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## THOUGHTS ON ETHICS

Ethics, as defined by Webster is “the system or code of morals of a particular person, religion, group, or profession”.

The other day I was shopping in the PX when a special news report flashed across the rows of Televisions on display. It drew my attention to the fact that one of our so-called “smart bombs” apparently missed its target and struck a residential neighborhood in Afghanistan. There were sure to be some civilian casualties. In her closing, the reporter asked if the United States was prepared for this and if this was, in fact, a just war. As the regular program came back on, a young soldier who had been standing next to me asked me pretty much the same question. He wanted to know if I believed the actions our country is taking in Afghanistan are justified, if they are “ethical”. The young man asked me this somewhat rhetorically and, when I answered “yes”, he responded “maybe, maybe not” and went on his way.

That young soldier’s response made me reflect on my position of the war America is waging on terrorism. Was I prejudiced because of what happened on 11 September 2001? After all, I had seen the images of those airliners slamming into the World Trade Center and the aftermath at the Pentagon dozens of times. Perhaps I felt this way because, as a senior noncommissioned officer, with so much of my life devoted to upholding the ideals of democracy, I was overly patriotic. Or maybe, my upbringing of serving in combat units was shaping my views. Did I just

want America to get revenge for these acts? Surely that isn't an ethical position to take, but are we doing the right thing?

Almost 1700 years ago, St. Augustine proposed a "Just War Theory" to resolve the issue of when fighting a war is morally justified. He tried to balance the teachings of Christ-not to kill, with the legal obligations of Roman citizens-to defend their empire. Throughout history, many have modified his theory but we still use it today, as an ethical scale of when and how much force to use. Today, we refer to his theory as the Just War Tradition and its principles encompass the same tenets Augustine developed. I thought I'd apply the seven principles of the Just War Tradition to point out a couple of things (Seven Principles of a just war).

***A just war can only be waged as a last resort.*** Though America seems to have entered into this war very quickly, I believe we have also shown great restraint and patience. Almost a month had passed before a plan was in place and the first round fired. It was then that the world realized that going to war was not only the last resort; it was the *only* resort.

***A war is only just if it is waged by a legitimate authority.*** The preamble of our Constitution reads, "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America". This, coupled with overwhelming worldwide support for America, I believe, gives us the legitimate authority to wage this war.

***A just war can only be fought to redress a wrong suffered.*** Nobody would argue that the events in New York City, Washington D.C., and in the skies over Pennsylvania that day were anything less than evil, cowardly acts against America and our way of life. America suffered a tragic loss that day. Our intentions are to right that wrong.

*A war can only be just if it fought with a reasonable chance of success.* America's resolve is to win, nothing less. We undoubtedly have the best weapons and equipment in the world; however, the single most impressive resource which guarantees our success are the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines who have sworn to uphold and defend the constitution of the United States. With them, the chances for success are not only reasonable; they are assured.

*The violence used in the war must be proportional to the injury suffered.* I can think of nothing more sickening than the scenes from that day. They killed five thousand plus Americans but the rest of us have also suffered. They hurt the American psyche by these violent attacks. The war on terrorism will also be violent, maybe even as graphic, but we can justify that violence.

*The weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants.* America believes that civilians are not valid targets of war. Our rules of engagement state every effort must be made to avoid killing civilians. But, as in all wars, civilians or non-combatants will die. This one will not be the exception. However, as I watch television reports of Afghan school children openly chanting, "death to America" and "bin Laden is good", I have to wonder whom should we consider a non-combatant. The sick men who took control of those planes may have chanted similar things years ago. The Taliban says they rule Afghanistan because of the will of the people, so who, exactly, are the enemy? Still, America will do everything possible to avoid the killing of civilians.

One day, allied support for this war may change. People may second-guess our intentions. There will be those who openly protest against us. To them, and to that young soldier I met in the PX, I would say this; the ultimate goal of a Just War is to establish peace. America's war on terrorism is ethically sound-a Just War. I would also ask them if, when this

war on terrorism is won, would the peace that comes from it be better than the fear that would have remained if we had not fought it at all? I definitely think so.

## Reference

1. Seven principles of a just war, retrieved from the internet [libraryofcongress.com](http://libraryofcongress.com)