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# Trends. Accountability in Security Organizations: The Case of the United States Navy

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Controversy surrounds the adjudication of the United States Navy (USN) commander whose submarine collided with and then sank a Japanese fishing boat in February 2001. The USN has Issued a letter of reprimand to the commander and is allowing him to leave the Navy with full pension based on his current rank, as opposed to authorizing a court-martial that would have rendered the commander liable to very serious criminal charges and sentences. At Issue have been the effects of the adjudication on military personnel aware of the adjudication. Specifically, what would best decrease the possibility that there would be future collisions, sinkings, untoward incidents including safety and security lapses, and detrimental effects on morale?

One possible answer involves a combination of the intentions and abilities of the commander and standards of what those intentions and abilities should be--all as perceived by other military personnel. For example, if the commander acted without regard, with reckless regard, or with malicious intent toward the fishing boat, criminal sanctions might be best. Or if the commander acted with the best of intent concerning purpose but intentionally did not keep himself competent and aware of procedures and pertinent data about which he should have been competent and aware of, again, criminal sanctions might be best. On the other hand, if the commander's intentions and abilities were optimal in every way and blind luck or the lack thereof became the causally attributed factors to disaster, administrative sanctions might be best. In fact, a case might be made for no sanctions at all.

However, there are problems with the above that render the conditional statements as unusually facile. One problem is the difficulty in accurately assessing either intent or ability at the time of the incident. A second is the press of political factors that often permeate distributive, procedural, substantive, consequential, deontological, and other variants of justice. A third is the matter of reinforcing a leader's moral judgment. Given that there are many types of moral judgment, what deters misbehavior in one individual may have no effect or even elicit misbehavior in others. The same applies for personnel who become aware of the specifics of the adjudication. A fourth are contentious yet resistant psychodynamic constructs involving infantile rage, sadomasochism, and a host of defense mechanisms that seem to be robust causal factors in organizational behavior bearing on security, safety, and morale.

A huge challenge remains, then, for those who seek to strengthen security organizations and for those who seek to exploit, weaken, or subvert them. The consequential unknowability of adjudication and its components leaves all of them whistling in the dark. (See Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10, 181-217; Bion, W.R. (1974). Experiences in groups-and other papers. Ballantine; Kifner, J. (April 24, 2001). Captain of sub is reprimanded and will quit. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Menzel, D.C. (1999). The morally mute manager: Fact or fiction? *Public Personnel Management*, 28, 515-527; Myers, S.L. (April 20, 2001). Officials say captain of sub won't be tried. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Wicks, A. C., Berman, S. L., & Jones, T. M. (1999). The structure of optimal trust: Moral and strategic implications. *Academy of Management Review*, 24, 99-116.) (Keywords: Adjudication, Fishing Boats, Japan, Naval Accidents, Security Organizations, United States Navy.)