

Running head

SGM Kurt Kagels

Importance of ethical decision training in the operational environment

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What is the dilemma?  
Good paper

*Abstract*

For the last four years, the United States Army deployed over seas to fight a war on terror. Every day in situations in Iraq and Afghanistan Soldiers, have to make ethical decisions that affect the Army's overall mission. The appearance of unethical behavior by our Soldiers in the United States and foreign media has large influence on the conduct of operations. In a war that has degenerated into an insurgency were the combatants hide among and dress like the local populace, it is difficult to find and eliminate the threat. Soldiers must make correct ethical and life saving decisions in a split second. The unethical behavior of Soldiers whether real or perceived, costs the United States Army credibility and vast amount of resources that hinder front line commanders and Soldiers from effectively carrying out missions. Comprehensive ethical training at all levels is the key to carrying out successful operations in all theaters.

Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq by the United States are the result of the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks. After the initial military victory in Iraq an insurgency has developed that has made it difficult for United States forces to stabilize the situation. After the ejection of the Taliban, operations in Afghanistan have moved to stabilizing the countryside and small unit engagements. In both countries, United States Soldiers face difficult situations on a daily basis. There are no defined enemy lines of communication, command structure, or unit organization. Instead, the enemy blends in with and uses the local infrastructure and populace as tools to achieve their goals. International and national media presences also present challenging obstacles to Soldiers trying to accomplish combat missions. These organizations look out for any story that will cause controversy. Significant military actions by the United States Army often draw media organizations that put their own truth to combat operations. During everyday operations, Soldiers have to make quick, ethical, and, correct decisions. When Soldiers make an ethical mistake whether accidental or on purpose can cause serious problems for the Army and the United States government.

The dilemma that faces the United States Army is the challenge of comprehensive ethics training that starts in Basic Training, continues through unit training, and holds Soldiers accountable all levels. The actual or perceived unethical behavior by United States Soldiers creates a significant barrier to Army and United States strategic goals.

A Soldier, in these complex situations has to decide to shoot or not to shoot. This is not as easy as it sounds; the enemy often looks like his surrounding citizens. The only way to differentiate between an innocent by stander and a "bad guy" is the presence of a weapon; the Soldier is compelled to hesitate. The reason for this hesitation is the fear of

making the wrong ethical decision and killing an innocent person. If the Soldier does make the wrong decision and kills or injures a non-combatant the consequences for himself, the Army, and the country are immense. The same holds true for “Cordon and Search” operations. Soldiers on these missions must also make snap ethical decisions concerning legitimate terrorists and innocent families inhabiting the structures. The real or perceived wrongdoing to local civilians and or detainees can harm the way the country and the world view the United States governments’ “Global War on Terror”. The country depends on its’ Soldiers to make the right ethical decisions so it can move ahead with the higher goal. Charles Dunlap reinforces this when he writes in Parameters magazine.

“In modern popular democracies, even a limited armed conflict requires a substantial base of public support. That support can erode or even reverse itself rapidly, no matter how worthy the political objective, if people believe that the war is being conducted in an unfair, inhumane, or iniquitous way’. (Charles J. Dunlap Jr., Autumn 1999, pg. 24)

Still, the Soldiers on the ground must make these ethical decisions and they must make them correctly.

Training and supervision are the keys to ensuring that Soldiers in the field make the correct ethical decisions. A strong emphasis on ethics should start in basic training and continue throughout a Soldier’s career. During basic and AIT a Soldiers are to be held accountable for the ethics training that they received. Continuous testing and evaluations during all training events will reinforce Army Ethics. The standard Army ethics training is the responsibility of the Chaplain. While this is a good place to start Army values, (the basis for Army ethics) is the duty of leaders and Soldiers at all levels.

Training at the unit level must include ethical situations that require decisions on the part of the Soldiers, NCOs, and Officers. This will ensure that good ethical behavior is on the mind of all Soldiers at all times. With this constant reinforcement, Soldiers will possess the tools to accomplish difficult missions in the active theaters. In two of the four challenges that the Army faces in its' ethics training John W. Brinsfield states the need for the same type of training in his Parameters magazine article.

“The Army faces four challenges in the near future. The first is to settle on an adequate supporting rationale to serve as a foundation for the seven Army values. This article has argued that virtue ethics, which may be useful as a first step, does not, on its own, meet the relevance and reality needs of Soldiers who are charged with winning the nation's wars. It is not wise to lose touch with the traditions of the profession in an effort to be purely "neutral" in approaching matters of moral behavior. Second, the Army must decide how closely it wishes to monitor what is being taught in ethics courses from the basic trainee and precommissioning levels through the senior levels of leadership. Many who have surveyed the current decentralized system of curriculum design believe that some detailed monitoring is desirable.”

(Brinsfield, Autumn 1998, pg 69)

As the war continues and moves on to the point where Iraqi and Afghan forces can start taking the over the mission of insurgent and terrorist hunting American Soldiers, utilizing their ethical training will be able assist them in this task. Resources that currently investigate U.S. units in the field can be more productive in intelligence collection. Commanders will be more confident in their subordinate leaders to make the correct

ethical decisions on missions. Subordinate commanders will possess more power over indigenous forces and the local populace because they know their Soldiers will conduct mission professionally. Soldiers will be able to make those ethical decisions more quickly because he or she will be able to resort back to their training. In all dynamic situations and hostile environments, people will make mistakes, some of them deadly and tragic for Soldiers and civilians alike. There will always be an enemy willing to behave unethically to achieve their goals. However, when United States' Soldiers conduct missions with the ability of making quick ethical decisions the terrorist or the insurgent will find his cause undermined. The national and international media will become allies to the country's goals in the region. All these things are possible when good ethical training conducted aggressively at all unit levels will ensure and good ethical decisions in all theaters.

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