

Assessing the Army Profession

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Civilian and military leaders might easily discount the conjecture that America’s Army is in trouble. After all, it is unmatched as a fighting force and successfully conducted military operations that achieved regime change in two countries in the space of 18 months. Total US military spending averaged nearly \$720 billion over the past four years and exceeded 46 percent of global defense spending in 2009. The \$6.73 trillion spent by the US Department of Defense in the 21st century dwarfed the annual gross national product of most other nations. Commensurate with this level of resourcing, the Army possesses the most modern equipment, the latest technology, and an unequalled training program for its people.

Combine all this with the relatively high confidence placed in the Army (as part of the US military) by the American people, and it would be easy to feel invincible. Harvard’s Center for Public Leadership National Leadership Index ranked the US military as the American institution with the most confidence in its leadership (a trend since 2005); a similar Gallup poll ranked the military at the top since 1989.¹ A recent study reported that while over half of American survey respondents said that the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were “not worth fighting” (52 and 57 percent, respectively), 91 percent “felt proud of the soldiers serving in the military.”² While Americans may have doubts about current wars, they are supportive of their warriors.

Even with such levels of fiscal support and public confidence, we should be cautious of our enthusiasm and reminded of the retort to a comment made by COL Harry Summers during the latter days of the Vietnam War. Summers is quoted as saying, “‘You know, you never beat us on the battlefield,’ I told my North Vietnamese counterpart during negotiations in Hanoi a week before the fall of Saigon. He pondered that remark a moment and then replied, ‘That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.’”³ Public support and confidence may indeed be irrelevant if America’s Army does not adequately prepare for the future.

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Reflections of the Past

The past four decades provide lessons derived from myriad challenges and successes as the US Army prepares for the next 10 years. We have witnessed America's Army transition from its focus on military operations in Vietnam, its triumph in the Cold War, its successes in Southwest Asia in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, its struggle with the impact of Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" in the 1990s, and finally its arrival at its current station in the 21st century.⁴

That journey was marked by successive Chiefs of Staff assessing the Army they inherited, establishing a vision, and charting a path to the future. Their preferred methodology was to commission a series of White Papers in an attempt to identify the issues that would serve as the basis for key initiatives during their tenure. In 1978, at the end of the US military's involvement in Vietnam and faced with the challenges of establishing the All-Volunteer Force, General Bernard Rogers published, "Assessing the Army."⁵ One year later, General Edward C. "Shy" Meyers declared the "hollow army" and penned, *A Framework for Molding the Army into a Disciplined Well-Trained Force*.⁶ It would be all too easy to simply generalize that the Army during these years was ill disciplined and untrained, requiring drastic actions by leaders to address unacceptable conditions. In 1986, General John Wickham wrote *Values, the Bedrock of the Profession* in an attempt to establish a moral touchstone for members of the force.⁷ From these White Papers, the Chiefs of Staff initiated a number of campaigns to redress shortfalls and "professionalize" an Army that was struggling with its identity while attempting to redefine itself.

It was that professional force that General Gordon Sullivan attempted to preserve during the drawdown of the 1990s. It was the 1994 Army White Paper *Decisive Victory: American's Power Projection Army* that conveyed the imperative to maintain an effective fighting force capable of responding when called to secure our national interests.⁸ Sullivan, an avid student of history, evoked the lessons of the Korean Conflict with the slogan "No More Task Force Smiths." Task Force Smith was one of the first Army units to engage in combat in the Korean War. As part of the constabulary force in Japan, it was woefully unprepared for combat with its minimal levels of equipment, manning, and training. General Sullivan feared external pressures to downsize the post-Cold War force would result in a similar lack of focus and jeopardize the Army's ability to accomplish its mission: to fight and win the Nation's wars.

Where There's Smoke . . .

Army leaders took note of what was happening within the institution—actions and situations that were indicative of systemic weakness. Call them signals or signposts, there are several events that give cause for concern regarding the health of today's Army. Ponder this list: Abu Ghraib, Walter Reed, Fort Hood shootings, and soldier suicide. The Schlesinger investigation and subsequent report on detainee abuse at Abu Ghraib identified several contributing factors

beyond what was initially classified as a leadership failure.⁹ *The Washington Post* series centered on conditions in the now-infamous Building 18 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and revealed unacceptable omissions in care for our Wounded Warriors.¹⁰ The traumatic event at Fort Hood (resulting in the deaths of 13 and the wounding of 29), was linked to a network of failures in various systems such as intelligence sharing and personnel management.¹¹ The disturbing rise in soldier suicide prompted an assessment of the Army health program and rediscovery of the “Lost Art of Leadership in Garrisons.”¹² Over the past decade, as these signals appeared, the Army addressed them as discrete events, and in many cases, prided itself on the actions taken to rectify them.

It is prudent to look at this collection of signals and question what senior leaders should garner from these incidents, especially as they relate to the health of the Army in an era of persistent conflict. As early as July 2003, Brookings Institution analyst Michael O’Hanlon warned about “Breaking the Army.”¹³ Throughout current conflicts, we heard senior Army leaders acknowledge such a possibility—the primary focus was on extended deployments—“boots on the ground” and the “dwell” time for soldiers between deployments. In 2006, then-Chief of Staff of the Army General Peter Schoomaker testified to a congressional committee that the pace of repeated deployments with limited respite between operations would “break the active component” and pose significant challenges to the Army Reserve and National Guard.¹⁴ The charter to prevent the Army from breaking in the face of mounting challenges was passed to General George Casey when he became chief of staff in 2007. The principal concern was the effect that such actions would have on the retention of company-grade officers and midgrade noncommissioned officers. The impact of a decade of continuous war, however, is more insidious; one only need to look at the series of reports, internal and external, to be concerned about the health of our Army.¹⁵

Keeping and Developing the Best?

The health of America’s Army can be gauged by analyzing a sample of its people—in this case, the leaders in the officer corps. In *The Atlantic*, journalist Tim Kane conducted a series of interviews with active-duty and former midgrade officers and asserted that the best of the Army are leaving.¹⁶ Some of these officers may have been of the quality that inspired three brigade combat team (BCT) commanders to write a White Paper to the Army Chief of Staff General George Casey, detailing the field artillery specialty as a “dead branch walking.”¹⁷ These BCT commanders made the argument that young officers are not skilled in their basic core competencies, an assertion that can easily extend beyond the artillery branch.

It is now the norm, when examining an Army officer’s professional development, to focus almost exclusively on the tactical counterinsurgency mission sets, while deferring attendance for Professional Military Education (PME).¹⁸ The trend to not enforce requirements for completion of Intermediate Level Education and Senior Level College results in officers being placed in

key assignments without the requisite experience and education to facilitate professional and organizational success.

Adding to this void in professional development is a lack of senior-level mentorship. An informal polling of division commanders found that effective mentorship of lieutenant colonels is impossible given the numbers (over 130 in a typical senior rating chain when deployed). According to Lieutenant General Mark Hertling's January 2010 memorandum to General Casey, "Division Commander Comments on Modularity Issues," the Army is "not spending as much time training and mentoring these officers [battalion commanders] for the inherent responsibilities associate [sic] with the leap to this critical position [of brigade commander]."¹⁹ The issues of education and mentorship may also be factors in the relief from command of over a dozen battalion and brigade commanders in the past year. One should also take note of the continuing interest in the subject of "toxic leadership," that Colonel (Retired) George Reed, Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of San Diego, addressed at the Pentagon in December 2010.

It is informative to examine how officers judge their senior leaders as in Paul Yingling's "The Failure of Generalship."²⁰ This concern is related to the professional competence and performance of senior leaders and transcends the services at every level. Lest one forget, since 2006, the US military has witnessed the firing or resignation of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, the Secretaries of the Army and the Air Force, plus several general officers, including the Commander of US Central Command and two successive senior American commanders and a deputy commander in Afghanistan.²¹

The key consideration is whether these actions are indicative of major faults or omissions within the Army exacerbated by a decade of persistent conflict. Is the Army strong and resilient enough to endure the stresses placed on its most valuable resource—its people—or will it succumb, like metal, to fatigue and fracture? Whatever the case, senior leaders need to assess the various threats and risks, and develop strategies for mitigation.

Not Just an Army Concern

It is clear that a period of transition is ahead for the US military resultant of the reduction of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the impact of America's economic recovery. These factors portend changes that will affect all services whether as a result of frozen and reduced Department of Defense (DOD) or Department of the Army budgets, reduction of forces, or the implementation of the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT). These transitions serve to reaffirm the characterization of today's strategic environment as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, demanding senior leaders who are strategic assets capable of ensuring relevance of the Army to the nation. Not unlike the 1990s where a peace dividend was expected following successive triumphs against the Soviet Union and Iraq, the fiscal environment of today requires a realistic assessment of defense expenditures. Accordingly, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in the last year of his tenure directed "efficiencies" in

DOD operations from which the savings will be reinvested into specific defense capabilities and where the total defense budget will be significantly reduced over the next five years. Subsequently, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, along with his Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, must now navigate the waters of an uncertain future for America's armed services.

A Review of the Army Profession

Following the methodology of former Army Chiefs of Staff when faced with times of change and turbulence, Secretary of the Army John M. McHugh and Chief of Staff of the Army General George W. Casey directed the initiation of the Profession of Arms campaign. The campaign and its accompanying study are the vehicles permitting senior leaders to assess the health of the Army. One of the products of the Profession of Arms campaign will be a revised White Paper that will serve as the first chapter in FM-1, *The Army*. That chapter will present the Army as a distinct profession while outlining the characteristics and attributes expected of its members. Figure 1 identifies the six essential characteristics that distinguish the US Army as a profession.²² The characteristics serve as institutional and individual touchstones to guide the profession.

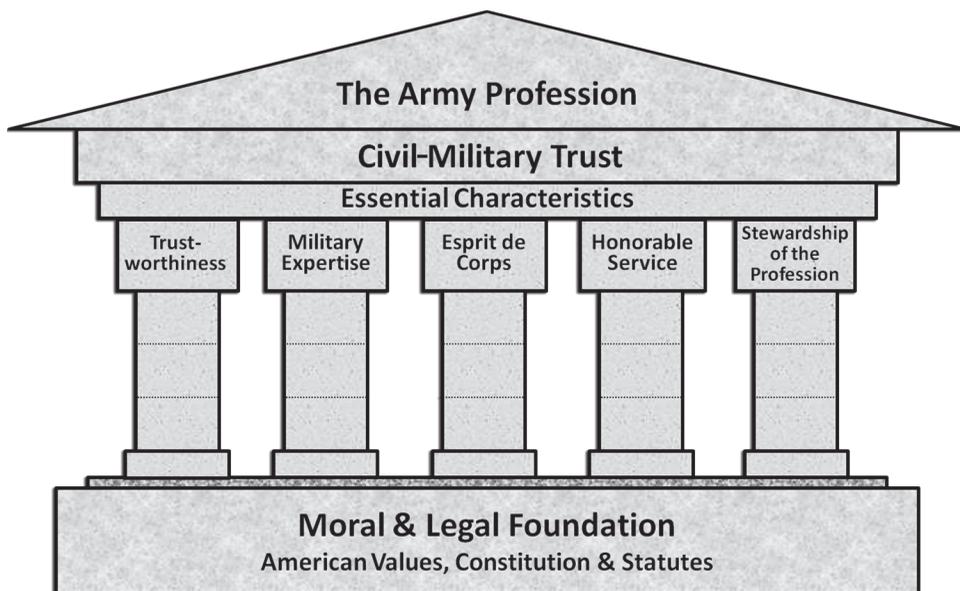


Figure 1. The Essential Characteristics of the Army Profession

“Who’s In and Who’s Out”

October 2011 marked a full year since the initiation of the Profession of Arms campaign, which has already touched every cohort within the Army. Early discussions centered on eight questions posed by then-Commanding General, Training and Doctrine Command, General Martin Dempsey. Those

focus questions were presented at a Profession of Arms Initial Planning Conference, 15 December 2010.²³ They are the following:

- What are our current strengths as a profession/as professionals?
- What are our current weaknesses as a profession/as professionals?
- Have we identified the right essential attributes of the profession/of professionals in the White Paper?
- Are we adequately developing the attributes in our professional military education, in our tactical units, and in our self-development, and do our organizational systems and processes reinforce these attributes?
- Are the roles and responsibilities in sustaining the profession different for officers, NCOs, and Warrant Officers, and are we adequately preparing leaders for these stewardship roles?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the Army Civilian in sustaining the profession, and are we adequately preparing leaders for these stewardship roles?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the retired military in sustaining the profession?
- How do responsibilities change as the professional gains seniority and, in particular, in dealing with the public, the media, senior civilian leaders, and coalition partners?

It became apparent that the first order of business was defining membership within the profession prior to assessing its health. The genesis of the membership question arose from a series of pointed questions voiced during Unified Quest 2010 to General (Retired) Fred Franks and the Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey. The design of the Profession of Arms Campaign with its multiple cohorts—junior enlisted soldiers and officers, midgrade leaders, senior leaders, and civilians—supported the basic evaluation that each is an indispensable contributor to the Army mission—to fight and win the Nation’s wars. From this evaluation, the determination of how professionals are developed within each cohort became an explicit task. The underlying intellectual challenge of this task was to establish whether all these professionals are part of the Profession of Arms.

Traditional thinking related to the Profession of Arms is aligned with that as presented by Lieutenant General Sir John Hackett in a compilation of three lectures at Trinity College in Cambridge, England. In 1986, the US Army endorsed Hackett’s views by publishing *Officer’s Call: The Profession of Arms*, with a foreword by then-Army Chief of Staff General Carl Vuono. Hackett espoused that the function of the profession of arms “is the ordered application of force in the resolution of a social problem,” and therefore the persistent image is that of the “man at arms.”²⁴ In the Profession of Arms discussion, this position is metaphorically represented by the tip of the spear. Expressions such as “management of violence,” “moral hazard,” and “risk of death,” accompany these

discussions and tend to identify members of the profession with the combat arms (what is now called maneuver, fires, and effects branches) of the active component. Such identification excludes a goodly number of the uniformed members of the US Army. In spite of Hackett's narrow definition, there is a justified need for criteria defining a professional in terms similar to those suggested by Dr. Don Snider.²⁵ Members within a profession must possess unique skills within the jurisdiction of the profession, be certified as competent by the profession, exhibit moral character consistent with ethics of the profession, and express then demonstrate commitment to be part of the profession. The process of becoming a professional can be represented by three concentric circles, similar to a target or bulls-eye. For example, the outer circle denotes members of the organization without professional aspirations, while the succeeding inner circles are equivalent to apprentices and journeymen with the innermost circle containing the full-fledged professionals.

The metaphors of the profession of arms were, however, incomplete when applied to the Army. As consistently mentioned throughout the Profession of Arms campaign, cohort members interpreted exclusivity in the Profession of Arms as divisive and not helpful in enabling the Army to achieve its mission and exercise its core competencies. The Profession of Arms campaign revealed that the majority of uniformed and civilian members of the Army believe without question the Army is a profession composed of multiple groups of professionals.

The multiple cohorts of the Army are essential to its being a profession. While there are numerous processes that permit one to become a professional member within a cohort (i.e., the concentric circles), each membership is incapable of standing alone if the Army is to accomplish its mission. Multiple cohorts permit the Army to maneuver and adapt to changing environments; they provide stability and resilience in times of turmoil; they infuse the Army with new ideas and energy; and aid in its regeneration. Accordingly, the campaign adopted an inclusive definition of membership that recognizes and codifies the essentiality of each cohort and its members. The Profession of Arms campaign generated the conclusion that the Army Profession appropriately consisted of uniformed (active Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard) and civilian components.

What Members Say

The methodology of the campaign included engagement with senior leaders in multiple fora to discern the major areas of interest, the administration of an Army-wide survey, a senior leader survey, and the interaction of focus groups of each cohort from various organizations and locations. These research efforts resulted in responses from over twenty-three thousand members of the Army—uniformed representatives from the active and reserve components as well as the civilian corps.

The data is encouraging: 94.1 percent of respondents to the Army-wide survey agreed or strongly agreed that the Army was a profession, and more, 97.8 percent, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am a professional." It is clear that the members understood and embraced the professional

concept with a mutual sense of identity, acceptance of Army Values, and a stated commitment to the profession. Correspondingly, 92.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am proud to serve in the Army,” a response consistent with the results of the recent survey of post-9/11 veterans from all branches, where 96 percent said they felt proud of their military service.²⁶

There were, however, concerns about organizational and institutional support of the profession. While leader development initiatives serve as critical components of professional development, only 31.3 percent agreed or strongly agree their organization had effective programs, coupled with just 27 percent who agreed or strongly agreed that leader development programs provided a realistic assessment of strengths and were essential in helping them grow professionally. This particular response reveals an apparent void in what is a perceived need and what is provided in organizations to develop professionals. It may be more indicative of an institutional failing when only 48.5 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am actively taught about what it means to be an Army professional.”

Trust In and Of the Profession

A recent US Army Center for Army Leadership report concluded, “Trust is currently a strategic advantage.”²⁷ Analysis and deliberation over the course of the campaign established trust as an essential characteristic of the Army Profession. Trust of the profession is a goal to be maintained with external stakeholders—those of immediate importance include the President, Congress, and the American people. To achieve that goal, there needs to be a sustaining relationship of trust among the members of the profession, its cohorts, and organizations that generate internal trust of the institution by its constituents. The resulting discussions of the Profession of Arms campaign established two forms of trust (external and internal) as civil-military trust and trustworthiness, respectively.²⁸

Civil-Military Trust: A positive relationship with the American people based on mutual trust and respect is the life-blood of the Army profession. The Army builds and sustains such trust through the active and continuous presence of the six essential characteristics of the profession. Only by military effectiveness, performed through honorable service, by an Army with high levels of trustworthiness and esprit de corps, and with members who steward the profession and its future and self-regulates itself—can the Army be a military profession.

Trustworthiness: Internal to the Army, trust serves as a vital organizing principle that establishes conditions necessary for an effective and ethical profession. Trustworthiness is the positive belief and faith in the competence, moral character, and calling of comrades and fellow professionals that permits the exercise of discretionary judgment—the core function of the Army professional’s work. Such trustworthiness must be shared among comrades both civilian and military, between leaders and followers in the chains of command,

between units and organizations, between joint and coalition partners, and between the Army and each of its individual professionals.

Current State of Trust

Trust is considered the lifeblood of the Profession of Arms and the Army Profession in particular. The campaign surveys assessed trust across three dimensions: Trust Climate (within units and organizations; trust in Army Senior Leaders), Institutional Trust, and Public Trust (of the American public, civilian authorities, and the media). The interim findings reflect members' perceptions of internal constituents and external groups.

Trust Climate is generally positive within organizations and at one level up or down, but not necessarily with respect to Army senior leaders. About two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed with statements: "I trust other members of this unit/organization" and "I can trust my subordinates to fully support my directive," indicative of trust in direct leaders. One in five, however, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "When an Army Senior Leader says something, you can believe it is true." The overall trust climate in the Army is an area of concern when only 25 percent agreed or strongly agreed with "The Army allows candid opinions without fear of repercussions" and 40 percent agreed or strongly agreed, "People can make an honest mistake without ruining their career."

Institutional Trust is a concern, a trend consistent with past studies conducted in the 1970s and 1990s as the Army faced eras of transition and the attendant uncertainties.²⁹ Forty percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed, "The Army no longer demonstrates that it is committed to me as much as it expects me to be committed."³⁰ Soldiers and civilians have a degree of skepticism (i.e., questionable trust) in Army-level decisions affecting them. Recent discussions about end-strength and pending force reduction, allocation of resources in anticipation of fiscal constraints, and perceived violation of expectations regarding retirement programs are sources of concern and potential distrust within the institution.

Public Trust with the American people is strong as reported in a 2011 Gallup Poll "Confidence in Institutions" and Harvard's Center for Public Leadership 2010 review, "National Leadership Index."³¹ The Profession of Arms campaign survey data indicated that trust by Army members in civilian authorities is markedly less where some 38 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement of "trust[ing] elected and appointed civilian officials to do what is best for the Army." In addition, only 13 percent agree or strongly agreed with "Members of the Army have a great deal of respect for media." While some may discount how soldiers and Army civilians feel about society as unimportant, these reported perceptions should not be ignored. Cynicism about senior Army leaders is not desirable and distrust in elected and appointed civilian leaders presents potential issues for civil-military relations as does perception of media that may separate soldiers from the society they serve.

In general, the Center for Army Leadership reported that a variety of data indicate that Army leaders are competent professionals who trust each other and believe that their unit will accomplish its mission. There, however, appears to be less trust at the institutional level of the Army. Specifically, there is low trust in the future of the Army and its evaluation system. Both interpersonal trust and institutional trust increase with rank—the more senior the individual, the more asserted trust and confidence in others and the institution.

The Trust Challenge

Lack of trust appears related to the Army as an institution. Members expect senior leaders to be competent in establishing priorities, clearly defining and resourcing missions, and emplacing effective systems and processes to not only accomplish missions, but at the same time to care for people. The perception exists that senior leaders are not candid with their superiors, military or civilian.

Interviews with focus groups reveal a perceived lack of trust and confidence in expertise (knowledge, skills, and abilities) for garrison (home station) operations. Commanders (O-5/O-6 level) as well as senior enlisted members (E-9) cited the lack of experience among midgrade officers and NCOs required for competence in the home station environment. These factors reinforce the belief that the competence and expertise of others is a major component of trust at the individual and organizational level.³²

Within the Army and its organizations, the lack of trust is related to the perception of a culture that fails to exhibit candor, does not permit honest mistakes, and where top-down loyalty is perceived as weak (at the expense of subordinates). Such perceptions are characteristic of poor leadership environments and were cited in two recent *Army Times* articles during 2011 related to toxic leadership based on data in reports from the Center for Army Leadership.³³

These indicators point to potential challenges for civil-military relations and societal (specifically, media) trust issues. This lack of trust in civilian officials as well as significant distrust of the media by members of the profession pose a risk for the Army's separation from the society it serves.

The Good News

In general, trust is reportedly strong among individuals and within units and other organizations, as substantiated by Center of Army Leadership studies that reflect 75 percent of subordinates trust their superior at least somewhat.³⁴

Senior Army leaders need to be more aware of how they are perceived by constituents in the profession when they are supporting or executing their senior leader's decisions. There is an increased need to exercise candor when providing advice to policy and decisionmakers. This is especially critical with regard to the current debates on the future role of the Army and its resourcing. Subordinates expect leaders to be candid when explaining the organization's positions, expecting that their leaders will present the full range of impacts these decisions may have on the organization and its people. Soldier and civilian

members of the profession embrace candor from senior leaders, accept that tough choices exist, and support upward loyalty (an Army value). They will, however, mistrust leaders who are perceived as patronizing or overly diplomatic when communicating motives, actions taken, or the impact of tough decisions.

It should be clear to even the most casual observer that members of the profession (uniformed and civilian) are paying close attention to what Army senior leaders say and do in the interest of the profession and its people. Senior leaders need to avail themselves of the numerous opportunities that exist to sustain and leverage various aspects of leadership within the profession, while building and nurturing internal and external trust of the institution.

Desired End State

The goal should be an Army comprised of members who trust in one another and in the institution's ability to serve the nation while caring for its people—both of these objectives are essential if the Army is to “serve the American people, protect enduring national interests, and fulfill the Nation's military responsibilities.”³⁵ We want the US Army to reflect a profession trusted by American society and the international community.

A reciprocal relationship of trust exists between the institutional Army as a profession and the nation it serves. In 1903, Secretary of War Elihu Root presented the charter to senior members of the Army to confer on “national defense, military science, and responsible command.”³⁶ Each of these three “great problems” has a trust component related to other essential characteristics of the profession. National defense requires that America's citizens trust their Army to serve and defend against all enemies, foreign, and domestic. Additionally, military science conveys an implied belief of technical expertise by trusted professionals who ethically employ violence to secure US national interests and those of our allies. Responsible command embodies the trust that military professionals will be good stewards of the people, facilities, equipment, and funds provided them in accordance with the values and ethics of the profession of arms. These three great problems are aligned with four important areas of expert knowledge inherent in the profession: Military-Technical, Human Development, Moral-Ethical, and Political-Cultural.³⁷

Since trust is the coin of the realm for any army in a democratic society, it is imperative that America's Army sustain the internal trust of its members and not break the trust with its citizens. In 1943, General George C. Marshall captured it well,

But we have a great asset and that is that our people, our countrymen do not distrust us and do not fear us. Our countrymen, our fellow citizens are not afraid of us. They don't harbor any ideas that we intend to alter the government of our country in any way. This is a sacred trust that I turn over to you today . . . I don't want you to do anything . . . to damage this high regard in which the professional soldiers of the Army are held by our people.³⁸

Conclusion

The Profession of Arms campaign, like the many others that preceded it, provides a diagnostic of the health of America's Army. The US Army, even while experiencing the many accomplishments that have extended over a decade of war, is still faced with a number of critical challenges that need to be addressed. Senior leaders need to capitalize on the strengths of the professional identity, values, and pride of service that members of the profession have openly embraced. The Army Profession needs to be inclusive of the myriad cohorts enabling its success. Members of the profession need to trust in one another and in the institution. The words of then-Secretary Gates in an address to West Point cadets provides insight that is appropriate to senior Army leaders, "You have an extraordinary opportunity—not just to protect the lives of your fellow soldiers, but for missions and decisions that may change the course of history."³⁹

By asking questions and sensing the responses of its members, the Army will be capable of examining and diagnosing its health as a profession. It is this insight from constituents that will aid in determining critical areas of concern that will reframe many of the existing challenges, and chart the way ahead. Through this critical and potentially uncomfortable self-reflection, the Army will gain what it seeks—"the strength to overcome and the strength to endure."

NOTES

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