

Ethical challenges in the global war on terror



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Abstract

The ethical dilemmas that a Soldier will encounter while fighting terrorism are numerous. The United States Military faces ethical tests daily in how it conducts the fight against global war on terror. We are fighting an enemy with no morals, principles or uniforms. Many accept as true that we handicap ourselves by fighting according to these principles. The United States Military aggressively confronts these hiatuses in morals whenever they ascend, and continues to emphasize our principles and values of the nation. Three areas in which the United States currently faces ethical challenges are torture, collateral damage, and the application of Law of War.

Ethical Dilemmas in Fighting the Global War on Terror

The current global war on terror presents the American Soldier with many challenges. None of these is more challenging than the ethical dilemmas that a Soldier will encounter while fighting terrorism. Fighting against an enemy that has no morals or principles can often lead us to question our application of our own morals and principles. The conflict about how right or wrong the action is versus how good or bad the consequences of the actions put our values to the test. History shows that a military force alone can defeat terrorism. However, these instances are of other countries, not the United States. The United States Military faces ethical challenges daily in how it attacks the global war on terror. Three distinct areas in which the United States faces ethical challenges are torture, collateral damage, and the application of Law of War.

Torture

Torture or the definition of torture, debated at the highest levels of our government reveals that the use of isolation and prolonged sleep deprivation constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and is illegal under the Common Article three of the Geneva Conventions (Kaye, 2009). The widespread argument is not about the moral or ethical problems with torture. The prevalent argument is that torture does not work, and that the intelligence obtained is worthless through the tactics of coercion. An ethical dilemma aside, history shows several examples where the use of unethical tactics provided tremendous attainment. An example that parallels Iraq and Afghanistan is the Battle of Algiers. In the late, 1950's France was fighting Islamic terrorists that tried to gain control of the country and oust the French. After two years of rebellious combat with several bombings and assassinations, the violent actions increased dramatically (Horne, 2006). The local police and military were powerless to confront the inhuman tactics used by the terrorists. After the assassination of a native mayor and the bombing of his funeral, procession at the cemetery the French could no longer standby without counter action (Horne, 2006). The decision made to match the terrorist's brutal tactics became a valuable deterrence against the terrorist attacks. The elite French 10th parachute regiment then ordered to take over and defeat the insurgency by any means necessary. They immediately began to torture captured Islamic terrorists for information. All detained individuals were subject to interrogation, and inhuman treatment. Within ninety days, the terrorist network that took eight-teen months to form fell to the hands of the elite 10th regiment. The entire organization to include the leadership within sleeper cells fell and the insurgency concluded. By all

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interpretations, the result of their actions made conceivable by the information collected from torturing apprehended Islamic terrorists (Horne, 2006). This example raises an ethical question. If doing something wrong yields something good, do the ends warrant the means? To the United States Soldier the answer is no. The example above cannot work within our military and goes against our moral values and beliefs. The Soldiers within our Army are obligation to do what is right even when placed in compromising situations. While we are, duty bound to win the nations wars, Soldiers are committed to win with the knowledge instilled by virtue of social principles and concepts. Soldiers remain obligated by a code of ethics to live by, while our enemy we face divulges all aspects of morality. The United States Military is not a perfect organization, and when examples of detainee abuse become public, the institution reacts strongly, morally, and ethically. A prime example was the world's outrage over the abuse and torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Collateral Damage

Collateral damage is a burning subject discussed by both those in and out of the military. Collateral damage is a U. S. Military term for unintended or incidental damage during a military operation (Cordesman, 2003). The term can refer to friendly fire, or the killing of non-combatants and the destruction of their property (Cordesman, 2003). When fighting terrorism the basic fact that always comes to the forefront is that terrorists or collateral damage hurts innocent people always. The manifestation of collateral damage came about during the Vietnam War when low drag general-purpose (LDGP) bombs fell from the sky and inflicted large amounts of civilian casualties. Civilian

casualties from U. S. actions ran from 100, 000 in 1965 up to 300, 000 in 1968, just from bombing (Romo, 2002). With the increasing media coverage, collateral damage became a moral and political issue. Historically, collateral damage remained an illusion of historicity and deemed not a major concern. Killing innocent civilians was inevitable due to the poor accuracy of bombs. Political reasons rather than military objectives often led to unwarranted collateral damage. The firebombing of Dresden is an example in which 135, 000 people lost their lives. It was the single most damaging bombing of the war including Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and all the more horrific because no strategic importance came from the action, since the Germans were already on the threshold of surrender (Crossman, 1963). As technology improved, so did the accuracy of our bombing. Currently, the United States uses bombs that can hit within six meters of their projected target. This type of technology led to targeted air strikes where we are trying to kill one person with a bomb. Examples of these strikes include drone attacks. According to statistics compiled by Pakistani authorities, more than 90 per cent of the more than 700 people killed in attacks targeting the tribal areas in 2009 were civilians (Drew, 2010). Terrorists are aware of our advanced technology and shifted actions to highly populated areas with the hope of discouraging a strike by increasing the costs in collateral damage. This tactic is effective with all but the highest value targets reported by former operational planners. The United States Military will agree to take up to thirty civilian casualties for every high value target killed (Jehl, 2004). They also reported that the Secretary of Defense could approve upwards to thirty and more (Jehl, 2004). The probability of civilian casualties joined with the negative publicity make these tactics morally and politically devastating to

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the United States objectives. With the added force the United States applies to high value targets along with the substantial collateral damage to the civilian population the United States essentially creates new terrorist due to our actions. If this continues, it will destabilize the morality and legitimacy of our actions in the hearts and minds of the people.

Law of War

The Law of War applies to the behavior of warfare and to relationships between belligerents and unbiased states. These laws apply only to nations that agree and consent to them in the form of diplomacy or international organizations. The United States Military adheres to the Laws of War, but our enemy does not (Cross, 2010). Terrorists do not abide by a code of ethics and often intentionally target persons sheltered by the Laws of War. Due to the environment the United States operates in the fight on terror, terrorists live and hide in the civilian population for protection. Terrorists cannot defeat our military in decisive combat, so they challenge our resolution as a nation. To achieve their goals they terrorize the civilian population in their country along with the populace in the United States. They do this in the belief that the American society will feel helpless. Terrorist promote this feeling by targeting non-combatants through kidnapping, ethnic cleansing, and bombings to promote fear. All of these acts rigorously test the military. With a civilian population that is largely aggressive towards are military Soldiers face tremendous ethical challenges when making a distinction between friend and foe. Following the Law of War places Soldiers in more danger by adopting tactics to avert civilian casualties. This leads many in the military to inquire why the U. S. follows the Law of War when our enemy uses it as a

force multiplier. The military relies on values, our goals to win while upholding, and maintaining ethics in our actions. The enemy deliberately forces Soldiers to violate our ethical values for political and propaganda value. Our society strongly believes in the principles of the Law of War and deviation from these principles undermines our actions.

Conclusion

The Global War on Terror places our country's ethics and moral principles to the test. Maintaining these principles when fighting an enemy who operates without moral standards is tremendously problematic. The United States Military actively confronts these lapses in standards whenever they arise, and continues to reinforce our principles and values. The world will judge us not only on our victory, but also on how we achieved it in respect to torture, collateral damage, and application of Law of War.