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**THESIS**

**KNOWLEDGE WITHHOLDING AND LEADER BEHAVIOR:  
FIVE U.S. GENERAL AND FLAG OFFICERS**

by

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December 2020

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**KNOWLEDGE WITHHOLDING AND LEADER BEHAVIOR:  
FIVE U.S. GENERAL AND FLAG OFFICERS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Knowledge withholding may co-occur with knowledge sharing, but current research has a negative connotation and focuses on quantitatively investigated antecedents. However, the social context seems to play a crucial role in this phenomenon. We therefore investigated knowledge withholding and leader behavior. In doing so, we applied a qualitative methodology and analyzed five memoirs of U.S. general and flag officers. The 1,853 memoir pages revealed 247 knowledge-withholding instances and eight different actors. We developed a framework of interdependence theory and social identity theory to order and explain the data. We found that the general and flag officers, as well as the other actors, withheld knowledge. Also, knowledge is withheld to (a) gain an advantage over another actor (negative interdependence), (b) yield a benefit for oneself and a trusted actor or to gain an edge over an untrusted actor (positive interdependence), (c) adhere to predetermined processes (neutral interdependence), and (d) create an advantage for the group with which a person socially identifies (social identity). Most importantly, the general and flag officers use knowledge withholding as a tool to achieve their goals. These findings indicate that this phenomenon in leader behavior may have been overlooked and should undergo further research.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“What do I know? Who needs to know? Have I told them?” U.S. General Mattis repeatedly asked these questions to himself and the people around him to ensure that everybody is informed. In his book *Callsign Chaos*, he describes how, on multiple occasions, this mantra enabled initiative among his troops. On the one hand, it seems that U.S. General Mattis heavily focused on knowledge sharing to increase performance. Research supports this practical example and shows that leader behavior that increases knowledge sharing also increases performance (Srivastava, Bartol & Locke, 2006). Leader behavior can also improve performance by facilitating knowledge sharing with people within and outside an organization (Obeidat & Zyod, 2015). Furthermore, leaders can fulfill various roles, and research shows that most of these roles have a strong and positive influence on knowledge sharing (Yang, 2007).

On the other hand, the second question, “Who needs to know?” also suggests that not everybody needs to know everything. This indicates that U.S. General Mattis also consciously withheld knowledge. In his book, he even describes that “the details you don’t give in your orders are as important as the one you do” (p.44). Some researchers have also noticed this nuance. They started to consider knowledge withholding as a phenomenon that may co-exist with knowledge sharing instead of considering it as the dark side of knowledge sharing or the other side of the continuum (Kang, 2016; Lin & Huang, 2010; Pan & Zhang, 2018). Extant research on knowledge withholding reveals a slightly negative connotation (Holten, Hancock, Persson, Hansen & Hogh, 2016; Huo, Cai, Luo, Men, & Jia, 2016) and focuses on why and when this phenomenon occurs (Anand, Centobelli & Cerchione, 2020; Xiao & Cooke, 2019). Moreover, thus far, only a few researchers have studied leader behavior and knowledge withholding (Offergelt et al., 2018; Peng et al., 2019).

Although Anand et al. (2020) describe events in which knowledge withholding occurs, they do not specifically put a person with a leadership role at the center stage. Looking at the example of U.S. General Mattis, we sense that current research may have overlooked knowledge withholding in leader behavior. We, therefore, focus on a leader as

an actor in knowledge-withholding events. We recognize the importance of the context in which people withhold knowledge. As such, we take a broad perspective and focus on the research questions: “In what types of events do leaders withhold knowledge?,” “Who are the other actors in knowledge-withholding events?,” and “How do leaders use knowledge withholding in their work?” Due to our research question’s explorative nature, we will take a qualitative approach and investigate five recent U.S. general and flag officers’ memoirs.

Our contributions are threefold. First, we offer an investigation from the perspective of leader behavior in regards to knowledge withholding. We, thereby, also distill the various actors in these events. Second, we present an integrative framework that organizes knowledge-withholding events and actors. This framework illuminates the theoretical mechanisms of leader behavior and knowledge withholding. Third, we provide an analysis that illustrates how leaders use the integrative framework of knowledge withholding.

We, therefore, start with a theoretical framework based on the two theories of interdependency and social identity. We then describe our qualitative methodology and, subsequently, continue with the results. At the end of this paper, we discuss the findings and conclude that all actors withhold their knowledge and, more specifically, leaders apply the integrative framework as a tool to achieve their goals.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Until now, we discussed knowledge withholding as one broad concept, but other researchers also identified the related constructs of knowledge hiding (Connelly, Zweig, Webster & Trougakos, 2012) and knowledge hoarding (Evans, Hendron & Oldroyd, 2015). Knowledge withholding is defined as “the likelihood that an individual will give less than full effort to contributing knowledge” (Lin & Huang, 2010, p. 188). This broad definition covers all situations in which knowledge is unrequested or requested by another person. This definition also covers situations in which knowledge is intentionally or unintentionally withheld. While knowledge hiding and hoarding are categorized within the knowledge-withholding definition, researchers agree that the two constructs are distinct from each other (Connelly et al., 2012; Kang, 2016). More specifically, knowledge hiding and hoarding are intentional behavior but differ in applying (un)requested knowledge.

On the one hand, knowledge hiding involves requested knowledge. It is defined as “an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person” (Connelly et al., 2012). On the other hand, knowledge hoarding refers to the intentional withholding of unrequested knowledge. It is defined as “an individual’s deliberate and strategic concealment of knowledge and information or the fact that they may possess relevant knowledge or information” (Evans et al., 2015, p. 495). Note that Evans et al. (2015) use knowledge hiding and hoarding as synonyms while Anand et al. (2020) considers knowledge withholding, hiding, and hoarding as similar concepts. We regard these three as distinct concepts.

Although Anand et al. (2020) conducted a systematic literature review and described various events in which knowledge hiding occurs, these events lack a coherent theoretical explanation. While we aim to develop such an integrative framework, we build on their work of identifying reasons. Moreover, current research reveals 93 reasons of knowledge withholding. Furthermore, not all these reasons are distinct constructs. For example, 16 reasons regard to personality traits such as neuroticism, openness to experiences, and conscientiousness (Chawla & Gupta, 2020; Pan & Zhang, 2018). Another seven reasons focus on leader behavior (Peng, Wang & Chen, 2019; Zhao, Liu, Li, & Yu,

2019) while many others illuminate reasons such as competition (Butt & Ahmad, 2019), (dis)trust (Connelly, Zweig, Webster & Trougakos, 2012; Lin & Huang, 2010), and (in)justice (Abubakar, Behravesh, Rezapouraghdam & Yildiz, 2019; Pan & Zhang, 2018).

While empirical evidence supports these 95 reasons and thoroughly explains why people withhold, hide, and hoard their knowledge, they do not investigate this behavior in a situational context. Take, for instance, war as the ultimate example of competition. Butt and Ahmad (2019) showed that competition positively relates to knowledge hiding, so the greater the competition, the greater the knowledge hiding. This relation is imaginable for the actors who are at war with each other. They both have an obvious goal to defeat their opponent. Therefore, the actors have a high level of competition and a high level of knowledge hiding due to the positive relation.

However, during war, knowledge about an upcoming attack is hidden from opponents and the people within a unit. While competition explains the knowledge hiding towards the opponent, this does not explain the knowledge withholding inside the unit. Looking at current evidence, collaboration has a negative relationship with knowledge hiding, so the more collaboration, the lesser knowledge hiding (Chawla & Gupta, 2019). When we assume that the unit is about to start an attack has a high level of collaboration, this finding suggests that knowledge hiding should be low. So, this antecedent does not explain the knowledge withholding within that unit. A similar rationale applies to the antecedent trust, which negatively relates to knowledge hiding (Lin & Huang, 2010). So, trust does also not explain the knowledge withholding with the unit.

Taken together, knowledge withholding within a military unit during wartime seems to be one example that cannot be explained by current research. The present quantitative research does not seem to value the “messiness” of human interaction. We suggest that these actors and their goals have some interdependence level (Johnson, 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In other words, the actors’ goals are related to each other, and interdependence theory explains this relationship. For example, if the planned attack succeeds, then that unit achieves its goal. At the same time, the opponent loses and does not meet their goal. This illustrates that the goals of the unit and the opponent have a negative relationship. If one wins, the other loses. This relationship is called negative

interdependence. The example also shows that if the unit achieves its goal, everybody in that unit successfully realizes their aim. This illustrates that the unit's goals as a whole and the individuals in the unit have a positive relationship. This is called positive interdependence.

However, interdependence theory is not sufficient to explain all these situations. We suggest that an actor can also withhold knowledge based on social identification with a larger group. Social identity theory describes that people may experience overlap between their individual and group identity. The groups may be countries, organizations, teams, or professions (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tajfel, 1978). This identification may even be so strong that people act against their self-interest (Turner, 1978). Returning to the example, the unit commander who planned an attack may identify strongly with that unit. Based on this social identification, he may decide that knowledge withholding towards his unit member benefits them all.

Therefore, we take a step back and explore events of leader behavior and knowledge withholding. We start by reducing the "messiness" of human interaction and identify the events and actors. Questions that we have are the following, "Do leaders withhold, hide, or hoard knowledge?," "Do other actors show this behavior to leaders?," and "Do leaders have various interdependencies and social identities?" Next, we organize these events and actors in an integrative framework of interdependence theory and social identity theory. Moreover, this framework explains the leader's behavior in knowledge-withholding events. Lastly, we reintroduce the "messiness" again and use the data to describe how leaders apply this framework of knowledge withholding, hiding, and hoarding as a tool in their daily work.

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### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. SELECTION OF DATA SOURCES

This research project aims to identify the events and actors of knowledge withholding. On the one hand, military organizations tend to be closed institutions (Kleinreesink & Soeters, 2016), but more and more of its personnel have chosen to write their memoirs (Harari, 2007). Authors of memoirs draw on their memory to write a narrative that looks back on their experiences. Such a narrative tends to be reflective and describe social situations. They also cover defining moments over a substantial period when the main characters participated in combat. In doing so, memoirs may directly serve as data sources for research (Harari, 2007; Marche, 2015; Kleinreesink & Soeters, 2016; Rozman, 2019). Moreover, they are specifically useful for studying command and command networks (Harari, 2007).

On the other hand, memoirs are not similar to historical accounts and are censored by definition (Harari, 2007; Kleinreesink & Soeters, 2016). Most memoirs (61%) acknowledge their narrative as subjective even though many (57%) make some truth claims (Kleinreesink & Soeters, 2016). They are also less accurate than wartime diaries, letters, and administrative documents but can complement those documents (Harari, 2007). Moreover, only the study of other sources can reveal the missing elements in memoirs (Rozman, 2019). Taken together, military memoirs may provide valuable insights into leader behavior in social situations such as knowledge withholding.

Besides these advantages and disadvantages, memoirs may be written by authors other than the main character. These authors are credited for their work or they acted as ghostwriters. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the latter is defined as “a hack writer who does work for which another person takes the credit.” In all these instances, a memoir must present the main character’s true experiences and reflections (Barrington, 2002). Therefore, we will discuss some memoirs reviews to identify potential bias and shortfalls in the data sources. Taken together, we used military memoirs as qualitative data sources to investigate leader behavior and knowledge withholding.

Furthermore, we applied the multiple case-study methodology of Yin (2010) to U.S. general and flag officers' memoirs. The selection of memoirs is based on six criteria (see Table 1). We identified the U.S. general and flag officers who had been commanders of U.S. Central Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, or the operations in Afghanistan. The latter operations were named the International Security Assistance Force and Resolute Support. This resulted in a list of 35 U.S. general and flag officers. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ran at the same time so many of these officers had experience in both geographical areas. For example, General Petraeus served as the commander in Iraq and Afghanistan. While some of these general and flag officers wrote a book, we specifically investigated which of them wrote a memoir. Based on the six criteria, we identified five sources of data. These data sources are the books of General Mattis with *Callsign Chaos*, General McRaven with *Sea Stories*, General McChrystal with *My Share of the Task*, General Frank with *American Soldier*, and General Petraeus with his book *The Insurgents*. Note that *Callsign Chaos* and *The Insurgents* are written by credited authors other than the main character and we found no indication of ghostwriting. These data sources have a total of 1853 pages.

Table 1. Selection criteria for cases

<b>Binds cases on:</b>	
Time:	Timeframe 9/11 to January, 2020
Culture (land/organizational):	United States military
Leadership level:	Four-star general officers
Leadership experience:	Commanded troops in combat
Geography of experience:	Commanded troops in Iraq and Afghanistan
Available data:	Memoirs of general officers

The selected data sources cover the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. More specifically, General Franks, McChrystal, and Petraeus are former U.S. Army officers, whereas general Mattis is a former U.S. Marine and Admiral McRaven a U.S. Navy SEAL. This representation means that three out of four U.S. military services are covered. Note that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had substantial ground components of the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps. The U.S. Air Force was also an important troop contributor in those wars, but numerically less than the Army and Marine Corps. A similar rationale applies to the U.S. Navy. They contributed troops in, for example, support roles and special operations forces. This could explain why the U.S. Army and Marine Corps provided most commanders in those wars, resulting in a relatively greater number of memoirs.

## **B. BOOK REVIEWS ON THE DATA SOURCES**

All of these memoirs are self-reported data sources with an associated risk of confirmation bias. Therefore, we started with an analysis of book reviews on these data sources to get a sense of the reviewers' perceptions. The book reviews are drawn from outlets such as *Military Review*, *the Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Political Science Quarterly*.

General Franks describes his military life in the book *American Soldier*. Hoar (2004) reflects that "he [General Franks] gives us an extraordinary view of the contingency planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom." He also describes, "we get some views of the secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, but I would have preferred to see more." Foutenot (2005) also notes that "Franks is less convincing when describing Iraq's and Afghanistan's strategic end states." Hoar (2004) has a similar sentiment and says, "my only disappointment with the book centers on the narrative related to "Phase Four"-the reconstruction of Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime." He also suggests that he would have liked to learn more about "Rumsfeld's management style." These notes of Hoar (2004) and Foutenot (2005) indicate that they suspect some level of knowledge withholding based on General Franks' account on the two politicians. In sum, Foutenot (2005) hopes that "in the coming years he [General Franks] will elaborate on the endgame in both campaigns" while Hoar (2004) writes that

“the definitive book on these two campaigns, however, will be written at a later time.” Yet, Hoar (2004) also calls the book a “great contribution to understanding the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.” Moreover, Foutenot (2005) also describes the book as “a great story ... straightforward in ways most autobiographies are not.” He regards it as “honest, captivating, illuminating, and direct” and says that “*American Soldier* is an important addition to the genre of military autobiography.”

General Mattis was a subordinate of General Franks in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Freedman (2020) notes that General Mattis blames, for example, “General Tommy Franks for failing to capture Osama bin Laden.” Freedman (2020) also notes that General Mattis is “forthright in his criticism” on the policy regarding Iraq and criticized the policy of “first for being in too much of a rush to invade Iraq, and the second for being in too much of a rush to withdraw.” Sky (2019) finds that General “Mattis is equally forthright in his interactions with Iraqi sheikhs.” However, “it’s clear...that Mattis [as Secretary of Defense] didn’t see eye to eye with the President [Trump],” Freedman (2020) describes. Overall, General Mattis is “admired by his troops for his blunt, no-nonsense talking, and respected by civilians for his principled stand against torture and for urging for the U.S. State Department to be fully funded” (Sky, 2019). Essentially, Freedman (2020) concludes that *Call Sign Chaos* is about the “practical and ethical challenges of military leader behavior” to “send soldiers into the field to kill and be killed.” Sky (2019) agrees with this view, says that “the book is in essence about leader behavior,” and concludes that “James Mattis shares a lifetime of learning from wars that failed to offer a better tomorrow. We need to take these lessons and do better in the future.”

Years later, Mead (2013) and Bacevich (2013) acknowledge that a defeat of American efforts in Iraq was nearby when General McChrystal took command of the special operations forces (SOF). Mead (2013) continues that General McChrystal reinvented “the military as a more flexible, flatter, faster, and more information-driven organization.” Cobb (2013) describes this as “the most intensely transformative period in SOF history.” Cobb (2013) also writes that General McChrystal was “an active participant in creating the most effective, discriminating and precise killing machine ever devised to attack individual targets.” General McChrystal has an “impressive aptitude for military

tactics” (Bacevich, 2013) with “successes leading the Task Force in Iraq” (Cobb, 2013) while he experienced “enormous pressures, making many errors, and encountering many obstacles” (Mead, 2013).

Mead (2013) refers to the strategy in Afghanistan and says that General McChrystal was “arguing persuasively that it represented a reasonable approach.” Cobb (2013) reflects that “McChrystal hedged his bets and employed both counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism – but he simply talked up the former and did not discuss the latter.” Bacevich (2013) seems to agree with this view and writes that General McChrystal “offers little to suggest that success was in the offing regardless of how long he might have stayed in the job.” With his resignation after the article in the Rolling Stone, Fontenot notes that “what little he says about what happened evokes no sympathy for him and his team” and finds too much comparison with Grant and policy “but of this he says little.”

At that time, President Obama announced that General Petraeus would take over the command in Afghanistan. Kaplan writes the book *The Insurgents* with General Petraeus as the main character. Freedman (2013) reviews that “in the wake of the Vietnam War, the army had developed an institutional allergy to counterinsurgency.” The reviewer also notes that “he [Kaplan] vividly captures the drama of Petraeus’ struggle against a Pentagon establishment.”

Moreover, “one factor stands out throughout this book,” Herspring (2016) continues that “it is clear that Petraeus is the conductor of this army symphony. He seized on the brilliance and creativity of officers who had taught in the Social Science Department at West Point.” However, Cambanis (2013) seems to display some disappointment because the “narrative ends before the news of Petraeus’s embarrassing and career-halting extramarital affair.”

So, two generals commanded the same coalition. On the one hand, a review of General McChrystal’s book starts with noting that “memoirs or...autobiographies are suspect” (Fontenot, 2013). In the case of *My Share of the Task*, he writes that General McChrystal “seems to have no concern for the self-deprecation” but “succeeds in writing-well.” Hart (2013) notes that “McChrystal does not provide sustained reflection on the

nature of leader behavior or its qualities.” He also suggests a “more philosophical account of lessons learned” to serve the U.S. military’s transition. He even notes that the book “contains many unaddressed undercurrents that require further thought.” Hart (2003) thus seems to suspect some knowledge withholding. However, Hart (2013) also noticed that “he assumes blame” and “is quick to share credit.” He agrees that “there is much to learned” in a book that provides “invaluable insight.” In this line, Mead (2013) calls *My Share of the Task* “one of the best memoirs of life in the U.S. military” and describes McChrystal as “self-controlled and professional” to the end.

On the other hand, reviews have also been written in the book *The Insurgents* about General Petraeus. Jackson (2014) concludes that “at its best, this volume is a revealing, second-hand autobiography of the authors of the doctrine. The book is at its weakest in connecting these ideas with outcomes.” He argues that it is an “uncritical summary” of new doctrine while “it does little to assess its validity.” In this line, Cambanis (2013) speaks about “savvy Petraeus” who “knew how to manage up, cultivating powerful Pentagon patrons and winning President Bush’s favor with a misleading op-ed in the Washington Post.” His rationale is that “they overestimated themselves. They fancied they were inventing a new way of war and casting out the demons of a moribund Pentagon. In fact, they were doing something far less grandiose.” However, other reviewers have a different perspective. Freedman (2013) describes the book as “a disquisition on the meaning of contemporary warfare and the challenge of framing a coherent strategy that addresses the concerns of civilian populations and intervening governments alike.” While Herspring (2016) describes Petraeus as “the intellectual powerhouse behind the change in approach to fighting a war,” Freedman (2013) considers the book “to be one of the most important works on the U.S. Army extant, there is at least one correction that must be made.”

During General Petraeus’ command in Afghanistan, Admiral McRaven also served in Iraq and Afghanistan as commander of a SOF task force. He described his experiences in the book *Sea Stories*. In his review, Ackerman (2019) recalls this event from the book, “when his pistol was later discovered, his father asked him, ‘Do you know anything about this?’ McRaven writes: ‘And then, for the first and last time in my life, I lied to my father. ‘No sir,’ I said.’” Ackerman (2019) finds this “Washington-esque in its I-chopped-down-

the-cherry-tree tone” and continues that “this is the book’s weakness. You can’t help but wonder how much these vignettes are aiming for truth and how much are they aiming for something else.” Ackerman, as a former Marine officer, regards this as “unnecessary SEAL mythmaking.” He concludes with the critiques that “McRaven could have written about what isn’t working in the SEAL teams. He could have touched on the emotional costs veterans pay for two decades of unending war.” He continues that, “addressing the complexity and humanity of the community would have been truly powerful, for being unique and new. That level of honesty would have made for the greatest sea story of all.” However, Himes (2019) calls the book “the great inspirational book of this genre” and notes that “his detailed depiction of the planning and successful execution of the bin Laden raid alone is justification for reading this book.” Other reviewers concur with this statement and say, “the highlight of the book is McRaven’s detailed account of the successful mission to track Osama bin Laden” (“Sea Stories,” 2019, May) and “his account of finding and killing bin Laden is one of the best in the literature” (“My Sea Stories,” 2019).

In sum, these book reviews reveal praise as well as criticism. For example, some reviewers argue that a book could have been more reflective, while others reason that a particular general officer stands vast under challenging times. One reviewer may call a general officer “savvy,” while another describes him as an “intellectual powerhouse.” Due to the selection criteria, the time frame in which the general officers commanded troops overlap. As a result, the general officers themselves also praise and criticize each other. Taken together, while some suspect knowledge withholding, the general officers aimed to tell their stories and reflect in various depths on their experiences. The book reviews do not reveal a confirmation bias towards knowledge withholding.

### **C. DATA COLLECTION**

We analyzed the 1853 pages of the five data sources on meaningful units of knowledge withholding. While reading, we paused after every page to reflect on its content. We asked ourselves questions such as “does this content reflect the handling of knowledge?,” “what actors played a role?” and “who withheld knowledge?” We initially coded these as meaningful units on the page where they are described and marked those

pages (Saldaña, 2012). These knowledge-withholding units may involve the author or other people who withheld knowledge. We also included units where knowledge should have been withheld, or instances in which withholding knowledge is suspected. We then collected, summarized, and briefly described all the meaningful units in a data collection table to analyze the data further. This process resulted in 247 knowledge-withholding units.

#### **D. DATA ANALYSIS**

We analyzed the meaningful units in the data collection table with narrative coding (Saldana, 2015; Figure 1, Step 1). This means that we searched for clues in the narrative of a unit that reveals knowledge withholding. Some units were clear. For example, Admiral McRaven broke into an ammunition complex at the military base where he lived with his parents. His father came home and asked him, “There has been an attempted break-in at the ammunition storage facility. Do you know anything about it?” Admiral McRaven answered, “No, Sir.”

Knowledge withholding in other units was more implicit. For example, General Franks describes, “the VC [Viet Cong] ambush was perfectly placed and timed, hitting my column from the dense bamboo to out right, exploding a captured American claymore mine and raking the trail with AK-47 fire.” The word “ambush” implies that an actor, in this case, the Viet Cong, withholds all their knowledge to create a deadly advantage.

We also included units in which the aim was to withhold knowledge. Examples of these units use words such as “secret” or “top secret” documents or words such as “sensitive” and “compartmented.” These words imply that knowledge must be withheld for unauthorized people. In other cases, words such as “leaked” indicated that knowledge was shared with the media. However, the word “leaked” implies that the knowledge should have been withheld for the public.

Furthermore, units also revealed that actors suspected knowledge withholding. For example, General McChrystal writes, “I arrived confident and full of ideas. I suspect Ranger NCOs [non-commissioned officers] got a bit tired of self-confident commanders arriving with notebooks full of new directions for the unit to take.” In this unit, he describes

that he suspects knowledge withholding. Hence, narrative coding enabled us to identify knowledge withholding within a unit.

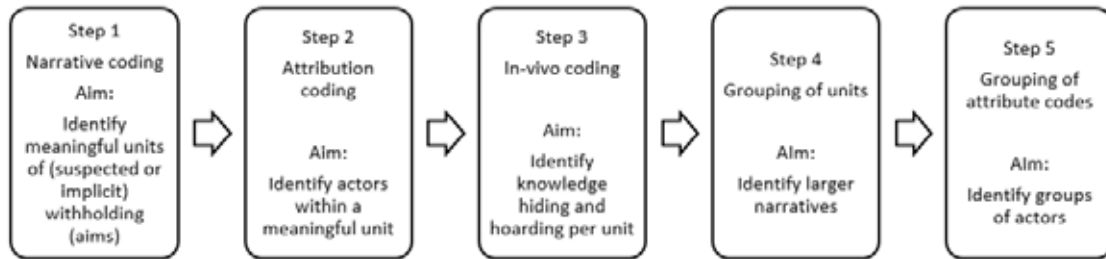


Figure 1. The data analysis process

We continued our data analysis with an attribution coding of the meaningful units to identify the participants per instance of knowledge withholding (Saldana, 2015; Figure 1, Step 2). For example, when a unit describes names of participants such as “General Petraeus,” “Mullen,” “the President,” or “President Saleh,” we noted the names in the table. In other cases, the authors used the names of job roles such as “my battalion commander,” “company commander,” or “chief of staff.” In these cases, we noted the participants by their role name. We also encountered participants who were enemies such as “Al-Qaeda,” “Viet Cong,” or “Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.” During the attribution coding, we made a distinction between the knowledge withholder and the potential knowledge recipient.

As a next step, we searched through the units for words that point towards knowledge hiding or hoarding. When we found an indication, we applied in-vivo coding and noted that in the data collection table (Saldana, 2015; Figure 1, Step 3). We return to the example of General McChrystal. He became the commander of a unit and wrote, “I arrived confident and full of ideas. I suspect Ranger NCOs got a bit tired of self-confident commanders arriving with notebooks full of new directions for the unit to take.” As described, we coded this as knowledge withholding, but the unit continues with, “But if they did, they hide it well.” Hence, he suspected knowledge hiding.

Next, we grouped meaningful units that formed a larger narrative by using narrative coding (Saldana, 2015; Figure 1, Step 4). In other words, every unit reflected one instance of knowledge withholding, but some units constructed a story of various cases of knowledge withholding. For example, after 9/11, General Franks anticipated a U.S. military response and asked his staff for potential targets to strike in Afghanistan. He withheld the potential targets from his higher command. This larger narrative consists of three knowledge-withholding units. However, the number of units could also be higher. Admiral McRaven provided a detailed account of the raid on Usama bin Laden in which we distilled 21 knowledge-withholding units.

Furthermore, we grouped actors in an iterative process based on the attribution codes and the Step 4 narrative coding (Figure X, Step 5). These groups enabled the identification of interdependencies and social identities. We, thereby, started with the meaningful units that were not coded as part of a larger narrative. For example, we categorized codes such as “Al-Qaeda,” “Viet Cong,” or “Abu Musab al-Zarqawi” and labeled them as the enemy. Or, we categorized codes such as “my battalion commander,” “company commander,” or “chief of staff” and labeled these as own units. Or, we labeled a category as locals with codes such as “President Saleh,” “elders,” “locals,” and “Iraqis.”

Subsequently, we looked at larger narratives and the actors who played a role. We categorized them within an existing category when the actors of all the included units matched. For example, if General Franks’s larger narrative consists of three meaningful units that all reflect knowledge withholding in his unit, we categorized it as his unit. However, some larger narratives included more than one actor category. For example, the story of Admiral McRaven and the raid on Usama bin Laden consisted of 21 units with various actors. We labeled these larger narratives as a separate category and tagged them as leader behavior. During this grouping process, we noticed that, in some cases, knowledge is withheld based on an agreed process between actors. We regarded this as an important insight, categorized these units separately, and labeled them as process.

We then reflected on the groups of actors and narratives in relation to the general and flag officers in terms of interdependencies. We, thereby, categorized their outcomes in negative or positive interdependencies. For example, the ultimate negative interdependent

situations are probably those in which two parties fight each other in a war. We, therefore, labeled the “enemy” as negative interdependent to the general and flag officers. Also, the potentially most intimate, positive interdependent events exist between family members. Similar but less intimate are the events between trainees and instructors because in both cases, the actors pursue the same outcomes. So, for example, we labeled “family” and “instructors” as positive interdependent events. Based on the interdependence theory, we also considered that actors who are on the “same side” and fight a war together experience a positive interdependence. We, therefore, labeled the actors “competitors” and “locals” as such. However, regarding the latter actors, the data revealed a lack of trust in the latter, so we distinguished between trusting and non-trusting positive interdependencies.

However, not all units categorized as either negative or positive interdependent situations. In some events, a successful outcome for one actor does not automatically lead to a successful outcome or failure for the other actor so we labeled those as neutral interdependent relationships. The actor “media” or “processes” are examples of such relationships. For example, regarding processes, they yielded positive effects for the involved actors because they, for instance, provided clarity on when to withhold and when to share knowledge. However, they did not reflect a specific type of interdependence. For that reason, we have categorized them as reflecting a neutral outcome interdependence between the actors.

Furthermore, we assessed the groups of actors on professional social identities of the general and flag officers. For example, the actor “units” reflected instances in which the general and flag officers socially identified with their units. We thus categorized all groups of actors as either negative, positive, or neutral interdependent or as a social identity of the officers. We developed an integrative framework based on these categorizations.

A second coder also conducts the coding in the data analysis. After Step 1 (Figure 1), the second coder assessed the meaningful units’ descriptions and quotes in the data coding table. The coder labeled them with either “agree” or “uncertain.” In the latter case, the first coder extended the quotes from the data sources to represent meaningful units. Then, the coders subsequently took Steps 2 to 5 (Figure 1) and discussed the coding differences. In the end, this process resulted in 247 meaningful units.

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## **IV. RESULTS**

As a first step, we aim to reduce the “messiness” of leader behavior and knowledge withholding, hiding, and hoarding. Therefore, we develop a theoretically coherent and integrative framework that subsequently describes the negative, positive, and neutral interdependent events as well as social identity. However, we then reintroduce the “messiness” of human interaction by describing the raid on Usama bin Laden led by Admiral McRaven. This larger narrative illustrates how a leader may use the integrative framework to deal with multiple actors.

### **A. NEGATIVE INTERDEPENDENT EVENTS**

The data reveals 18 units of knowledge withholding that illustrate how both parties conduct themselves in this behavior. We start with examples where the general officers were confronted with the violent effects of enemy knowledge withholding. For instance, General Franks describes how he got ambushed in Vietnam by the Viet Cong. He writes that “the VC ambush was perfectly placed and timed, hitting my column from the dense bamboo to outright, exploding a captured American claymore mine and raking the trail with AK-47 fire” (p. 74). Sometime later, he was on patrol, looking for Viet Cong in a village. The villagers “swore on Buddha’s head that they hadn’t seen a thing.” General Franks thought that they were in another “dry hole,” but when the patrol arrived at their pick-up zone, “the enemy cut loose with everything he had” (p. 81). In another unit, the Viet Cong ambushed the patrol led by General Franks from “less than thirty meters away.” This situation was much more peculiar than the previous ones because he had no radio with him, and “without a radio we had no way to direct them [the helicopter gunships] toward the enemy” (p. 108). Hence, the US’s enemy withheld knowledge from U.S. forces to gain a tactical advantage on the battlefield.

The data also shows less violent enemy knowledge withholding. For example, General McChrystal describes Task Force 417 hunts on terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. The terrorist leader is very skilled in hiding his whereabouts for the U.S. forces. At some point, units of General McChrystal have a promising lead and launch a

raid. The general describes that “if Zarqawi was in fact there, he got away” (p. 89). Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was also very skilled in hiding his communication with other terrorist leaders. However, the Peshmerga caught a courier named Ghul, who “was carrying two CDs and a thumb drive, which yielded a letter written from Zarqawi to bin Laden and Zawahiri” (p. 120). In another unit, General McChrystal’s units detained Mussabir, who had a suspected link to a terrorist leader. The interrogator “showed the picture [of the terrorist leader] to him, Mussabir waved it away, claiming not to know the man.” In this case, the interrogator requested knowledge, but the detainee hid it. General McChrystal continues, “for weeks, Mubassir refused to recognize the face in the picture.” After a “marathon nighttime session” with the interrogator, the detainee is wearied down and acknowledged his knowledge of the terrorist leader with “I love that man very much” and “that is my brother” (p. 211). Thus, the enemy aimed to withhold and hid knowledge of their locations and communications for U.S. forces.

Conversely, the U.S. forces also withheld and hid knowledge from their enemies. For example, General Franks describes how he develops a plan with the Coalition Forces to assault Iraq. He notes that “surprise and speed were the key elements of the plan” (p. 153). General Franks also describes that the Iraqi watchtowers at the border with Saudi Arabia are the first targets when the Coalition Forces start their massive assault. He was there when the towers were attacked by artillery and describes, “Exploding like a firecracker, the tower disappeared in a cloud of smoke and pulverized concrete” (p. 155). The Coalition Forces were not attacked or counterattacked by the Iraqis. Thereby, the knowledge withholding of the Coalition Forces from the Iraqi forces seemed to be successful. However, the Coalition Forces did share knowledge with the Iraqi forces. The Iraqi intelligence service Mukhabarat “had recruited April [an American military officer] as a double agent.” However, “Unknown to the Mukhabarat, the officer had contacted his chain of command within hours of the Iraqi’s initial overture.” As a result, the Coalition Forces were “feeding disinformation to the regime of Saddam Hussein” and thereby hiding their real intentions. General Franks notes that “because of the sensitivity of the deception, only a few of us in the U.S. government were aware of it.” Thus, U.S. forces withheld knowledge to gain a tactical advantage on the battlefield.

The data also shows that the U.S. forces were not always successful in withholding their knowledge for the enemy. General McChrystal describes how U.S. forces intended to free the U.S. embassy staff who were taken hostages in Iran in 1980. During Operation Eagle Claw, “The demands of operational security were understandably heavy. But the mission was too corseted.” The term “operational security” implies that the knowledge is hidden from the enemy so that the assault force has the tactical advantage of surprise. Moreover, the assault force aimed to maintain their surprise by avoiding “detection at the airstrip.” General McChrystal also writes that “the soldiers would spend the night hiding in advance of an early-morning assault” (p. 35). Despite the focus on knowledge hiding, the assault force endured multiple accidents and lost eight servicemen. Operation Eagle Claw was aborted and became an upright catastrophe for the U.S. military. A potential reason for this failure is that the term “operational security” implies that knowledge about an upcoming operation is withheld for all non-involved personnel. However, the clause “But the mission was too corseted” suggests that knowledge was too tightly withheld within the assaulting forces. As a result, the assault force’s various elements had not rehearsed the maneuvers together, which could be one of the reasons for the accidents. So, knowledge hiding to the enemy had its advantages, but a similar level of withholding within an assault force can have devastating effects.

## **B. POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENT EVENTS: TRUST BETWEEN ACTORS**

The data reveals 18 knowledge-withholding units within families. These units show that knowledge is withheld between parents and children or between husband and wife. We start with examples of parents who withheld knowledge for their child. For instance, General Franks describes that his father missed a finger, but Franks never asked his parents how that had happened. He writes, “For some reason, I never asked him about this. And he never chose to discuss the injuries.” When General Franks lived in Midland, Texas, his uncle Bob explained that “your dad got hurt when was about ten years old” (p. 10). In line with this, General Franks’s parents withheld knowledge about his adoption until he was a junior at high school. He notes that “my folks finally told me I had been adopted” when “I was a junior at Lee High School in Midland, Texas” (p. 12). Again, some years later, General Franks was living in a student room in Austin, but his parents couldn’t afford it

anymore. They sold their business to move to Austin so that Franks could live with them and reduce their spending. His father started the conversation with “I’m selling the business, Tommy Ray. It’s not working out the way I hoped, and I’ve got an offer.” Later in the conversation, his mother continued with, “we are planning to move down to Austin” and “we’ll get a place and we can all live together.” General Franks notes, “Only later that afternoon did I realize what my parents had in mind: If I moved back in with them in Austin, it would save them the ninety dollars a month room” (p. 31). These instances illustrate that parents thus withheld knowledge for their children.

The data also shows that the general officers, as children, withheld knowledge from their parents. For example, as a kid, Admiral McRaven lives on a military base with his parents. He and his friend Jon plan to sneak onto a high-security ammunition compound at the base. Admiral McRaven’s mother asked the boys where they are heading to that afternoon. They answer that they go to the “clubhouse.” At the end of that day, Admiral McRaven writes, “Mom gave me a big hug and asked where I have been all day. ‘At the clubhouse,’ I answered. That’s nice, she said” (p. 24). He hid his adventure at the ammunition storage for his mother. However, when his father came home, Admiral McRaven needed to go to the living room and was asked, “there has been an attempted break-in at the ammunition storage facility. Do you know anything about it?” Admiral McRaven answered with “No Sir” (p. 25). He thereby also hid his activity for his father. So, children also withheld knowledge for their parents

Furthermore, the data illuminate instances that show that the general officers also withheld knowledge for their wives. For example, General McChrystal “scheduled a parachute jump” for his unit, which was “finished after midnight.” After the jump, he “decided to raise morale” and organize a party at his house, but “the plan...was not relayed to Annie [his wife]” (p. 30). By withholding his party plans for his wife, she was surprised when the unit ringed the door with cases of beer. It could also be worse. Admiral McRaven had a parachute accident. He was severely wounded and ended up in the hospital. He asked a buddy to “call Georgeann [his wife] and let her know I am all right” while he was far from all right (p. 147). It could also be better. General Franks describes that he wanted to marry Cathy. After an exercise, he bought a ring and looked for her at the university

campus. He describes, “Cathy was on her way to class. But I convinced her to go for a ride instead. By the time I dropped her back at the sorority house to change for dinner, she was wearing that diamond” (p. 60). Hence, the general and flag officers withheld knowledge for their wives.

Besides family, the data also uncovered 12 knowledge-withholding units in positive interdependent situations between instructors and trainees. For example, Admiral McRaven applies for SEAL training and notes that “it was difficult to find out anything about SEALs or SEAL training” (p. 36). While in training, they were briefed by a trainee who had been through Hell week. This week is known as the hardest week of the training. This trainee was a “rollback” and had to do Hell week again. While this trainee had all the knowledge and experience of a previous Hell week, the only advice he offered was, “you must stick together” (p. 38). At some point during that Hell week, the students knew it might be the last day of Hell Week, but the SEAL instructors tightly withheld that knowledge. Only after the relieving words “congratulation, Class 95. Hell Week is over” and “get the Class out of the water,” they knew for sure that the week was over. General Franks provides another example. During his crypto analyst training, the students had to break an encrypted code. The instructor hoarded his knowledge on the correct code so that the students could learn from the exercise. When General Franks thought he broke the code, he notes, “I carefully printed our answer and handed the worksheet to Sergeant Reilly.” The instructor then acknowledged the successful code-breaking of General Franks and said, “Outstanding, Franks! Way to go, Feldman. You men found the correct eight-letter word based on just the first five letters.” Hence, instructors withheld and hoarded knowledge for trainees to support their learning and development.

However, the data reveal instances in which trainees may also withheld knowledge for instructors. For example, General Franks describes that he got blisters and limps while marching, but he doesn’t say it to the platoon sergeant. The platoon sergeant comes to him and says, “Been watching you, boy. The way you march ain’t normal. Come with me.” General Franks walked with the platoon sergeant to the barracks. He says he knows that General Franks has got blisters and asked, “why didn’t you tell me?” He then explained, “I’m your platoon sergeant. My job is to get all your sorry asses trained as soldier, and that

won't happen if you can't march" (p. 37). Thus, in some cases, trainees also withheld knowledge for their instructors.

Besides family and instructors, knowledge is also withheld between the general officers and politicians. For example, General Mattis describes a conversation that he had with "Vice President Biden and his assistants" about the prime minister of Iraq Maliki. He writes that they "listened politely. But as we spoke, I sensed I was making no headway in convincing the administration officials not to support Maliki." Vice president Biden apparently intended to maintain support for the prime minister, but did not share that. General Mattis notes, "But he was past the point where he was willing to entertain a 'good idea.'" Another instance also illustrated the knowledge withholding of General Mattis to the Secretary of Defense. They had a meeting in which they had to decide how and where to cut Defense budgets. General Mattis describes, "I listened attentively, not wanting to add my gripes to the litany already heard. I got up to get a Coke in the back of the room, where I stood listening. I thought for a few seconds and decided, what the hell. I took a napkin and scribbled on it: Disband JFCOM-Mattis." He, thereby, proposes to disband his organization to meet the budget demands. This may seem a spontaneous action, but it was "based on many months of reflection and experience of decades spent looking at what delivers real capability." This suggests that he already knew that his organization created overhead but withheld that until budgets were restrained. Hence, politicians and general officers withheld knowledge for each other.

### **C. POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENT EVENTS: A LACK OF TRUST BETWEEN ACTORS**

The data reveals 12 events in which people withheld knowledge to each other. These people represent various organizations that are positively interdependent in a sense that they all have to cooperate to achieve the US's goals. However, they withheld knowledge due to a lack of trust. For example, General McChrystal notes that there was "counterproductive infighting among the CIA, State Department, Department of Defense, and others back in Washington" (p. 116). He later continues with "special operations and CIA worked together only marginally better than they had during Operation Eagle Claw in 1980. At best, we were fighting parallel, fractured campaigns against Al-Qaeda; ours had

to be a united fight” (p. 118). As described earlier, during operation Eagle Claw, knowledge was too tightly withheld between and within fighting elements. In another instance, General Mattis describes how the FBI and attorney general held a press conference about a bomb plot. The plot was directed from the Iranian Qods force. While Iran was in the area of responsibility of General Mattis, he notes, “I was puzzled why CENTCOM hadn’t been informed beforehand” (p. 230). Hence, the data illustrates that organizations that fight the same enemy in a war did not trust each other and withheld knowledge.

Furthermore, knowledge is not only withheld between organizations but also within a single organization. Again, actors withheld their knowledge while the situation seems to be positive interdependent. For example, General Franks was under investigation during his Vietnam tour, but he did not know that. Four days after a fierce fight with the Viet Cong, a helicopter landed at General Franks’ camp. Two people stepped out and asked for the artillery liaison officer. He describes, “None of the senior officers shook my hand; nor did they smile, or exchange the usual pleasantries. One of the colonels was from the Inspector general’s office; the other was a JAG lawyer. He presented a printed form and directed me to swear that my statement was voluntary, true, and complete.” They then asked General Franks to drive to the place where the fighting took place. He writes, “Half an hour later, as we drove from blasted house to shattered factory, I’d begun to figure it out” (p. 104). Eventually, he became aware that they suspected him of applying excessive violence during the fight. So, while both parties are at the “same side” and aimed to fight the Viet Cong according to the law, the data indicates that investigators did not trust the suspect and withheld knowledge.

Next, a lack of trust and subsequent knowledge withholding also occurs between individual actors within an organization. For example, General Petraeus’s book illuminates instances in which an actor shares knowledge with somebody else but, at the same time, hoards their knowledge for other people. The author describes, “What none of these people knew - not Gates, Edelman, Casey, Abizaid, nor, for the matters, Kagan - was that Keane had also shared the slides with Ray Odierno.” In this example, Keane shared a slide with Ray Odierno but did not inform Gates, Edelman, Casey, and Kagan (p. 239). The author describes another unit in which Odierno and Petraeus shared knowledge, but their

communication needed to be kept secret. He writes, “The two couldn’t communicate directly during this time,” because Odierno and Petraeus would be “accused of subverting the chain of command” (p. 249). Thus, these instances indicate that individuals did share knowledge with a trusted partner but withheld from other, potentially less trusted people.

A lack of trust in positive interdependent situations led to knowledge withholding between organizations and individuals within a country. Simultaneously, the data suggest the existence of this mechanism also between a military force and local populations. For example, in General Petraeus’s book, the author describes how the same problems seemed to reoccur regularly. He writes, “At first he [Maliki] blamed the problems on miscommunication and incompetence, another instance of weak governance,” but after the Americans concluded that “they [the Shiite politicians] were responsible for making them happen.” He continues that “wiretaps revealed that Muqtada Sadr’s lieutenants [insurgents] had been tipped off just before an American raid got under way.” This indicates that Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki withheld his knowledge about and connections with Shiites for the Americans. The author concludes that “Maliki’s power base rested in part on Sadr, so, regardless of what the American wanted, Maliki’s administration would protect him” (p. 188). In this unit, the American military and Prime Minister Maliki seemingly fight the insurgents together and are therefore positively interdependent. However, this unit also illustrates that both parties do not trust each other. Moreover, the wiretaps reveal that Prime Minister Maliki seems to experience a more substantial positive interdependence with Shiite insurgents. In another example, General McChrystal describes an American Tomahawk missile strike on Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. Pakistanis might “think the U.S. missiles crossing over their country were from India,” so the U.S. warned Pakistan. However, the Americans “gave the Pakistani notice, but just barely,” because “Pakistan’s military and intelligence establishment would tip off the Taliban or bin Laden” (p. 69). Thus, the Americans withheld their knowledge until their enemy could not be warned anymore because the Americans do not trust the Pakistani military and intelligence organizations. Hence, the data illustrates that positive interdependent actors withheld knowledge when they do not trust each other.

#### **D. NEUTRAL INTERDEPENDENT EVENTS**

The data reveals 10 neutral knowledge-withholding instances. We provide an example of General McChrystal, who interacted on various occasions with a Rolling Stones magazine reporter. He aimed to give the reporter and the public transparency about the difficulties that the command team encountered while fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, the reporter published an article named “The Runaway General,” which led to a storm of controversy and General McChrystal’s resignation. When he read the article, he describes, “For a number of minutes I felt as though I’d likely awoken from what seemed like a surreal dream, but the situation was real.” The reporter did not focus on the difficulties of fighting the Taliban, but rather on the command team’s supposedly critical attitude towards their political leader behavior. General McChrystal continues that “its ultimate effect was immediately clear to me” and that he “knew only one decision was right for the moment and for the mission.” He flew to the U.S. to speak to his higher command and President Obama. He writes that he had a “professional meeting with President Obama and drove to Fort McNair to tell Annie that the president had accepted my resignation” (p. 388). This instance indicates that General McChrystal decided to resign directly after reading the article but waited to offer his resignation until he met with the President.

We continue this story with a unit from the book of General Petraeus. That author describes that “he [Obama] called the general [McChrystal] to the White House for a one-on-one meeting on June 23.” The author continues that “McChrystal had tendered his resignation the day before.” This indicates that General McChrystal offered his resignation to President Obama on June 22, which was also the Rolling Stones article’s publication date. This suggests that General McChrystal withheld his knowledge about his planned resignation for a shorter time than described in his book. While this may be the case, both units show that General McChrystal withheld his knowledge about his planned and actual resignation for the public. Actually, President Obama held a press conference later that day. Kaplan (2013) writes, “That afternoon, he [President Obama] announced the move [resignation of General McChrystal] at a press conference.” The author continues that “the president introduced the general he’d chosen as McChrystal’s replacement - David Petraeus” (p. 338).

The data also illuminates 29 units as a category in which knowledge is withheld from certain (groups of) recipients due to procedures or processes. For example, publication processes of academic articles, doctrine, or field manuals tend to result in a withholding of knowledge to readers for some time. Moreover, Professor Kalev Sepp “arrived in Iraq in early November 2004” (Kaplan, 2013, p. 103). Kaplan writes that “as a first step, he [Professor Kalev Sepp] wrote out a list of all the insurgency wars in the twentieth century” and “then, jotting down the factors that led to victory or defeat in each conflict.” The commander Casey, approved the article, and it was sent to the journal the *Military Review*. Kaplan (2013) continues that “Darley [the editor of the *Military Review*] knew he had a classic on his hands. He emailed Sepp ... that it needed footnotes.” Eventually, Kaplan notes that “the footnoted essay appeared in the May-June 2005 issue” (Kaplan, 2013, p. 107). This unit indicates that Professor Kalev Sepp wrote his article at the end of 2004 and that the publication process took several months to make it available for the readers of the *Military Review*. Hence, the publication processes did result in knowledge withholding between actors.

Planned meetings are another form of procedural knowledge withholding. This means that meeting participants withhold their knowledge until the planned meeting occurs. General Franks describes several of these units in the planning phase of the assault on Iraq. The U.S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld gave General Franks the order to look at the existing plan and brief him next week. Rumsfeld said to General Franks, “Please dust it off and get back to me next week” (p. 315). At the planned meeting, General Franks briefs Rumsfeld about the planning. Rumsfeld then said, “Well, General, you have a lot of work ahead of you,” and “Today is Tuesday. Let’s get together again next Wednesday, December 12. I want to hear more details at that time” (p. 335). At the next meeting, General Franks briefs Rumsfeld again, who then notes, “This is a good beginning, but I need more detail before I take it to the President.” Rumsfeld continues with, “Let’s talk next week” and “I want this to be worked by a very small group. There are still too many leakers, and this must not be leaked” (p. 344). Now, besides that Rumsfeld expects that General Franks withholds his knowledge to him until the next planned meeting, he also explicitly notes that the knowledge must be withheld for the media and public. Then,

Rumsfeld called General Franks and said that “the President does want you to do the briefing out in Crawford tomorrow.” Again, Rumsfeld expects General Franks to withhold his knowledge until the planned meeting with President Bush. Hence, scheduled meetings did also result in knowledge withholding between actors.

#### **E. SOCIAL IDENTITY: COMMANDERS AND THEIR UNITS**

The data illustrates 59 knowledge-withholding units between the commanders and their units. For example, General Mattis reflects on the fact that commanders must love their soldiers and must be able to send them to death. He thereby quotes the novel *The Killer Angel*, “To be a good officer you must be willing to order the death of the thing you love [his men].” He then reflects, “the mission comes first. Personal solace must wait for another day.” This indicates that General Mattis distinguishes between himself as an individual and himself as a commander, whereby the latter represents his whole unit. During the battle, he, therefore, ordered to withhold knowledge, “To maintain my emotional equilibrium, I knew I couldn’t be informed about casualties, let alone their names, while fighting. I instructed my staff not to report the names or the number of casualties to me unless their mission was jeopardized” (p. 31). General Franks says something similar. When his commander arrived at the spot of a brutal attack, General Franks notes, “I studied Eric Antila’s [the commander of General Franks] eyes. I knew he was gripped by anguish, but he never let it show.” General Franks then explains, “In war, it is necessary that commanders be able to delay their emotions until they can afford them” (p. 99). The data also illustrates that general officers may identify themselves with broader Services such as the U.S. Army. For example, Kaplan (2013) describes that “the Army’s top generals said ‘Never again’ to the notion of fighting guerrilla’s in the jungle (or any place else)” (p. 2). This suggests that the “top generals” socially identified with the U.S. Army as an organization and wanted to avoid another “debacle of Vietnam.” As a result, “they [top generals] threw out the book (literally: they threw out the official manuals and curricula) on anything related to what was once called ‘irregular wars.’” Hence, these units illustrate that commanders socially identify with their units and organization. Moreover, especially during combat operations, knowledge withholding enabled commanders to focus on achieving the mission.

Furthermore, General McChrystal “stressed transparency and inclusion” within his task force and wrote, “I shared everything with the team.” However, he too withheld knowledge and notes, “Rare exceptions to this policy of transparency were sensitive personnel issues and cases when sharing would betray someone’s trust” (p. 151). General McChrystal describes in another unit how commanders build trust by requesting knowledge withholding. In this instance, General McChrystal commander asked him to prepare a briefing for a four-star general. When General McChrystal wanted to go through the presentation, his commander asked, “Stan [General McChrystal], is it good?” The commander then said, “If you think it’s good, I don’t need a brief; I trust you.” According to General McChrystal, the effect was that “his willingness to trust was more powerful than anything else he could have said or done” (p. 54). General Mattis was also focused on maintaining “the trust in our tight-knit platoon.” During a jungle training, a corporal discussed his concerns with General Mattis. A Marine had said he would “like to kill the fucking hard-ass lieutenant.” General Mattis walked to that Marine and describes, “I told him to follow me back through the jungle to the company command post. At the end of the hike, I told him that he could have shot me in the back. But he didn’t have the guts” (p. 8). Hence, commanders withheld their knowledge or asked to withhold knowledge to build or maintain trust.

A recurring theme in the data was the application of commander intent. This means that a commander only shares what he expects that subordinates achieve but not how they are realized. General Mattis explains, “The details you don’t give in your orders are as important as the one you do” (p. 44). In other words, he withholds knowledge to “unleash” “their [subordinate commanders] cunning and initiative.” In another unit, he describes, “After I communicated my intent, subordinate commanders, along with their Navy and Marine staffs, drafted plans for how they would execute their parts of the mission” (p. 60). While this practice is widely described in doctrine, the data shows that the reality is less straightforward. Kaplan (2013) describes “David Kilcullen [expert in counterinsurgency doctrine] came to Iraq in late February 2006.” Kaplan continues that “he [David Kilcullen] spent several hours talking with some of these newly arrived junior officers: the American lieutenants, captains, and majors.” These officers had read the new strategy and

“understood its drifts,” but said, “I get what we’re supposed to achieve, but what are we supposed to do?” Hence, commanders applied knowledge withholding as they provide their commander’s guidance, but the extent to which knowledge should be withheld seems to differ per situation.

#### **F. THE INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK AS A TOOL FOR LEADERS**

The data reveals 54 units that construct nine narratives. These units represent multiple actors and interdependencies. We use one narrative of Admiral McRaven to illustrate the reality of leader behavior and its numerous interdependencies. This narrative tells the story of the raid on Usama bin Laden. The narrative starts with the Joint Chief of Staffs, Admiral Mullen, who speaks to Admiral McRaven about a potential intelligence lead to Usama bin Laden. He says, “you can’t tell anyone else about this mission.,” which means that Admiral McRaven needs to withhold and hide his knowledge for others. Admiral McRaven subsequently has a meeting about the intelligence lead at a CIA facility but calls the facility “The Pentagon” to withhold his destination for his (personal) staff. He makes it even more explicit to his personal assistant and says, “I can’t tell you anything right now and I need you not to ask any question.” He explicitly tells his assistant that he withholds knowledge and, upon asking, would hide it. While he drove to the CIA facility, he was a bit anxious because his “command had dozens of folks working at the CIA, and sooner or later I knew one of them would spot him slinking into the facility.” He shares that he “hoped to have a better cover story” by then. Using a cover story, he shares knowledge, but he withholds his true intentions. Thus far, these meaningful units illustrate a commander who socially identifies with his unit and withheld his knowledge.

After the meeting at the CIA facility, Admiral McRaven starts developing plans for an operation to capture or kill Usama bin Laden. He needs extra expertise in his planning team and asks Admiral Mullen permission. Admiral Mullen answers with, “Don’t speak with him [the requested expert] until I get back to you.” Sometime later, the Secretary of Defense contacts Admiral McRaven and says, “The President is likely to want a Concept of Operations in a few weeks.” Admiral McRaven answers that he can only be certain of success when he brings in “aviation and ground operators to really look at the problem and

rehearse the concept.” Admiral Mullen, who is also present, answers, “For now it remains just you... But no one else is allowed in until the President agrees.” The President allows Admiral McRaven to add people to his planning team, and Admiral then calls a Navy SEAL officer. Before he briefs the officer, the Admiral ensures knowledge hiding with a “yes, Sir” on his question. “I am going to tell you something, and I need to ensure that no one, absolutely no one else, learns about this.” Besides knowledge withholding of a commander, these units describe a process approach of withholding in which the President must give permission to share and asks for a briefing at some point.

Next, Admiral McRaven and the officer go to a meeting with the CIA. The Admiral instructs the officer with “just listen. The last thing I want is for the Agency to think that we are trying to take over the mission.” The officer is thus expected to withhold his knowledge about what the Navy SEALs regard as viable options. During the planning phase, Admiral McRaven is still the commanding officer of a task force of special operations forces (SOF) in Afghanistan, so he often flies between Afghanistan and the United States. Usually, these flights would attract attention, but the situation in Libya was deteriorating, so “for the next several months, all my [Admiral McRaven] movements and my frequent visits to the White House were assumed to be closely held planning for Libya.” He thus kept the assumption alive to withhold knowledge on the potential operation on Usama bin Laden. He also uses this “shallow cover story” when he calls the aviation squadron commander and says, “I needed one of his best pilots for a few days just to do some preliminary planning for a possible Libyan contingency.” Now, besides a commander, these units revealed sensitivities between positive interdependent organizations and subsequent knowledge withholding.

At some point, the representatives of the CIA and SOF meet to discuss the operational options. During the meeting, there are tensions between the two organizations. CIA gathered the information, and they want to conduct the mission while Admiral McRaven provides support for a raid by the Navy SEALs. The Director of the CIA was also present and quietly listened. Admiral McRaven describes, “As the meeting ended Panetta pulled me aside and reaffirmed his support for the SOF raid.” Again, sensitivities

and even competition appeared between the two organizations, and it seems that Panetta wanted to withhold his opinion for his organization.

When Admiral McRaven had to brief the President, the director of the briefing room in the White House, “Subtly made it known that he was unaware of whatever was transpiring that afternoon. There was no record of the meeting on the President’s calendar, and the Situation Room schedule only indicated the room was blocked.” During the briefing, the President decided that Admiral McRaven could inform the assault force and rehearse it. He describes, “The Navy SEAL officer and his squadron had just returned from Afghanistan and were on leave for three weeks. Three weeks! It was the perfect cover for action. No one at his command would ask about his whereabouts. No one would miss him at work.” The squadron commander hand-picked the assault force and instructed them to be at a meeting. He “hadn’t provided the new guys [the assault force] with any information on why they were here nor whom they were meeting with.” So, “none of them knew why they were being asked to come to North Carolina on such short notice.” And, the CIA officer began the meeting by “handing out non-disclosure forms.” These instances illustrate knowledge withholding by various levels of commanders within their units as well as to a White House employee. The latter represents a neutral interdependent situation with Admiral McRaven.

After the CIA officers’ briefing, the raiding force’s rehearsals began straightaway at a U.S. Airforce facility. Admiral McRaven describes, “While the Airforce officers weren’t read-in to the mission, they knew that owing to the priority we had been given, something very important was in the works. They were incredible professional and equally discrete.” This indicates that the Airforce did not ask why the assault force rehearsed, thereby enabling the knowledge to be withholding. They also practice what they should do when locals gather around the house of Usama bin Laden. Admiral McRaven writes that “if a crowd develops Mohammad will tell them it is a Pakistani exercise and to go back to their homes.” This means that the assault force plans to hide their operation by acting as the Pakistani military. These instances illustrate positive interdependent situations in which actors did not trust each other and, therefore, withheld or hid knowledge.

Subsequently, the assault force moves to Afghanistan and needs a quick reaction force in case they require assistance. However, they use a quick reaction force that is already in Afghanistan because “those forces wouldn’t need to be notified until the day of the mission, so OPSEC [operational security] could be maintained.” On the day of the mission, the Admiral informed the regimental commander, and “he devised a cover story to assemble the QRF without anyone taking notice.” The commanders in Afghanistan, General Petraeus, and CENTCOM commander, General Mattis, would be informed on the upcoming mission by their chain of command. However, when Admiral McRaven speaks to General Petraeus, he finds out that “Petraeus had been left out of the planning for the raid.” Also, when “I [Admiral McRaven] called Mattis,” he “found out he knew little about the mission as well.” These units illustrate commanders who withheld or hid knowledge for their units or other units or knowledge that is being withheld for commanders.

The assault force of Navy SEALs eventually conducted the daring raid and killed Usama bin Laden. The President would make an announcement late that evening in the United States. McRaven describes that “it was unprecedented that a President would come on television so late in the evening.” Some presenters speculated that “it must be that Mohammar Gadhafi was dead...What else could it be?” The President withheld his knowledge on the outcome of the raid for the public until a planned media conference. Long story short, the operation was a success.

## V. DISCUSSION

This paper explained knowledge-withholding events and mapped the respective actors in a framework of interdependence theory and social identity theory. We categorized eight actors, whom we labeled as the enemy, family, instructors, media, locals, politicians, people of other (parts of the) organization(s), and immediate team members. The data revealed that knowledge is withheld by the general and flag officers and these other eight actors. Furthermore, we found that leaders withhold knowledge in both negative and positive interdependent situations as well as in situations in which they experience a level of social identity. Moreover, we found that trust plays a pivotal role in positive interdependent situations. In other words, even in situations where people's outcomes have a positive relationship, actors will withhold their knowledge from actors whom they do not trust. Next, we found that people withhold knowledge when it is part of a predetermined process. Last, the data illuminated larger narratives that showed that leaders apply knowledge withholding as a tool to achieve their goals.

However, we also identified several limitations of our research. We briefly discussed these and connected them to potential avenues for future research. First, we categorized eight actors, but we expect that there may be many more categories. We believe such additional categorizations are important because they likely will increase the understanding of the framework's mechanisms. As said, when future research considers the enemy actor on a continuum of competitiveness, it may become apparent that people inside one country, one organization, or even one department regards others as an enemy. This raised awareness combined with the theoretical mechanics of the social identity theory may enable leaders to reduce knowledge withholding, hiding, or hoarding within their organization or team. Therefore, we propose that future research continue to categorize actors. We suggest that a way to do will be to investigate social contexts outside the military such as commercial corporations, non-governmental organizations, or political institutions.

Second, while we introduced and coded for knowledge hiding, we found only limited evidence. As described, knowledge hiding is defined as the intentional hiding of

requested knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012). We believe that this concept may be prominent in negative interdependent situations. Moreover, as said, the general and flag officers withheld knowledge from the enemy and vice versa. Obviously, enemies in a war will not request knowledge from each other, but in situations of less competitiveness there might be such interactions. We also expect knowledge hiding in positive interdependent situations in which actors do not trust each other. The data showed examples of the general and flag officers withholding knowledge from locals or people from other (parts of the) organization(s). Despite the potential obviousness, we believe it is important to investigate knowledge hiding in these situations. An increased level of awareness could result in a better application of knowledge hiding as a tool for leaders. Also, research showed that knowledge hiding and distrust might strengthen each other in a vicious cycle (Cerne et al., 2014). Consequently, when leaders intend to build trust with another actor and are aware of the effects of (perceived) knowledge hiding, they may consciously stay away from this behavior. Therefore, we propose that future research focus on knowledge withholding in both negative and positive interdependent situations. Future research may also investigate the relationship between knowledge hiding and trust and, specifically, whether knowledge hiding triggers the pivotal function of trust in positive interdependent situations.

Third, the coding for knowledge hoarding also resulted in limited evidence. As said, knowledge hoarding is also regarded as intentional behavior but focuses on unrequested knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012). We expect that this concept has a broad application for leaders. They may hoard knowledge to benefit themselves in the sense that the advantage occurs at the individual level. This will most likely be in negative interdependent situations or in situations of positive interdependence that lack trust. However, looking at the social identity theory, they may also hoard knowledge to gain an advantage for their team or organization. Depending on the leader's hierarchical level, the benefits could manifest themselves for large groups of people. Future research may raise leaders' awareness of the potential usage of knowledge hoarding as a tool. Therefore, we propose that future research investigates the antecedents and effects of knowledge hoarding in negative and positive interdependency situations. Future research should also investigate how knowledge

hoarding contributes to group outcomes and how both the ingroup and outgroup members perceive it.

Fourth, while we found limited evidence for knowledge hiding and hoarding in these memoirs, this does not mean that leaders do not apply these concepts. Nevertheless, this might indicate that these memoirs, despite their reflective nature, insufficiently describe the details about intentions and requests within the knowledge-withholding situations. Based on our research, we do believe that these concepts play a role in leader behavior. More importantly, we expect these concepts to serve as additional tools for leaders to achieve their goals. Therefore, we propose that future research investigate the antecedents and effects of knowledge hiding and hoarding. Future research should also focus on the three concepts' covariance to identify whether such a distinction is valuable for theoretical and practical purposes. A similar approach should be taken for the identification of their antecedents and effects.

Fifth, as described, the framework draws on interdependence theory and social identity theory. While these theories explain the knowledge-withholding situations derived from the data sources, we are aware of the memoirs' reflective nature. In other words, the general and flag officers may have reflected for many years on these situations before they wrote their respective books. We suspect that leaders who are in knowledge-withholding situations might experience a less clear picture. For example, an actor might experience multiple social identities simultaneously. Future research should investigate whether one identity trumps another identity and in what cases. Also, in such cases, future research could investigate how identity perception changes the interdependence structure of a situation. Or, how identity perceptions may change the trust and its pivotal role in positive interdependent situations.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, we investigated leader behavior in knowledge-withholding events. We, thereby, focused on the research questions: “In what types of events do leaders withhold knowledge?,” “Who are the other actors in knowledge-withholding events?,” and “How do leaders use knowledge withholding in their work?” The theoretical framework that we applied to answer these questions consisted of interdependence theory and social identity theory. By using a qualitative methodology, we collected data from five memoirs of U.S. general and flag officers. We, therefore, analyzed 1853 pages that resulted in 247 meaningful units of knowledge withholding.

In sum, besides the general and flag officers, we categorized eight actors of knowledge withholding: the enemy, family, instructors, media, locals, politicians, people of other (parts of the) organization(s), and immediate team members. We, thereby, found that both the general and flag officers and these eight actors withheld knowledge. More specifically, people withhold knowledge in negative interdependent situations to gain a benefit for themselves. When people trust each other in positive, interdependent situations, they withhold knowledge to achieve both parties’ desirable outcomes. However, when they lack trust, they prioritize their outcome over the other’s outcome. Next, people also withhold knowledge because it is part of a predetermined process. Furthermore, the data illustrated that people who socially identify with a group may withhold knowledge in favor of that group’s outcomes. Taken together, the data revealed that leaders apply knowledge withholding as tool to achieve their goals.

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