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Opportunity for Continuous Assessment In Support of Engaged Leadership

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"The question is, is that all of them? Are there others? We need to be conscious of it and we need to put all of the mechanisms in place to thoroughly vet these men and women who would support any operations like this.", Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy [1]

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the January 6th riot at the Capital, 25,000 National Guard troop from 50 States and three territories were deployed to Washington DC to protect the Presidential Inauguration as part of Operation Capitol Response. As law enforcement began arresting suspects involved in crimes at the Capitol, members of the military and National Guard were among those arrested, raising concerns regarding the risk of insiders within the National Guard: Where the troops authorized to protect our Nation's leaders a direct threat themselves?

Suddenly and very publicly the National Guard was in the spotlight, not for the professional deployment of thousands from across this nation on short notice, but rather the mandated rescreening of those troops assigned to Inauguration security by the FBI, Secret Service and Army. Days later, the media reported an additional 12 members of the National Guard had been removed from Inauguration duties. Two of the individuals were flagged for "inappropriate" comments and texts and 10 Guard members were removed for questionable behavior found in the secondary vetting process.

Once again, static, point-in-time assessments of behavioral risk proved to be outdated, inefficient and ineffective. This old model of understanding Guardsmen tied to calendar-based checks, open-door policies, or random interactions with the troops will not uncover the known drivers of pressure and stress that everyday impact, and in some case move, individuals to harm to self or others.

There is a better opportunity to use enhanced continuous assessment technologies to uncover concerning behaviors far enough in advance to resolve issues before they manifest into significant problems. These proven, best-in-class solutions protect the privacy and civil liberties of individual Guardsmen and support staff through anonymity, elimination of bias and favoritism, alignment with organizational policies and incorporation of trust and effectiveness.

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LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT APPROACH

One of the leading tools to help mitigate the risk of insider threat is a background check. A background check is a static assessment of an individual's historic behavior at that point-in-time. Once the individual is considered "trusted" and becomes part of the organization, the rechecking of some key is often restricted to static data sets queried at a predefined time-interval. Within this largely artificial interval, the ability to discover high-risk behavior is limited to certain fixed data and lagging data or digital cyber security monitoring. For the Guardsmen that interact with leaders and fellow Guardsmen there is also personal interaction and possible feedback from fellow Guardsmen in the unit that tend to be segmented and uncorrelated with other data.

Missing, in this mostly static assessment, are the daily drivers of known stress or high-risk behavior that most often appear away from the duty station and the eyes of leadership. This "gap" has grown during COVID and will arguably never fully close. Today, organizations have disparate snapshots of an individual, often with little to no context that a Guardsmen has become isolated, under external pressure, and moving down the "critical pathway" to become an insider threat who creates risk to the organization, the community, fellow Guardsmen and potentially at risk for self-harm.

The challenge is to move from away from this fragmented process to one that leverages smart automation, real-time decision support and a foundation of legal compliance. Years of insider risk and suicide After Action Reports continue to demonstrate patterns of behavior that (if they had been identified) could have changed an outcome. However, organizations too often dismiss this opportunity to move "left" and discover early red-flag behavior because they don't have existing capability to solve for privacy and compliance. They stovepipe their thinking, assuming that risk for possible insider threat is different than risk of a struggling Guardsman at elevated risk of suicide. However, early discovery of behavioral risk is essential, because the same patterns of compounding pressure and stress and high-risk behaviors that may eventually manifest into insider threats, may also manifest into a lack of resiliency and readiness, bullying, harassment, depression and suicide. Linear processes reinforce legacy assumptions that resilience and wellness only relate to behavioral health challenges and that insider threat only relates to security.

Beyond risk detection, the goal of any employee risk management program, including insider threat and suicide prevention, must be to establish and maintain trust within the organization and the workforce while establishing the right levels of deterrence and due process.

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To create a trusted workforce, organizational leadership must protect the privacy and rights of its workforce. An effective employee risk management program must go beyond the discovery of misconduct or high-risk behavior to ensure a consistent and compliant execution of security and personnel policy that prevents bias, discrimination and targeting. As an example, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) and applicable privacy compliance must be integrated within each organization's employee risk programs for both insider risk and suicide prevention.

Organizations must have a legally compliant and standardized process to fairly investigate and adjudicate concerning behaviors in a timely manner that protects the privacy and civil liberties of the Guardsman. This process ideally provides appropriate levels of anonymity to eliminate bias and favoritism. This process must integrate seamless communication and automated policy execution across all organizational stakeholders, including the individual in question, human resources, organizational leadership, insider threat teams, and legal.

New availability of behavioral data brings new requirements to document, archive, and log all activity and provide follow-on analytics to improve the overall organizational processes and support leadership across the organization. This new availability of insight also creates a new opportunity to establish an increased level of local leadership engagement within the workforce. Organizational-specific policy thresholds should be configured for different positions and billets, set at levels below those by DoD, State Governments or other Federal Government agencies to enable the National Guard to first become aware of potential issues and take appropriate mitigation steps before issues become larger problems that involve external organizational action. The ability for local leadership to become informed and engaged can help get the employee move off the critical path sooner and receive appropriate departmental support. Preemptive support in many cases is helpful and empowering to the individual; not punitive.

BEYOND INSIDER THREAT

Mental Health

The National Guard has seen an increase in operational tempo in 2020, from support of unrest to wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. 92,000 National Guard members were activated on Jan 20. By comparison, only six divisions totaling 73,000 American soldiers landed in France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Beyond being deployed away from home, families and jobs, the Guard continues to support overseas operations. It appears that 2021 will follow a similar high operational tempo for the National Guard as it continues to support COVID vaccination, increased internal security tasking, support for other critical internal missions and sustained deployment in support of national mission tasking overseas.

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Hidden within this continued high tempo environment the struggles at the individual level. Guardsmen find themselves dealing with increased pressures and stress that Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed to represent risk factors for decreased mental health, resiliency and increased risk of depression and suicide. These precipitating public health factors are stressful events that can trigger a suicidal crisis in a vulnerable person. Evidence-based public health stressors include, financial pressure, arrest even for low-level criminal misconduct, pending court adjudication, substance abuse, and relationship challenges that compound with a decrease in connectiveness. These can represent single trigger events, or an accumulation of events that overwhelm the protective measures of each Guardsman. Mental Health is more than a clinical challenge. The evidence shows that unmanaged stress over time cannot be resolved with only a medical diagnosis. The data supports that an integrated approach that involves both public and clinical health is the best way to improves individual resilience and wellness over time.

Suicide

Initial data is suggesting that 2020 will be one of the worst years for active duty and National Guard suicides. The USAF is expected to exceed its 2019 suicide numbers that saw 137 airmen across active duty, National Guard and Reserve die by suicide, a 33% increase over the previous year, and the highest annual number since the Air Force began keeping an official record in 2008. The Army is already reporting over a 30% increase for both active Reserve and Guard forces. In 2020 the USAF and USA will lose more Airmen, Soldiers and Guardsman to suicide than ever before. This year the National Guard operational tempo has been the highest in recent memory. This has placed significant pressure on both the Guardsman and their families. This pressure has been compounded by the impacts of COVID and a struggling economy. The concern is as the Guard returns home post this year of increased up tempo they many will find themselves dealing with both public health and mental health issues.

THE WAY FORWARD

Commands can do more to support their Guardsmen and families by leveraging technology to support the early and ongoing discovery of personal pressure and stress. This is the logical extension of increased security screening as it captures pre-defined concerning behaviors that occur between community engagement and interaction.

By identifying hidden pressure and stress (often an indicator of underlying mental/emotional problems) leadership can reach out to at-risk Guardsmen, connect them with appropriate resources and course-correct behavior through additional required training, mentoring, and hands-on engagement before negative events occur. Enhanced continuous assessment solutions

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streamline the personnel and risk management process; ensuring cases are reviewed quickly, efficiently, and fairly; and allowing for easier record-keeping and auditing. They also increase intradepartmental collaboration, prevent miscommunication, and increase individual resilience and overall unit readiness .

In addition, enhanced continuous assessment solutions reduce known barriers to incident reporting. Guardsmen are less likely to report incidents via 1-800 hotlines or "open door" policy because they don't trust the anonymity and often unsure if certain behavior should be reported. By comparison, secure self- and peer-reporting that occurs on mobile applications and internet browsers can increase incident capture, predefine concerning behaviors that should be reported, and ensure anonymity. This integrated communication pathway will add to the unit's ability to stay connected with their Guardsmen as they return home and return to a more set schedule.

ClearForce is a unique leadership tool that automates the complaint actioning of behavioral alerts and provides organizations the ability to configure alerting and behavioral policy at the individual or unit level. ClearForce complements and enhances the value of current DoD solutions with its standardized and fully complaint (EEOC/FCRA/CCPA) platform to ingest and decision new insider risk alerts and updates. ClearForce removes the complexity and risk associated with addressing personnel matters, protects privacy and supports an environment of trust. ClearForce can empower departmental leaders to reduce risk and remain integrated with the larger government fight against insider threats.

ClearForce offers proven commercial technology that can discover early signs of evidenced-based behavioral risk, integrate disparate behavioral data into meaningful patterns, and securely connect all key players into a single digital environment to enable commanders to clearly understand which of their personnel are in need of an informed timely outreach.

Established in 2015, ClearForce, Inc. is an analytic risk management technology company headquartered in Vienna, Virginia. We deliver innovation to the global risk management market. Our mission is to eliminate risk by informing organizations of the early signs of individual stress, misconduct and criminal activity and enable proactive and policy complaint action to mitigate risk.

[1]Associated Press, Defense officials worry about insider attack at inauguration; Guard troops to be vetted, Jan. 17, 2021 at 9:57 p.m. ET, https://www.marketwatch.com/story/defense-officials-worry-about-insider-attack-at-inauguration-guard-troops-to-be-vetted-01610937635

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