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Empowering the Future Noncommissioned Officer Corps

1WO Teo See Keong

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

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SGM Taylor, R07

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Thesis Statement: Asymmetric warfare changes the way we fight and the roles of the noncommissioned officers.

Thesis outline

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### Abstract

The advance technologies, growth of transnational threats, and globalization have affected the world of peace. Noncommissioned officers (NCO) of our Army are trained as conventional fighters to secure victory in a swift and decisive action. Why is there a need to empower our NCO corps to the next level in order to win the global war of terrorism despite our success?

## Introduction

The noncommissioned officer (NCO) concept began in 1775, with the birth of the Continental Army. During then, the corps blended tradition of the French, British, and Persian armies. As years progressed, with the American political system, social attitudes, and the westward expansion removed the NCO from the European cultures and formed the truly American NCO.

In the revolutionary war of 1812, the NCO started with sergeants and corporals and established a systematic selection system by 1840. At that time, sergeants and corporals held their units intact during engagements and they have shown their continuous exemplary and valiant actions through two world wars, Vietnam, Korea, Panama, and today's global war on terrorism in the Middle East. The fundamental tasks of then and now have not changed much, although it has greatly evolved through the centuries. The basic business of the NCO is still responsible for all individual training, welfare, personal appearance and operational discipline of their Soldiers. They are also accountable to the well being, training standards, and behaviors of their Soldiers and commanders.

## Impetus to Changes

Beside the basic roles mentioned above, do you think that the NCO corps is capable enough to take on more responsibilities or even hold a higher appointment equivalent to field grade officer? Yes. The recent wars have proven and reinforced the importance of the United States NCO corps to take on more responsibilities and expansion of their job scopes.

Since the Gulf War, the NCO roles are more situational based and require a lot of critical decision makings in the asymmetric war zones. NCOs are expected to be a fighter and be able to

switch to a peace keeper in a matter of seconds within the same mission. This will lead me to the following three impetuses to empowerment of the future NCO corps.

### *Environment*

Environment - What if we remain in our current roles and responsibilities and not take on additional roles? I am sure we'd see the increase of casualties and the morale of the NCO corps will be diminished. Current wars have shown the need for NCOs to put on different hats in the ever changing and unpredictable battle field. Gone are the days that we only engage and execute according to a clear mission statement. Critical thinking and decision making are seen constantly in our war in the Middle East. The current operating environment has changed our tactics, deployment, doctrines, and procedures in dealing in small unit engagement or similar to guerillas warfare. The adversaries have adopted the hit and run tactics, using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombers, and using indigenous people as a sheath to cover their actions. The enemy attackers have no rules of engagement and are indistinguishable from the local populaces. This has created a significant impact with regards to intelligence gathering and collateral damages. NCOs at lowest level are often forced to make critical decision that could lead to strategic implications. The NCO must be agile and adaptive in making the right and logical decision under stressful environments. They are often exposed to constant uncertainty that need them to react swiftly in current fluid battlefield.

The environment has forced the NCOs corps to know more than what they needed before. Accessibility to intelligence and understanding the big pictures or the Army's strategic intents is paramount. Knowledge is power and better understanding of the environment will empower them to have critical thinking and in making critical decisions in our changing asymmetric warfare challenges. The environment has expanded their roles drastically. They are expected to

be a negotiator, mediator, peace keeper, and war fighter at the same time. Empowering them with this information will definitely boost their confidence and make them feel right and good during the conflicts.

### *Technology*

Technology – Technology and transformation can never take place without the guidance, support and the NCO leadership. If the NCO corps choose or feel that they are the ground people and all they need is to be fit and able to eliminate enemy as ordered. That will be the downfall of the corps, as well as seeing more comrades perish in this modern battlefield. Is that what we want to see?

Technology is a force multiplier to the success of current wars. Army transformation requires advance weaponry and educated NCOs to maintain and operate these new technologies. Technology has forced shaped the development of our future NCO corps. Rapid upgrading of our technology will require better educated and well trained NCOs, empowering them to be master trainers will help in training Soldiers and commanders more effectively. This will in turn help the officer corps to stay focus in their strategic planning and shape the way ahead to fight this full spectrum warfare.

Our future NCO must be able to operate in the network centric operation environment. The fundamental functions of an NCO have increased and again expanded. They are required to be middle manager, taking care and instructing the Soldiers and NCOs, and yet making critical decision like a field grade officer. This has never happen before but is unavoidable in today's situations. As NCOs, we will have to compliment the officer corps in trying our best and to maintain a good working relationship in order to maximize the usage of the technology to inflict maximum damage to our enemies.

Empowering the NCOs with technical knowledge and making the corps as part of the development team, have brought about great success and advancement to this best NCO corps in the world.

### *Education*

Education – How do we link education to empowerment? Is it important and relevant to our NCO academic qualification? From civil wars to Vietnam war, NCOs were the daily figure to discipline, manage, training, and be the voices for the junior ranks. They are subject matter experts for all battle crafts, tactics, and weapon handling etc. These service members were required to have minimum general education development (GED) to join the force. Perhaps, the most difficult training for a typical foot Soldier was signal training which required service members to have a bit more technical data and operating procedures to make it work. And lastly, all that needed was to understanding the operation orders and maneuvering troops to over run the enemy.

The current professional military development courses such as Warrior Leader Course (WLC), Basic NCO course (BNCOC), Advance NCO course (ANCOC), First Sergeant course and Sergeant Major course (SMC) have provided the basic education of the our NCO corps in leadership development, while keeping abreast with the current operating environment.

As such, transformation and modernization of the Future Combat System (FCS), NCOs will have to acquire higher education to keep pace of today's technology dominated battlefield such as network centric environment, SMART technology, unmanned equipment, and Precision strike missions. The officer corps is moving fast forward and the NCOs will have to be well educated to understand their strategic intents and provide professional advice to the planners. Leveling the field of education as the officer corps will enhance the confidence and the

perception of the NCO corps. Constant engagement will lead to better communication and minimize the knowledge gaps between the NCOs and the officers. These will naturally translate into trust, authority, appointment, and finally empowerment to our NCO corps.

### Roles and Responsibilities

Is there a need to expand our roles and responsibilities? Yes, in order for us to achieve a swift and decisive battle and be able to operate in the full spectrum of operations. The rapid advancement of technology, the growth of a multitude of transnational factors, and the consequences of increasing globalization and economic interdependence created national security challenges for their complexity. Despite the ever changing environment, the values, roles and responsibilities will still remain firmly as the bedrock of NCO Corps. The need to empower the expanded roles and responsibilities of the NCO will enable their subordinates to cover more ground, increase multi tasking, maintain better situational awareness, as well as coordinating the Soldiers and systems to achieve every mission. With good trust and empowerment from the officer corps will compliment the NCO ability to execute his roles and responsibilities more effectively with the combination of environment awareness, technology, and education to complete his task with success.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, empowering the NCO corps to the next higher level will definitely enhanced our operational capabilities and be the moving force in rallying our corps in shaping the battlefield to reach the strategic intent of the organization in support of the Global War on Terrorism.



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