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Leader Responsibility and Influence on Soldiers' Behavior

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Abstract

Atrocities committed by the US Soldiers and Marines in Iraq make civilization around the world think that America is not developed enough in the field of human rights. Three examples provided with senior NCOs leaders, a high ranking officer, and a Marine platoon leader will give a snap shot of leaders' irresponsibility and brutality in action against Iraq people, where Soldiers and Marines acted in behalf of leaders, or leaders involved them in inhuman actions.

Army leaders before every operation or task must motivate Soldiers since a motivation gives to Soldiers trust and confidence. There are many types of motivation from material to physiological such a speech. The last one is the most popular because words cost nothing and what leaders need to do just address to Soldiers. Some Army leaders, however, do not pay attention to ethics and aftermaths when address to Soldiers by giving them a motivation speech. Furthermore, they prove Soldiers actions which in human life would be considered as unacceptable.

Army Medicine Online (2007) reported that “Approximately 10 percent of Soldiers and Marines report mistreating non-combatants (damaged/destroyed Iraqi property when not necessary or hit/kicked a non-combatant when not necessary)”. (§ 34)

There is no doubt that mentality plays the main role in a stressful situation when a Soldier or Marine treats civilians in an inappropriate way. From my point of view, however, I would like to underline leadership responsibility when we see Soldiers or Marines act inappropriately against civilians or wounded enemy combatants.

Senior NCOs a slap in the face

“Military training often involves highly demeaning forms of hazing and Soldiers are often encouraged by their leaders to feel deep hatred toward their opponents on the battlefield, which can lead to ruthless treatment of those who surrender or are incapacitated by wounds.” (Perry, 2003, § 18) In other words, from the very beginning of military service leaders train subordinates to be obedient and carry out all leaders’ orders without any consideration whether they were right or wrong. A good example highlighted the issue during Chaplain’s Johnston’s class, “Values, Ethics, and Military Leadership”. A short movie depicting a situation in Iraq where a helicopter crew shot a wounded Iraqi civilian, since the crew suspected him of

committing a crime. The crew identified suspected civilian as wounded and asked for confirmation from their authority whether to open fire or not. The command was “hit him, hit him”. This action was a senseless execution, yet a large number of the audience of USASMA students were confident that the helicopter crew commander made the right decision. It is difficult to believe, that these senior NCOs could make correct and sound decisions regarding wounded or captured enemy soldiers.

Kill all military-age males

Colonel Michael D. Steele the former commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, Iraq, addressed to his soldiers before an operation in 2006. According to the Soldiers that were in that formation, LTC Steel stated “kill all military-age males.” Moreover, officers in their unit encouraged them with words: “Let the bodies hit the floor.” Despite the fact that Colonel Michael D. Steele was a highly reputable officer with an outstanding military carrier and famous for the 1993 mission in Somalia, he trampled military ethics, which reflected by his actions, caused his Soldiers inappropriate behavior, and harmed the standing of US Army leaders. His motivation speech contributed to the deaths of four unarmed Iraqi men during the raid. In the same year the US Army Command formerly reprimanded Colonel Michael D. Steele in private for not reporting the deaths or details of the mission and reassigned him to an administrative position. The reprimand essentially prevents him from being promoted to general.

Treating civilians

The Sacramento Martial Court charged 2nd Lieutenant Nathan Phan, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, with assaulting Iraqi civilians in April, 2006. He severely beat three men. The Court accused Phan of choking two of them and putting an unloaded M9

pistol into the mouth of the other. In the same month the court accused his seven Marines and a Navy corpsman of kidnapping and murdering a 52-year-old Iraqi man. All belonged to Kilo Company's 2nd Platoon led by Phan, who was the highest ranking among, those accused. This example shows incomprehensible military actions against civilians. Iraqi people have been expecting from the military to preserve human rights, to spread democracy and peace, and to defend civilians. These actions counter efforts to implement trust and confidence in the local population. Marines admitted Phan's orders as the right decision and they did not denied since they were loyal to the commander.

The Soviet Forces in Comparison

I served in the Soviet Army for two years. Many of my friends, who also served in the Soviet Army, and I still believe that there were not Soldiers and officers moral and human behavior against civilians. The Soviet Army trained soldiers to act against civilians to use combative, digging tools, and other available equipment to spread fear within population.

In 1992 Georgian and Lithuanian unarmed people went into streets to celebrate their countries' independence. The Soviet Authority ordered troops to disperse crowd. During the operation Soldiers did not pay attention whether there were children or oldies. They utilized all equipment against civilians what ended with a large number of death people. The Soviet generals who were in charge in both operations did have experiences how to act against civilians. Those massacres were typical Soviet civilian-military operations style.

I would like to compare the US Army with the Soviet Army officers conduct. My viewpoint is that whether the Soviet Army officer or the US Army officer they did not have sense of military ethics since they threat people in the same manner. The Soviet Army officers, however, did not have sense of responsibility regarding soldiers or people. They were

responsible for the Communist Party. In Soviet time officers considered Soldiers and civilians as cannon fodder. The Communist Party was only one provider of all types of education for officers, this means no ethics, no humanity. The US Army officers, on the other hand, receive a huge array of education from different reliable sources, which are adopted in this country. The US Army officers as citizens were born in a democratic environment where ethics and humanity are instilled from childhood.

The US Army after these incidents against civilians launched a new campaign to teach its own leaders about ethics. For instance, all levels of NCOs training include Army values and ethics in their curriculum. The United States Air Force Academy, located in Colorado Springs, has taken a giant step toward teaching cadets morals and ethics. The US Army acknowledged a problem exists with leaders and responded immediately. That in the Soviet Army would have never happened.

Conclusion

In general, Army leaders are facilitators, teachers, and coaches for subordinates. Even young Soldiers are easily trusting of leaders who can influence in the battlefield by giving orders. Soldiers take examples from leaders how to act if they get authority to conduct tasks. By doing so they truly believe that it is right and leaders can protect them from any situations and actions that could lead to prosecution or are against the law. Leaders must be aware of this and think before speak or do.

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