On Friday, December 1, 2017, retired Army Lieutenant General Michael Flynn appeared in federal court to plead guilty to a single felony count of "willfully and knowingly" making "false, fictitious and fraudulent statements" to the FBI. In a statement, Flynn said he acknowledged that his actions "were wrong, and, through my faith in God, I am working to set things right." It is not clear what motivated Flynn's deceit concerning his discussions with the Russian ambassador to Washington any more than it is clear that the investigation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller is not a witch hunt into the Trump campaign. However, it is clear that, after 33 years of Army service, Flynn's moral compass had gone seriously adrift if he felt it necessary to lie to federal officials. Flynn's actions are in some respect reminiscent of those of Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, who lied to the Congress in the 1980s.

While Flynn was no longer on active duty at the time of his transgression (he retired in 2014), he is the latest in a rash of senior military officers who have compromised their personal ethics, despite the long-held emphasis of the military services on integrity. Below are a few of the recent, more egregious examples throughout the Department of Defense:

- In the so-called Fat Leonard scandal, the Navy has censured three rear admirals in the Seventh Fleet (Pacific), along with more than a dozen lesser ranks in a massive bribery and corruption scandal with national security implications. The Washington Post titled a recent article on the affair "Prostitutes, vacations, and cash."
- In 2014, a major general in charge of all Army operations in Japan was forced to retire at reduced rank because he failed to "properly address" sexual assault allegations in his command.
- Also in 2014, the Air Force relieved nine field grade officers assigned to command and control the nation's Minuteman missile (ICBM) arsenal following a cheating scandal that implicated scores of airmen under their command or supervision.
- In 2012, a four-star Army general, the former head of all Department of Defense operations in Africa, was retired at reduced rank following numerous allegations of abuse of DOD travel policies and unauthorized, lavish expenses.

A brief search of the internet can easily identify numerous other scandals.

The increasing instances of misbehavior among senior officers have been a source of concern at the highest levels of the Pentagon. In 2012, and following the sex scandal of General David Petraeus, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to determine how to strengthen the ethical climate within the services. Two years later, Chuck Hagel (Panetta's replacement) referred to the ethical lapses as a matter of urgency and asked senior leaders to "put renewed emphasis on developing moral character and moral courage in our force." In August of this year, current Defense Secretary James Mattis issued

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a memo to "all hands" in the Department of Defense, underlying the importance of ethical behavior. Of note, Mattis stated the following:

> "I expect every member of the Department to play the ethical midfield. I need you to be aggressive and show initiative without running the ethical sidelines, where even one misstep will have you out of bounds. …
>
> To ensure each of us is ready to do what is right, without hesitation, when ethical dilemmas arise, we must train and prepare ourselves and our subordinates. Our prior reflection and our choice to live by an ethical code will reinforce what we stand for, so we remain morally strong especially in the face of adversity."

While one can hope and pray that senior officers and civilians will be up to the challenge laid down by Mattis, it will certainly take more than one memo to restore the high ethical standards which the military culture both espouses and requires. In a 2015 study, Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession, two professors at the U.S. Army War College have offered a damning indictment about the current culture in the Army and across all military services. They have noted that lying in the routine performance of duty has caused leaders to become "ethically numb" and to resort to "justifications and rationalizations" of immoral conduct. In the document's closing paragraph, authors Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras note, "Ethical fading and rampant rationalizations have allowed leaders to espouse lofty professional values while slogging through the mire of dishonesty and deceit. The end result is a corrosive ethical culture that few acknowledge and even fewer discuss or work to correct."

As a postscript, it should be noted that, while the issue of ethics is gaining some attention in military circles, it is being selectively applied. Specifically, the issue of homosexuality in the ranks has been turned upside down, thanks to the insidious policies of Presidents Bill Clinton ("don't ask, don't tell") and Barack Obama, whose chief interest in the military seemed to involve advancing his radical social agenda. As recently as 1981, DOD issued a policy stating that "homosexuality is incompatible with military service." By 2011, just 30 years later, DOD had lifted its ban on "gay" troops and pronounced that "sexual orientation is a personal choice and a private matter." The nation will likely not see again a commander-in-chief like George Washington, who in 1778 approved a court martial which drummed a lieutenant out of the Continental Army for attempted sodomy and perjury. Indeed, Washington emphasized his "Abhorrence and Detestation of such Infamous Crimes" while dictating a report of the matter to his staff. While the Pentagon wrestles today with a lack of "integrity" and "ethics" which resulted in the false statements of General Flynn, it is

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ignoring a far larger danger to both morality and combat readiness – homosexuality within the ranks.

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