

MAKING RIGHT MATTER

ESTABLISHING THE UNITED STATES MILITARY AS AN ETHICAL EXEMPLAR FOR OUR TIMES

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If we are to ensure that right matters here, then we must figure out how to reinstitute ethical conduct and reinforce the importance of morality in our politics and our society at large. In this paper, I argue that the solution can be found by first concentrating on making right matter within the U.S. military. Through implementing different strategy techniques, utilizing military professionals in different ways, and teaching ethics through new instructional methods, we can successfully re-establish our military institution as the national gold standard for ethical and honorable conduct.

1) Introduction

As LTC (U.S. Army Ret.) Alexander Vindman stresses, “here, right matters” (Maddow). As the United States grapples with widespread ethical issues, our military faces similar problems that demand immediate attention. If we hope to ever address the concerns in our civilian world, we must first start with correcting the issues that afflict our military members, of whom at one time represented the best and brightest among us. This paper argues that we can make *right* matter in the United States if we

first instill that mindset in our military. In section 2, I discuss the disgraceful events surrounding the treatment of LTC Vindman and how his experiences and subsequent suggestions for action can guide our promotion of ethical and honorable conduct within the military. In section 3, I explain why we need to focus on the military first in order to eventually implement similar changes in the ethical status of the civilian world. After establishing why the military should serve as an ethical exemplar for our country (section 4), I then explore three different themes that exist within the literature on suggestions for supporting ethical conduct in the military. These three themes include looking at imposing a change in our wartime strategy (section 4.1), instituting a shift in our instructional method (section 4.2), and reconsidering the professional duties of members of the JAG Corps (section 4.3). Lastly, I address various criticisms and issues that exist within the suggestions that I propose throughout the paper (section 5). In the words of the Roman Stoics, *'Vivere militare!'* – 'Life is being a soldier!' (Stockdale). We ought to aspire to pursue the most ethical life possible. For the virtuous good of our nation, we should begin our endeavor by focusing on the ethical lives of our soldiers.

2) The Vindman Lesson

In a recent television interview, LTC (U.S.

Army Ret.) Alexander Vindman discussed his newly released book that is adequately titled *Here, Right Matters* (Maddow). Vindman received national press coverage in the fall of 2019 after he testified under subpoena about his concerns relating to the now infamous phone call between former U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (Ryan and Harris). "I would have had a much easier go of it," admitted Vindman in his interview, "if I'd just stayed in, kept quiet, like so many other people" (Maddow). Instead, he chose to adhere to the law and appear before the House Intelligence Committee for the impeachment proceedings of Trump, which resulted in media scrutiny and a "campaign of bullying, intimidation, and retaliation" from the former president (Ryan and Harris). Vindman was up for a promotion to full colonel, but after his testimony and the political fallout that it resulted in, the promotion never became a reality. Shortly thereafter, Vindman announced his retirement from the Army. His lawyer summed up the events as this: "LTC Vindman's patriotism has cost him his career" (Ryan and Harris). More than a year later, Vindman is now making an effort to speak out about what occurred post-testimony and why he made the choices that he did. While discussing the title of his book which refers to a line from

his testimony that received an ovation from the audience when delivered (“Lt. Col. Vindman on America”), Vindman said the following during his interview:

Interviewer: Your title of the book is “Here, Right Matters,” – do you believe that still? Here, right matters?

Vindman: I do, but not in the very simplistic notion that everything works out exactly as one would hope. Here right matters—really, it matters only if we make it matter. If we are active in the process, if we are engaged, if we are trying to drive the things that are important to us (Maddow).

His statement that *right* matters here in the United States is important. As he discusses during the interview, if he had committed the same actions (testifying against the president, coming forward with corruption allegations, etc.) in his home nation (Soviet Union, now Ukraine), it most likely would have resulted in both he and his family getting killed (Maddow). The protection of whistleblowers, the claims we make to discourage political violence, the honor that we show military officers – especially one as high-ranking as Vindman – were all factors that were supposed to set America apart from other countries. However, military members and civilians alike have seen how quickly those factors can evaporate (post-First Impeachment through the end of the Trump administration, for example), depending on ever-changing circumstances such as the administration

in power or the makeup of the legislature. While there has always been a rebellious streak among Americans, and there will always be political or social dissenters among our population, why does it seem like we have hit an all-time low in our sense of honor, both for ourselves and others? How have our politics and our behaviors become so uncivilized?

It is easy to point fingers at various factions, organizations, and parties and assign them blame for the moral devolution occurring. Truth be told, it is the result of a culmination of multiple factors, all of which are hard to precisely enumerate or quantify. More importantly, what do we gain from identifying these factors if we don’t first have an adequate roadmap for change? We must focus on establishing how to make that change, through creating and implementing measures to prevent this moral slippage and general disregard for ethical behavior. Our challenge – for philosophers, academics, and citizens at large – is to establish a thoughtful and effective way to begin our task.

The military generally enjoys a certain veneration among the public, at least before certain members become politicized (as with LTC Vindman, or Gen. Mark Milley (U.S. Army), or Gen. John Kelly (USMC)...). The military should always collectively retain its apolitical status and should insist on trying to prevent

individual members from becoming targets of political attacks. While upholding our right to free speech and our ability to critique institutions, we should try to curb public attacks such as unhelpful remarks from political pundits (Dutton).

We can help restore the honor and dignity that we used to commonly associate with America through first resolving ethical difficulties within America's military. By making *right* matter within the institution of the U.S. military, we can re-establish it as our national gold standard in ethical and honorable conduct. If we used to be able to agree that members of the armed forces represented the best of us, the most disciplined and honorable individuals in our society – why can't we all agree on that claim now? To examine the larger ethical issues occurring within our country and attempt to find solutions to them, we should first begin with studying and correcting our practices within the massive military institution of the United States. Our efforts, if successful, can aid the military in restoring its prestige and ensure that it continues on as the pinnacle of honor, morality, and ethical behavior in our country.

3) Why Focus on the Military First?

After the horrific and deadly events that transpired at the U. S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021, a great amount of media attention and fanfare surrounded the various military

members and veterans who took part in the insurrection. United States Air Force (USAF) Maj. Asha Padmanabhan argues that those who are military-connected receive more attention when they participate in anti-government and white supremacist activities than people with other professions do because of one paramount reason: members of the military “are held to higher standards of behavior than society as a whole” (Padmanabhan). Padmanabhan advances the notion that the military is not, and cannot be, a microcosm of larger society because members of the armed services are supposed to be fundamentally more honorable, more ethical, and more *right* than the general populace is. Besides the physical training, professional preparation, and leadership development that they receive during their time in the service, military members face disciplinary measures and the possibility of being removed if they fail to meet expectations “in order to create the force needed to overcom[e] any threat to our nation's security” (Padmanabhan). However, Padmanabhan acknowledges that the military still suffers with various issues within the ranks, but affirms that all branches must “root out racist, hate-based, and discriminatory attitudes, processes, and people,” because “even if [these problems] exist in society as a whole, they cannot be tolerated within the military”

(Padmanabhan). Why is this? “The American people,” Padmanabhan asserts, “expect those who serve, who lead their sons and daughters, who are entrusted to protect and defend the United States, to be better, to be more capable, to be deserving of their trust” (Padmanabhan). Ultimately, “the military should be a reflection of the best in our society” (Padmanabhan).

While the military might not be a true-to-life microcosm for our civilian society, it can serve as the testing ground for how *good we can be*. By focusing in on those who are the best members of our society and identifying the moral gaps they face and ethical blunders they commit, we can try out various methods for correction and learn what works and what does not. The knowledge that we gain from these trial runs with service members could then potentially lead to those methods being adapted for civilians and implemented in our society at large. Furthermore, by correcting ethics issues within the military, we can reinforce that *here, right matters*. After all, for “the sake of all those who have chosen to serve, and for the institution to retain the public’s trust, we need the military to be the [best and brightest]” in their conduct and all that they do (Padmanabhan).

Focusing on the enhancing morality in the military first also allows us to create a top-down ecosystem for ethical development. What happens in the military serves not only as an example for the civilian world, but also helps to shape what we do and how we do it in society at large. For example, United States Military Academy instructor LTC Nathaniel B. Davis, Ph.D. (U.S. Army) makes this point clear in a piece written for *The New York Times* in which he applies military ethics to Wall Street. While the two may seem irrelevant at first, LTC Davis shows how Just War Theory and the corrupt dealings on Wall Street – and how the military and the civilian world – actually have far more in common than one might think.

Starting with a description of total war (per Carl von Clausewitz), LTC Davis explains that there must be some required limits in the practice of war, or it can devolve into its “own *raison d’être*, an irrational end in itself,” much like how the inner dealings of Wall Street have spun out of control and transformed into an “immoral space” (Davis). We put limits on our practices in war because “immoral action may provide the combatant with a comparative advantage, but it also stains society and humanity in ways that we have collectively deemed to be unacceptable,”

and just as “humanity has managed to place moral limits” on war, we can do the same to our free market economy (Davis). As Michael Walzer, one of the foremost thinkers on military ethics, describes, “War is the hardest place: if comprehensive and consistent moral judgments are possible there, they are possible everywhere” (Davis).

Indeed, it may seem as though in the “modern world, the Just War Ethic [seems] like a distant abstraction,” but in reality, “its effects influence the relationship between war and society in profound ways” (Davis). By applying military ethical thinking to a complicated and immoral institution such as Wall Street and our economy at large shows the top-down moral ecosystem at work. As this example shows, the military and their processes have the ability to influence the operations of civilian institutions and can impact how civilians employ ethical reasoning in their personal and professional lives. What began as just a theory created for thinking about military conduct has now created a new avenue for us to think about ethics and apply ethical frameworks to other various facets of our civilian society.

Focusing on making *right* matter in the military first is ultimately beneficial to the rest of society because of factors such as retaining the

public’s trust in the institution as well as the top-down ecosystem for ethical development. While any ethical system will always be “imperfect,” it is better to implement some system than to have “no ethics at all” (Davis). Fundamentally, the “question is not one of moral perfection, but of moral improvement. It is a step in the right direction” to making *right matter here* (Davis).

4) The Military as Ethical Exemplar - How Do We Get There?

The most profound point that LTC Vindman made during his interview is the following: “Here right matters – really, it matters only if we make it matter” (Maddow). This begs an overarching, complicated question: how do we make *right matter* to our military personnel – from enlisted 20-something-year-olds to distinguished commissioned and non-commissioned officers, special forces, DoD civilian employees, and everyone in between? There has been much scholarship from military-connected writers, strategists, and academics, and this paper cannot hope to touch on all of the suggestions and ideas that have been theorized about or put forward over the years. However, this paper will attempt to focus on three of the common themes that exist within the literature on suggestions regarding how to implement ethical instruction and awareness within the military.

4. 1) A Shift in Strategy

What if emphasizing *right* to our soldiers began with establishing *right* conduct in our wartime strategy? Instead of a philosophical conversation about *jus ad bellum* requirements, would implementing applied strategy practices during trainings help make our service members more aware of the reasoning behind who we shoot and motivate them to think about conflicts and combatants in a more ethical way?

LTC (U.S. Army Ret.) Ralph Peters believes that a fundamental shift in our wartime strategy may hold the key to promoting ethical behavior and inspiring ethical decisions on who to kill and when. He argues that we have “become not only losers, but random murderers,” because of our sloppy targeting and attacking of foreign masses (Peters). Instead of killing “several hundred Somalis in a single day,” why can we not go straight to the root of the evil and “kill the chief assassin?” (Peters). LTC Peters finds this troubling and argues for a “refocus [of] military operations on punishing the truly guilty,” because after all, in the “20th century, we would have liked to strike a Hitler directly, but had not the means. So we destroyed the cultural treasure-house that was Dresden out of spite” (Peters). If we have the intelligence and the technological means nowadays, why not use it for a direct strike?

Targeting the heart of the problem seems to be the most ethical choice to limit mass foreign combatant death, civilian involvement, and overall collateral damage. It’s time to “re-humanize warfare,” and we could achieve that through “attacking the sources of evil directly and minimizing, when possible, assaults against the faceless foe and his kin” (Peters). Besides the strategy of this decision and the ethical choices that it hopes to promote among both soldier and commander, LTC Peters also asks if we have an ethical duty to instill this type of thinking in military training – to always focus our attentions on the leaders of these conflicts, but not the enemy fighters themselves. We employed this logic in the past, such as when we mustered “the will to strike evil at its source” and “justified shooting the most vital man in Japan, Admiral Yamamoto, out of the sky” (Peters). Today, we should continue that type of strategy and not maintain our habit of “succumb[ing] to the allure of attacking faceless populations,” when we have the technological means available to us to “execute atrocious leaders and criminal mass-murderers without firebombing Tokyo or Hamburg” (Peters). Now, we “have the means to prevent wars and conflicts, or to stop them in their earliest stages, by aiming our military directly at the responsible parties” (Peters). Consequently,

we have an ethical duty to pursue this course of combat – and to teach it in our warfare training for service members. By changing who and what we instruct our soldiers to target, we can prevent needless death and reduce the overall amount of suffering (for us and the enemy combatants). This change to our strategy curriculum can help reaffirm why – and how – we make *right* matter to our troops.

4.2) A Shift in Instructional Method

Playing by the rules involves internalizing the warrior code of ethics. It is something you have to practice at 24 hours a day. Unethical actions not only can get you or your Soldiers killed, they can also hurt the Army. — General Mark A. Milley (Belscamper).

Whatever type of strategy policy we decide to teach our armed forces, it must be part of a larger, all-encompassing teaching curriculum. Military academics and professors have weighed in on how to best teach ethics to students of the military by identifying promising teaching methods, ranging from the application of ancient considerations to a reliance on real-life scenarios and case studies to encourage student engagement. There has also been recent discussion about who should receive these ethics trainings, and the answer may be surprising.

Any ailment left untreated can quickly

devolve into a larger problem, and ethics training in the military is no different. A lack of “attention to ethics and ethical development” can create a “climate in which ethical abuses easily take root and spread,” writes Dr. Lon Olson, who formerly served as a U.S. Naval officer and ethics instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis (Olson 178). Although some courses in ethical development are initially taught to new recruits in the service, it seems as though the instruction they receive during their early training is quick to evaporate once they begin at their first duty station. This might be remedied by implementing measures such as continued education courses or required annual trainings, yet this doesn’t actually occur in practice, as “meaningful ethics education ceases almost completely upon a soldier’s graduation from initial training” (Olson 172). To resolve the current void that exists in the ethical training that is required of soldiers, we must identify the importance of such courses as well as how they contribute to the development of honorable moral character.

Teaching ethics to military students coming from every walk of life is no simple feat. However, Dr. Olson maintains that approaching the curriculum with a focus on the contributions of Aristotle and his influential ideas on virtue theory present a compelling way for instructors

to develop virtuous moral character and, crucially, practical reason in students (Olson 197). The importance of practical reason is absolutely paramount in preparing our service members to be successful leaders in their military and one day, in their civilian lives too. We must insist on continuing ethics classes after graduation from initial training, because imparting practical reasoning skills on soldiers enables them to take control of their “knowledge of the virtues” (as taught to them in class) and apply it in a practical sense by “leading fulfilling lives that are conducive not only to [their] own well-being, but to the well-being of society” (Olson 88). Likewise, it’s important to recognize that “practical reason reveals where we are deficient in our exercise of the moral virtues,” and it can assist in determining how we can go about “correct[ing] our ethical deficiencies” as well (Olson 88). Implementing these skills into the repertoire of our soldiers is essential to moral conduct within the military and by extension, the civilian world. We can feasibly teach this curriculum in a traditional classroom setting, yet this method will not always cut it. A student’s “moral character is formed through a process of habituation,” which has to come from “acquiring experience in the practice of the virtues” (Olson 179). Because of this, “ethics education must expand beyond the static

classroom setting,” and find different avenues for instruction (Olson 179).

One instructional method that could serve to be beneficial but that is currently problematic is the concept of the moral exemplar. “Moral exemplars influence ethical behavior primarily through emulation,” and if students had a proper moral exemplar to look up to, it could help them emulate suitable ethical behaviors and gain experience in their practice of the virtues (Olson 85). Unfortunately, sometimes those who occupy roles that should be able to serve as moral exemplars – such as senior officers – are actually the ones engaging in the most egregious cases of ethical misconduct.

LTC Marc E. Belscamper (U.S. Army) has put forward an intriguing research paper surrounding the recent rise in ethical misconduct allegations made against senior leaders within the Army Total Forces (Belscamper). Upon investigation, it turns out that the ethical problems within the Army do not always stem from petty cases committed by junior enlisted soldiers as one might think. Instead, it appears as though the allegations usually consist of higher-level issues that are frequently the result of higher leaders “simply trying to protect their own reputations” to make themselves and their command or staff section appear ethically blemish-free all so that

they may compete for “coveted duty positions” or “the next promotion” (Belscamper 6-16). Clearly, this is wildly unacceptable and must be fixed, both for the Army’s sake and to preserve the notion that higher leaders are deserving of their status as an ethical example for their subordinates. Those who serve as “senior leaders within the Army Profession and Army Ethic are expected to be exemplars and role models” (Belscamper 14). In order for those in leadership positions to regain their reputation of being a worthy moral exemplar, we must institute ethics development in the training and continuing educational programs for service members of all ranks – and take care to not overlook the higher leaders as well. In fact, LTC Belscamper suggests that senior Army leadership (Colonel level and above) should “continue professional development and professional military education” with a focus on ethical conduct in order to “reinforce their knowledge of [ethical doctrine] and reiterate what is expected from them as senior leaders” (Belscamper 23).

Whether we teach ethics by emphasizing Aristotelian virtue theory in a classroom setting or focus instead on practical examples through moral exemplars, the truth remains the same: we must institute more effective ethical development and training programs in our military institutions that

are aimed at educating the whole force – enlisted soldier and high-ranking leader alike. By doing so, we can make sure that *right* matters to all service members, regardless of rank or position. Furthermore, making *right* matter through improved instruction and moral exemplars ensures that “ethics are woven into the fabric” of the armed forces, “from the senior to the most junior levels,” so that the military as a whole can “adhere to the same common value system the nation espouses and promotes throughout the world” (Belscamper 6).

4.3) A Shift in Professional Duty

Once we begin pushing for improved ethics instruction and for a more conscious effort towards promoting ethical conduct within the military, who are we going to assign this task to? If it naturally is to fall to the higher-ranking leaders, then who is to train them (per LTC Belscamper’s concerns) on being moral exemplars first and ethical instructors second? Another option would be to contract the positions out, and bring in outside professors, academics, and scholars from universities and think tanks who are trained in ethics instruction to give in-services and courses to our military members. Why this might seem feasible given that so many contractor positions already fill our military institutions, it could also set up a host of logistical issues,

like who exactly we would hire (Professors? If so, what university and what level – lecturer, adjunct? Etc.) and how we would make this training streamlined across all bases (much less all branches) to ensure service members of all ranks are receiving the instructional attention that they require to prevent certain groups (such as LTC Belscamper’s higher leaders) from being overlooked, because if that occurred, it could effectively create a chain reaction of carelessness or the perceived unimportance of ethics instruction and thus further disrupt efforts to promote ethical instruction and conduct.

There may be another possibility that offers a more streamlined and secure way to acquire ethics instructors: utilizing members of the Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps. All JAGs are bar-licensed attorneys who have graduated from American Bar Association (ABA) accredited institutions. Nearly all law schools require their students to take some sort of ethical training courses, and the area of ethics, compliance, and regulatory affairs is a specialization that many JAGs practice. As an added bonus, philosophy is one of the most common undergraduate majors for law students. In brief, law students, attorneys, and JAGs are some of the most well-equipped individuals to instruct on ethical matters, because of the ethical training they are required to study

in school and practice in their profession as well as the moral “character and fitness” requirements that attorneys must uphold to retain their licensure.

Major Jack B. Cohen (U.S. Army) examines how the possibility of JAGs serving in a position of both ethical instructor and counselor could work, and why it’s urgent to consider it. A 2015 monograph released by the Strategic Studies Institute and the U.S. Army War College detailed the culture of widespread dishonesty and members who have become “ethically numb” because of the “repeated exposure to overwhelming demands that cause them to put their honor on the line to maneuver Army bureaucracy” (Cohen). It seems ridiculous that red tape and bureaucracy could have such a massive impact on the Army and the “assertion that overly burdensome administrative requirements have eroded the Army’s warrior ethos” might seem overexaggerated or unrealistic, but as it turns out, the armed forces present a “particularly challenging ethical environment” (Cohen). However, it appears as though members of the JAG Corps are particularly well suited to meet these challenges and may be able to provide us the answer to who could provide ethics instruction and oversight.

Judge advocates are equipped with the ability to “effectively navigate” the ethical issues existing within the Army through their

“professional application of principled counsel” (Cohen). “Principled counsel infuses legal advice with the virtues of honor and integrity,” and because of the nature of their profession as well as their “doctrinal mission,” JAGs are the “ideal moderators to teach ethical decision making and to influence their Army client when and where most needed” (Cohen). Currently, it seems like a time when the services and guidance of JAGs are indeed most needed.

The revelations from the 2015 monograph are “shocking because the dishonesty cuts at the professional fabric of the armed forces woven by the trust instilled in the profession from the people of the United States” (Cohen). Fortunately, “the special nature of the judge advocate’s position implies a professional backbone of regulations, policy, and culture that both require and enable judge advocates to act ethically in difficult situations,” and thus give them the training and experience to not only advise but to instruct others in times of morally difficult situations (Cohen). Both Army and professional doctrine put “judge advocates in the unique position to give impactful advice” on ethical matters, as well as to “train the force on ethical decision-making” (Cohen). Using this approach and applying the expertise of JAGs helps to address the logistical question of how we can promote ethical

instruction and conduct to ultimately make *right* matter in our military.

5) Distrust in Government, Distrust in Military

The United States military as a whole is an enormous organization, consisting of millions of military and civilian personnel, billions of dollars in funding, and more problems than most of us can probably imagine (Cancian). Predictably, a multitude of issues arise in any sort of large company or operation, ranging from criminal offenses to logistical errors to miscommunications on a grand scale. Both civilians and those who are military-connected hear about the failures, moral atrocities, and general incompetence that seem to plague our national military operations. Of course, the political sphere is also no stranger to the sort of widespread pessimism that seems to have consumed the general American populace. Distrust in authority is not a new social concept, yet it seems to have hit a critical mass: in a recent survey of those who are refusing inoculation against the COVID-19 virus, 26% cited a lack of trust in the “vaccine development process” and another 10% cited “conspiracies” and their mistrust of government as the reason why they would be skipping the vaccine (Galvin). Just within the last few years, former U.S. President Donald Trump “rose to power in part by tapping

into [the] distrust of government” among American voters (Friedman). However, a distrust in the authority of D.C. bureaucrats spreads from the top down, reaching other institutions related to or part of the federal system.

While the term ‘government’ is usually used in connection to politics and politicians, the United States military is also referenced simply by way of its intrinsic connection to the federal government. When voters express their distrust in the “corrupt politicians,” (Friedman) and have media outlets or national figures (such as Trump) fueling their sense of skepticism, they are inherently connecting that distrust in their notion of a shadowy federal government to all the institutions that it touches – such as the FBI (Figliuzzi), the NIAID / NIH (Brown), and the military (Flatley and Tiron).

Critics may argue that particularly because of the current atmosphere of distrust and skepticism that afflicts our politics and popular culture, it is unwise to focus our efforts on trying to establish the military as morally superior and better than the rest of us. This could lead to a sense of elitism within the military and resentment for military members from the general public, of whom are already ignorant to the complexities of military service. Moreover, how will correcting military ethics issues assist in correcting ethics

issues for the rest of us, such as what we see in domestic politics?

The reason why we should focus on making corrections within the military first is because what happens there changes our world. We look up to military members and honor them, at least we used to culturally before the widespread and systemic ethical issues have recently come to light. Similar to the discussion earlier regarding us finding “moral exemplars” for military students to look up to, once we correct the ethical issues existing with the armed forces, military members themselves could effectively serve as moral exemplars for civilians. Additionally, through our efforts in restoring the military as the pinnacle of honorable conduct in our society, we can take the first step in restoring public trust in the institute as well as the federal government by extension. Although there seems to be this burgeoning distrust among the masses, we can begin to remedy it by alleviating the identified ethical issues within the military. The lessons we learn through our efforts there can then be studied, corrected, and strategically implemented in other federal government agencies and institutions.

Fortunately, this task is not insurmountable. We can conquer the ethical issues that the military is facing through the range of methods that have been mentioned in this paper

as well as others that the space available here does not allow for. We have ideas for how to correct the ethics of our wartime strategy, what ethics we should teach and how we should teach it, and even who among the ranks is most suited to instruct and supervise such courses.

Members of the armed services are quick learners, especially when presented with the right information in a timely manner. If we give them the right tools, they can learn what we need them to learn and apply those skills to real life situations. Especially if we put as much emphasis on ethics courses as any of the other courses that they must take (ex: ethics classes have equal importance as other course requirements in the forces, like task-based classes relating to individual professions), then students will be equally as inclined to pay attention and learn.

Thankfully, we are already seeing attempts to correct some of the ethical issues facing military institutions. Some of the most widely publicized and serious ethical breaches have related to sexual assault and misconduct allegations within various branches. Recently, just making a small change in the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program has had significant results. Instead of teaching recruits the SHARP course requirements two weeks into their training program, a new and improved

version of the course that has been tested at Fort Leonard Wood (MO) has focused instead on implementing the program into the early stages of recruit training. It has been immensely successful, with "Army officials tout[ing] a 72% decrease in SHARP reports in 2021 compared to 2020 due to the changes" of the new and improved program (Britzky).

This is just one recent instance showing that once we begin working towards a more ethical military, we can accomplish a lot in a relatively short amount of time. In the SHARP example, the improved results came in a very timely manner, allowing for quicker adaptations and improvements to take place. A spokeswoman for the Army said that the results are "very promising," and that the Army is "looking at implementing these changes across the training base" (Britzky). If those efforts are successful, who knows what is next? Perhaps this improved program can be taught at other Army training bases, or training bases for other branches as well. Ultimately, it shows that with the right research and dedication to improvement in our ethics instruction, it is possible to have a quick and efficient turnaround in teaching that *right matters here*.

6) Conclusion

In LTC Vindman's moving interview, he

reminds us that “here, right matters,” but only if we “make it matter” (Maddow). We can make *right* matter by correcting the ethical issues that face our military institutions. As we work towards this achievement, we are “active in the process” of making right matter, as LTC Vindman says (Maddow). Concentrating on why we should be promoting ethical behavior in the military shows that we “are engaged” in the issue, and by exploring how we can fix the ethical issues that currently face the military and threaten their societal reputation for having honorable and morally conscious members, we are “trying to drive the things that are important to us,” as LTC Vindman suggests (Maddow).

Following his suggestions can help guide us as we work to accomplish our goal. I have started this paper by discussing the extraordinary story of LTC Vindman, because his experiences, while shocking, provide us with a reality check. LTC Vindman defends his choices by claiming they were made with ethics in mind over his own career. Doing what he felt was *right* ultimately cost him his military career. No service member, whatever their branch or rank, should be put in a similar spot to what LTC Vindman faced. The ethical choice and the choice good for the military (and good for one’s career) should be one in the same. If we ever hope to combat ethical issues and

corruption within our own civilian world, we must start by doing what we can to correct similar issues within our armed forces. They were, and can be once again, representative of the very best of us.

Throughout this project, I have discussed a wide range of considerations and yet I have just barely scratched the surface of all that there is to this subject, all of which deserves extended discussion and analysis. While I do not have the time or space appropriate in this project to accomplish that task, it is one that should absolutely be pursued, and I hope to take it up again in the near future. In this paper, however, I have tried to touch on some highlights and provide background to the topic, offer suggestions for our course(s) of action, and supply responses to various criticisms. The paper began (section 2) with the account of LTC Vindman and his experiences and concluded with my main argument (thesis statement) and outlook for this paper. Next, I explained why we need to focus on the military first and utilize our discoveries and lessons there as the vehicle for implementing changes in the ethical status of the civilian world (section 3). After establishing why the military should serve as an ethical exemplar for our country (section 4), I explored three different themes that exist within the literature on suggestions

for supporting ethical conduct in the military. These three themes included looking at imposing a change in our wartime strategy (section 4.1), instituting a shift in our instructional method (section 4.2), and reconsidering the professional duties of members of the JAG Corps (section 4.3). Lastly, I addressed various criticisms and issues that exist within the suggestions that I have proposed throughout the paper (section 5).

Our aspirations are within sight, and we are already taking active steps to combat the ethical blunders being committed in today's armed forces. The suggestions proposed here (as well as others that have not been included in this discussion) will help the military in restoring its prestige and cultural reputation as the pinnacle of honor, morality, and ethical behavior in our country. Through these changes, corrections, and new implementations, we can establish the military as the ethical exemplar of our times. *Making right matter* tomorrow begins with our efforts today. We still have a long road ahead of us, but if we employ our moral compass and sail true north, we can declare without hesitation that "*here, right matters.*"

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