

 PREFACE 

The Army's professional ethic is built on the trust granted to our profession and the legal authorization to use violence in order to compel an adversary and to assert the Nation's will. The military remains among the most trusted professions in America. Our continued ethical conduct is paramount to maintaining the respect that generations of Soldiers have forged.

The American people trust us to fight and win the Nation's wars, but simply winning is not enough. We must win ethically and in accordance with our shared values. It means the basic concept of decent human conduct and doing the right things the right way. This is especially challenging for Soldiers in the chaos of battle who have to make life-changing split-second decisions. To ensure the Army remains a stronghold of moral correctness, leaders of character need to be present and demonstrate to Soldiers ethical courage in combat by doing the right things the right way.

Character does not happen by accident; it requires a commitment by the leader to internalize the values of the organization and to understand that the unit's success depends on the leader exhibiting ethical courage by doing the right things in the right way. This cultivation of character strengthens trust within the unit and preserves the American people's confidence in the Army.

In 2001, I attended the National Security Fellow Program at Harvard University. I took a course led by Father J. Bryan Hehir, who taught in the Divinity School at the time, about the ethical use of force. This was the class I was in when the 9/11 attacks shattered the world order as we knew it. Everyone at that time was scared and nervous. We discussed in shock what people could do because of how they saw the world. They could take airplanes and crash them into buildings and intentionally kill thousands

of innocent people. At that moment, the Army as we knew it was changed and we were going to war.

I took the notion of just means and just cause from Father Hehir's class with me throughout my combat experiences. As I went into positions of leadership, I felt that leaders had a responsibility to instill into Soldiers the just way of conducting combat operations. These thoughts are easy to talk about in classrooms, at briefing tables, and outside the environment of combat. It is essential for leaders to go beyond instruction for opportunities to demonstrate just actions and work through how we must conduct ourselves in combat.

During one deployment to Iraq in 2004, while I was assigned as an Air Cavalry Brigade commander, I experienced an engagement I will never forget. It was a trying period across the region, and many units were involved in intense combat. One day, I was on patrol on the west side of Baghdad with two Apache helicopters supporting an infantry unit engaged in serious combat that had taken many casualties over the course of the week from rocket attacks. The unit recently established checkpoints after receiving intelligence on insurgents moving equipment and people through their area of operations. Those reports also attributed the recent mortar and rocket attacks to a white van in the area. While Soldiers were conducting checkpoint operations, a white van suddenly approached. Despite the obstacles in place and Soldiers signaling to stop, the van swerved around it and took off. The unit on the ground followed rules of engagement and escalation of force criteria and assessed the van as demonstrating hostile intent. They made the decision to attack and called on us to engage the vehicle.

An Apache helicopter can take out a vehicle in less than 2 seconds, so we could easily eliminate the threat as soon as we arrived. This made me consider the ethical use of force, and I stated to my crew, "Hold on. Let's just make sure we know what's going on here. We're not taking fire. Just take a deep breath, and let's develop the situation. We have some time here." I maneuvered the aircraft and forced the vehicle to stop. We were stunned when women and children exited the van.

That was a hard lesson for everyone involved in that operation. It was a situation where everyone thought we were doing the right thing, but would it have been right to engage the van? These are the tough situations that Soldiers in combat are in, and they have to make hard decisions. It took a little more time to confirm if we should engage, but it made a difference. That is why leaders have an obligation to be involved and demonstrate to Soldiers how to apply just cause and just means in combat.

Our world continues to rapidly change. Advances in robotics, unmanned combat platforms, and artificial intelligence have the potential to increase our lethality in ways previously unimaginable. Adversaries with different views of ethics challenge and change the character of war as they innovate more lethal weapons and apply technology across multiple domains like cyber and space to control information. As these advances occur, so do the debates on military ethics.

One hundred years ago, the First World War brought technological changes including submarines, aircraft, and machine guns that sparked ethical debate. World War II and the nuclear age reignited the debate, as did the Cold War. The debates disguise the truth that, despite our constantly changing world and character of war, the moral foundation of our military remains fixed.

The Nation is going to send young men and women to war. These Soldiers will deploy and fight. What internal struggles will they sustain from decisions they made in combat? We are among the most trusted professions because of the moral foundations that are the basis of our Army. As the world continues to change around us, it is strength of character and our ethical foundation that must remain. We must do the right thing the right way.

—General James C. McConville
Chief of Staff of the United States Army