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# U.S. Army experiencing leadership breakdown

By Col. (Ret.) Wes Martin



The U.S. Army is simultaneously experiencing two epidemics. COVID-19 invaded America at the beginning of the year and preventive steps are being taken to ensure the disease does not decimate the ranks. The second epidemic, sexual misconduct, fueled by ineffective chains of command, lack of accountability, and cover-ups, has been taking a devastating toll on dedicated troops and unit effectiveness for years.

COVID-19 will likely require a still being developed vaccine infusion to eradicate the disease. The infusion needed to eradicate the Army's sexual predator problem is leadership. It seems the only person to understand that is Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois. In his July 16th letter to Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Mark Esper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Mark Milley, Senator Durbin correctly assessed the situation: "...only the leadership of the Department of Defense can initiate a serious, top-to-bottom review of how the Armed Forces can reach the ideals of equality, fairness, and justice, which we owe to all Americans who take the oath of service to our military."

The Army's current woes are not for lack of regulatory guidance. Following the surge of sexual misconduct scandals in the late 1990s, the Army published its Sexual Harassment and Response Prevention (SHARP) regulation. Like today, in the early '90s indications and warnings were either ignored or covered up at the expense of the victims and whistle-blowers. It took the courts-martialing of the Aberdeen drill sergeants, the Sergeant Major of the Army, and the Deputy Inspector General of the Army for senior leadership to admit an ignored problem had overwhelmed the force.

Today's military seniors, who were in the ranks during the '90s, do not appear to have learned the lessons of their predecessors. Those '90s problems were a direct result of the Reagan expansion of the Army. Even the most corrupt and incompetent were able to stay in the ranks and get promoted. We ended up with what then-Chief of Staff General Reimer called "cancers." Today's problems are greatly impacted by the previous decade's loss of outstanding junior officers and enlisted due to the continual deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Their departures created vacancies to be filled by a surging number of unprofessional supervisors.

Senator Durbin should not be the driving force behind Army reform. His January 2020 letter to Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy sparked an investigation of the Army Reserve's 416th Theater Engineer Command. The letter addressed the command's failure to comply with SHARP program requirements and the cover-ups. The investigation documents adverse findings against the 416th commander, Major General Miyako Schanely, and seventeen of her subordinate officers. Schanely has since been suspended from command.

The murder of Private First Class Vanessa Guillen has sparked outrage. Vanessa was on-duty inside Fort Hood when she was murdered, her body removed and dismembered. Despite her wallet and identification remaining in her workspace and her car still in the parking lot, for over two months she was identified as "missing."

Vanessa had previously told her family that she was enduring sexual harassment but feared reporting it to her seniors. She was not alone. Hundreds of victims are now coming out sharing their harassment experiences and reporting fears.

Today's senior generals need to stop making the same mistake as their '90s predecessors. Each scandal, then and now, are not isolated incidents. The bottom line is until the Army fixes its leadership problems and uniformly enforces rules and regulations on everyone, sexual misconduct, abuse of authority, and blatant cover-ups will continue. New York City police detective Frank Serpico said it best: "Corruption cannot exist unless it is tolerated by management."

SecDef Esper and Army Chief of Staff, General James McConville, are West Point graduates. As cadets they had to memorize the following words: "Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never be content with a half-truth when the whole can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy."

Their immediate leadership challenges are to make those words the Army standard and bring an end to the tolerance of corruption throughout the ranks.

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