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# ETHICAL DYNAMICS AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY PROCESS: PROFESSIONALISM, POWER, AND PERVERSION

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## ABSTRACT

*Some have characterized Oliver North's conviction in federal court, for lying to Congress among other things, as the criminalization of policy differences, whereas others have condemned his actions as subversive of constitutional checks and balances. Within the government, "designated liar" has become an unofficial title when selecting an agency official to give the "company line" to Congress or the public. The commonplace acceptance, even expectation, of official lying as exemplified by North is merely accepted as a fact of governmental life. What is it about the culture of national security decision making that makes lying an acceptable form of behavior? The authors have found that some of the real-world factors that shape individual behavior include organizational indoctrination, access to information, succumbing to that cult-like power of special access to classified information, and national-security policy making itself.*

"What in context beguiles, out of context mortifies."  
David Wayne

It is common knowledge that Oliver North, a Marine Corps lieutenant colonel, was convicted in federal court for, among other things, lying to Congress. Some have characterized his ordeal as the criminalization of policy differences; others have condemned his actions as the subversion of constitutional checks and balances. Although we may debate the precise nature of his crimes (or contributions), it is

impossible to ignore the impact his actions have had on the public debate about relations between the president and Congress, on the one hand, and the nature of personal ethics on the other.

In many ways, Major Hal Knight, an Air Force officer, is North's direct predecessor as a foot soldier caught in the crossfire between the president and Congress. Knight became a whistle-blower. Faced with evidence of possible illegal bombings of Cambodia in 1972, Congress, to get to the crux of the contention, summoned Knight to Washington to testify about what he knew. Knight told the truth and laid bare the administration's record of illegal bombings and its corresponding lies to Congress and the public.

These two people provide us with examples of two eras: Each illustrates issues of national security and examples of executive misconduct, as well as the poignancy of individual military officers making crucial decisions about whether to lie when confronted by a congressional inquiry.

Knight's experience achieved some minor status as an academic footnote in the history of the war in Southeast Asia. North's opportunity to become a celebrity could also have been consigned to oblivion, but his actions took him elsewhere. In an attempt to parlay his current fame into lasting recognition, he even ran for the U.S. Senate in Virginia. Two military men were faced with a set of critical personal and professional decisions and each chose a radically different path toward their denouement. Their experiences are still relevant as a point/counterpoint of parameters as we watch successive instances where decision makers have been criticized and accused of insubordination for telling the truth in their testimony before Congress.(1)

After analyzing the patterns of action in each of these cases, followed by discussions of the legal obligations, moral imperatives, and professional strictures, this article will focus on the following questions: What factors need to be considered by a military officer - or for that matter, any federal official - who prepares to testify before Congress? What is it about the culture of national security decision making that makes lying an acceptable form of behavior? What are the implications to the nation that such widespread behavior may portend in terms of

both personal and bureaucratic power, obedience to authority, and responsibility?

### **Pattern Matching**

North and Knight share a wealth of traits but exhibit a host of differences as well. Although their careers on the surface appear to run in parallel, the interaction between their basic characters and the political and bureaucratic milieu in which they became entangled eventually resulted in a great ethical divergence. This divergence appears clearly in the following comparisons:

***Low-Level Military Operators.*** Both were military officers, and low-ranking ones at that. Both were clearly led to believe that a certain response was expected of them, which amounted to the cover-up of information that Congress deemed critical.

The foreign-policy environment - Vietnam/Cambodia and Iran/Contra. Both were entangled in the interplay between Congress and the president in the making and conduct of foreign policy. Presidential interpretations of broad prerogatives were met with congressional reactions that could be variously interpreted as the preservation of checks and balances, congressional oversight, or, at worst, congressional micro-management.

Institutionalized mistrust between Congress and the president. This chasm is best illustrated by increased congressional micro-management, which, instead of ensuring compliance, has led to a series of "ineffective statutes that invite abuses rather than eliminate them, [leading to] a penchant for secrecy on the part of the executive, which has come to border on obsession" (Talk of the Town, 1993).(2)

Consequence/reward. Knight was congratulated by grateful legislators for his courage in reporting the illegal bombing; nevertheless, he subsequently received adverse efficiency ratings from his military superiors and ultimately left the service. North was convicted on three felony counts, although the charges were dropped on "technicalities" related to the possible misuse of his previously immunized congressional testimony. He now commands large fees at speaking engagements across the country.

**Legal Obligations.** North's actions had criminal consequences. Obstruction of a congressional inquiry and lying to Congress merit the same harsh legal responses appropriate for courtroom perjury.

Bureaucratic milieu. North was immersed in the role of analyst/bureaucrat on the staff of the National Security Council. Knight was an operations officer who was involved in the practical side of getting things done in support of a war effort. In a real sense, Knight would have been largely unexposed to much of the personal and bureaucratic gamesmanship that is the *methode de guerre* of the policy-making insider.(3)

**Constitutional Imperatives.** North and Knight found themselves at the center of controversies that have surrounded presidential prerogatives in the conduct of foreign affairs. As in a judicial setting, Congress depends on access to information as an integral part of the decision-making process. Its fact-finding mission enables it to establish issues, define debates, and formulate responses. Access to relevant information directly affects Congress's ability to exercise oversight in relation to the nation's business and to ensure that it is being conducted in accordance with the laws of the land. Congress's ability to ferret out the truth has always been problematic at best, if not impossible, when it comes to controversial issues involving its relationship with the president.

**Moral/Professional Strictures.** North freely admitted that he lied to Congress and that he actively attempted to cover up the facts and chronology of events that led up to and included Iran-Contra. He knowingly lied, and in so doing, he arguably committed moral transgressions, whether justifiable or not.

### **Official Lies**

In a narrow legalistic sense, lying to Congress is a clear violation of federal law, not unlike perjury in a federal courtroom. Liability under the law extends not only to statements under oath before a formal committee hearing but also to statements made extemporaneously before individual members of Congress who are engaged in an ongoing investigation. In North's case, he was charged but not convicted on a count of lying to a committee chairman and several committee members

who had convened under secure, classified conditions in the White House situation room. Although not a formal committee session - North was not under oath, and the only record was a longhand transcription produced by two committee staff members - the group had clearly met to establish certain sensitive facts related to Iran-Contra.

North's subsequent trial resulted in federal felony conviction on 3 of 12 charged counts. They included the destruction of evidence related to the ongoing congressional Justice Department investigations, and further obstruction through the intentional construction of falsified chronologies, which detailed the "arms for hostages" deal with the Iranian government.

In a broader context, North was guilty of undermining the notion that ours is a government of laws and not men and that the executive is obligated to follow the laws of the land. No one can be put above the law. To do so jeopardizes the concept of checks and balances between the president and Congress. North acted as a vigilante, going against the intent of the Boland amendment (1992), if not the actual letter of the law, which prohibited governmental support of the Contras.

Testimony developed during the trial indicated an attitude of contempt toward Congress and its prerogatives that has insinuated itself throughout much of the executive branch.

Although the inherent danger in a lie begins with the liar's intent to deceive another, the practice of lying is even more worrisome, especially in public life where it affects public trust and damages the fabric of our democracy. As in private life, the lie affects choice and the ability to make decisions for oneself. Lying, particularly by those who profess to govern, may obscure objectives or make them seem beyond reach. Lies may also affect one's consideration of alternatives to public policies and their estimated costs. Finally, lies may create uncertainty or exacerbate the level of uncertainty in society to the point where political participation and decision making are rendered meaningless.

It is not likely that North contemplated the implications of his acts with any of the intellectual rigor contemplated by Sissela Bok (1989) in her treatise, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*. It is conceivable that his mental deliberations were limited to the simple, calculated justifications made by any common criminal, but that is not

likely, given abundant character evidence that compels us to give him the benefit of the doubt. He intended to lie and deceive - that much is clear from his testimony before Congress and in court. It is doubtful that he internalized the constitutional implications of his actions; indeed, all evidence points to the notion that he acted as a "good" soldier in following the orders of his superiors. In fact, his major defense rested on the notion that he was following the orders of his superiors, Robert McFarlane and John Poindexter, who, in turn, allegedly were following the wishes of President Reagan. Poindexter and McFarlane freely admitted their personal responsibility for North's conduct and also received federal convictions.(4)

In a rather pathetic attempt to garner sympathy for his plight as a subordinate who was merely following orders, North testified that he "felt like a pawn in a chess game being played by giants" (Toobin, 1991: p. 293). More revealing was North's assertion before Judge Gesell that he had never considered telling the truth to Congress about his activities (Toobin, 1991: p. 309). This is an option that North never considered, in stark contrast to Knight who apparently saw honesty as the only way out of his own predicament. Of course, a committed cynic might also note that North understood only too well that he could have retired in obscurity and financial mediocrity as a potential whistleblower who would "just say no" when asked or ordered to lie.

The option to say no was as viable in 1985 as it was in 1973. However, not only was North, unlike Knight, self-aggrandizing, but he hailed from a different bureaucratic culture - a culture where obfuscation, plagiarism, lying, hoarding information, and an inherent contempt for those outside of the narrow policy circle are the order of the day. Ironically, Knight's altruistic and democratically rooted mindset resulted in his retirement into obscurity, leaving the service in 1975. He is little remembered, with almost no attention paid to his courage and integrity by academic researchers and, sadly, his courageous testimony amounts to little more than a historical reference.

## **Banality of Official Lying: Some of its Origins**

Why are some government officials more prone to lying than others? Why do they lie even when they have little to gain personally or professionally from lying? Why is it that North lied and Knight told the truth? Some of the real-world factors that shape their behavior include organizational indoctrination, access to information, succumbing to the cult-like mystique of routine access to classified information, and national security policy making itself.

### **Organizational Indoctrination**

The acculturation of employees into their organization's value system is an important precursor to the "other-world" mentality that some agencies breed in their employees. Some government organizations have a greater disposition than others toward elitist attitudes vis-à-vis the rest of society in general and other government agencies in particular. If a thumbnail continuum were to be constructed depicting elitist tendencies, it would place the General Services Administration at the low end of the scale, with the State Department at the opposite end grouped closely with military Special Forces units and certain intelligence agencies. Those organizations at the high end of the continuum often create "true believers" or "ideological warriors" whose egos are fulfilled by elitist slogans such as "many apply but few are chosen," or "we are an elite unit." Better yet is working in a closed, or secret, compound such as the National Security Agency where employees arrogantly reply to innocent questions with "I work at the Fort," as if 99% of the population would have any clue as to what that means.

Acquiring a strong organizational identity or persona appears to be the dangerous first step in a layered process that eventually results in the necessary detachment from the public mainstream whereby remorseless lying to achieve an objective becomes a routine tactic or strategy.

### **The Power of Access to Information**

The old accepted phrase "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" lends itself to the construction of the following syllogism: knowledge is power, knowledge is always

incomplete, and incomplete knowledge invites abuses of power. In the present context, access to information, particularly within the national security world, often becomes an end in and of itself. With disturbing frequency, information becomes perverted or conveniently misinterpreted to justify a preordained action or policy. The fact of who has, or does not have, access to current information on a particular subject is a powerful stratification agent that determines the credibility, or at least the appearance of credibility, of participants in a given process.

Although sometimes a source of frustration, the sensory overload resulting from the overwhelming quantity of information available within the government has a powerful seductive or addictive quality to it. In fact, many ex-officials have stated that what they miss most about government service is access to information. Access to oceans of new, constantly updated, revised, and largely unpublished information allows an analyst or policy official to quickly develop a facade of expertise, which is easily built but hard to maintain. Is it any wonder that staffers like North can quickly get in over their heads? Some staffers, like North, use their access to information to become freewheeling players in high-stakes games. Others tend to hide information from coworkers to get a "leg up" with the boss, or hoard information for future use as a pivotal part of an imagined postgovernment career.

In addition, internal government information flows are so massive, diverse, interesting, and at times exhilarating, that a drug-like addiction develops. Unfortunately, as with addiction to chemical substances, compulsive personalities develop and mainstream standards of appropriate behavior are quickly discarded. One such standard is the legal and intellectual prohibition against plagiarism. Plagiarism is a way of life in the government. The typical headquarters, or front-office, analyst/adviser lives off the work of others - usually nameless analysts and authors who have detailed, substantive knowledge of their narrow fields. By any definition, plagiarism is a form of lying. However, within government the misuse or wanton theft of another's work is a commonplace occurrence that creates further distance between the individual employee and his coworkers or the larger society.



The civilian corollary to this information addiction is evident in heavy users of the Internet and several commercial on-line information services. In effect, the Internet is Everyman's intelligence network. It is a mechanism that allows millions of voyeurs to scavenge a vast variety of information in digital (perfect for plagiarizing) form and develop firm, "informed" attitudes on far-ranging issues with no other frame of reference.

### **Secrecy as a Mystique Builder**

The information addiction just described is compounded in the national security arena where classified information is routinely used. The use and abuse of classification standards reinforce the worst aspects of some personalities. First, they reinforce self-perceptions of self-styled elites by providing people without direct roles in events and process the ability to read what is going on long before any of it becomes accessible to the general public. In many cases, the vast bulk of this information cannot be used by the recipient but is vicariously enjoyed. In addition, overclassification is often used as a means of hiding errors or avoiding political embarrassment (Stupak and Hone, 1992).

The converse is also true; the selective release of information, outside of official government channels, acts as an ego builder for the leader. By becoming an unauthorized "source" to outsiders, the leader develops a new yardstick of self-worth, which is linked to the quality or currency of the information released. The ability to leak "sensitive" information places low-level employees on the same plane as the "big shots." The dangers inherent in such a condition are manifest, as the ego trip of feeling important, or having an affect, is an exquisitely dangerous lure and often becomes an unwitting entry into espionage activities. Further, the purposeful dissemination of misinformation can be used as an act of contempt for the recipient of the data or as a weapon against opponents - real or imagined.

An additional danger inherent in the use of classified material is the "believe everything you read" syndrome. This involves the "automatic" acceptance of information based on its packaging or appellation. For instance, the higher the classification the greater the likelihood of its prima facie acceptance. Therefore, documents bearing secret, top-secret, or code-word labels will find more ready acceptance than those bearing confidential or limited official use labels. In fact, the

deliberate overclassification of information is often used as a tactic to garner support for programs, allegations, or activities that would otherwise undergo close scrutiny.

## **Lying as an Outgrowth of the Government Process**

In an atmosphere where fact and fiction are blurred; where individuals can no longer differentiate between where their own wisdom begins and where it ends; where analysts have difficulty discerning what is theirs, what they read, and what they believe; and where qualified judgments, unattributed sources, anonymous reports, and rampant plagiarism make one analyst's view just as valid as the next one's, arrogant, paternalistic attitudes develop. A belief in the rightness of one's own "informed" views (despite the above limitations) in turn leads to the familiar litany for justifying official lies, such as "The average person is too unsophisticated to understand these issues." "The public doesn't want to know the truth; it can't handle it." "No one really cares about this obscure issue so I have wide latitude to act." "I am an unsung hero." "It is for the greater good that I do this."

Most of these rationales are embedded in the various pronouncements and testimonies of North but are less unique to him than they are common to the atmosphere and culture of national security decision making. North, in effect, was someone who stepped, or was cast, out of the cluttered backdrop of government machinations and found himself stark naked in the light of day. When North was interviewed by congressional staffers and gave them false information he was playing the role of "designated liar" on behalf of his organization and employers. This is a role played out in Washington on a daily basis and usually by officials bearing the title of press secretary, briefer, or even the President himself.

## **A Prescription**

Given that the aforementioned pressures exist and effectively distort individuals who lack the moral compass to weather such temptations, what operating guidelines could mitigate the lure to lie?

Bok (1989) makes no blanket assertion that lying is never acceptable. The obvious exceptions, such as lying to save another's (or one's own) life, are understood. She examines the morally difficult situations within the context of a "contingency model" that takes into account the inherent dangers, regardless of the case or situation, associated with lying - the potential damage to individual integrity, the loss of trust, and the actual harm to those being lied to.

Acknowledging these concerns, she devises a case study checklist that encourages the decision maker to consider the gravity of the situation, the potential harm associated with a lie, and the possible alternatives. The checklist is conceptually easy to understand and operationalize:

1. Evaluate alternative courses of action that will not require lying.
2. Consider moral arguments for and against the deceit ("excuses"), to include the avoidance of harm, the production of a benefit, and issues of fundamental fairness.
3. Establish the existence of justification, through a system that proceeds along a continuum that begins with internal thought; moves to collegial consultation with one's peers, associates, or advisers; and ends up with public scrutiny. (Bok, 1989: pp. 90-106)

Public scrutiny is key to establishing public "consent" to deception by the government. As Bok (1989) points out, the light of publicity may not always be needed, and, in fact, may not always pose a solution to the public dilemmas that generate the case analysis. Nevertheless, it ensures an objective airing of perspectives on policy issues and illuminates the nature of moral reasoning associated with the underlying issues. At best, it may merely "facilitate moral choice" - an admirable result in and of itself.

Bok's (1989) prescriptive efforts do not conclude with the moral calculus just outlined. However, her findings are clearly valid given the overall national security decision-making climate discussed earlier. Bok encourages an examination of institutional "climates" that may facilitate deception.<sup>(5)</sup> She naturally encourages compliance with

existing laws and rules that ought to serve as a moral "floor." She takes this inquiry a step further by encouraging the formulation of professional codes of ethics, the examination of rules and laws that reward honesty, and finally, the active study of ethics and case studies that emphasize the concrete application of moral choice to public life. This last point is particularly important insofar as she finds that the current state of instruction is less than operational - a situation that prompts many students to treat formal ethical instruction as academic gymnastics or irrelevant rhetoric.

Public Law 96-303, which was passed unanimously by Congress on June 27, 1980, and signed into law on July 3, 1980, sets forth a very clear statement of the ethical standard expected of government employees. This law (along with Executive Order No. 12674 [1989]), puts "loyalty to the highest moral principles and to the country" (Code of Ethics for Government Service, 1980: p. 855) above devotion to any individuals or agencies, emphasizing that "public office is a public trust" (Executive Order No. 12674, 1989: p. 215).

The implications for military officers and civil servants are clear. They cannot take the public's trust lightly. Once lost, it is nearly impossible to recover the institutional and personal integrity needed to function effectively in the public arena. The legacy inherited from North and others is disheartening for anyone who concludes that democracy rests on citizen participation. Public deception strikes at the heart of our political culture and weakens our society. There is much literature available to demonstrate that Americans are alienated from public life, feeling that they have lost the ability to "make a difference" through the contemporary political process. Some would say that the mistrust has distorted our political dialogue to the point of paralysis.

From a decidedly military perspective, Richard Gabriel (1982) offers up a framework that carefully explores the military's traditional (or stereotyped) preoccupation with loyalty and obedience and contrasts it with the perceived need to encourage dissent under carefully delineated circumstances. He is perceptive in noting that the inclination to dissent tends to be tightly controlled, not only by the criminal sanctions of the Uniformed Code of Military Justice but by the constraints of careerism as well. It is useful to contrast Gabriel's rather blunt advocacy of dissent with Harry Summers' poignant sketch of General Harold K. Johnson, a Vietnam-era army chief of staff who went

to his grave regretting his "lapse in moral courage" when he failed to supply a frank assessment of the war to the president (Summers, as cited in Matthews and Brown, 1989: p. xvii). Gabriel, of course, takes pains to point out that during the period 1960 to 1980, 27 Canadian officers of flag rank resigned in public protest over one policy or another, whereas during the same period in our own history, a single American general followed suit. (Gabriel, 1982: p. 184).

When the constitutional prerogatives are hazy at best, what does the "little guy" do? North was arguably blameless given his assertion that his actions were not illegal and that he could claim some safety from prosecution by maintaining that his actions were authorized by the president. The conduct was at least ambiguously excusable under such circumstances. Excuses ended, however, with his intent to obstruct congressional investigations through lies, misinformation, and the destruction of documents. The legally dubious conduct of a questionable foreign-policy initiative led to an active criminal enterprise in which 11 of 14 high officials were charged and convicted by federal juries for obstruction and lying to Congress. These were men who lied and asked us to trust them when they were in a position to tell the truth; clearly trust is not a rhetorical statement or a personal feeling; trust is behavior: the power of actions always overshadows the veneer of exposition.

### **Conclusions**

The actions taken by North and his conscious decision to lie to the U.S. Congress and, by extension, to the American people must be viewed within the context of the organizational culture in which he was imbued and his total immersion in the development and execution of the illegal policies being uncovered. As described earlier, the effect of cognitive dissonance combined with the ego-distorting effects of being so close to the locus of power was a fundamental determinant of North's behavior. These factors were noticeably absent in Knight's case. In addition, the culture of information and misinformation - particularly involving classified information - within the policy levels of the government is so rife with plagiarism, opportunism, selfishness, overclassification, and other abuses that it is no wonder that official lying is such a commonplace event.

Within the government, "designated liar" has become an unofficial title when selecting an agency official to give the "company line" to, or craft the "proper spin" for Congress or the public. In the case of Iran/Contra, North was the designated liar. Pushed forward by his superiors to throw Congress off the trail of an unauthorized covert operation, North acted as a good foot soldier is supposed to act when instructed by his superiors. However, such behavior within the context of national decision making debases the very Constitution North had sworn to protect (Stupak, 1990: p. 5).

Perhaps the most frightening aspects of "official lies" or "true lies" are their extent and that they are often aimed at the American public, not potential foreign adversaries. Recently declassified data from the Department of Energy concerning nuclear test effects on civilians clearly demonstrate this. The secrecy of the Cambodia bombing is another example - surely our adversaries in Cambodia knew they were being bombed.

Oliver North is representative of the attitude and manner in which government conducts itself and abuses the trust placed in it by its citizens. Hannah Arendt's (1977) exploration of the banality of evil within Nazi Germany is a strong analogy for the banality of lying within governments in general, and the U.S. government in particular.

The investigations, trials, and subsequent convictions of North and his colleagues could conceivably be distilled to clinical insights about the character and behavior of individual bit players in a two-bit conspiracy, and dismissed at that. But the actions of these bit players were symptomatic of what Toobin (1991) characterizes as contempt for the Constitution, disdain toward Congress, and hostility to the truth. This is, in retrospect, another example of one administration's indifference to truth as well as its failure to engage Congress as a partner in the public policy decision making process. The story from those years has yet to be fully played out as we continually see the connections between Iran-Contra and our policy toward Iraq, as well as criticism of the military for the alleged falsification of the Star Wars reports submitted to Congress.

Insofar as military and civilian training is concerned, perhaps ensuring a broad education that emphasizes the democratic ideals and constitutional principles that animate our form of government would

give each player a head start in surviving the pitfalls outlined in this analysis. Moreover, it would help us understand that in any organizational crucible, especially in the arena of the national-security professional, the challenge of education and training is not to prepare for success but to prepare for the possibility of failure. "It is in disaster, not success, that the heroes and the bums really get sorted out" (Stockdale, 1989: p. 201).

How valid is the statement by North's prosecutor, who asserted, "There is a difference between keeping secrets and telling lies. You don't have to tell lies to keep secrets" (Craney, 1989b: p. 408)? It appears that the difference is much narrower than Kecker (North's prosecutor) allowed. North's actions, although appearing to be extreme and flagrant disregard of the Constitution and the political system he was sworn to protect, were neither. The very banality of his action, seen in the fact that it occurs, in varying degrees, each and every day throughout the national security agencies, is the important finding. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of subordinates who place their career ahead of their country and who are willing to place their allegiance to their boss above all else. Janowitz (1971a)(6) has described the loyalty patterns among the military in Third World nations in great depth. A repeated finding was that allegiances among soldiers are often focused at the unit or service level because that is where the rewards or punishments are centered. The attachment of individual soldiers to a "national identity" is often nonexistent. Soldiers willingly do what they are told because the military - particularly their local commander - is their only meal ticket out of poverty and obscurity.

The importance of the military as an avenue for upward social mobility was described by Stendhal (1973). Stendhal highlighted the military (*le rouge*) and the clergy (*le noir*) as the primary, and perhaps only, avenues for the common man to advance his social standing (although, if he was writing today, he would probably include government bureaucracy as a third avenue). But as Janowitz (1971a) points out, the military is an affiliation without a firm social connection to the ruling elites it often serves.

How different is the U.S. military? North's testimony that he "felt like a pawn in a chess game being played by giants" (Toobin, 1991: p. 293) should arouse some serious concerns. North's unquestioning loyalty to, and awe of, his immediate superiors is disturbing. His loyalty

came apparently in exchange for the status, prestige, and trust given to him by those "giants." A more clear-headed, less ego-driven officer would have been suspicious of the motives of those who would give a low-ranking officer such latitude to conduct a private war. North did not question such extraordinary events; instead, he viewed them as a recognition of his abilities and a huge step up the Washington social and power ladder - a mind-set reminiscent of Janowitz's (1971a) seminal findings concerning loyalty patterns and social climbing within military establishments, both Third World and Western.

More disturbing is the similarity of North's professed powerlessness (7), as an excuse for his willing complicity in the commission of illegal actions, to Arendt's (1977) description of Adolf Eichmann's confessed role in Hitler's final solution.

The first indication of Eichmann's vague notion that there was more involved in this whole business than the question of the soldier's carrying out orders that are clearly criminal in nature and intent appeared during the police examination, when he suddenly declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty. This was outrageous on the face of it, and also incomprehensible, since Kant's moral philosophy is so closely bound up with man's faculty of judgment, which rules out blind obedience.

Upon further questioning, he added that he had read Kant's Critique of Practical Reason. He then proceeded to explain that from the moment he was charged with carrying out the final solution he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles, that he had known it, and that he had consoled himself with the thought that he no longer "was master of his own deeds," that he was unable "to change anything." (Arendt, 1977: p. 136)

In essence, Arendt (1977) explained that systems become brutal, corrupt, and oppressive when no one can find "who's in charge." Ethical conduct anchors an inner experience of self, coupled with an inner sense of duty. And yet, with all of the multiple masters, tribal politics, and value ambiguity prevalent in bureaucratic culture - reinforced by the constant battering of powerful externalities in the form of interest groups - it becomes more understandable how an individual can get swept up in forces that one believes are beyond one's control.



Whereas North's moral and character structure can in no way be compared with that of Eichmann, nor can the nature or magnitude of his crimes . . . his bureaucratic behavior can. The commonplace acceptance, even expectation, of official lying as exemplified by North, eschewed in interpersonal relationships, is merely accepted as a fact of government life. The extraordinary parallel between North and Eichmann appears not only in their acceptance of their own criminal behavior, but also in their putting that aspect of their actions out of their minds. They simply did not think about it. Instead, each was caught up in his own little world of career advancement and the exhilaration of wielding power. Arendt's (1977) final reflections on the Eichmann trial could just as easily have been used to sum up an observer's view of the North case or a psychoanalyst's comment on human nature within large organizations.

[F]or when I speak of the banality of evil, I do so only on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared one in the face at the trial. Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth. Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing. It was precisely this lack of imagination which enabled him to sit for months on end facing a German Jew who was conducting the police interrogation, pouring out his heart to the man and explaining again and again how it was that he reached only the rank of lieutenant colonel in the S.S. and that it had not been his fault that he was not promoted. In principle he knew quite well what it was all about, and in his final statement to the court he spoke of the "reevaluation of values prescribed by the [Nazi] government." He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness - something by no means identical with stupidity - that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period. And if this is "banal" and even funny, if with the best will in the world one cannot extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from Eichmann, that is still far from calling it commonplace. That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man - that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem. But it was a lesson, neither an explanation of the phenomenon nor a theory about it. (Arendt, 1977: pp. 287-288)

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## **Notes**

1. For example, General Norman Schwarzkopf's reluctance to commence Desert Storm until he was "ready," and General Colin Powell's willingness to articulate his positions on the advisability of committing American troops overseas. See, in addition, Nowlin and Stupak.
2. See also Gilmour and Halley (1992).
3. See, for example, Stromberg et al., 1982.
4. For an interesting philosophical foundation for this "good" soldier defense, see Gilman, Stupak, and Collier (1993).
5. In this context, there surely needs to be some indepth research done on lying and deceit within the methodological framework of organizational culture.
6. See also Janowitz, 1971b.
7. It is clear from co-author Stupak's consulting efforts and executive positions that there is a major misunderstanding about power in organizations; namely, powerful people are generally gracious, while powerless people are brutal tyrants.

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