

ETHICS THOUGHT PAPER

Ethical Challenges in an Asymmetric Fight

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“Never let yourself be driven by impatience or anger. One always regrets having followed the first dictates of his emotion”.
Marshal de Belle-Isle
French Minister of War 1757-1760

The War on Terrorism started on a beautiful September morning. On 11 September 2001, terrorists executed a horrendous attack on American soil, killing thousands of innocent Americans. For most Americans the attack came as a total shock, yet the Islamic extremist factions within the Muslim World declared Jihad on America long before the events of 9/11. Following the carnage of this attack, Americans united and the United States decided to hunt and kill the spineless individuals responsible for the massacre.

From the beginning it was clear that this would be a different type of war; an unconventional war. This war would test our ability to quickly and effectively shift strategies and tactics. But most of all, this war would test our ethics, our values, and our own individual beliefs.

In the mid-1990s America's military came to the realization that urban combat would most likely be the scenario for our next conflict. By early 2000, nearly all soldiers were required to train for this environment. Mount sites were erected overnight on every Army base. As soldiers learned the tactics associated with urban warfare, heavy emphasis was also placed on leadership training in accordance with Army Regulation (AR 22-100). This leadership training is crucial because in an unconventional war, superiors, peers, and subordinates are tested daily on their ethical training and individual beliefs. Failure to train personnel adequately in ethical issues can have tremendous consequences. The

world has witnessed the negative actions performed by a few U.S. military personnel. The world has seen pictures and videos on television, and on computer screens. Whether it is shooting an injured combatant or cruel treatment of prisoners, these acts breed resentment. These stories and the images associated with them have made it hard to win “hearts and minds”. They also make it difficult to maintain the support of the American people in the war.

American soldiers are fighting an unconventional, asymmetric war on two fronts: Iraq and Afghanistan. This means that soldiers are going to battle every day, yet rarely do they see the enemy face to face. The enemy employs VBIEDs, IEDs, human suicide bombers, booby traps and sniper fire – none of which are face-to-face tactics. Our enemy has been, and continues to improve their skills in these type tactics. As we adapt and make strategic shifts, so they adapt and constantly change theirs. Bottom line: the enemy knows the U.S. military is too powerful to fight face-to-face so they have adapted their tactics accordingly.

Our enemy’s tactics, techniques, and procedures, (TTPs) are horrendous. To make matters worse, the enemy is not a nation state, but rather an extremist religious faction. They have no morals, no values, and no ethics. They do not subscribe to the rest of the world’s view on accepted warfare tactics. As America and its allies continue to deploy overseas, fighting war on Islamic extremists is becoming second nature. We as American soldiers have “restocked our kit bag”. We have learned to approach our foes from a new perspective. This type of battle is a chess game. As we have had to shift our tactics we are also dealing with the ethical questions and dilemmas that arise.

The Geneva Convention is the standard by which nations are supposed to operate during war. Islamic extremists do not fight in this manner, for they know it would lead to their quick death and defeat. Yet the only way to hold our moral high-ground is to continue to observe the rules of warfare recognized by most nations. In this matter we simply have no choice.

With units routinely deploying, some with over 30 months in a combat zone, how do they maintain their moral values and ethics when they do meet the enemy face-to-face, or clear a building, or find a severely wounded combatant, or interrogate a known bomb maker? The answer lies in the Field Manual, (FM 22-100). This is every combat leader's bible. A complete understanding is key to success on battlefield. Without a solid foundation of ethical training and guided leadership, many soldiers would lash out in an unethical way against their enemy.

Soldiers must never react to the mercy of their impulses. A way to accomplish that is to understand and adhere to the Warrior ethos. It is this ethos which reflects the established Army values. Leaders have tools available to them which facilitate the implementation of the Warrior ethos. These tools include the Code of Conduct, discipline, and instilling a sense of pride in the military's proud heritage. Warrior ethos requires consistent and unrelenting action to do what is always moral and fair. It means defeating the enemy with vigilance, but also with mercy.

Scenarios that test soldiers' ethics occur daily in the two fronts. For example, a known terrorist who has been responsible for the deaths of three members in your platoon has been captured. Do you let emotions take over and beat him into submission, or do

you question him using accepted Army interrogation procedures? By now the answer to this question should be clear.

Or consider this scenario and the number of ethical dilemmas faced in just one operation: A twelve man intelligence team sets out to conduct a source meet. The three vehicles are armed with crew service weapons. Before leaving the Forward Operating Base (FOB) you as the team leader have just been briefed that sniper fire and VBIED incidents are on the rise in that area of operation. The teams have rehearsed their actions to and on the objective. Minutes after leaving, a local national not paying attention, runs a road block, and is able to get within striking distance of the rear convoy vehicle. Do you as the gunner shoot a warning shot, a round to the radiator or the person driving the car? You know from your training that the Rules of Engagement (ROE), stress first fire a warning shot, if to no avail, disable the vehicle, and as a last resort take-out the driver. In this example, the gunner places a 7.62 round into the radiator and continues on towards the objective. Thirty minutes later, as your team enters the town, a dump truck is heading towards your convoy, traveling the wrong way on a one way street. By now all team members are tense, and on an adrenaline high from the previous incident. Back at the FOB, you as the team leader were briefed to be on the look out for such an occurrence. Recent reports cited a bomb laden dump truck in this particular area. The lead vehicle gunner is equipped with a 50 caliber machine gun. Immediately the gunner puts his training into action, by first waving the truck to move over and stop. Instead the truck continues to travel towards the convoy. At this moment the gunner is given permission to fire a warning shot. The gunner aims and shoots the pavement directly below the vehicle.

The dump truck pulls over and stops. Unfortunately, the bullet grazed the pavement, and a fragment hits an innocent boy in the eye.

The above examples were provided to demonstrate just how delicate the situation can be at times in reacting the proper way in combat. Understanding, demonstrating, and implementing established guidelines will aid leaders in their decision-making process, and will help avoid potential ethical dilemmas.

At no other time in history has America's fighting men and women faced the ethical issues resulting from the War on Terrorism. Soldiers often don't see the enemy face to face. Also, it is extremely difficult to differentiate between "good guys" and "bad guys". The enemies are not associated with a particular state and therefore they are enemy combatants rather than recognized soldiers from a legitimate nation. The enemy uses gruesome tactics and does not display established ethical war-fighting techniques. All of these facts make ethical training critical in order to maintain a vigilant yet moral fight. American soldiers must never give up the moral high-ground; they must adhere to the high ethical standards of the United States military.