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Introduction

The term ethics relates to the study of human behaviour in respect of being right or wrong. Throughout history ethical reflection has seldom been carried out in isolation from theology. Although many would argue that morality in the West today is driven by secular rather than religious values, this is not the case in the Muslim world, nor in many developing countries with a strong religious or ideological tradition.

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the West has come to realise that they do not have a monopoly of ethical values. For example, many in the Muslim world feel that there is both a degree of arrogance and hypocrisy when Western democracies start to speak about ethical foreign policies and ethical (and accountable) military doctrines. However, in recent years traditional Islamic belief has been distorted by extremist militant doctrine, which is epitomised by intolerance and bigotry. The West in turn is portrayed as the enemy of Islam; it is seen as collectively amoral, aggressive and greedy, with the USA depicted as the Great Satan!¹

It is an unfortunate fact that down the centuries it is intolerance and bigotry that has been the cause of so much death and suffering at the hands of religion of whatever persuasion. It is therefore vital for us to counter extremism by both political and military doctrine and deeds; we need to show compassion during military operations and to give no cause or excuse for extremist leaders to make propaganda from the inadvertent killing of innocent lives and the mistreatment of prisoners.

Our Western laws and ethical values are principally derived from Christian principles, which in turn are based upon Old Testament and Judeo-Christian tradition. Although these traditions and teachings have been eroded and sometimes prostituted over the centuries, they still form the basis of our ethical thinking. At the centre of this thinking is the belief that life is sacred, has value and should be respected. That the Almighty is both creator and mentor of the human spirit

and human life is precious to Him. It therefore follows that whatever protects or enhances human life is good and whatever destroys or degrades human life is wicked. Thus our attitude to right and wrong is inextricably linked to this thesis and must equally apply to the military as to all other professions who espouse Western values. However, it is important to balance these ethical values against those of other faiths, for example we must compare them with Islamic traditional values.

The Christian Tradition

In the early days of the Christian Church, military service was not encouraged. Indeed most early Christians were pacifists, believing in Christ's injunction to turn the other cheek and walk the extra mile.² However, it is clear that Christ implicitly respected the role of the Centurion, who requested healing for his servant, where Christ responded with the amazing words: "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith...go; be it done for you as you have believed."

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Much later we read in the Canons of Hippolytus (336 AD) that a "Soldier is not to kill even when ordered to do so." He goes on to say, "A Christian is not to become a soldier, unless he is compelled by a chief bearing the sword. He is not to burden himself with the sin of blood." Alan Kreider explains that if a Christian soldier took life, he could not participate in the Holy Communion until he was "purified by a punishment, tears and wailing." However, he fails to give detail of the punishment, or how long his exclusion would last!⁴

Over a period of time, Christian military doctrine was developed and became known as the theory of the "Just War". St Ambrose (340 – 396 AD), like Cicero (106 – 43 BC), believed in justice and called upon soldiers to risk their lives to protect the innocent. St Augustine (354 – 430 AD) enlarged upon the teachings of Ambrose by determining whether the "Cause of the war was just and declared by a legitimate political authority that is rightly motivated". A further development of the "Just War" theory centres on the work of Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274 AD), where he lists three necessary conditions for a war to be just: sovereign authority, just cause and right intention. The latter had two components, namely, a right intention that aimed at peace as well as the need to avoid a wrong intention.⁵ The work of Aquinas led to the development of the principles of the "Just War" by various 17

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Century Jurists.

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In summary the "Just War" criteria is as follows:

Jus ad Bellum (Just War)

- The war must have a just cause.
- The war must be waged by a legitimate authority.
- The war must be fought with a right intention.
- The war must be a last resort.
- The expected results of the war must be proportionate.
- There must be a reasonable hope of military success.

Jus in Bello (Conduct of War)

- The weapons and acts of fighting must be discriminating: non combatants may never be targeted.
- The weapons and acts of fighting must be proportionate.
- All the legal rights of enemy soldiers and civilians must be honoured.

The Muslim Tradition

In Islam the focus is on moral character. The Prophet Mohammad repeatedly said that the best Muslim is the one who has the best moral character. Mohammed was asked: "Which Muslim has the perfect faith?" He answered: "One who has the best moral character".⁷ Also, Mohammad said: "On judgement day there will be no deed weightier in the scale of the believer than his noble character. Allah does not like an obscene and rude talker, and the person who has a good character achieves the status of a person who prays and fasts".

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Islam is a religion that focuses heavily on character building. There is a strong relationship between faith and good character. A person cannot attain full or perfect faith without attaining good character. "A person can reach a high status in the hereafter by his good conduct though he may be weak in matters of worship..."⁹ To achieve good character he must obey the Five Pillars of Islam:

1. To Believe in the oneness of God (*Tawheed*)
2. Prayer five times a day (*As-Salat*)
3. To give charity (*Zakat*)
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan (*Sawm*)
5. A pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*), if you are able

The third admonition, “to give charity,” is relevant here as it shows the practical reality of character. It shows compassion as an obligation to serve the welfare of citizens, also to establish a relationship of kindness and love amongst all classes of society. It is also intended to reduce the love of material wealth and increase the desire to help those in need. These injunctions of compassion are very relevant when considering military ethics and the conduct of war (military *jihad*).¹⁰ In the Q’uran we find the following verse, which shows a strong element of both justice and compassion: “If two sides quarrel, make peace between them. But if one trespasses beyond bounds against the other, then fight against the one that transgresses until it complies with the law of God; and if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair” (Sura 49:9). And also, “If the enemy inclines towards peace, then you must also incline towards peace” (Sura 8:61)

A useful summary of the conduct of military operations was given by Muhammad’s successor, Abu Bakr, in the form of ten rules for the Muslim army: “Stop, O people, that I may give you ten rules for your guidance in the battlefield. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy.”¹¹

An examination of Islamic tradition concerning the “Rules of War” from the Quran and the Hadith suggests that war is not regarded as a good thing. Islam means peace - “*Salaam aleikum*”. That

it is not right to inflict suffering to take power or gain food or land. This is tyranny: "If anyone walks with an oppressor to strengthen him, knowing that he is an oppressor, he has gone forth from Islam."

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That war should only be called in the following situations:

1. In defence of the cause of Allah, not conquest
2. To restore peace and freedom of worship
3. For freedom from tyranny
4. When led by a spiritual leader
5. Only fought until the enemy lays down his arms
6. Women, children, old and sick should not be harmed. Trees and crops should not be damaged.

With regard to point number 4 (above) only certain spiritual leaders can declare a *Jihad*:

1. The Prophet himself and the first four Caliphs
2. The Caliph of the *Ummayyad (Abu Sayad)* dynasty
3. The Caliph of the *Abbassid (Abu Abbass)* dynasty
4. The Caliph of the *Ottomans*
5. The last call for a *Jihad* against non-Muslims was called by the *Ottoman* caliph-sultan in 1912. It was a failure
6. A leaders' call to *Jihad* is not binding – he must convince the faithful!

Although written in the Seventh century, these directives are still very relevant today. However, the problem in the minds of many people today is how these admirable principles could be distorted by some militant Islamists, such as Osama bin Laden, who wrote in 1998: "American policy does not differentiate between civilians and military. Child, human or animal. Example Hiroshima and Nagasaki where they tried to eliminate a whole nation...we also do not differentiate between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians; they are all targets of our *fatwa*."

This includes all who share in the killing of Muslims, assaulting their holy places or helping the Jews occupy Muslim land."

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The clear assertion here is that the Americans (and their Allies such as the United Kingdom) have forfeited the right to be treated with the same respect as the earlier enemies of Islam at

the time of the Prophet. However this interpretation of absolute war is contrary to the classical (Salafist) doctrine from the early years of Islamic conquest. It is also far removed from the principles of honour applied by the great Muslim leader, Saladin the Great (1138 – 1193 AD). His generally chivalrous behavior was noted by Christian chroniclers at the time, especially in the accounts of the siege of Kerak in Moab (1183). Despite being the nemesis of the Crusaders, Saladin won the respect of many crusaders, including Richard the Lionheart. Saladin became a shining example of the principles of honour and chivalry.

Analysis

It can be seen that there is great synergy between the general ethical principles of military warfare reflected both by Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition. The military in both the USA and the U.K. embrace standards of professional ethical conduct, both written and unwritten. The West Point motto is "Duty, honor, country," and the Sandhurst motto is "Serve to Lead." All professions lay down standards of conduct, for example the medical profession is dedicated to the preservation of human life as laid down in the Hippocratic code.

The problem for the military is that they need to define much more clearly what is meant by an ethical code of practice, as the consequence of getting it wrong can lead to appalling loss of life. It can also threaten to destroy the purpose of the mission itself by alienating the very people they are intending to help. History tells us that this has happened all too often in the past. For example the Amritsar massacre (1919), the My Lai massacre (1968), Bloody Sunday (1972), and until recently the indiscriminate aerial bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan by U.S. and British forces.

The result has been the destruction of trust and respect in both Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as creating a dangerous security environment, which has led to the killing or maiming of many hundreds, if not thousands, of innocent lives. Some of the mistakes made are that of misunderstanding or underestimating the importance of local religious and cultural traditions and thereby causing unimaginable anger. Generally, British servicemen have lived up to the very highest ethical standard in the most difficult situations, but even if a very few fail and let their service down, the consequence can be fatal to the whole mission.

Conclusion

Although much work has already been done, we need to clarify further our basis for ethical standards and practices, in particular our knowledge and understanding of the ethical values and cultures of other countries and their religion. It follows that these values must be translated into more detailed guidelines for everyday activities. Once these values have been both accepted and embraced they need to be taught to subordinates, who need to wholeheartedly accept and commit themselves to these ethical principles and practices. In this way we can challenge extremist dogma and intolerance.

Leadership is by example and this includes morality and integrity. These aspirational characteristics are common to both Islam and Christianity. An example of the latter is the motto, "Serve to Lead"; whereby we are urged to put our soldiers' interests before our own. However, although we teach selflessness, we tend to reward ambition. Sometimes officers appear to be brilliant to their superiors, but in some cases they are sycophants who treat their subordinates with arrogance and contempt. On some occasions officers initiate massacres of the innocent, and these isolated incidents need to be examined in detail to determine whether they were caused by a predictable character flaw.

Although some work has been done on military ethical standards and practices, I believe further research is needed. For example we need to:

1. Re-examine current British military ethical codes and practices, with a view to producing a more robust ethical code within a multi-cultural society. This may or may not reinforce the traditional Judeo – Christian values, but these need to be challenged and tested in the light of the secularisation of our Western society with its changing mores and customs.
2. Research and identify the ethical codes and practices of other countries that, for example espouse Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions. From this we can adjust our procedures and practices to avoid unnecessarily antagonising the indigenous peoples of the countries in which we serve.
3. Re-examine past failures, violations and massacres, to learn the lessons and to determine why they happened and whether they can be avoided in the future by a more rigorous code of ethical practice. We also need to examine successes, where good leadership has succeeded in establishing well respected ethical values.

4. Establish a firm academic and empirical basis for the teaching and training of British military ethical codes and practices. This should take the form of an anthology covering the following elements:

- A review of the Judeo – Christian ethical tradition in the U.K. and U.S.

- A review of military ethical traditions and practices in Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist countries to form a basis of understanding and possibly a connection with U.K. practices

- A examination of a varied number incidents where massacres, atrocities and violations of human rights have taken place at the hands of the military in order to determine patterns and lessons

- Studies of successful operational commanders, who have been constrained by ethical principles, integrity and moral courage

- The profiles and psychology of infamous leaders, who have not been bound by any ethical code. Can they be recognised or profiled early in their military careers and, if so, can they be retrained?

The results of these research studies should point the way to changes that need to made to U.K. military ethical codes, practices, teaching and training. This is a most urgent requirement as the consequence of getting things wrong will seriously undermine the purpose of any military operation and reflect badly on the United Kingdom's standing in the world and especially that of our excellent Armed Forces. Who knows, sometime in the distant future we may realise Isaiah's dream of "beating our swords into ploughshares"...and neither shall they learn "war anymore."¹⁴

ENDNOTES

1. Shaykh Usamah Bin-Muhammad Bin-Ladin and Amir Ayman al-Zawahiri: "We -- with Allah's help -- call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim Ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson". 23 Feb 1998

2. The Gospel of Matthew, Ch 5 v 39 - 41

3. The Gospel of Matthew, Ch 8 v8-13

4. Kreider, Alan. "*Military Service in the Church Orders*". Journal of Religious Ethics. 2003 p 419

5. Dobbin, Victor. *Why Ethics, Why Christian, Why You?*. Impact Printing, Ballycastle, 2009

6. Spanish theologians, Francisco de Vitoria (1486 – 1556AD) and Francisco Suarez (1548 – 1617AD) and the Dutch Jurist Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645AD).

7. Tabarani. <http://learndeen.com/jm/deen-islam/aqueeda-a-tawheed/36/105>

8. Imam Ahmed. Encyclopaedia of Islam Online

9. Abu Dawood. Encyclopaedia of Islam Online

10. *Jihad* literally means “struggle”. So military *Jihad* is war, but spiritual *jihad* is the battle, or struggle, to improve oneself spiritually etc. The term

Jihad

was also used by Ayatollah Khomeini to rebuild Iran after the first

11. Aboul-Enein et al, *Islamic Rulings on Warfare*, P 22, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Diane Publishing Co, Derby PA

12. Hadith. Bukhari Islam

13. Newsweek, 20 Jan 2008

14. Isaiah 2 v 4, Micah 4 v 3