

# MORAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONAL SECURITY: A PERSPECTIVE FOR DEMOCRATIC STATES

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**Introduction.** In Estonia, two major factors may be given credit for speeding freedom from totalitarian domination: the strength of NATO and the moral fiber of Estonian citizens. From the drama of the dark 1950's to the jubilation of the 1990's, the tenacity and inner strength of Estonian men and women has been the more important factor of the two. This is true because although physical power can coerce and kill, force alone cannot overcome the determination of a people united around a clearly defined cause. Determined Estonian society, with its mores and folkways intact, has won the day against brutal domination. But, is the battle really over?

*Determination* implies an *objective*. An objective implies a *starting point and destination*. It is easy for a group of individuals to agree on the identity of an enemy that is larger than life, that defines the social system, dominates daily routine and is physically imbedded in society. It is easy to define an objective as simple as *freedom from domination*.

It may not be easy to define the common values of the Estonian people. Such work usually begins with a great mass of perceived commonality and, as discussion evolves, ends with a very simple core of *first principles*. The challenge of setting limits on freedom without restricting genius, of protecting the people without destroying independence, is not only difficult at first effort, it is a process that must never end. But, the process must be based on solid moral foundations. This is a dilemma shared by each newly independent state. It is a universal dilemma of freed people.

At the very time in European history when moral fiber and long-suffering have overcome the degradation of totalitarian rule, a black cloud of despair threatens society. Criminal activity, political corruption, and "frontier economics" have begun to flourish. To many, the roller coaster of parliamentary democracy has made seem governing inconsistent at best. Leadership is pressing hard to join NATO but cannot define succinctly its own concept of national security. The people, led by patriots and statesmen of the highest order, have rallied to win the fight for their freedom only to enter a perilous gray zone between "hobnail" rule and the lawlessness of the mythical "American West."

**Who are we?** Estonians are now sagging under the weight of the core questions of society: Who are we? What do we really stand for? What are the limits of freedom? How do we relate to other nations? What are the basic rights of the individual

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and what are an individual's responsibilities under the law? What do we want for our children? This struggle for identity has serious implications for Estonian national security. Just as the moral foundation of three generations of Estonians laid the bedrock for survival during the 20th Century's trauma, for the generation now governing Estonia, confusion and conflict about first principles could lay Estonia's tombstone before the 21st Century. There is cause for concern.

The moral foundation for a nation must center on a respect for human life, a clear understanding of the dignity of mankind, and a religious devotion to the basic worth of the individual. A democratic nation's creed should guarantee life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to all. But, it must also hold citizens to the responsibilities of freedom -- citizens must meet their responsibilities to the state. A person who enjoys freedom's benefits must be willing to help protect and project them to others. Children should learn that the individual is responsible for securing freedom for future generations. They must be willing to help strengthen the rule of law through service.

In former Soviet-occupied States, military service has lost its attraction. Governments find it hard to raise an army and harder to re-enlist trained assets. Inside the ranks, attitudes and behavior patterns practiced during the brutal totalitarian period linger. Under developing military systems, despite heroic efforts by senior leaders, conduct abhorred by western democratic military tradition often creeps back into behavior patterns.

Conscripts are considered less than adequate soldiers. Such grading encourages mistreatment. Rank divisions under these conditions become more like Hindu "casts" than military categories. The equation of power and morality among officers may lead some to condone brutality as a teaching technique. Officers unconstrained by a sense of morality and a humane code of conduct mistreat enlisted personnel in the name of discipline.

The military system bemoans the situation. In Estonia, Major General Einsele, Commander of the Estonian Defense Forces, demands strict but consistent enforcement of the law and highest standards of personal integrity among his officer corps. The situation has dramatically improved, but conditions in the Estonian military remain far from an enticement to service.

Some Estonian leaders are convinced that apathy about national security reflects a lack of moral fiber. They say Estonia has no public consensus on security issues. Citizens and parliamentarians are divided on whether to have a military or totally disband the Army. The roots of Estonian morality in modern times have grown in the soil of devout Lutheranism and a strong work ethic. These traditions have been poisoned by socialism's incipient slothfulness and attacked by atheistic totalitarian dogma. Estonians, some contend, have won the war against Soviet domination but have lost the battle against evil. Others see hope.

**The Way Ahead.** What could be done to improve trends and potentials? We would suggest a national program to begin reinforcing traditional Estonian values. This program should begin at home with preschool education and should continue as an integral part of cultural development for every Estonian. The program should be more than emotional cheer leading and nationalistic rhetoric. The substance of cultural development should emphasize the worth of the individual and the inalienable rights of all people, regardless of national origin, race, politics, religion, and the like. It should teach true commitment to national service and emphasize highest regard for human life. It must be devoted to defending the Constitution and the vital interests of Estonia.

As part of this program, Estonian civil and military law should be reviewed to ensure that it has not been skewed during the post-communist era of political instability, uncertain security, economic desperation, and cut-and-paste development. Without judicial and parliamentary consistency in military as well as civil justice systems, citizens will find hope for a brighter future difficult and military service will continue in disrepute. Unless a state demands consistent treatment and protection of basic human rights under the law -- both in and out of uniform -- it cannot hope to become a trusted member of the international community.

With the rule of law must come constancy of purpose. Law enforcement must be logical and consistent for civilian and military offenders. In the army, law must be fair, as well as strict. Tradition and *esprit de corps* are often more powerful disciplinarians than are stockades. Democratic societies use fair laws, consistent treatment, and devotion to duty, honor and country to inspire passionate service. Brutality and domination are not acceptable substitutes.

Estonian citizens must feel responsible for keeping Estonia secure. There is no substitute for this internalized sense of moral responsibility. Without it, no nation can long survive. With it, a people become invincible. Recall the heroic story of the island nation of Melos. The Athenian democracy had putrefied into an unrecognizable paranoia of militarism, insecurity and heartlessness. Preserving Empire had become the first principle of Athens. Melos, historically neutral and peace loving, was within the Athenian security perimeter. In BC 416 the Melians were given an ultimatum: Yield your freedom; serve Athens or die. Melos offered to remain neutral under a non-aggression pact, only to be rejected. In the shadow of overwhelming force, faced with the prospect of certain death, the Melians refused to yield to domination. "We will not in a moment deprive of freedom a city that has been inhabited for 700 hundred years." Athens, in a spasm of moral degeneracy destroyed Melos. But, Melian moral fiber and love of freedom still stands as an inspiration after 2,411 years. The credo of Melos, translated during the American Revolution as, "Give me liberty or give me death," has become the bedrock for victory against all odds.

Estonia, too, has a proud history of resistance. Military and political heroism runs through the veins of every Estonian. This sense of historic bonding with a heroic past is not without power. It should be used to motivate youth, galvanize citizens to action and point the way for mature leaders.

**Three Suggestions.** How do we convince the youth of Estonia to feel a moral commitment to serve their country, possibly to pay the ultimate sacrifice for freedom? We suggest three ways.

First is law. Conscription -- universal conscription -- should be enforced. This has the double benefit of ensuring a labor pool during the reconstruction of Estonia's military infrastructure and standardizing the experience of generations of Estonian men and women. The single most important element in the technological explosion and moral bonding for the United States and other nations during the 20th century was World War II. More important than the surge in industrial production was the common experience of conscription and service. Conscription affected all men with few exceptions allowed. Women bore the burden within American society when millions of men were pulled away from their chosen professions to answer the nation's call to arms. Service must be inclusive, not exclusive.

The draft and military service performed a pivotal function for a diverse nation of individuals. It provided a common base of experience and a consistent education to the work force. Every man and woman who entered the United States military was taught not only to value the individual, respect human rights, and defend freedom under the law, but they were taught why these core values are important. The moral foundation of the United States was revitalized and standardized through conscription and subsequent military training. No person left the military without understanding what it meant to be an American. The effect of this rite of passage is still very important in American political and social life 50 years after WWII.

Without conscription, the "melting pot" does not blend as it once did. Although the United States has transitioned with some success to an "All Volunteer Force," the absence of a common frame of reference for post-Vietnam generations is evident in American society. The erosion of morality and the increase in violence among American youth may be attributed to weak family ties and a fading sense of personal responsibility for providing "liberty and justice for all." This has led some to call for a return to conscription or the institution of some form of universal public service. The objective most often cited would be to teach young people the essence of freedom through service and to give first-hand experience in practicing democracy vice only enjoying its benefits.

Pilot youth programs instituted by the United States National Guard in communities across America have been designed to cope with rapidly changing social conditions. One of the common characteristics of these programs is that youth are involved with "citizen-soldiers" who teach them practical skills and democratic principles. Youth gain self respect and confidence from learning to work as part of a team. They become socially conscious and politically sensitive when they learn the traditions of their nation and the importance of individual responsibility in sustaining the promise of freedom.

Estonia needs to reinforce a tradition of service to the nation. This can be done with some form of universal conscription. Military service need not be the only option for conscripts, but should be a principle option. Other service options must directly support vital national interests. Conscripts must understand vital interests.

A second way to draw in young people for service is through incentives. Public service can be made attractive by providing a benefit package that makes sense. Education, income, medical and retirement plans are strong motivation for men and women living on the edge of economic collapse. Since the end of WWII, “GI Bill” benefits earned through military service have been the only way for millions of American men and women to attend college. Today, education benefits remain a strong enticement to military service in the United States. The Veterans Administration loan program provides government insurance to encourage banks to lend veterans money for their first home. Estonia should consider adopting a similar approach to under-girding national security.

The list of good ideas is long. Honorable work for the national government in exchange for education and other benefits could help meet the immediate needs of the state and the individual. An incentive scheme is also a powerful tool for insuring future prosperity. Skills learned in the military carry over to help boost productivity in industry. A clear view of the benefits military service offers to one’s personal fortune and future makes it easier for a young man or women to value the theoretical benefit of military service to society. The United States National Guard is a popular military service option for Americans. The military skills learned are used often to assist local communities struck by disaster or other emergency. This community-based service concept unites people and reinforces national pride because it is a visible and practical return on the tax dollar. It allows people to enjoy a civilian occupation while also serving their nation

The third way to convince young Estonians to serve their country is by visionary leadership. Estonia should dust off every living hero, every Estonian legend, and every romantic tale of bravery and sacrifice. Use these powerful motivators. Preach Estonian history. Revere Estonia’s great men and women. Revise or rejuvenate the system of national holidays and celebrations to focus attention on the moral bedrock of Estonian values. Visionary leaders see beyond the horizon. They teach their children well.

Mobilizing two powerful tools for this campaign -- the family and the news media -- can guarantee success. The impact of family nurturing is only exceeded by the impact of not having family nurturing. Growing the moral core of a nation begins in the nursery and never ends. Use the classroom to instill a bias toward service in future generations. This need not be done by stirring up fear of an “evil empire” poised to strangle Estonia. Reason enough for national service can be found in the need for the rebirth of Estonian values and the re-engineering of Estonian society now in progress. Pay attention to Estonia’s youth. Listen carefully and do not discount their attitudes and conclusions. Pay attention to the details of Estonian culture. Reinforce them constantly. Never forget: democracy is a journey, not a destination. The importance of media support for giving the

campaign continuity and sustainment cannot be over stated. We are not suggesting a propaganda campaign. The truth will work quite nicely.

**Conclusion.** Citizens must accept responsibility for involvement with the life of their state if the concept of “Estonia: Land of the Free” is to survive. They must understand and accept the vision of their national leadership. They must trust the system of laws and justice, understand the means of power transition within the government and trust that the constitution will prevail as the principle repository of the Estonian “self” through their commitment to service.

If Estonia is to successfully enlist her young men and women to national service, she must be able to communicate clearly to them what it means to be Estonian, and must be able to relate national goals to individual responsibility. Young people must understand and assume responsibility for Estonian vital interests.

The leadership of a great nation must be held accountable to the people. Leaders must use their power to further the interests of the state and not enrich themselves. The system of government adopted by a great state -- and the military aspect of governing -- must be transparent not only to its citizens, but also to the family of nations.

Estonia must examine her first principles carefully to insure they are relevant. For socially conscious youth around the World, minority rights, ecological sensitivity and the bias toward inclusion rather than alienation have become a gospel for activism. Without relevance that can be understood by children, the magnificent constructs we leave behind will be empty cathedrals to an unknown god.

Military service can be a tool for social change. Service to nation has through history been one means of reinforcing national pride and restoring momentum in hard times. For Estonia, a step forward may be to enforce a revised system of universal conscription. A firm insistence on personal accountability in the public and private sector, a campaign to educate the people on why their country needs them to serve and a clear presentation of the benefits of national service are necessary. Both Estonia’s youth and the mothers and fathers who will send them to stand tall for Estonia must agree on the value of national service.

The rejuvenation of Estonia’s moral foundation must be a product of the genius and bravery of citizens. The mechanism of social change must not be forced. Change agents can be abused. The military must be part of a process of change that is sanctioned by consensus. The value system projected by the military must reflect the values of Estonian society. The military must not be seen as the “People’s Army,” *it must be the people.*