

Noncombatants: What are the Rules of Engagement?

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The Army's current ethical challenge is the mistreatment of enemy prisoners of war and noncombatants during combat operations or during confinement. Events over the past year demonstrate significant violations by American Soldiers regarding the rights and treatment of prisoners of war and noncombatants. The Army takes great strides to instill the seven Army values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage and the rules on the proper treatment of prisoners of war and noncombatants in each and every Soldier beginning in basic training. The Army values serve as a cornerstone for the actions of all Soldiers in both peacetime and war. Soldiers often justify the mistreatment by claiming it was necessary to obtain critical information on national security or threats to troops in combat. However, the Army must find the answer in regards to the human factor of restraint from retaliation when facing the enemy in a noncombatant status after combat operations in which a fellow Soldier dies or is injured. The Army must also identify a way to restrain the human drive when obtaining what some may believe to be life or death information from a noncombatant in a prisoner of war or confined status.

Soldiers at all levels understand that the maltreatment of enemy prisoners of war or noncombatants goes against the Army values and the laws of war; however the challenge is with control of human emotions and a clear understanding of directives. Currently, the Army does not have the ability to simulate true combat situations; because the simulation of the loss of a fellow soldier will never replicate the true heart felt emotions that flow through each Soldier in true combat. The abusive and sometimes deadly reaction towards noncombatants on the part of Soldiers in combat situations is not a new challenge to the Army. The Army's struggles to prevent these abuses are an unfortunate part of history from the Civil War to present day war. In

Vietnam, there are reports of Soldiers of dropping noncombatants out of helicopters in order to force other noncombatants to provide critical intelligence regarding combat operations. Thirty some years later in Afghanistan and Iraq, there are reports of the maltreatment and murder of noncombatants during both combat operations and during confinement in order to obtain intelligence or simply to revenge the death of a fellow Soldier.

The Army must now strive to grasp a better understanding of this situation and work to better educate Soldiers at all levels, but especially leaders, on how to recognize, channel, and control these often deadly emotional reactions. The Army must work towards a better understanding of what causes some Soldiers to abuse or kill noncombatants and detainees in these situations while others are able to restrain from such actions. The best approach is for the Army to clinically evaluate Soldiers from both ends of the spectrum and from every conflict for which Soldiers are still available for study.

The Army must identify what the root causes are of Soldiers who make the unethical decision to take the life of another human outside of combat operations. First, the Army must identify those Soldiers, who before the incident consistently live by the Army values. Those Soldiers will be able to relate the raw emotions, which overcome some Soldiers in these situations and cause those Soldiers to set aside personal and professional morals, values, and standards. Second, the Army must separate the data from Soldiers who believe torture and murder is morally right based upon the situation despite the punishment for those actions. Those Soldiers, like many who take a human life on the basis of pure emotion, have no understanding of the impact of the act and mentally create a justification in order to live with those actions. Third, the Army must identify all the key factors, which cause other Soldiers who encounter the same situations to make the ethically correct decision and humanly interact with those involved

despite the raw emotions of the incident. Those Soldiers will also be able to relate the raw emotions, which flow through the body at the time of the encounter, and what allows some Soldiers to suppress those emotions and react in a professional manner.

The collection of data from each side of this ethical challenge will permit the Army to develop a plan of action to address this situation from the root level all the way through training and leadership. The Army already knows that in some of these incidents one critical factor is lack of leadership in providing clear directives during emotionally charged combat situations and leadership having an active role in day-to-day operations. The Army also knows an error in Army design removes the military policemen trained in confinement operations from the battlefield. The Army must combine the data with the other factors and create training programs to address this issue.

The Army must begin to use this critical data to develop programs to address this issue during deployment readiness training. Soldiers at all levels must be made aware of the situations which some may encounter, the emotions some will feel, and the ways to suppress or channel those emotions and react professionally. The Army must make Soldiers at all levels aware of how to identify when fellow Soldiers are over taken by personal emotions. The Army leadership from officers to noncommissioned officers needs to have awareness training on this issue at all levels from the primary leadership development course to the sergeants major academy and from the officer basic course to the war college.

The Army leadership must not only understand how to identify potential problems with either individual Soldiers or groups of Soldiers, but how to help prevent potential incidents through leadership. In many instances Army leadership utilizes the emotions from the death of a Soldier as a motivational tool prior to operations which seek out those the Army suspects as

being responsible without considering the potential negative impacts. Army leadership must understand the importance of limiting personal emotions when providing directives in operations to search for individuals the Army suspects in past deadly attacks against Soldiers.

In some instances, Army leadership provides guidance, which is often vague or left open for interpretation by emotional Soldiers. For example, making the statement "Tonight this unit is going back into the town where those responsible for the death of Private Smith are hiding. Those responsible, others like those responsible, and those who assist the ones responsible for the death of a Soldier must understand there will be consequences." The Army leadership must understand the need for clear directives regarding noncombatant and detainee treatment during those operations and a clear objection for any form of maltreatment.

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States Army is in a war against terrorism and any who support it in any manner. Soldiers have made significant achievements during that time period; however, the unethical acts by a few regarding the treatment of noncombatants and detainees have put a negative light on the Army. The Army must act immediately to try and address this issue in whole from a root understanding to Soldier and leader education.