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C.S. 404

NSA Group Project: Mission & Strategy Evaluation

To give a brief overview of this assignment, my group and I are presenting our analysis of the NSA’s overall compliance to ethical principles. We will be examining the NSA’s Mission & Strategy and then be critiquing various scenarios the organization has dealt with morally challenging decisions. In such situations, it is our belief that in order to fully understand the NSA’s motives and methods, one must first understand the guidelines of conduct upon which the NSA is based. Throughout the course of this paper, we will analyze then critique the NSA’s Mission & Strategy statement.

The section begins with a mission statement, defining that the NSA is formed to assure cryptology and procetive services to the American people. It then explains that the NSA shares many positive values with agencies such as the military and U.S. intelligence, but there are values that are should be specifically implemented and defined for the NSA’s line of work. The mission statement closes with the assurance that the NSA works “in order to gain a decision advantage for the Nation and our allies under all circumstances.” Thereafter, there are four Core Values that are listed as being key attributes of the NSA and its members. There values are Honesty, Respect for the Law, Integrity, and Transparency.

As we examine the Mission & Strategy of the NSA, we find there are both strengths and weaknesses of the NSA’s ethical positions. What the NSA’s Mission & Strategy excels in is its selection of necessary virtues. The statement speaks of various ethical principles that each NSA employee should not only abide by, but what principles they should internalize. These four principles are far more than simply checklist criteria, but when truly exemplified define the moral character of an individual. Each principle listed in the Core Values section; Honesty, Respect for the Law, Integrity, and Transparency, is followed by a brief explanation as to why it is relevant the NSA’s work, then followed by how each NSA employee can exemplify this attribute. Identifying the need for NSA employees to be a certain way is very indicative of virtue ethics and describing how they can become people exhibiting these characteristics is perhaps one of the great strengths of the NSA’s Mission & Strategy. Also, this webpage is very current and up to date. At the bottom of the page it says it was published February 3rd 2016, a document written quite recently when compared to other government documents.

However, there are some faults with the NSA’s disclosure on its ethical principles and conduct. What we have discussed here is the NSA’s Mission & Strategy, whereas its Code of Ethics is nowhere to be found! On the NSA’s official website there is a link to a proposal essay for a new Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, but it is unknown or not readily known if it is actually what the NSA’s official Code of Ethics actually is! The website has no indication that the proposal paper was actually accepted, there is only a link to it on the page. Though we have searched the entire webpage and done various external searches for the official Code, all sources eventually return to this document. This is the biggest fault we have concerning the NSA’s Code of Ethics, is this the most current version of it or not? If there isn’t one, the implications could be quite horrifying!

To conclude, the NSA’s Mission Statement, though imperfect does contain valuable principles that are found admirable and worthwhile for members of the National Security Agency to live by. It’s comforting to know that individuals seeking to defend the peace and wellbeing of US citizens strive to live by such principles.