, deterrence, strategic responsibility, weakness of will, attribution of responsibility, Kant's dictum, ethical education*

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## Introductory considerations

The decision on military neutrality is inherently<sup>1</sup> related to capacities for its defence, i.e. capacities for successful deterrence. Therefore, such a decision is made only if there are optimal capacities for deterrence and rational prospects for capacity development. In other words, strategic commitment to military neutrality implies, i.e. it *should* also include the assumption of readiness to defend and protect neutrality - otherwise, nobody will respect that neutrality, which is a necessary precondition for its existence.<sup>2</sup> The responsibility for making a decision on potential military neutrality, especially in the periods of competition for global hegemony, cannot be overemphasized. A possible decision on neutrality lacking capacity and willingness to be defended would be not only strategically wrong, but also profoundly morally and politically irresponsible, especially towards one's nation. Real capacities for successful deterrence, as well as readiness to protect neutrality, are necessary "instruments" and prerequisites for justified decision-making on neutrality, as well as its maintenance during periods of uncertainty and pressure. The very decision on potential (non)alignment, that is, on military neutrality or integration into the existing military and political organizations, is made by the legitimately elected political authority of a country. Thus elected government has the right to define strategic commitment of a country and make decisions that further define it. Naturally, the decision-makers of military neutrality bear the ultimate responsibility for any misjudgement and the consequences of the decision resulting from such a judgement, which can be disastrous.

Two directions of ethical argumentation of this phenomenon can be clearly distinguished in the context of what military ethics deals with - the first, which is explicit and relatively well-developed theoretically, and the second, which is only implicit and insufficiently studied. The primary direction of ethical argumentation, which this paper will not deal with in detail, is the existence of a clear moral responsibility of the political decision-maker on neutrality for the establishment of the optimal Armed Forces and for the systemic development of capacities for successful deterrence. The wide literature, which refers to this direction of discussion, defines activities that have to be undertaken for the optimal development of capacities for successful deterrence - the development of strategic culture,<sup>3</sup> the adequate

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<sup>1</sup> Serbia declared its military neutrality in 2007, by adopting the *Resolution on the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity and constitutional order of the Republic of Serbia*. The *Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia* defines military neutrality as "the defence interest of the Republic of Serbia that has arisen from its national values and interests and international position". "Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia", *Official Gazette of the RS*, 94/2019, December 27, 2019, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> According to the definition, neutrality implies "the impartial position of a state that does not participate in an armed conflict, *recognized by other states*". Radoslav Gaćinović, "Vojna neutralnost i budućnost Srbije", *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti*, year IX, Vol. 14, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Veljko Blagojević, "Strateška kultura kao determinanta nacionalne bezbednosti u funkciji podrške konceptu vojne neutralnosti", *Vojno delo*, 8/2019, pp. 7-8.

armament and renewal of materiel,<sup>4</sup> the adequate number of the Armed Forces and types of recruiting personnel for troops,<sup>5</sup> a synergistic approach to economy, energy industry, etc.<sup>6</sup> The second direction of ethical argumentation is insufficiently studied theoretically, although it deals with an extremely important phenomenon for the Armed Forces. Therefore, the paper will study exactly that direction of argumentation that raises the question of the existence of the moral responsibility within the Armed Forces for contributing to the political decision-making on neutrality - a direction we call "strategic responsibility" within the Armed Forces, in the context of deterrence and neutrality.

## Political decision-making and epistemic limitation

Modern democracies clearly define decision-making mechanisms, including the definition of functions that have decision-making legitimacy. This is of particular importance when it comes to capital decisions that affect the entire population and which have to be made only from a position of absolute legitimacy. Certainly, a comprehensive strategic decision on military neutrality represents a glaring example of a capital decision, whose adoption requires the existence of the unambiguous legitimacy of the decision-maker. Therefore, this decision is made by the highest political leaders, i.e. a very narrow circle of people who can be claimed to have unequivocal decision-making legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> Here, it is very important to refer to the phenomenon of epistemic limitation of capital decision-makers, which is intrinsically linked to the structure of modern democratic systems.

Namely, capital political decision-makers are inevitably faced with the extraordinary complexity of the reality in which and about which they decide. A "complication" of reality is one of the most significant features of the development of human civilization – "the fund of human knowledge about man, nature and existence grows exponentially with the development of civilization, and one of the key characteristics of this process is the

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<sup>4</sup> Dragan Stanar, „Zatvorenikova dilema i paradoks trke u naoružanju“, *Savremeni ekološki, društveni, politički i ekonomski izazovi*, Sanja Mrazovac Kurilić, Ljiljana Nikolić Bujošević, Miša Stojadinović (ed.), UNT, Beograd, 2020, pp. 287-300.

<sup>5</sup> Srđan Starčević, Srđan Blagojević, "Uloga služenja vojnog roka u razvoju srpske strateške kulture", *Vojno delo*, 4/2020, pp. 85-104.

<sup>6</sup> Blagoje S. Babić, "Geoeconomija i neutralnost Srbije", *Vojno delo* 8/2019, pp. 181-198 and Mirjana Radovanović, "Strategijska kultura kao faktor definisanja energetske politike Evropske unije i Ruske Federacije", *Vojno delo*, 8/2019, pp. 214-227.

<sup>7</sup> This is most clearly expressed in the event of deciding on war. Such a decision in democratic practice is generally made by a person who is recognized as the highest expression of legitimacy. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the criteria of *Jus ad Bellum* is "statement by a competent/legitimate authority" constituted by the fulfillment of four conditions including "support and representation of the people". More in: Anne Schwenkenbecher, „Rethinking Legitimate Authority“, in: Fritz Allhoff, Nicholas G. Evans and Adam Henschke (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Ethics and War – Just war theory in the twenty-first century*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, New York/London, 2013, pp. 161-162.

segmentation of total knowledge”.<sup>8</sup> The segmentation of knowledge about reality and the understanding of the complexity of factors that influence the separate life of individuals and the dynamics of social events result in the practical impossibility of the existence of modern *Doctor Universalis*, i.e. individuals who can encompass knowledge of the entire range of factors. Instead, today “specialized and expert knowledge about every single sphere of life and existence is the *condition sine qua non* of serious work and progress”,<sup>9</sup> and capital political decision-makers have to be aware of epistemic limitation. Due to the awareness of the limits of their expertise and practical knowledge, it is natural for decision-makers to rely on assessments that are made by unquestionable experts in fields that have an impact on political decision-making.

The decision on military neutrality is made on the basis of assessments from the most diverse spheres of social and political reality - from the sphere of diplomacy and the state of geopolitical dynamics, through the sphere of political and military history, economy and energy industry, all the way to the sphere of security and military power. Although it is most natural that the final responsibility for the consequences of the decision on military (non)alignment is borne by politicians, it is very important to consider the potential existence of the responsibility of experts, whose assessments are the basis of a political decision. An unavoidable role in deciding on military neutrality is also played by the assessment of rational prospects for “recognition” of neutrality by others,<sup>10</sup> that is, of the state of military capacities for successful deterrence and protection of neutrality. Such an assessment can only come from expert officers from the Armed Forces, i.e. from those defined by Huntington as “force managers”.<sup>11</sup> In this context, potential establishment of moral responsibility within the Armed Forces for inadequate reporting and assessment of state and capabilities of military power for successful deterrence and protection of neutrality is considered. Since a capital decision with strategic consequences is made on the basis of these assessments, such responsibility can be called “strategic responsibility”.

## Strategic moral responsibility

During long tradition of reflection on those phenomena that are today included in the field of military ethics, responsibility for what has the sign of “strategic” as a rule either encompassed a rather narrow circle of people within the military, or was

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<sup>8</sup> Dragan Stanar, “Demokratija, stručnost i lojalnost: Sistem plena ili oligarhija eksperata”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, Vol. LXX, No. 172, p. 552.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 553.

<sup>10</sup> As Stajić *et al* note, “The unilateral declaration of neutrality may remain without effect on the political and international legal status of a country if great powers do not support the proclaimed neutrality both formally and in reality”. Ljubomir Stajić, Nenad Radivojević, Vladan Mirković, “Vojna neutralnost kao princip strateškog opredeljenja Republike Srbije – problemski pristup”, *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, 4/2016, p. 1072.

<sup>11</sup> Semjuel P. Hantington, *Vojnik i država*, Centar za studije Jugoistočne Evrope, Fakultet političkih nauka, Diplomatska akademija, Beograd 2004, p. 14.

identified entirely out of the Armed Forces, in the sphere of politics. This is expected, since the concept of strategy (and the derivative of this concept - strategic) implies the highest level of decision-making, i.e. it has great connotations of supervenience in relation to each substrategic level. The level of strategic reflection in the context of the Armed Forces is fundamentally inseparable from the level of political consideration - these two levels are inherently intertwined,<sup>12</sup> as the famous Clausewitz found out.<sup>13</sup> And since the power of strategic decision-making is always concentrated in the hands of a small number of people, strategic responsibility is *prima facie* established at the highest levels of military and political decision-making. However, already at the end of the 1990s, certain authors noticed a paradigmatic change in the possibility of establishing strategic responsibility at substrategic level, since modern civilization is entering the mature phase of the "transformation of war".<sup>14</sup> One of its features is the possibility that decisions at tactical level have strategic consequences. The greatest author who realizes this change is the US General Krulak, who introduces the concept of "strategic corporal",<sup>15</sup> wanting to, *inter alia*, emphasize the existence of the possibility that decisions at corporal level have strategic consequences in war.

In the context of considering deterrence and protection of neutrality, there is considerable room for analysing a similar phenomenon - the possibility of establishing strategic responsibility for decisions made at "tactical" level, that is, more precisely, moral responsibility within the Armed Forces for actions that contribute to the distortion of the perception of the capability for deterrence and protection of military neutrality among political decision-makers or, simply, for inaccurate and incomplete reporting on real situation and capacities of the Armed Forces that should perform the function of deterrence and protect neutrality. We add the prefix strategic because this type of unethical behaviour in the military can have strategic consequences in perspective, far above the level of the one who carries out such actions.

## The Janusian character of the problem

The task of definitively identifying motives and reasons for incomplete or inaccurate reporting on the state and capacities within the Armed Forces is certainly thankless and difficult. A wide range of potential reasons can lead to this malignant

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<sup>12</sup> A political decision-maker should be familiar with the basic assumptions of military strategy. On the other hand, military strategy, which is separated from political, very often leads to historical failures, even when a military victory is won! As stated, "war has its grammar, but it does not have its logic, because its logic is always in the sphere of the political". Srđan V Starčević and Srđan Blagojević, "Kreveldov spor sa Klauzevicem – Da li je smisao rata politički?", *Srpska politička misao*, Vol. 56, 2/2017, pp. 119-120.

<sup>13</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, pp. 133-140.

<sup>14</sup> A great number of factors has influenced the transformation of war - from the influence of non-military actors, the influence of the private sector, the development of new information technology, etc. More in: Martin van Kreveld, *Transformacija rata*, Official Gazette, Belgrade, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Charles C. Krulak, „The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War”, *Leatherneck*, Jan. 1999, pp. 14-17.

anomaly within the system - starting from ignorance<sup>16</sup> and professional irresponsibility, through fear and careerism, all the way to moral corruption and evil intent. In addition, unpredictable situational factors can produce a variety of reasons for the described phenomenon. However, two key elements stand out as central to the phenomenon of incomplete and inaccurate reporting within the Armed Forces: the insufficiently developed moral awareness of potential far-reaching implications of such an act and the irrational attribution of responsibility within the Armed Forces. While the first element that affects this phenomenon is recognized at an individual level, the second one is undoubtedly found at structural, i.e. organizational level.

### *Weakness of will and “small moral lapses”*

The result of the insufficiently developed moral awareness of the Armed Forces' personnel about potential far-reaching and strategic consequences of their actions is the phenomenon of “weakness of will”. Weakness of will or *ἀκρασία*<sup>17</sup> is the concept used in ethics to explain the conscious disregard of the moral imperative in the form of making exceptions. Most often, these exceptions are made in situations when consequences are not “so great and important”, i.e. when an agent believes that “nothing terrible” will happen if the moral imperative is not followed. The main cause of weakness of will resulting in deliberate incomplete/inaccurate reporting on real capacities and capabilities of the Armed Forces is the lack of awareness of potentially far-reaching consequences of “small moral lapses”. On the basis of a series of such “lapses”, political decision-makers on neutrality can create a distorted idea of the real deterrence and neutrality protection capabilities that they use to actually make decisions. Having this in mind, it is clear that the distribution of strategic responsibility for potentially wrong decisions has, to some extent, include officers, as well.

One of the most important activities that has to be undertaken in order to develop the awareness of the necessity of ethical behaviour in all professional situations, including those that are “not so important”, is adequate ethical education and training of the Armed Forces.<sup>18</sup> Thorough ethical education and “training” have to continuously build a strong moral character, not only by insisting on abstract

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<sup>16</sup> It is typical “distorted” ignorance that moral responsibility can be established for, as opposed to “undistorted”. More in: Jovan Babić, “Non-culpable Ignorance and Just War Theory”, *Filozofija i društvo*, Vol. 18, 3/2007, pp. 59-68.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to make a difference between the concept of *ἀκρασία*, which appears in the ancient philosophy and the concept of “moral dilemma”. Unlike a dilemma, where it is not clear what should be done, in situations of weakness of will an agent knows what *should* be done, but still does not do it due to some other interest or fear.

<sup>18</sup> There is a difference between education and training: “Training equips you with specific knowledge or skills relevant to a given situation, while education is more concerned with understanding broader principles, so that you can understand any situation, not just that one”. Both are necessary for the optimal functioning of the military. David Whetham, „Expeditionary Ethics Education”, George Lucas (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, London 2015, p. 127.

principles, values and duties,<sup>19</sup> but also by practical familiarisation of officers with implemented military ethics, i.e. with potential strategic consequences arising from their decisions and seemingly “small moral lapses”. This is the only way to increase firm awareness of officers about their vital importance for society, as well as the level of responsibility that their profession entails. This type of ethical education would, in the most direct sense, contribute to the development of an aspect of the much-needed strategic culture within military organization, since it would condition the evaluation of the officers’ actions through a strategic prism. However, it is equally important to consider the other side of this phenomenon, i.e. the irrational attribution of responsibility in the Armed Forces, which is intrinsically linked to the described “moral lapses” of the military members.

### *“Kant’s dictum” and responsibility in the military*

Despite the importance of the described “moral lapses” that ἀκρασία produces, identifying the entire problem exclusively at an individual level would represent a simplification of the complex phenomenon of incomplete and inaccurate reporting only to an insufficiently strong moral character. It is very important to consider the elements that influence the described phenomenon, which are by their character at institutional, i.e. organizational level, therefore, the organizational attributes of the Armed Forces that favourably influence the occurrence of the phenomenon of the distortion of the perception of real capabilities and capacities for successful deterrence and protection of neutrality. It seems that the key organizational attribute that directly affects the occurrence of this phenomenon is the irrational attribution of responsibility, which cannot be ethically justified or logically defended. Moreover, the culture of this model of uncritical attribution, almost unlimited responsibility of officers directly affects the development of the described element at an individual level, i.e. weakness of will.

The issue of the character and particularly the limits of responsibility has been one of the central ethical issues for centuries. Therefore, it is not surprising that contemporary ethical theory offers developed logical principles that define the limits of responsibility, whether it is individual or collective responsibility. These principles impose the logical limits of responsibility, not only in moral, but also in legal, historical and any other sense. From this logically limited field of responsibility, the limitation of the justification of sanctions for actions is derived. Principles such as the

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<sup>19</sup> Certainly there is a place for this aspect of ethical education, but it must not be the only approach to their moral education. More about optimal ethical education in the modern Armed Forces in the chapter “Pristupi etičkom obrazovanju oficira” in: Dragan Stanar *Pravedan rat – između apologije i obuzdavanja rata*, Dobrotoljublje, Belgrade, 2019, pp. 106-123 and Dragan Stanar, “Martial Virtues and Whistle-Blowing: Loyalty Misplaced and Courage Misunderstood”, *Czech Military Review – Vojenský rozhled*, Vol. 30, No. 62, 2/2021, pp. 26-38.

“Principle of Alternative Possibilities”,<sup>20</sup> the principle “Ought Implies Can”<sup>21</sup> and the like can most clearly and precisely be summarized in what we call “Kant’s dictum”<sup>22</sup> or the law, which says that no one can be obliged to do what is impossible, and thus they cannot be responsible for something they have had no rational possibility to influence. Kant’s dictum is directly represented in the context of legal sciences and jurisprudence, in some of the most important principles of contemporary legal practice, such as *Ad impossibilia nemo tenetur*, *Impossibilium nulla obligatio est* and *Ultra posse nemo tenetur*.<sup>23</sup>

If we were to implement Kant’s dictum to the culture of the responsibility attribution in the Armed Forces, we could conclude that such a culture is not only irrational and logically unfounded, but also ethically unjustified and practically counterproductive, which is particularly evident in the context of strategic moral responsibility. Although there is the irrational attribution of responsibility in civilian organizations, as well, one gets the impression that it is nowhere as overemphasized and implied as in military organization. Namely, in practice and the very professional culture of all Armed Forces, the insistence on borderline absolute and unlimited responsibility of officers for everything that occurs under their command is grounded. An officer, as a rule, bears full responsibility, and, in relation to that, they are subjected to potential sanctions<sup>24</sup> for a variety of phenomena that they cannot rationally influence. In addition to the explained logical lack of the foundation of this practice and its obvious ethical incorrectness, this structural irrational attribution of responsibility contributes to the defined anomaly of incomplete and inaccurate reporting on the situation in the Armed Forces. Of course, it cannot be justification for unethical behaviour, but it would be extremely naive and frivolous to ignore its direct influence on creating a very fertile ground for “moral lapses” and making “exceptions”.

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<sup>20</sup> The Principle of Alternative Possibilities defines that a person can be responsible for an action only if they have had a possibility to act differently. Despite many hypothetical counterexamples, this principle remains central to ethics. More in: David Widerker, Michael McKenna (eds), *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006 and Nedžib Prašević, *Frankfurtovski kompatibilizam – odgovornost i alternativne mogućnosti*, doktorska disertacija, Filozofski fakultet, BU, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> The principle “Ought Implies Can” has also been the subject of many ethical discussions, but it is still unquestionable. More in: William K. Frankena, „Obligation and Ability”, in Max Black (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis*, Irvington Publishers, New York, 1950, pp. 157-175 and David Copp, „Ought Implies Can and the Derivation of the Principle of Alternate Possibilities”, *Analysis*, Vol. 68, 1/2008, pp. 67-75.

<sup>22</sup> Markus Kohl, „Kant and ‘Ought Implies Can’”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 261, 2015, pp. 690-710.

<sup>23</sup> “Nobody can be asked to do the impossible”, “The impossible is not legally binding”, “No one is obliged to do what they cannot”.

<sup>24</sup> These sanctions can be formal, but sometimes they are implied informally (removal from a commanding position, preventing further career advancement, stigmatization within a professional group, etc.).

By the attribution of responsibility, which ignores the principles represented in Kant's dictum, officers are put in a situation where they consciously accept being called to account, and, accordingly, suffer the consequences of phenomena which they cannot rationally be held responsible for because they could not influence them. This course of events creates a "perfect storm" for expressing weakness of will and making exceptions to morally responsible behaviour, which, as a rule, are accompanied by rationalization of immoral behaviour, which is practically articulated as an officer's internal refusal to "suffer" their career due to something they know they are not or can be responsible for.<sup>25</sup> Once again, it should be emphasized that this is *not a justification* for incomplete and inaccurate reporting on the condition and capacities that an officer is responsible for, for a procedure that deviates from the very foundation of the ethos of military profession. However, in efforts to develop strategic culture within the Armed Forces, we should not ignore a phenomenon that directly contributes to the problem.

## Conclusion

Despite the intuitive tendency to attribute responsibility for consequences of every political decision, including the vital decision on military neutrality, exclusively to politicians, it seems impossible not to recognize reality and the need to distribute such responsibility to experts in the field of decision-making, whose interpretations and suggestions are the basis for final decision-making. Thus, in the context of decision-making on military neutrality, the holders of the highest political functions, taking into account their epistemic limitation and the primacy of the officers' expertise, necessarily base their decision on the perception of capacities and capabilities of the Armed Forces to successfully perform the function of deterrence and thereby protect neutrality. Accordingly, the responsibility for potentially cardinal consequences of a decision made on the basis of a distorted perception of the military readiness and capabilities has to also be distributed within the Armed Forces. Since potential consequences are by their character strategic, responsibility for the distortion of the perception of deterrence and neutrality protection capacities can only be strategic; naturally, "strategic responsibility" also implies sanctions that are of an appropriate, draconian character.

However, in order to rightfully demand this kind of responsibility and sanctions from officers, as a rational society, firstly it is necessary to recognize two key causes of the problem of incomplete and inaccurate reporting – the insufficiently developed awareness of far-reaching implications of such an act and irrational attribution of responsibility within an organization. The removal of the first cause, which lies at an individual level, has to be approached both with high-quality ethical education and continuous ethical training, which would develop the moral character of officers,

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<sup>25</sup> Everyone immediately understands with their mind that if an agent is asked *to do* something, that implies that they *can* do it. If the default does not exist, it is understood as injustice, which directly leads to the rationalization of immoral actions that arise from the primary injustice, whose object is an agent.

acquainting them with practical consequences of unethical behaviour. One of the pillars of developing strategic culture in the military is the development of the awareness of the military personnel about their importance and strategic consequences of their decisions. It is necessary to consider the structural cause of the problem in a multidimensional manner - by questioning the logical and ethical validity and effects of the existing culture of almost unlimited attribution of responsibility. The model of attributing responsibility to officers that ignores Kant's dictum, i.e. assigns responsibility to individuals even for those phenomena that they cannot be responsible for, not only establishes fertile ground for tragic "moral lapses", but also directly obstructs the development of strategic culture. In perspective, this can lead to a distortion of the perception of capabilities and capacities for deterrence and protection of neutrality and potentially fatal historical consequences, not only for the Armed Forces and political decision-makers, but also for the entire nation.

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## Summary

In this paper, author aims to identify and define the existence of a special kind of responsibility, i.e. “strategic” responsibility, within the Armed Forces for incomplete and inaccurate reporting regarding real and existing capacities and capabilities for deterrence and protection of military neutrality. In order for proclaimed military neutrality to be recognized and respected by other countries, the neutrality itself has to be viable, i.e. a country that is proclaiming it has to be capable of protecting and defending its neutrality. The potential for deterrence is of the utmost importance in this regard. By analysing the impact that the assessment of capacities and capabilities of the Armed Forces done by military officers has on making a potential political decision about military neutrality, the author points out and highlights the fact that it is not only justified, but also necessary to identify and attribute strategic responsibility within the military for the defined phenomena of incomplete and inaccurate reporting. The author places special emphasis on military officers as the “managers of force”. It is not just political decision-makers and

politicians who can be held responsible for potential consequences of the wrong decision regarding military neutrality of a country, but also all those who take part in the development of inaccurate and distorted perception of capacities and capabilities for deterrence and protection of such neutrality. By analysing the very phenomenon of incomplete and inaccurate reporting in the military, in this paper the author recognizes and identifies two key causes of this phenomenon – the insufficiently developed moral awareness of military officers about potentially far-reaching and long-lasting implications and consequences of such actions and the irrational attribution of responsibility to officers in the Armed Forces. The author introduces the ethical and logical principle of Kant's dictum to explain the limits of moral responsibility for the military personnel, and also the limits of justification of potential sanctions for officers. The author also suggests several important mechanisms for the optimal removal or at least mitigation of the described key causes of this perilous problem – most importantly, adequate ethical education and continuous ethical training of military officers and all military personnel and critical re-examination of the institutional culture that attributes almost unlimited and irrational responsibility to all military officers for phenomena, processes and practices that they cannot logically be held responsible for, and thus there can be no justified sanctions, both formal and informal, for them. The implementation of these mechanisms would additionally strengthen and further develop the necessary and invaluable strategic culture within the Armed Forces.

*Key words: neutrality, deterrence, strategic responsibility, weakness of will, attribution of responsibility, Kant's dictum, ethical education*

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