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Ethics A Guidepost1

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Abstract

The way we have to think and act on the battlefield of today has changed dramatically since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Our own press or the enemy in their Information Operations uses everything we say and do against us. This coupled with the ever-changing rules of engagement and doctrine created as we go makes ethics as a guidepost more critical than ever.

### Ethics A Guidepost

The physical and mental abusive actions used by United States and coalition soldiers against civilians and combatants. The reported incidence of United States soldiers killing innocent civilians out of revenge for losses their unit had suffered earlier in the day. These are only a couple of examples of how we have failed our soldiers in ensuring that the Army's and our society's ethics are instilled in all soldiers at every level.

Instilling ethics at every level is critical. Soldiers at every level from General Officer to Private First Class have been involved in incidents where their lack of ethics or lack of understanding of the importance of applying ethics have resulted in negative consequences. These consequences have had far-reaching and damaging effects on our ability to win the war. When such unethical acts occur, someone uses them against the Army, the United States as a whole, and the United States government. Groups use these incidents to convey the message or further the agenda they support by exaggerating, manipulating, and publicizing the incident. They use them to inspire and solidify the resolve of our enemies, legitimize their cause and justify their actions no matter how heinous. They use them to discredit our government and Army, and to turn public opinion against the Army and the government of the United States at home and throughout the world. This undermines public support in the United States and the support or continued support of our allies and coalition partners. Ethical behavior takes away a key tool of our enemies both on and off the battlefield, both foreign and domestic. The Army must find a way to instill ethics and ensure our soldiers apply them in every situation.

Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom have created a situation that is unique to this era of conflict. We are writing doctrine and changing standing doctrine as we go during this conflict. This takes away doctrine as one of the tools the Army uses to guide soldiers in many of the situations they face on and off the battlefield. The authors of doctrine inserted ethical behavior in the writing of these documents to ensure that if doctrine were followed soldiers actions would be ethical. This took away most if not all of the responsibility from the individual soldier for his actions and for making ethical decisions for themselves. This was also a way for the Army to make up for any deficiencies in ethics training provided to soldiers and still ensure a consistent and high degree of ethical behavior. With the fluidity of doctrine based on the ever changing and evolving enemy and enemy tactics, doctrine will not be a viable way to address ethical behavior or training deficiencies in ethics for any time in the near future. The Army must find a new way to compensate for the degeneration of doctrines roll in ensuring ethical behavior.

The Army has taken away another historical source of ethics training and compelling force for soldiers to adopt these ethics as their own by marginalizing the role previously played by the Jewish and Christian religions. Religion has a powerful influence on people that transcends any secular training or rules. Religion is a belief system that people embrace of their own free will and influences their actions in a way the rule of law cannot. People who believe in and embrace these religions hold these values and ethics as their own and strive to live by them in their daily lives and when they violate them feel guilty. Guilt has a powerful psychological effect on people to influence their behavior. Secular rule of law will not get you to heaven or cast into hell. Jewish and Christian

religions values and ethics are many of the same values and ethics the Army and our society have adopted as their own. Why and how these values and ethics became so similar is debatable and is a topic for another paper. The Army must find a way to bring these religions back as part of the mainstream Army or find another way to makeup for the loss of this source for instilling ethical behavior in soldiers. With the Army's concern for not showing any preference for any one religion and generic approach to religion, it is highly unlikely that religion will continue to have a significant effect on soldier's applying ethic to their behavior.

The Army has traditionally expected officers and to a lesser degree senior noncommissioned officers to make ethical decisions for their soldiers. This is not always possible on today's battlefield. Often junior noncommissioned officers and enlisted soldiers find them selves in situations where they must act and an officer or senior noncommissioned officer is not available to make a judgment call or a decision for them. They must make this decision for themselves biased on whatever ethics training they have and whatever ethics they value. Soldiers are making these decisions everyday and sometimes several times a day. The majority of the time our soldiers are making the right decisions in regards to ethics. Due to the serious repercussions of committing an unethical act, the best solution for the army would be to find a way to eliminate all unethical acts. Unfortunately, elimination of all unethical acts is not realistic. It is imperative though every effort possible is taken to get as close as possible to the elimination of all unethical acts. If the Army is going to achieve this goal, it must do a better job of preparing soldiers for making decisions with ethical considerations.

The problem facing the Army is how does it adjust and formulate its training to accomplish instilling a high enough degree of ethical standards to approach eliminating unethical behavior in its soldiers with the loss of some of its traditional methods as mentioned previously in this paper. Force feeding a list of ethics and threatening judicial and non-judicial punishment as the way to get soldiers to accept and apply the Army's ethics is a plan destined for failure. Soldiers must be taught the importance of ethics and understand how ethics affect their lives and others lives and the Army's mission. The Army must get soldiers to accept the ethics as their own and believe in the value of the Army's ethics and incorporate them in to their everyday thought process. Ethics training must evolve from teaching a list of ethics to a scenario-based training with realistic situations that reflect actual situations on the battlefield. Soldiers are being put through scenario based training prior to deployment and are forced to make decisions on tactics and how to interact with local civilians. There is a lot of effort put into making these scenarios as realistic as possible by using role players and mockups resembling the villages and cities in which they will fight. Ethical problems need to be incorporated in this training and reviewed in the after action reviews with the same emphasis as tactics. Ethics training must begin when a soldier enters the Army and must be taught and reemphasized at every step of the way throughout their career. This is especially true for the warrior leader's course, basic noncommissioned officers course and advanced noncommissioned officers course. Ethics are not just for the battlefield and we must conduct training throughout the year and not once a year in a canned one-hour presentation. The majority of the training needs to take place at the squad and team level.

This is the only way to get the frequency and personalization in the training to get soldiers to embrace the Army's ethics as their own and apply them as such.

### Conclusion

Ethics as a guidepost is the key to soldiers being able to operate on the dynamic battlefield of today. Training in ethics is the key. The training must be at all levels from generals to privates. The training must be situational based and realistic to force soldiers to think their way through the situation applying an ethical decision making process. Soldiers must accept the Army's ethics as their own. Ethics and our ability to apply them will play a major role in the U.S. winning this war and wars of the future.