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THEY SOUNDED THE ALARM OVER CHINA... THEN DID THEIR WORK FOR THEM





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They Sounded the Alarm Over China...Then Did Their Work for Them

Many an occasion over the last few years, as I've watched our military's leaders spew platitudes about people and readiness, only to follow those words up with frittering away their focus and energies on anything but, have I asked myself: "I wonder what the Chinese think of this? I wonder - does Chairman Xi and his inner circle meet and discuss how we are steadily sliding into entropy and just laugh? I wonder - is the Chinese master strategy vis-à-vis the U.S. military simply to sit back and watch it all unravel?"

Because as much as we fret (or our Military Industrial Complex (MIC) encourages us to fret) over the number of ships, or fighters, or next trillion-dollar gadgets we 'need' to confront the China threat, many lawmakers and military leaders alike seem to gloss over a very real and very pressing concern: the threat isn't an exogenous one looming on the horizon, it's already here at home - and that threat is [the erosion of trust in our military institution](#); a threat which places everything jeopardy now.

And with that, my above rhetorical questions pivot inward: what is happening to us? What is happening to our military? And, from the experience of three years of work at the [Walk the Talk Foundation](#): why are we grinding our "1%" out when we should be doing just the opposite? Why are we abusing the very few who raise their right hand when we should instead be exalting them?

In a future [Star Chamber Podcast](#) episode, we will talk about the psychology behind the "why" - why does the institution seemingly cut off its nose to spite its ace? Why would the military institution take the brave men and women who volunteer to serve and sacrifice and then subject them to the following:



1. Forfeiture of their Constitutional rights, both legally and otherwise,
2. A higher-than-average likelihood to succumb to mental health afflictions and/or suicide,
3. A frighteningly high rate of sexual harassment/assault,
4. Avenues of so-called redress such as the Inspector General system which are frankly jokes,
5. An administrative system of justice that resembles more a kangaroo court than any American justice our citizens are afforded,
6. Housing allowances that woefully lag current rents,
7. Pay which is increasingly non-competitive,
8. And on and on...

And at the same time, we have the following converging factors:

1. An up-and-coming peer adversary in China,
2. A desperate need to recruit and retain talent,
3. A near-unprecedented reduction in uniformed service members in the last 4 years,
4. Constant recruiting challenges,
5. A nation whose youth is increasingly unwilling or unable (physically, e.g.) to serve,
6. A lagging military machine in terms of number, age, and reliability of weapons systems, and,
7. A steady decline our nation has in its military institution.

And therein, at number 7, lies a critical center of gravity: trust. For the U.S. military to remain a viable and credible force, it must have the trust of both the American people and Congress. Without that trust, recruiting efforts falter, readiness declines, and adversaries like China gain a strategic advantage. Over the past two decades, confidence in the military has plummeted, and the consequences are becoming impossible to ignore. Unfortunately what our recently-departed military leadership seemingly failed to grasp was this basic principle which is concisely spelled out as:

**** Trust Begets Readiness ****

The derivatives of that formula being:

Retention: When a member trusts in the institution, they continue to serve,



Recruiting: When a service-aged American trusts the military, they enlist,

Recruiting by extension: When service members leave, if they trust the welfare of a friend/loved one to the military, they recommend service to that person.

For emphasis, it's important to highlight the converse of the above three axioms:

Retention: When a member no longer trusts the institution, they leave and their hard-to-replace talent leaves with them,

Recruiting: When a service-aged American doesn't trust the military, they don't enlist and their skills and talents go elsewhere,

Recruiting by extension: When service members leave, if they would not entrust the welfare of a friend/loved one to the military, they don't recommend service to that person.

From having consulted in some form or fashion 500+ current and/or former members of the DoD and Coast Guard, we at the Foundation immediately see why our military suffers from such a significant trust deficit: because its leaders can't be trusted to do the right thing. That statement is an admittedly broad one which requires further explanation. I am not saying that the outgoing leadership class of the DoD were bad people or were necessarily all unfit. They all were upstanding Americans and undoubtedly worked hard to get to the position that they arrived at. They, however, unequivocally failed. I readily concede that a CJCS or a CNO can't acquire weapons systems faster, or can't erect shipyards - there is in fact much that is out of their control. Where they had an opportunity to seize the initiative and irrefutably failed to do so, was to instill and recoup the sense of trust that the country, especially its service members and/or would-be service members, had in them.

They could have clamored on the Hill for better pay / allowances for their people. They didn't.

They could have shown grace to the 8,500 members they summarily walked out of the service. They didn't.

They could have accepted accountability for poisoning their people and surrounding neighborhoods at Red Hill. They didn't.

They could have protected whistleblowers who reported wrongdoings as they were told was their duty to do so. They didn't.

They could have attacked crooked contractors providing shit housing for service members and their families. They didn't.



They could have been forthcoming about the failures in Afghanistan. [They weren't.](#)

They could have ensured justice in literally thousands of ways when members came to them and said "I've been harassed or abused or assaulted or wronged by the chain." [They didn't.](#)

And each time they didn't back their superfluous platitudes up with actions, we all saw it: service members, former service members, and most of the country...except perhaps for much of our Congress who spent the last few years more than satisfied to throw some band-aid legislation at a symptomatic problem or two and carry on with life...

And now here we are: "new jet, new day" - a new administration, a new military leadership cadre, [a new military JAG corps](#), a new(ish) Congress. The question is: will anything really change or are we doomed to continue down the trust death spiral we find ourselves in? To continue to spew meaningless BS about mission and people while we grind our talented all-volunteer force into despondent dust. And meanwhile across the Pacific, are Xi and his cohorts chuckling because they know the answer already?

We Need General Costanza's

The saving grace here is that some of the solutions to this conundrum are relatively straightforward. The downside is that they are not in the DNA of many of today's military leaders primarily because the behaviors needed to salvage this wreck have never been generally awarded. If you are a fan of "Seinfeld," you may recall the episode "[The Opposite](#)" in which George Costanza takes every instinct and does the opposite thereof. In short, we need some General Costanza's right now who:

- Are transparent when their predecessors would have been opaque,
- Accept responsibility / culpability when they screw up,
- Don't knee-jerk react to those raising concerns of wrong and circle the wagons to crush the victim / complainant / whistleblower,
- Ensure investigations, inquiries, and the like are carried out with real due diligence and actual fairness,
- Be champions for their people and their needs where their predecessors championed for themselves and their promotions.



Those sound simple...because they are. You see, gone are the days where the leadership cabal of the military could obfuscate their shortcomings: their self-servitude, their flaccidity, their opacity, their indecision, their weakness. It's apparent to us now and it cannot be unseen. With social media, a quasi-interested press, and an advocacy community that calls it like it sees it, it is now an "open kimono" when it comes to the failures of the military and its leadership. The worst thing they could do in these instances is not own it, not admit it, not learn and grow from it. Not doing those results in one important effect: to widen the ever-growing trust gap, which serves to one entity's advantage: our adversary's.

For years, [our now-departed military leaders said China was an ever-increasing threat](#). Few disagreed. But while their rhetoric was aimed at a foreign adversary thousands of miles away, a domestic enemy was gaining ground steadily here at home: the diminishing trust we had in our military and its leadership. And the worst part about that period was those leaders not only failed to prevent that enemy from making significant inroads, they were the ones aiding and abetting it.

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- Find your Senator here: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>

Feel free to reach out privately at francescagraham@walkthetalkfoundation.org or in the comments.

PETITIONS: [SIGN THIS PETITION](#) demanding that our leaders in Congress change the DoD's unjust administrative investigatory system.

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