

# Strategy Research Project

## Learning Trust: A Leadership Lesson From Twelve Years at War

by

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United States Army War College  
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## **Abstract**

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## **Learning Trust: A Leadership Lesson From Twelve Years at War**

As we begin our transition following this time of twelve years of war, we must rededicate ourselves to the development of our leaders as our best edge against complexity and uncertainty.

—General Raymond T. Odierno<sup>1</sup>

The Army is at a strategic inflection point. Operations in Iraq are now two years behind us, the war in Afghanistan is drawing down significantly and scheduled to transition by the end of 2014, and the U.S. military is shifting active operations away from the Middle East and reorienting toward the Asia-Pacific region. All of this is occurring during a time of fiscal austerity, dwindling resources, and a four-year plan to draw personnel strength down to 490,000 or below. In the midst of embarking on such a significant change in posture, it is important that the Army reflects on what it has experienced over the last twelve years of combat, counterinsurgency (COIN), and stability operations, and takes advantage of the opportunity to improve its core capabilities to lead Soldiers, execute its core missions, and meet its obligations.

There is much to be learned from these recent experiences and accumulated lessons spanning the full range of how the Army prepares and employs its personnel, equipment and doctrine. Yet, as an institution historically engaged in the business of building leaders, it is the lessons in leadership that have the greatest implication for positive, enduring effects on and for the military force, and that provide a competitive advantage that cannot be replaced by technology, weapon systems or platforms.<sup>2</sup>

One important lesson in leadership, empowering subordinates with disciplined initiative and underwriting the risk associated with that initiative, has been observed and acknowledged, but its solution has been only partially implemented. The full benefits of empowering subordinate leaders through the now doctrinal concept of *mission command*

have yet to be fully realized and, in the opinion of some, its concepts are misunderstood at all ranks across the Army.

A second related lesson in leadership that has been observed over the last twelve years is the general lack of dissent towards questionable employment of military forces to achieve desired strategic objectives. Put another way, the Army has not displayed the capacity to speak “truth to power” among and between its leaders, particularly to senior civilians and policymakers.

A lesson observed is not a lesson learned; rather it is more akin to an issue that is acknowledged as a problem. Fortunately, both of these lessons can be addressed simultaneously, and steps toward resolving both are mutually reinforcing. By understanding the origins of mission command and approaching its implementation from a perspective of changing organizational culture, the Army stands to reap benefits well beyond merely empowering subordinate leaders. More importantly, truly inculcating mission command will also serve as a catalyst to an even greater lesson that Army leaders must learn: the ability to dialogue within, across, and outside the Force, undeterred by the trepidation of speaking truth to power when presenting dissenting views, alternative perspectives, and potentially unpopular options.

### Speaking Truth to Power in Iraq

It is unmistakably clear that the war in Iraq revealed significant fractures in American civil-military relations. The common opinion among many in the military at the time was that the war was severely mismanaged by senior civilian officials, and while it is generally accepted that Secretary Rumsfeld’s dominant personality, excessive control, and outright micromanagement of tactical details forged an environment that was not conducive to receiving contrarian perspectives, senior military officers cannot

be absolved from all responsibility associated with the decisions leading up to the war, nor its outcomes. This position, because of the statutory obligation for senior military officers to provide their best military advice to political decision makers, questions the professional moral courage of these officers, and indicts their failure to provide candid military counsel.<sup>3</sup>

This indictment came as a surprise to many military professionals at the time, particularly since there had been renewed emphasis on the significance of providing candid military advice in the wake of the book *Dereliction of Duty*, published in 1998 by H.R. McMaster. The complicity of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to form and pursue misguided policies in Vietnam, as described by McMaster, served as a “cautionary tale” for much of the Army officer corps and for many leaders across the military writ large.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on the lessons observed in the book from senior leaders, both military and civilian, reinforced the idea that this type of behavior was unacceptable in today’s military. In May 2004, recalling how General Hugh Shelton had distributed copies of McMaster’s book to all senior leaders in the military while serving as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, former commander of U.S. Central Command, General Anthony Zinni, USMC, (Ret.) stated:

The message to us, after we heard this from Hugh Shelton, is that will never happen here. And the message to us from Secretary [William S.] Cohen at that time, too, is that the door is always open, and your obligation to the Congress, which is an obligation to the American people to tell them what you think, still stands strong.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, both Cohen and Shelton retired from their respective positions in 2001, well before planning for the Iraq invasion began.

The failure of senior officers to question dubious analysis of intelligence reports and to provide subsequent sound military advice prior to the invasion of Iraq has been

thoroughly documented. The issue surfaced most prominently in what has become known as the “Revolt of the Generals,” when six retired flag officers spoke out in 2006 against military policies pursued in Iraq, as well as the civilian leaders most responsible for them.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, the “revolt” generated as much controversy as the claims of failed generalship. The most obvious criticism of the revolt was that these officers waited until they were retired before voicing dissent, causing some to wonder where their voices were while still on active duty.

Retired U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant General Gregory Newbold, in an April 2006 *Time Magazine* article, expressed his regret that he did not challenge the actions that led up to the invasion of Iraq more openly. He then went on to castigate those who did not speak out at all:

Flaws in our civilians is one thing: the failure of the Pentagon’s military leaders is quite another. Those are the men who know the hard consequences of war but, with few exceptions, acted timidly when their voices urgently needed to be heard. When they knew the plan was flawed, saw intelligence distorted to justify a rationale for war, or witnessed arrogant micromanagement that at times crippled the military’s effectiveness; many leaders who wore the uniform chose inaction.<sup>7</sup>

In response to the burgeoning revolt, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs at the time, General Peter Pace, offered similar, yet theoretical criticism of his fellow generals, without implicating any wrong doing by senior civilian policymakers, namely Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. During a Pentagon news conference on April 11, 2006, Pace stated, “We had then, and have now, every opportunity to speak our minds, and if we do not, shame on us because the opportunity is there.”<sup>8</sup>

If the opportunity to speak their minds persisted throughout the war in Iraq, senior military officers continued to be silent in the face of additional contentious decisions. In late 2006 the U.S. was confronted with the reality that the war in Iraq was on the verge

of being lost. General Casey's strategy of transitioning security responsibility to the Iraqi military was failing, and any hope of achieving the stated U.S. strategic objective of "a democratic Iraq that upholds the rule of law, respects the rights of its people, provides them security, and is an ally in the war on terror" was rapidly slipping away.<sup>9</sup>

Recognizing the deteriorating problem of sectarian and intra-sectarian violence, the U.S. Government realized that the Iraqis would need to reach a number of political and economic settlements in order to achieve a level of reconciliation that would allow the Government of Iraq (GOI) to pursue a truly democratic government. A new strategy was in order.

The military objective established with the new strategy in Iraq beginning in early 2007 was to "achieve sufficient security to provide the space and time for the Iraqi government to come to grips with the tough decisions its members must make to enable Iraq to move forward."<sup>10</sup> To achieve this objective, the U.S. military deployed an additional five U.S. Army brigades (bringing its total to 20) and extended the tours of approximately 4000 Marines that were already deployed. The force in Iraq, numbering 168,000 by September of 2007, employed counterinsurgency practices that underscored the importance of living among the people they were securing, focused on improving security, especially in Baghdad and the areas around it, by wresting sanctuaries from Al Qaeda control, and disrupting the efforts of the Iranian-supported militia extremists.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, there was a significant mismatch between the military strategy and the political objectives that it sought to achieve, particularly in the context of the Iraqi environment in which the U.S. military and its inter-governmental partners had to

operate. Most troubling about the military strategy and, more importantly, the strategic objectives that supported the U.S. national goal, was that everything beyond the strategic military objective relied *solely* on the will of the Iraqi Government to conform to governing standards that were completely foreign to its institutional history. The U.S. certainly had a role in helping the GOI develop the systems and framework to form their governmental institutions, but to pursue a truly democratic Iraq that shared power and revenues was, and continues to be, a decision *only* for those in power who govern Iraq.

Unbeknownst to those not closely following the proceedings leading up to the new strategy's implementation, this was fully acknowledged at the time the new strategy was taking shape by the commander who would oversee its execution. Testifying before Congress, then-Lieutenant General David Petraeus stated:

Some of the members of this committee have observed that there is no military solution to the problems of Iraq. They are correct. Ultimate success in Iraq will be determined by actions in the Iraqi political and economic arenas on such central issues as governance, the amount of power devolved to the provinces and possibly regions, the distribution of oil revenues, national reconciliation and resolution of sectarian differences, and so on. Success will also depend on improvements in the capacity of Iraq's ministries, in the provision of basic services, in the establishment of the rule of law, and in economic development.<sup>12</sup>

Achieving such drastic improvements to yield reconciliation, merely setting conditions to achieve true democracy, could be deemed phenomenal in even the most passive environment, but attempting to achieve them within the context of the security and political environment of 2007 proved virtually impossible.

It appears that somewhere within the process of deciding to change the strategy in Iraq and implement the surge, senior military officials and the Bush administration must have believed the *assumption* that PM Maliki would make good on his

commitment to take reconciliation seriously and implement change in his national policies and political processes. Unfortunately, that would not be the case.

An alternative view, particularly considering the political and cultural environment of Iraq and its government in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's rule, is that no one in the administration or anyone among the senior military officials felt compelled to provide a dissenting opinion. Instead of considering alternative approaches, the U.S. "doubled-down" militarily in Iraq on this arguably false assumption. As a result, the U.S. military remained in Iraq for another five years, until the end of 2011, having fully achieved *none* of its strategic or national objectives.

Generally speaking, telling people things that they don't want to hear is a difficult proposition, even in the most benign situations. That difficulty compounds exponentially when the situation involves controversial information or contrarian recommendations delivered to powerful senior officials who happen to hold sway over the messenger's career. To use an analogy couched in educational terms, speaking truth to power is a post-graduate level display of trust. To continue with that analogy, as any PhD student can attest, one cannot earn a doctoral degree without two very important things: a prerequisite degree and, more importantly, a fully-developed set of scholarly habits to study at that level. Similarly, it cannot be expected that strategic leaders possess the innate ability to begin speaking truth to power once they have arrived at a professional level where they are required to provide counsel and advice to their civilian counterparts or, more importantly, their political masters. Rather, as might be expected, they need to have developed that skill long before by studying and practicing the art of speaking truth to power throughout the entirety of their careers.

Learning to speak truth to power early in a career, however, cannot begin in an environment that is not conducive to candid exchange. Leaders at all levels must create conditions that express to subordinate leaders that open, professional dialogue is not only accepted but also expected. Recognizing that dialogue is intended to inform rather than to convince, this level of conversation is not focused on conflict resolution or mutual understanding and agreement, but rather on improving the way people interact with one other.<sup>13</sup> In senior subordinate relationships, communication of this nature requires a significant amount of trust both up and down the chain of command.

Because mission command is built on the idea of mutual trust, it is intuitive that effective mission command can also serve as the foundation for improving professional dialogue. By understanding the origins of mission command and approaching its implementation from a perspective of changing organizational culture, the Army stands to improve not only its operational capabilities, but more importantly, it can sow the seeds of true professional dialogue and, ultimately, a renewed capacity to speak truth to power.

### The Seeds of Mission Command

In 2006 Lieutenant Colonel Douglas Ollivant and First Lieutenant Eric Chewning wrote a compelling article for *Military Review*, based on their understanding of French counterinsurgency expert David Galula as well as their own experiences in Iraq during 2004-2005. In short, they argued that the combined arms maneuver battalion, partnering with indigenous security forces and living among the population it secures, should be the primary tactical unit upon which COIN operations are organized and conducted.<sup>14</sup> The article was so convincing that it won first place in *Military Review's*

annual writing competition for 2006 and, more importantly, it captured the attention of General Petraeus.

On January 8, 2007, shortly after it became public that he would replace General Casey as the commander of all Multinational Forces in Iraq (MNF-I), Petraeus sent an email to Ollivant, then serving as the Plans Chief (G5) for the First Cavalry Division, Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B), asking if he still believed his thesis and if it could be implemented in Baghdad. Ollivant told Petraeus that he still believed in the notion and that the fundamental elements of the article formed the operational approach for MND-B's impending security plan, *Fardh al-Qanoon*, or "Enforcing the Law." This approach would move battalions and their subordinate companies off the Forward Operating Bases and out into the communities. Moreover, and most importantly, senior commanders would empower company-grade and non-commissioned officers, now in extended daily contact with the population, with initiative to secure the populace and improve their quality of life, using whatever innovative techniques these junior leaders deemed necessary and appropriate.<sup>15</sup>

Discussing his approach, Ollivant stated, "While we cannot transform our hierarchical Army into a fully networked organization overnight, powering down to the lowest practical level will enable the most adaptive commanders to implement a Galula-like solution."<sup>16</sup> Certainly a concept of running networked operations against an enemy that employed its own sophisticated operating network was a profound proposal in an Army that historically concentrated decision making at the top.<sup>17</sup> Yet, this was not an altogether new concept among some senior Army leaders; a similar networked approach, according to General Stanley McChrystal, had been instrumental in his

efforts to improve the effectiveness of special operations forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, beginning in late 2004.<sup>18</sup> It was, however, a unique approach among conventional forces and implementing it successfully would require patience and determination at all levels of command.

Several books and multiple articles have argued that this operational approach, coupled with the surge of additional combat forces into the Baghdad area of operations (AOR), resulted in a significant decline in violence due largely (though not exclusively) to the incorporation of local fighters into the security apparatus. In what would grow to become the “Sons of Iraq” program, local men from multiple communities in Baghdad, familiar with their neighborhoods and the foreign AQI affiliates that had infiltrated them, organized into small groups that wrested control of their own streets back from AQI and continued to patrol and provide security in conjunction with U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Recognizing, supervising, nurturing and weaving these local groups into the fragile security fabric of Baghdad (and later Iraq) was not a task that could be driven, managed or even directed from the upper echelons of command. Rather, it required the initiative of junior leaders at the tactical level who understood the unique dynamics of each individual community, as well as the personalities of its governing body, ISF commanders, and a host of other informal local leaders such as sheiks, imams, and advisory council members.

Initiative at this level and of this magnitude clearly carried with it a great deal of risk, not only to the Soldiers who operated alongside these local fighters, many of whom were former low-level insurgents, but also to the overall success of the mission. Therefore, such initiative had to operate within the bounds of a commander’s intent and,

more importantly, had to be underwritten by commanders willing to accept the associated risk. Fortunately, both were displayed in Iraq during 2007 that allowed opportunities to flourish.

One of the first examples in Iraq where a senior commander underwrote risk of this magnitude occurred in early June of 2007. Approximately one week after the first group of local fighters rose up against AQI and began fighting alongside soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry in the Western Baghdad community of Ameriyah, Colonel Chip Daniels (then a Major and serving as the operations officer of 1-5 CAV) was summoned for a morning run with General Petraeus. Petraeus often used these runs with junior officers to gain unfiltered feedback about areas of particular interest to the commander. After updating the commander on the progress of the week, Daniels expressed his concern that several members of the unit were nervous about the kind of risk they were assuming. “Do not stop! Do not let our Army stop you; do not let the Iraqi government stop you,” Petraeus replied emphatically. “You are doing the right thing and now is the time to take risks.”<sup>19</sup>

Instances of empowering junior leaders were not confined solely to general officers enabling field grade officers, majors and lieutenant colonels. A recent *New York Times* article recounted the story of a young Lieutenant empowered well beyond the responsibilities normally associated with such a junior officer. Captain Brandon Archuleta (a Lieutenant at the time of the incident) described one experience when he was approached by his battery commander to help lead a team of representatives in a town council where he supervised the administration of public services, conducted reconciliation talks with tribal elders, and distributed payroll funds to the ISF.<sup>20</sup> “My

battery commander and my battalion commander realized they had a big challenge with governance. They knew they couldn't be everywhere at once. It was quite empowering for them to delegate those authorities to me."<sup>21</sup>

The idea that this kind of empowerment, springing from the bold and unique operational approach developed in Iraq in 2007, produced resounding tactical success is assuredly important; yet tactical successes would not be the enduring legacy. More importantly, this approach with conventional forces – mirroring the similar approach instituted by General McChrystal in counter-terrorism Task Force (TF) 714 – displayed that Army forces of all types, and at all levels, could empower subordinates with initiative, exploit their successes, and underwrite the risk associated with their inevitable mistakes.

#### Mission Command Takes Root

Fortunately, some senior leaders took notice and began to take measures to institutionalize this initiative. During his 2010 Kermit Roosevelt Lecture at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), while serving as the Commander of the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), General Martin Dempsey presented his vision for how the Army should organize and operate as it approached the end of a decade of combat and adapted for the future and an increasingly uncertain global environment. That vision included the “need to redefine and rearticulate the command and control war-fighting function and reintroduce it to the force as mission command.”<sup>22</sup>

Since that lecture, General Dempsey has been on a mission. For more than three years now, spanning his tenure as the TRADOC Commander, through a short five-month stint as the Army Chief of Staff, to his present responsibilities as the 18<sup>th</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey has been urgently promoting

mission command. Throughout this time, General Dempsey has particularly expressed the need to demand that subordinate leaders at all echelons exercise disciplined initiative and act aggressively and independently to accomplish their missions.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, empowering subordinate leaders at every echelon to exercise initiative with both aggressiveness and independence may be a tall order in today's Army, particularly in light of the implications that General Dempsey associates with that power. While serving as the TRADOC Commander, he stated that mission command "implies that collaboration and trust are as important as command and control."<sup>24</sup> That might appear to many in today's ranks as an understatement, considering the words that followed: "Importantly, mission command is also about understanding, sharing and mitigating risk. As we decentralize capability, authority and responsibility to lower tactical echelons, we must not decentralize all the risk as well."<sup>25</sup> If the Army truly embraces the concept and philosophy of mission command, then collaboration and trust will become more than simply *important*; if commanders and leaders must willingly accept the risk associated with affording junior leaders with the authority and responsibility to make decisions that impact the outcome of a mission, then collaboration and trust will be *essential*.

The challenge for the Army will be to harness these experiences and lessons and then translate them back to "Garrison Life" as the war in Afghanistan winds down and fiscal austerity reduces the amount of training opportunities in local and national training centers. After returning from Afghanistan in 2010 and in command of his own company, Captain Archuleta complained that he missed the responsibilities that his superiors had given him in war; and he stated that many of his peers who felt similarly simply left active duty for business schools and jobs in the private sector.<sup>26</sup>

Currently, despite improvements over the last ten years of combat, the Army is culturally misaligned to exercise this kind of collaboration and trust. At its core, the Army is still a very hierarchical organization that has an historical high power distance. According to U.S. Army War College Professors Steve Gerras, Leonard Wong and Charles Allen in their work *Organizational Culture: Applying a Hybrid model to the U.S. Army*, such a high power distance is not always conducive to implementing the kind of change required to become more flexible and adaptive.<sup>27</sup> Those senior Army leaders who create both the value and the direction of the Army as an organization have instilled the expectation of obedience to orders and adaptation to organizational norms that limit the acceptance of risk and thereby reduce initiative.

As the Army transitions back from more than a decade at war, a time when junior leaders enjoyed a great deal of flexibility and initiative as the tactical situation dictated, these organizational norms will appear more prominent and will likely further the divide between junior and senior leaders. Unless the Army is able to adapt at the senior levels, loosening at least the appearance of tighter control, junior leaders who experienced greater flexibility, exercised more initiative, and made tough decisions in combat, will likely not conform well to tighter controls back in a garrison environment. Less conformity, of course, will spiral toward tighter controls from the top, and the divide will widen even further; mutual trust, running both up and down the chain of command, will diminish and the concept of mission command will likely remain just that.

#### The Way Forward: Nurturing Mission Command to Fruition

If the Army is going to truly implement the Chairman's vision and become more adept at decentralizing capability and authority, it must understand that change, like establishing mutual trust, takes time. But the clock is already ticking. Fortunately for

the Army, the Chairman has already developed a foundation for implementing the types of changes required to adapt the culture of the Army to the desired outcome. Viewing General Dempsey's actions over the past three years through the lens of noted author and change-expert John Kotter (see figure below), it becomes readily apparent that Dempsey has: 1) established a sense of urgency, 2) created a guiding coalition through the Mission Command Center of Excellence (MCCOE), 3) developed a vision and strategy through his already published White Paper, 4) communicated his vision, and 5) has begun to empower those beneath him for broad-based action.<sup>28</sup>

#### Kotter's Eight Step Process for Creating Major Change

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating the guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short-term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

Figure 1. Kotter's Model<sup>29</sup>

If the Army adopts Kotter's model and builds upon General Dempsey's accomplishments, it must complete the remaining three steps in the change process: generate short term wins; consolidate gains and produce more change; and anchor new approaches in the culture. As previously discussed, junior leaders have been given greater latitude and displayed exceptional initiative and leadership abilities in the complex and ambiguous environments of Iraq and Afghanistan over the course of the last several years. In essence, the Army has already generated these short-term wins

and must continue to recognize and reward these junior leaders while that opportunity still exists in Afghanistan in the coming year.

Thus, while culture takes a long time and effort to change, according to Kotter's model, the Army is closer than it may appear to establishing the kinds of conditions required for institutionalizing the Chairman's vision. By implementing the last two steps that Kotter describes, the Army increases the likelihood of achieving that vision. The Army can accomplish these two steps by implementing three initiatives: 1) refine training requirements for echelons below division; 2) incorporate feedback from 360-degree assessments into the promotion and command selection processes; 3) and incorporate mission command into all levels of professional education. The first two recommendations attempt to consolidate gains and produce more change, while the second and third can both effectively anchor effective changes in the Army's culture.

Simply attempting to induce change through Kotter's model, however, is not enough – the model must focus on the implementing the *right* things. All three of these recommendations align with what Schein calls embedding mechanisms; the first two align with “what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis,” and the final recommendation aligns with the “leader's use of teaching and coaching”.<sup>30</sup> By focusing on implementing changes that align with embedding mechanisms, the Army can effectively introduce and emplace new assumptions about how the organization runs and operates. But to understand what this means to the Army, a little clarity is required regarding how to implement these changes.

Refining training requirements at the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) and below will further the Army's efforts in establishing trust between senior and subordinate leaders

by empowering field grade officers to establish their unit training plans based on their assessments of unit readiness. Part of the perception now is that training requirements are overly cumbersome and are developed from arbitrary checklists established by multiple layers of bureaucracy from echelons that never interact with the units in question. Trusting leaders who have been in the Army for more than ten to twenty years to develop training plans based on their assessments of their units' capabilities, while still retaining the required rigor to assure readiness, removes an unnecessary interdependency between small units and the institutional Army. Moreover, providing mid-level leaders the opportunity to express their training priorities, specifically in terms of what their formations do not need to do, allows these leaders the latitude to express their dissent of these requirements. In short, this initiative provides emerging senior leaders with regulated opportunities to speak truth to power.

This is a key tenet in Kotter's seventh step, consolidating gains and producing more change. According to Kotter, organizations are better able to consolidate gains and produce additional, effective change if they eliminate policies and structures that do not align with one another or the transformation vision.<sup>31</sup> Brigade and battalion commanders who are given the latitude to train their subordinate formations will be more likely to "power-down" that latitude over time, as senior leaders display the willingness to accept the risk associated with that freedom. Moreover, it is those very junior-level leaders who will have to bear the consequences of that risk, should it be misplaced, establishing a heightened sense of accountability and diligence as they develop their training plans.

Incorporating 360-degree feedback into the promotion and command selection processes directly institutionalizes the concept of professional dialogue, lending to the inculcation of speaking truth to power, and should be accomplished through two specific methods. First, leaders at all levels must be required to discuss a synopsis of their 360-degree feedback with their subordinate leaders two levels down. Second, senior-raters must be required to review the results of their subordinate leaders' 360-degree feedback and consider that feedback when penning their remarks on the rated officers' evaluation report.

The first of these two initiatives is meant to establish open communication between leaders and those that they lead, increasing the likelihood of achieving true dialogue on key topics involving direct and organizational leadership skills. By displaying the willingness to describe and discuss what junior leaders assess as their strengths and weaknesses, even if it is institutionally directed, senior leaders establish a sense of trust and confidence among leaders at all levels, up and down the chain of command. That then establishes the conditions for senior leaders to analyze a subordinate's 360-degree assessment, and take that feedback into account when providing written comments on the rated officer's evaluation form.

These initiatives promote both the seventh and eighth steps of Kotter's model for change. They help to consolidate gains to produce necessary change by developing people who can implement that change vision, and they anchor these new approaches into the culture by promoting better performance through subordinate-oriented behavior.<sup>32</sup> When leaders at all levels understand, from their subordinates' perspective,

the implications of their actions and leadership methods, they are more likely to open themselves up to effective feedback and provide constructive feedback to other leaders.

Finally, incorporating the tenets of mission command into the officer and non-commissioned officer professional education system is the enduring step that will ultimately anchor the change into the military culture. One of Kotter's key components of anchoring change is to develop effective ways to focus on leader-development and senior-leader succession.<sup>33</sup> Because the Army is an organization that promotes from within, and all members of the organization begin at the entry-level of their respective career fields, this concept becomes increasingly more important.

By incorporating the fundamental aspects of mission command into the education system, the Army establishes the means to continue to communicate the change vision throughout the organization in a manner that is received and interpreted, at each echelon, and at the appropriate level. Young leaders in their basic non-commissioned officers' courses, along with emerging senior leaders at an appropriate senior service college, will all be receiving reinforcing messages targeted at their specific role in the process. By utilizing this approach, the Army will be able to target all the significant stakeholders, from colonel to corporal, to maximize institutional acceptance of the change.

Not represented in this solution set are the Army's most senior officers. Those most influential in actually ensuring that these changes take root and become embedded into the emerging Army culture are the senior stewards of our profession. Along that front, General Dempsey continues to communicate his message to these leaders, utilizes his guiding coalition that includes fellow general officers at Fort

Leavenworth (MCCOE) and TRADOC to help propagate the message, and supervises the revision of Joint doctrine to inform and guide supporting Army doctrine.

These reinforcing mechanisms must be received and supported by the senior leaders in the Army if this change process is to be successful. If executed correctly, with appropriate senior leader involvement, the Army can build enduring trust among leaders at all levels, institutionalize the concept of mission command, help the Chairman achieve his vision for the future force, and rejuvenate professional dialogue and the apparent lost art of speaking truth to power. Achieving these objectives will ideally reestablish a culture of professional honesty in the Army and, over time, prevent the kind of tacit complicity to misguided policies observed at senior levels in both Vietnam and Iraq.

#### Conclusion

It has been said that hindsight is 20/20. That is only partially true. While professionals can certainly see what happened by studying the past, *understanding why* it happened that way may still prove to be the elusive key that requires thoughtful, unbiased analysis. Thus, the true importance of hindsight is not only recognizing potential mistakes and miscues, to merely observe lessons from the past, but rather its importance lies in the ability to analyze them, learn from them, and carry out the professional obligation to implement measures and change organizational behavior to ensure similar mistakes do not occur in the future.

Pursuing cultural change in the Army, particularly through effective inculcation and implementation of mission command, can better equip Soldiers and leaders to adapt in today's ambiguous strategic environment. Building upon the lessons of the last twelve years, nurturing and fostering the level of initiative and professional trust that

young leaders have grown accustomed to, will help carry the force into the next generation, increasing the capacity and combat capabilities of all Soldiers in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world.

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, that increased level of trust will increase the frequency and quality of professional dialogue between the leader and the led. With time, true dialogue must certainly build the kind of confidence necessary to voice dissent and speak truth to power when alternative views need to be heard, at all levels within and external to the military organization.

### Endnotes

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<sup>5</sup> Gen. Anthony Zinni, USMC, (Ret.) Remarks at CDI Board of Directors Dinner, May 12, 2004," Center for Defense Information, 22 May 2004, quoted in Martin L. Cook, "Revolt of the Generals: A Case Study in Professional Ethics," *Parameters* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 6.

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<sup>11</sup> General David H. Petraeus, "Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq," September 10, 2007, <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/petraeus-testimony20070910.pdf>.

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<sup>15</sup> LTC Douglas A. Ollivant, email from General David H. Petraeus, January 8, 2007, provided to author during telephonic interview, January 31, 2013.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>31</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change*, 21, 141-142.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 21, 157.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 21.