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# PROFESSIONALISM AND THE VOLUNTEER MILITARY

## Will Army 2025 be a Military Profession?

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Don M. Snider

ABSTRACT: Army 2025 is now being built and it needs to have all the right expert knowledge developed into its practitioners and units for immediate use when called upon. That is an immense task given the crunching defense reductions now ongoing. Analyzing the current state of the Profession using Army data on the bureaucratizing influences of the drawdown, on leadership and trust within the ranks, and on the development of moral character of future Army professionals, the author arrives at a less than sanguine conclusion.

While the Army will find the necessary efficiencies during reductions, military effectiveness is the true hallmark of the success of our stewardship.

ADP1 - *The Army* (2012)<sup>1</sup>

In this article I will argue there are no guarantees that Army 2025, now being developed by its current Stewards, will be an effective participant in the military profession. In fact, there is a very good possibility it will not be, to the extreme detriment of the Republic's security. The provenance of this challenge resides within the Army's history and its unique institutional characters. And, as we shall see, the potential solution lies with the quality of the Stewards the Army develops, the leadership they provide through this decade of defense reductions, and the results they do, or do not, obtain.

The Department of the Army is, in fact, an institution of dual character. It is at the same time both a governmental bureaucracy and a military profession. Thus there is a powerful, internal tension raging between the competing cultures of bureaucracy and profession. Only one can dominate institution-wide and at the levels of subordinate organizations and units.<sup>2</sup> Presently, and after fifteen years of war, there are indicators the culture of profession dominates that of bureaucracy, but only weakly so.<sup>3</sup>

Stated another way, like all organizations the Army has a set of default behaviors that accurately reflect a core functional makeup. Since its establishment in 1775, that default behavior has been, and remains,

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1 US Department of the Army, *The Army*, Army Doctrinal Publication 1 (Washington, DC: US Department of the Army, September 2012), paragraph 4-19.

2 This dual-character framework and the conduct of its inherent, internal struggle is one of the main findings of the two research/book projects that renewed the study of the US Army as a military profession. See, Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews, eds., *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2d Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

3 This is a judgment call on my part based on the data reported in the *2015 Annual Survey of the Army Profession* (CASAP FY15) and the *2013 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership* (CASAL – Main Findings, April 2014). In particular, I focused on data in both reports that supported the existence of a professional vs. bureaucratic culture within Army AC units. Subsequent documentation in this article will draw specifics more from the CASAL given the longitudinal nature of its data.

Dr. Snider currently serves as Professor of Army Profession and Ethic in the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College and as Senior Fellow for the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic at West Point. He is also Professor Emeritus of Political Science at West Point and in a previous military career served three combat tours in Vietnam as an infantryman. In 2015 the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society awarded Dr. Snider the Morris Janowitz Award for lifetime achievement in that discipline.

one of a hierarchical government bureaucracy. Only by the immense efforts of post-Civil War leadership, both uniformed (Major General William T. Sherman) and civilian (Elihu Root), was the behavior of the Army first conformed from bureaucracy to that of a military profession, and then only within the officer corps. The remainder of the Army was professionalized later, though that status was lost in Vietnam only to be renewed in the re-professionalization that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. To this day the challenge remains—every morning by presence and policy, Army leaders at every level, and particularly the senior Stewards, must shift the Army’s behavior away from its bureaucratic tendencies and to the behavior of a military profession. It simply does not occur naturally; it is a function almost solely of leadership. To be more specific, read carefully the contrasts laid out in the table below:

#### **Profession Versus Bureaucracy Comparison<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Comparison</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Bureaucracy</b>
Knowledge	Expert, requires life-long learning, education, and practice to develop expertise	Non-expert skills based, learned on the job and/or through short duration training
Application	Knowledge applied as expert practice through discretion and judgment of individual professional; commitment based	Work accomplished by following SOPs, administrative rules and procedures; compliance based
Measure of Success	Mission effectiveness	Efficiency of resource expenditure
Culture	Values and ethic based; granted autonomy with high degree of authority, responsibility and accountability founded on trust; a self-policing meritocracy	Procedural compliance based; closely supervised with limited discretionary authority, highly structured, task-driven environment founded on low-trust
Investments	Priority investment in leader development; human capital/talent management; investment strategy	Priority investment in hardware, routines; driven by cost
Growth	Develop critical thinking skills to spur innovation, flexibility, adaptability; broadened perspectives	Develop tactical and technical competence to perform tasks
Motivation	Intrinsic - Sacrificial service, sense of honor and duty, work is a calling	Extrinsic - Ambition to get ahead, competition; work is a job

<sup>4</sup> This table was first published in a chapter by T.O. Jacobs and Michael G. Sanders in *The Future of the Army Profession* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005). I have subsequently adapted and updated it several times, most recently with insights from Professor John Meyer of the Navy War College.

It should be clear from these comparisons of the Army's dual character that a real tension exists within the Army and its subordinate commands and agencies. Thus leadership, both civilian and uniformed, through presence and policy is what ultimately determines the cultural and behavioral outcome of Army commands and agencies.

This is not a trivial issue, as too many today believe, because if the Army morphs into its default behavior of an obedient military bureaucracy it will be unable to do what professions alone can do.<sup>5</sup> As shown in the table, professions only exist because of two unique behaviors their clients need to exist: they create expert knowledge and develop individuals to apply it effectively and ethically under the control of a self-policed Ethic.

As new Army doctrine states, that sought after behavior is only manifested when Army stewards create and maintain within Army culture and its professionals the five essential characteristics of the Army profession (versus Enterprise bureaucracy): Military Expertise; Honorable Service; Esprit de Corps; and Stewardship which together produce the internal and external Trust needed for the Army to be, and to remain, a military profession.<sup>6</sup>

Restated in military parlance, unless the Army behaves as a military profession it will be unable to produce: (1) the evolving expertise of land combat to *Win in a Complex World*; and, (2) an Ethic to motivate the development, honorable service, and sacrifice of individual professionals and to control ethically the immense lethality of their expert work.<sup>7</sup> Either outcome, I believe, is a disaster for the security of our Republic.

I will make three inter-related arguments in support of the thesis that there is no guaranteed outcome for Army 2025. But first let me state very briefly two facts needed for context by those who may not be acquainted with the sociology of professions.<sup>8</sup> First, the Army is not a profession just because it states somewhere it is one; calling yourself a professional does not make you one! In fact the Army does not even get to determine if it is a profession. As with all professions, their clients determine when they are behaving as effective and ethical professions and their approval is seen in an established trust relationship and in the resulting autonomy of practice granted to the profession and its individual members.

Second, modern professions compete within their jurisdictions of work with many other organizations and in that competition some of them do not succeed; they die as professions. They either cease to exist because their work is no longer needed or expert (railroad porters and schedulers), or they morph into a different organizational behavior for

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5 This point is best understood by comparing, over the past decade or so, the battlefield performance of the professional US Army to that of the bureaucratic European land armies serving in the same coalitions in the Middle East.

6 US Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 1 (Washington, DC: US Department of the Army, June 2015), 1-3 - 1-5.

7 US Department of the Army, *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World: 2020-2040*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Washington, DC: US Army Training and Doctrine Command, October 2014); and Don M. Snider, "Renewing the Motivational Power of the Army's Professional Ethic," *Parameters* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 2014): 7-11.

8 The foundational text is, Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

a period until they can try to re-earn the trust of their clients (accountancy, after the Enron scandals). Thus, contrary to what Huntington implied in his classic, *The Soldier and the State*, it is simply not the case, “once a profession, always a profession.” I will return to this point in the conclusion.

With those facts stated, on to the first argument.

### **An Institutional Culture of Trust**

While it is well established in research and in Army Doctrine that trust, both internal and external, is the “currency” of professions, it is not clear the Army’s Stewards will be able to maintain the current institutional culture of trust so essential to the Army functioning as a military profession. There are at least two reasons for this:

The first and main reason is found external to the Army. It is the intense bureaucratization being abetted within all military departments by the ongoing defense reductions.<sup>9</sup> While only slightly winning the constant battle over institutional culture, the Army is now enduring extensive and de-motivational reductions in personnel and other resources (e.g., involuntary terminations of service for both officers and senior enlisted soldiers, lowered readiness in many units which demotivates leader initiative, a sustained high op-tempo which means at all levels “doing more with less,” etc.). For the Army leadership, as they execute such necessary—but clearly bureaucratic—responses, the culture of trust so tenuously held together is pressured to fray even further. This is but a recurring example of the well-accepted fact from decades past that defense reductions tend strongly to bureaucratize the military departments.<sup>10</sup>

A second reason the battle over a professional institutional culture may well be lost in the near future is the fact that the operational Army has now moved back to garrison in CONUS from its wartime deployments in the Middle East. And, it is fair to say, it is having some major problems fitting in. Particularly in the junior ranks, both officer and enlisted, there is a huge learning curve to be surmounted as individuals and units learn anew, to cite just two critical items, how to do training management/execution in garrison; and, how to develop Army leaders under stateside priorities, policies, and procedures. This transition is turning out to be a very significant leadership challenge at all levels, one that will exist for several more years with the outcome likely remaining in question.

Fortunately, the Army regularly surveys at all levels throughout the institution both the state of the Army as a profession, and Army leaders’ perceptions of leadership and leader development effectiveness. The former is found in the CASAP Report, the most current being

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9 The post-Cold War reductions within the Department of Defense provided an “extreme” case of organizational downsizing, and scholars documented then across all types of organizations such bureaucratizing effects as “increasing formalization, rules, standardization, and rigidity; . . . loss of common organizational culture; loss of innovativeness; increased resistance to change; risk aversion and conservatism in decision-making. . .” See, Kim S. Cameron, “Strategic Organizational Downsizing: An Extreme Case,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* Vol. 20 (JAI Press, 1998):185-229.

10 Periods of Defense reductions also offer opportunities for the Stewards of the profession to renegotiate jurisdictions of practice to ease an excessive optempo created by the smaller force. It remains to be seen whether that will eventuate for Army 2025.

September 1015; and, the latter in the CASAL Report, the latest being April 2014.<sup>11</sup> Of interest to this discussion are findings that cast light on the state of the Army's institutional and unit climates amid the defense reductions in which Army leaders now lead. One finding from the CASAL is particularly relevant to our discussion:

Mixed climate indicators – Commitment high (Captain intent to stay highest percent since tracked in 2000), confident in mission ability, but decrease in career satisfaction, upturn in unit discipline problems, increase in workload stress.”<sup>12</sup>

For the last item, the report notes, “Stress from high workload is a serious problem for nearly one-fifth of Army leaders.” This is a significant increase from 2009 when twice as many active component Army leaders rated it “not a problem.”<sup>13</sup>

To understand better this challenge of the bureaucratizing, indeed de-professionalizing, influence of the defense reductions coinciding with the post-war “return to garrison,” consider the case of the implementation to date of the Army's new doctrine of mission command. Within internal audiences senior Army leaders repeatedly state, “We can't do mission command unless the Army is a profession.”<sup>14</sup> They say this, correctly, because of the critical role trust plays in the execution of mission command and the fact that, uniquely, professions create and maintain high levels of trust both internally and externally—it is, as noted earlier, the “currency” of all professions. But is that requisite level of trust being generated now among those implementing mission command?

To remind, mission command is “...the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.” Several doctrinal principles are embedded in this definition, three of which are germane here: “Build cohesive teams through mutual trust,” “Exercise disciplined initiative,” and “Accept prudent risk.”

The current challenge, which is now described internally within the Army as the “hypocrisy” of mission command, rests on the different perspectives held by the Army's younger generations of leaders about the current implementation of the concept. Junior leaders, both commissioned and non-commissioned, most of whom enjoyed great freedom of action while deployed and have seldom before served in garrison, focus on the principles of exercising initiative and accepting prudent risk. They want to operate in garrison as they did while deployed—mission orders, freedom to exercise initiative, and with minimum oversight by seniors who underwrite the risks inherent in their initiatives.

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11 Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE), *Annual Survey of the Army Profession (CASAP FY15)*, Technical Report 2015-01 (West Point, NY: Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE), September 2015), <http://cape.army.mil/repository/reports/Technical%20Report%20CASAP%20FY15.pdf>; and Center for Army Leadership, *Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL)*, *Main Findings*, Technical Report 2014-01, April 2014, <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/2013CASALMainFindingsTechnicalReport2014-01.pdf>.

12 Ibid., 28-29.

13 Ibid., 35-36.

14 For example, General David Perkins, CG TRADOC, speaking at the Army's Senior Leader Seminar (SLS-15-02) in August 2015, author in attendance.

But, currently, their perception is it is not the case. In the CASAL report company grade officers and especially junior NCOs rate satisfaction with “amount of freedom/latitude in the conduct of duties” as even below the CASAL’s acceptable (but inexplicably low!) favorability threshold of 67 percent. Similarly unsatisfactory ratings were received for empowerment to make decisions, and learning from honest mistakes.<sup>15</sup>

Their battalion and brigade commanders, on the other hand, see in garrison situations significant personal and professional downsides in underwriting initiatives by junior leaders. Simply stated, executing live fire exercise in CONUS is a far more restricted and controlled activity than it was when conducted while deployed. To paraphrase one recent, and successful, battalion commander, “If you think I am going to risk a ‘top block’ OER on the initiatives of one of my platoon leaders who doesn’t know what the hell he’s doing in garrison, you are crazy.” While regrettably careerist as expressed, the CASAL data indicates this position may well be too common among the 20-30 percent of Army leaders not rated effective in demonstrating the principles of mission command. That data concludes:

Between 70-78% of leaders are rated effective in demonstrating the principles of the mission command philosophy (lowest rating of six tasks was “building effective teams” at 70%).<sup>16</sup>

In earlier defense reductions such a climate was known as “micro-management,” a recognized obstacle to leader development and the creation of positive unit climates.<sup>17</sup> The result is not only the erosion of critical leader-led trust relationships within operational units, but also the erosion more broadly of the institutional culture necessary for the Army to remain a military profession.

So, aside from the specific issue of mission command, how is the Army doing at building and maintaining a culture of trust amid this bureaucratizing environment? Let us turn again to specific CASAL data, two of which are directly focused on this question:

Seventy-three percent of leaders rate their immediate superior effective or very effective at building trust while 14% rate them ineffective. A majority of leaders (72-83% [by component]) are also viewed favorably in demonstrating trust-related behaviors including looking out for others’ welfare, following through on commitments, showing trust in other’s abilities and correcting conditions in units that hinder trust.

Two thirds of leaders report having high or very high trust in their immediate superior, peers, and subordinates (overall no more than 12% of leaders reporting having low or very low trust in those cohorts). Just over half of leaders (55%) report having high trust in their superiors two level ups (14% report low or very low trust).<sup>18</sup>

I read these data as, roughly one-quarter of all the followers surveyed indicate that their leaders are less than “effective or very effective” at building trust and 14 percent of those are, in perception, fully ineffective.

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15 Center for Army Leadership, *Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL), Main Findings*, 38.

16 *Ibid.*, 39-40.

17 See, for example, George Reed, *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the US Military* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2015).

18 Center for Army Leadership, *Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL), Main Findings*, 46.



Further, one third of Army leaders do not have “high or very high” trust in their immediate leaders, and considerably less in those two levels up. When these portions of Army leaders (1/4 -1/3) are deficient at the critical tasks of “building trust” and “being trusted,” it is difficult for me to be sanguine about the future state in internal trust within the Army.<sup>19</sup>

### **Army Leaders are Not Sufficiently Practicing Transformational Leadership**

The second element of my thesis is that current leadership practices within the Army are unlikely to provide the inspiration and motivation, and thus the trust and commitment, needed for both the institutional Army (at the policy level) and its professionals (at the level of individual practice) to prevail against the bureaucratizing pressures outlined in the first argument.

While there are currently dozens of leadership theories extant in the relevant literatures, for our purposes here they can be discussed best in the context of how they are practiced by Army leaders. Broadly speaking there are two related practices, both of which are implicitly endorsed by the Army in its leadership doctrines. Current doctrines emphasize “situational leadership,” that is, Army leaders are to be able to adjust their actions to influence and otherwise lead based on the specifics of the situation.<sup>20</sup> This is commonsense—in the chaotic work that is the Army’s, situations confronted by leaders are seldom if ever replicated.

The first broad practice is “transactional” leadership. Known for its use of contingent reinforcement, or the “if-then, carrot and stick” approach, it emphasizes the use of the formal authority of the leader to influence, indeed if required to compel, subordinates to obedience, to correct actions and behaviors.<sup>21</sup> Rewards and punishments, threats and sanctions are prominent in such interactions. The motivation and commitment produced by such a compliance-oriented relationship, then, is what we know as the obligation of the duty concept, “I must do my duty.” Thus commanders offer rewards for high performance and within UCMJ there are articles which prescribe punishments for “dereliction” of one’s duty. Understandably, such a leadership practice, if relied on too heavily, will create a top-down, legalistic, compliance-oriented climate, one more akin to a bureaucratic organization than a professional one.

Going well beyond such compliance oriented interactions is the practice of “transformational” leadership. This approach looks deeper into the human dimension of the leader-follower interaction to address “the follower’s sense of self-worth in order to engage the follower in true commitment and involvement in the effort at hand. This is what transformational leadership adds to the transactional exchange.”<sup>22</sup>

More specifically, such leadership practices focus on the underlying commitment of the leader and follower to shared goals and ideals as

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19 This data on trust is only very slightly improved from the 2013 CASAL, which rated as “moderately favorable” the perceived level of trust within Army organizations and units.

20 US Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Doctrine Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: US Department of the Army, August 2012), 4.

21 Bernard M. Bass, *Transformational Leadership: Industrial, Military, and Educational Impacts* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 6-7.

22 *Ibid.*, 4.



the basis for influencing behavior. Generally such leadership has four components: (1) Leader as role model, someone whose attributes and competencies are so compelling as to be aspired to and emulated; (2) Inspirational motivation by the leader's demonstrated commitment to shared goals, well communicated expectations, and creation of a team spirit; (3) Intellectual stimulation by the leader's encouragement of innovation and creativity by the team; and, (4) Individualized consideration of subordinates by the leader's special attention as mentor or coach to each one's needs for achievement and growth.<sup>23</sup>

The relevant questions, then, are: (1) which, or what mix, of these approaches is most likely to produce climates of trust and honorable service needed for the Army to maintain its effectiveness and status as a military profession; and, (2) which is the Army now using most?

When the first question is addressed in the context of the role of a military Ethic in regulating the performance and behavior of individual professionals, the answer is comparatively clear. Research on the Israeli military has shown the three facets of a soldier's commitment—to organizational goals, to career expectations, and to internalized ethical principles—are aligned better, and maintained that way, under the transformational techniques.<sup>24</sup>

Research on the development and capabilities of "authentic" leaders also sheds light on which practice is more effective. There, the leader's development of a cooperative interdependent relationship with subordinates based initially on his/her competence, character, and demonstrated dependableness are the sources of trust. In turn, this trust opens subordinates to further influence by their leaders, creating high-impact leadership seen both in unit effectiveness in combat and in the moral development of subordinates. "Transformational leaders induce their followers to internalize their values, belief and visions."<sup>25</sup>

Further, studies of transactional versus transformational leadership component effectiveness in both stable and unstable environments show both practices to be effective in stable environments. But in an uncertain and unstable environment, such as deployments or combat where "complexity, volatility and ambiguity are increased, transformational practices rated approximately 85 percent more effective than transactional."<sup>26</sup> This is not a marginal difference!

Thus, what is most needed for Army 2025 is authentic leaders using more frequently the practices of transformational leadership. So how is the Army doing?

Returning once again to the 2014 CASAL report, the findings of relevance here are those that give insights into the leadership techniques now being used by Army leaders. The CASAL assesses leader

23 Ibid., 5-6.

24 Reuben Gal, "Commitment and Obedience in the Military: An Israeli Case Study," *Armed Forces and Society* 11 (1985): 553-564.

25 Patrick J. Sweeney and Sean T. Hannah, "High Impact Military Leadership: the Positive Effects of Authentic Moral Leadership on Followers," in *Forging the Warrior's Character*, Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews, eds. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 91-116; quotation, 95.

26 Bernard M Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2d Edition (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 53; see also Peggy C. Combs, *US Army Cultural Obstacles to Transformational Leadership*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, March 2007).

effectiveness in each of the nine methods of influence described in Army doctrine, methods ranging from inspirational appeals and getting buy-in at the transformational end of the influence continuum, to pressure and legitimating actions by authority at the transactional end. As one would expect, Army leaders are perceived as exercising different degrees of effectiveness with these techniques. Overall the report notes:

Larger percentages of leaders use the preferred methods of influence to gain commitment from others as opposed to compliance-gaining methods, which is a positive finding. . . . Two thirds of AC leaders (69%) rate their immediate superior effective in inspirational appeals as a method of influence, while 15% rate them ineffective. While these results meet the two-thirds threshold of favorability, improvement of leader effectiveness in this skill [would be] beneficial as it is positively associated with other favorable outcomes.<sup>27</sup>

Specifically, the five lowest rated techniques were participation, pressure, personal appeals, inspirational appeals, and exchange.<sup>28</sup> It is good that three of these are transactional techniques and that, in particular, exchange rated the lowest. But I find it problematic that inspiration appeals and getting buy-in (participation) are even in this group and that inspirational appeals are next to the lowest.

So, what we currently have is 15 percent of all AC Army leaders perceived as ineffective in a vital tenet of transformational leadership and roughly a third are rated less than “effective or very effective” with the same technique. Further, in another critical tenet of transformational leadership, getting buy-in, Army leaders are only rated as 77 percent effective. How can an Army with that portion of its leaders (roughly one-fourth) perceived as less than effective in critical transformational leadership techniques expect to create a culture of trust essential to professional behavior?

These data reinforce my contention Army leaders are leading too much with transactional modes and too little with transformational ones.<sup>29</sup> Transformational leadership can still be practiced during a draw-down and in a constrained environment. But, as presented in the earlier discussion on trust, some leaders will succumb to bureaucratic tendencies and gravitate towards transactional leadership in order to “survive” and “climb” the careerist ladder. But the best organizations will be those that have transformational leaders. Both will look good on paper in the short term, but units and organizations with inspiring, developmental leaders will continue to be successful beyond that leader’s tenure, i.e., will provide a far greater contribution to the professional state of Army 2025.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, unless the use of transformational leadership increases markedly in the future one cannot be sanguine about Army 2025 being a military profession.

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27 Center for Army Leadership, *Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL), Main Findings*, 20.

28 *Ibid.*, 19.

29 Obviously leaders at all levels and at most all times use a blend of techniques; my conclusion is qualitative rather than quantitative.

30 The concluding comments here benefit from discussions with Colonel Thomas Clady, USA.

## An Ineffective Approach to Character Development

The third element of my argument is the Army does not have an effective approach to the development of the moral character of its professionals. Yet, such character is essential to the Army's daily effectiveness as a profession, and in particular as just discussed, to the authenticity requisite to transformational leaders.

Professions are not only expected to be functionally effective, but they are also expected to do their work rightly, according to their own Ethic which their client has approved. This is their basis of trust with their client, their life-blood as a profession. Not unexpectedly this is particularly true of a profession such as the military because its lethality places it in the "killing and dying" business.<sup>31</sup>

Couple this with the fact that the "practice" of the Army professional, regardless of age, rank, or location, is the "repetitive exercise of discretionary judgments."<sup>32</sup> These decisions and resulting actions, done many times a day by each Army professional, are highly moral in character in that they directly influence the well-being of other persons. Given this situation, the imperative for high personal character in each Army professional is clearly established.

However, recent research describes the Army's approach to character development as "laissez faire."<sup>33</sup> This is attributed to a number of reasons not the least of which is an institutional culture too infused with social trends that contradict the principles of the Army Ethic, imperatives such as the moral principle that each Soldier, to be trustworthy, must be capable and reliable in executing all requirements of their occupational specialty.

But the main point of the critiques is that Army doctrine essentially absolves the institution of responsibility and places almost complete responsibility on the individual professionals to development themselves morally. The key excerpt from current doctrine is:

Soldiers and Army Civilians are shaped by their backgrounds, beliefs, education, and experience. An Army leader's job would be simpler if merely checking the team member's personal values against the Army Values and developing a simple plan to align them sufficed. Reality is much different. Becoming a person or leader of character is a process involving day-to-day experiences, education, self-development, developmental counselling, coaching, and mentoring. While individuals are responsible for their own character development, leaders are responsible for encouraging, supporting and assessing the efforts of their people.<sup>34</sup>

The last sentence is key. Such a "hands off" approach is further exemplified by the fact that no extant doctrine contains a robust model explaining human or character development and how such a thing comes about and is reinforced by the fulfilling of the mutual responsibilities of the Army, its leaders, and the individual. So, without such

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31 James Toner, *True Faith and Allegiance: The Burden of Military Ethics* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 25.

32 US Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, Ibid., para 1-8 on page 1-2.

33 Brian M. Mickelson, "Character Development of U.S. Army Leaders: The Laissez-Faire Approach," *Military Review* 93, no. 5 (September-October, 2013): 30-39.

34 US Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: US Department of the Army, August 2012): paragraph 3-26, page 3-6.

common understanding and language of character development, how can the Army hope to effectively develop the strength of character of its professionals? According to one Army study, this recognized void now:

...permits leader and professional development of Soldiers and Army Civilians to proceed without explicit, coordinated focus on character in concert with competence and commitment; accepts unsynchronized, arbitrary descriptors for desired qualities of character in Soldiers and Army Civilians; continues undisciplined ways and means of assessing the success of Army efforts to develop character within education, training, and experience; and defers to legalistic, rules-based, and consequentialist reasoning in adjudging the propriety of leaders' decisions and actions.<sup>35</sup>

To further document this argument we need not rely on the all too often cited media reports of egregious cases of moral failure by individual Army leaders. Instead, the results of such a weak approach to character development and reinforcement are more reliably seen in a recent study completed by two Army War College professors aptly titled, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession*.<sup>36</sup> In it they sought to determine, as the Army is downsizing and returning to garrison, what the impact of increasing requirements for evaluative reporting up the chain of command is on the ability of Army leaders, and particularly officers, to refrain from moral compromise, or "ethical fading" as it is known in the literature:

While it has been fairly well established that the Army is quick to pass down requirements to individuals and units regardless of their ability to actually comply with the totality of the requirements, there has been very little discussion about how the Army culture has accommodated the deluge of demands on the force. This study found 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. As a result, an officer's signature and word have become tools to maneuver through the Army bureaucracy rather than being symbols of integrity and honesty. Sadly, much of the deception that occurs in the profession of arms is encouraged and sanctioned by the military institution as subordinates are forced to prioritize which requirements will actually be done to standard and which will only be reported as done to standard. As a result, untruthfulness is surprisingly common in the U.S. military even though members of the profession are loath to admit it.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the authors document clearly that the Army, as an institution, is actually abetting the very behavior it finds unacceptable as the antithesis of the behavior of a military profession. Operationally, the strength of character of Army leaders, in this case primarily officers, has been and continues to be too easily overmatched by the demands of the Army's bureaucratic behavior.

Yes, the current bureaucratizing behavior of the Army, unchecked by its Stewards, is allowing the culture of bureaucracy to dominate that of profession, a dire situation for the future of Army 2025. And, for yet another data point we can look at the long, and as yet unsuccessful, campaign the Army has waged against sexual assault and harassment

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35 Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, *The Army Concept for Character Development of Army Professionals*, Draft (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Mission Command Center of Excellence, US Army Combined Arms Center, December 23, 2015), 5, copy in possession of author.

36 Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, February 2015).

37 Ibid., ii.

within its own ranks. What better case is there that the Army's client, the American people have lost trust in its effectiveness as a military profession? Trusted professions are granted autonomy by their client; the people's Congress is doing exactly the opposite as it repeatedly seeks to pull away from Army commanders authorities to deal with this issue.

Leaders of character are not bystanders, especially when a buddy-professional is threatened! Yet by observation it is clear that the Army is not yet winning its battle against the moral disengagement, indeed moral cowardice, of the too-many bystanders among its ranks, both uniformed and civilian.

Demonstrably, then, how can the Army's current process for character development of leaders be seen as other than inefficacious? The observable behaviors are not moving in the right direction and, in my judgment, the Army's laissez faire approach to character development simply is too weak to reverse them.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

We started with the question of whether Army 2025 will be a military profession. And I have offered three reasons why I believe a positive answer is not at all assured.

Some will argue my assessment is too negative: there are very positive things going on I did not consider. I am aware of many positive things going on, even in the midst of the very trying defense reductions. One is the development of new fields of Army expert knowledge, such as cyber, and the development of soldiers and civilians to use that new, and urgently needed, knowledge. Such behaviors are exactly what one would expect from a military profession rather than from a military bureaucracy.

There is a second positive trend centered on the Army's recent intellectual efforts to rethink its own future, culminating in the new operation concept, *Win in a Complex World*.<sup>39</sup> A part of that effort is the Army's new focus on the "human dimension" of warfare which very favorably corresponds to the focus of this paper, the quintessentially human nature of modern competitive professions.<sup>40</sup> This initiative does have potential to address directly and powerfully the professional character of Army 2025. But, given the facts that it has just been initiated and the Army's poor historical record of actually implementing any strategy for, or actual reforms to, policies for human capital development, it is far too early yet for anything but sincere hope.

Thus, on balance, I believe it a fair assessment to be less than sanguine about the professional future of Army 2025. To me, the three arguments offered here simply out-weigh such positive scenarios. The fact that the Stewards' ability to prevail against the bureaucratizing tendencies of the

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<sup>38</sup> To be fair, the Army is aware of this failing and has initiated an internal effort to rethink its approach to character development. But the results are not due until late 2016 and implementation will take additional years after that. Whether this effort will be implemented to show results within Army 2025 remains to be seen.

<sup>39</sup> US Department of the Army, *The US Army Operating Concept*, Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> US Department of the Army, *The Army Human Dimension Strategy 2015* (Washington, DC: US Department of the Army, 2015), [http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/20150524\\_Human\\_Dimension\\_Strategy\\_vr\\_Signature\\_WM\\_1.pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/20150524_Human_Dimension_Strategy_vr_Signature_WM_1.pdf).

defense reductions remains problematic, the fact that Army leaders do not sufficiently use practices of transformational leadership to generate needed climates of trust; and, the fact that the Army lacks an effective approach to strengthen and reinforce the moral character of its professionals, altogether indicate to me a very problematic future for the US Army as a military profession.

All of this brings us back to the title of this article and to the moral agency that the Army's Stewards play in such a time as this. They alone have the moral responsibility and accountability to keep the Army a military profession, and thus an effective national instrument of land-power. And they will only do so by urgently and forthrightly addressing, among many others, the issues outlined in this essay.

As General Odierno noted when he commenced his tenure as CSA at the beginning of these crunching force reductions (epigram to this essay), "the necessary reductions will be found." But, as he also noted, they will not define success for the Army's Stewards. Rather, it will be the residual effectiveness of Army 2025 that defines their success in executing their moral agency. And that effectiveness will be assessed, as we have done in this analysis, by whether Army 2025 is then a military profession "ready for the first battle of the next war," or just another obedient military bureaucracy.<sup>41</sup>

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41 This phrase is adopted from, Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, *America's First Battles, 1776-1965* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

