

FEATURE ARTICLES

Leader and Character Development Through Ethics Education

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Abstract

Developing leaders of character to sustain a just and honorable standard of military ethics into the future unites the armed forces, reinforces crucial bonds with allies and partner nations, and keeps the faith of a nation's people. As military members across joint and multinational forces work to strengthen military ethics in the profession of arms, they face many challenges inherent to the complex nature of military ethics. This article identifies underlying psychological, cognitive, and sociological factors making ethical challenges in the military difficult to recognize and overcome. This analysis offers evidence-based solutions to confront these leadership and character development issues through purposeful military ethics education across the forces. To address these concerns, this article distinguishes the scope of military ethics and its role in the joint force. Next, it exposes challenges affecting ethical military conduct. Finally, it provides a practical examination, supported by theoretical literature, to propose applicable approaches for developing and maintaining military ethics. Ultimately, to better function as a unified profession of arms, the joint force may benefit from a more balanced approach to inculcate military ethics, reinforce support and accountability, increase applied understanding of virtues and values, and navigate situational factors in the joint and multinational environment.

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Introduction

For many organizations and academic institutions, forging a path to the future has meant placing an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM; Department of Education, 2022). While this is an important approach to developing cutting-edge innovations, the tumultuous social, political, and global issues continuing to emerge expose broader, more complex challenges requiring additional areas of expertise as well. In the next decade, leaders will face revolutionary and sweeping change efforts for multifaceted problems, such as overcoming social injustice and inequity, biased misinformation, violent extremism, political and international divisiveness, environmental policies surrounding climate change, and recovering from a global pandemic affecting the lives of billions of people around the world. Consequently, developing leaders of character for this uncertain and complex future must also emphasize social and behavioral sciences with a keen emphasis on ethics education.

As the United States navigates critical challenges at home and abroad, the need for strong ethics as a central tenet of leadership development will undoubtedly continue to manifest. One area where this is most evident is the future of military operations in an increasingly joint and multinational environment. While the military is traditionally called upon to defend the nation and its interests as a lethal force and deterrent against global threats, its role continues to expand to support a range of operations. Military members will continue to engage in worldwide efforts into the future as peacekeepers, negotiators, advisors, strategic planners, policymakers, nation builders, governmental liaisons, international representatives, and more. The trust placed in a military force by its nation and its ability to effectively wield power justly (Reiley & Jacobs, 2016), influence hearts and minds

benevolently (Lieber & Reiley, 2016; 2019), and maintain its status and respect in the eyes of the world (Reiley et al., 2018), may rely on honor, integrity, and ethics more than any other profession. This article emphasizes the role of ethics education in developing future military leaders, outlines potential challenges, and provides practical recommendations to overcome them in a globally integrated force.

The Future of Military Ethics Education in the Profession of Arms

Military ethics education stands firmly at the crossroads of developing leadership and character in the profession of arms. Sustaining a just and honorable standard of military ethics unites the armed forces, reinforces crucial bonds with allies and partner nations, and keeps the faith of a nation's people. Indeed, military ethics is the joint force's most essential uniform, but cases of misconduct have left it stained (e.g., Department of Defense, 2021). While most members of the armed forces dedicate themselves to serving their country honorably and living ethically, destructive incidents of compromised ethics undermine the vital trust placed in the military by the nation—and damage its integrity in the eyes of the world. Ethical transgressions among a force's highest positions may even threaten internal trust (Vanden Brook, 2015), which is a unifying element of the profession of arms, and essential to the chain of command and the future of integrated operations. The United States' former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Martin Dempsey, recognized this threat a decade ago and called for a renewed commitment to the profession of arms built on trust and leadership—one defined by ethics, standards of excellence, code of conduct, and professional values to sustain the joint force's dedication to the rule of law (Dempsey, 2012; 2014). The 24th U.S. Secretary of Defense, Secretary Charles "Chuck" Hagel reinforced this sentiment by appointing a senior general officer

to serve as ethics czar and stem the tide of growing ethical issues (Garamone, 2014). However, ethical transgressions are merely visible symptoms. To combat these transgressions, the military must equip itself to better understand and defend against their root causes.

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. recently instituted an executive order emphasizing a broad plan designed to restore and maintain public trust in the U.S. government through policies aimed at ethics (Exec. Order No. 13989, 2021). Now, more than ever, the U.S. military must also reinforce its commitment to professional ethics, and work to address underlying concerns, as it faces growing tests both at home and abroad in an increasingly expansive, multinational environment.

Military operations exist within a broad constellation of national powers, which rely on governmental and nongovernmental organizations, partner and ally nations, indigenous cultures, and regional stakeholders. The joint force's ability to integrate effectively with partner-nation militaries is essential to global operations and, at their core, these partnerships rest on military ethics. Commanders, and certainly all members of the profession of arms, will face many real-world challenges inherent to the complex nature of military ethics: How does one define a common professional ethic in a multicultural force? What causes individuals to behave unethically in a profession so reliant on standards of conduct? What practical approaches develop and sustain military ethics effectively?

To address these issues, one must first distinguish the scope of military ethics and its role in the joint force. Next, one must expose challenges affecting ethical military conduct. Finally, a practical examination must draw from the theoretical literature to propose applicable approaches for developing and sustaining military ethics into the future. Ultimately, to better function as a unified profession of arms, the joint force may benefit from supplementing its traditional

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The Scope of Military Ethics

In an effort to focus the broad and diverse subject of military ethics, Cook and Syse (2010) offered:

Military ethics is a species of the genus “professional ethics.” [I]t exists to be of service to professionals who are not themselves specialists in ethics but who have to carry out the tasks entrusted to the profession as honorably and correctly as possible. It is analogous to medical ethics or legal ethics in the sense that its core function is to assist those professions to think through the moral challenges and dilemmas inherent in their professional activity and, by helping members of the profession better understand the ethical demands upon them, to enable and motivate them to act appropriately in the discharge of their professional obligations. (pp. 120-121)

While ethics draws from the lessons of history and theoretical discussions of moral philosophy and theology, Cook and Syse (2010) argued, military ethics must have a more practical focus centered on the applied profession of arms. Soeters (2000) also noted, “Uniformed organizations are peculiar. They represent specific occupational cultures that are relatively isolated from society. The very landscape of the primary mission for which militaries exist sets them apart from other public or private institutions within a society” (p. 465). The application of military ethics requires joint and multinational forces to frame their guiding ethical standards thoughtfully, recognize unique challenges, and develop a uniformed approach to upholding these standards.

Standards Guiding Military Ethics

While it may be difficult to define universal standards of ethics, the profession of arms often carries the burden of making ethical decisions uniformly and acting in the best way possible—or at least avoiding lesser alternatives. To evaluate these alternatives, Myers

(1997) proposed three general aspects of an ethical decision one should consider: a) the individual making the decision, b) the action taken, and c) the resulting outcome. Aligning three prominent, normative ethical approaches with these aspects in a military context may inform a common standard of military ethics. For example, Rhodes (2009) suggested teleology or *virtue ethics*, which emphasizes the role of one’s character, may provide a lens for evaluating the individual making the decision; *deontology*, which judges ethics based on duty and adherence to values and rules, may provide insight for evaluating the act; and *consequentialism*, which weighs the “rightness” or “wrongness” of one’s conduct by its results, may be helpful for assessing outcomes (pp.19-20). Military members need not be theoretical ethicists to understand and apply standards based on these elements. These considerations contribute to a shared conceptualization of military ethics and seek to achieve outcomes aligned with core virtues and values. These guiding approaches assist decision-making and fill gaps between more formal requirements in military ethics.

Formal Requirements in Military Ethics

Laws, policies, and agreements unique to the profession of arms provide standards of conduct surrounding military ethics. A military exists to serve the needs of its nation. Governments and citizens provide support to the military and expect members to comply with regulations designed to regulate the force. Formal standards identify unique ethical requirements individuals must follow in the profession of arms, regardless of personal beliefs. Adherence to formal requirements, such as the Manual for Courts-Martial, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), and the Joint Ethics Regulation, maintains the public’s trust and the nation’s credibility. Formal international rules, such as the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC),

Status of Forces Agreements, and The Hague and Geneva Conventions, which include over 170 nations, also affirm shared values, outline responsibilities, and formalize ethical standards for international forces—distinct from non-military citizens.

Military Ethics in the Joint and Multinational Forces

Ethical behavior serves a very practical purpose in a military force. Based on social learning theory, individuals learn and interpret appropriate organizational behaviors by observing the behaviors of others (Bandura, 1986). For example, Mayer et al. (2012) found, “When a leader models desired ethical behavior and uses rewards and punishments to help ensure appropriate behavior on the part of subordinates, [workers] are less likely to engage in unethical behavior and less likely to have relationship conflict with coworkers” (p. 166). Moreover, military followers who believe their leaders are ethical are more willing to accept the influence of these leaders, and more likely to perform duties beyond their formal job requirements to support the organization (Reiley & Jacobs, 2016). Prior research also links ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005) to improved task performance across different cultural contexts (Piccolo et al., 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2011)—a critical consideration for joint and multinational operations, which future leaders must continue to navigate and foster.

Joint operations involve two or more agencies, military services, or departments operating under a single commander (Joint Publication 3-0, 2017). When facing ethical problems, the joint force will expect individuals across these diverse groups to arrive at similar conclusions. Nevertheless, these organizations and other coordinating entities have different subcultures, which affect ethical decision-making. The joint force relies on each organization’s

interpretation of virtues, enforcement of values, and systematic processes to operate effectively and ethically.

Similarly, multinational forces (i.e., two or more nations, structured as a coalition or alliance) will continue to be challenged with language barriers, cultural differences, social distinctions, competing national interests, and several other future obstacles, which rely on unifying military ethics to form solutions (Joint Publication 3-16, 2013; Febbraro et al., 2005). Joint and multinational forces test their decision-making through international training events (e.g., Theater Security Cooperation and Security Force Assistance exercises) and tackle real-world challenges during operations around the globe. These efforts incorporate international military forces to perform the vital joint functions of command and control (C2), information, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment (Joint Publication 3-0, 2017).

Military ethics must guide joint and multinational forces across these shared functions. For example, ethics distinguishes the line between enhanced interrogation techniques and torture during intelligence gathering. Employing fires concerns military ethics when selecting and engaging targets. Protection functions rely on military ethics when determining priorities, responsibilities, and boundaries. Information functions not only integrate all other joint functions, they are expected to operate beyond reproach as they seek to change or maintain perceptions, attitudes, and other elements driving behaviors and are also relied upon to support human and automated decision-making (Joint Publication 3-0, 2017). While the importance of these functions is clear, their execution in a joint and multinational environment can often be uncertain. Forces must navigate distinctive national interests, methods, histories, and traditions. These factors

influence national strategies and objectives, cultural norms, the enforcement of rules and regulations, and even organizational structures. This may cause inconsistencies in operations related to personnel policies, service programs, doctrine, functions, and effectiveness. Forces that strive to create a common understanding of military ethics will enhance and nurture a deeper awareness of international cultures and norms—and may more effectively overcome their unique challenges.

Joint and multinational forces rely on military ethics to enhance coordination, collaboration, communication, and trust. Working from a common framework for military ethics helps guide joint commanders and multinational personnel through ethical dilemmas not covered or supported through formal legal mechanisms. Military ethics also serves as a steady hand in difficult circumstances, such as those requiring military members to prioritize the protection of civilians—who might also be enemies—over the members' personal safety, or in situations mandating strict standards of conduct, even when enemies disregard or exploit those standards. Overall, the profession of arms must understand and apply the virtues and values of military ethics within the context of joint and multinational operations because they form a basis for common actions across the joint functions essential for the success of any future mission.

Challenges Affecting Ethical Military Conduct

Military ethics is certainly an expansive issue with practical importance to the joint and multinational environment. Transgressions within the armed forces demand an examination of fundamental challenges in ethical military conduct. Chief among these challenges are those related to virtues, situational factors, and values.

Virtues

Virtue ethics emphasizes one's moral character as the central focus for determining behavior (Wright et al., 2020). General Dempsey's vision of military ethics in the profession of arms rested, in part, on promoting virtues—specifically duty, honor, courage, integrity, and selfless service—as the guiding force for military professionals (Dempsey, 2012). Western military academies have adopted this virtue-based, Aristotelian approach, since they view its principles as beneficial to the military profession (Robinson et al., 2008). The fog of war creates a chaotic, time-compressed environment ill-suited for philosophical contemplation. The military believes a virtue-based approach creates desirable, conditioned responses aligned with the force's core beliefs (de Vries, 2020). This approach aims to reinforce who the military member is, versus what they should do, in order to guide future ethical decisions.

A potential limitation of this virtue-based military ethics approach is the difficulty of identifying and governing a definitive list of virtues necessary for all the roles and responsibilities military members might face. Although efforts have been made to outline a set of virtues for the joint force (Dempsey, 2012), each service has its own unique list as well. For example, the U.S. Army calls for seven virtues: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (ADP 6-22, 2019). By contrast, the U.S. Air Force emphasizes three: integrity, excellence, and service before self (AFI 1-1, 2012). Adding to this complexity, multinational forces differ from country to country and between their forces. For example, the British Army espouses selfless commitment, courage, discipline, integrity, loyalty, and respect for others (British Army Code 63813, 2018), whereas Canadian forces focus on duty, loyalty, integrity, and courage (Department of National Defence, 2009). While noting common virtues provides an important

ethical foundation for joint and multinational forces, inconsistent interpretations of virtues—or the relative importance of each virtue—may also lead to ethical conflicts and enforcement challenges, especially among forces with more drastically differing cultures.

Another fundamental limitation of the virtue-based approach is it assumes all ethical failures are attributable to core character flaws (Grassey, 2005). In practice, ethical failures may not be so straightforward. Wong and Gerras (2015) observed a virtue-based focus is detrimental because it allows members of the military profession to “sit in judgment of a few bad apples, while firmly believing that they themselves would never lie, cheat, or steal” (p. 2). These biased and dismissive reactions expose a deeper intricacy. Moreover, like many components of ethics, one’s virtue is not truly revealed until it is tested. Consider cases where military members struggle to de-conflict loyalty to individual services versus loyalty to the joint force, or those who must temper the extremes of bravery to avoid recklessness. Promoting virtues does not encompass all the considerations necessary for practical ethical decision-making. Robinson (2007) argued, “Teaching soldiers that they must be brave, loyal, and so forth, does not tell them what to do when there are conflicts between the requirements of various virtues” (p. 31). He further warned characterizing ethical failures in terms of flawed virtues “may prevent leaders from taking a critical look at the institutions they lead and thereby ensure that morally corrupting rules, structures, and systems remain” (Robinson, 2007, p. 31).

Even bastions of military leadership and character development like the United States’ military academies have experienced recent, large-scale cheating scandals (Losey, 2021; Mongilio, 2020; Zaveri & Philipps, 2020). While these lapses in ethical decision-making offer hard learning opportunities and highlight the

need for continuous improvement in military ethics education throughout the joint force (Cohen, 2021), the involvement of hundreds of cadets and midshipmen across these institutions provides evidence these offenses cannot simply be pinned to the flawed virtue of a few bad apples.

Situational Factors

This leads to a second challenge for ethical military conduct: situational factors. When evaluating ethical military conduct, individuals tend to underestimate the role situational factors play in determining behavior (Miller, 2017). In practice, person-based characteristics (e.g., virtues and values) do not drive conduct independently; instead, a combination of person- and situation-based factors is more likely to influence an individual’s actual ethical behavior (Mastroianni, 2011). For example, Wong and Gerras’ (2015) study of ethical transgressions in the U.S. Army highlighted situational challenges pervasive across the joint force. They described how an incessant flood of requirements forced members and units to choose which requirements will be done to standard, versus those that “will just be reported as done to standard.” (Wong & Gerras, 2015, p. 2). Consequently, individuals have adapted to these situational pressures through *ethical fading* (i.e., effusive desensitization that fails to recognize the moral components of an ethical decision) and *rationalizing* in order to convince themselves that their honor and integrity are intact despite compromises in their ethics (Wong & Gerras, 2015).

Adding to this effect, individuals differ in their personal perceptions of control in a situation. Some individuals attribute outcomes primarily to their own actions, while others see their behavior as less consequential, and attribute outcomes to factors beyond their locus of control (Galvin et al., 2018).

Thus, situational factors may change the way military members approach and respond to ethical challenges since some situations may make it more difficult for certain individuals to perceive their personal control over outcomes—or even the pertinence of ethics to the decision. These situational constraints can

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become so commonplace, widespread unethical work-arounds, which individuals may fail to recognize are unethical, may cause military members to believe these circumventive practices are the only way to succeed. The military's rigidly structured organizational hierarchy may also be a situational factor that socializes members to uphold the organization's preferred methods—and even influence members to choose these methods over more ethical alternatives (Smith & Carroll, 1984). The joint and multinational environment adds additional situational challenges related to socialization processes, environmental influences, and organizational hierarchies, which members must overcome to meet unrelenting requirements. As a result, these situational factors play a prominent, yet underappreciated, role in ethical military conduct.

Values

A third challenge affecting ethical conduct in joint and multinational forces relates to the role of shared values. While the academic study of values in organizations has

waned in recent years, these elements help shed light on several ethical and practical aspects of human behavior (Kraatz et al., 2020). General Dempsey's (2012; 2014) call to action emphasized that the joint force must live by the values embodied in the U.S. Constitution. This perspective balances professional ethical guidance

based on virtues (i.e., desirable, person-based characteristics, such as integrity) with values-based ideals (i.e., cherished principles, such as freedom and liberty). As discussed previously, formal standards (e.g., UCMJ) capture some of the joint force's values-based component of military ethics. Similarly, multinational forces articulate shared values in Technical Agreements, Status of Forces Agreements, and Status of Mission Agreements, as well as willingly supporting national and international laws (Joint Publication

3-16, 2019). These become the practical tools and formal criteria regulating joint and multinational forces' efforts to operate uniformly and ethically as military professionals.

However, these standards are not without their limitations. For example, international humanitarian laws (which apply to both state and non-state actors), along with LOAC and The Geneva Conventions, are designed to limit military actions and guide decisions during armed conflict by protecting persons who are not, or are no longer, participating in hostilities. Although these laws and agreements are a more formal expression of common values, they are sometimes vague and not binding to all nations or groups. These standards do not provide a universal norm for those who interpret them differently, or those who do not support or agree to them. Furthermore, these formal mechanisms may unintentionally restrict military forces from conducting operations aligned with the nation's intended values. For example, Canadian

General Roméo Dallaire (2004) described a practical limitation of these laws and agreements in his recount of military ethical challenges in Rwanda. While deployed as the head of a small, multinational peacekeeping force, Dallaire served as a United Nations (UN) mediator between two ex-belligerents. In January 1994, Dallaire sent warnings to UN-Rwanda Headquarters of plans to exterminate over 4,000 Tutsis inside the city of Kigali. He found several weapon caches indicative of an impending genocide and local tribal leaders corroborated intelligence indicating extremists' intent to build an armed militia. Dallaire sent several requests for permission to seize these weapon caches; however, under the UN Charter, UN-Rwanda Headquarters could not give him permission to shift to offensive operations and therefore denied his requests. Dallaire and his team, restricted by the UN Charter, did not seize the weapons and roughly, two months later Hutu militias armed with these weapons began systematically killing Tutsis across Rwanda. By the time the genocide ended, more than 800,000 were dead (Dallaire, 2004). The values articulated in existing formal policies were in conflict with Dallaire's localized intelligence and situation. This incongruence demonstrates a critical limitation of these formal values-based mechanisms in the role of ethical military decision-making.

Inculcating Military Ethics

The military has a long history of utilizing top-down approaches to train its forces and communicate standards—including military ethics. The top-down approach allows commanders to control, pro forma, an organization's approach to military ethics centrally, promoting clear and coherent unity of effort (Robinson et al., 2008). This approach relies on senior leaders to establish the organization's ethical principles and exemplify desired behavior to foster ethical conduct at lower levels (Mayer et al., 2009). In spite of its ostensive importance and advantages—on

its own—this approach may prove tenuous, since any perceived malfeasance among these senior leaders can compromise important ethical foundations across the force. Overreliance on top-down approaches makes organizations too bureaucratic, inflexible, and slow to change (Bolman & Deal, 2017). These characteristics traditionally plague the military's efforts to institute meaningful reforms.

The top-down approach may also present toxic barriers to military ethics training. Junior military members may construe a pure, top-down approach as yet another tedious training requirement imposed on them by senior leaders, which some personnel may complete with minimal care or effort (Robinson, 2007). These perceptions limit junior members' personal investment and ownership of the process, which often leads to cynicism and resentment rather than long-term organizational change. Given these limitations, infusing a more integrative and bottom-up approach may help address unforeseen ethical challenges.

A bottom-up approach promotes wider ownership of ethical development by delegating the leading role to members at lower levels of the chain of command (Robinson, 2007). This approach may facilitate more open and relevant discussions, and allow for subtle differences (e.g., service differentiations and mission challenges) among individual units. A bottom-up approach relies on a more organic, decentralized philosophy to leverage perspectives from members at lower levels and create changes in day-to-day organizational behavior (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). This may also reveal ethical challenges more commonly found at operational or front-line tactical levels, which a higher, strategic-oriented view may not fully recognize or address. While a bottom-up approach does offer advantages, it is also not without its limitations. For example, inconsistent developmental

approaches may lead to an incoherent ethical identity across the joint force.

Based on the advantages and disadvantages of both top-down and bottom-up approaches, the joint force may benefit from a more balanced tactic, which combines these methods to develop military ethics. These two approaches may not be incompatible. For example, organizations “may have a centrally operated program that outlines the principles and provides training for the trainers, while the actual management is conducted at the lower levels” (Robinson, 2007, p. 27). This combined approach may effectively support future changes necessary to cultivate military ethics, since it promotes a participative and collaborative process driven by organizational stakeholders at every level.

A combined, balanced approach should allow the joint force to establish a clearer top-down interpretation of ethical military principles, but still permit individual units to be the stewards of ethical development—tailoring programs to address their idiosyncratic challenges from the bottom-up. Similar combined approaches have targeted safety and security programs in the U.S. military by delivering a unified top-down emphasis on these issues while relying on military members at every level to share the ownership of these challenges (AFI 91-202, 2021). A combined approach may also support the integration of multinational forces through a focused effort to share and understand ethical perspectives internationally, which may educate the profession of arms more uniformly. The empowering elements of this approach allow members to create broader social norms and integrate cultural elements within, and across, joint and multinational forces to support future operations.

Recommendations for Military Ethics Education

Traditionally, the U.S. military’s primary approach for instilling ethics takes place during basic training or accession programs. Military personnel are also commonly required to perform annual computer-based training or attend mass briefings on issues related to ethics. When military units experience a conspicuous ethical infraction, leaders often enforce additional mandatory briefings or remedial training to emphasize the ethical issue. However, on their own, these ineffective approaches do little to explore and instill the complex facets of military ethics (de Graaf, 2017; Mulhearn et al., 2017). To be clear, this is not a call to add even more training requirements across the forces. Instead, military forces must refine their current approach and maximize the value of time already dedicated to this effort. Military ethics education must cultivate the wisdom necessary for military members to understand the applications and potential limitations of the force’s virtues, and reinforce profession-of-arms-based values, which guide ethical military decision-making across a spectrum of situations. This requires a more well-rounded educational approach than relying on focused training interventions alone. Training merely instructs individuals on procedures they must follow for known situations, but an education better prepares them for new and unknown challenges. Ethical military decision-making relies on both of these elements to be successful.

First, the military should supplement senior leaders’ identification, uniformed-interpretation, and accountable-demonstration of virtues and values with a more balanced, bottom-up approach to engage junior members, emphasize these ethical elements, and highlight ambiguities. For example, a standardized, modeled process to military education drives

individuals to take ethical dilemmas through a series of questions to find the appropriate ethical answer (Jensen, 2013). One method is to develop instructors who are able to frame and evaluate Myers' (1997) three general aspects of ethical decisions (i.e., the individual making the decision, the action taken, and the resulting outcome). These instructors could then educate the force more effectively by facilitating discussions, examining relatable case studies of both positive and negative applications of military ethics, promoting informed awareness of standards, and focusing on unit-specific challenges. This is not only an effective approach to developing military ethics (van Baarle et al., 2017), but it also offers opportunities to align bottom-up perspectives, intentions, and behaviors with top-down values and virtues. This effort is more than training the military force on what is ethical and what is not; it aims to educate the force on how to identify and approach complex ethical decisions in an unpredictable future.

Second, the military must provide avenues to assess, revise, or remove systemic practices clouding ethical military conduct. For example, policies and procedures incentivizing dishonesty, ethical fading, or rationalizing, such as unrelenting reporting requirements and administrative demands prevalent both in garrison and combat environments; political influences across and surrounding the service branches; and gatekeepers along the chain of command who exert pressure through exclusionary in-groups (Crosbie & Kleykamp, 2018; Wong & Gerras, 2015). Senior leaders should promote and support revisionary efforts openly by providing members opportunities and resources to identify limitations or develop alternatives (Argote et al., 2020). Concurrently, military members at all levels must guard against social frictions and any

potential repercussions associated with whistleblowing or challenging the status quo (Dungan et al., 2019). In addition to individual efforts, formal teams comprised of members from all levels of the organization should explore, evaluate, and recommend alternatives to their leaders on a regular basis—not just in response to ethical indiscretions. In any case, leaders must stress the need for change, while addressing members' ethical concerns deliberately, and instituting recommendations actively, as a formal function of the military organization (Kotter, 2012).

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Third, military branches—and the joint force—should extend and inform their approach through multinational forces to solidify standards of virtues and values, and address broader situational factors and challenges. To better prepare for future operations, U.S. and partner forces should actively exchange military members at multiple levels of their forces for the deliberate purpose of sharing and understanding the challenges—and successes—of military ethics efforts from other international perspectives. For example, professional military education programs provide an important context for the exchange of ideas and insights among U.S. and international military personnel; ethics education and discussions at all

levels must be a critical emphasis for these experiences. Future multinational exercises should also evaluate and support approaches specifically fostering a more uniformed interpretation of military ethics. These military-ethics-focused activities may overcome international challenges and the ambiguity associated with military ethics, leading to more successful joint and multinational operations.

Fourth, military ethics education should capitalize on existing programs in the joint environment. For example, the CJCS's Combatant Commanders Exercise Engagement and Training Transformation (CE2T2) program supports the development of Joint Training Plans (JTPs). JTPs include all Geographic Combatant Commands and strive to enhance joint integration and synchronization. The joint force could leverage the role of JTPs more broadly to emphasize military ethics education aimed at strategic, operational, and tactical decisions across the joint functions. The CE2T2 program reaches the worldwide force, and could shift the consideration of military ethics to a more central role in the joint and multinational environment.

Fifth and finally, conventional, joint, and multinational forces must extend this learning beyond the classroom and incorporate military ethics education into how forces view and assess daily decisions and operations. This includes making military ethics a more prominent consideration in routine decisions, as well as deliberate planning and risk assessments. For example, this might include specifically evaluating ethical considerations during go/no-go milestone decisions, or reinforcing ethical decision-making approaches as part of broader quality assurance functions. Developing the forces' understanding of ethical approaches, virtues, values, situational factors, and their associated challenges supports efforts to reinforce ownership and

accountability for military ethics across the profession of arms.

Conclusion

Ethical decisions are complex and multifaceted. This discussion contributes to the force's understanding and future practice of military ethics by exploring some of the practical, ethical challenges experienced in the joint and multinational environment. While ethical challenges may test the U.S. military, it remains a dedicated exemplar for military ethics and one of the United States' most trusted and well-regarded institutions (Gallup, 2021). This article's discussion and application-focused conceptualization of military ethics theory may still serve to support the development of future leaders, and strengthen the joint force's uniformed ethical identity, its ability to serve the nation and international partners honorably, and its influence in the world.

Military ethics education must cultivate the wisdom necessary for future members to understand the applications—and potential limitations—of the force's virtues, and reinforce profession-of-arms-based values, which guide ethical military decision-making across a spectrum of situations. This ethics education must go beyond the demonstration and enforcement of virtues and values by senior military leaders. It must leverage bottom-up developmental efforts to support the practical evaluation and, when necessary, revision of systemic challenges to safeguard ethical military conduct at all levels of joint and multinational forces. This combined commitment to military ethics in the profession of arms by joint and multinational forces can enhance future leader and character development and help to sustain the long-term success of military operations around the world.

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