

Running Head: THE WAR AGAINST INTEGRITY

The War Against Integrity

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Abstract

When fraternization and adultery occur among military leaders, such behavior negatively impacts unit cohesiveness and morale, especially when it goes unpunished. When President Clinton was not removed from office following the Monica Lewinsky scandal, military leaders were thrown into an ethical dilemma: appear to condone the Commander-in-Chief's misdoings or publicly denounce his behavior. They remained silent, communicating to Soldiers that leaders lacking moral authority can impose rules and punishments on subordinates. For a "privileged" few like the President, there are "professional" ethics and "personal" ethics. However, as Senator John McCain stated, Presidents must live by a higher standard. Unfortunately, today's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy continues to say to Soldiers that integrity is relative. Only by living the Army Values can Soldiers be Army Strong.

Recently, Donald Trump announced that he would give Miss America, Tara Conner, what he called a “second chance,” if she went into alcohol rehabilitation. The next day, Rosie O’Donnell responded to Trump’s decision on *The View*, a morning TV show on ABC. She said that the decision annoyed her “on a multitude of levels,” and then went on to make the following observations: “He’s the moral authority? Left the first wife, had an affair. Left the second wife, had an affair. Had kids both times—but he’s the moral compass for 20-year-olds in America!” Rosie O’Donnell is certainly not a proponent of what you might call “traditional family values.” However, the point she made resonated with many people. Character matters, and more particularly, marital fidelity matters.

Contrary to TV shows like *M.A.S.H.* in which the military unit portrayed seemed to gain more cohesiveness and camaraderie the more that sexual misconduct occurred, in the real world, violations of standards of morality by military leaders can have a devastating effect on troop morale and combat readiness, especially for the younger, unmarried enlisted Soldiers. This I saw firsthand with those returning from Iraq. The single Soldiers that I met as a Chaplain Assistant at my Chaplain’s single Soldier retreats had really no complaints about the hardships they experienced in the war. Their main complaint was what they had seen firsthand (or had heard of through the rumor mill): instances of fraternization and adultery involving officers and enlisted leaders alike, with seemingly no consequences being meted out, even though accusations of such behavior could have been easily substantiated in many instances. Young, idealistic, and ready to lay their lives down for their country, these promising men and women were cruelly disappointed by “leaders” who were technically in charge, as far as the military rank structure is concerned, but lacked moral authority. They so much desired to follow people that they could look up to. Disillusioned, many of them had decided that the military was not what it was

“cracked up to be,” and were planning not to reenlist. Yet, the experiences of the particular Soldiers that I encountered are surely not the norm.

A Double Standard

The military clearly forbids both adultery and fraternization (see Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, and Article 134 of the United States Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)), and violators, at least it would appear based on a number of high profile cases recently (e.g., Army 4-star General Kevin Byrnes), are routinely punished. Commanders recognize that it would send the wrong message to Soldiers were violators not held accountable for their wrongdoing. Character matters, whether in private or in public. A number of senior officers and enlisted, in fact, have been relieved from duty because of adulterous affairs. As a rule, they have not been given that so-called “second chance.” However, our previous Commander-in-Chief, President William Jefferson Clinton, was given a second chance and not removed from office for his affair with the intern Monica Lewinsky, and my hypothesis is that it caused a dilemma for leaders in the military that could have had serious consequences on our national security, particularly in time of war.

Clinton’s relationship with Monica Lewinsky would be the equivalent in the military of a married 4-star General having a consensual sexual relationship with his young, single, enlisted Private-First-Class (PFC) female driver. In such a case, the General’s removal from his position would be swift, and court martial proceedings initiated immediately. By the President not being removed from office, the message communicated to Soldiers was that failing to uphold values like moral integrity is only an issue if you are not the one in power. In other words, you will be punished for not upholding those values if you are the person who fights the wars and is asked to

pay the ultimate sacrifice. On the other hand, the individual who sends you to the battlefield, and who at night gets to sleep in a nice cozy bed in the White House, with much less risk of losing life or limb, can behave as he or she so pleases without losing their position of authority. Obviously, such an idea is absurd.

The ethical dilemma for military leaders during the Clinton administration, especially those at the highest levels, was that they were expected to refrain from publicly denouncing their Commander-in-Chief, while continuing to encourage, uphold, and enforce the highest standards of moral conduct by their troops (as specified by military regulations and the UCMJ). True, denouncing the behavior of the President publicly would not only have been highly irregular, but also risky. It would require a significant amount of intestinal fortitude, since such an action would likely have been interpreted as disloyal, even seditious, resulting in one's military career being terminated. Officers and non-commissioned officers are not in the habit of denouncing their superiors in a public forum. That is not how the military works. By refraining to do so in this case, however, their moral authority and credibility with the troops was compromised, because it is natural for young Soldiers to lump all senior leaders into the category of "hypocrites"—those who require their subordinates to do as they say, not as they do.

I should mention here that technically, President Clinton was not being charged with sexual misconduct. According to Article One in the impeachment proceedings, Clinton committed perjury before the Grand Jury. Article Two, which was much more lengthy (see Linder, 2007), had to do with Clinton's obstruction of justice. However, though his sexual misconduct was not what was being addressed directly, but rather his lying to the Grand Jury and his obstruction of justice, the basis for the charges against Clinton (that is, what got him in the predicament in the first place) was his sexual misconduct; and, such conduct, as has been stated

already, would have resulted in the immediate removal of a Soldier from his or her position of leadership, both then and now.

Why a Higher Standard is Necessary

No doubt during the impeachment proceedings, some military leaders avoided an ethical dilemma by rationalizing the situation this way: “Yes, government leaders are part of the military system. Within the Executive branch, the President is the ultimate individual in charge—the Commander-in-Chief. As a Soldier, I must respect his office because it represents authority, regardless of whether I agree with or respect the office holder.” Other leaders chose to ignore the impeachment proceedings, perhaps with the hope that the whole affair would eventually “just go away.” Fortunately, our country was not in the midst of any major military conflicts at the time, for Clinton’s lack of moral integrity would have greatly demoralized the troops, as common sense would tell you. Furthermore, in betraying the nation’s trust and dishonoring his office, Clinton’s actions during a real war could have been used as a tool for fanning the flames of resistance and hate against the United States, which in turn would have made our Soldiers more vulnerable to the more concentrated efforts, devices and schemes of our nation’s enemies.

Some elected officials, especially those who had served in the military, recognized what was at stake. One such individual, Senator John McCain of Arizona, a former Navy pilot and POW during the Vietnam War, made the following observations (“Allpolitics,” 1999):

All of my life, I have been instructed never to swear an oath to my country in vain. In my former profession, those who violated their sworn oath were punished severely and considered outcasts from our society. I do not hold the President to the same standard that I hold military officers to. I hold him to a higher standard. Although I may admit to

failures in my private life, I have at all times, and to the best of my ability, kept faith with every oath I have ever sworn to this country. I have known some men who kept that faith at the cost of their lives...

Most officers of my acquaintance would have resigned their commission had they been discovered violating their oath. The President did not choose that course of action. He has left it to the Senate to determine his fate. And the Senate, as we all know, is going to acquit the President. As much as I would like to, I cannot join in his acquittal...

No, an ordinary citizen would not be treated as the President has been treated. But ordinary citizens don't enforce the laws for the rest of us. Ordinary citizens don't have the world's mightiest armed forces at their command. Ordinary citizens do not usually have the opportunity to be figures of historical importance.

Presidents are not ordinary citizens. They are extraordinary, in that they are vested with so much more authority and power than the rest of us. We have a right; indeed, we have an obligation, to hold them strictly accountable to the rule of law.

If a sufficient majority of Senators had voted like Senator McCain and impeached the President, military leaders would have been spared the ethical dilemma of whether to speak out against the Commander-in-Chief in a public forum.

Conclusion

We have an obligation as a nation to hold our political leaders, particularly our Commander-in-Chief, to at least the same standard of moral conduct that we hold our Soldiers to. That would send out a clear message to Soldiers that while rank may have its privileges, it also has its responsibilities. The greater the responsibility, the greater the scrutiny, because

people want to follow a leader who is honorable and true. They want to follow a man or woman who possesses integrity. Integrity, one of the seven Army Values, includes doing what is right, both in one's personal life as well as in one's professional life. To behave otherwise is to be duplicitous. Be accountable and do not violate that sacred trust to your country and to the people with whom and for whom you serve.

Unfortunately, while we do not have a situation with our current Commander-in-Chief as I have described here, nevertheless the message that duplicitous conduct is okay is being communicated to our Soldiers in today's Army via our "Don't ask, don't tell" policy. This policy was put into place, not ironically, during the Clinton administration. The policy communicates to Soldiers that homosexual behavior is okay, as long as one is duplicitous and hides such behavior from others. Whether one regards homosexuality as an acceptable behavior (and it is a behavior—no reliable research proves that there is a genetic component to homosexuality), this Army policy contradicts the basic Army value of integrity, not to mention that it is inconsistent with other Army policies having to do with sexual misconduct, like adultery and fraternization. Of course, the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy was not the focus of my paper here. However, it is a clear example of how duplicitous and compartmentalized behavior, what the Army is against both in the letter and spirit of its moral codes, regulations and traditions, can be inadvertently (or openly and purposefully) condoned, resulting in a persistent eating away at the very values that we as Soldiers are entrusted to uphold.

Loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage are the seven Army Values, not the "seven empty and meaningless platitudes." They are values that we want to truly live by. By living these values, we will be true to ourselves and to others. By being true to ourselves and to others, we will be Army Strong.

References

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