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ETHICS THOUGHT PAPER

ETHICAL PROBLEM FACING THE ARMY

Senior Officers Are Failing the NCO Corps:

Proposed Changes to NCOES Will Hurt the Army

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Almost every senior officer that has addressed the student body of the Sergeants Major Academy has stated one reoccurring theme. Each one of them has said how important noncommissioned officers are and how NCOs have made the biggest differences in their careers. All said how they would not be where they are now without the NCO. The officers are now supporting decisions to tear apart the very corps they say is so vital. These officers are not living up to the Army values if they significantly alter the Noncommissioned Officer Educational System (NCOES).

Senior officers are failing the Army through their decisions on the future of the NCO corps. Specifically, the drastic changes to the NCOES will affect the Army for several years. The NCOES has been the centerpiece of creating the best NCO corps in the world. Changes made at the level currently discussed will not affect NCOs and the Army immediately. When the problem finally does appear, it will be too late to fix.

This paper will first address reasons for the changes to NCOES. Then the discussion will focus on the proposed changes to the system. Next, the paper will focus on the potential effects and consequences of the proposition. Finally, this paper will provide recommendations to prevent the collapse of the foundation of the NCO corps.

Why are these changes occurring? There are three basic reasons. First is the transformation of the Army. This operating concept is changing how the Army fights. This coincides with the Global War on Terror (GWOT). This war is our current fight and is probably going to be a long one. Finally, money always plays a central role in officer decisions on the Army. First on the list is transformation.

The Army's transformation to modular units or Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) has created a 36-month life cycle. This concept allows for cohesion and readiness. The Army

intends to tie all Soldier and unit functions to this time cycle. Within this 36 months, there is set time for training and schools for Soldiers and leaders.

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) has deployed Soldiers to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places. Some Soldiers are now on their third rotation to a combat zone. This war has no foreseeable end. While deployed, Soldiers' educational opportunities are extremely limited. The Army ties promotions to schools. If you cannot attend the school, you cannot keep the promotion. The Soldier pays in the end.

The Army is paying for this war in many ways. Where does the Army's money go? Politics restrict funds. Elected civilians allocate budgets for the Army. Officers then set policy and control the funds. Sergeants have minimal roles in the major finances of the Army. Because of this system, NCOs cannot control the money for NCOES. This lack of voice over money results in proposals to cut NCO programs first. Officers control the "Golden Rule." "He, who has the gold, makes the rules." Here are the "Golden" proposals for NCOES.

One proposal is to stop NCO schools for three years. The premise is to keep leaders in units and capable of deployment instead of going to schools. It is a notion of acceptable risk. The risk is these sergeants' education will come later. The Army needs them to fight now. The question is, do the sergeants have the skills and education level needed to win this fight? A delay or absence could have effects on the ability to wage war in the future.

If the Army determines that a soldier can be successful without this education system, the logical extension will be why have the schools at all? If the Army can be successful for three years without this program, can we eliminate it completely? The problem with this idea is this is where NCOES came from. History shows a need for a systematic program for NCO education.

In the 1970's, there was a need identified for these schools. Just because the Army is at war does not eliminate that need from 35 years ago.

Another proposal to change NCOES is to shorten the courses and require completion of some of the work at home. Shortening the courses is not the solution. The Army is at war. NCOs need to know more, not less in wartime. NCOs are very busy with their full-time jobs in the Army. The solution is not to burden Soldiers more with homework after they return home from work. This is more stress on Soldiers and families in an already stressful life.

What are the effects and consequences of eliminating or significantly changing NCOES? One effect is the cycle of the unit will stifle a Soldier's career. The Army only wants to let Soldiers go to school during a very limited time during the 36 months. This will limit promotions and professional development. The unit gains at the Soldier's loss. Officers need to remember that without Soldiers, there would not be units. Soldiers support leaders and they deserve support back from them.

Cancellation of NCOES would eliminate the need for all the support and instructors for the courses. Combat commanders would gain from the use these resources. This is short-term thinking on two levels. One problem is that this will not be a short-term war. Will the Army ask for another cancellation three years from now when the Army is still fighting? The other problem is three years from now, the NCOs who did not go the appropriate level of schooling will be eligible for their next promotion. Now they will be eligible for "college" without ever attending "high school." At least they received their "GED" in Iraq or Afghanistan.

It would be unfair to discuss the problems of changing NCOES if the discussion did not include recommendations. Change is not bad. There is certainly room for improvement within the current system. The different levels need to address what critical tasks deserve protection

and what tasks can go. The focus could change to combat while the Army is at war. Later, revisions could focus on other tasks for the future. NCOES could adapt to the needs of the Army. It can survive *to be* the fittest.

If the courses need shortened, then only the most important tasks should remain. The solution is not to distribute classes or requirements to the individual before they are in the course. Extend the days of the course. Work weekends if necessary. The NCOs will rise to the challenges made of them. However, they must feel like they matter. Our leaders and future leaders deserve the best the Army has to offer. Sergeants give their best everyday.

NCOES is vital in the formation of qualified NCOs to perform their wartime missions. The schools are not a distracter but a facilitator. Elimination of these courses will have a detrimental effect for years to come. If the officers want to make changes to the Army, then they should make the Army bigger so there are more forces to rotate to war, school, and home. This would truly be taking care of the Army. Officers are making ethical decisions about the long-term future of the Army and Soldiers. Officers and their senior NCO supporters need to consider more than their careers and money when making these important decisions. The future of the NCO corps and the Army is at stake. We can do America and freedom better than this.