

ABU GHRAIB REVISTED: AN ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP DECISION MAKING THROUGH THE CONTEXT OF THE LAW OF WAR AND THE ARMY VALUES

Theodore Byrne, College of Business and Public Policy, California State University Dominguez Hills, 1000 E. Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747, 310-714-9483, tbyrne@csudh.edu

ABSTRACT

Abu Ghraib has become synonymous with a United States' military failure during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Allegations involving sexual, psychological, and physical abuse of prisoners were rampant and ultimately lead to the conviction of 11 U.S. soldiers and the demotion of a brigadier general. The events that occurred in Abu Ghraib created significant international interest and pressure regarding the United States' interrogation techniques. At the heart of this scandal was a problem of leadership and a lack of effective decision making. This paper explores leadership and the decision making process leading up to and immediately following the events of Abu Ghraib through the context of the Law of War and the Army Values.

INTRODUCTION

Abu Ghraib is known today as the prison where the United States engaged in torture and abuses of prisoners captured during the Iraq War. Beginning in 2004, stories of human rights violations developed which included allegations of sexual, psychological, and physical abuse. The allegations from Abu Ghraib were particularly disturbing because they were committed by members of the United States Army military police.

As a result of the military investigation, the United States Department of Defense removed 17 soldiers and officers from duty and 11 soldiers were criminally charged with dereliction of duty, maltreatment, and aggravated assault and battery. Between May 2004 and March 2006, 11 soldiers were convicted in courts martial, each receiving dishonorable discharges from military service as well as sentences to military prison. Meanwhile, the commanding officer, a brigadier general, was reprimanded for dereliction of duty and then demoted to the rank of colonel. The commanding officer denied knowledge of the abuses and claimed that the interrogations were authorized by her superiors and performed by subcontractors and that she was not even allowed entry into the interrogation rooms.

The events that occurred in Abu Ghraib created significant international interest and pressure regarding the United States' interrogation techniques. The debate continues to this day on the highly politically charged role of torture during interrogations. As a result of this focus, Abu Ghraib has become synonymous with what went wrong with leadership and decision making during the Iraq War.

LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

The values promoted by the leader can have a significant influence on the values exhibited within the organization [1] [3] [4]. Because of their inherent influence, leaders play a major role in establishing the organization's values [2]. The commanding officer's lack of effective leadership and flawed decision making leading up to and immediately after the events of Abu Ghraib created an environment where the applicable standards regarding the detention of prisoners was not enforced.

By examining the leadership and decision making process used by the commanding officer and others involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal through the context of the Law of War and the Army Values, a deeper understanding of what went wrong can be identified. With this understanding, similar leadership and decision making problems can be avoided in the future.

The standards applicable to the detention of prisoners in a combat zone are identified in the relevant provisions of the Law of War. The Law of War is the body of law relating to acceptable justifications to engage in war as well as those limits acceptable for wartime conduct. Particularly relevant is the aspect of the Law of War related to the treatment of prisoners and the concept of military necessity. In the Abu Ghraib scandal, the standards existing within the Law of War were violated. The apparent lack of leadership allowed these violations to continue over an extended period of time.

Also important in the analysis of the leadership and decision making process involved in the events of Abu Ghraib are the Army Values, which are inculcated in all United States' Army service members. The Army Values include: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. For the events of Abu Ghraib to have occurred, the Army Values must have been compromised. Though the soldiers involved in this scandal knew each of the Army Values, none of them acted in a manner that could have brought the sexual, psychological, and physical abuse to a quick end.

CONCLUSION

In order to avoid similar problems in future U.S. military engagements around the world, changes must occur which could reduce the opportunity for ineffective leadership and poor decision making. Several of the recommendations for change include enhanced training and education for military service members at all leadership levels placed in a similar environment. Providing directed guidance regarding the chain-of-command as well as identifying those circumstances which rise to a level requiring mandatory reporting to outside organizations, and the ability to do so in a confidential manner. Reemphasizing the importance of the Army Values in all aspects of military service, especially for those not normally in an active duty status is critical. Emphasizing the basic army leadership principle of "lead by example" and ensuring those around you do the same. A failure to support these organizational changes could likely compromise the success of future United States' military engagements.

REFERENCES

- [1] Carison, D. S., & Perrew, P. L. Institutionalization of organizational ethics through transformational leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1995, 14(10), 829-838.
- [2] Northouse, P. G. *Leadership ethics in leadership: Theory and practice (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004.
- [3] Schminke, M., Ambrose, M. L., & Noel, T. W. The effect of ethical frameworks on perceptions of organizational justice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1997, 40(5), 1190-1207.
- [4] Trevino, L. K. Ethical decision making in organizations: A person-situation interactionist model. *Academy of Management Review*, 1986, 11(3), 601-617.