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The War in Iraq: A Potential Ethical Dilemma for Those Who Serve

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Class #57

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January 3, 2007

Abstract

The United States military's death toll reached 3,000 at the end of the 2006 year and the Iraqi government executed Saddam Hussein. November elections ousted Republican leaders from both the House and the Senate and led to the subsequent resignation of Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. The Commander-in-Chief has an approval rating in the 30's percentile. While leaders attempt to develop a new strategy for the war in Iraq, those who serve in our military face a potential ethical dilemma in the upcoming year. Members will face the increased challenge of maintaining the Army values and the dedication to the mission. The ethical dilemma stems from the country's seemingly unpopular view of the war and its doubts about its leadership. Soldiers will face decisions between loyalty to the Army, public opinion, personal opinion, and family life.

The War in Iraq: A Potential Ethical Dilemma for Those Who Serve

Soldiers serving in the military face a challenging year ahead and will potentially face an ethical dilemma as the war in Iraq continues with decreasing public support for the war. They will face the challenge of balancing loyalty and selfless service to the Army with that of family and community. Leaders will have to continue the mission while motivating and training their soldiers even though personal doubts may exist. While the Army's leadership develops a new strategy for the war in Iraq, a strategy is necessary in order to help stave off this potential dilemma.

Not the "Greatest Generation"

The Army has come a long way with the Warrior Ethos and defining the Army values which are worn around most soldiers' necks. During World War II, those who fought for years across multiple theaters became known as the "Greatest Generation." The recognition was not just because of their dedication and loyalty to the country, but what they accomplished after the war. The generations fighting now are not the "Greatest Generation" because the people are different. Our current fighters grew up with different values in a high-tech world. The current Army is no less inclined to do what is morally and ethically right than previous generations and face many of the

same challenges as its predecessors. If anything, the current Army faces even more challenges and is more highly trained, lethal, and effective. The current generation does not care any less, but perhaps sees life and military service differently.

The recognition of these differences is necessary in order to understand the dilemma Soldiers may face. More apt to ask questions and take the time to analyze the answer, younger Soldiers have access to more information. The Internet and satellite news television provide more information for younger Soldiers to form opinions and increase their awareness. With all the information and conflicting viewpoints, Soldiers' decision making is more challenging.

Current Challenges

Despite what appears to be an unpopular war in Iraq and the ongoing political battles, many soldiers accept deployment orders and continue the mission. Most are proud to serve in the Army. The challenge is to maintain the Soldiers' willingness to fight even after multiple deployments to the region. Further decline in the support at home for the war may cause Soldiers to rethink their dedication to the Army. The negativity of news reporting, if not countered with unbiased, factual accomplishments in Iraq will undermine our Soldiers' will.

Another challenge is the perception of leadership. With the recent resignation of the Secretary of Defense following the November elections and the lack of Presidential popularity, it is understandable why some Soldiers may begin to doubt their leadership. Some are asking, "Okay, what now and why?"

Iraq's apparent lack of effort to take control of itself creates a conflict within our Soldiers to ethically and morally follow orders. "Why should I fight for them if they do not want it or are willing to fight for it?" While it is unrealistic to expect a country to grasp democracy and a new way of life quickly, the perception must be that Iraq wants its freedom.

The greatest test on Soldiers is a continued, long-term commitment to the Army and the separation from family. While the "Greatest Generation" spent years away fighting, our Soldiers' values are different. We are a less patient society and separations lead to a disastrous divorce rate. Soldiers must decide between multiple deployments away from their spouses or retirement or separation from the military.

Easing the Dilemma

The public support of our troops is a significant factor in our Soldiers continued dedicated service. Unlike Vietnam, our current Soldiers benefit from our country's support and the

separation of the action of the war in Iraq, and those following orders. They will maintain a sense of pride as long as the support for our troops does not wane and our Soldiers are not called upon to rally against the Commander in Chief and the war. The Soldiers' may redefine the definition of loyalty and determine expressing personal beliefs counter Army service.

There must be a way to display the good that our Soldiers accomplished in Iraq. A continual negative portrayal in Iraq will only cause our Soldiers to question themselves even more. Leaders must present unbiased, honest appraisals of accomplishments. The effort cannot be misinterpreted as propaganda.

While the government and military leaders develop a new strategy for the war in Iraq, it is important for the military leaders to reestablish themselves as leaders amongst the troops. CNN generals who constantly question military decisions and actions undermine the Army. Polls reflecting the disapproval of how leaders run the war are disparaging. Leaders need to let the public and our Soldiers clearly know our goal and strategy. The Military Times recently released a poll of military members which inferred that our soldiers have lost faith in our leadership in regards to Iraq. A strong military leadership must be present for a Soldier not to doubt his or her service.

Not only military leadership, but the political leadership needs to make a change to prevent future turmoil for our troops. The war should not be a political point of contention for elections, but looked at as a problem that politicians need to solve. Initially in the war, political parties stood on the steps of the Capitol unified in their stand against the war. The government needs to unify their approach for a solid solution and stand on the war in Iraq. The perception created by all the political wrangling is detrimental to our Soldiers.

Willingness to Serve

Despite a feeling that the war in Iraq is not "militarily winnable," many Senior Noncommissioned Officers expressed a desire to deploy and continue to serve. However, the younger Soldiers, especially junior enlisted and junior NCOs may find it more difficult to continue their service in the military. They will face increased opposition to the war and unless our leaders take the necessary steps, many Soldiers will have more difficulty defining their values and even more challenged to follow them.