

Strategy Research Project

Strategic Consequences of Resilience

by

Lieutenant Colonel Joel D. Newsom
United States Army

Under the Direction of:
Dr. Craig R. Bullis



United States Army War College
Class of 2018

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release
Distribution is Unlimited

The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188		
The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2018		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Strategic Consequences of Resilience			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Joel D. Newsom United States Army			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. Craig R. Bullis			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited. I understand this document will be included in a research database and available to the public. Author: X					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 6676					
14. ABSTRACT The Army has taken great strides to address the negative impacts that 16 years of sustained conflict and high operational tempo have inflicted upon its soldiers and their physical, psychological, social, spiritual and family needs. Maintaining the stamina and endurance to make sound decisions under these conditions necessitates great resilience to buffer the stressors that inevitably result from the pressures faced by senior leaders. Under the umbrellas of the Ready and Resilient Campaign and Senior Leader Sustainment Program, the Army has invested significant resources into strengthening the resiliency of its soldiers and families. However, these programs do not adequately address the unique needs of the Army's senior leaders. This paper will examine the environment in which strategic leaders are compelled to operate, discuss the desired attributes required of them, analyze the components of the resilience framework most applicable to senior leaders, and identify the strengths and limitations of the current resilience programs given the VUCA environment.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS VUCA, Grit, Hardiness, Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness, Senior Leader Sustainment					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 31	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

Strategic Consequences of Resilience

(6676 words)

Abstract

The Army has taken great strides to address the negative impacts that 16 years of sustained conflict and high operational tempo have inflicted upon its soldiers and their physical, psychological, social, spiritual and family needs. Maintaining the stamina and endurance to make sound decisions under these conditions necessitates great resilience to buffer the stressors that inevitably result from the pressures faced by senior leaders. Under the umbrellas of the Ready and Resilient Campaign and Senior Leader Sustainment Program, the Army has invested significant resources into strengthening the resiliency of its soldiers and families. However, these programs do not adequately address the unique needs of the Army's senior leaders. This paper will examine the environment in which strategic leaders are compelled to operate, discuss the desired attributes required of them, analyze the components of the resilience framework most applicable to senior leaders, and identify the strengths and limitations of the current resilience programs given the VUCA environment.

Strategic Consequences of Resilience

We recognized senior executive leaders, with varying amounts of stress, lacked a holistic program that focuses on comprehensive health...a new emphasis on senior leaders is needed.

—General Mark Milley¹

On July 31, 2016, two days before assuming command of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command (SMDC) and receiving his third star, Major General (Promotable) (MG (P)) John Rossi committed suicide in his home on Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. Major General (P) Rossi's military career had been unquestionably successful, resulting in his advancement from serving as commander of Fort Sill, Oklahoma and the Fires Center of Excellence to commander of all of the U.S. Army's space and missile forces. From the perspective of all observers, MG (P) Rossi was confident, extremely mission-focused, and in control, successfully dealing with the stressors that are inherent within the responsibilities that come with serving as a senior, strategic leader in the military. However, the 15-6 investigation into his tragic death revealed that the demands of his job were taking a much higher toll than was outwardly visible. Anxiety, stress, inadequate restorative sleep, insecurity about his ability to understand all aspects of his new job, fear of disappointing others, and lack of work/life balance all contributed to his decision to take his life. The report concluded that the "cumulative effect of several career and medical stressors...impaired his judgment and caused cognitive distortions regarding his self-worth. They ultimately overwhelmed his psychological defenses and ability to cope with these negative emotions, resulting in his decision to commit suicide."²

Fewer than two months later, another Army strategic leader, MG Wayne Grigsby, was relieved of command of the First Infantry Division for pursuing an inappropriate

relationship with a female captain on his staff. Married with five children, MG Grigsby ignored multiple warnings from close advisors that his relationship with the female captain was negatively impacting his ability to lead the division as it prepared for a combat deployment to Iraq.³ Like MG (P) Rossi, MG Grigsby had a flawless military record prior to this incident, successfully commanding troops from the platoon to division level over a thirty year career.⁴ Deployed eight times for a total of six and a half years since September 11, 2001 and burdened with the significant responsibilities of a division commander, MG Grigsby departed from his past behaviors and morality and made a decision that impacted his career, his family, and the First Infantry Division. Major General Grigsby attributed his poor decisions to family problems stemming from the high operational tempo caused by his professional responsibilities.⁵

Commonalities exist in the above case studies in that both MG (P) Rossi and MG Grigsby were highly successful officers, well-respected by superiors and subordinates alike. Both were strategic leaders who spent years operating in positions of great responsibility without demonstrating any indicators of behavioral aberration or emotional instability. Both were believed to be resilient. At some point, however, a crucial attribute within each officer eroded, and catastrophes struck. In such circumstances, the pertinent question is, "Why?"

Senior Army leaders are constantly immersed in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment which is stressful, cognitively challenging, and fast paced.⁶ As they progress through the upper ranks, work hours become longer, separation from family increases, and opportunities to take time off shrink. Over time,

these stressors, unless properly buffered, can impact senior leaders' abilities to make sound decisions.

The Army has taken great strides to address the negative impacts that 16 years of sustained conflict and high operational tempo have inflicted upon its soldiers and their physical, psychological, social, spiritual and family needs. Under the umbrellas of the Ready and Resilient Campaign and Senior Leader Sustainment Program, the Army has invested significant resources into strengthening the resiliency of its soldiers and families. However, the two cases given above, when combined with other similar examples, indicate that these programs may not adequately address the unique needs of the Army's senior leaders.

This paper will examine the environment in which strategic leaders are compelled to operate, discuss the desired attributes required of them, analyze the components of the resilience framework most applicable to senior leaders, and identify the strengths and limitations of the current resilience programs given the VUCA environment.

The VUCA Environment

Strategic leaders are compelled to operate constantly in an environment that is rapidly changing, interconnected, and difficult to assess. The enemies of the United States are persistently trying to gain a competitive advantage throughout the world, and facts that are true today might no longer be accurate tomorrow. Conversely, the U.S. security apparatus is a massive organization, slow to change and difficult to maneuver quickly to maintain competitiveness in pursuit of U.S. national interests. This dilemma is one of several factors that make the job of the strategic leader so difficult. In order to understand the challenges of the strategic environment, it will be useful to define each of its components.⁷

Volatility is the rapid rate in which the environment changes.⁸ In the *Mission Command White Paper*, General Dempsey states that the “pace of change and speed of operations will continue to accelerate,” and that the environment will continue to change more rapidly than what the Joint Force has experienced in the past.⁹ With volatility comes an increasingly difficult challenge for strategic leaders to keep up with the rapidly changing environment, and the associated risk of having to predict, rather than assess through facts and analysis, what will happen in the future.¹⁰

Volatility in the environment contributes to uncertainty, which can be described as the lack of ability to know all of the facts about an issue in enough detail to adequately predict the outcome.¹¹ During military planning, a shortage of accurate facts creates a reliance on assumptions in order to continue the planning process, leading to risks a strategic leader must wrestle with. First, if the assumptions are invalid, then the leader has potentially committed valuable resources towards the wrong objective, delivering an advantage to the enemy. Second, due to uncertainty, the leader may try to cover too many possibilities, reducing his flexibility to reposition assets to the right place when planning assumptions become facts. Whether the strategic leader’s predictions of the future are close to correct or wildly wrong, the great uncertainty in the current environment will likely prevent the leader from being absolutely right.¹²

The complexity of the strategic environment refers to the “difficulty of understanding the interactions of multiple parts or factors...in a highly interdependent system or even a system of systems.”¹³ In today’s complex environment, it is impossible for any single leader to understand all facets of a problem, or the second and third order effects of an input into the environment. As highlighted in Joint Publication 3-0, strategic

leaders must account for multiple dimensions of a problem, to include cultural aspects, military and civilian considerations, and the impacts of other instruments of power.¹⁴ With the rise of near-peer and regional competitors such as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, along with their alliances and use of proxy forces--combined with the global and/or regional impact of violent extremist organizations (VEO) and fragile states--the future security environment will continue to grow more complex. According to the *Joint Operating Environment 2035*, the U.S. should expect major competitors to challenge the current global order, and VEOs and weak states to create “persistent disorder,” further challenging the strategic leader’s ability to understand the environment in which he must operate.¹⁵

The final component of the VUCA environment is its ambiguity, defined as a type of uncertainty caused by multiple possible interpretations when the context of the problem is unclear.¹⁶ When volatility, uncertainty, and complexity are injected into a national security issue or event, a leader’s ability to fully understand the context of that problem is a true challenge. United States competitors are intentionally utilizing ambiguous means to gain strategic advantages to further their interests, often at the expense of the United States. In testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that U.S. competitors are “advancing their interests through competition with a military dimension that falls short of traditional armed conflict.”¹⁷ Russian deployment of “little green men” in the Ukraine, Chinese land reclamation in the South China Sea, and the increased use of offensive cyber operations by multiple competitors all create ambiguity in the strategic environment, as it is difficult for strategic leaders to fully understand each actor’s

intentions or, in the case of cyber-attacks, who to attribute the action to. As described in the *2017 National Security Strategy*, U.S. adversaries in “closed and repressive states” are not held to the same standard of transparency and truth as are leaders within a democracy, further making the strategic leader’s job more difficult.¹⁸

There are other challenges not directly attributed to the VUCA environment that contribute to the stressors placed on senior leaders. Technology has created a culture in which a leader is always connected through the smart phone, and is expected to be available day and night, seven days a week. This culture can cause the leader to overwork and spend too much time in the performance zone, without having the adequate time in the recovery zone to recuperate mentally and physically.¹⁹ The demands required of senior leaders result in long hours and can lead to a lack of restorative sleep, in which the mind, as well as the body, adequately recovers to their optimum state.²⁰

In summary, the VUCA environment has the potential to negatively impact leaders from a human performance perspective. The volatility of the environment requires leaders to adapt to the changes in the environment that are different from the one in which senior leaders gained their developmental experiences, a situation that is uncomfortable for most people. Uncertainty and ambiguity require leaders to make assumptions and take risks, with the knowledge that they might, and most likely will be, wrong at least some of the time. No professional likes to be wrong and potentially disappoint their subordinates, peers, or superiors, which adds intrinsic pressure. Complexity in the environment dictates that strategic leaders will not have all the answers and will have to rely on others with specific expertise in order to gain thorough

understanding of the environment. Leaders must ensure that expertise is shared among all relevant organizations in order to weave together the different interactions, which means that strategic leaders have to accept a lack of control and instead rely on building consensus among parties with varying interests and priorities. Given these challenges, success potentially hinges on a leader's resilience to sustain himself in this environment without derailing from his original goals, values, and morals.

Desired Leader Attributes

As examined above, the VUCA environment is different and more challenging than what most leaders have experienced earlier in their military careers. For this reason, it is essential that strategic leaders possess the physical, mental, and emotional qualities to not only bounce back after difficult experiences, but to have the stamina to keep going without losing energy and drive. One of the most respected strategic leaders in U.S. history, General George Marshall, made this point clearly when he said,

You have to lead men in war by bringing them along to endure and display qualities of fortitude that are beyond the average man's thought of what he should be expected to do. You have to inspire them when they are hungry and exhausted and desperately uncomfortable and in great danger; and only a man of positive characteristics of leadership, with the physical stamina that goes with it, can function under those conditions. Remember this: the truly great leader overcomes all difficulties, and campaigns and battles are nothing but a long series of difficulties to be overcome. The lack of equipment, the lack of food, the lack of this or that are only excuses; the real leader displays his qualities in his triumph over adversity, however great it may be.²¹

The leader competencies that General Marshall describes above represent the intersection of leadership with physical fitness, health, and emotional strength. In U.S. Army leadership doctrine, each of those elements falls under the umbrella of resilience, but doctrine is limited in explaining the non-cognitive aspects that contribute to a person's resilient nature. The next portion of this paper will examine the concept of

resilience. Research has indicated that two personality factors, in particular, facilitate a person's resilience. These two traits, grit and hardiness, are indicative of a leader's likelihood of enduring stress and performing at a high level over a long period of time in tough conditions, as described in General Marshall's quote above.

Conceptual Resilience

When assessing young leaders, the Army places great emphasis on their physical abilities, objectively measured by discreet events such as the Army Physical Fitness Test and Combat Water Survival Test. Meeting a compulsory standard for each of the above physical assessments is required in order for an officer to earn their commission, and proficiency in one of the above or other demanding physical requirements is mandatory for entry into or graduation from a myriad of Army professional development schools.²² However, as a leader reaches the strategic level of the Army, performance of difficult physical tasks becomes less critical to success, while the cognitive stamina and endurance to consistently make sound decisions and exercise good judgment increases in importance. Although there is a physical component to stamina, this discussion will focus on the important cognitive and non-cognitive elements in the non-physical domains that are critical to the strategic leader.

Resilience is defined as "the capacity to respond adaptively to extreme stress," or can be further described as "the mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral ability to face and cope with adversity, adapt to change, recover, learn, and grow from setbacks."²³ In Army populations, resilience has acquired the connotation of a soldier's ability to bounce back from extreme difficulties such as those experienced during an operational deployment, but resilience is broader than that. A resilient person is not only

capable of recovering positively from a negative experience, but is also what might be described as unflappable and effective at handling stress and adversity.

Grit

Grit is a behavioral characteristic dealing with a person's ability to persist under adverse circumstances. A leading researcher on the concept of grit, Dr. Angela Duckworth, defines grit as the "sustained interest and persistent effort in the passionate pursuit of long-term goals."²⁴ Duckworth emphasizes that although natural talent is important, talent without grit is no predictor of success. In multiple large population studies across diverse populations including college students, business executives, and military members, grit proved to be an accurate indicator for the likelihood that a person would achieve success of long term goals.²⁵

A person with grit possesses two important characteristics: a long term passion towards accomplishing a goal, and the perseverance to continue moving towards that goal, despite setbacks and failures along the way. Duckworth's analysis indicates that intrinsic motivation and drive, rather than raw talent, are the most important traits to determine success. She illustrates her point utilizing the following formulas: "talent plus effort equals skill;" and "skill plus effort equals achievement."²⁶ When studying people's level of achievement, a person's talent alone was not indicative of their ability to succeed; rather, it was the effort they put towards developing their skills, and the effort they expended utilizing those skills that creates great success. Following Duckworth's logic, the most successful person would be one who possessed a high level of natural talent and then put forth a great amount of effort in the pursuit of achievement.

In another study of grit, Maddi et al. examined the importance of grit by studying the dropout rates of new cadets during Cadet Basic Training at the United States

Military Academy. Although West Point's application process is challenging and highly selective, on average, twenty percent of the new cadets will fail to complete Cadet Basic Training. The results showed that those who completed Cadet Basic Training scored two times as high on the grit assessment than those who dropped out, demonstrating a strong relationship between grit and the achievement of a difficult, high stress training program.²⁷

Supporting Duckworth's conclusions, Maddi determined that a person's approach and attitude were critical to successful completion of Cadet Basic Training. Maddi defines grit as a form of courageous perseverance in that a gritty person remains focused on their objective despite setbacks and adversity. Similar to a long distance runner, a person with a high level of grit approaches challenges with psychological stamina and is not easily deterred.²⁸ Although this study focused on a population much younger and at a different place in their military careers than strategic leaders, the endurance aspect of grit is even more critical to senior leaders. Long hours, frequent travel, and constant connectedness compete with available time for family, rest, and physical fitness, creating a dilemma less prevalent for junior leaders.

Hardiness

While grit describes an individual's ability to persist in the face of adversity, hardiness demonstrates how a person can grow from adverse circumstances rather than be debilitated by stress. Hardiness is comprised of three components, or stress buffers, which explain how hardy people respond positively to stressful events in their lives. The three stress buffers--commitment, control, and challenge, or 3Cs--describe attitudes that when possessed by an individual, result in better physical and mental health, overall personal fulfillment, and performance.²⁹

Each of the 3Cs of hardiness, although different, should be present in a person's attitude and well-balanced to result in optimum resilience. First, a hardy individual will possess a high level of commitment, remaining vigorously engaged with their work, other people, and life in general, as opposed to alienating themselves when life presents challenges. Second, they will possess a feeling of control over their circumstances that keeps them engaged in actively influencing the outcomes, rather than passively accepting their fate. Third, a hardy person views challenges as an opportunity to grow from difficult circumstances and embraces friction, rather than retreating from adversity or viewing challenges as a threat to their goals.³⁰

Three key themes particularly applicable to senior leader resilience have been proven through studies on hardiness. First, an individual's level of hardiness is an accurate predictor of their ability to effectively adapt to changing conditions in their environment. In a seven year study of 145 West Point cadets, measured from their entrance into West Point to three years after commissioning and graduation, hardiness was the most accurate predictor of identifying which officers proved the most adaptable. In particular, their levels of commitment and control determined which of the subjects were best able to build on their prior experiences and solve challenging new problems. Interestingly, hardiness was a more accurate predictor of performance in their first three years as a commissioned officer than were the traditional West Point selection criteria such as the Whole Candidate Score and Standardized Aptitude Test scores.³¹

Second, hardiness can increase through training and practice. Leaders who encourage their subordinates to grow can build hardiness by convincing them that they have the power to turn adversity into an opportunity. With repetition, this positive

attitude-shaping will build hardiness and improve skills to cope with stress in a healthy manner. The greater a person's natural level of hardiness, the greater the training effect will be. Conversely, an individual with low initial levels of commitment, control, and challenge are less likely to respond to hardiness coaching, especially in the face of stressors that overcome their ability to cope.³²

The third relevant finding involving hardiness gets its roots from the initial studies on hardiness dating back to the 1970s and demonstrates a link between hardiness and spirituality. Early research by Maddi used the 3Cs of hardiness to describe people's behaviors, but the 3Cs did not fully explain how these behaviors substantially changed their attitudes and positively affected their psychological state. Maddi hypothesized that positive change is accomplished through existential courage, through which an individual grows by positively dealing with stress. By repetitively making hard decisions that end with a positive result, people achieve personal development and fulfillment. Commitment, control, and challenge, when combined, operationalize the attribute of existential courage. Theologian Soren Kierkegaard explained faith in God as the utmost form of existential courage, since God is all powerful and controls the future.³³ Philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich describes courage as the "affirmation of one's essential nature, and its analysis must precede an understanding of such attributes as faith, wisdom, and joy."³⁴ Self-confidence and acceptance of life result in intrinsic contentment, not dependent on the approval of other people. The spiritual aspect of hardiness is a set of beliefs that provides confidence that a person's decisions are the correct ones and that their self-worth is based on intrinsic value, not on the opinions of others.³⁵ In MG (P) Rossi's case, much of his stress and anxiety were caused by his

lack of confidence that he could meet the expectations of others, demonstrating a void of existential courage and spiritual health.

When Leaders Derail

Grit, hardiness, and spirituality are all desirable attributes that result in passion, perseverance, commitment, control and positive acceptance of challenges. In the stressful VUCA environment in which senior leaders operate, the possession of the above attitudes increases leader resilience and stamina. However, when these attributes are lacking, the potential increases for leaders to derail from prudent decision-making and can lead to ethical and work-related failures.

The examples provided at the beginning of this paper demonstrated the tragic impact of derailment in the cases of MG (P) Rossi and MG Grigsby. Unfortunately, they are not isolated. According to a recent report by the Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General, ethical allegations against senior DOD officials increased by thirteen percent between 2013 and 2015, from 710 to 803. Thirty seven percent of those allegations were substantiated, demonstrating that there is a real problem with senior leader decision-making in the armed services.³⁶ It is puzzling that leaders who have excelled for their entire careers, enabling them to reach the senior levels of military leadership, should succumb to the stressors and pressure that they have effectively managed for twenty or more years of honorable service.

According to research in the area of leader derailment, many of the characteristics that cause executive-level leaders to succeed can also contribute to their failure. Researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership examined the traits and behaviors of over forty corporate Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), half of whom were highly successful and half of whom derailed from their previously successful careers.

They discovered several traits that proved critical to either failure or success. First was how leaders reacted to their own personal mistakes. Successful executives humbly admitted fault, whereas those who derailed were prideful and defensive, blaming external influences or other people for their errors. Second, failed leaders displayed a lack of integrity by pursuing their personal ambitions to an extent that it caused harm to others around them. The third trait involved a lack of interpersonal skills, which destroyed the trust between them and those they led due to their abrasive and intimidating behavior. The fourth trait was their high levels of technical expertise which had contributed to their rise to leadership. Expertise is obviously a positive attribute, especially at lower management levels, but can be detrimental to a senior leader if it causes them to become overconfident and arrogant to the point where they reject sound advice and ignore feedback from others. Finally, emotional stability, or the CEO's ability to handle pressure, was a trait that contributed directly to their continued rise or downfall.³⁷

The detrimental effects of stress can manifest in multiple ways, but with equally negative impacts. From a physiological perspective, chronic stress can become so intense that it weakens the body's systems, resulting in physical illness. Furthermore, unbuffered stress can increase "the risk of breakdowns in the form of...mental disorders or behavioral failures."³⁸ Although there are multiple physiological factors such as diet, exercise, sleep, and overall health that affect a leader's resiliency, the non-cognitive effects produced by the stressful VUCA environment must also be accounted for.

Bad decisions by senior leaders have potentially far-reaching effects, and the more senior the leader, the greater the impact. Soldiers and families will be impacted by

policies and budgetary decisions made at levels from the DOD down to individual installations. In combat, senior leader decisions will directly affect the safety and survivability of the soldiers under their influence. A poor ethical decision by a strategic leader erodes the trust and confidence of the American people in the integrity of the military institution. Therefore, leader resilience resulting in clear-headed decision-making is imperative for the welfare of soldiers, civilians, and families. The following section of this paper will discuss three Army resilience programs, the Army Physical Fitness Research Institute (APFRI), the Army Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Program (CSF2) and the Senior Leadership Sustainment Program (SLS), and examine the strengths and limitations of their effects on strategic leaders.

Army's Resilience Framework

Army Physical Fitness Research Institute was the first modern program dedicated to creating a culture of health and fitness within the Army's officer corps. Created in 1982, APFRI was intended to promote a "...philosophy that...soldiers and...leaders must be committed to an improved lifestyle through physical fitness."³⁹ Based out of the Army War College, with satellites at the Sergeants' Major Academy and the Command and General Staff College, APFRI was comprised of executive level programs focused on leader health, nutrition, fitness, and cognitive enhancement. Although highly regarded for its contributions to senior leader wellness, APFRI was closed in 2011 due to funding constraints.⁴⁰

In 2009, after several years of sustained combat operations, the Army recognized the need to shift from intervention to prevention of stress-related wellness problems that were exacerbated by high operational tempo and war. As a result, CSF2 became a program of record with the goal of enhancing the "resilience, readiness, and

potential of Soldiers, Army Civilians, and Family Members” through science-based education and behavior modification.⁴¹ The CSF2 is structured around the Five Dimensions of Strength: physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and family; and operationalized through Master Resilience Trainers (MRTs), primarily non-commissioned officers who attend 10 days of intensive resilience training at the University of Pennsylvania. Upon completion of training, these non-commissioned officers serve as company level MRTs and are responsible for leading resilience training within their companies. Well-resourced and implemented, a 2011 evaluation of the program studying eight Brigade Combat Teams showed that MRT training effectively improved soldiers’ psychological health and resiliency.⁴²

Face-to-face MRT training is augmented by online assessment and self-development training, called the Global Assessment Tool; institutional training at Initial Entry Training and Professional Military Education schools; and at CSF2 Training Centers located on most installations which serve soldiers, family members, and Department of the Army Civilians. Although the last three training methods are important components of the overall CSF2 program, MRT training is where soldiers receive the greatest exposure to resilience training over time, and is the backbone of the Army’s resilience framework. As demonstrated by the 2011 study, MRT has proven effective; however, it does have limitations in its impact on senior leaders.

First, MRT is by design focused at the company level. Led by trained non-commissioned officers, MRT is intended to influence the Army’s most at-risk population, and it successfully accomplished that goal. The study found that MRT was most effective on the eighteen to twenty four year-old population by a factor of two to three in

most categories, with significantly less positive effect on soldiers age twenty five or older.⁴³ Second, enlisted MRTs are by regulation restricted to the ranks of Staff Sergeant through Master Sergeant, and officer MRTs in the rank of Second Lieutenant through Major. The MRTs are intended to serve as the principle subject matter expert on resilience within a company or battalion to enable the CSF2 program at battalion or below levels, as opposed to being a favorable resource to counsel senior leaders on personal resilience challenges.⁴⁴ Given these limitations on the CSF2 program, and recognizing the resilience needs of strategic level leaders, the Army developed SLS.

Based at the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, the SLS pilot course began in 2017, focused on the lieutenant colonel and colonel population enrolled in the Army War College, as well as general officers who rotate through Carlisle Barracks for general officer development courses. The SLS “integrates medical readiness, personal fitness, and several human dimension insights to optimize senior leaders’ health, readiness, and peak fitness performance” through individualized assessment, intervention, and education.⁴⁵ Senior Leadership Sustainment Program assesses each leader’s blood work, aerobic fitness, physical strength, flexibility, eating habits, body composition, sleep health, behavioral resilience, and spiritual well-being utilizing a highly educated and professional team of medical providers, fitness experts, health educators, and chaplains. Upon completion of the assessment phase, each leader is briefed on their results and provided with behavior modification recommendations to enhance overall readiness, reduce risk, or increase performance. Additional optional education or intervention is offered to the leader based on high risk

areas discovered in the assessment phase. The leader is then encouraged to repeat portions of or all of the assessment to track progress.⁴⁶

Due to the relative infancy of the program, there is a lack of hard data to validate its effectiveness. However, anecdotal evidence shows that multiple leaders have discovered previously unknown medical conditions, some potentially fatal, as a result of the medical screenings embedded in SLS. Additionally, the expertise within the SLS staff consistently yields practical and relevant recommendations on methods to improve health and fitness. Given the increasing age of the senior leader population, and the more sedentary lifestyle caused by the desk jobs inherent to assignments at this phase in their careers, the health, fitness, and dietary advice provided by SLS contributes to better health and increased medical readiness for participants. The heavy focus on health and fitness is the greatest benefit of Senior Leader Sustainment, but limitations exist in the program's effectiveness in sustaining leaders' resilience in the emotional, social, spiritual, and family Dimensions of Strength.

Senior Leadership Sustainment Program provides twenty two areas of analysis to participants based off of the assessment phase of the program. Twenty one out of twenty two of those metrics are focused on the physical dimension of resilience, while only one section of feedback is non-physiologically oriented.⁴⁷ The physical dimension is much easier to evaluate than the emotional, social, spiritual, and family dimensions, but the latter are more directly related to senior leaders' ability to endure in the VUCA environment. The SLS addresses stress management as the one non-physical area of assessment, providing education on mindfulness and demonstrating how deep breathing can lower the participant's heart rate. Senior Leader Sustainment is a

valuable tool, but a gap exists in the Army's capability to help senior leaders navigate the social and non-cognitive challenges that they face. The next section will examine the emotional, social, spiritual, and family dimensions of resilience in relation to the senior leader, and how neglecting them is detrimental.

The emotional dimension of resiliency governs our psychological health, and is influenced by the attitude with which leaders approach life's challenges.⁴⁸ The previous discussion on hardiness demonstrated how a person's levels of commitment, control, and challenge impact whether they thrive or succumb to stress. Stress management is critical to maintaining emotional health due to the adverse psychological and physical effects that unbuffered stress can create on the human mind and body. However, as seen in MG (P) Rossi's case, sometimes leaders effectively conceal the true extent of their emotions, while failing to deal with their challenges in a healthy way. In his situation, a confluence of extensive resilience issues, both medical and emotional, overwhelmed his ability to deal with them. The volatility and complexity of his environment, specifically the rapidly changing technology and unfamiliar complexities of SMDC, combined with self-doubt and a fear of failure indicative of reduced hardiness, contributed to his suicide. Unfortunately, the above symptoms were not recognized until they were revealed through the investigation into his death.

A major challenge of accurately assessing someone's emotional strength is that unlike blood pressure or body composition, emotional health is self-reported and intervention is voluntary. If a person chooses not to seek help, their only recourse is the intervention of a close friend or family member. Feelings of isolation are a reality for a leader, especially if they are the one of the few senior leaders on an installation, which

limits the pool of associates they can confide in. The challenge of isolation leads to another important dimension of resilience, the social dimension.

Establishing a social network of trusted and valued friendships is critical to avoiding feelings of isolation. Social support is important to overall well-being for four primary reasons. First, social relationships are a basic human need, resulting in emotional support and better health. Second, having positive relationships increases a person's ability to solve problems, which increases their hardiness through greater perceptions of control. Third, social relationships can reduce the amount of time a person is exposed to stressors and improve intervention, thus leading to better health and wellness. Finally, social support itself serves as a buffer to stress.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, successful senior leaders find social networking challenges exacerbated by frequent moves, deployments, and busy schedules. Maintaining contact with close friends from the past can mitigate these challenges, but forming new social ties becomes increasingly difficult, potentially leading to unhealthy isolation and greater difficulty in maintaining a healthy perspective on life's stressors. When social support and emotional strength decrease, the spiritual dimension, while important in normal circumstances, becomes essential for maintaining self-confidence and a strong sense of personal identity.

The CSF2 program defines the spiritual dimension of resilience as "identifying one's purpose, core values, beliefs, identity, and life vision."⁵⁰ A person's spiritual health is a function of their hardiness and existential courage that determines their confidence in themselves when all outside support structures are stripped away. Spiritual strength is deeply personal, often derived from the culture in which they were raised, their

experiences, and religious beliefs. Although difficult to describe or assess, spirituality is interwoven within a person's character and is a critical influence on their morals, values, ethics, and how they frame decisions. Based on the criticality of spiritual wellness to a leader's well-being, it is detrimental to the Army that spirituality is rarely discussed in leader counseling. A common misperception is that the spiritual dimension is strictly about religion. Although many people's spiritual beliefs are based on religion, this should not prevent leaders from being concerned about their subordinates' spiritual health and discussing spirituality during counseling. Both MG (P) Rossi and MG Grigsby reached what Maddi describes as "spiritual bankruptcy" when they made bad decisions outside of their normal character, but unfortunately no one was able to intervene before each of those leaders took actions with irreversible consequences.⁵¹

The stressors of military service apply not only to senior leaders, but also to their spouses and families. Recognizing this, the Army has taken steps to assist families through programs such as Army Community Service, the Army Family Action Plan, Army Family Team Building, and others. However, as with MRT, these programs are oriented towards the families of younger soldiers and leaders, and do not necessarily meet the needs of the families of senior leaders. Senior leaders, especially the most successful ones, move more often, with less predictability, and on shorter notice than the rest of the force, but the impacts on the family of instability, disrupted social networks, and anxiety due to the unknown are the same. Despite the Army's efforts to improve quality of life for military families, the nature of the profession, personnel management practices, and culture of "mission first" create tensions between a senior leader's commitment to their duty and the contentment of families.

When family issues reach a point where the tension becomes too great, and intervention is necessary to save a struggling marriage, where does a senior leaders go for help? The Army has support structures in place through chaplains and Military Family Life Consultants, but these resources are often in positions subordinate to senior leaders which make them a less attractive alternative. As seen in MG Grigsby's case, he blamed frequent deployments and a "frenetic schedule" for a family situation he had struggled with over a period of time, which led to his inappropriate relationship with a female subordinate. What, if any, outside intervention efforts MG Grigsby attempted are unknown, but his example clearly demonstrates that the strategic leader environment impacts families, and strong family resilience is critical to leader success.

Recommendations

Change the Strategic Leader Resilience Culture. The culture of the senior leader environment is part of the challenge. First, leaders are successful because they are self-reliant and confident, which got them to their current positions of authority. The negative side of these traits is an unwillingness to reach out for help, as leaders are assured that they can control their destiny. The grit that gave them the passion and perseverance to accomplish their goals, and the hardiness that built their self-confidence, can be detrimental if it results in pride that leads them to believe they can control everything without helpful intervention.

Senior Leader Modeling. Second, leaders must set a positive example in all of the dimensions of resilience for future generations. Subordinate leaders will believe and model what their boss does, not what he says. Although the demands on a senior leader are great, the culture of the workaholic comes with risks to resilience.

Include Resilience in Counseling. Senior leaders typically counsel subordinate leaders with a focus on performance, with little discussion of the subordinate's physical, emotional, social, spiritual, or family health. These are missed opportunities to mentor subordinates on ways to sustain themselves in the VUCA environment. Opening the door in counseling to discussions about resilience and personal matters builds trust and loyalty between the leader and led, and can potentially help the subordinate avoid pitfalls in the future.

Assessment and Intervention of Non-Physical Dimensions in Senior Leader Sustainment. The thorough physical assessment included in SLS appears to be effective and should be continued. However, with the exception of a brief Diaphragmatic Breathing test and a short discussion of stress reduction, assessment of emotional, social, spiritual, and family resilience was absent. Include testing and assessment of those resilience dimensions, utilizing validated assessment tools as found in research literature. Conduct follow-up intervention as required as a part of the SLS program.

Develop an Executive Coaching Program. As discussed above, senior leaders need an outlet to reach out to outside of their immediate environment. As a part of the follow-up intervention in SLS, Army War College students meet with an Executive Coach to address areas of risk identified in the SLS assessment. After developing a relationship with the Executive Coach at the Army War College, the Executive Coach will continue to provide periodic contact with the leader and be available for reach-back as a confidential intervention outlet for the senior leader. Leveraging the volunteer assistance of retired Flag Officers might provide the needed pool of officers who can help senior leaders manage the unique challenges they face.

Conclusion

Strategic level leaders constantly operate in a VUCA environment that is challenging mentally, physically, and emotionally, requiring them to perform at high levels day after day. Maintaining the stamina and endurance to make sound decisions under these conditions necessitates great resilience to buffer the stressors that inevitably result from the pressures faced by senior leaders. The current Army resilience framework does not comprehensively address the unique resilience challenges faced by those at the upper levels of leadership, requiring further development of programs to address the emotional, social, spiritual, and family health of Army senior leaders. When leaders derail and no longer make rational decisions, soldier and families are adversely affected, and the trust of the American people erodes. The Army cannot allow this to happen. Consequently, the Army needs to continue to invest in its executive leaders by expanding SLS beyond the physical domain and address the cognitive and non-cognitive areas of the human dimension that are presently under-represented.

Endnotes

¹ Lolita C. Baldor, "Army Looks for New Ways to Address Misbehaving Generals," *Army Times Online*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/09/24/army-looks-for-new-ways-to-address-misbehaving-generals> (accessed December 20, 2017).

² Gary H. Cheek, *Army Regulation 15-6 Investigation and Line of Duty Investigation Involving the Death of Major General (MG) John Rossi* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, October 20, 2016), <https://localtvwhnt.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/15-6-investigation-redactions-applied.pdf> (accessed December 5, 2017).

³ Craig Whitlock, "Army Busts Another General for Improper Relationship with Woman," *The Washington Post Online*, June 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/army-busts-another-general-for-improper-relationship-with-woman/2017/06/22/3cbccf42-5755-11e7-ba90-f5875b7d1876_story.html?utm_term=.370dc34f1a7e (accessed January 12, 2018).

⁴ 1st Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, "Maj. Gen. Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr. Receives Command of 'Big Red One,'" August 6, 2015, linked from the *Fort Riley, Kansas Home Page* at "News," <http://www.riley.army.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/612476/maj-gen-wayne-w-grigsby-jr-receives-command-of-big-red-one/> (accessed January 12, 2018).

⁵ Meghann Myers, "Disgraced 2-star Blames Op Tempo for Inappropriate Relationship with Junior Officer," *Army Times Online*, June 23, 2017, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/06/23/disgraced-2-star-blames-op-tempo-for-inappropriate-relationship-with-junior-officer> (accessed December 5, 2017).

⁶ T. O. Jacobs, *Strategic Leadership: The Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, July 2009), 13.

⁷ Charles Allen, "Strategic Decision Making Paradigms: A Primer for Senior Leaders," in *The Strategic Leadership Primer*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen J. Gerras (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2010), 10-11.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Martin E. Dempsey, *Mission Command White Paper* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 3, 2012), 3.

¹⁰ Allen, "Strategic Decision Making," 11.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Colin S. Gray, "The 21st Century Security Environment and the Future of War," *Parameters Online* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2008-2009): 16, in [ProQuest](#) (accessed January 3, 2017).

¹³ Allen, "Strategic Decision Making," 11.

¹⁴ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 17, 2017), II-3, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0_20170117.pdf (accessed January 13, 2018).

¹⁵ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operating Environment 2035: The Joint Force in a Contested and Disordered World* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, July 14, 2016), 52, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joe_2035_july16.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162059-917 (accessed January 13, 2018).

¹⁶ Jacobs, *Strategic Leadership*, 21.

¹⁷ Joseph Dunford Jr., *Posture Statement of General Joseph Dunford Jr., USMC 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff before the Senate Armed Services Committee Budget Hearing*, Posture Statement presented to the 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 17, 2016), https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Dunford_03-17-16%20.pdf (accessed January 13, 2018).

¹⁸ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 18, 2018), 27-28, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf> (accessed January 2, 2018).

¹⁹ Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan, "Resilience is about How You Recharge, Not How You Endure," *Harvard Business Review Online*, June 24, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/06/resilience-is-about-how-you-recharge-not-how-you-endure> (accessed January 11, 2018).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Department of the Army, *Leadership Statements and Quotes*, DA Pamphlet 600-65 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, November 1, 1985), 11.

²² United States Army Cadet Command, *Army Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps Basic Officer Leader Course-A: On-Campus Training and Leader Development*, Cadet Command Regulation 145-3 (Fort Knox: U.S. Army Cadet Command, September 20, 2011), 10-12, http://www.cadetcommand.army.mil/res/files/forms_policies/regulations/CCR%20145-03%20Reserve%20Officers%20Training%20Corps%20Precommisioning%20Training%20and%20Leadership%20Development%2009-20-11.pdf (accessed January 24, 2018).

²³ Salvatore R. Maddi et al., "The Role of Hardiness and Grit in Predicting Performance and Retention of USMA Cadets," *Military Psychology* 24 (2012): 20; U.S. Department of the Army, *Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness*, Army Regulation 350-53 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, June 19, 2014), 6, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/r2/policydocs/r350_53.pdf (accessed January 24, 2018).

²⁴ Angela L. Duckworth et al., "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology Online* 92, no. 6 (2007): 1087, <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-07951-009> (accessed January 24, 2018).

²⁵ Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 8.

²⁶ Ibid., 44.

²⁷ Maddi et al., "The Role of Hardiness and Grit," 19-24.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁹ Salvatore R. Maddi, "The Story of Hardiness: Twenty Years of Theorizing, Research, and Practice," *Consulting Psychology Journal* 54, no. 3 (2002): 173-174.

³⁰ Maddi et al, "The Role of Hardiness and Grit," 20-21.

³¹ Paul T. Bartone, Dennis R. Kelly, and Michael D. Matthews, "Psychological Hardiness Predicts Adaptability in Military Leaders: A Prospective Study," *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* 21, no. 2 (June 2013): 205-207.

³² Maddi, "The Story of Hardiness," 177-178.

³³ Ibid., 175.

³⁴ Wesley Wildman, "Book Review: The Courage to Be," 1994, linked from the *Paul Tillich Resources Home Page*, http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/tillich/resources/review_tillich-paul_couragetobe.htm#Review_by_JL (accessed February 20, 2018).

³⁵ Maddi, "The Story of Hardiness," 175.

³⁶ U.S. Department of Defense Inspector *General, 2018 Summary of Management and Performance Challenges Facing the DOD* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Defense, FY18), 66, https://media.defense.gov/2017/Nov/20/2001846364/-1/-1/1/FY%202018%20MANAGEMENT%20CHALLENGES_11172017.PDF (accessed February 20, 2018).

³⁷ Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 6th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2006), 187-188.

³⁸ Maddi, "The Story of Hardiness," 177.

³⁹ U.S. Army War College, *APFRI Leadership, Health and Fitness Guide* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, June 2011), 3-7.

⁴⁰ Melissa Bower, "APFRI Shutting Down, Services Covered by Others," October 27, 2011, linked from the *U.S. Army Home Page* at "Article," https://www.army.mil/article/68153/apfri_shutting_down_services_covered_by_others (accessed March 11, 2018).

⁴¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness*, Army Regulation 350-53 (Washington, DC, June 19, 2014), 6, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/r2/policydocs/r350_53.pdf (accessed February 23, 2018).

⁴² Paul Lester et al., *The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program Evaluation: Report #3: Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of Master Resilience Training on Self-Reported Resilience and Psychological Health Data* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, December, 2011), 1, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1032&context=publicpolicyfacpub> (accessed February 23, 2018).

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, *Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness*, 10-11.

⁴⁵ U.S. Army War College, "Senior Leadership Sustainment," linked from the *U.S. Army War College Home Page* at "The Student Experience," <https://www.armywarcollege.edu/experience/seminarExperience.htm#six> (accessed February 24, 2018).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ U.S. Army War College, *SLS Results and Interpretation Guide* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2018).

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness*, 8.

⁴⁹ Juliana McGene, *Social Fitness and Resilience: A Review of Relevant Constructs, Measures, and Links to Well-Being* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force Series on Resiliency, 2013), 12.

⁵⁰U.S. Department of the Army, *Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness*, 8.

⁵¹ Maddi, "The Story of Hardiness," 181.