How Thin Is the Ice?:
The Potential for Collapse in Today's Army

A Monograph

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Is it possible to determine how close an army is to collapse? Are there indictors that give warning that the force is reaching the limits of its endurance? With the U.S. Army in its seventh year of sustained combat in the War on Terror with no end in sight, these questions are of more than passing interest. Many people, from military leaders to security experts to elected officers have voiced concerns about impact of sustained combat operations on the Army. How thin, really, is the ice upon the U.S. Army now skates? An examination of some historical examples of military collapse leads to the conclusion that early warnings are frequently seen in an army's individual discipline, small unit cohesion, and effective leadership, with the most typical pattern being a slow but steady rise in warning signs followed by a rapid acceleration leading up to collapse. A survey of individual discipline, small unit cohesion, and effective leadership in today's Army reveals that, although there are many signs that the Army remains more healthy than often depicted, there are clear indicators of problems in all three areas. These conclusions lead to specific recommendations about the Army's unit rotation policy, the balance of experience and education in its leader development programs, and the Army's role in maintaining national will during protracted conflicts.

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Abstract

HOW THIN IS THE ICE?: THE POTENTIAL FOR COLLAPSE IN TODAY'S ARMY by LTC Joseph S. McLamb, U.S. Army, 47 pages.

   Is it possible to determine how close an army is to collapse? Are there indictors that give warning that the force is reaching the limits of its endurance? With the U.S. Army in its seventh year of sustained combat in the War on Terror with no end in sight, these questions are of more than passing interest. Many people, from military leaders to security experts to elected officers have voiced concerns about impact of sustained combat operations on the Army. How thin, really, is the ice upon the U.S. Army now skates? An examination of some historical examples of military collapse leads to the conclusion that early warnings are frequently seen in an army's individual discipline, small unit cohesion, and effective leadership, with the most typical pattern being a slow but steady rise in warning signs followed by a rapid acceleration leading up to collapse. A survey of individual discipline, small unit cohesion, and effective leadership in today's Army reveals that, although there are many signs that the Army remains more healthy than often depicted, there are clear indicators of problems in all three areas. These conclusions lead to specific recommendations about the Army's unit rotation policy, the balance of experience and education in its leader development programs, and the Army's role in maintaining national will during protracted conflicts.

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Introduction

Breakdown. Disintegration. Collapse.

Few terms carry as much weight or draw as much attention from military professionals. No dream is more appealing to a commander than that of causing the enemy force to collapse, to dissolve under the pressure of combat. No nightmare is more troubling than that this should happen to his own force. Much of military theory centers on methods, either proven or experimental, for inducing collapse in the enemy at the lowest risk of collapse to the friendly force. In some ways warfare boils down simply to two forces competing to see who will collapse first.

Yet armies are surprisingly resilient and are capable of maintaining their organizational integrity under incredible levels of hardship, privation, and exhaustion. Armies are, by intent and design, capable of accommodating the stresses of combat. Many, perhaps most, wars conclude long before either military force disintegrates. But the consequences of a collapse can be so catastrophic that military commanders and leaders have always sought the surest ways to inoculate their armies from this danger.

Clausewitz wrote of ideal armies with "the true military spirit." Such organizations would maintain their cohesion "under the most murderous fire," would follow orders even when defeated, and would accept hardship as the natural environment of their enterprise. But Clausewitz cautioned that it is extremely difficult to identify such armies, because it is easy to "confuse the real spirit of an army with its mood."[1] Armies, in other words, can fool even the most careful of observers, and collapse may come upon an army which moments before appeared sound.

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[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 220-222. It is worth noting that Clausewitz had personally observed the total collapse of the Prussian Army at Yena, and likely drew his distinction between "mood" and "spirit" from this disastrous experience.

Is it possible to determine how close an army is to collapse? Are there indictors that give warning that the force is reaching the limits of its endurance? With the U.S. Army in its seventh year of sustained combat in the War on Terror with no end in sight, these questions are of more than passing interest. Many people, from military leaders to security experts to elected officers have voiced concerns about the impact of sustained combat operations on the Army. How thin, really, is the ice upon the U.S. Army now skates?

The answer to this question lies in examining collapse from a historical perspective. Armed with a model of collapse based on the commonalities of past collapses, it is possible to assess the presence or absence of such commonalities in the current Army, and so gain a general appraisal of the degree of risk. One must answer two basic questions: "What are the indicators that an army is approaching collapse?" and "To what degree does the U.S. Army demonstrate those indicators today?" The two major sections of this study attempt to answer these questions. While it may be impossible to determine the exact thickness of the metaphorical ice, one can at least determine if there are significant cracks under the feet of the Army.

Recognizing Collapse Before It Is Too Late

Military collapse has many forms and degrees, from the complete collapse sometimes seen within tactical units that have been physically destroyed to the much rarer, army-wide mutiny and refusal to fight. Between these two extremes lie an almost infinite number of shades of collapse. During World War II, psychologists conducted one of the more famous studies into the cohesion of combat units, basing their conclusions on interviews with captured German soldiers on the Western front. The study outlined five broad "modes of disintegration" among German tactical units: the total disintegration of a unit as a result of physical destruction that leaves only individual survivors, the surrender intact of a large unit after the leaders determine that further resistance is pointless, efforts by smaller units to actively seek out the enemy in order to surrender, inaction on the part of small units that is designed to result in the unit's capture by

the enemy. and individual desertion.[2] Although the study was limited to only tactical units, it demonstrated that there is no single form of disintegration; there are degrees of collapse.

Even so, it is possible to identify some general indicators of an imminent collapse, as a subsequent review of some military collapses will show. This is because the methods that militaries use to *prevent* collapse are much less varied, and collapse is most frequently preceded by the marked reduction in one or more of these key components of effective military units. Western militaries have long relied on three critical elements in keeping their units in the field and operating within the tolerances of the controlling government: individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership. These factors are critical to effective military units, so much so that two U.S. Army officers writing of the Vietnam period used these three indicators alone as the standard by which armies can be objectively evaluated.[3]

Individual discipline is simply the willingness of the soldier to abide by the policies and orders of his government. Its necessity for effective fighting units has been recognized since at least Roman times. The sources of discipline have been widely argued, but in the last resort the discipline of an army rests on the ability and willingness of the government to force compliance – to compel. The soldier must understand, as one veteran of the Great War put it, that there "is only one thing" for him do, with no really acceptable alternative.[4] His confidence that his own government will force him to comply must be matched by an equal confidence that the enemy offers no better alternative; his discipline is based, to some degree, on "fear and distrust of the

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[2] Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the German Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948): 282. This study made the idea of a "primary group" famous, convincing many academics and military leaders that the key to cohesion is the identification of the individual soldier with his squad, platoon, or company.

[3] Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 29. It is worth noting that, although this book was the source of much controversy when published, detractors tended to refute the authors' perhaps overly broad conclusions rather than the standards they used for measuring unit effectiveness.

[4] Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (New York: Avery Publishing, 1987), 59.

enemy."[5] But Western armies have long understood that discipline alone is not always sufficient to maintain an army; for this reason they have typically applied two other elements.

As one Western military historian has observed, soldiers in Western armies are "encouraged to develop new military loyalties towards their leaders, units, and comrades," a concept that is usually referred to as unit cohesion. Loyalty to the squad, platoon, in some cases even company and battalion, have proven to be much more powerful motivators than fear of punishment, and efforts to get soldiers to identify with their comrades are extensive and often include efforts to "encourage distrust or even inflame hatred" against the enemy."[6] The Germans in World War II were so effective in building these ties to the unit that the study of prisoners found that only complete separation from the group, the demand for immediate personal survival, or the invocation of a more powerful familial obligation were significant factors in breaking the bonds of the soldiers.[7] In the U.S. Army today, the idea of cohesion as an essential element in combat effectiveness is deeply engrained.

Cohesion among soldiers can be detrimental, however, if there is not effective leadership to guide the group in the desired direction. Not surprisingly, the importance of effective leadership is almost universally recognized. "A national army is held together by young leaders," Lord Moran stated after serving as a battalion field surgeon in the First World War and as the physician to the prime minister of Great Britain in the Second.[8] The U.S. Army would reach a similar conclusion in a self-examination following its experiences in Vietnam; it declared "Army leadership" as the "mediating influence" between the individual soldier and the goals on the

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[5] Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale, and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 232.

[6] Watson, 233.

[7] Shils and Janowitz, 288-291.

[8] Moran, 108.

organization.[9] While Alexander Watson, himself a historian, has argued that historians have traditionally "underplayed the central role of junior officers in determining men's actions," military professionals have long understood that effective small unit leadership is essential to preventing collapse.[10]

Individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership have been the key ingredients in the resiliency of Western armies in modern times, and remain key components today. It is difficult to identify the exact relationships between these components, and perhaps they are best viewed as three nodes in a complex network, their exact interactions dynamic and unknown, perhaps unknowable. For the purposes of this study it is important only to note that the three components work most effectively in combination. And, as a short review of some modern military collapses will demonstrate, a rapid decline in one or more of them bodes ill for an army.

Collapse in the Great War: Dysfunctional Cohesion and Indiscipline

There were several large-scale collapses of militaries, and even entire societies, in the First World War. Given the cataclysmic nature of the war, perhaps this is not surprising. The French mutinies of 1917 offer special insight into military collapse, however, as they are not as clearly tied to the preceding collapse of the domestic social order as is often argued for both the Russian and final German collapses. In perhaps the best documented study of the French mutinies, Richard Watt ultimately identifies the root causes as a sense of betrayal within the army, directed at the senior leadership and largely resting on the failure of those leaders to achieve success despite years of sacrifice; open indecision and conflict within the French

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[9] Donald W. Connelly et al., *Leadership for the 1970s: United States Army War College Study of Leadership for the Professional Soldier* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: United States Army War College, 1971), vii.

[10] Watson, 234.

government; a strong defeatist element among the civilian population; and the disastrous shattering of the high hopes held for the Nivelle offensives.[11]

Whether Watt is correct or not, the mutinies offer interesting insight into the connection between military collapse and an army's discipline, cohesion, and leadership. Throughout the summer of 1917, a total of at least 49 divisions participated in the mutinies, but prior to the Nivelle offensives there had been only small indicators of problems with the Army.[12] As the mutinies began and then spread across the army however, these small indicators rapidly grew to shocking proportions. At the height of the mutinies, discipline had deteriorated to the point that leaders feared to enforce even the most basic military rules, such as those of courtesy to officers and maintenance of personal hygiene. Soldiers threatened to shoot officers who attempted to enforce such standards, and desertions, which had been fewer than 9,000 in 1916, rose to more than 30,000.[13] Cohesion also deteriorated rapidly, although in a somewhat unique manner. French units remained largely intact, but simply refused orders and appointed *de facto* leaders from within their own ranks as their spokesmen. And the message the spokesmen delivered was revealing; units that mutinied would, for the most part, continue to maintain defensive positions, but they would not obey orders to attack. As historian Niall Ferguson correctly points out, the mutinies "did not signify an intention to let the Germans win."[14] Throughout the mutinies, French units remained largely cohesive, but they were committed to France and one another, not the French army – and especially not the leadership of the army. There can be little argument with the mutineers' complaints about the low quality of leadership within the army. Indeed, while

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[11] Richard M. Watt, *Dare Call It Treason* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 174.

[12] Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 345. The exact number of French divisions that experienced some level of mutiny is debated. Ferguson's number is based on a review of historical accounts of mutiny. Barnett's somewhat higher number, reflected on the following page, reflects the French command's internal reporting, which used a broad definition of mutiny.

[13] Watt, 176,199.

[14] Ferguson, 345.

cancelling the remaining offensives and suppressing some of the leaders of the mutinies undoubtedly played a major role in bringing the disorders to an end, there is clear evidence that Petain's efforts to resolve many basic leadership shortfalls played a role of the same magnitude. Petain took immediate action to improve field sanitation, leave policies and facilities, and food services across the army, and with this increased focus on the basics of leadership, which had been widely disregarded in the past, the mutinies came to an end.[15]

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the French mutinies is the manner in which early indicators of trouble in discipline, cohesion, and leadership were ignored, the problem eventually ballooning to the point that only drastic action saved the French Army. The first combat refusal of a unit occurred on April 29, 1917, and involved only a single battalion that had been largely destroyed two weeks earlier in the initial phases of Nivelle's offensive. Under the influence of alcohol, the discipline of the unit began to break down when it was unexpectedly ordered to return to the front. The officers proved incapable of influencing the men, and, more worrisome, the NCOs refused to make the effort. The battalion commander eventually restored order by employing a military police platoon, abandoning a small number of individual soldiers, and ordering the arrest of six soldiers identified, probably erroneously, as ringleaders in the mutiny. The army executed the alleged ringleaders, and appears to have believed that it had resolved the underlying issues. By May 3, 1917, an entire division went through essentially the same experience, and this time the disorder was so great that the division was eventually sent back into the front only to assume a defensive position, _not_ to join in the attack in which it had been ordered to participate.[16] Still the army remained wedded to the idea that these events were only local anomalies, not reflective of larger issues. By late May, however, the French Army experienced seven or eight fresh outbreaks of mutiny on a daily basis, and by mid-June would

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[15] Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun, 1916* (London: Penguin Books, 1962), 324.

[16] Watt, 177-183.

report fifty-five divisions, amounting to sixteen corps, as mutinous.[17] This pattern of a relatively small number of early indicators which rapidly accelerated when left unattended would appear again in future wars.

American forces never experienced anything nearing the scale of the French mutinies, but there is at least one subsequent event that involves the alleged collapse of an American unit, the 35th Infantry Division. The 35th participated in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, during the period September 26 through October 1, 1918. The division failed to achieve its objectives, and had to be replaced by the 1st Infantry Division after its subordinate units grew so intermingled that the division commander was incapable of putting the unit back into forward motion. To be fair, four of the nine divisions participating in the attack were in roughly similar conditions, but the 35th was viewed by both its corps and army headquarters as particularly incompetent, and the term "collapse" was used to describe the division's status on 30 September, 1918.[18]

A post-battle inspection of the unit returned a report that deemed the unit "not well trained" and "not a well disciplined unit." The remainder of the report was crystal clear on the cause of these conditions – exceptionally poor leadership. The list of examples was long and disturbing. Both brigade commanders and all four of the regimental commanders had been placed in the unit in the week prior to the attack. The division signal officer was relieved due to the complete failure of the division's communications networks (he was replaced by the executive officer of the Fort Leavenworth prison). Tthe division failed to bring up field kitchens for the attack, leading to widespread hunger during the operation, and issued maps down to

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[17] Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 213-215.

[18] Robert H. Ferrell, *Collapse at the Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 25. Ferrell is an excellent source on this incident, but tends to focus on the friction between the National Guard and Regular Army officers. Given that his previous works was a biography of Truman, who served as a National Guard captain in the 35th Division, perhaps this is not surprising.

battalion commander, but no lower. One of the new regimental commanders collapsed on the first day of the attack, while the division commander and his chief of staff were out of communication with both the division headquarters and their subordinate units for most of the operation. Following its relief by the 1st Division, the 35th abandoned significant amounts of food and ammunition. The report found little of merit within the leadership of the division. Although the individual soldiers of the unit rightly believed they that had fought well and accomplished something, the report concluded that "after September 27th the Division was really one in name only."

Army Colonel Lesley J. McNair was present as an observer during the 35th Division's attack on September 26, 1918, and summarized his perceptions of the division's tactical disposition in one word – "foolish."[19] The debacle led him to conclude that the Army had to provide better small unit leadership to its men, and better unit integrity to allow for the development of cohesion. In the next war, as the lieutenant general commanding the Army Ground Forces, McNair would get his chance to bring this to pass.

Resilience in World War II

When U.S. Army officers wrote the official history of the Second World War, they reflected the degree to which the experiences in the Great War influenced the way the Army saw the problems of the Second. In the official record of the Army's effort to build an effective ground force, they wrote, "The Army Ground Forces from the beginning attached great importance to unit integrity and to the training of the members of the fighting team in their normal associations….teamwork required that officers know their men and the men know each

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[19] Ferrell, 111 (for the summary of the report), 46 (for the presence of McNair).

other."[20] Understanding the stresses that modern combat places on units, senior leaders were determined to provide better discipline, closer cohesion, and more effective leadership to the organizations deployed for the Second World War. In this endeavor, they met with both success and failure.

U.S. Army divisions demonstrated a wide range of effectiveness levels during their first combat employments, but most settled into reasonable levels of performance after the initial shock of combat.[21] Some, however, performed particularly well while others seemed to come dangerously close to the collapse seen in the Great War. In explaining these variances, senior leaders at the time almost universally reported differences in leadership, cohesion, and discipline.

The 90th Infantry Division, as an example, saw heavy combat in the *bocage* area of France, and was widely believed to have come close to complete collapse. W.E. Depuy, later the first commander of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, served as a battalion operations officer and battalion commander in the 90th. While labeling the efforts of the unit "heroic," he found no difficulty in explaining the unit's poor battlefield performance, which he characterized as "only marginally effective," admitting that the division was "nearly disbanded." He tied the unit's problems directly to the fact that the average platoon leader survived only two weeks, resulting in poor leadership and cohesion at the small unit level. Only actions by senior leaders to "tip the scales toward seasoning and away from casualties" restored the capability of the division. Once platoon leaders averaged ten weeks in their units, the division never again failed to achieve an assigned mission.[22] This contrasted sharply with the experience of the 88th Infantry Division, assessed by one military historian to have been twice as effective as the average U.S. division.

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[20] Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Forces*, United States Army in World War II: The Army Ground Forces (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1948), 480.

[21] Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 250.

[22] William E. Depuy, "Battle Participation and Leadership," *Military Review* 69 (July 1989): 97.

Trevor Dupuy, who served as a battalion commander in World War II and subsequently emerged as one of the Army's most prolific historians, placed the credit for the division's performance on the unit's leaders, starting with the division commander and extending down through the regimental and battalion commanders as well. Dupuy's study of the division also noted that, in addition to excellent leadership, the division was widely noted for its "strict discipline."[23] A second study of the same division credited much of the success of the unit to reduced personnel turbulence during pre-deployment training, resulting in greater cohesion within the division, as well as the exceptional leaders within the unit.[24]

Somewhere between these two extremes lay the vast majority of U.S. divisions, as demonstrated by the experience of the 4th Infantry Division in the Hurtgen Forest in 1944. One regiment of the division, the 22nd, suffered 86% casualties in an eighteen-day period, at the end of which the unit "stood at the edge of the abyss…a shell of its former self." Despite the remarkable stress, however, the unit remained largely intact and accomplished its mission. In explaining the unit's success, historian and Soldier Robert Rush credits two factors in his definitive account of the battle. First, "leadership within the regiment was dynamic and up front," including not only the original leaders but those who progressed into leadership positions as a result of the extremely high leader casualty rates. This allowed what the researcher termed a cohesion that was "situational in nature," as replacements were quickly integrated into a team centered on a veteran leader. Second, "as veterans fell and replacements arrived, the regiment relied less on cohesion and more on coercion."[25] Given the rate of losses, perhaps a greater reliance on discipline, in its most basic form of coercion, is not surprising.

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[23] Trevor N. Dupuy, *Understanding War: History and Theory of Combat* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987), 120-121.

[24] John Sloan Brown, *Draftee Division: The 88th Infantry Division in World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 153.

[25] Robert Sterling Rush, *Hell in Hurtgen Forest: The Ordeal and Triumph of an American Infantry Regiment* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 340-343. Rush is a retired Army NCO who served as the command sergeant major of the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment in the 1980s.

Far from perfect, what the experience of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, the 4th Infantry Division, and the vast majority of the other U.S. formations in the war demonstrated was that the American Army had shown remarkable improvement in its understanding of how to maintain the resiliency of combat formations in the face of the stresses of combat. Although debate would and still does rage over the performance of U.S. divisions in comparison to their German counterparts, U.S. divisions by and large proved to be good enough, which is perhaps the only meaningful standard in combat. Sadly, within only a few decades the Army would forget much of what it had learned. The Army Ground Forces' commitment to leadership, cohesion, and discipline would give way to other concerns. In the two world wars, tactical units from the U.S. Army had occasionally collapsed under the pressure of high intensity combat, but there was never any danger of a wholesale collapse on either front. In Vietnam, under much lower levels of combat stress, the Army itself would disintegrate.

Vietnam: Collapse Writ Large

In 1978, in what is arguably the seminal account of the deterioration of the U.S. Army in Vietnam, two former officers with combat experience in the conflict would characterize the Army as "an undisciplined, ineffective, almost anomic mass of individuals who collectively had no goals and who, individually, sought only to survive the length of their tours."[26] Although largely ostracized by their peers for their comments, they were not effectively refuted. Yet their characterization requires clarification. As one scholar has accurately described, there were really three Armies in Vietnam, and only the one that fought in the period of 1970-1972 saw "wide-

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[26] Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 9. At the time of publication, Gabriel was a Reserve major serving as an Assistant Professor at Saint Anselm's College. He subsequently wrote a number of scholarly historical works. Savage was a retired lieutenant colonel serving as the Chairman of the Politics Department at Saint Anselm's. Savage had seen combat in Europe and Asia prior to authoring the book, and wrote subsequently on defense issues.

spread breakdowns." In the two earlier periods, 1965-1967 and 1968-1969, the Army

demonstrated increasing signs of problems, but the acceleration in the final period was

remarkable and terminal.[27] During the final years of the U.S. Army's involvement in Vietnam,

individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership all but disappeared.

Today's Army officer is almost incapable of imagining the state of indiscipline in the

Army of 1970. In 1967, three years into the war, the Army experienced an Absent Without Leave

(AWOL) rate of 78 per 1,000, and a desertion rate of 21.4 per 1,000. By 1970, those rates had

risen to 132.5 AWOLs and 52.3 desertions, and these numbers do not include those who simply

never reported for service after receiving their draft notifications. Those who remained with their

units were often of questionable utility. One study, which examined only the elite 173rd

Airborne Regiment, concluded that 68% of the unit used marijuana, and 31% used it at least once

a week. When the Army began testing all returning veterans for drug use in 1971, the first

week's results indicated that 10% of servicemen were using heroin while in theater.[28]

The combination of drugs and weapons proved volatile. At Camp Eagle, a base operated

by the 101st Airborne Division, a 1970 disagreement between officers and enlisted Soldiers

resulted in an afternoon attack on the officers' club by 20-30 unidentified enlisted men armed

with rocks, gas, and smoke grenades. In an unrelated incident, occurring several weeks later, a

disagreement over the seating arrangements in the dining facility resulted in an on-camp skirmish

that lasted 48 hours and left five Soldiers seriously injured.[29] In a separate camp, two majors

were shot and killed while attempting to get Soldiers to reduce the volume of their tape player.[30]

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[27] Charles C Moskos Jr., "The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam," *Journal of Social Issues* 31, no. 4 (1975): 25.

[28] William L. Hauser, *America's Army in Crisis: A Study in Civil-Military Relations* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 94, 114, 120. Contrary to the popular view that the U.S. Marine Corps was impervious to such issues, Marine rates in 1970 were significantly higher than the Army's.

[29] Eugene Linden, "The Demoralization of an Army: Fragging and Other Withdrawal Symptoms," *Saturday Review* 55, no. 2 (8 January 1972): 13-14.

[30] Hauser, 75.

Most disturbingly, the Army did not appear see any of these incidents as particularly unusual or worrisome. The ability of the Army to coerce compliance, to maintain discipline, appeared to be at an all-time low.

Unit cohesion, which had been high among Army units deploying in 1965, was abysmal by 1970. A famous study of the psychology of the American Soldier laid the blame for the dissolution of unit cohesion squarely at the foot of the Army's rotation policy. "The rapid turnover of personnel hindered the development of primary-group ties…[and] reinforced an individualistic perspective."[31] Because individuals arrived in theater, served their tour, and departed theater based on their own individual timeline, there was little or no opportunity for small units to develop the cohesion that had proven so vital in both world wars. In Vietnam, the rotation policy made it "virtually every man for himself."[32]

Unfortunately, this is not to say that primary-groups did not emerge. They did form, coalescing around unofficial groupings and organizations that frequently held values and goals at direct odds with those of the Army. As one embedded journalist wrote in 1972, although the

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[31] Moskos, 31.

[32] Gabriel and Savage, 13. The Army's individual rotation policy in Vietnam was not its first effort along these lines. During World War II the Army had allowed theater commanders to develop their own rotation policies, but in practice the need for manpower was so acute that in almost all cases only those Soldiers who had proven themselves incapable of further combat, due to injury or ineptitude, were rotated out of theater. This general rule held until the end of the war in Europe, after which the European Theater did begin to rotate some of its longest-serving veterans. The Army attempted to improve on this model in Korea, where in 1951 it instituted a rotation policy of "eligibility" at 6 months for Soldiers in forward units and 12 months for others. Eligible Soldiers could rotate, however, only after a replacement had arrived at their units. Since the replacement flow reflected an optimistic underestimation of casualties, the reality was that very few eligible Soldiers ever rotated out of theater. The replacement policies of World War II and Korea generated a great deal of criticism during the two conflicts, managing to undermine unit manning in the eyes of commanders while simultaneously appearing unfair to the Soldiers and public at large. The Vietnam policy was designed to avoid these two shortfalls of the earlier policies, but inadvertently undermined unit cohesion. For an insightful historical overview of the Army's personnel rotation policy, written by an enlisted veteran of the Korean War who later served as an officer, see: Francisco Toro-Quinones y Silva, "Rotation of Combat Personnel Within the United States Army," (Master's thesis, Command and General Staff College, 1972. In Master of Military Arts and Science Monographs, http://comarms.ipac.dynixasp.com/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=126J99458BQ97.996&menu=search&aspect=b asic_search&npp=25&ipp=20&spp=20&profile=carlcgsc&ri=&term=&index=.AW&aspect=basic_search &term=&index=.TI&term=rotation+system+replacement+system&index=.GW&term=&index=.SW&term =&index=.SK&term=&index=ISBN&term=&index=.PW&term=&index=.SE&x=0&y=0#focus (accessed February 12, 2010)).

Soldier is demoralized, "he is no coward…he will still risk his life for a friend."[33] In the final stage of Vietnam, however, Soldiers no longer identified as their "friends" the members of their small units. Other affiliations often took precedent, creating what might be called "dysfunctional cohesion," a bonding that works at odds to the Army's purpose.

Race, for example, played an increasingly important role in how Soldiers identified themselves, reflecting racial tensions within the nation at large. Many incidences of internal violence were motivated by questions of race, to include two of those already discussed in this study. With little or no cohesion within squads and platoons, minority Soldiers frequently turned to *ad hoc* groupings based on race to fulfill the primary-group role.[34]

The most prevalent form of dysfunctional cohesion, however, was the creation of unofficial groupings of draftees who saw themselves as endangered by the volunteers, derisively termed "lifers." The cohesion within such *ad hoc* groupings could become so rigid that the group would attempt the murder of an officer or NCO who placed mission accomplishment above the perceived safety of the group. The prevalence of such behavior, termed "fragging" because of the frequent use of a fragmentation grenade as the murder instrument, is nothing short of shocking. In the twenty-four months of 1970 and 1971, the Army reported 363 confirmed cases of fragging, with another 118 possible cases, resulting in the deaths of 45 officers and NCOs. Lawyers in the Judge Advocate General Corps estimated that these numbers represented 10% of the actual attempted murders. By 1971, fragging had become so common that one war correspondent believed that it caused "more fear among officers and NCOs than does the war with 'Charlie.'"[35] A psychological study estimated that 80% of fraggings were the actions, not of "a solitary individual pursuing a kind of personal vendetta," but of organized small groups who believed the target to be a threat to the group's safety or identity. The study recognized as "irony" that the

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[33] Linden, 55.

[34] Moskos, 33.

[35] Linden, 12.

same small group dynamics that had served the Army well in World War II were working in direct opposition in Vietnam.[36]

These *ad hoc* groupings did not always resort to violence, of course, but could have extremely detrimental effects on the organization by other means. In October, 1971, the Soldiers on Fire Base PACE refused to conduct the local security patrols ordered by the company commander. Known as "combat refusals," such actions were more and more frequent after 1969. In the case of PACE, on the evening of the first refusal, sixty-six members of the company signed a letter to Senator Edward Kennedy, complaining that "we are troops that are supposed to be in a defensive role…but we constantly find ourselves in the same combat role we were in ten months ago." In something of a compromise, the commander was eventually able to gather enough volunteers to get the mission accomplished. The majority of the company, however, remained securely in the fire base.[37] Dysfunctional cohesion had trumped the organizational cohesion once experienced among squads and platoons.

Could effective leadership have overcome the corrosive effects of the rotation system? The question is difficult to answer since officers, and even commanders, were subject to the same rotational rules as individual Soldiers. Command, in fact, was generally only a six-month tour, severely limiting the ability of even the best leaders. But the record seems to indicate that the Army's leaders had some significant issues aside from the rotational policy. In 1971, the U.S. Army War College conducted a serious study of leadership across the Army, relying heavily on feedback from Soldiers, NCOs, and officers. The results were disturbing. "Significant problems in leaders were found at all levels," the study reported. And while there was plenty of censure for leaders in all roles, commanders emerged as the least respected of leaders. The report quoted one of the respondents in describing the typical commander as "ambitious, transitory…marginally skilled in the complexities of his duties…fearful of personal failure…determined to submit

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[36] Moskos, 35.

[37] Hauser, 100.

acceptably optimistic reports." In light of its findings, the study recommended a wholesale, but poorly-defined, revamping of the officer education system.[38]

Outside the officer corps, the perception of the officers was little better. The same War College study interviewed NCOs, and found that 27% of senior NCOs reported themselves "somewhat, highly, or totally disappointed" with officer leadership. When the question was reframed to include only officer leadership in combat, the level of disappointment rose to 34%.[39] Those outside the Army but with extensive experience with the officer corps did not have a more optimist view of officers; one war correspondent described the Army officer corps as "suspicious, resentful, angry beyond measure."[40]

Even the more sympathetic elements of the press recognized that many of the shortcomings of the officer corps, especially at the junior level, were as much the fault of the organization as of the individuals involved. Officers in Vietnam frequently lacked the support of a strong and able corps of NCOs because, as one observer noted, "the current career NCO retreats from contact with his men and consorts only with others of his own breed," finding himself ill-equipped to cope with the "drug-using, anti-authoritarian draftee."[41] The Army as an institution provided little support for its overburdened officers, and was sometimes almost other-worldly in its response to the problems in the field. One commander stated that any sincere efforts to reinstate discipline in his unit would result in his relief from command; "There is no control. The word is 'Don't harass the troops.'" And one can only imagine the response of the officers of the

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[38] Donald W. Connelly, et al., *Leadership for the 1970s: United States Army War College Study of Leadership for the Professional Soldier* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: United States Army War College, 1971), 19, 27. The recommendations of the report were broad, calling for additional study and unidentified "new ideas" in several areas.

[39] Connelly, 16, Figure 12.

[40] Ward Just, *Military Men* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 5.

[41] Linden, 16.

Americal Division who read the January, 1971, report which categorized the one-per-month rate of fragging within the division as "not serious enough to warrant special attention."[42]

The story of the collapse of the U.S. Army in Vietnam is one of an initially slow but then rapidly accelerating loss of individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership. Many factors played a role in this disintegration, but it is difficult to ignore the prominent role played by at least two critical factors: the individual rotation system and the marked decline in political support for the war in and around 1969. The rotation system, with its negative effects on discipline, cohesion, and the effectiveness of small unit leadership, was a continuous drain on the effectiveness of the Army, and probably played a role in the steady but noticeable decline of the first years of the conflict. The rapid acceleration of the collapse of the Army in Vietnam, however, corresponds markedly with the loss of political support for the war demonstrated after Tet in 1968. A RAND study of all U.S. post-World War II conflicts concludes that "leadership consensus" – meaning support for the conflict among the political leadership of the nation – plays a central role in determining the degree to which the public will support the conflict.[43] Not surprisingly, political consensus evaporated after the Tet offensive and the President's subsequent decision not to participate in the 1968 elections. It is difficult to believe that this nation-wide disenchantment with the war did not play a role in the collapse of the Army. The parallel and rapid decline in both the public support for the war and the Army's performance in the war seem too remarkable to be written off as coincidence.

Whatever the underlying causes of its collapse, as the Army began to emerge from its post-war stagnation its senior leaders would focus on individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership, along with a much greater emphasis on training, in an effort to rebuild the Army. Not coincidentally, these same senior leaders would also demonstrate great concern that the

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[42] Hauser, 95, 102.

[43] Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996), xx.

military not be committed to combat without an assurance of continued political support.

Ironically, at the same time that the U.S. Army was attempting to rebuild itself, its Cold War

adversary was undergoing a collapse of its own in Afghanistan. For the Soviet Army, however,

there would be no opportunity for recovery.

Soviet Collapse in Afghanistan

"When the army of an empire can no longer recruit effectively, the regime itself is in

danger. The Soviet empire crossed that threshold in 1989-1991." William Odom, a retired U.S.

Army lieutenant general and former director of the National Security Agency, placed the blame

for the collapse of the Soviet Army in 1991 on three factors: large reductions in conventional

forces, a backlash against military conscription among the civilian population, and the wide-

spread and open resistance to conscription that eventually caused the Army to evaporate as semi-

annual cohorts left active duty and no replacements entered the system. This is a solid

explanation of the final act in the death of the Soviet Army, but it misses a fact that Odom makes

pointedly in his account: the nationwide collapse of the Soviet Army was really a continuation of

the collapse the Soviet Army suffered in Afghanistan.[44]

The Soviet Army was very different from the U.S. Army, Afghanistan was much

different from Vietnam, and the tactics employed by the Soviets were markedly different from

those employed by the Americans. Yet a close look at the Soviet Army in Afghanistan produces

striking similarities to the U.S. Army in the last years of its involvement in Vietnam. In both

armies, individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership deteriorated rapidly under

the pressures of combat, producing many of the same types of dysfunctional behavior. If

[44] William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 272-273. Odom's account stands largely alone in its detailed analysis of the events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Army. Lester Grau's *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* is focused on tactics of the war in Afghanistan, but provides some insight into the internal problems of the Army, and the way the Frunze Academy viewed these problems.

anything, the Soviet deterioration appears to have been both faster and more radical than that of the Americans.

Discipline appears to have been a very early casualty of the war, a problem compounded by the government's tendency to place convicted criminals into the Army in lieu of prison, and the Army's tendency to heavily favor such individuals for service in Afghanistan. A 1987 survey of troops in Afghanistan revealed that 69% stated that hashish was readily available in their units, while 22% made the same claim for heroin, and 11% for LSD. Those not taking drugs represented less than half the troop strength, and this minority drank excessively, resulting in cases of death among soldiers who drank automotive brake fluid in the absence of vodka. Throughout the war in Afghanistan, the crime rate in the Army soared; a 40% increase in one six-month period, to include a nearly 20% increase in premeditated murder, was representative. Theft of government property was rampant, with soldiers routinely selling even weapons and ammunition to Afghans for alcohol or drugs, and "indiscriminate executions, rapes, and mutilations" were widespread.[45] An Afghan passing through a Soviet checkpoint with any money was likely to be "sent to Kabul" – robbed and shot in the head.[46]

Cohesion in Afghanistan existed primarily in the dysfunctional pattern of loyalty to one's conscript cohort or one's ethnic group. The Soviet pattern of conscription produced a cohort of soldiers every six months; each cohort went to initial training together, arrived at their unit together, completed their two years of service together, and returned to the civilian world together. In Afghanistan, these cohorts came to resemble classes in a U.S. high school, with the "freshman" cohort routinely abused by the three "upper class cohorts." Not surprisingly, cohorts, rather than squads and platoons, became the primary group for most soldiers in Afghanistan. Within cohorts, soldiers were sometimes further divided by ethnic group, typically in an *ad hoc*

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[45] Odom, 247-249, 289, 302.

[46] Lester W. Grau, ed. and trans., *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1996), 207.

organization known as a *zemlyachestus*. Tensions between the groups, especially the Slavs and Central Asians, could lead to "murders, riots, and occasional mutinies." Both cohorts and ethnic groups were known to murder officers they deemed as threatening, although the Soviet Army did not maintain records that allow a meaningful comparison to the fragging incidents in the U.S. Army.[47] Both cohorts and ethnic groups proved capable of atrocities in Afghanistan, although the fact that at least some of these were committed under Soviet orders makes it difficult to determine what role dysfunctional cohesion played in such events.[48]

What is clear is that Soviet officers in Afghanistan were largely ineffective in leading their units. Officer credibility with the soldiers was poor, often having been irreversibly damaged by the whimsical descriptions of the Afghanistan battlefield provided to new conscripts by the political officers. Such damage was exacerbated by the officer corps in Afghanistan, where "vodka was the officers' drug of choice," "officers frequently beat soldiers," and "junior officers nursed fear and veiled resentment toward senior officers."[49] This ineffective mix proved incapable of providing good order and discipline; most criminal acts on the part of soldiers were simply ignored by the officer corps. Officer influence was so limited, in fact, that soldiers termed life in a unit as *dedovshchina* – loosely translated as "grandfather rule." The "grandfathers" were the members of the senior cohort, those on their final six months of enlistment, and they, not the officers, ruled the barracks and the battlefield.[50] It is frankly difficult to imagine a less effective model for military leadership. By the end of the war, the collapse of good order and discipline was so complete that the Supreme Soviet found it advisable to issue a blanket pardon to all

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[47] Odom, 287-289, 249.

[48] Grau, 207.

[49] Grau, 207 (role of vodka); Odum, 248 (use of physical violence); Odum, 292 (attitude of junior officers).

[50] Odom, 288.

soldiers involved in the war in Afghanistan, to include more than 2,500 already convicted of crimes.[51]

The Soviet Union's eventual decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was undoubtedly driven by a wide variety of factors, both domestic and international. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that one of those factors, perhaps one of the more important, was that the Soviet Army had simply collapsed under the stress of combat, and had little hope of bringing the conflict to an acceptable termination. Unfortunately for the Soviets, upon returning to the USSR, the Army did not go through the post-war recovery of the U.S. Army, but rather spread the loss of discipline, cohesion, and leadership across those units who had not participated in the Afghanistan war.[52]

Common Indicators of Impending Collapse

A working model of military collapse emerges from the review of selected modern Western experience. Recognizing the need for resiliency in an army during combat operations, Western governments routinely employ individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership to guard their armies from the effects of combat stress. This approach is largely, even astonishingly successful. But sometimes, most frequently within a tactical unit but occasionally across an entire field army, the synthesis of these three elements begins to unravel.

The exact relationship between discipline, cohesion, and leadership is beyond this study, but it is clear that they are connected. Personal experience indicates that effective leaders generate discipline and unit cohesion, but as with all human interactions the relationship is much

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[51] Odom, 250.

[52] Odum, 250.

more complex than that of singular cause and effect.[53] The reality is likely that the three factors do not have a static relationship, but interact as a complex system.

In a unit or army approaching collapse, one or more of these elements begins to show signs of diminishing. The signs may be slight at first, often no cause for alarm. If the underlying problems remain unchecked, however, the signs of a disturbance soon spread to a second element, then a third. There may be a long period of a slow increase in warning signs, but the collapse of the unit or army appears to accelerate sharply at some point, spiraling out of control. If the survey of military collapse provides anything of value, it is a clear caveat that early signs of collapse must be heeded, for at some point it may be too late to avoid disintegration.

The U.S. Army in 2010: Indicators of Impending Collapse

When the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army published their goals for the 2010 calendar year, accomplishing the nation's strategic objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan was, unsurprisingly, the top item on the list. The second and third of the six objectives, however, might raise the eyebrow of the casual observer: "restore balance" – a broad concept that largely rests on the idea of attaining a 1:2 ratio of deployed to non-deployed time for Active Units – and "sustain Soldiers, civilians, and families." Both goals reflect the underlying suspicion that the Army, after eight years of war, must focus its efforts to offset the negative effects of combat on the institution itself and the people who comprise it. The fifth goal, calling for a leader development strategy, recognizes the critical role of leadership in offsetting the effects of combat, and a potential future shortfall in this area if actions are not taken to prevent it.

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[53] The author's personal experience with individual discipline, unit cohesion, and leadership spans more than twenty years of service in the U.S. Army, to include three years of combat duty in Iraq in command and operations billets at the infantry battalion and brigade levels.

In all, half of the Army's senior leader goals for 2010 are tied to preventing the Army from cracking under the strain of sustained combat.[54]

Given the performance of the Army over the past decade, perhaps this seems a bit of an overreaction. Compared with the U.S. Army in, say 1971, there are few commonalities with the Army fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan today. National newspapers do not carry weekly stories of Soldiers attacking and killing their leaders; there are no wide-spread combat refusals. The Army appears to be doing well. And in large measure, it is.

But a closer look at the discipline, cohesion, and leadership within the Army reveals a number of troubling indicators that the Army's senior leaders appear to already recognize. There are, to be certain, plenty of positive indicators; it is relatively easy to find good news about the way the Army is performing. Yet the more troubling indicators require attention, especially as several of them show negative growth trends that may be the first indicators of an Army nearing the end of its optimal capacity to fight. There is some bad news in the Army, and some of it appears to be getting worse over time.

Individual Discipline

Although the general discipline of the Army remains intact, and discipline within the combat zone appears stable, misconduct among Soldiers within the United States has been on the rise for the past several years and appears to be continuing that trend. A report by National Public Radio in 2007 revealed that the rate at which Soldiers are discharged because of

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[54] United States Army, *Memorandum: Calendar Year (CY) 2010 Objectives*, signed by John M. McHugh and George W. Casey, January 15, 2010. The three goals tied to preserving the Army are "Continue Efforts to Restore Balance," "Sustain Soldiers, Civilians, and Families," and "Implement the Army Leader Development Strategy."

misconduct had risen by 20% in the first four years of the war.[55] Many leaders are not surprised

by this rise in misconduct, seeing it as a natural consequence of extended combat operations.

When asked to explain the spike, many leaders point to the large number of Soldiers suffering

from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The explanation is not without merit.   Although

the exact percentage of Soldiers who have some symptoms of PTSD remains a debated issue,

psychologists have conclusively tied PTSD to "misconduct, legal problems, unauthorized

absences, and alcohol/drug-related problems."[56] Whatever the cause or causes, however, the

Army has seen a continual and accelerating increase in misconduct in at least two critical areas:

alcohol and drug abuse and Soldier suicide.

Although alcohol abuse has long been associated with military service in the eyes of

many, recent years have seen a spike in alcohol abuse of remarkable scale. In an interview in

2009, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army reported that the number of Soldiers enrolled in

treatment programs for alcohol abuse or dependency had almost doubled since the beginning of

the war. Perhaps more alarmingly, he called into question the veracity of the Army's drug abuse

reporting, which has shown only a slight increase since 2003. The general stated that he had

personally encountered "hundreds" of cases where Soldiers who should have been referred to the

drug abuse program were not referred, perhaps driven by the need for local commanders to

maintain high numbers of deployable Soldiers.[57] An alternate explanation for the low enrollment

in drug abuse programs may be that unit commanders are simply discharging drug abusers

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[55] National Public Radio, "Army Dismissals for Mental Health, Misconduct Rise," http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16330374, November 15, 2007 (accessed January 28, 2010).

[56] Hoge, Charles W., et al, "The Occupational Burden of Mental Disorders in the U.S. Military: Psychiatric Hospitalizations, Involuntary Separations, and Disability," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 162, no. 3 (March, 2005): 585. The reported percentage of Soldiers suffering from PTSD varies widely, but tends to be in the 20-30% range, with some reports going as high as 50%. Since different reports use different standards to identify PTSD sufferers, and most rely on some form of self-reporting, it is difficult to determine how much of the misconduct in the Army can be tied to PTSD.

[57] Gregg Zoroya, "Alcohol Abuse by GIs Soars Since '03," *USA Today*, June 19, 2009, http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-06-18-army-alcohol-problems_N.htm (assessed January 28, 2010).

immediately, without waiting for treatment. In fact, the Army reported that discharges for drug use had more than doubled from 2003 to 2007.[58] The Army likewise experienced a significant rise in the illegal use of prescription drugs. Although no solid statistics are available, an Army news release from Fort Sill stated that "it's not a stretch to believe" that as much as 25% of the college-age Army population might be misusing such drugs.[59] Whatever the exact numbers, the Army is seeing clear warning signs concerning individual discipline in the area of alcohol and drug abuse.

Within the media, and to some extent within the Army itself, these signs have been largely overshadowed by the unprecedented rise in Army suicides. While an in-depth look into the underlying causes of suicides is beyond the scope of this study, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a prolonged, marked, and steady climb in Soldiers taking their own lives does not reflect well on the discipline of the organization.[60] The numbers have been alarming. 2009 marked the fifth consecutive year in which Army suicides rose, the third consecutive year in which the Army set a new all-time record for suicides, and the second consecutive year in which the Army suicide rate exceeded that of the U.S. population at large. Despite establishing an Army Suicide Prevention Task Force and reviewing each suicide personally, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army reported that no single causal factor had emerged to explain the continued

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[58] National Public Radio, "Army Dismissals for Mental Health, Misconduct Rise," http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16330374 (accessed January 28, 2010).

[59] Robyn Baer, "Prescription Drug Abuse on Rise in DoD," http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/04/24/20152-prescription-drug-abuse-on-rise-in-dod/ (assesses January 28, 2010). The author's personal experience has been that much of this increase, at least within combat units, has been in the abuse of medications prescribed to assist Soldiers suffering from PTSD or physical injuries incurred in theater.

[60] Some might argue that suicides reflect poorly on unit cohesion as well, but the link to discipline is more clear. When a Soldier has taken his own life, he is an individual operating outside the Army's intent and guidance. To label this a breakdown in unit cohesion, as defined in this study, would require that a group of Soldiers conspired to operate outside the Army's intent and guidance. Nor is labeling a suicide an "act of indiscipline" intended to infer a moral judgment against those who commit suicides. It simply reflects that suicide runs counter to the Army's guidance for the behavior of Soldiers.

surge.[61] Indeed, suicides were almost evenly split between Soldiers who had completed at least one combat tour, those who were on their first combat tour, and those who had not deployed into combat – undermining the popular argument for a direct connection between combat tours and suicides.[62] As the Army prepares to enter its ninth year of sustained combat, evidence that the suicide rate is being affected by the significant effort of the Army's senior leadership to control it is in short supply.

Some have argued Soldiers are increasingly killing not only themselves but others as well. With the recent case of mass killing at Fort Hood still fresh in the minds of many Americans, it is easy to imagine this to be case.[63] The evidence in support of the assertion, however, is not very compelling. Aside from the highly visible actions of one major at Fort Hood, one other series of homicides has captured national attention, feeding the perception of a rise in Army homicides. During the period of 2005 to 2008, fourteen Fort Carson Soldiers were charged with eleven homicides and two attempted murders, causing Senator Ken Salazar to call for an inquiry into the underlying causes.[64] The subsequent Army investigation found that the Soldiers involved were clustered within a single brigade, and largely within a single battalion, seeming to indicate more about the conditions within that specific unit that about the discipline of the Army at large.[65] Similarly, a widely publicized article in the *New York Times* in early 2008 inferred an increase in homicides within the Army by claiming that homicides by discharged

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[61] C. Todd Lopez, "Suicide Numbers May Top 2008, But Progress Being Made," http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/11/18/30584-suicide-numbers-may-top-2008-but-progress-being-made/ November 18, 2009 (accessed January 28, 2010).

[62] BBC News, "U.S. Army Suicides Hit Record High," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7859797.stm, January 30, 2009 (accessed January 28, 2010).

[63] Major Nidal Malik Hasan was charged with the murder of twelve people on Fort Hood on November 5, 2009.

[64] Michael Riley and Tom Roeder, "Intense Combat Tied to Homicides by Fort Carson GIs," *Denver Post*, July 16, 2009, http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_12847489 (accessed October 27, 2009).

[65] United States Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, "Epidemiological Consultation No. 14-HK-OB1U-09: Investigation of Homicides at Fort Carson," (Aberdeen Proving Grounds: Center for Health Promotion and Preventative Medicine, July 2009), ES-3.

veterans within the United States had increased by 89% during the period of the current war. The credibility of the assertion, however, proved tenuous, as it rested solely on a survey of homicides reported in the media, making it impossible to know the validity and completeness of the data.[66] In fact, there is little evidence that the Army is experiencing a rise in homicides among its Soldiers, despite the impression created by the high visibility cases at Fort Hood and Fort Carson. The widely-held assumption that combat veterans are more prone to violence may be part of the conventional wisdom, but the evidence to support it is extremely limited. A scholarly effort to find a correlation between combat deployments and domestic violence in 2005, for example, found no such correlation, concluding that the age of the couple was a better predictor of domestic violence than combat experience.[67] Perhaps the Army has seen an increase in Soldier homicides since 2003, but the data to support such an allegation is certainly scarce.

Yet there is no doubt that the Army has and is experiencing remarkable increases in Soldier suicide and drug and alcohol abuse. Setting aside the contentious issue of homicides, these indicators alone are reason for concern among Army leaders. The discipline of the Army remains largely intact, it is true. But worrisome cracks are showing.

Unit Cohesion

There are considerably fewer cracks showing in the cohesion of small units within the Army, but not all the news is good. On one hand, the Army has enjoyed significant success in

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[66] Deborah Sontag and Lizette Alvarez, "Across America, Deadly Echoes of Foreign Battles," *New York Times*, January 13, 2008. To their credit, the reporters recognized this early in their article, but subsequently ignored the obvious consequences. Having pointed out that the media might be likelier to report homicides as "involving a veteran" during a time of war than in the earlier period of peace, the reporters went on to draw broad and unsubstantiated conclusions. The authors stopped short of pointing out that, if their data is correct, the murder rate among veterans falls well below the rate among the U.S. general population.

[67] John H. Newby, "Postdeployment Domestic Violence by U.S. Army Soldiers," *Military Medicine* 170, no. 8 (August, 2005): 643.

retaining the Soldiers and officers of the all-volunteer force, and the coordinated assaults on Army leaders, a defining characteristic of the US experience in Vietnam and the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, are essentially non-existent. In one area, however, there is cause for concern – allegations of war crimes by Army units. In sharp contrast to the individual acts of indiscipline that mark alcohol and drug abuse, war crimes by small units often require active cooperation among many Soldiers and leaders, operating in accordance with the group's internal norms but well outside the Army's values. While such incidents are by no means widespread, a few cases have been widely publicized and should give Army leaders pause, as a more detailed review will illustrate. Overall, unit cohesion appears to remain a strong positive indicator within the Army, but the exceptions are troubling.

Historically, the desertion rate of an army has been a strong indicator of the organization's internal cohesion. In an all-volunteer force, however, Soldiers do not have to take such drastic action. Instead, disgruntled Soldiers simply allow their enlistment to run its course, then exit the Army at the first legal opportunity. Not surprisingly, today the Army uses unit retention as a key indicator of unit health, down to battalion and even company level.

Since the war started, there has been plenty of good news concerning retention. After the initial spike in retention following the attacks on September 11, 2001, the Army saw a steady decline in retention on a yearly basis, culminating in fiscal year (FY) 2006. Based on retention in the first quarter of that year, the Army anticipated that it would fail to meet its retention goals for the year in at least one critical field – mid-grade non-commissioned officers. This conclusion drew attention from both Congress and the media, neither of which missed the potential implications for the ability of the Army to continue the fight in the Middle East.[68] In the end, the concerns proved unfounded. By the end of FY2006, the Army had exceeded its retention

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[68] Lawrence Kapp, *Recruiting and Retention: An Overview of FY2005 and FY2006 Results for Active and Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2006), http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs8290/ (accessed February 1, 2010), Summary, CRS-8 – CRS-10.

requirements in all categories, a trend that would continue throughout 2007 and cause a Congressional report to draw attention to the Army's "strong retention performance."[69] Well before the economic downturn that many credit with the improvement in retention, the Army was consistently meeting its retention goals. By this measure of health, the Army has been doing very well, and there is little cause for alarm.[70]

In a similar vein, the Army can draw reassurance from the almost total absence of violent anti-leadership conspiracies. Such conspiracies, many culminating in violence against officers, were a common occurrence in Vietnam, and reflected a breakdown in small unit cohesion. By comparison, the current war has seen almost nothing of this nature. A November, 2009, report in *The Christian Science Monitor* attempted to argue that the Fort Hood slayings of that month were part of an over-all trend in increasing Soldier-on-Soldier violence, but was able to identify only five such incidents within the Army during the entire course of the war. More importantly for the purposes of measuring cohesion within the Army, none of the incidents involved a group of Soldiers conspiring against their leaders based on a sense of loyalty to some group other than the Army. Each incident, from the 2003 grenade attack by Sergeant Hasan Akbar to the 2009 shooting spree of Major Nidal Malik Hasan, involved a single Soldier acting on his own.[71] Such

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[69] Lawrence Kapp and Charles A. Henning, *Recruiting and Retention: An Overview of FY2006 and FY2007 Results for Active and Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2008), http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL32965_20080207.pdf (accessed February 1, 2010), CRS-9 – CRS-10. No doubt the increase in a broad range of retention incentives played a role in this success.

[70] Army retention goals may have been artificially lowered by the use of the Stop Loss Program to maintain manning, averaging around 10,000 personnel requirements each month. For a summary account of both the costs and benefits of this program, see: Charles A. Henning, *U.S. Military Stop Loss Program: Key Questions and Answers* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009). It is unclear what impact the end of this program will have on the Army's ability to meet its retention requirements.

[71] Brad Knickerbocker, "Fort Hood shootings: How often do soldiers kill soldiers?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 6, 2009, http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2009/1106/p02s10-usmi.html (accessed February 2, 2010). Knickerbocker's tally included two incidents of Soldiers killing due to religious beliefs, one murder-suicide after a Soldier was confronted about stolen Army property, one incident of a Soldier opening fire in a mental health facility in Baghdad, and one incident of a National Guard Soldier allegedly killing two officers with a grenade in Tikrit.

limited violence as has occurred, in other words, may be attributed to a breakdown in individual discipline, and does not appear to reflect any broad loss of small unit cohesion in the Army.

Less clear is the underlying meaning of the well-documented and wide-spread use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" by Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. While there seems little doubt that Soldiers did use inappropriate techniques, some which might be fairly characterized as "torture," it is less clear what, if anything, this says about the level of cohesion in the Army. For example, if a particular unit or small group of Soldiers employed such techniques for the benefit of themselves or their unit, recognizing that they were violating the Army's guidance and hiding their actions from their superiors, one might argue that this reflects the emergence of dysfunctional cohesion. The story of enhanced interrogation techniques is a bit more clouded, however. Ambivalence and confusion about what constituted acceptable treatment of detainees extended well beyond the small unit level, and apparently included the nation's most senior civilian leaders. In reaction to this confusion and clear cases of inappropriate treatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, Congress passed the Detainee Treatment Act (DTA) in 2005, but by then the damage was done. The DTA marked a return to traditional U.S. treatment of detainees, and ironically called for the military to follow the Army's field manuals in this area. Although debate over CIA interrogation techniques continued into 2009, the DTA largely ended the Army's involvement in questionable techniques.[72] Given the confusion surrounding this issue, it is difficult to conclude that a breakdown in unit cohesion contributed to the Army's involvement in detainee abuse. Rather, it seems that most such instances came about as a result of legitimate, if inappropriate, leader decisions across multiple echelons.[73]

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[72] Michael John Garcia, *Interrogation of Detainees: Requirements of the Detainee Treatment Act* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/intel/RL33655.pdf (accessed February 2, 2010), Summary, 9-10.

[73] Douglas A. Pryer, *The Fight for the High Ground: The U.S. Army and Interrogation During Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003 – April 2004* (Fort Leavenworth: CGSC Foundation Press, 2009), 120.

Sadly, there are other cases in which there is little doubt that unit cohesion went horribly wrong, resulting in Army units committing crimes that shocked both the Army and the nation and brought comparisons to My Lai into the popular image of the war. In each case, an organized military unit committed a premeditated war crime, and then conspired to hide the fact from others. In 2006, a four-man fire team of U.S. Soldiers entered the home of an Iraqi family near Mahmudiyah, raped a young girl and killed the entire family, and managed to keep the entire incident secret for several months.[74] In the same year, a small Army unit captured three suspected insurgents, then freed them and shot them in the back as they attempted to run away.[75] In 2007, a unit consisting of thirteen Soldiers, to include several non-commissioned officers and a first sergeant, captured four armed insurgents and subsequently moved them to a remote location, shot each of them in the head, and dumped the bodies into a canal.[76]

While none of these incidents may match My Lai in scope, they do represent the same sort of unit dynamic, one in which a small, cohesive organization "develops values, attitudes, beliefs and norms contrary to the organization's."[77] This type of dysfunctional cohesion is and should be very troubling to the Army, as it can serve as an early warning of more wide-spread problems. In this case, the Army can draw some reassurance from the fact that the three cases discussed above came during the period of the heaviest fighting in Iraq, and do not appear to be part of a continuing trend. But with the heaviest fighting in Afghanistan almost certainly still in the Army's future, only the most optimistic of leaders would assert that these types of incidents will not occur again.

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[74] BBC News, "Life for U.S. Soldier's Iraq Crimes," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8239206.stm, September 4, 2009 (accessed February 2, 2010).

[75] BBC News, "U.S. Soldier Guilty in Iraq Killing," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6461215.stm, March 17, 2007 (accessed February 2, 2010).

[76] Abbie Boudreau and Scott Zamost, "Army Tapes Reveal Motive in Iraq Prisoner Killings," http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/11/17/army.tapes.canal.killings/index.html, November 18, 2009 (accessed February 2, 2010).

[77] Robert Rielly, "The Darker Side of the Force: The Negative Influence of Cohesion," *Military Review* 81, no. 2 (March-April 2001): 67.

The Army can and should be proud of its success in retention in a long war, and the almost total absence of conspiratorial violence against its leaders. It cannot, however, ignore the early warnings provided by such clear examples of dysfunctional cohesion. To dismiss these incidents as merely "rogue" units gone astray is to miss the larger, more important message.

Leadership

As with individual discipline and unit cohesion, the Army's leadership situation is a source of both reassurance and concern. A study of the current state of leadership reveals that the Army is in nowhere near the situation that marked the last years of Vietnam, and that some of the more popular negative views of Army leadership are more myth than substance. Nevertheless, there is room for concern, especially as the Army looks to the future.

When Gabriel and Savage authored their famous critique of the Army in Vietnam, they took the officer corps to task on two emotional topics. They claimed that the quality of leadership was a major source of discontent across the Army, and that officers were not sharing in the "burden of death" faced by the troops. They based these accusations on both their personal experiences in Vietnam and on statistical analyses of both Army surveys and casualty rates.[78] An updated look at the same statistics reflects a much more positive view of today's Army. A bi-annual survey of Army officers and enlisted Soldiers routinely asks respondents how satisfied they are with the quality of leadership in their units. In the six years prior to the start of the current war, on average 70.4% answered that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied." In the six years of war for which the survey has already occurred, that average has risen to 72.9%, and never fallen below 70.3%.[79] In other words, Soldiers appear to be more satisfied with the quality

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[78] Gabriel and Savage, *Crisis in Command*, 63.

[79] U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, "Well-being / Quality of Life and Job Satisfaction – U.S. Army Active Army Soldiers," January 28, 2009. This unpublished spreadsheet provides aggregated data for each of the Army's quality of life surveys for the period 1992-

of leadership in the Army today than they were in the period immediately preceding the current

war, a finding that could not be in greater contradiction to the Vietnam period. Similarly, a look

at casualties in the current war negates any sense that officers are somehow shirking danger. Of

the 3,722 Army fatalities through August 1, 2009, 403 (10.8%) were officers.[80] Although this is,

admittedly, lower than the total share of the Army comprised by officers (16%), it is closely

aligned with the population of officers found in combat units. (In a dismounted infantry

battalion, for example, officers make up 6.9% of the unit's authorized strength.) At least among

the population within theater, in other words, officers appear to be accepting their fair share of the

risks. Although there are exceptions in the form of a few well-known and vocal malcontents,

there appears to be no general sense that the leaders are the Army are somehow failing to measure

up to the challenge.

Yet there is room for some concern, especially as the Army looks to the future. Put

simply, regardless of the quality of the officer corps, there are not enough officers to go around.

This is not due to some "mass exodus" among the officer corps. Despite much anecdotal

evidence found in the news media and even within the Army itself, officer attrition rates since

2001 have been below historical norms.[81] The Army's shortage of officers does not reflect a

problem with supply, but with demand. The Army's decision to modularize the force and

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2008, and was provided directly to the author by the research Institute in response to an email request for information. Results from each bi-annual survey are published independently.

[80] Anne Leland and Mari-Jana Oboroceanu, *American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009), http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL32492_20090915.pdf (accessed February 2, 2010), 14-17. The Army's NCO corps is clearly accepting its share of the danger as well, accounting for 38% of the killed in action and 38.7% of the wounded in action.

[81] Charles A Henning, *Army Officer Shortages: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2006), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33518.pdf (accessed February 2, 2010), CRS-5. Historical officer attrition rates have been a fairly constant 8.5%, but have averaged 7.8% during the war. What *have* changed are the reasons that officers give to explain their decision to leave. Deployment tempo and concerns about family are now frequently given as the primary reasons for an officer's departure from the Army. The actual rate of departure, however, has decreased during the war. The statistics seem to indicate that a slightly *higher* number of officers would have departed over the same period had there been no war.

transition to brigade combat teams (BCTs) generated a requirement for an additional 3,635 captains and majors.[82] As a result, the Army is short several thousand leaders at perhaps the most critical ranks for combat operations. The Army is aware of the problem and is using a number of initiatives, from early promotion to retention incentives, to fill the gap.[83] The fact remains, however, that it takes years to produce seasoned captains and majors, and in the immediate future the Army will continue to experience a shortage of mid-grade officers while nearing a decade of continuous war. This is, and should be, cause for concern.

Unfortunately, not only are there not enough officers, there are continuing indicators that those who are in the force are no longer receiving adequate preparation for their assignments. A recent study reported that, while the Intermediate Level of Education (ILE) provided to majors at the Command and General Staff College has adapted its curriculum to the modern demands of war and is capable of producing trained and equipped majors for the force, the high demand for majors has translated into an increasing number of empty seats at Fort Leavenworth.[84] With the requirements for majors in deploying units taking precedent over attendance at ILE, the population of majors who rely solely on on-the-job training continues to grow. The majors are not alone. In a separate study of the Army's education program for BCT commanders, a researcher found the education to be adequate, but increasingly never undertaken. In the face of the on-going war and an increase in the number of combat brigades, significant numbers of selected BCT commanders simply forego attendance at the senior service college level, relying on

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[82] Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Army's Modular Redesign: Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2007), http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL32476_20070124.pdf (assessed February 2, 2010), CRS-9.

[83] United States Army, "2009 Army Posture Statement: Officer Retention," http://www.army.mil/aps/09/information_papers/officer_retention.html (accessed February 2, 2010).

[84] Thomas S. Hollis, "Intermediate Level Education a Casualty of War" (Master's thesis, Advanced Operation Art Studies Fellowship, 2008. In School of Advanced Military Studies Monographs, http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p4013coll3&CISOPTR=2310&CISOBOX=1&REC=1 (accessed September 15, 2009)), 49-51.

their experience to make up for the shortage in education.[85] This practice, extended over several years, has changed the general perception of the role and value of the senior service college, as noted by one of the Army's more respected retired general officers. Writing in the February, 2010, edition of *Proceedings*, Major General (retired) Robert H. Scales noted that the senior service colleges have seen the average student age rise from 41 to 45, making the experience more relevant to retirement than service at the senior level. This perception is amplified by the practice of replacing active duty faculty with civilians and contracted retirees. Scales pulls no punches when he says that the Army War College has become an "intellectual backwater" in the eyes of many of the Army's future senior leaders, who increasingly see a fourth or fifth combat tour in the Middle East as preferable to a year in school.[86]

Army leaders have done well, perhaps exceptionally well, in the current war. The Army can and should take pride in their performance. But there are early warning signs even in this area of historical strength. The Army faces a real shortage of officers at the captain and major levels, and has delayed or foregone the education of a significant portion of its mid-level and senior leaders. To date, there are few signs these factors have had a negative impact on the ability of the Army to continue to fight. But there is also no doubt that running a war with a shortfall of officers and allowing backlogs in the officer education system are decisions that must eventually lead to negative consequences. At some point, the bill will come due.

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[85] John G. Norris, "Is Professional Military Education Preparing BCT Commanders for Command in the 21st Century?" (Master's thesis, Advanced Operational Art Studies Fellowship, 2008. In School of Advanced Military Studies Monographs, http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p4013coll3&CISOPTR=2232&CISOBOX =1&REC=8 (accessed September 15, 2009)), 40-41.

[86] Robert H. Scales, "Too Busy to Learn," *Proceedings Magazine* 136, no. 2 (February, 2010), http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/story.asp?STORY_ID=2195 (accessed February 4, 2010).

Conclusions

So, how thin is the ice? It has already proven thick enough to bear the Army through eight years of war with its individual discipline, unit cohesion, and effective leadership largely intact. There are no indicators that the Army is in danger of an immediate collapse.

But there are disturbing cracks in the ice, indicators of problems that are just beginning to emerge and portents of potentially much more serious issues down the road. The accelerating rates of alcohol and drug abuse and Soldier suicide indicate that individual discipline is under strain. The cluster of units committing war crimes and then engaging in deliberate deception in 2006-2007 indicates that Army unit cohesion, undoubtedly one of the Army's great strengths, can go awry under the right battlefield conditions. And at a time when operational and leader fatigue is a reality across the force, the shortage of captains and majors and the requirement to delay or forego professional military education for significant numbers of officers means that the Army will face the next round of challenges with an officer corps in some ways weaker than in earlier years. Disaster is by no means imminent or fore-ordained, and in many ways the situation is not as dire as often portrayed. But the Army cannot afford to ignore the early warnings of problems ahead.

Recommendations

The challenges facing the United States Army today are daunting. While the war in Iraq appears to be drawing to a close, the force requirements in Afghanistan are likely to offset any anticipated reduction in stress on the force. The road ahead in Afghanistan is difficult to foresee, especially as the U.S. has publicly placed a planning horizon of less than two years on that campaign. Few military professionals believe the Army's commitment in Afghanistan will end in such a short time period, however, and Afghanistan is not the only theater in need of Army units. Whatever the future may hold, it is highly unlikely that the Army will find its forces in less demand over the next decade. "Persistent conflict" is not simply a bumper sticker slogan; it reflects the future as most Army leaders see it.

With one eye on that future, the Army sees some disturbing internal indicators with the other. Soldier suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, war crimes, a shortage of captains and majors, delayed investments in the education of mid-grade and senior leaders – all of these highlight that the Army has not come through its first eight years of war unscathed. Keeping these early cracks in the ice from expanding and leading to collapse has the attention of senior Army leaders, as evidenced by the number of initiatives and programs designed to cope with many of these issues. More than thirty years after the end of the Vietnam conflict, the images of an Army in collapse remain very much a part of its institutional memory. Much of the Army Chief of Staff's concern with "balancing the force" and achieving a better ratio of garrison to deployed time can be best understood as an effort to make sure that the Army does not repeat the Vietnam experience.

At the macro level, the historical and current information reviewed during the preparation of this study suggest three very broad policies that the Army should adopt (or continue) in order to maintain the Army's resiliency in the future years of the war. They include maintaining the Army's commitment to the unit rotation policy, balancing experience and education among the Army's leaders, and supporting the maintenance of national will in foreign policy.

Although the breakdown in discipline, cohesion, and leadership in the U.S. Army in Vietnam can be attributed to many factors, it is difficult to miss the role that the individual rotation policy played. As discussed within this study, the individual rotation policy undermined unit cohesion and made effective leadership more difficult by orders of magnitude. The Soviet Army experienced many of the same issues in Afghanistan, where leaders and cohorts of enlisted soldiers rotating into and out of units in-country. Both of those Army's were comprised largely of draftees, of course, making a direct correlation with today's Army problematic. While some of the resiliency demonstrated by today's Army may be credited to its composition as an all-volunteer force, however, it seems clear that the unit rotation policy has played a critical role in maintaining individual discipline, promoting unit cohesion, and allowing for effective leadership. In sharp contrast to the Army's experience in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, the current rotation policy satisfies the Soldiers' and the public's preference for a system that is perceived as

generally fair while allowing the Army to generate, deploy, and employ functional units. The costs of the unit rotation policy are indeed high from a manning perspective, but history indicates the costs of abandoning this policy will be measured in reduced combat effectiveness and perhaps in a reduction in public support for the Army. The Army must steel itself against those who decry the inefficiency of the current policy and continue to deploy units into combat as trained, coherent teams led by the same officers and non-commissioned officers who prepared them for war. This will not prevent incidences of misconduct or unit failure, but it will serve as a primary safeguard against wholesale collapse.

The Army must also adequately equip the leaders of its combat units. This is, to be fair, a sort of Catch-22 for the Army. Does one send a bright and motivated young major to ILE, or allow him to serve as a battalion operations officer in Afghanistan, taking advantage of the combat experience he gained in two deployments as a company-grade officer? Should the best, most combat-experienced lieutenant colonels go to the War College, or move directly into brigade command to provide combat leadership at this critical echelon? This dilemma is not new; it is inherent to all armies engaged in extended combat operations. But it is becoming clearer that the balance the Army has struck between education and experience is not adequate for the long term. There are no easy choices, but the Army is currently dangerously out of balance. The Army must place a greater emphasis on mid-grade and senior leader education, which means both sending valuable officers as students and, perhaps more painfully and more importantly, sending high-quality, combat-proven leaders as instructors. In concrete terms, this means substantially reducing, if not eliminating the wide-spread use of deferments in the officer education system. Officers will continue to forego their professional education as long as the Army continues to reward them for doing so. Only a change in Army policy will restore balance to the combination of education and experience that is necessary for success at the most senior levels.

Although not addressed in this study, there is some evidence that the Army's imbalance in professional education extends into the non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps as well. In an effort to provide deploying units with qualified non-commissioned officers over the past several

years, NCO development schools have been shortened in duration, taught by Mobile Training Teams at home station rather than at dedicated facilities, and often deferred well past the NCO's assignment to critical leadership duties in combat units. The necessity for such changes is self-evident; the Army simply was not meeting unit demand for qualified small unit leaders. The cost of these decisions, however, is not clear. At some point, the Army must transition to a sustainable model that produces NCOs who are qualified for their current duties and educated to allow them to continue to positions of greater responsibility. Perhaps the current model accomplishes this, but there is certainly room for doubt; a thorough study of this issue is needed.

Finally, the Army has a role to play in maintaining national resolve in the execution of its foreign policy. A surprising, incidental, and unanticipated finding of this study was the high correlation between collapses in an army's fighting ability and a near-simultaneous collapses in a nation's support for the war. The French mutinies in World War I coincided with a marked increase in the "defeatist" movement in the French rear and open dissension within the French government itself. Anti-draft movements in the Soviet Union increased in parallel with the Soviet Army's decline in Afghanistan. The U.S. Army's rapid degeneration in Vietnam coincided with sharply increased dissension over the war among the nation's political elites. As simple as it sounds, it appears to be true that armies fight best when they are sure of the support of their nation. Certainly many U.S. Army officers walked away from Vietnam with this as the first and most important lesson of that traumatic experience. Their efforts to prevent the commitment of the Army without that support have played no small part in the subsequent history of the Army and the nation.

Maintaining that support over years, perhaps decades, is the problem of both politicians and Soldiers, and the Army cannot afford to ignore its responsibility. Within the limits of legal and Constitutional boundaries, the Army must communicate with the American people - directly, honestly, and frequently. Remaining silent and adopting a model of the Army as a society isolated from the larger civil society is a recipe for disaster, as the trust of the American people in their Army is a critical component in national will. Above all else, the Army must guard its role

as an honest broker of national defense, providing the American people with sound, straight-forward, non-partisan military advice about its wars and its security. The Army lost its status of honest broker in Vietnam, and it took generations to regain. With armed conflict extending into the future as far as anyone is willing to predict, the Army cannot afford to be a contributor to a collapse in national will. Rather, it must be an ardent promoter of open and honest dialogue.

The Global War on Terror is likely to test severely the Army's ability to fulfill this role, and, to date, the record is somewhat mixed. The image of the Central Command commander providing Congress with a clear and concise report on the condition of the war in Iraq in early 2007, along with his fairly accurate prediction of what would be required for victory, is certainly reassuring. It is difficult for an Army professional not to take pride in the candor and competence reflected in that historic report. Alongside that memory, however, sits more disturbing memories of Baghdad in 2006, when the Army as an institution seemed hesitant to acknowledge what Soldiers on the ground saw clearly – a deteriorating situation that required a new and energetic approach. If the Army is to both survive and succeed in its current war, it must consistently live up to the model of 2007.

Long wars are hard on armies, eroding the discipline, cohesion, and leadership that bind them together. Today the U.S. Army is in a war that has already stretched across eight years and shows no sign of ending soon. If it is to remain intact and maintain its ability to achieve the nation's objectives, it must continue to adapt, finding ways to extend its capabilities into the long-term while meeting security requirements in the short. This is no academic concern; it gets to the very heart of preventing the collapse of an army. The health of the Army is a matter of national interest, and should never be taken for granted. If military history teaches anything about military forces, it is that no army - not even that of the United States - is above collapse.

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