

The Systems That Broke the Army: Decoupling in the Army and the Decline of Ethics in the Military Profession

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The Systems That Broke the Army: Decoupling in the Army and the Decline of Ethics in the Military Profession, by MAJ William B. Hoelscher III, 41 pages.

Decoupling is the process through which an organization's day-to-day functions become separated from its compliance mechanisms. In short, it is the creation of a gap between what the organization says it does and what the organization does. This phenomenon is not unknown to people within the Army. What is unknown is that the phenomenon has, not only, a name but carries with it some significant ramifications. In many cases, decoupling is not only required. Still, it can be beneficial toward achieving efficiency within the organization, as some minor rules are ignored, but it can also have other effects on the organization. Decoupling, if left unchecked, can lead to institutionalized misconduct and could damage the trust that the US Army acknowledges is required to perform its function. This monograph seeks to apply academic work from the field of organizational theory and sociology to the context of the US Army and demonstrate the possible consequences and ramifications of decoupling compliance programs from day-to-day activities. Additionally, conclusions may help the US Army improve itself so that it can remain the trusted institution that it has worked so many years to be. The US Army needs to significantly overhaul its mandatory training regulation and readiness reporting systems to ensure that what it is asking its subordinate organizations to achieve is actually in the realm of the possible, and that when it discovers deliberately false or inaccurate reporting to hold those leaders accountable.

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Abbreviations

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
AR	Army Regulation
DTMS	Digital Training Management System
JP	Joint Publication
USC	United States Code

Introduction

All commanding officers and others in authority in the Army are required—to show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination to be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command; to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Army, all persons who are guilty of them; and to take all necessary and proper measures, under the laws, regulations, and customs of the Army, to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons under their command or charge.

—The Requirement for Exemplary Conduct, *Title 10 USC § 7233 (as of 2018)*

The US Military is among the most trusted professions in the United States, and the Military Officer comes in second place among the most trusted professionals in the United States, falling just behind nurses and well ahead of medical doctors and pharmacists.¹ This scale is based on the perceived level of adherence to honesty and ethical standards. Over the last several years, there has been a series of highly publicized ethical failures by senior leaders across the military. Beginning in 2014, a series of scandals made national headlines that have caused some in the news media to claim that the military is experiencing an “ethical crisis.”² Officers cheated on nuclear launch proficiency tests; military recruiters falsified enlistment documents, admirals and generals abused the perks of their offices, and Naval officers accepted bribes from foreign nationals.³ One such example is the “Fat Leonard Scandal,” which has resulted in 31 officers being criminally charged, 550 active and retired officers, to include 60 admirals were scrutinized for violations of military law or ethics rules, with more than 400 further cases pending

¹ Megan Brenan, “Nurses Keep Healthy Lead as Most Honest, Ethical Profession,” *News* (blog), *Gallup*, December 26, 2017, accessed October 29, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/224639/nurses-keep-healthy-lead-honest-ethical-profession.aspx?g_source=Economy&g_medium=newsfeed&g_campaign=tiles.

² James Joyner, “The U.S. Military's Ethical Crisis,” *National Interest*, February 13, 2014, accessed October 29, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-us-militarys-ethics-crisis-9872>.

³ Paul A. Pillar, “What's Going on with Military Officers?,” *National Interest*, February 2, 2014, accessed October 29, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/paul-pillar/whats-going-military-officers-9810>.

investigation.⁴ The proposed explanations for these ethical failures have been attributed to everything from nearly two decades of persistent conflict, to the divide between the professional military and the American citizenry. However, these are purely speculative observations and do not fall within the bounds of an established theoretical or academic construct. According to the Army's public-facing website, the purpose of the United States Army is:

To deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars by providing ready, prompt, and sustained land dominance by Army forces across the full spectrum of conflict as part of the joint force. The Army mission is vital to the nation because we are the service capable of defeating enemy ground forces and indefinitely seizing and controlling those things an adversary prizes most—its land, its resources, and its population.⁵

US Army officers are entrusted with the enormous responsibility of achieving this mission, and officers “are tasked with making important decisions in stressful situations, and they are entrusted with the safety of the men and women under their command.”⁶

There is an adage in the Army that the commander “is responsible for everything the unit does or fails to do.”⁷ Another common phrase across professional literature is that the commander is “entrusted” with the accomplishment of the mission, the lives of the Soldiers under his or her command, and the maintenance and accountability of his or her assigned equipment. Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 1 states that the Army Profession is a “profession built on trust.”⁸ ADP 1 identifies trust as the critical element in the Army being able to accomplish its mission,

⁴ Craig Whitlock and Kevin Uhrmacher, “Prostitutes, vacations and cash: The Navy officials ‘Fat Leonard’ took down,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2018, accessed October 29, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/seducing-the-seventh-fleet/>.

⁵ “The Mission of the US Army,” About, United States Army, accessed October 29, 2019, <https://www.army.mil/about/>.

⁶ “Become an Officer in the U.S. Army,” *Military Officer Careers*, United States Army, accessed October 29, 2019, <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/become-an-officer.html>.

⁷ Joe Doty and Chuck Doty, “Command Responsibility and Accountability,” *Military Review* 92, no. 1 (January-February 2012): 35, accessed on October 29, 2019, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20120229_art009.pdf.

⁸ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 1, *The Army* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-1.

because “[o]ur ability to fulfill our strategic roles and discharge our responsibilities to the Nation depends upon trust between Soldiers; between Soldiers and their leaders; among Soldiers, their families, and the Army.”⁹

In order to maintain the trust of the American people, the Army has implemented codes of conduct, the Army Values, to give Soldiers a guide for their expected standards of behavior. General Creighton Abrams tied the professional responsibility to maintain a high ethical standard when he said, “While we are guarding the country, we must accept being the guardian of the finest ethics; the country needs it, and we must do it.”¹⁰ Ethics and trust are closely intertwined, and to maintain the confidence of the American people, the Army must maintain a high ethical standard. Over the nearly two-hundred and fifty years of service to the country, the US Army has built a reputation of being honest and trustworthy, as demonstrated in the annual Gallup poll that consistently ranks military officers as one of the most trusted professions in the country, second only to nurses.¹¹ This reputation must be jealously guarded.

Within academic literature in the field of ethics, there is a well-accepted concept known as decoupling. Decoupling is the process through which organizations separate, inadvertently or deliberately, their compliance programs from the “central, task-related processes of the organization.”¹² This process of decoupling was first identified and studied in 1977 by John Meyer and Brian Rowan, who argued that “organizations reflecting institutionalized environments maintain gaps between their formal structures and their ongoing work activities.”¹³

⁹ US Army, ADP 1, 2-3.

¹⁰ US Army, ADP 1, 2-7.

¹¹ Brenan, “Nurses Keep Healthy Lead as Most Honest, Ethical Profession.”

¹² Tammy L. MacLean and Michael Benham, “The Dangers of Decoupling: The Relationship Between Compliance Programs, Legitimacy Perceptions, and Institutionalized Misconduct,” *Academy of Management Journal* 53, no. 6 (December 2010): 1499.

¹³ John W. Meyer, and Brian Rowan, “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony,” *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (September 1977): 341.

Decoupling has a relatively extensive body of research, specifically in sociology, organizational theory, organizational leadership, and ethics. The decoupling of compliance programs, defined as “organizational control systems the purpose of which is ‘standardizing behavior within the domains of ethics and legal compliance.’”¹⁴

Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras were the first authors to draw serious attention to the ethical problems within the US Army’s culture. In their 2012 paper entitled “Lying to Ourselves,” they sought to bolster the professional trust in the Army by calling attention to “deleterious culture the Army inadvertently created.”¹⁵ This paper was widely read throughout the officer corps and garnered much attention at the time. Drs. Wong and Gerras successfully identified many of the causes of this issue by finding “that many Army officers, after repeated exposure to the overwhelming demands and the associated need to put their honor on the line to verify compliance, have become ethically numb.”¹⁶ These overwhelming demands of the bureaucracy resulted in a separation between the compliance structures of the organization from the organization's daily operations. The action that the authors identified in their work is, in effect, decoupling, though they do not use the term. There has been significant academic writing on the subject of organizational ethics and peer-reviewed studies of the practice of ethics within organizations, to include the structures that encourage or discourage ethical behavior. There is a lack of research into these processes as they occur within the US Army. Through the academic body of work and the work of Drs. Wong and Gerras, this monograph will demonstrate the ethical impact that decoupling can have on the organization, which, if left unchecked, can damage the trust that the US Army acknowledges is required to perform its function. This monograph seeks to apply this body of academic work to the context of the US Army and demonstrate the possible

¹⁴ MacLean Michael Benham, “The Dangers of Decoupling,” 1500.

¹⁵ Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, 2012), x.

¹⁶ Ibid., ix.

consequences and ramifications of decoupling compliance programs from the day-to-day activities of the US Army and help the Army improve itself so that it can remain the trusted institution that it has worked so many years to be.

Compliance programs are defined as training, monitoring, and disciplinary processes within the organization.¹⁷ The US Army has extensive compliance programs ranging from job-specific task training, professional military education, the officer/non-commissioned officer evaluation system, and even has an independent justice system that investigates, prosecutes, and punishes offenders within the organization. Managing an organization of approximately 500,000 active-duty service members, a footprint that spans the globe, and manages billions of dollars of inventory and real property presents complex challenges to effective management. The extensive, and sometimes conflicting, compliance structures require leaders within the organization to decouple the compliance programs from the day-to-day running of the organization to some extent, or the organization could grind to a halt due to a lack of efficiency. Decoupling, while necessary, can lead to a lack of internal and external legitimacy to the organization and, ultimately, toward institutionalized misconduct.

The question that this monograph seeks to answer is: Where/how is decoupling present within the compliance structures of the US Army, and what are the implications of decoupling? This monograph argues that decoupling is present in the US Army. Decoupling in the Army has significant implications for the continued legitimacy and relevance of the Army as a professional institution; can be confirmed or denied.

Decoupling can undermine the internal and external legitimacy of the Army, leading to institutionalized misconduct, misrepresentation, misreporting, and degradation of the combat effectiveness of the Army and can be harmful to the national security of the United States, as

¹⁷ MacLean Michael Benham, "The Dangers of Decoupling," 1499.

exemplified by the numerous instances of senior leader misconduct across the Army and the Department of Defense. The dissonance between what is said and what is done creates stress and tension within the organization, as the members of the organization attempt to reconcile this conflict.

The writing on ethics in the military is relatively limited, and the writing specifically on decoupling is nonexistent. Decoupling has the effect of breaking the link between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law, which allows people to continue the behaviors that prompted the creation of the code in the first place. This dissonance forces the members of the organization to reconcile this gap as they attempt to determine what is the right thing to do or what is the correct thing to do. The letter of the code makes the ideal seem unrealistic, and the ideal makes the letter of the code seem less than ethical.”¹⁸ This decoupling at first leads to a loss of internal legitimacy within the organization, and if left unchecked, the decoupling can cause the organization to lose external credibility. Given the current struggles amongst senior leaders, maintaining the external legitimacy of the organization is vital to accomplishing the Military’s purpose of fighting and winning the nation’s wars. The solution to maintaining external legitimacy with the American public is not simply providing a compelling narrative to the American people and Congress, but by building the internal legitimacy within the organization through the reduction of the dissonance by re-coupling the compliance structures with the day-to-day business of the organization.

This monograph will review the literature related to decoupling across several academic fields, including sociology, psychology, and organizational theory because ethics literature is often multidisciplinary. Next, this paper will review the relevant professional literature the addresses ethics within the military profession, looking for specific linkages to the topic of

¹⁸ Spoma Jovanovic and Roy V. Wood, “Dialectical Interactions: Decoupling and Integrating Ethics in Ethics Initiatives,” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (April 2007): 218.

decoupling. By examining these two bodies of work, the gap between the academic ethics literature and the professional military literature will be identified. This monograph will look at the scholarly works from the ethics and sociology fields to build the theoretical basis for the applied ethics of the Army to help fill in this gap. This monograph will seek to bridge the gap between the academic literature and the Army by conducting a case study analysis of the Army's readiness reporting system (known as Objective-T and the Sustainable Readiness Model), and the mandatory training requirements outlined in Army Regulation 350-1. Through observation and examination of these compliance systems, I will demonstrate where decoupling exists in the Army and by applying the academic research from outside of the Army shows the potential ramifications of decoupling on the officer corps.

The case studies that this monograph will analyze are the compliance mechanisms that exist within the Army. The first is the Army's mandatory training regulation, Army Regulation 350-1. This regulation outlines all of the Army's mandatory training requirements regardless of the source of the requirement, whether it be Congress, the Army itself, or a member of the chain of command. Next is a synthesis of multiple systems that fall under the umbrella of Objective-T. Objective-T is the process through which units conduct training to achieve a required level of proficiency. Achieving a necessary level of proficiency and equipment availability is how the Army generates readiness. Readiness is the common thread through all of these systems. The Army is focused on providing trained and ready forces to support the geographic combatant commander's requirements in achieving the Unified Command Plan as directed by the President of the United States.

Following the case studies, this paper will show that all three cases tied to readiness reporting, evaluations, and creating a narrative to the American people through their representatives in congress. This environment that the Army is operating within is extremely complex, as this narrative often serves as a justification for continued funding, especially in an era of constrained defense budgets and increased competition from rivals. Many of the training

requirements are based on the individual interests of specific constituencies and “pet” issues that are foisted upon the Army. However, they may not be relevant to the successful completion of the Army's mission. But, many of these requirements are tied to “generating readiness,” which is the Army's stated number one priority, which has led to the “mission creep” of mandatory training. In this case, mission creep is defined to mean the slow accretion and expansion of requirements. Through this increase in training requirements combined with a finite amount of time and the pressure on Army leaders to “get results,” the Army has created a system of systems. This enterprise-level system has decoupled the compliance mechanisms from day to day business of the organization. This decoupling at the enterprise level can ultimately lead to unethical behavior, perhaps even contribute to the series of high profile ethical failures that have and continue to rack the Defense Department. This topic is pervasive and certainly warrants further research by both Academia and the professional military.

Literature Review

Much of the academic body of work revolves around the way that organizations can either help or hinder the ethical behavior of the members of the organization through the structures in place to manage the system. One of the ways that organizations can encourage ethical behavior is by building a value-based culture by focusing on fairness within the organization. In this case, fairness has two distinct definitions, outcome fairness and procedural fairness. Outcome fairness is determined by what people think they deserve, and procedural fairness is based on the processes that create outcomes.¹⁹ While outcome fairness is based on the perception of the individual, procedural fairness concerns the systems that the organization has in place to govern outcomes. These processes and procedures are in place to manage the system and

¹⁹ Tom Tyler, John Dienhart, and Terry Thomas, “The Ethical Commitment to Compliance: Building Value-Based Cultures,” *California Management Review* 50, no. 2 (2008): 33.

ensure that the system is producing the outputs that it is required to provide. However, in a complex system, simple solutions are impossible, and everything is subject to the law of unintended consequences.²⁰

Academic writing is relevant to the discussion of organization ethics and management within the Army, as many of the organizations that the academic researchers studied face very similar challenges to the Army. While the military, rightly, considers itself unique amongst the pantheon of professions, large organizations are still large organizations regardless of what they do or produce. They are populated by individual people and leaders with their own thoughts, desires, and beliefs and, as a result, face similar challenges. Though a direct one-for-one comparison is impossible, any direct one-for-one comparison is absurd for any organization, there are too many variables, but there are analogous components. There is a significant amount of writing and research on organizational ethics and ethical decision-making by authors such as Linda Treviño, Niki Den Nieuwenboer, and Tom Tyler. Studies of organizational ethics within the Army are minimal. Limited to the point that when the concept of organizational ethics is unknown in an Army context. If it is known at all, the only article mentioned is “Lying to Ourselves.”

For example, a Harvard Business Review article discussed the ethical dangers inherent with comparison-based performance management systems.²¹ Most military professionals would immediately write this article off as irrelevant because they are unfamiliar with the term, or even if they were familiar with the word, what would it have to do with ethics? However, this article is exceptionally relevant within the military profession. The Officer and Noncommissioned Officer

²⁰ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 61.

²¹ Kriti Jain, “When Competition Between Coworkers Leads to Unethical Behavior,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 12, 2018, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2018/12/when-competition-between-coworkers-leads-to-unethical-behavior>.

Evaluation System is not similar to a comparison-based performance management system; it is, in fact, a comparison-based performance management system. As the Army has taken on the mission of reforming its talent management system, understanding the ethical implications of a comparison-based performance management system is critical for the development of future leaders within the Army, lest the Army promotes a generation of high-achieving sociopaths.

Military ethics training is generally centered around standards of conduct or Just War Theory. There has been much professional writing on the subject of ethics within the military. Still, those discussions are on topics like standards of conduct, not specifically on the subject of organizational management and the impact that the Army's established systems have on the ethical behavior of its members. The Army has looked at ethical failures as individual instances that require individuals to undergo additional training, such as the ethical training now required across the Army's professional education enterprise. Instead, the Army should look at whether or not the compliance mechanisms and systems it has established accomplish their intended purpose or if they are further exacerbating the problem.

The US Military enterprise is one of the largest and most complex organizations ever created. It is the largest single employer in the US, with "over 2.5 million military personnel (active and reserve); 861,000 civilians, spread across 163 countries."²² A system as large and complex is extraordinarily difficult to manage, primarily when administered as a top-down bureaucracy. Solutions implemented to solve problems, create other problems, the problems associated with compensating and delayed feedback, the lack of a clear and easy solution, and implemented solutions can have wide-ranging and unforeseen second and third-order effects in areas completely unrelated to the initially identified problem.²³

²² Kimberly Amadeo, "Department of Defense and Its Effect on the Economy," *The Balance*, February 13, 2020, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://www.thebalance.com/departments-of-defense-what-it-does-and-its-impact-3305982>.

²³ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 59-62.

The academic and popular literature is wide-ranging and diverse in terms of topic but generally agrees that effectively managing large organizations is extremely difficult. Decoupling is the manifestation of this difficulty, and both employers and employees attempt to accomplish, what they perceive, are the goals and purpose of the organization. Most modern organizations understand the importance of maintaining an ethical standard for their behavior, both internal and external, to the organization. The problem lies when employees and managers face a dilemma, when they have to choose between following the rules or accomplishing their mission. The implications and ramifications of decoupling on the perceived legitimacy of the organization and the negative effect on the ethical behavior of the members of the organization that results from decoupling have been shown in numerous papers and studies.²⁴ Decoupling is a well-researched topic in the academic fields of ethics, leadership, and management, but there is little to no professional writing on the subject as it applies to the US Army.

Studies by Tammy Maclean and Michael Benham has looked at how decoupling can lead to institutionalized misconduct and some of the reasons behind the decoupling and the methods through which organizations actually decouple.²⁵ Linda Treviño, et. al, have written numerous papers and studies on organizational ethics and provide examples of effective compliance systems and how to build structures within the organization that reinforce and encourage ethical behavior. Additionally, Treviño has developed ethical decision-making models that demonstrate how people make decisions within an ethical context. Michael E. Brown and others have written several articles and outlined areas of future research looking at how leaders shape and influence

²⁴ Ruth Zschoche, "A Multilevel Model of Police Corruption: Anomie, Decoupling, and Moral Disengagement," (PhD diss., University of South Florida, Florida, 2011), 20, accessed on October 28, 2019, <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4617&context=etd>.

²⁵Tammy L. MacLean and Michael Benham, "The Dangers of Decoupling," 1507.

the ethical environment of their organizations, looking at the “intersection of leadership and ethics.”²⁶

Niki Den Nieuwenboer and Gary Weaver have written on the concept of moral disengagement, in which “individuals can engage in morally transgressive acts without experiencing negative self-sanctions for behaving in discord with one’s moral values.”²⁷ This moral disengagement is relevant because it is related to how people can violate the spirit of the rules within the Army without believing that they are actually doing anything wrong through rationalizing and justifying their actions. What is most relevant to the discussion of decoupling is the fact that this behavior is that the authors argue that it is not a purely individual phenomenon but is shared across people in the same social group.²⁸

As stated in the introduction, Dr. Wong has come the closest to bridging the gap between academic and professional writing, but he is the only one. Based on the article, “Lying to Ourselves,” it appears that Dr. Wong was not familiar with the academic works concerning the decoupling action that he describes but could not explicitly state because he lacked the vocabulary. In the same vein as Dr. Wong, other authors within the military have written, short articles and papers describing the problems with the compliance systems and the struggles Army leaders have attempting to reconcile a “failure is not an option” culture with a culture that prides itself on integrity and honesty, as they try to find a way to achieve compliance with a standard that is temporally impossible to achieve without violating the laws of physics or the space-time continuum.

²⁶ Michael E. Brown and Linda K. Treviño, “Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 17 no. 6 (2006): 597.

²⁷ Niki A. Den Nieuwenboer and Gary Weaver, “The Social Production of Moral Disengagement: Meaning, Actors, and Social Tools,” *Organization Science*, (forthcoming), 1.

²⁸ Ibid.

This monograph attempts to begin building the bridge between the established literature on the topic of organizational ethics and decoupling and demonstrate that decoupling exists within the Army and that the Army's attempts to correct the ethical problems it finds in its ranks are exacerbating the issue rather than remedying it. In a future of shrinking defense budgets, increasing competition from not only foreign rivals but also interservice rivals the Army must continue to demonstrate that it is a moral and ethical institution that serves the people of the United States, not a morally bankrupt shell of itself, attempting to get by on the power of its former glories.

Methodology

The author researched the academic works from the ethics and sociology fields to build the theoretical basis for the applied ethics of the Army. Through a case study analysis of the following compliance systems: The Army's Sustainable Readiness Model, and the mandatory training requirements outlined in Army Regulation 350-1. Through observation and examination of these compliance systems, this paper will demonstrate where decoupling exists in the Army and by applying the academic research from outside of the Army describes the potential ramifications of decoupling on the officer corps.

These cases were selected because they are each system of systems that exist to maintain control over the vast and bureaucratic organization that is the US Army. Though each of these systems governs separate spheres within the larger Army enterprise, both of these compliance systems are tied to training and readiness reporting which is how the Army understands itself, how the organization evaluates the performance of its leaders and selects them for promotion in rank and advancement in position, and how the Army communicates legitimacy to external audiences, specifically the American people and their elected representatives.

In order to look for evidence of decoupling within the Army, this paper will confirm or deny the existence of criteria that are indicative that decoupling is occurring within the

organization. First, a coincidence of the pressure to perform along with an opportunity to violate rules undetected. Second, the implicit encouragement of this behavior by leaders at higher echelons or encouragement through the design of the system itself. Third, empty rituals that seek to restore or maintain the legitimacy of the organization despite this rule-breaking behavior.²⁹ The knowing acceptance of this behavior is a sensemaking exercise through which the leaders of the organization go through a continuous process of creating a story that is “more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism.”³⁰

The systems the Army has established to govern a truly massive enterprise also create ethical problems for people as they attempt to navigate the system. The more complex the Defense Department and US Army have become, the other systems have been implemented to try to manage and control other systems effectively. There is even a cliché in the Army that this is a system of systems. The complexity inherent in the larger enterprise defies bureaucratic control. This mismatch as the bureaucracy attempts to and implements procedures and controls to manage this complex system has manifested itself in wide-ranging unintended consequences that lead to other problems that the institution tries to solve through the application of additional control measures and systems in a bureaucratic amplification loop.

Case Study 1: AR 350-1 Mandatory Training

Army Regulation 350-1 (AR) 350-1, *Army Training and Leadership Development*, is the regulation that specifies the administrative requirements for the US Army, which includes mandatory training requirements. The regulation’s purpose, “... consolidates policy and guidance for Army training and leader development and supports Army decisive actions in unified land

²⁹ MacLean and Benham, “The Dangers of Decoupling,” 1511.

³⁰ Karl E. Weick and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe, “Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking,” *Organization Science* 16, no. 4 (July-August 2005): 415.

operations.”³¹ This is not the only source of mandatory training requirements. Subordinate commanders are authorized to supplement AR 350-1 with command-specific consolidated training guidance.³² AR 350-1 is one of the Army’s many compliance programs. Expanding the definition of compliance programs from Maclean and Benham, to the definition of a “Comprehensive Ethics and Compliance Program,” as defined by the Ethics and Compliance Initiative:

An ethics and compliance program should include six key elements: 1) written standards of ethical workplace conduct; 2) training on the standards; 3) company resources that provide advice about ethics issues; 4) a means to report potential violations confidentially or anonymously; 5) performance evaluations of ethical conduct; and 6) systems to discipline violators. A seventh element is a stated set of guiding values or principles.³³

AR 350-1 is not the Army’s entire compliance program but merely one part of a larger system, specifically the regulation that specifies the training requirements for the organization, covering elements one and two, but not an exhaustive list.

The purpose of the United States Army is to fight and win the nation’s wars, but creating a standing army capable of performing that task incurs a significant amount of administrative overhead that looks to ensure the Army is capable of performing its assigned mission. The bureaucracy created within the Army exists to manage a large and complex system, and the bureaucracy has become nearly as large and complex as the organization that it is intended to control. AR 350-1 outlines the Army-wide mandatory training requirements that all Soldiers are required to complete. These requirements are in addition to the mission training and job-specific training requirements that must also be accomplished and are more centrally located to the Army’s intended purpose.

³¹ US Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), i.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Comprehensive Ethics and Compliance Program,” Ethics and Compliance Glossary, Ethics and Compliance Initiative, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.ethics.org/resources/free-toolkit/toolkit-glossary/>.

In a given training year, in a non-deployed environment, the Army has available 256 training days out of the 365 calendar days. This day count takes into account the fact that the Army (usually) does not train on the weekends, receives time off for federal holidays and training holidays, and Soldiers receive thirty days of paid vacation per year, usually taken in two, two-week blocks one around the winter holidays, and one in the summer. These 256 training days account for the total time available for units to complete all of their mission-essential and mandatory Army-wide training requirements.

The name of the regulation itself conjures up negative associations for members of the organization, to the point that numerous professional articles have been written advocating that the regulation be abolished or severely curtailed.³⁴ The subject of the excessive mandatory training requirements has been discussed at the highest levels for nearly two decades. In 2002, the Army War College commissioned a study to determine the total extent of mandatory training requirements. If we look at this statement independently of the actual findings, a study was required to determine the total amount of time required to complete mandatory training implies that the organization did not know what it was asking of the members of the organization.

This 2002 Army War College Study found that there were more than 100 separate mandatory training requirements, which would take 297 days to complete when there are only 256 available training days to complete not just the 297 days of required training, but also the mission-essential tasks, or the tasks that a unit is expected to be able to accomplish based on the type of unit it is. For example, an infantry unit's mission essential task list includes conducting a combined-arms breach of a mined-wire obstacle, a very complex task requiring days and weeks

³⁴ Crispin J. Burke, "No Time, Literally, for All the Requirements," *Association of the United States Army* (blog), April 4, 2016, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/no-time-literally-all-requirements>.

of training and practice. This example is just one of many for this type of unit, with some units having many more.³⁵

A commonly held belief in the Army is that during wartime, the extraneous non-essential requirements drop away as the difficulties of wartime drive the organization to find every efficiency possible. Based on this reasoning, it is reasonable to assume that after more than two decades of war in the Middle East and Central Asia, the Army's extraneous requirements would have dropped to an absolute minimum. This assumption, in practice, proves to be false. In 2015, the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth commissioned another study to determine the extent of mandatory training requirements in the Army. The 2015 study found a total of 514 days of required training, an excess of 258 training days.³⁶ With the creation of these requirements, the organization also created accountability systems to ensure that the members of the organization completed these tasks, the Digital Training Management System (DTMS). This system is the focus of the next Case Study.

When the Army conducts multiple studies within the span of one twenty-year career to determine the full extent of mandatory training, it speaks to a lack of understanding of what is required versus what is expected. This difference between the amount of training required and the amount of time available demonstrates an implicit encouragement of rule-breaking purely from the fact that it is physically impossible to complete all of the required training in a given year. The transition team for then-Chief of Staff General Martin Dempsey that he "take a red pen to," or "eliminate, most of the requirements in AR 350-1."³⁷ This lack of available time to complete all of these 'mandatory' requirements meant that some things are more mandatory than others, requiring members of the organization to pick and choose what mandatory training they were

³⁵ Burke, "No Time, Literally, for All the Requirements."

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Burke, "No Time, Literally, for All the Requirements."

going to accomplish. This phenomenon became widely published in Dr. Leonard Wong's paper "Lying to Ourselves," which highlighted this pressure to perform to an impossible standard and the subsequent unethical behavior that it caused. Training conducted to 'check the block' refers to training event that was conducted but not to the specified standard is one way that members of the organization could rationalize their unethical behavior because they would now be able to report that mandatory training had been conducted without outright lying.³⁸ More senior commanders, under similar pressures for their time, could have easily verified this through drop-in inspections of published training events, back-briefs, or other enforcement mechanisms that are commonly used throughout the Army, but seldom (if ever) did. If they had inspected training, the status quo of checking the block or pencil whipping training records would be easily and rapidly uncovered. Or, more simply, if senior commanders across the Army had taken the results of either the 2002 or 2015 Studies, and audited the training records, it would be clear that units are not meeting the standard outlined in the regulation. Additionally, the sheer number of requirements makes the completion of specific training events nearly impossible to identify except as an aggregated whole. The Army attempted to wrap its hands around this problem by requiring all training records to be inputted into DTMS, though even this system is imperfect, as will be discussed in the next case study. The Army created a complex system to manage a complex system and then created yet another complex system to manage the second. Units, typically, only completed the training that would or could be verified, usually through DTMS.

Despite this lack of time to complete the training and a demonstrated willingness to look the other way when it comes to mandatory training is evidence of empty rituals as units report an ever-increasing level of readiness and training through both traditional and social media messaging and a perpetually increasing quality of the Army. Demands for increased combat

³⁸ Wong and Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves*, ix.

readiness have only exacerbated the problem of too much to do and no enough time to do it in.

The Army has taken steps forward to improving this situation by the release of Requirement Reduction Memoranda, mandating that some requirements cease or be modified.

In order to build a more capable and lethal force, Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) is reducing requirements in brigade-sized (4000 Soldiers) and below units. This effort focuses on a systematic simplification, reduction, or elimination of required activities (training and non-training), which consume commanders', leaders', and Soldiers' time that they might otherwise spend building and sustaining combat readiness.³⁹

The requirements that were removed or modified included eleven training requirements, of which, six Training requirements were removed, and five Training requirements modified so that they are included in current training events but not removed. Of fourteen Administrative requirements that were included, eight Administrative Requirements modified, but not rescinded, and six Administrative requirements eliminated.⁴⁰ While this is a small step in the right direction, it scarcely makes a dent into an over-500 day per year time deficit. This minimal effort toward correcting this massive deficit in the Army's system communicates the tacit acceptance of this behavior, which shows that the Army may have decoupled its largest compliance program from its ethical underpinnings. The Army states that:

Many people know what the words Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage mean. But how often do you see someone actually live up to them? Soldiers learn these values in detail during Basic Combat Training (BCT); from then on, they live them every day in everything they do—whether they're on the job or off. In short, the Seven Core Army Values listed below are what being a Soldier is all about.⁴¹

³⁹Office of the Secretary of the Army, "Army Secretary Releases Reduction Requirement Memos to Improve Readiness," Army.Mil, October 26, 2018, accessed November 27, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/207160/army_secretary_releases_reduction_requirement_memos_to_improve_readiness.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "The Army Values," Features, Army.mil, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://www.army.mil/values/>.

The Army goes on to define each of these values in detail. What is most striking is the Army's definition of Integrity:

Do what's right, legally and morally. Integrity is a quality you develop by adhering to moral principles. It requires that you do and says nothing that deceives others. As your integrity grows, so does the trust others place in you. The more choices you make based on integrity, the more this highly prized value will affect your relationships with family and friends, and, finally, the fundamental acceptance of yourself.⁴²

The Army may be inadvertently creating a system in which it requires its members to violate the values that it describes as being fundamental to being a Soldier.

Case Study 2: Readiness Reporting

Through the previous case study of AR 350-1, it appears that decoupling may be present in one of the Army's main compliance systems. Likely resulting from the weight of bureaucratic pressure to add additional control measures and mechanisms to maintain control. Layered onto the already complex world of training management within the Army is the difficulty and impossibility with completing all of the mandatory administrative requirements given the lack of time in a calendar year does not take into consideration the additional time required to train for the Army's wartime purpose, to fight and win the nation's wars. As in the previous case study, there is also implicit encouragement of the decoupling of the daily business from reporting mechanisms and procedures. Previously, in this case, defined as before 2016, the Army used the Net Unit Status Report (Net-USR) to send readiness data up the chain of command and to congress monthly. There were both classified and unclassified versions of the report that were completed, and they represented an attempt to codify how prepared a unit was to conduct its wartime mission. This information was aggregated and pushed up through the chain of command, with each commander

⁴² "The Army Values," Features, Army.mil, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://www.army.mil/values/>.

making a subjective assessment of the aggregated data of his or her subordinate units. This report provides a snapshot of where the unit is at the moment that the data for the report was pulled.⁴³

The difficulty in this system is that the Army operates under a peer-comparison based performance management system, which is called the Officer Evaluation Report. The rated officer's immediate superior, known as the rater, writes the majority of the report. The senior-rater, who is typically the "rater's rater," writes a small portion of the evaluation. The rater writes his or her section based on the performance of the rated officer, and the senior rater writes his or her portion based on the assessed potential of the rated officer. It is this small portion of the evaluation that carries the most weight for promotion and selection boards. Studies conducted outside of the Army have shown that peer-comparison based performance management systems can lead to unethical behavior that has not dissuaded their use in or outside of the Army. Additionally, the Army has "doubled-down" on peer-comparison based performance management system by increasing the granularity of peer-comparison in both the Officer Evaluation Report (OER) and Academic Evaluation Report (AER). The OER was adjusted in 2014 to reflect additional peer comparison by the rater.⁴⁴ The AER was updated in 2019 to increase the level of granularity of an officer's performance in professional military education. Previously to the change, the AER would only capture officers who performed in the top 20 percent of their cohort. In contrast, the new system captures not only the top 20 percent but also the officers that perform from the top 21 percent to 40 percent.⁴⁵ These systems also come with a significant downside that

⁴³ "What is Readiness and How Do We Get There?" *The Angry Staff Officer* (blog), March 5, 2016, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://angrystaffofficer.com/2016/03/05/what-is-readiness-and-how-do-we-get-there/>.

⁴⁴ Melissa Buckley, "New OER transition: HRC team informs officers on changes," US Army, January 24, 2014, accessed January 12, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/118791/new_oer_transition_hrc_team_informs_officers_on_changes.

⁴⁵ Sean Kimmons, "New Academic Evaluation Report aims to better identify top performers," US Army, June 24, 2019, accessed January 12, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/218798/new_academic_evaluation_report_aims_to_better_identify_top_performers.

has been studied in academia. These peer-comparison based systems can encourage unethical behavior.⁴⁶

The Net-USR replacement: Objective T attempted to remove the subjectivity inherent in the Net-USR system by making hard gates in the training and reporting of a unit's level of readiness.⁴⁷ In the Net-USR system, commanders would determine their own Mission Essential Task List (METL), and their unit's level of proficiency would be determined against the tasks that the commander determined were mission essential. The commander could, in effect, determine the tasks that they would use to rate the proficiency of their unit and thereby report to their superior officers, their rater and senior rater. The rater and senior rater would then aggregate the data and report that up the chain of command ultimately to the National Command Authority and Congress. There was an inherent conflict of interest in this system. Officers know that their data is being compared to the data of their peers at all levels of command. This conflict of interest can create pressure to modify or adjust reporting statistics to make the unit appear in the most favorable light possible to the officer's superiors. This pressure exists up and down the chain of command because it is in everyone's best interest to report the most advantageous data possible. This pressure to report positive or positive-trending data runs counter to the stated purpose of readiness reporting, which is to “informs the Army on which units are prepared for war immediately and which require a specified amount of time and resources to become ready.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Kriti Jain, “When Competition Between Coworkers Leads to Unethical Behavior,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 12, 2018, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2018/12/when-competition-between-coworkers-leads-to-unethical-behavior>.

⁴⁷ US Department of the Army, The Chief of Staff, *Memorandum for All Army Leaders: Army Readiness Guidance Calendar Year 2016-17*, by General Mark A. Milley, January 20, 2016, accessed March 15, 2020, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/standto/docs/army_readiness_guidance.pdf.

⁴⁸ Dan Alder and Theresa Barbour, “Objective-T Effort,” *Special Warfare* 29, no. 2 (July-December 2016): 5, accessed April 22, 2020, https://www.soc.mil/swcs/SWmag/archive/SW2902/JUL-Dec_2016.pdf.

The new Sustainable Readiness Model rectifies some of the shortfalls of the previous system by standardizing METLs across similar units across the Army. For example, two Infantry Brigade Combat Teams will have the same Mission Essential Tasks now, whereas previously, the list would be dependent on the personality and judgment of the current commander. As the Army responded to this, it created Objective-T as part of the sustainable readiness model that would place hard and fast measures of performance on readiness reporting. For example, there are required attendance percentages, required external evaluations, and requirements on specific training gates that must be achieved for a unit to receive a specific readiness rating.⁴⁹ This may imply that the Army felt it could no longer trust the subjective judgment of its field commanders so that it applied a particular control measure to remove as much subjectivity as possible in an attempt to realign the business practices with the compliance mechanisms.

The Army's stated number one priority is generating readiness.⁵⁰ "The Army defines strategic readiness as a process that assesses the ability of the total force, as well as the operating and generating force, to execute its role to meet the demands of the National Military Strategy. The Army is developing the latest readiness model to meet that need."⁵¹ Readiness in and of itself is just an idea, and inherently unquantifiable. Much as declaring war on drugs or terrorism is nearly impossible to quantify or develop effective approaches, attempting to quantify "readiness" is just subjective. This subjective nature overlaid on an organization as large and complex as the Army with many subordinate organizations doing very different things working toward the common goal of fighting a winning the nation's wars makes attempts at applying a quantitative

⁴⁹ Alder and Barbour, "Objective-T Effort," 7.

⁵⁰ "The Number One Priority: An Interview with General Mark Milley" interview by Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard, Army.Mil, November 4, 2019, accessed January 23, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/219028/the_number_one_priority_an_interview_with_gen_mark_milley; US Army, The Chief of Staff, *Memorandum for All Army Leaders: Army Readiness Guidance Calendar Year 2016-17*. The message of readiness as the number one priority has been repeated numerous times by General Milley and numerous other senior Army leaders.

⁵¹ Alder and Barbour, "Objective-T Effort," 5.

solution to a qualitative problem an exercise in futility. The dissonance is created when accurate reporting could have negative impacts on an officer's potential for future promotion and advancement. For example, if an officer, accurately reports his or her unit's level of readiness lower than his or her peers, he or she could be viewed in a negative light by his or her superior. Additionally, because the superior's evaluation is also tied to the reported readiness data as it is aggregated up the chain of command, this could establish a system in which it could become accepted to adjust and report doctored training data because it is in everyone's best interest to report the most favorable picture possible.

This would be further reinforced by Quarterly Training Briefings from the Company to Brigade Level in which the commanders would brief their statistics to their rater and senior rater. What might start as low readiness could be hidden in the aggregate as more and more units are combined, especially if there are one or two high performing outliers. Making this another example of an empty ritual in which the data is provided in the most favorable light because it benefits all involved parties. The risk of discovery was low because, as outlined in the previous case study, the current workload for most leaders within the Army is so inordinately high that it makes verification and auditing next to impossible since it is challenging to measure readiness empirically. Only subjective measures based on the experience of long-serving professional officers are accepted throughout the organization. This subjective nature, combined with the limited available time to conduct “spot-checks” or audits, make accountability difficult, if not impossible. When presented with a dilemma, with a chance of reward and little chance of being caught, these “weak sanctioning systems — those with both a small probability of detecting unethical behavior and small punishments — actually increase unethical behavior relative to having no sanctioning system.”⁵² Professionals espouse a high degree of ethical awareness, and

⁵² Ovul Sezer, Francesca Gino, and Max H. Bazerman, “Ethical Blind Spots: Explaining Unintentional Unethical Behavior,” *Current Opinion in Psychology*, no. 6 (2015): 80.

will generally repulse at the idea of ethical failure, but “in these systems, individuals viewed their decisions from a business frame rather than from an ethics frame.”⁵³ In other words, individuals do not even realize that they are facing an ethical dilemma. Demonstrating a decoupling of the Army's day-to-day business practices from its compliance systems. A real-world example of the age-old adage: “The path to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Each of these two case studies revolves around the same issue of reporting organizational performance data. The first case study concerns the standard administrative tasks that every Army unit are required to do through a mix of administrative, legal requirements, congressional mandates, and executive fiats. The second is how the Army attempts to quantitatively assess its performance and communicate what it is doing and what service it is providing to the country in an attempt to inform decisionmakers on the capacity and capabilities of the Army. This is an extremely complex, multi-level game in which the Army and its service members are trying to balance the competing demands of pressures internal to and external to the organization and country. On top of this, the servicemembers are attempting to balance the competing demands of professional and familial obligations with living up to their oath to the country as military professionals in a very stressful and demanding line of work.

Significance and Conclusions

Both of these case studies are tied to status reporting on the current state of the organization in terms of administrative status, in the case of the former, and operational readiness in the case of the latter. Coming out of the dark times of sequestration within the Army the requirement to justify funding became more and more apparent, resulting in a shift of focus to generating readiness for near-peer, and later, peer competition in which the fighting ground would not be the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan, but on some undetermined future battlefield

⁵³ Sezer, Gino, and Bazerman, “Ethical Blind Spots,” 80.

which would be fought in terms of heavy-metal, large scale combat operations. After nearly two decades of limited counterinsurgency operations in the Middle East and Central Asia, the Army did not put forward any significant effort toward modernizing its major combat systems. The Army walked out of nearly two decades of conflict with the same equipment it deployed at the beginning of these twenty-year-old hostilities. While many new systems were used, many of them were stop-gap systems that were never officially or permanently added to the inventory, such as the numerous different Mine-Resistant, Ambush-Protected vehicles, or the M14 Enhanced Battle Rifle. Additionally, many were just modifications to existing systems such as the V-hulled M1126 Stryker Infantry Carrier Variant or the M1A2 Abrams Tank Urban Survival Kit (TUSK). Compare this to World War Two, in which the Army that ended the war in 1945 bared little resemblance to the Army that began the war less than four years before.

This shift in narrative serves two purposes: the first to justify the continued existence of the organization, as there is no constitutional or legal requirement to maintain a standing Army. Second, in an era of decreasing defense spending, the Army has to justify not only its standard operations and maintenance funding, but also the funding streams to support Research, Development, Testing, And Evaluation (RDT&E) and acquisitions. To justify future budget requests, Congress requires evidence and substantiation on what services, programs, and equipment the Army spends its money on. The Army, which views people as its weapon system, does not have the data as neatly and easily as the Air Force or Navy, who can provide numbers on ships, planes, bombs dropped, days at sea, sorties, etc. The Army, which can spend millions of dollars per year training on and maintaining its equipment. But, a general officer or service secretary might struggle with articulating the required costs associated with deploying a brigade combat team (BCT) to a combat training center (CTC), and what benefit that provides the national security establishment. The Army has developed reporting systems in an attempt to manage the enormity of its organization and collect data that can be turned into information to

communicate to Congress and the American people about what service the Army provides to the country.

These systems are in and of themselves complex and difficult to manage in the most ideal of circumstances. These systems are directly related to performance evaluations and selections for promotion and advancement within the organization as the previous case studies demonstrate the Army may have decoupled its compliance systems from its ethical codes. In this environment the members within the organization are forced to choose between reporting as accurately as possible and possibly risking their performance evaluation and potential for future promotion and advancement in the Army or reporting per the decoupled system and continuing to advance, thereby securing their livelihood and benefits for their family members.

This monograph begs the question: what is wrong with the Army's system(s)? This decoupling of the Army's systems delegitimizes the rules and regulations. Now, some rules are admittedly more important than others; for example, male Army officers (and only male officers) were not allowed to use an umbrella in uniform, for a reason (possibly apocryphal) that umbrellas opening would "spook the horses." This regulation was not amended until 2013. There are other rules; however, that govern things like when and where flame resistant uniforms and boots are required, appropriate safety protocols for live-fire exercises, and many others. With the sheer volume of rules and regulations, and the physical impossibility of knowing all of them, let alone adhering to all of them, individuals are required to pick and choose which rules to follow for the sake of efficiency. Finding all possible efficiencies is critical for the individuals given the extreme demands on a leader's time to accomplish all of their assigned tasks.⁵⁴

Studies on the impact of decoupling within the Army are nonexistent and represent an important area for future research. MacLean and Benham have demonstrated the detrimental

⁵⁴ Lisa Saum-Manning et al., *Reducing the Time Burdens of Army Company Leaders* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), 1, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2979>.

effects that decoupling can have on an organization. While the organizations studied by MacLean and Benham are not military, some direct links can be made. Decoupling can lead to the institutionalization of misconduct and, ultimately, to a loss of external organizational legitimacy. In the case of the Army, organizational legitimacy is critical at multiple levels. Internal legitimacy is critical for the organization to continue operating. External legitimacy toward the American people and Congress are also critical for the Army to continue to exist as an organization. External legitimacy toward the adversarial and competitor nations of Russian, China, North Korea, and Iran is also critical because, without a degree of legitimacy, the Army would cease to have a deterrent effect against those nations encouraging them to act in ways that are detrimental toward US interests.

What at first glance appears as an internal and organizational problem for the Army can have wide-ranging consequences for both the Army, the National Security establishment, our partners and allies, and the stability of the world in general. The Army needs to take a hard look at the systems it has in place and how those systems are used. The largest sources of decoupling are at the Army-wide level because they are Army-wide systems and processes that drive this decoupling. First, the Secretary of the Army and Chief of Staff need to realign the mandatory training requirements to fit within the amount of time in a given training year and then develop realistic definitions and expectations for the amount of training and level of proficiency that can be achieved during a given amount of time. These steps will help initially mitigate the impact and start to realign the Army's compliance systems with its ethical code. Additionally, the phenomenon of decoupling is well-known throughout the Army. Still, people do not know that it has a name or that it has an extensive background of research in the civilian world. Education about what decoupling is will help leaders at all levels become aware and help them take whatever steps they can to realign compliance systems with ethics. The RAND Corporation has researched the significant time burdens that Army leaders face, and their study makes sound

recommendations to realign time requirements with actual time available, which is another contributing factor to the decoupling within the Army.

The Army has begun to reform its talent management systems in both its assignment selection process and the battalion command selection process to help mitigate the negative effects of decoupling on the US Army. Improving the lower-level employee perceptions of the larger organization, thereby increasing the internal legitimacy through re-coupling the compliance systems, will help improve the ethical culture of the organization. As well as ensuring accountability and effective compliance systems based on a transparent, rules-based system that applies the rules equally across time, space, and circumstance. This transparent rules-based system is known in the academic ethics literature as organizational justice and procedural fairness. Within a system that has procedural justice, an employee who receives a bad outcome understands that he or she lost in a fair and transparent process, which improves that employee's perception of the organization and increases positive behaviors.⁵⁵ The cases of senior leader misconduct across the Defense Department may result from decades of experience and acculturation to the decoupled systems within the military apparatus. When you combine institutionalized misconduct within the organization and minimal vetting of senior leaders across the organization, the organization inadvertently creates the opportunity for unethical and toxic leaders to rise within the organization. Unethical leaders will use the organization for their benefit. However, ethical leaders will depart the organization due to their inability to improve an agency riddled with flaws.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Linda Klebe Treviño and Gary R. Weaver, "Organizational Justice and Ethics Program 'Follow-Through': Influences on Employees Harmful and Helpful Behavior," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (2001): 654.

⁵⁶ Tim Kane, "Bleeding Talent: The U.S. Military's Leadership Breakdown," *Harvard Business Review*, November 17, 2010, accessed January 4, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2010/11/bleeding-talent-the-us-militar.html>.

A significant problem that the Army faces is a loss of internal and external legitimacy. Without internal legitimacy, the Army will not be able to operate effectively as a large organization because there will be too many small fiefdoms across the entire organization. The central authority will struggle to control across the huge expanse of time and space that the Army operates within. Without external legitimacy, the Army will struggle to justify its reason to exist if the civilian decisionmakers believe that the funding they are providing the Army is not fulfilling the intended purposes and that the funding could be put to better uses elsewhere across the government. Even further, if the Army is no longer providing a credible conventional deterrent, enemies around the world could take action opposing US interests. These issues over internal organizational rules, policies, procedures, and practices not only effect inside of the organization but also outside of the organization and, probably more importantly, outside of the country.

The Army and the Defense Department need to take significant actions to recouple the organization's compliance mechanisms with its ethical foundations. The consequences of not acting could be an organizational collapse due to vanity—day-to-day organizational business processes growing farther away from ethics and codes, which provided the original professional structural underpinnings of the organization. Traditions of professionalism, nonpartisanship, and servant leadership are put at risk the farther the Army gets away from the oaths its members take upon entry into the service. The Requirement for Exemplary Conduct has remained in effect, but has the Army's desire to adhere to it and enforce it changed? The danger in decoupling is that the individuals do not necessarily realize that they are undermining their ethical standing; they believe they are acting "for the greater good."

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