GETTING A GRIP ON CAREERISM

bу

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I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this discussion on what I feel is one of the most crucial issues we'll deal with at this conference: careerism.

So far we've focused on the nature of careerism and, to some extent, what we can do about it. I'd like to conclude today's presentations on careerism with a note of caution. Although efforts to purge the officer corps of careerism are long overdue, careerism is much more elusive than most care to admit--a complex problem which is hard to pinpoint and even more difficult to treat. Overly-zealous, simplistic reforms could not only be ineffective, but also inadvertently distill valuable attributes from the officer corps. Therefore, corrective action must be carefully considered and judiciously applied, lest a short-term fix result in even graver long-term problems.

In the next few minutes, I'll examine the complexities of treating careerism. To lend historical perspective, I'll briefly highlight some background information, then establish a working definition for purposes of this discussion. Next, I'll outline the difficulties in pinpointing and treating careerism. Finally, because none of us likes to highlight a problem without offering solutions, I'll conclude with some thoughts on how to help the officer corps deal with careerism.

Although careerism has existed as long as the military profession itself, the genesis of today's careerism lies in a shift in basic values within the officer corps. As Samuel P. Huntington observed in his classic work, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, one of the salient characteristics that has

traditionally distinguished the officer corps is its view of the military as a ". . . 'higher calling' in the service of society" (5:8). However, a change in orientation was noted as early as 1960 in Morris Janowitz's book The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait. After interviewing 113 potential military leaders, Janowitz concluded: "Those who see the military profession as a calling or a unique profession are outnumbered by a greater concentration of individuals for whom the military is just another job." (7:117-118). Janowitz is not the only military sociologist to document these findings. Charles C. Moskos, Jr. also wrote of a change in the officer corps' orientation, from institutionalism (in which the profession is viewed as a calling) toward occupationalism (just a job). The consequence, Moskos argues, is a shift from an attitude of self-sacrifice and moral commitment to one of materialism (16:2-3). With a deterioration of institutional values, military sociologists theorize, the concept of a calling higher than self diminishes.

In recent years, the officer corps itself has also recognized this shift in basic values. In 1970, Army Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland commissioned the well-known Army War College study to assess the etnics and values of the officer corps. In light of the trend identified by Janowitz 10 years earlier, the results of the Army War College study were both predictable and unsettling. A loss of ethical orientation was cited, to include ". . selfish [,] promotion-oriented behavior," ". . disloyalty to subordinates," and ". . . poor standards of ethical and professional behavior" (4:74-75). This loss of orientation has not been limited to the Army. According to

a 1980 Air Command and Staff College report, 100 percent of officers surveyed felt "... most fellow officers compromised their integrity to varying degrees" (32:vii). Most recently, an Industrial College of the Armed Forces report entitled Cohesion in the US Military observed, "The shift in orientation of the officers has weakened [their] corporate cohesion. Many officers view the military as a job that offers material rewards and individual success" (8:62). As the evidence mounted, military as well as civilian critics increasingly referred to occupationalist pehavior as careerism.

As we've discussed this afternoon, there are a variety of definitions of careerism. In their book <u>Crisis in Command:</u> Mismanagement in the Army, Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage define careerism as ". . . self-seeking, the use of one's charge and command largely as a means to higher career rewards" (3:88). In another well-known reformist work entitled National Defense, James Fallows describes careerism as ". . . the desire to be, rather than the desire to do. It is the desire to have rank, rather than use it; the pursuit of promotion without a clear sense of what to do with a higher rank once one has attained it" (1:114). Members of the officer corps define careerism in similar terms. In his article "The Military Professional in America," Air Force historian Lieutenant Colonel John F. Shiner defines careerism as ". . . seekling] advancement for its own sake and iusing] . . . it exclusively as a goal rather than as an opportunity or reward" (20:1-35). A similar conclusion was reached in an AFMPC study in June 1987, in which careerism was defined as "[clareer-building as a deliperate aim: preoccupation with career advancement/promotion that

supplants concern for basic duty performance" (34:1). Although other definitions exist, these are representative thoughts of both outside observers and members of the officer corps. For purposes of this discussion, then, I'll define careerism as the practice of placing self-interests above the interests of the organization, for the purpose of personal advancement.

There are two aspects of careerism I'd like to highlight. First, self-interest is central to the definition. For this reason, careerism as I've defined it here is the antithesis of professionalism, which stresses subordination of self-interests to the interests of the organization (5:63-64). By extension, the relationship between professionalism and careerism is a zero-sum game--when careerism prospers, professionalism suffers. The second aspect I'd like to highlight is that careerism is based on motivation. If, motivated by the lure of personal advancement, an individual places his own interests above the interests of the organization, he is by definition a careerist. However, another individual, performing the same act, can be called a professional if his actions are motivated by altruism. On the surface, the simplicity of the definition I've provided implies careerism would be relatively easy to pinpoint and deal with. However, several factors complicate the process.

First of all, it's difficult to pinpoint careerism because human behavior is easily misunderstood. What constitutes careerist behavior is largely a matter of individual perception, and perceptions are often based on an incomplete picture. Consider this profile of a stereotype careerist:

He forged his career through ambition, courage, occasional ruthlessness, driven by the phiolosophy "what is there in it unless one can get forward as much as possible?" He was a hard worker, yet depended on outside influence to help him along. In fact, his commission and promotion to first lieutenant were obtained through the influence of his father, an influential senator from Wisconsin. that the turning point in his career would hinge on his developing influential political and social contacts, he sought a staff tour in the Washington area as a captain. Throughout his career, his brilliance lay largely in his ability to capitalize on the ideas of others, rather than in original thinking. In the end, despite a long career marked by promotions and success, his zealous, overbearing nature allenated both his peers and the military establishment at large, (6:2-4, 10, 139)

This account, although somewhat dramatized, is nevertheless a good example of what many would call classic careerist behavior. I'm sure many of you also recognized it as a rather disjointed serie's of descriptions taken from Alfrea Hurley's excellent book Billy Mitchell: Crusader for Air Power. This point illustrates how an individual can be misunderstood when his intentions are misperceived. On the surface. many of Mitchell's actions, such as his use of influence to further his career, suggest he was putting his own interests ahead of the interests of the Service. However, this conclusion ignores Mitchell's basic orientation--one of a brilliant visionary, one who "...employed some remarkable gifts and unusual energy in trying to alert his countrymen to the promise of aviation." (6:140) The point is, it's extremely difficult to make a distinction between careerist and crusader unless one is privy to the entire picture. That means we must understand the motivation behind an individual's actions.

Even when motivation is taken into account, careerism is no less difficult to reliably pinpoint. According to Samuel P. Huntington, the professional is motivated by a sense of responsibility to the profession

(5:9). The careerist, on the other hand, is motivated by the lure of Consequently, whether or not an action personal advancement. constitutes careerism depends on whether the individual was motivated by a desire to serve the organization, as in Mitchell's case, or simply a desire to achieve rank for rank's sake. As an example, an officer who consistently takes on high-visibility additional duties is considered a professional if motivated by a sincere desire to contribute to the unit's mission. However, if motivated solely by prospects of a good efficiency report, he is a careerist. In theory, the difference between the two individuals is clear-cut. In reality, this black-or-white approach can easily lead to incorrect assumptions of what motivates peers or subordinates. Further complicating the picture, human behavior often results from several different, perhaps even conflicting, motives. Rarely is our motivation as simple as others assume it to be. To add to the confusion, sometimes the individual himself isn't aware of his true motives. For these reasons, motivation is extremely difficult to assess, making careerism difficult to reliably pinpoint. The result can be a series of erroneous judgments by a commander or an individual's peers, leading to an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, and a rapid preakdown of unit cohesion.

Careerism, then, is difficult to pinpoint when individual motivation is overlooked, and just as difficult when motivation is taken into account. Unfortunately, even when it can be pinpointed, several factors make careerism difficult to treat.

To varying degrees, our personnel systems make careerism difficult to treat because they often send mixed signals to the field. Within the Air Force, as an example, careerism is decried as fostering an environment of selfishness that undermines the traditional military ethic of self-sacrifice. Yet many personnel policies actually reinforce a careerist orientation. Pilot retention provides a timely example. On 1 December 1988, the Department of Defense (DoD) asked Congress for "authority to pay bonuses up to \$20,000 a year to pilots in the most critical retention areas." (23:14) In a report which accompanied the request to the Congress, DoD officials stated although several incentives had been studied, a bonus was considered the most effective experienced pilots. (23:14) solving the exodus of means οf Unfortunately, this approach to improving retention tends to reinforce the most pessimistic view of the officer corps as self-serving occupationalists, motivated by material gain. The shift in attitude that Charles Moskos warned of, from self-sacrifice and moral commitment to one of materialism, is reinforced. In the short term, cash bonuses may reverse declining retention rates; however, in the long run, careerist incentives are bound to encourage more careerism. The effects of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 on the personnel system have also encouraged a careerist orientation within the officer corps (17:--). Title IV of the Act, which deals with joint officer personnel policies, requires officers promoted to general or flag rank to have served in a joint duty assignment (30:H6857). effect, according to General Thomas R. Morgan, former Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. is to force a choice ". . . between operational experience that will sharpen combat skills and

administrative assignments that will enhance promotion potential" (19:10). As this legislation encourages young officers to scramble for joint duty assignments, careerism could be institutionalized to a much greater degree in the future. Against the current backdrop of anti-careerism, policies such as incentive pay and joint officer duty tend to send conflicting signals to the officer corps, thereby further muddying the water.

Another aspect which makes careerism difficult to treat is the close relationship between careerism and self-interest (36). As previously noted, self-interest is central to the definition of careerism. As a result, the officer corps tends to equate self-interest with careerism. In reality, they can be quite different. In an article entitled "Etnics of Leadership," Colonel Malham M. Wakin has identified two components of self-interest: self-development and selfishness. He writes:

We attribute selfishness to those who seek their own advantage without regard to the consequences of their actions for others or insplie [sic] of causing harm to others. To develop one's talents can be viewed as self-interested action, but it need not be selfish. Certainly, some self-interested actions can be morally right and justifiably encouraged. . (26:254)

Although selfishness is clearly careerism, self-interested action which supports organizational goals is not, and is therefore desirable. A good example is the Air Force non-resident Professional Military Education (PME) program. In recognition of the role of PME in professional development, the Air Force considers PME an important factor in career progression (15:65). If an individual enrolls in a PME program to enhance his chances for promotion, he is acting out of

self-interest. However, this self-interested action is not careerism, because it meets the Air Force's objective of developing expertise in the use of air power (29:8). In spite of the recent decision to disregard "early" PME accomplishment at promotion boards—i.e., Intermediate Service School at major boards and Senior Service School at lieutenant colonel boards—appropriately—timed PME remains an important factor for promotion (15:65). If, in a heavy—handed effort to rid the Air Force of careerism, all promotion boards were to disregard PME records, an important incentive for the officer to complete PME programs would be removed. Presumably, an eventual reduction in the effectiveness of the officer corps would result. Therefore, the elimination of self-interested action can be counter—productive.

Finally, formulating an effective approach toward careerism is complicated by the legitimate need for competitive spirit and amplition within the officer corps. Competitiveness is a basic ingredient of leadership, and the military cannot afford to be in short supply, particularly in compat. As General Douglas MacArthur pointed out, the mission of the profession of arms is to "... win our wars. Everything else in [the officer's] ... professional career is but corollary to this vital dedication" (14:4-58). Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence adds that leadership requires "... very competitive individuals, [who possess] ... a high degree of pride, and [who] satisfy that pride in achieving productive ends. More simply stated in the context that all in the military understand, they are fighters with a strong will to win" (13:4-61). Another related ingredient of leadership is amplition. As Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker once observed, great leaders are not shy

about selzing an opportunity. "If you find need for a leader and have to coax or urge your selection to take the Job, " Eaker said, "you'll be well advised [sic] to pass him over. He's not the man you need" (33:11). That's pretty straightforward--we need competitive spirit and ambition. The rub is, only in moderation. When taken to the extreme. these two virtues of competitiveness and ambition become the vices of the careerist. As Richard A. Gabriel charges in his book Military Incompetence: Why the US Military Doesn't Win, "Competition and careerism make every officer look out for himself. Such a system engenders values corrosive of any concept of the military as a special calling requiring special service and sacrifice" (2:13). Competition becomes destructive when it detracts from team spirit. Excessive amplition can have a similar effect, driving the careerist to pursue personal achievement at the expense of mission effectiveness or unit welfare. Worse yet, to the extent an ambitious individual indulges in careerism, he tends to encourage careerism in others. The result can be a self-perpetuating situation in which careerists who advance into leadership positions teach others to either follow their example, or get out of the service (1:172). So, competitiveness and ambition can be valuable attributes when properly channeled, or destructive influences if allowed to run rampant. Therefore, a clear distinction must be made between legitimate, and destructive, competitiveness and ambition. Otherwise, in the name of reform these two important leadership qualities could be distilled out of the officer corps, directly impacting combat effectiveness.

Thus far I've painted a grim picture of a problem which is difficult to identify and even more difficult to treat. However, there are steps we can take to help the officer corps get a grip on careerism without creating more problems than we solve. First, the officer corps must develop a common understanding of careerism. Second, strong, ethical leadership is needed at all levels to control careerism. Finally, systemic changes are required to encourage a belief in our personnel systems.

The officer corps cannot realize a basic philosophical change toward careerism without a common understanding of what careerism is, as well as what it isn't. While it's unlikely careerism will ever be perceived by the entire officer corps in exactly the same way, a common understanding of careerism and its effects is needed to provide a basis for action. At present, careerism is like pornography: few can define it, but everyone claims to recognize it when he sees it. Furthermore, the search for careerism generally begins with others, rather than with oneself. As Stromberg, Wakin, and Callahan point out, "Most talk about careerism centers,. . ., on the alleged careerism of other people. It is often easier to censure others for self-seeking motives than to identify similar motives in oneself" (22:277). In order to facilitate self-examination, the causes and effects of careerism should be subjects of discussion at all levels, from the smallest units to headquarters staffs. Conferences (like this one), commander's calls, and individual counseling can be useful avenues for developing an awareness of the dangers of careerism (21:211). Equally important, however, is a discussion of what careerism isn't. When properly channeled,

self-interested action, competitiveness, and ambition are not careerism, rather hallmarks of winning organizations. Likewise, eagerness is not careerism, nor is striving to be the very best at one's profession. The officer corps must understand this, lest misdirected peer pressure discourage the individual's desire to excel.

Even with this common understanding, the officer corps will be able to control careerism only to the extent commanders are stewards of professional ethics. In an organization which searches for role models, strong, ethical leadership must be the standard. Commanders should be selected largely on the basis of ethical character, as it is their example which will teach the individual to draw the line between self-interested action and selfishness, competitiveness and antagonism. ampition and greed. An awareness of where to draw the line will give the officer corps the confidence it needs to aggressively pursue individual excellence, as well as the wisdom to occasionally stop and get its ethical bearings (11:591). Led by commanders who set high ethical standards for the organization, the individual will be inspired to place duty above self. Led by commanders who set expedient standards, the individual will be inspired to look out for himself. Without an example of ethical leadership, even a basic philosophical change on the individual level will eventually give way to the pressures of careerism.

Finally, we must build a faith in our personnel systems--probably the most difficult step of all. To begin with, we need to examine our personnel policies for evidence of "institutionalized careerism," particularly in light of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization

In an environment which places a premium on operational Act. experience, staff assignments, PME, and joint duty, many middle-grade officers develop a "one career path" mentality which encourages them to work their own assignments to fill the appropriate squares. Very few officers are willing to allow personnel officers to decide their fate, largely because of the wide-spread attitude "if you don't look out for yourself, no one will look out for you." This attitude must be overcome. The Air Force's recently announced policy of considering an officer's qualifications before his volunteer status is a step in the right direction (18:1), but factors such as general officer interference in assignment selection must be drastically reduced before the officer corps can to return to a basic orientation of placing duty before self. We must eliminate the imperatives which force the individual to bypass the system. Pilot retention presents another problem that must be addressed. Raising flight pay as a primary incentive to keep pilots in the Air Force is inconsistent with urging the officer corps to return to the institutional values of "duty, honor, country." Furthermore, such incentives could exacerbate the problems of specialization within the officer corps, create animosity between rated and non-rated officers, and further weaken the profession's corporate identity. Instead of occupationalist incentives, the Air Force should explore institutional incentives to keep pilots from leaving the service. To enhance their promotablilty, pilots should be able to remain in the cockpit rather than forced to accept career-broadening assignments by the realities of the promotion system. Such a change would not only eliminate a major source of pilot dissatisfaction (25:6), but shift the measure of performance from ticket-punching to fulfilling the professional

officers' principle obligation—improving combat capability. As Marine Major Robert B. Neller so astutely put it, "If any group within the Corps, or any of the Services, should be given an edge at promotion time, it should be those individuals who possess the leadership and tactical expertise in warfighting skills and can lead us to victory in war" (16:20). Lastly, to nurture the attitude of "send me where I can best serve," the promotion system should encourage highly-qualified officers to accept difficult assignments for the good of the service, as well as the individual. As Harry G. Summers notes, "You want people to be ambitious. You want people to seek out difficult jobs. What you need to bring out is that the jobs that enhance their careers are the most difficult to do. , . . . what we need is a structure, a system where what's important pays" (11:210). If the military builds such a structure, the officer corps will be more likely to believe in the equity of the personnel system.

Clearly, action must be taken to arrest the development of careerism within the officer corps. To the extent this trend is allowed to continue, the fundamental ethics which stress duty over self will further deteriorate. Although military reformists, senior military leaders, and the officer corps itself are in agreement of the need for reform, getting a grip on careerism is not as easy as its clear-cut definition suggests. Lack of a common perception within the officer corps makes careerism difficult to pinpoint, as does the inability to accurately assess individual motivation. To further cloud the issue, some personnel policies foster a careerist orientation. Finally, the close relationship between careerism and self-interested action.

competitiveness, and ambition also make quick, easy solutions unlikely. The officer corps, it seems, is stuck between a rock and a hard place--faced with a grave problem which demands immediate attention, yet unable to implement a rapid solution for fear of unforseen consequences.

Solving the enigma of careerism must start at the source: the officer corps. Careerism must be seen as a betrayal of the ethic of "duty, nonor, country." At the same time, legitimate forms of self-interest, as well as competitiveness and ambition, must be separated from careerism and preserved as valuable assets. Strong, ethical leadership is needed to properly channel these assets, as well as to inspire selfless dedication in the officer corps. Finally, systemic changes are necessary to ensure personnel policies reinforce, rather than diminish, the traditional values of the profession of arms.

Regardless of the solution adopted, one thing should be borne in mind: lasting philosophical changes on the individual and institutional level will not come quickly or easily. Just as there are no miracle cures for the scourge of careerism, neither can a heavy-handed approach be without undesirable side effects. Lieutenant General Walter F. Ulmer, a former superintendent of the US Military Academy, wryly observed the military tends to zealously overreact to fundamental ethical dilemmas. "Most mischief and lack of motivation in our systems." General Ulmer concluded, "is caused by well-intentioned policies promulgated by a dedicated chain of command" (23:55). As the controlled OER system of the 1970's so graphically illustrates, even the pest intentions can have gisastrous results. This painful lesson should

be kept uppermost in mind as individual and institution attempt to get a grip on the slippery issue of careerism.

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