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DEFINING THE ESOTERIC FACTORS OF DECISION-MAKING IN INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS

Recently, a Marine LtCol was presenting a post deployment After Action Brief at the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA). He had been the Commanding Officer (CO) for a battalion of Marines who had recently returned from Afghanistan. In the opening remarks of his presentation, he posed a seemingly simple yet pointed question to the audience, “What is the Department of Defense (DoD) definition of enemy?” No one in the audience could provide an answer. The CO indicated that at the beginning of his deployment he could not readily find a good definition of whom or what the enemy was. The CO further explained to the audience how important it was to articulate his intent clearly to his staff and his Marines. This task was compounded because he found it difficult to identify, or more specifically define, the enemy beyond the common terms of “Taliban” or “insurgent”.

Gradually, it became apparent that the answer to the CO’s opening question was that there was not an approved definition of the word enemy for DoD, especially for an operational environment like Afghanistan. In effect, the CO had to develop his own definition of the enemy based on his knowledge, experience, and education, and convey that definition to his battalion. The CO indicated that the enemy was anyone or anything standing between his battalion and the success of the mission and ultimately the coalition’s counterinsurgency strategy. The battalion commander went even further while defining the battalion’s mission and gave detailed examples of how to enact different lines of operation in different contexts, all the while incorporating his definition of the enemy. The final portion of the CO’s presentation reflected on the overall success of his battalion’s deployment. He enumerated several examples of excellent results, all of which were achieved because his Marines knew how to define the enemy and how their CO would define success. This shared understanding helped reduce the stress of a complex situation.

Recognition of understanding is necessary to remove confusion in complex areas and allow difficult decisions to be made when time or criticality supersedes the ability for research.

The aforementioned example has been used to illustrate that sometimes a seemingly simple, commonly used word or concept can have a very elusive definition. While dictionary definitions are easy to identify and understand, the conceptual context in which words are used often is more complex than the word itself. The same theory applies to understanding ethics, morals, and values and how they

apply to the conduct of leadership, particularly leadership within the DoD and more specifically the Intelligence Community (IC). Many organizations espouse their own organizational values, many individuals claim to be guided by their own morals, and different organizations claim they are guided by their code of ethics. However, such terms are often misunderstood, misused, and mistaken for each other. Add in other words like, beliefs, convictions, or ideals and the discussion is even more convoluted. It is important to understand what each term means, how each one relates to each other, and how each is utilized in making the right leadership decision at the right time.

Many people within the IC, especially those who are or have been in uniform, are familiar with the military style of leadership and they have heard of the Marine Corps 11 Leadership Principles and 14 Leadership Traits.¹ Officers and enlisted personnel receive education regarding these traits and principles from the very beginning of military service and these models are reinforced throughout one's military career. What, however, is the basis of these traits and principles that seem so simple and straightforward? How were they formed? These concepts and guiding principles appear to be quite simple when first presented. In order to form a deeper understanding about these leadership traits and application in decision-making, we must first understand the philosophy behind them and understand that the basis of their existence comes from values, morals, and ethics. Unfortunately, much like the enemy in Afghanistan, these words are difficult to define for everyday use.

When defining a word for common understanding, it is best to begin with its simplest form. Webster's Dictionary defines a **value** as "a principal, standard, or quality regarded as worthwhile or desirable." A **moral** is defined as "a rule or habit of conduct." Finally, Webster identifies an **ethic** as "a system of moral principles or values."² When examining these simple definitions, it becomes apparent that each one of the words is related and that one appears to build on the other, increasing the complexity of each concept. .

Using the dictionary definition, it likens a value as something to strive towards, as in a quality that every individual should possess. Contextually, a value can be exemplified as, "the emotional worth you apply to human characteristics." Across the published world and on the internet you can find lists of values that someone else says are important. Some lists contain as many as 374 terms and many lists contain the same terms. Values are most commonly identified with an individual, but are also incorporated into societies and organizations at varying degrees and levels. While it may be that within a group people will share the same values, they are often unique in the worth or prioritization that is given to a specific value. Environmental stressors can radically re-prioritize what a person considers their values, but once the crisis has passed, they revert to their norm. Change in values will mature over

time but typically at such a slow pace that they appear to be fixed. (e.g., as an individual, you may value all human life. However, when another individual threatens your life with immediate harm, the prioritization of your life over another's is common.)

By contrast, morals are more like a set of rules in a game. They provide you guideposts of conduct that allow you to live with your decisions and progress forward, however these rules are yours alone and not necessarily agreed upon by others. Morals can be affected by an individual's values, but may be influenced more easily by upbringing, society or the environment.³ Just like the rules of a game, morals are learned over time and perfected the more the game, in this case decision-making in the IC, is played. Morality, or the act of living in accordance with a moral framework, is shaped when society presents the concepts of harm, welfare, and fairness.⁴ As the game is changed or the rules are modified, people's morals follow suit. These changes are based on circumstances or environmental inputs. Morals help guide individuals to act in such a way as to reduce harm to oneself or their society, to ensure greater welfare for society at large, and to ensure fairness to those who encompass society, taking diversity into account. Many have called this grouping of rules as their Moral Philosophy. As an additional level of complexity, the dictionary defines Moral Philosophy with one word: ethics.

Ethics become even more complicated as they tend to fuse morals and values into a system of openly shared "business practices" that is eventually accepted by society or a professional community. Over time, ethics emerge as the commonly accepted standards of conduct for a given society or segment thereof.⁵ These standards are designed to ensure that all decisions or actions executed by the individual are conducted with the common good of the society or organization in mind. All decisions made are done so with the intent that they are best for the organization or society and in line with the openly agreed upon ethical standards of the given practice. While a person may make an ethical decision, it may not be consistent with their personal values or morals; however, all decisions that affect people are viewed as moral. (e.g....If the decision to choose which office equipment to purchase is based solely on available funds, it may be viewed as ethically successful, but if that office equipment does not support the mission of the personnel utilizing it, it is a moral failure.)

Values, morals, and ethics are all complex issues, difficult for an individual to define, and therefore are likely difficult to implement when making leadership decisions. Many philosophers have debated these topics for thousands of years and the debate continues. Most of today's leaders do not have the luxury of time to philosophize about values, morals, and ethics. This is why we take time to study ethical or moral dilemma in service schools or leadership training; someone else has already done the initial thinking for us and has given us fodder for infinite additional thought relevant to our unique

situation.⁶ Similarly, leadership within the IC must incorporate values, morals, and ethics into every official or professional decision they make. When IC leaders understand what values, morals, and ethics are and how they are used in the decision-making process, they are better prepared to make decisions that are justifiable, no matter how unpleasant the decision. In the absence of time, a better understanding of values, ethics, and morals enables a decision-maker to make sound judgments. A senior civilian leader in Marine Corps Intelligence recently stated that the Marine Corps Intelligence Enterprise needs leaders who “make ethical decisions.”⁷ By establishing an easier, more refined definition of ethics, such leaders, uniformed or civilian, increasingly will make decisions that are, “good” for the organization or society. In this case, that society is the greater IC, Marine Corps Intelligence Enterprise in particular.

As intelligence professionals, it is important to understand values, morals and ethics in the conduct of providing the best intelligence available at a particular point in time. The number one responsibility of intelligence is to remove uncertainty regarding any decision.⁸ Many intelligence decisions being made in today’s conflicts involve other people and their societies. As a recent example, it has become evident to many in the IC that an understanding of Afghan ethics and morals is imperative when making decisions about implementing counterinsurgency policies affecting that population.⁹ It is folly for Western nations to impose our morals and ethics upon Afghan society, as any given foreign society may not necessarily identify with most Western ideological beliefs. By understanding the morals of any given society, and often its myriad of subcultures, decision-makers can better judge what impact our influence will have, positive or negative. What we see as the “greater good” for the people of Afghanistan may not necessarily be what they believe as their greater good.

In the conduct of intelligence, it is not enough to understand how values, morals, or ethics affect an adversary, it must be aware without influence. In order for intelligence analysis to be effective, to ensure that it provides the best assessment possible, intelligence must remain unbiased. Unfortunately, finished intelligence often has been written with the intent of supporting political policy or a strategic goal.¹⁰ The ethics governing intelligence require that analysis should be written to present the facts and, at best, predict what might happen based solely on those facts. It would be unethical and possibly immoral to modify intelligence to support a political agenda.¹¹ Before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, U.S. and allied intelligence agencies had information indicating Iraq was refining its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program. When the information from a single, highly valued human intelligence analysts scrutinized source, substantial evidence emerged indicating that the source was unreliable. However, many senior intelligence officials believed that their intelligence needed to

support the executive belief that Iraq was improving its WMD program and these officials tailored their analysis to support that conclusion, even in the face of contrary information.¹² Such decisions by these intelligence professionals were neither ethical (against the established norms) nor moral (they did not reduce harm) and may have led to an unnecessary military campaign. Because of this overly politicized analysis, the ethics of intelligence analysis have been incorporated into U.S. law (the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Protection Act) and are deliberately considered in all analytic products using the Office of Director of National Intelligence Analytic Intelligence Standards. Because the ethics and morals of intelligence can be so difficult and so dependent upon individual interpretation, they have been codified for the entire Intelligence Community and have become an integral part of intelligence analytic practices.

It is difficult to define values, morals, and ethics. It can be more difficult to implement those ideals into our every day decision-making process, although we may sub-consciously do so anyhow. Imagine if you as an individual are not clear in your understanding of these items, then compound it by not understanding these items in those around you, and finally in the complex application of those you are studying for analytical assessment. While values are often personalized they are affected by varying degrees of personal, organizational, environmental and societal levels; as such, they appear rigid but their prioritization is constantly changing. Morals are less unyielding and can be affected by values adopted by an organization or society and the by norms of a particular culture. Ethics are perhaps the most fluid set of rules to apply to everyday official decision-making, as these principals differ based on various positions, jobs, or responsibilities. There is no universal set of “business rules” for every situation or category; what is “ethical” in one context may not be so for another. It is not necessary for every person to adopt the same definitions, but if you cannot define it for yourself, how will you believe in it or be able to apply it. It is for these reasons that leaders must understand the difference among values, morals, and ethics and be able to use them each appropriately to make the best decisions. After all, the decisions made today, affect your tomorrow.

¹ *Guidebook for Marines*. (Marine Corps Association, 1986).

² Webster's Dictionary.

³ Immanuel Kant. “Good Will, Moral Worth and Duty,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Kant. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/#AimMetMor>.

⁴ Immanuel Kant. “Good Will, Moral Worth and Duty,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Kant. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/#AimMetMor>. In Kant's terms, a good will is a will whose decisions are wholly determined by moral demands or as he often refers to this, by the Moral Law. Human beings view this

Law as a constraint on their desires, and hence a will in which the Moral Law is decisive is motivated by the thought of *duty*. 3. Duty and Respect for Moral Law.

⁵ Immanuel Kant. "The Principle of Beneficence in Applied Ethics. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/principle-beneficence/#KanThe>.

⁶ One of the reasons military personnel study ancient battles is that there are lessons to be learned from them and applied even today. By studying such situations in combat, combat leaders have foreknowledge on how to deal with similar events in modern times. By having this foreknowledge, leaders can call upon it and make sound decisions faster.

⁷ Karin Dolan, opening comments made to Ka-Bar Cohort 1 in learning module 1, February 23, 2010.

⁸ Allen W. Dulles, *The Craft of Intelligence* (Harpercollins Press, 1963).

⁹ As adopted from the Small Wars Manual and the recently rewritten counterinsurgency manual for the U.S. Armed Forces.

¹⁰ Report to Congress of the 9/11 Commission.

¹¹ This is based on the legislation passed in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Protection Act. This legislation led to the Analytic Integrity Standards (intelligence Community Directive 203) used in the IC today when assessing the validity and partiality of an analytic product.

¹² Report to Congress of the 9/11 Commission.