

# **Reduction in Force May Mean a Reduction in Values**

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The Army has recently completed the first in a series of involuntary reductions in officer strength, the largest since the Vietnam war. Under President Clinton's guidance, additional reductions in force (RIFs) are certain to continue, perhaps at an increasingly precipitous rate. Undeniably, some reductions appear prudent in light of a dramatically changing world. The Soviet threat is gone, our domestic economy is fragile, and the American people have called for new political leaders to implement new national priorities.

These new national priorities focus attention on the morality and rationality of current defense management policies. Will the pressures to draw down the force dilute our resolve to be fair and reasonable? The answer is still unclear, but current policy suggests cause for concern. Changing the armed forces to respond to a changing world threat is rational. National defense should and will respond to the world's new order of power. The Soviet superpower is gone. We should not be surprised that our political leaders look to reduce the size of the military. However, we should not assume that changes in our military force structure will affect size alone. There are serious moral questions that result from an examination of current officer reduction policies. Are we fairly and reasonably reducing the number of active duty officers?

This century's history of post-war reductions provides sufficient warrant to closely examine current force reduction policies. In retrospect, past reductions have hollowed the morale, discipline, and training of our forces -- in short, we traded readiness for savings. Our shortsighted reduction policies resulted in unprepared, undermanned, and unmotivated forces. Officer reduction policies were largely responsible for the hollow forces that proved incapable of responding when called to fight. Those unprepared forces often paid the ultimate price for policies that neglected national defense in exchange for peace

dividends. Today, concerned politicians vie for national resources even as American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are deployed overseas.

Those very soldiers are the target of evolving policies to reduce defense expenditures. Within the defense budget, active duty personnel reductions are an obvious target. The most lucrative target, on a per capita basis, is the active duty officer corps, the leadership of our military. We wish to focus on the current policies used to manage and reduce the officer corps. Our purpose in doing so is to examine the moral and rational foundations of our policies. We seek to expose the flaws in current policies and suggest the moral principles upon which more reasonable policy ought to be based.

Are current officer management policies fair, rational, and effective in achieving the goals of downsizing the officer corps? We suggest that current policies fail to reduce and maintain the active duty officer corps in a manner consistent with the expectations of the American public.

What do the American public's expectations have to do with officer management policy? We will argue that the American public rightly expects fair, rational, and efficient policies to draw down the military. Americans are sensitive to the costs of the drawdown but equally sensitive to the need for a military capable of responding to new threats to our national interests. We propose that there exists a link of reciprocal expectations between the officer corps and the American public that is vital to developing fair, rational, and efficient officer reduction policies.

Our argument for policy reform proceeds in four parts. First, we demonstrate the expectations that exist between the American public and the officer corps. Second, we examine the source and motivation for the core values that underlie those expectations. Third, we argue that current policies to reduce the officer corps are inconsistent with the values of the American public and the

officer corps. Finally, we suggest changes to officer personnel management policies that we think will help restore fairness and rationality to the difficult task of retaining quality officers in a smaller military.

## **I. EXPECTATIONS**

Americans rightly expect their military officers, as public servants, to selflessly sacrifice time, talents, and if necessary, their lives, in defense of the nation. Such an expectation is indicative of a special trust that requires commensurate professional responsibility. The American public cannot entrust national defense to amateurs or self-serving citizens. America wants her finest and most committed citizens to defend the values embodied in the Constitution. Arguably, the all-volunteer force has fulfilled the public's highest expectations; we have extremely capable and responsive military forces. Professional military officers, as leaders of those military forces, are guardians of America's special trust. The role of the officer is largely defined by rigorous expectations that correspond to the special responsibilities of their office -- they must never fail to respond selflessly in defense of the nation. Officers who do not meet the public's expectations are rightly condemned. Their misconduct constitutes a failure to uphold the oath of office; more important, it is a serious breach of faith.

Such moral language may seem a bit utopian. Perhaps we are overstating the case. Does America hold her officers in such high regard and to such unyielding standards of duty? Let us briefly recall events that focused national attention on violated expectations -- breaches of faith. The public's reaction in these cases helps to underscore our assertion that Americans have substantial expectations of their public servants.

Nearly one year ago, the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles provided dramatic proof of the special relationship between public servants and American

society. Reflect for a moment on the video depicting several officers flailing police batons over Rodney King's fetal form on the pavement. What is your first emotion? Most of us experience a visceral response of moral outrage. We intuitively sense that something is desperately wrong in the world. We do not need to ponder whether someone *might* be doing something wrong. The surreal images of brutality shatter our expectations. We need no confirmation from lawyers, judges, or philosophers; our moral and rational judgment is immediate and clear. Police are not supposed to assault helpless people who offer no resistance -- even suspects who moments earlier may have been dangerously violent. Our reaction to injustice is overwhelming. Unless the judicial system can restore justice to the world, our moral outrage may quickly give way to frustration and violence.

Certain citizens of Los Angeles, having watched Rodney King's arrest, reacted with violence when those who participated in the beating were not punished. When the formal legal system failed to render justice, the citizens took to the streets in violent protest. Unable to strike at those guilty of the crime-- either the police officers themselves or the jurors who they believe wrongfully acquitted them--the mob struck out at persons bearing a superficial resemblance to the officers, with the result that innocent persons were attacked and killed simply because of their proximity and skin color.

Our point in discussing this case is not to enter the debate about who was right or wrong in the Rodney King case, but rather to focus on the outrage that the case elicited. Why is it that we respond differently to the behavior of the police officers who brutalized Mr. King than to the countless beatings and killings that go on daily in the cities of America? It seems that it is not just the harm done to the innocent victim that incenses us--after all, many persons who are much more *de facto* innocent than Mr. King are attacked and killed in this

country on a daily basis, and it is likely that Mr. King is *de facto* guilty of crimes against genuinely innocent persons. Rather, we are outraged because it was law enforcement officials themselves who conducted the beating. We rightfully expect--indeed, we demand--a different and much higher standard from professional law enforcers than we do from citizens at large.

The police officers in this case failed twice. First they failed in their duty as citizens to obey the laws of their community. They violated the rights of the suspect. Second, and more important, they failed to perform--and in fact violated--the very purpose for which police officer is created: to protect innocent persons by enforcing the law. When put in these terms we realize that it is the second aspect of this double failing that elicits our extraordinary condemnation. We recognize the officers' misconduct as a kind of moral hypocrisy -- police officers sworn to protect the rights of citizens violate the duties of their office when they beat submissive suspects. The violation of Rodney King's rights shapes our perception of the police officers' conduct. Good faith requires that officers protect rights; instead, they chose to victimize their suspect.

Our military officers also protect rights, but public expectations of the military officer are even greater than those in the Rodney King case. We entrust the collective defense of American's most fundamental rights -- life and liberty -- to the guardians of peace.

Military officers who commit war crimes, or who violate the special trust placed in them by society, elicit similar outrage. LT Calley, and the other officers involved in the massacre at My Lai, were, like the officers who beat Rodney King, guilty of moral hypocrisy. They allowed themselves to become indistinguishable from the evil aggression it was their *prima facie* duty to defeat. Their violation of the laws of land warfare was a serious dereliction of duty. However, our primary concern is that they violated the good faith of the

American public and the national values that they were ostensibly defending. If an officer cannot be trusted, who can be trusted to uphold the values of the nation while defending her national security interests? War is morally dangerous. Our leaders cannot fail us; in the ravaged moral sphere of combat we cling most tenaciously to our values. It is reasonable for us to do so since it is those same values that cause us to oppose aggression with military force.

When leaders subvert the underlying values of their office, they are deserving of our contempt. Just as we express disbelief while police officers beat Rodney King, so too we feel a fundamental violation of moral expectations when military officers fail in their duty to protect innocent civilians from armed aggression. Society arms soldiers for the purpose of defending against aggression. When officers turn those arms on their own citizens, or on non-threatening citizens of another country, they violate the very purpose and trust upon which society first gave them the weapons. Society makes a special, implicit agreement with its military officers. It will provide them weapons capable of incredible destruction, a supply of soldiers subject to their command, and a legal framework to ensure compliance with orders and to create a general atmosphere of discipline. In return, the officer takes on the obligation to follow specific rules in the employment of those soldiers and weapons. Officers who violate these rules not only violate the laws of their nation, but also violate national trust. That national trust is reasonable. America rightly expects much of her military officers.

## **II. VALUES**

Military officers have special responsibilities to their society in virtue of the role they fill in that society. Americans expects their military officers, in addition to simply following the laws of war, to be dedicated, disciplined, loyal, morally

courageous, and selfless in their performance of their duties. Indeed, these values are formalized as part of the professional military ethic and form the basis for an annual performance appraisal along with integrity, responsibility, and moral standards. Furthermore, officers swear an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, and are expected to do so even at the cost of their own lives. These values constitute what the military refers to as the Professional Military Ethic (PME).

Violations of the PME can be expected to elicit widespread condemnation should they come to public light. Such violations need not be of the magnitude of CPT Medina's and LT Calley's at My Lai; General Patton striking a subordinate, for example, and Admiral Poindexter and Lieutenant Colonel North lying to Congress violated the PME and the public condemned their acts. Even at the service academies, violations of the PME can cause a public outcry. Cheating incidents, hazing, and abuses of women, for example, have been the subject of national attention. Whenever our moral expectations are not fulfilled, we seek to restore moral and rational balance: those empowered to defend our values must exemplify those values in the performance of their duty. To do less is unreasonable. To do less is wrong.

When the public becomes aware of violated expectations, it rationally seeks to restore the collective morality -- our national values. Reaction to officer misconduct is more than an effort to assert our common values. It is an attempt to combat irrational conduct with rational principle. One cannot will to uphold values (the oath of office) while acting in violation of those same values. The PME is firmly grounded in the values of the Constitution which are in turn evident in the laws of society. Violation of the laws that protect our natural rights to life and liberty evoke instinctual defensive action. This instinctive desire to defend what we value is an essential component of the expectations formalized in the

oath of military office. It is rational that we wish to defend our personal and collective rights. It is rational that those who defend our rights should not violate our rights or the rights of others in the performance of their duties. Since we give the military officer broad powers over life and liberty, we must be watchful to guard against any abuse of power that jeopardizes national values. Such abuses are intolerable violations of our expectations. As professionals, officers must embody the values of their office; their integrity must be irreproachable.

Samuel Huntington, in *The Soldier and the State*, makes explicit the relationship between the American public's expectations and the officer's professional ethic:

An officer corps is professional only to the extent to which its loyalty is to the military ideal. What appeals politically one day will be forgotten the next. What appeals politically to one person will inspire the hatred of another. Within the military forces only military loyalty to the ideal of professional competence is constant and unifying; loyalty of the individual to the ideal of the Good Soldier, loyalty of the unit to the traditions and spirit of the Best Regiment. The most effective forces and the most competent officer corps are those which are motivated by these ideals rather than by political or ideological aims. Only if they are motivated by military ideals will the armed forces be the obedient servants of the state and will civilian control be assured.

The PME reflects Huntington's view by identifying values such as selfless service, loyalty, and courage. But such expectations by society imply a level of commitment that is not expected of managers in the corporate world where the operative value is self interest. Simply put, you can hire people to perform tasks or produce outcomes, and you can threaten sanctions or punishments if they violate specific laws, but money or threat will not buy loyalty, selflessness, or courage in the face of extreme danger. Such values are not bought under the pressures of supply and demand. The qualities we most value in our officers are fostered by respecting the very values we ask our officers to defend. Rationality

demands that we balance the expectations of office with a reciprocal commitment to our officers that reflects the values we ask them to defend. If we, as a nation, fail to commit ourselves to the officer, we undermine the values of respect and fairness that our in the Constitution of our nation. Dare we expect our officers to accept anything less than respect and fairness in exchange for their service?

### **III. INCONSISTENCIES**

We believe society cannot expect commissioned military officers to manifest values such as selflessness, loyalty, integrity, and commitment when they are subject to having their employment terminated without cause at any time (as has just occurred during the recent RIF). The most recent round of forced reductions were counterproductive to the objectives of the military drawdown. We want a force that is smaller, yet capable and committed to defending our national values. Paradoxically, current policies undermine the qualities we seek to retain in our shrinking officer corps. Consider the impact of the RIF on the officers we most desire to keep.

The military officer has a unique employment relationship with the U.S. government. It is an important part of an officer's ethic to defend the principles of the U.S. Constitution; the oath of office makes the expectations of office explicit. If the U.S. government terminates an officer's employment without cause, it acts irrationally. We cannot rationally, nor morally, ask officers to commit themselves to a career of selfless service when they are subject to firing in spite of their competence, loyalty, and selflessness. When professional officers fulfill our every expectation, how can we summarily dismiss them? It is little wonder that our best officers may feel some reluctance to commit themselves to the profession of arms when the national government can dismiss

them merely out of "economic necessity." Such conduct by the government is irrational and morally hypocritical.

Current policies have caused the moral and rational dilemma we assert is inherent in a RIF. We have no mechanism whereby we can establish, foster, and maintain an officer corps that operates under a clear and explicit set of reciprocal expectations. The American public expects loyal, selfless, committed officers who operate under the PME. Officers expect to be employed so long as they fulfill the expectations of their office. These are rational expectations. Clearly, current policies violate the latter of these balancing expectations. The officer rightfully expects career employment as a regular commissioned officer so long as she fulfills the expectations of her office. If we dare to violate that expectation, we may cause grievous harm to the career officer corps which is essential to our national defense.

It is morally and rationally difficult to develop a sense of *selflessness* in an individual when he must devote himself to an institution whose management policies do not share the values he swears to uphold. Society demands that officers put their nation before themselves. But officers must be able to support themselves and their families. Assuring them employment provides the psychological basis necessary for them to strive for selflessness.

If the government can terminate an officer at any time without cause, he or she will be forced to continue to think of *self*, rather than *selflessness*. Officers will feel it necessary always to keep one eye on the civilian job market, and to reassess their marketability constantly (since they may be subject to a RIF based on economic necessity, not moral principle). They will seek out experience and education that is useful to them personally, rather than to the Army. This can only distract from selflessness and may even make selflessness impossible to attain. The pervasive discomfort in the officer corps today gives

ample evidence that current policies are irrational insofar as they fail to achieve their intended goals of reducing the force while keeping a quality officer corps. We do not promote selfless service when we fail, as a nation, to value our officers.

It is also difficult, if not impossible, to develop loyalty in someone to whom you are not loyal. Most would agree that it is hard to be loyal to a disloyal friend. Yet, by making officers subject to termination without cause, the U.S. government is demanding what we might call "one-way loyalty." The officer must be loyal to the military, but there is no obligation for the military to be loyal to the officer. The expectation is irrational.

Integrity and commitment are similarly problematic. We find the military demanding commitment, yet not being committed to the officer. Officers must have integrity, yet Congress can change and manipulate officer personnel management policies at any time; benefits that were promised can be reduced or eliminated. How can we rationally and morally expect our officers to unwaveringly commit themselves to absolute values when management policies are indifferent to those same values? We have created for ourselves a harsh climate in which to try to develop the PME while drawing down the force.

The values of selflessness, loyalty, integrity, and commitment exist, to a large degree, in the officer corps today. But as officers see their colleagues coerced into taking separation incentives and see fellow officers out on the street, victims of the RIF, those remaining cannot help but reexamine the prudence of their selflessness, loyalty, and commitment. It seems to us that if officers can be terminated at any time without cause, society cannot reasonably expect to develop these special values in its military officers. The inconsistency between expectations and policies is irrational and immoral.

We are left with an obvious tension between what society expects from its officer corps in terms of commitment to abstract values, and the way Congress manages the officer corps. By resorting to a RIF, we are treating our military officer corps as if they are corporate executives or "managers of violence," employed by the state, who can be fired or replaced at will. Congress and senior military planners should keep in mind that the implications of this tension are simply that some, if not many, officers will be loyal, selfless, or committed only so long as it is in their interests to do so.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

How do we relieve this tension between current officer management policies and developing the values of our officer corps? The first step, of course, is to recognize, as we have in this essay, how recent large-scale cuts can affect development of selflessness, loyalty, commitment, and integrity among professional military officers. We must not allow economic necessity to override our need for a smaller, competent officer corps imbued with professional ethics. Any policies that prioritize reductions over the quality of the remaining force will be ultimately self-defeating.

Next, we believe Congress and the senior military leadership must consider a number of significant changes in the way officers are managed. While we are critical of current policies, in particular, the RIF, it is possible to restore the moral and rational balance of expectations between officers and the American public. Moreover, we can reassert the fundamental values upon which reciprocal expectations are based. The moral principles that underlie those values should be our guideposts for the development of officer management policies. They ensure fairness as we reduce the force. How? Below are some brief descriptions of ideas that we think are worthy of consideration.

### **Do not RIF Officers With Regular Commissions**

Officers with regular commissions should not be subject to employment termination without cause. These officers should be tenured until eligible for retirement. This policy will provide the stability and security necessary for the officer to develop the values that society rightly expects: integrity, loyalty, commitment, and selflessness. We applaud the recent consideration of early retirement. It is fully in keeping with the principle of reciprocal expectations for which we argue. If early retirement does not draw down the force rapidly enough, the Variable Separation Incentive (VSI) and Special Separation Benefit (SSB) programs offer non-coercive alternatives to separate those officers who no longer desire to serve.

### **Make Regular Commissions Meaningful**

Require an apprenticeship period for all officers before they are awarded a regular commission. Currently, an officer's commitment and career intentions are essentially irrelevant in awarding a regular commission. We need to make commitment to a military career a prerequisite for awarding a regular commission. While serving a full career should not be a statutory obligation, we should only award regular commissions to those officers who express the desire to make the military a career. By so doing, we make clear the expectations of the career officer and make explicit the corresponding commitment of the nation to allow regular officers careers of service unencumbered by the threat of termination without cause.

An apprenticeship period provides a good way to make this idea work. After an apprenticeship period of four to five years with a reserve commission, an officer can better decide whether or not he or she is committed to a military

career. The officer would have the benefit of practical experience with troops, a sense of the sacrifices that must be made, and a taste of the satisfaction that can be gained from military service. Likewise, the military will have a better idea of the officer's leadership potential, competence, and level of commitment. If an officer does not measure up to the standards, or is unwilling to make the commitment to a career in the military, then a regular commission would not be offered. Such a policy would also help to ensure our finest officers have the incentive to seek out regular commission status through competition on a level playing field. Regardless of commissioning source, each officer would have the opportunity to internalize the PME before deciding whether to commit to a career of service to the nation.

These changes would make a regular commission an indicator of competence and commitment to a military career, rather than an essentially meaningless label assigned to nearly all officers on active duty. We can restore the balance of expectations by developing a regular officer corps committed to the nation, toward whom our management policies demonstrate commitment. Should future reductions be necessary, regular officers would know that they are expected to serve selflessly; they need not fear a policy of termination without cause.

### **Modify the "Up or Out" Promotion System**

While we believe that officers with regular commissions should not be terminated without cause, we know that some of these officers will not demonstrate the potential for promotion to senior grades. Therefore, we should modify the up or out promotion system so that officers can remain on active duty until retirement at the grade that matches their competence and desires. Such a

change would also allow for faster promotions for the most promising officers, since promotions would be based more on competence, potential, and the officer's desire to advance, rather than on seniority and the need to get promoted simply to remain on active duty.

### **Professional Development and Education**

We need to develop more extensive educational and professional development programs for the precommissioning phase and for the apprenticeship period that stress the special values society expects of military officers and the commitment necessary to gain a regular commission. We must insist that all U.S. officers receive education in the fundamental values of the professional military ethic. This education should be from a professional rather than a national perspective. Once officers understand the relationship between the values embodied in the Constitution and the PME, they will be better equipped to decide whether they are ready to fulfill the expectations of career officership.

### **Change Focus at the Military Academies**

The military academies should stress in their mission and purpose statements, and throughout their four year programs, that they are preparing cadets for careers in the military-- not just to serve a minimum service obligation. For example, there is implicit, as well as explicit encouragement at USMA for cadets to select an academic major based on its marketability in the civilian sector rather than its usefulness in preparation for membership in the profession of arms. Indeed, this emphasis on marketability may encourage service academy graduates to leave upon completion of their minimum service obligation.

We are not criticizing the fact that cadets are free to choose limited numbers of elective courses during their four-year period at the academies--such choices stimulate interest and creativity. We simply believe that elective choices and selection of academic majors should be based on individual interests or relevance to the profession of arms rather than on salary potential in private industry.

## **SUMMARY**

We have seen that public expectations are significant and real. Military officers who violate the good faith of their office become the object of justified criticism. Their subversion of national values is evidence of moral hypocrisy. Their misconduct evokes justifiable public contempt. However, we also recognize that the values within our Constitution -- universal fairness and respect for others -- require us to fulfill the reasonable expectations of the officer corps with respect to management policies. We must foster loyalty and commitment in our officers by underscoring our commitment to the regular officer corps. Rationality and morality dictate no less.

Our purpose in this essay has been to make an argument for principle, not policy. Our recommendations are not exhaustive in scope or detail. We have suggested examples of changes to officer management policy that reassert the principles upon which the oath of office are based. We must change our officer management policies to reflect the values we expect in our officer corps. More changes than these may be necessary in order for the military to fully develop in its officers the special values expected by society. However, we believe these changes would be good places to start.