



## CARLISLE SCHOLARS PROGRAM

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# A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR EXPANDING AND SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF WARFIGHTING IN THE ARMY (WHITE PAPER)

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*In the fall of 2023, the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) asked the US Army War College (USAWC) to assist and advise on the matter of expanding and sustaining the desired “culture of warfighting” in the Army. This white paper from the Carlisle Scholars Program (CSP) is one contribution to the USAWC’s overall effort to help the Army develop a campaign for strengthening a culture of warfighting that incorporates CSA priorities and messages that enhances the Army’s efforts to better prepare for future war.*

*The white paper proposes a framework for unpacking the meaning of “culture of warfighting.” The collective experience of CSP instructors and students suggests that the various branches, components, and communities within the Army interpret the meaning of warfighting differently according to what capabilities each bring to the table. Also, barriers to building the desired culture emanate from across the Army, not just within operational units. Our proposal is that building a culture of warfighting begins by ensuring the total Army – active and reserve components, civilians (appropriated and non-appropriated), contractors, and family members – see themselves as part of the desired culture. The implication is that building and sustaining the desired culture will be best done through a powered-down campaign comprising a set of common central themes implemented in distribution fashion.*

*And what we've tried to show, I think, in our ad campaigns, for example, is the range of different things you can do, but really also to bring a focus on warfighting. I don't know if any of you have seen the new ad that shows a young soldier doing his first jump out of an airplane. I think it's important to remind young Americans you know that our job is to fight and win the nation's wars. And that's a good example of the kind of thing you'll be doing if you join the United States Army.*

CSA, 4 October 2023<sup>1</sup>

The 2022 National Defense Strategy established four priorities – (1) defend the homeland, (2) deter strategic attacks, (3) deter aggressions and be prepared to prevail in conflict, and (4) build a resilient joint force.<sup>2</sup> This reflects an important shift from recent stability operations toward preparations for large-scale combat operations (LSCO). The Army is at the center of this shift and is re-emphasizing conventional land warfare in the context of multi-

domain operations. This is reflected in the CSA’s four priorities of (1) warfighting, (2) delivering combat-ready formations, (3) exercising continuous transformation, and (4) strengthening the profession.<sup>3</sup> But completing the shift is about more than changing structures, budgets, or the battle rhythm; it involves changing the minds of all Army personnel what it means to be ready – away the world of patch charts, steady rotations, and two well-understood and dominant theaters of operation toward the more uncertain threats of combat in a widely dispersed theater with both contested logistics and a contested homeland. It is also about removing barriers to the culture that distract personnel from focusing on the fundamentals of warfighting.

The paradigm shift has been described as a *culture of warfighting* that emphasizes a renewed emphasis on fundamental skills, team building and cohesion, standards and discipline, and accountability at all levels.<sup>4</sup> However, changing an organization’s culture is difficult even when

the members of an organization wholeheartedly support the change. The sheer size of the Army is itself a challenge as it includes about two million people – soldiers, civilians, dependents, and contractors – all of whom have roles to play in the new culture.<sup>5</sup> But each individual may see the cultural shift differently depending on the mission, tasks, location and other factors, and may perceive different barriers or challenges in adopting the desired culture. Moreover, much of the discussion about a culture of warfighting has emphasized what leaders in combat or supporting units need to do, whereas many of the barriers to such a culture emanate from the enterprise level – the Army staff and Army major commands that perform most of the planning and support functions. This leads to questions about how the Army should run differently at enterprise level to enable the desired culture.

This white paper is intended to initiate dialogue on the most effective way to bring about a culture of warfighting in the Army. The white paper will explore the meanings of “culture” and “warfighting” to generate a set of attributes that the desired culture would exhibit. It explores a wide range of potential barriers to that culture and how to overcome them. Finally, it presents a proposed decentralized campaigning approach for further development.

## I. UNPACKING A “CULTURE” OF “WARFIGHTING”

An important first step toward implementing any culture change is to describe and explain the problem. One view is that there are three different kinds of problems that appear in organizations: (1) that the organization is not doing things right (problems of performance), (2) that it is not doing the right things (problems of alignment), and (3) that members are not wholly behind the organization (problems of commitment).<sup>6</sup> Because of the size and complexity of the Army organization and the types of missions it performs, some parts of the Army may see themselves effectively already at war, others will see a straightforward path to instituting the desired culture, while still others may believe that it will have no impact

whatsoever to the tasks performed so espousing the culture might seem superfluous. In this section, we will more fully define the terms culture and warfighting based on organizational and military professional literature.

### I.A. Culture

The term “culture” can be summed up as follows -- “how things are done around here.”<sup>7</sup> It reflects the habits, norms, values, and informal structures such as working groups or task forces that enable mission accomplishment more efficiently than the formal structure alone.<sup>8</sup>

However, in the case of a “culture of warfighting,” we perceive that the term culture also means *climate*, which measures several factors:

- How well the values of the Army fit with those of Soldiers\* and how reality measures expectations. This is often greatly influenced by leader actions.<sup>9</sup>
- How strongly Soldiers feel connected to the Army, often expressed in one or more of three ways: “I like it here,” “I sense an obligation to be here,” and “being here is better than being elsewhere.”<sup>10</sup>
- How well everyone in the Army, especially leaders, promotes and disseminates the desired values and exemplifies them in their personal and professional actions, therefore building and sustaining trust in leaders and the Army.<sup>11</sup>

For analytical purposes, there is value in measuring these factors separately to identify problems and target solutions. However, the umbrella term *culture* simplifies communicating to members what the desired culture should look like – one where ordinary behaviors match expectations, engender commitment, and reinforce its values.

Leaders often view culture as a tool to make the organization better – both to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency and to strengthen

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\* For brevity, “Soldier” is an umbrella term to mean Soldiers (active, reserve, National Guard) and Army Civilians.

member commitment. A common perspective is that the organization should have a “strong” culture that represents a universal shared understanding at all levels of what is important and what is not. All members see themselves as part of the mission – no matter how far removed from the core organizational task, members should be aware of how they contribute.<sup>12</sup> A powerful example of this was 1960s-era NASA, when excitement over the Apollo program spread through the organization, leading a janitor to proclaim that he was not just performing custodial services, he was doing his part to put an astronaut on the moon.<sup>13</sup> Strong cultures also foster the strengthening of norms whereby members naturally taking corrective actions when they see deficiencies.<sup>14</sup> Finally, such cultures are not static but are dynamic, providing the organization with abilities to respond to new stimuli.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars generally agree that culture change is best accomplished using what are known as *primary embedding* and *secondary reinforcing mechanisms*.<sup>16</sup> The former inculcates the new preferred norms and values while weakening old, undesired ones. The latter are those that members internalize as the belief system of the organization and enact as rules, norms, and stories passed on to new members.<sup>17</sup> However, culture change is challenging to implement because rarely does the whole organization fully adopt the desired culture. Common barriers that can contradict or complicate adoption include external mandates, different interpretations among internal groups, and strong adherence to the status quo.

### ***I.B. Warfighting***

All the services have embraced warfighting cultures as critically important, and their descriptions of them show two elements in common. One is the important human dimension that fills the operating force with warfighters. A warfighter is one who exhibits certain norms and values such as honor, courage, commitment, selfless-service, mutual trust and loyalty, and placing the mission first.<sup>18</sup> A culture of warfighting therefore purposefully promotes and sustains such values in each member.

Another element of the culture concerns competence. Warfighters must be experts in their specialties and perform their tasks effectively, efficiently, and in a coordinated fashion across operational environments.<sup>19</sup> Each profession of arms responsible to maintain competent warfighters capable of performing military activities within a particular warfighting domain of land, aerospace, maritime, or cyber. Such activities require competence across four domains of expert knowledge: (1) offensive and defense operations, (2) stability operations, (3) strategic deterrence, and (4) homeland defense.<sup>20</sup> With its focus on landpower, the Army is mostly concerned with conducting offensive and defense land operations, although within a multidomain context.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, different communities within the Army contribute capabilities for stability operations (e.g., Security Force Assistance Brigades), deterrence (e.g., global posture, strategic intelligence), and defending the homeland (e.g., installations and garrisons, National Guard in its Title 32 role, military police). Competence gaps in any of four areas of expertise constitute vulnerabilities for the Army and the nation.<sup>22</sup>

## **II. DESCRIBING WARFIGHTING CULTURES**

While the nature of warfighting cultures are similar across the services, the character of such cultures is unique and reflective of the service’s heritage, history, current and future capabilities, and the threats and challenges faced. Just as the character of war evolves continuously, so must the elements of a service’s declared culture of warfighting. In this section, we will propose a list of key attributes of the desired warfighting culture in the Army based on senior leader statements and the authors’ collective experiences. First, the following were drawn from CSA statements:<sup>23</sup>

### ***II.A. Command-centered***

In a warfighting culture, the authorities and responsibilities of commanders (operating and generating force) are as closely aligned as possible. However, command above brigade level can be complex as commanders often are formally dual- or multi-hatted or support multiple external stakeholders, each wielding significant power and influence. Only

commanders are postured to establish command and control and provide strategic direction at echelon to navigate this complexity.<sup>24</sup>

However, many military activities, especially in combat support and service support, require far wider levels of expertise than would ordinarily be expected of any one commander, especially at company level. Thus, the Army enterprise includes a robust staff and several major Army commands that cultivate and provide that expertise. But left to its own devices, the enterprise can intrude upon the commander's authorities and create bureaucratic pressures for conformity or efficiency, adding to rather than reducing the complexity of command. This risks degrading the commander's abilities to exercise command and control during operations.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, bureaucracy is too often treated as a negative. It serves a vital purpose to ensure the warfighters have what they need to fight – all classes of supply, the latest and most lethal capabilities, the terrain and adequate facilities and infrastructure to train and deploy, and the coordination and relationships with our sister services and joint force that leads to winning the war and securing a better peace afterwards. The enterprise must remain vigilant and ensure bureaucracy exercises its proper roles and does not intrude or impose itself upon preparations for warfighting. In a warfighting culture, the enterprise serves commanders and not the other way around.

### ***II.B. Ruthlessly prioritize time and resources***

The above suggests that the Army enterprise must critically evaluate the processes, systems, battle rhythm events, etc. to ensure their value for the warfighter. This is hard work, as each began for a reason and it is likely that someone depends on the information generated. Bureaucracy is easy to grow, hard to shrink.

But it must shrink. Time and resources should not be devoted to activities that do not support the Army's mission or the competencies that warfighters need. The Army expects commanders to plan their own activities, lead their own soldiers, develop their leaders, and train as they would fight. Anything else asked of commanders should be minimized.

### ***II.C. Reduces complexity in how to fight***

The contemporary security environment is becoming increasingly complex and today's warfighters are better informed and attuned to current events than generations past. But if unfiltered, complexity can lead to confusion, hesitation, or poor coordination in battle. While we trust commanders to exercise professional judgment or *coup d'oeil* under duress, they need help in seeing the operational environment clearly. Commanders should be shielded from unnecessary and unhelpful distractions.

This responsibility rests on the enterprise, whose primary role is to make sense of all this complexity and communicate clarity to the warfighter – before and during the fight. Doctrine needs to be simple to communicate, simple to train, and simple to evaluate, yet still achieve the desired strategic effects. Also, as CSA GEN George stated, technology should be designed to simplify warfighting, not complicate it.<sup>26</sup> The fundamentals of combat support and service support activities must be reinforced for predictability and reliability, especially when lines of communication are contested.

### ***II.D. Builds teams***

Team-building extends at all echelons, horizontal and vertical, with the essential teams being built at the lowest levels. Strong teams are competitive, dynamic, constantly striving to be better, constantly pushing their members to greatness.

This sense of team building extends to all parts of the Army, especially where members of different specialties must work together for coordinated solutions. Tenant units must build teams with their garrison commands. Active component units must build teams with their reserve counterparts. Joint and service component commands must build teams with their foreign area officers in theater. Teams naturally span unit or staff boundaries and avoid silos and barriers to communication.<sup>27</sup>

Team building also applies to distributed and remote environments. While people naturally prefer personal contact and relationships as a way to build trust, one must remember that the Army is globally employed and many crucial

activities must be performed from afar. Warfighters actively avoid the temptation to engage in we-they conflict due to distance and instead reach out to others who have the right expertise to solve problems.

### ***II.E. Overcomes adversity***

*I can assure you that character, culture, and climate within our formations at every installation will reflect a continued focus on placing people first.*

HON Wormuth<sup>28</sup>

Resilience is a critical competency. Its five dimensions of physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and family reflect healthy behaviors that increase soldier readiness, build inner strength, and prepare for and overcome adversity in battle.<sup>29</sup> Resilience is also important for building trust among units and cross-functional or remote teams.

Warfighters gain the skills and confidence to overcome adversity through realistic training, including shooting, moving, and communicating in challenging environments such as over long distances, difficult terrain, urban settings, and others. Combat support and service support units must likewise prepare in realistic environments where their support is disrupted or interdicted, requiring creative ways to continue support.

### ***II.F. Is always ready to answer the call***

Being ready means having capabilities postured to deploy when needed, with all other capabilities postured for build-up and follow-on activities. Readiness is not only essential for successful offensive and defensive land operations, but it also carries a strategic deterrent weight all its own. Recent events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Hamas' operations against Israel show how adversaries are looking for signs of weakness, actual or perceived, such that they expect no repercussions for their actions. A culture of warfighting shows actual readiness and precludes misperceptions concerning US resolve.

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In deliberations, CSP faculty and students offer the following additions:

### ***II.G. Supports as it would fight***

It would be easy for one to hear the term *warfighting culture* and think primarily in terms of individual combat arms soldiers or their teams and squads on the battlefield. But the culture applies to all soldiers in all components, all civilians (government and non-appropriated fund), all family members, and all contracted civilians supporting the mission.

Training as one would fight only goes so far if the processes and systems of support and administration impose peacetime-like restrictions on that training. In times past, when battalions went to the field, they performed inprocessing, pay, and other soldier support activities in the field – there was less of a tether to garrison. Given the potential for a contested homefront and contested lines of communication, bases and installations (both CONUS and forward) should not be considered safe havens. At a minimum, the Army should adjust how it conducts routine administrative tasks (e.g., personnel actions, awards, supply transactions, administration, onboarding and outprocessing) to operate effectively under conditions where bases must move and respond to real and present threats. The enterprise must adapt its processes and systems to enable this, such as decreasing dependency on robust information networks and ability to shift to paper-based or other means as a temporary solution when units or bases become isolated.

### ***II.H. Integrates all members and capabilities***

This follows from above. A warfighting culture leaves no one behind. Unfortunately, various processes and systems do not work well across component boundaries or treat civilians (both Army and NAF) differently from the military. Too many times, reservists going on active duty experience pay problems that takes months or longer to resolve. NAF employees providing essential family services have experienced difficulties renewing their contracts. The intended benefit of a robust bureaucracy is to make routine actions routine and thereby demonstrate the trustworthiness of the Army enterprise to take care of its members and address problems expeditiously and smoothly.

This inclusive culture of warfighting inspires all its members to greatness, both for themselves and for the Army. The return of “Be All You Can Be” embodies both. Strong Army climates are mission-oriented, disciplined (where individuals and leaders are accountable), show trust and loyalty to each other and to the Army, have well-trained and developed leaders, act ethically and with integrity, are resilient, and steward the Army profession of arms.

### *III.I. Focuses on winning wars*

Winning matters yet winning tactically is but one part. A culture of warfighting connects its people to the broad mission, not just individuals’ or units’ contributions to it.<sup>30</sup> The Army must deter, deploy, fight, win, and secure a better peace afterward. All phases of operation are important.

Strong and constructive civil-military relations play key roles. Senior warfighters have the responsibility and duty to provide military advice to civilian leaders and present the case for the resources, capabilities, and the will to achieve victory, set conditions for stability, and preclude the risk of renewed or prolonged conflict. However, political realities may preclude the Army from fighting the war as it wishes. A warfighting culture ensures clarity as orders are produced and disseminated so there is no disunity out of disagreement.

### *III.J. Fights honorably*

Army units are led by responsible command that creates a climate conducive to fighting within the laws of land warfare. This is essential for winning wars. Responsible command is not only about commanders but also of staffs and the enterprise that ensures soldiers have the resources and leadership they need to prevail on the battlefield.

## III. BARRIERS TO WARFIGHTING CULTURES

Below are among the general challenges that Army faces in instilling a warfighting culture. It is the collective view that the desire and will to change the culture is present, but that Army members (soldiers, civilians, contractors alike) are limited in their capacity to drive change. The

attached information papers elaborate on the nature and character of these problems.

### *III.A. The complacency problem*

This is a multi-pronged problem that is potentially causing the Army to stagnate, which directly opposes the CSA’s call for continuous transformation. Complacency lays the foundation for many of the problems listed below. The following are four different ways that complacency manifests in today’s Army:

- *A sense of disempowerment.* Soldiers and civilians feel that leaders or others are taking away their discretion, autonomy, or judgment. They feel there is no point pushing for change because someone will say no.
- *Liability avoidance.* Soldiers are not encouraged to “rock the boat” or “speak truth to power” to avoid retaliation.
- *Ambivalence.* This is a range of reactions to senior leader messaging that Soldiers/civilians either are uncertain about the meaning, confused, otherwise fail to understand, or do not believe applies to them. In many cases, this is because mid-level leaders are merely passing the message through as is and not making it relevant at echelon (due to disempowerment or liability avoidance)
- *Obstinance.* A small part of the Army simply refuses to change. Such Soldiers/civilians probably should not continue to serve, but retraining or separating them can be difficult.

### *III.B. The administrative complexity problem*

This compounds the feeling that leaders are disempowered and specifically opposes the desired commander-centered culture. It can manifest as distant staffs micromanaging leaders, faceless bureaucrats say ‘no’ to good ideas, and centralization for efficiency getting in the way of mission command.

Administrative complexity and excessive information channels are signs of a bureaucracy

that serves its own purposes rather than that of commanders. Contemporary information technology has created a culture of high expectations for immediate access to information and immediate responsiveness among unit leaders. This damages readiness by distracting and demoralizing leaders who need to concentrate on their readiness tasks.

A related problem is silo-ing. While team-building may be simpler among combat and combat support units who are assigned and routinely work together, team-building is most needed among communities of practice at higher-level commands and staffs where natural silo-ing (often due to resourcing or funding streams) gets in the way. Of course, operational security can present valid reasons for restricting information flow. However, silo-ing takes this to an extreme where the culture is to say 'no' rather than finding ways to collaborate where possible.

### *III.C. The rules of engagement problem*

Rules of engagement is a deeply concerning source of self-inflicted battlefield complexity. The US military is at risk of institutionalizing kill chain requirements that have emerged from stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. These requirements encourage micromanagement over engaging targets, confusing rules of engagement, and associated command and control problems. An example from recent operations is when a corps has operational control over a division, yet the rules of engagement requires that the division directly seek authority from the combatant command (often through a service component command) before engaging certain targets.

During times of relative peace where strategic deterrence and stability operations dominate, it is understandable that each engagement receives significant attention and carries great consequences. However, the risk is that this approach will carry into large-scale offensive and defense land operations, where it can lead to indecisiveness of commanders concerned over inappropriate repercussions of their actions.

Responsible command is not just a competency of the commander. In order for commanders to engage targets swiftly and

effectively with minimal collateral damage, a warfighting culture bolstered by constructive civ/mil relationships continuously negotiate effect rules of engagement and disseminate them with simplicity and clarity, permitting understanding under the barrage of continuous information flow.

### *III.D. The prioritization problem*

Resource constraints always create uncertainty. However, such constraints are sometimes disproportionately felt on support activities essential to the Army's readiness and resilience. Common complaints include lack of investments or resources in critical support capabilities such as facilities and infrastructure, garrisons and family support activities, and reserve component mobilization.

Also of concern is over-training or over-commitment to exercises that consume rather than enhance readiness. Too many exercises that require taking small units or mostly leaders out of formations risks complicating unit training and disrupting unit cohesion if done too often or when exercises deviate too far from a unit's METL or doctrine. While partnership exercises are an essential part of building allied and coalition relationships, quantity must not become more important than quality.

### *III.E. The technology problem*

The technology problem is not so much about technology as it is about unnecessary or counterproductive centralization that suppresses innovation and creativity. The reliance on centralized technology platforms too often encumbers the fundamentals rather than enhances them, both in the operational and administrative spheres. Basic combat support functions are now handed to contractors because of the complexity of administrative or support systems, intellectual property rights, and the fact that the fielding of new software and apps is highly disruptive and plagued with bugs and problems. As above, technology also contributes to unhelpful bureaucratization by making individuals, especially commanders, always accessible and therefore pestered on a continuous basis. A culture of warfighting cannot survive if its commanders become disenchanting or frustrated – this will carry over to junior officers

who will be dissuaded from pursuing command in the future.

The Army is a great laboratory for innovation, but it generally occurs in pockets and despite the bureaucracy rather than because of it. Some commands have created “innovative officers” with special duties and responsibilities to bring new technological solutions into the force at low levels or engage with industry in ways that supplement, not replicate, that of the Army Futures Command. This potentially enhances two-way communications between developers and users and should improve the efficacy of modernization. Innovative approaches to technologies *and* talent will motivate warfighters to continuously improve their “foxholes” while the enterprise focuses on long-term modernization programs.

### *III.F. The perverse incentives problem*

A seminal scholarly article highlighted the tendency of organizations to take actions that are supposed to incentivize a set of behaviors but end up incentivizing something else, including the opposite behavior.<sup>31</sup> An example of this is the so-called “end-of-year spending spree,” in which units are encouraged to spend their budgets rather than turn in excess funds for re-use elsewhere. Another is the shooting of leftover training ammunition rather than turning it back in for re-use. These behaviors are the result of perverse incentives in the system that make saving funds or ammunition administratively difficult or that punish good stewardship by cutting funding or ammunition levels in subsequent years.

Good stewardship means judiciously using resources and reallocating them appropriately and is a responsibility of both commanders and the enterprise. In war, contested lines of communication may require that units share or re-distribute supplies in theater so all warfighters have the food, water, bullets, fuel, medicine, etc. to sustain themselves. Stewardship habits must be built during training – they will not come about automatically when transitioning to war.

### *III.G. Known culture & climate problems*

Eradicating the following may never be perfect, but *striving for perfection and accepting*

*nothing less* is an important attribute of a culture of warfighting: (a) failure to uphold standards or hold leaders accountable for their actions or inactions, (b) failure to properly and fully welcome and integrate new members or congratulate and separate departing ones, (c) failure to build esprit de corps, failure to remove toxic leaders, (d) failure to stop sexual harassment and assault and all other criminal or unacceptable behaviors inimical to the desired culture, and so on.

Only empowered commanders can address climate problems in a unit. No administrative program can do it for them. Commanders need time and space to know their people, understand their needs and unique contributions to the mission, build esprit de corps and warfighting spirit, serve as the moral arbiters and developers of their subordinate leaders, and above all be the example of professionalism and the Army values for them to follow.

The Army must make command the pinnacle of all assignments at each echelon and choose its commanders appropriately, yet at the same time discourage a culture that views non-selection for command as a career ender. A warfighting culture recognizes that war often requires soldiers to take on roles and responsibilities that may differ from their peacetime roles. Therefore, the spirit of individual competition among soldiers should be channeled toward the betterment of all and of the Army and not used to divide members into perceived “haves” and “have nots.”

### *III.H. The uniformity of messaging problem*

This problem is another symptom of leader disempowerment. For a warfighting culture to take hold, everyone in the organization must see themselves in it. For some (e.g., combat arms soldiers), the culture will make immediate sense. For others (e.g., garrisons, service support), the connection may be less obvious. Unfortunately, sometimes the tendency at Army level is to impose the desired culture through centralized messages down the chain of command. Such approaches work well in times of crisis, such as in past episodes of sexual harassment and assault that require immediate corrective action. They work less well under ordinary circumstances



when different parts of the organization come to believe that the desired culture is not about them. Moreover, top-down messages can get muddled two echelons below as different leaders transmit the message to their subordinates. Attempts to force conformity of the message (such as putting it on cards or dog tags) risks soldiers not believing or caring about it.

One insight from our discussions is that some parts of the Army already see themselves “at war.” Examples include military intelligence and cyber units that are already confronting threats and strategic signal operations whose activities are comparatively indistinguishable between war and relative peace. For them, messages about a warfighting culture may appear redundant or irrelevant.

As the message about the warfighting culture is disseminated across the Army, variations of it at echelon should be treated as a feature and not a bug. Each unit, specialty, locality, etc. should be free to enact the desired culture in their own ways so long as their actions conform to the intent. The Army’s priorities are straightforward, simple, and provide plenty of room for individual judgment, innovation, and creativity. Soldiers and civilians alike will embrace a culture they are able to contribute to in their own way, just as the janitor in NASA. But this means that leaders must be empowered to personalize the message appropriately for their units or activities. Messages that prove successful could then be shared and possibly adopted by the Army.

#### IV. THE SOLUTION FRAMEWORK

There is no getting around the fact that culture change is challenging. However, just as the above problem set suggests the importance of engaging with and empowering commanders, so too must the solution. Achieving the desired warfighting culture and correcting climate problems take people working together. The common “engineered” approach to organizational change will probably not succeed as it typically relies on centralized lines of effort, coordination, and reporting.<sup>32</sup> Culture change often suffers from setbacks or is sensitive to the continuing changes in the environment. Therefore, the recommended approach is

characterized more as “top-down planning, bottom-up refinement,” consistent with mission command.<sup>33</sup> This would still include a central team working as an office of primary responsibility (OPR) to help with dissemination of messages, monitor implementation, and pre-emptively identify emerging problems or crises to allow for quick action. However, this OPR would itself exemplify the desired culture by subordinating its activities to commanders and avoiding inducing administrative complexity.

The tools for change are called embedding and reinforcing mechanisms. Gerras & Wong (2018) list several categories of them that leaders at echelon can tailor to their unit’s needs. These are listed below.<sup>34</sup>

##### *IV.A. Primary Embedding mechanisms:*

- What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a daily basis
- How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises
- Observed criteria by which leaders allocate scarce resources
- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching
- Observed criteria by which leaders recruit, select, promote, and separate/retire members
- Observed criteria by which leaders allocate rewards and status

##### *IV.B. Secondary Reinforcing mechanisms:*

- Organizational systems and procedures
- Organization design and structure
- Designs of real property, including facilities, infrastructure, training areas, and allocations of spaces
- Formal statements of organizational norms, values, ethos
- Organizational rites, rituals, etc. celebrating successes or acknowledging failures and shortcomings
- Stories, legends, and myths about people and events.

The OPR can also serve as the champion for success stories and helping to reinforce the message by showing what right looks like rather

than merely telling by words.<sup>35</sup> The OPR should avoid over-emphasizing particular parts of the force and instead show as wide a variety of positive stories as possible, thereby reinforcing both empowerment of all leaders and involving all members. By doing so, the culture of warfighting is most likely to take hold over time.

As the message about the warfighting culture is disseminated across the Army, variations of it at echelon should be treated as a feature and not a bug. Each unit, specialty, locality, etc. should be free to enact the desired culture in their own ways so long as their actions conform to the intent. The Army's priorities are straightforward, simple, and provide plenty of room for individual judgment, innovation, and creativity. Soldiers and civilians alike will embrace a culture they are able to contribute to in their own way,

just as the janitor in NASA. But this means that leaders must be empowered to personalize the message appropriately for their units or activities. Messages that prove successful could then be shared and possibly adopted by the Army.

Attached to this white paper is a series of information papers that demonstrate how this framework can be applied toward strengthening a culture of warfighting in the Army. Each information paper focuses on building or reinforcing the desired attributes of a culture of warfighting or mitigating one of the barriers. The framework can therefore provide the basis for a holistic plan of action to change the Army culture as needed.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Army Public Affairs, "Media round table with Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth and General Randy George," Army.mil, October 4, 2023, [https://www.army.mil/article/270505/media\\_round\\_table\\_with\\_secretary\\_of\\_the\\_army\\_christine\\_wormuth\\_and\\_general\\_randy\\_george](https://www.army.mil/article/270505/media_round_table_with_secretary_of_the_army_christine_wormuth_and_general_randy_george)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, 2022 *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>

<sup>3</sup> Zach Sheely, "George lays out his vision for the future of the Army, and how the Guard fits in," Army.mil, August 21, 2023, [https://www.army.mil/article/269236/george\\_lays\\_out\\_his\\_vision\\_for\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_the\\_army\\_and\\_how\\_the\\_guard\\_fits\\_in](https://www.army.mil/article/269236/george_lays_out_his_vision_for_the_future_of_the_army_and_how_the_guard_fits_in)

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Tan, "Simple strategy: New SMA sees back to basics as way forward," Association of the United States Army, October 4, 2023, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/simple-strategy-new-sma-sees-back-basics-way-forward-0>

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, 2017 *demographics: Profile of the military community* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017), <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2017-demographics-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Tom Galvin, *Leading Change in Military Organizations: Primer for Senior Leaders*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, 2023), 49.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras, "Culture and Military Organizations," in *The Culture of Military Organizations*, ed. Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 17-32.

<sup>8</sup> For present purposes, the term "culture" of warfighting is taken to mean "culture" and "climate" combined. "Culture" includes those factors that affect commitment at the organizational level while "climate" is generally measured at the individual level. It is presumed based on senior level communications that the culture of warfighting also includes the climate of warfighting.

<sup>9</sup> Carey Walker and Matthew Bonnot, "Understanding Organizational Culture and Climate," online exclusive, *Military Review*, July 8, 2016, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2016-Online-Exclusive-Articles/Understanding-Organizational-Culture-and-Culture/>

<sup>10</sup> John Meyer and Natalie Allen, "A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment," *Human Resource Management Review* 1 (1991): 61-89.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas P. Galvin, *Two Case Studies of Successful Strategic Communication Campaigns* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2019); Thomas P. Galvin, *Communication Campaigning: Primer for Senior Leaders*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Joann Keyton, *Communication and organizational culture: A key to understanding work experiences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 19-22.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew M. Carton, "'I'm not mopping the floors, I'm putting a man on the moon.' How NASA leaders enhanced the meaningfulness of work by changing the meaning of work," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2018): 323-369, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0001839217713748>

<sup>14</sup> Alvin Gouldner, *Patterns of industrial bureaucracy* (New York: Free Press, 1964).

<sup>15</sup> Harrison Miller Trice and Janice M. Beyer, *The cultures of work organizations* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1993), cited in Keyton, *Communication and organizational culture*, 35-37.

<sup>16</sup> Wong and Gerras, "Culture and Military Organizations."

<sup>17</sup> Keyton, *Communication and organizational culture*.

<sup>18</sup> For a recent comparison of service cultures, see Kevin MacLaughlin, *Space warfighting culture: A white paper* (National Security Space Association, 2020), [https://nssaspace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/pub\\_2020-11-12.pdf](https://nssaspace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/pub_2020-11-12.pdf). An older comparison that remains relevant in contemporary times is Carl H. Builder, *The masks of war: American military styles in strategy and analysis* (John Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Coffin, "How a strong warfighting culture guides the Spruance to success," *Surface Warfare*, November 2023, <https://www.surfpac.navy.mil/Portals/54/Documents/Digital%20Story/2023/11-Nov/How-a-Strong-Warfighting-Culture-Guides-the-Spruance-to-Success-V2.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Richard Lacquement and Tom Galvin, *Framing the future of the U.S. military profession* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2022), 92.

<sup>21</sup> Department of the Army, *Operations*, Field Manual 3-0 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, October 2022), paragraphs 1-2 & 1-3.

<sup>22</sup> Lacquement & Galvin, *Framing the future*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Sheely, "George lays out."

<sup>24</sup> Tom Galvin, *Responsible command: Primer for senior leaders* (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, 2020), 31.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas MacGregor, *The human side of enterprise*, annotated edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006), 199.

<sup>26</sup> McKinsey Harb, "2023 Eisenhower Luncheon Remarks," Army.mil, October 10, 2023, <https://www.army.mil/article/270807> is a transcription of GEN George's speech at the AUSA's luncheon event in 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Étienne Wenger, *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 103-121.

<sup>28</sup> Directorate of Prevention, Resilience, and Readiness, "Ready and Resilient," Army G-9, <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2-home.html>

<sup>29</sup> Directorate of Prevention, Resilience, and Readiness, "Five dimensions of the personal readiness," Army G-9, <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Five-Dimensions-of-Personal-Readiness.html>

<sup>30</sup> MG David C. Hill, email message to authors, April 16, 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Kerr, "On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B," *Academy of Management Journal* 18, no. 4 (December 1975): 769-783, [https://web.mit.edu/curhan/www/docs/Articles/15341\\_Readings/Motivation/Kerr\\_Folly\\_of\\_rewarding\\_A\\_while\\_hoping\\_for\\_B.pdf](https://web.mit.edu/curhan/www/docs/Articles/15341_Readings/Motivation/Kerr_Folly_of_rewarding_A_while_hoping_for_B.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Garri Hendell, "Our Army: Run by Engineers. Pre-Occupied by Process?" WAR ROOM, July 5, 2018, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/army-preoccupied-with-process/>

<sup>33</sup> MG David C. Hill, email message to authors, April 16, 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Wong and Gerras, "Culture and Military Organizations," 27-30.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Galvin, *Two case studies of successful strategic communications campaigns* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, 2019), 75-156, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/07/2003195611/-1/-1/0/3679.PDF>