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STRATEGIC RIFT IN THE FY26 DOD OIG OVERSIGHT PLAN: THE MISSING “PEOPLE” LAYER





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Strategic Rift in the FY26 DoD OIG Oversight Plan: The Missing “People” Layer

The Department of Defense Office of Inspector General’s FY 2026 Oversight Plan is 24 pages long, packed with audits, evaluations, charts, flagship priorities, and finely tuned focus areas. It covers missiles. Cyber. Space. Infrastructure. Procurement. PFAS. Fentanyl. Submarines. Hypersonics. Barracks mold. Arctic runways. AI. Nuclear enterprise.

What it barely covers is people.

“People” appears zero times in the entire document.

Let that sink in.

Language matters. What gets named gets measured. What gets measured gets resourced. And what gets resourced tells us what actually matters.

Right now, this Oversight Plan tells us that platforms, programs, and process outrank leadership, trust, and human systems.

That should alarm everyone.

What the Oversight Plan Studies—And What It Doesn’t

The FY26 plan contains:



- ▶ Extensive evaluations of medical access, food service, barracks conditions, housing mold, suicide-related investigations, and noncombat deaths.
- ▶ Deep dives into recruiting, retention, medical workforce manning, and specialty fields.
- ▶ Heavy emphasis on financial audit, procurement controls, and infrastructure protection.

All of that matters.

But what is never meaningfully assessed?

- ▶ Leadership effectiveness
- ▶ Trust inside commands
- ▶ Professional Military Education as a leadership pipeline
- ▶ Inspector General system effectiveness
- ▶ Whistleblower protection outcomes
- ▶ Retaliation patterns
- ▶ Whether administrative investigations are producing *truth* or just paperwork
- ▶ Whether commanders are leading—or merely managing optics

In other words, the Oversight Plan looks everywhere except at the people who actually make the system work or fail.

We Keep Inspecting Everything Except Leadership

There is an unspoken assumption embedded in the Oversight Plan: If the programs function, the people must be fine.

That assumption is demonstrably false.

From our vantage point—having advised and advocated for hundreds of service members navigating IG complaints, EO investigations, command-directed investigations, and administrative punishment—the core failure across these cases is not policy.



It is leadership failure.

And yet:

- ▶ We do not systematically assess whether leaders are trusted.
- ▶ We do not audit whether investigations are properly trained, unbiased, and competent.
- ▶ We do not measure retaliation as a leadership failure.
- ▶ We do not evaluate whether PME is actually producing ethical, accountable commanders.
- ▶ We do not examine whether the IG system itself has become insulated from meaningful external scrutiny.

The IG looks outward at the force.

But almost no one is looking into the IG system itself—and the force knows it.

That gap has consequences.

Trust Is Not a Soft Metric. It Is a Combat Multiplier.

The Oversight Plan frames “Quality of Life” through:

- ▶ Healthcare
- ▶ Environmental safety
- ▶ Family systems

All critically important. But trust is the enabling condition for all of it.

You can build:

- ▶ New clinics
- ▶ New barracks
- ▶ New programs
- ▶ New HR systems

But if service members believe:

- ▶ Reporting harm will destroy their careers



- ▶ Whistleblowing guarantees reprisal
- ▶ Investigations are performative
- ▶ Leadership protects itself first

Then the entire force rots from the inside—no matter how modern the hardware looks.

Trust is not a morale issue.

Trust is a readiness issue.

Trust is a retention issue.

Trust is a national security issue.

Yet it is almost completely absent from the oversight framework.

We've Been Here Before—And We Know What Happens If We Ignore This

After Vietnam, the U.S. military conducted a painful, sweeping self-examination:

- ▶ Leadership culture
- ▶ Command accountability
- ▶ Professional ethics
- ▶ Training pipelines
- ▶ Civil-military trust

That introspection produced the all-volunteer force, modern PME, and a renewed emphasis on command responsibility.

We are now well inside another institutional crisis:

- ▶ Recruiting and retention problems
- ▶ Trust collapse
- ▶ Whistleblower retaliation normalization
- ▶ Administrative punishment replacing due process
- ▶ Investigations conducted by untrained officers with life-altering authority



And yet the Oversight Plan responds primarily with:

- ▶ More program audits
- ▶ More infrastructure reviews
- ▶ More compliance scoring

We are inspecting the surface while ignoring the engine.

The Missing Question the FY26 Oversight Plan Never Asks

Here is the question that never appears in the document:

Are our leaders actually leading—and are our systems capable of telling us when they are not?

Because if leadership works:

- ▶ Discipline works.
- ▶ Trust returns.
- ▶ Reporting increases.
- ▶ Retaliation decreases.
- ▶ Readiness improves.
- ▶ Quality of life follows.

And if leadership fails: Everything else becomes institutional theater.

Oversight That Never Evaluates Power Cannot Fix Abuse of Power

The FY26 Oversight Plan contains dozens of audits of:

- ▶ Assets
- ▶ Systems
- ▶ Infrastructure
- ▶ Finances
- ▶ Programs

But it contains no comparable, systemic assessment of:

- ▶ How power is exercised inside commands



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- ▶ How retaliation flows through the administrative system
- ▶ How investigative authority is abused
- ▶ How careers are quietly destroyed outside the criminal justice system

That is not just a gap.

That is the main battlefield.

The DoD IG Oversight Plan tells us what the Department is watching.

What it does not tell us is whether the Department is willing to watch itself where it is most uncomfortable:

- ▶ Leadership
- ▶ Retaliation
- ▶ Integrity of investigations
- ▶ Whistleblower protection in practice—not theory
- ▶ Trust as a strategic asset

Until those become formal oversight priorities—not footnotes—the force will continue to hemorrhage talent, credibility, and moral authority.

You cannot audit your way out of a leadership crisis.

And right now, the FY26 Oversight Plan proves we are still trying to.



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Send this newsletter to your elected officials if you believe they need to correct the issues discussed.

- ▶ Find your Representative here: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>



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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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Graphic:

<https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2024-11-16/navy-documented-risks-red-hill-fuel-tanks>