

ETHICS PAPER

The Ethical Dilemma on Regionalism in the Papua New Guinea Defence Force

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In Papua New Guinea the majority of people lived in their tribal or ethnic community mainly villages either along the coastline or in the highland region. Recruitment takes effect almost every year for young male from the four regions throughout the country to join the PNG Defence Force. As these young people converse in to the organization, they bring with them their cultural heritage known as regionalism that had a diverse effect on discipline within the PNG Defence Force.

Regionalism is based on a system known in Papua New Guinea as a “**Wantok system**”. An example of a “**Wantok**” system is ‘if you do good to me, I will do you good’. On the other hand is a negative situation. It is like a payback system.

This system is a behavioral culture, inherited during childhood through parents, tribes and the society for which they are part of. People rely on each other and extended families to survive during peace and hostile situations.

Although soldiers meet the education requirements and the criteria to be in the PNG Defence Force, excessive application of regionalism is a crippling discipline in the PNG Defence Force.

So now, as leaders how can we effectively erode this ethical behavior within the PNG Defence Force.

PNGDF Code of Military Discipline

No organization when established will be without operating procedures or set of rules and regulation. These set of rules and regulations are there for the employer and the employees to abide by in their cause of duties. As such, the PNG Defence Force had in its constitution a Defence Act, a set of rules and regulations enacted from the Papua New Guinea constitution to govern and protect human and material resources within the PNG Defence Force. This item is a Code of Military Discipline.

Here is an example of what can likely to happen when a soldier intends to cheat his reenlistment after hearing and dismissal from the defence force.

In an absent without leave for more than thirty days, soldier 'X' had committed a serious offence, a breach of military service discipline; his punishment is dismissal from the defence force. If soldier 'X' is not satisfied even though he is guilty of committing an offence he may resort to regionalism to foster his way back into the system, the army. Usually soldier 'X' would manipulate someone in the higher echelon as long as the person to whom he is dealing with is from the same region. In this paper, I refer to higher echelon as being the Department of Defence and HQ PNG Defence Force.

The soldier taking advantage of his clan's man, close relative or someone in the name of regionalism can easily gain favor. It is a chain action from there on through high-ranking officers and officials and sometime authority until soldier 'X' will reenlist in to the army.

Discipline

As leaders, Officers and NCOs must maintain discipline whether personal or collective discipline. Leaders at all level must critically review ethical issues and personal conduct within the PNG Defence force. Many soldiers are tempted to behave unethically because sometimes it is the path of survival in their regional community. Senior leaders find themselves dealing with gray solutions when caught up in such situation. The line between what is ethical and what is not becomes obscure all the time, and leaders must guard against moving away from this line. No matter how far up the ladder you go, you should never be far from the truth. Ethics are important in all that we do each day. Honesty and upholding of soldiers code of conduct will enhance individual ability to make decision and see between good and bad.

Favoritism

Again, favoritism in a form of regionalism is an unethical behavior that contributes to the discipline in the PNG Defence force. Take an example on promotion, senior NCOs are well aware that Regimental Sergeants Major serves as board members for the promotion selection committee. Knowing this should not preclude, senior NCOs

through regionalism can influence the RSMs to win favor as long as the RSM hails from the same region. Performance of duties, demonstrated leadership, and potential should be the key factors to selection for promotion. Leaders must discourage regionalism and avoid unethical behavior as a means of getting ahead.

Leaders at all level should guide every Officers and NCOs in their charge and take an active interest in their career development. They should not attempt to help selected individuals as a reward for unethical behavior and regionalism. Leaders should look at the overall soldier and guide them in the right direction for progression.

Personal Occurrence Report is another area for leaders to observe. Leaders should ensure that all troops receive a fair and just evaluation based on individual performance, leadership skills, and potential. Taking care of the boss because of regionalism should not be the evaluating criteria. When a soldier is successfully in his performance, he or she deserves a commendable recommendation according to army rules and regulation.

Counseling

Counseling is an area where leaders can remind the troops to behave ethically and uphold the Army's code of conduct. Counseling should take place according to schedule, and leaders must be physically and morally courageous enough to be honest with their troop's evaluation. Initial counseling should define performance standards and the leader

should understand their daily duties. Leaders should make it clear that they do not expect the troops to violate policy or behave unethically in any way.

Awards are another area that must send the proper message. Soldiers should not receive awards for unethical behavior through regionalism. Awards are incentives for soldiers who perform their duties well and meet or exceed Army standards in every way. A fast way to lower morale in a unit is to present an award to a soldier who does not deserve it based on their unethical conduct. Officers and NCOs must assist commanders by applying fair and honest judgment at awards selection boards.

Solution

Commanders should conduct continual training and immediately carry out ethical awareness focusing on regionalism. We should act now before it is too late. Regionalism is a much more broader area to manage as long as soldiers can change their attitude towards the situation, it will change. Leaders at all level must participate in training, assisting, and maintenance of code of conduct and set example. Soldiers who choose to behave unethically will eventually learn that their decision was costly. We can do our part by grooming young soldiers to be successful leaders. What we can do is assess the ethical climate and provide avenues to rid regionalism in the PNG Defence Force. For a young, intelligence and affordable force to be successful and meet the countries demand would be a zero tolerance on unethical behavior.