

U.S. MILITARY

CNN politics

Allegations of sexual assault, cocaine use among SEAL teams prompt 'culture' review

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Updated 3:57 PM ET, Mon August 12, 2019



US Navy SEAL team ordered home over alleged misbehavior 01:33

Washington (CNN) — In the wake of several high-profile scandals, including allegations of sexual assault and cocaine use against Navy SEAL team members, the four-star general in charge of all US special operations has ordered a review of the culture and [ethics of the elite units](#).

"Recent incidents have called our culture and ethics into question and threaten the trust placed in us," Gen. Richard Clarke, head of Special Operations Command, said in a memo to the entire force.

While the memo did not mention specific incidents, it comes after an entire SEAL platoon was recently sent home from Iraq following allegations of sexual assault and drinking alcohol during their down time -- which is against regulations.

Another recent case involved an internal Navy investigation that found members of SEAL Team 10 allegedly abused cocaine and other illicit substances while they were stationed in Virginia last year. The members were subsequently disciplined.

Special Ops

Clarke oversees the training, equipping and operational matters of all special operations, including clandestine operations conducted by the Army's Delta Force and the Navy unit popularly called SEAL Team Six.

Clarke has ordered a two-part effort to be completed in November. An outside team, including former retired senior special operations personnel and some civilians with expertise in issues such as military ethics, will look at problems from a top level.

Another review team of military personnel will go to individual units. In an effort to try to find out why ethical failures occur, Clarke has ordered the review to examine a broad range of issues, including how recruiting into special operations units take place, how troops are educated on ethics, training and whether failures are dealt with appropriately.

There are currently 72,000 personnel, including 6,700 civilians in the Special Operations Command. While the majority of troops behave appropriately, the high-profile nature of recent scandals has received significant public attention.

In March, a self-assessment by various units was made public, but it has had limited impact on the force. Clarke's review is taking a different tack, sending senior personnel directly into individual units. "I expect you to expend every effort to facilitate access and support the review team's efforts," Clarke said in his memo.

SOCOM will make the latest review public after sending it to Congress and removing any classified information. It declined to name any of the outside experts until the review is done.

CNN reported earlier this month that the top US Navy SEAL recently sent a blistering letter to the force, writing in boldface type, "We have a problem," following several high-profile incidents of alleged misbehavior by the US Navy's elite service members.

In that letter -- dated July 25 and exclusively obtained by CNN -- Rear Adm. Collin Green gave commanders until August 7 to detail the problems and provide recommendations on how they will ensure troops are engaging in ethical and professional behavior.

"I don't know yet if we have a culture problem, I do know that we have a good order and discipline problem that must be addressed immediately," Green said.

In early July, a military court decided Navy SEAL team leader [Eddie Gallagher](#), a one-time member of SEAL Team 7, would be demoted in rank and have his pay reduced for posing for a photo with a dead ISIS prisoner while he was serving in Iraq. Another SEAL was sentenced in June for [his role in the 2017 death](#) of Army Staff Sgt. Logan Melgar, a Green Beret, in Bamako, Mali.

Some military officials question whether these incidents, such as Gallagher's case, are happening because of the pressures special operations forces have been under for the last nearly two decades, with constant deployments on the most dangerous missions.

Values

However, CNN has spoken to several military officials who say they don't believe there has necessarily been an increase in incidents of bad behavior, but say they have to ensure none of the incidents are tolerated, even if they

don't rise to the level of full criminal investigations.

Congress is also beginning to question how the US military is dealing with these incidents. The admiral picked to be the next Chief of Naval Operations was asked about this at his Senate confirmation hearing in July.

"It's especially important in combat that those values be maintained for all the reasons that we understand so well," Vice Adm. Michael Gilday told the Senate Armed Services Committee, adding that he was committed to "getting a better understanding of those issues, to holding people accountable if and where they need to be held accountable, to getting after the root causes and ensure that if there is a problem with the culture with the community, that that is addressed very, very quickly and very firmly."

CNN's Zachary Cohen contributed to this report.