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**NORMALIZATION OF  
DEVIANCE – WHY THE U.S.  
MILITARY IS HEADED  
DOWN THE SAME PATH AS  
THE CHALLENGER**

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### ***Normalization of Deviance – Why the U.S. Military is Headed Down the Same Path as the Challenger***

Normalization of deviance is a term first coined by sociologist Diane Vaughan when reviewing the Challenger disaster. Vaughan noted that the root cause of the Challenger disaster was related to the repeated choice of NASA officials to fly the space shuttle despite a dangerous design flaw with the O-rings. Vaughan describes this phenomenon as occurring when people within an organization become so [insensitive to deviant practice that it no longer feels wrong](#).

Aviation professionals to this day are keen to retain and pass on the difficult lessons learned from that NASA culture, one which bred one of the most infamous disasters of our time. And that is because the psychological principals remain the same whether they occur in an organization or on a flight deck. Once that group, whether it be as small as a flight crew, or as large of an organization such as NASA, begins to accept deviations from rules, regulations, and law (no matter how seemingly insignificant) it inevitably and insidiously leads to a culture of complicit acceptance.

Within Title 10, which is U.S. law governing active-duty service members, there is a stipulation that a member, after having filed a complaint of reprisal, is to be notified in writing of the status of that investigation every 180 days. The number of our clients who have experienced Inspectors General violate that law is now too high to count. Many say that it is a relatively insignificant infraction, and that the violation of that law really has no bearing on the outcome of the investigation. And while that may be true, we argue it is an indication of a much larger issue: the same one we saw at NASA in the 1980s - a widespread normalization of deviation occurring within our Department of Defense.



On any given day, our Department of Defense violates a slew of laws to include Title 5, Title 10, Title 50, the Privacy Act, HIPAA, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, and so on. They do so with impunity. Why? Simple: because they can and, more saliently, because it has become the accepted norm. We have had several clients in recent months frustratingly exclaim to us “but they can’t do that to me!” and then list the laws, rules, and regulations why that is so. Unfortunately, the harsh reality is that “they” in fact can. They can decide who the law applies to and who not. And that is derived from this culture of operating above the law, which is the result of a decades-long organizational phenomenon of normalization of deviance. It likely started by scoffing laws such as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) which mandates that you receive your requested information within 20 days, and then morphed into bigger and more impactful things, things that derailed careers and irrevocably impacted lives. And all the while, our other branches of government, designed by our founding fathers to impart checks and balances on the executive branch, complicitly watched.

This is the sad state of affairs today in our Department of Defense. It is the very definition of normalization of deviance, and it happens throughout nearly all levels throughout the Department. Of course, it is not occurring at every level - the E-4 out there who violates the Joint Travel Regulation when they charge two dollars more for their taxi: they get a [LOR](#), a [GOMOR](#), a [PD-07 \(Page 7\)](#), etc. For those leaders in the Department who brazenly disregard the laws of our country and deny our service members their Constitutionally-derived rights, what do they receive? Promotions. And it is this culture, the one which destined NASA for disaster, that, if not changed, will ultimately be the military’s undoing as well.



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

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