

WAR PSYCHOLOGY AND THE MILITARY MORAL DILEMMAS

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The article presents one of the most significant psychological aspects experienced by the military during their operations – ethics and morality.

Thus, it dives deeper into the idea of “war psychology”, to then analyse the biggest ethical and moral dilemmas of the military during battle.

Far from exhausting the subject, the article wants to draw attention to the fact that, in the end, the military is still human, and in the absence of adequate preparation for combat and adequate post-action psychological support at the end of the conflict, moral wounds can appear, which, most of the time, are as painful and devastating as the physical ones.

Keywords: war psychology; military; dilemma; morale; wound; conflict;

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHICS AND MORALE IN WAR PSYCHOLOGY

Certainly, discussing the military ethical and moral dilemmas in wartime must begin by defining these notions. Thus, by *ethics*, we mean the set of norms in relation to which a human group regulates its behaviour to distinguish what is legitimate and acceptable in achieving goals (DEX, 2022). *Morality* is defined as being the set of beliefs, attitudes, habits, reflected and fixed in principles, norms, rules, determined historically and socially, which regulate the behaviour and relationships of individuals with each other, as well as between them and the collective and whose respect is based on conscience and public opinion (Ib.).

War psychology is a branch of military psychology, which studies the person, before the outbreak of war, during its development and after its completion (Dobre, 2020). The three phases are stated because people begin to think and behave differently before the outbreak of an armed conflict and will continue to adopt a particular way of being both during the war and for some time after it ends.

Both ethics and morality are specific to human society, from ancient times to the present, but they have undergone significant changes from one historical period to another and from one civilization to another, depending on certain contextual factors, such as: the power and leadership style of a certain leader, religion, political system, people’s access to resources, local customs, cultural aspects, the type of interpersonal relations between the inhabitants of a certain geographical space, the system of social organization, the dangers to which people from a certain period or region were subjected etc.

Thus, for example, what is totally immoral in one religion may be tolerated in another – for example, the consumption of alcohol is intolerable in the Islamic religion, while in the Christian religion it is accepted. Or, polygamy is accepted in the Muslim religion, while in the Christian religion it is intolerable. These differences between the ethics and morals of large human communities are just as well encountered today.

The phylogenetic approach to ethics and morality in military confrontations respects the same benchmarks as that of the entire human society. Thus, if, in the past, the conquest of a city, followed by its looting, devastation and destruction and the transformation of prisoners into slaves was absolutely normal, nowadays, through the adoption of international conventions and protocols, ratified by most

of the world's states (The Hague, 1907; Geneva, 1949 and others), things have changed significantly, not only from a legal point of view, but also from a moral and ethical point of view, with significant psychological consequences.

Contemporary military conflicts, including wars, respect, at least declaratively, a series of rules of international humanitarian law, which reflect the ethical and moral principles of human society of this historical time. Failure to comply with them attracts serious accusations of “*crimes against humanity*” or “*war crimes*” from the international community and a strong psycho-emotional reaction from society in general.

THE ETHICAL AND MORAL WOUNDS

It has been talked, in countless studies, about the *injuries and physical trauma* to which soldiers are subjected, fighting in different theatres of military operations. Thus, we refer to damage to organs, muscles or bones (following the shooting), loss of parts of the body (following contact with mines or explosions), paralysis (following wounds that cut the nerves), loss of senses – sight, hearing, kinaesthetic etc. (following contact with fire, very loud noises or toxic chemicals), damage to the skin and appearance (following exposure to burns), severe intoxication (generated by contact with chemical or radioactive substances), systemic diseases (due to contact with pathogenic germs) and even death.

Obviously, several scientific studies have also dealt with psychological injuries and trauma (Brock, Lettini, 2012). They bring together both psychiatric and, above all, psychological suffering, generated by the military's contact with extreme life situations, such as: being injured, being captured by the enemy, being taken prisoner, losing relatives, friends and comrades during armed confrontation, contact with extreme human suffering, generated by war (refugees, war destruction, lack of food and water etc.), war crime (robbery, ferocious revenge, betrayal, desertion etc.) and much more. Most of the time, these traumas are brought together under the syndrome of “*post-traumatic combat stress*”. If we do not intervene quickly and professionally, from a psychological point of view, many of the problems that arise can degenerate into mental illnesses, with serious and long-term consequences, not only on the (ex)military, but also on his family and even on society, in general (Jamieson et al., 2020). Some of these traumas are associated with painful and complex somatizations, which further complicates the diagnosis and the decision on the next treatment. The “*moral and ethical wounds*” of the military also contribute to this second category of psychological conditions. Although there is no established definition of this category of psychological injuries, we appreciate

that “*moral and ethical injuries*” are psychological conditions generated by marked and totally incompatible differences between the value system of the military and the dramatic reality of the battlefield. They are generated by the moral and ethical dilemmas (situations with two exits, both unfavourable), to which the military is subjected suddenly and very intensely, on the battlefield (Grace, 2016).

These ethical and moral dilemmas generate negative feelings of great intensity, which are very strongly imprinted in the subject's psychic system, disturbing it strongly, in some cases, even irreparably. The military, most often than not directly involved, from an operational point of view, in such situations, fails to adapt to the reality of the battlefield, because his personal values (most of them strongly imprinted in his being, from the time of peace) prevail and create an apocalyptic state of psychological discomfort that prevents him from developing any mechanism to reduce cognitive dissonance.

In what follows, we will address some of the most common ethical and moral dilemmas the military faces on the modern battlefield. For ease of expression, in what follows, although we will write “*moral dilemma*”, we will refer to the whole concept, as it was previously described.

ETHICAL AND MORAL DILEMMAS OF THE MILITARY IN THE THEATRE OF OPERATIONS

Although human society has evolved and many of the old customs of war are no longer found in the training of the military and in their behaviour on the battlefield, reality has shown that life and death situations in the theatre of military action, which can decide victory or defeat, produce tragic contexts, in which ethics and morality, be it legally justified or simply psychologically, are destroyed or at least significantly affected.

Next, we will analyse, from a predominantly psychological perspective, the most significant moral dilemmas of the military today, including those faced by the military in Ukraine, which, by the way, have also been used as case studies for this article.

The Dilemma of Killing Another Human

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of not killing another person and, on the other hand, the idea of killing a man, even if he is declared an “*enemy*”. The dilemma is an extreme one indeed. If you do not kill the enemy, he can kill you or your comrades, you do not carry out a direct order, and you are subject to the opprobrium of your own citizens. If you kill him, you think that it is against nature, that maybe he also has a wife, a child, a desperate mother, waiting for him at home, and maybe, at the time of reference, he really did you no harm (Grossman, 2009).

Military confrontation presupposes, par excellence, the neutralization of enemy forces. If, in the past, this “*neutralization*” involved real massacres, nowadays, recent military confrontations have shown that an increasing emphasis has been placed on the “*surgical*” elimination of legitimate military targets. Moreover, the contact between the belligerents was significantly reduced, using modern kinetic strike systems – precision weapons, missiles, and drones. Obviously, only very modern armies have access to these means of combat. This fact is designed to minimize the “*moral dilemma*” to which the military is exposed.

By excellence, every person, during peacetime, is educated “*not to kill*”. Killing a human being, even by mistake (for example in a car accident) is most severely condemned, both by society and by law. The Church reinforces this value in the conscience of each person. In wartime, this “*supreme sin*” is transformed into a “*virtue*” if it refers to the enemy. Most people cannot suddenly reset their value system even in such dramatic situations. Many of the accounts of soldiers involved in military action (from the First World War to the present have confessed, post-factum, that they did not directly target the enemy, so as not to live with the feeling of guilt).

The psychological mechanisms to reduce the cognitive dissonance of the military, in such situations, involve strategies of dehumanizing the enemy, of highlighting the atrocities that the adversary has committed, of showing the fact that the military action is perfectly legitimate, of emphasizing the idea to save the people from a ferocious dictator, to liberate a territory that historically belongs to a certain party, to remove the oppression of the enemy on a certain population/ethnicity, to recover the goods and resources that rightfully belong to the country etc.

The analysis of the confrontations in the war in Ukraine allowed us to find that the weapons and tactics used by the aggressor aimed at the indiscriminate and total destruction of entire cities, and the killing of combatants and the civilian population located there. This created the conditions for deep moral wounds.

The Dilemma of Believing in the Fight’s Legitimacy

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of serving your country, as a soldier, and, on the other hand, the idea of not causing suffering to other people. The dilemma is an extreme one this time as well. If you do not carry out the orders of the military commanders, you risk being tried by Court Martial, and if you carry them out, you risk violating your own values and moral principles, because you do not believe in the justice of the cause you are fighting for, or maybe because you have friends, relatives, and dear acquaintances in that country.

Relations between states involve, in certain circumstances, armed confrontation. It is an extreme form of foreign policy and even diplomacy. The purpose for which a military confrontation is triggered is extremely diverse: struggle for power, regional geo-political imbalances, support of a dissident faction in a state, competition for resources, personal goals of high-level leaders, redistribution of spheres of influence, imposing the interests of one state on another state, removal of a dictator, elimination of an explicit threat, assertion of a firm political will etc.

To reduce the moral dilemma, in such cases, recent military interventions needed, for the most part, an international legitimization (the UN, in most cases) to justify them. Thus, the military fought under the mandate and flag of the UN or other international/regional organizations, for a noble purpose.

The analysis of the confrontations in the war in Ukraine allowed us to ascertain the fact that each of the involved parties tried to “*legitimize*” the military action in the consciousness of own citizens as best as possible. Even under these conditions, interviews with the aggressor’s prisoners of war showed that many of them were not motivated enough to fight and did not even understand what was happening to them.

The Dilemma of Fulfilling Illegal Orders

The dilemma places, on the one hand, a series of moral and legal rules and principles for fighting (in accordance with international protocols and conventions) and, on the other hand, the idea of winning the fight by any means, be they illegal (atrocities of all kinds – war crimes, mutilations, killing of prisoners, rapes, starvation etc.). Sometimes, it is not even about winning the fight, but only about criminal and inhumane revenges or acts of gratuitous sadism, for one’s own pleasure (Kubany, 1994).

The dilemma is an extremely serious one. If you respect the rules and principles of armed combat, you risk losing the battle and even the war...honourably. If you resort to means of combat prohibited by international conventions, there is a possibility of winning some battles, but you are violating the values you believe in. To this aspect, it can be added the conformity to the group and the power of persuasion of an autocratic leader, who does not offer alternatives to get out of the situation.

The psychological mechanisms to reduce the cognitive dissonance of the military, in such contexts, involve arguments like: “*if you are not with us, it means you are with the enemy*”, “*you have to choose, between our team and theirs...*”, “*in war, anything is allowed*”, “*the end justifies the means*”, “*only cowards sneeze...*” etc.

Officially, the state cannot accept such acts of cruelty, committed by its own soldiers, but simply tolerating them represents a gesture with many meanings.

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine allowed us to observe (on media channels) some hard-to-imagine atrocities against some of the captured soldiers (beatings, mutilations, killing in macabre ceremonies etc.). We wonder how many of those involved, perhaps as mere witnesses, faced the moral dilemma and how much they suffered because of it.

The Dilemma of Self-sacrifice during Battle

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the ultimate military honour (that of giving your life for the country, through a heroic gesture) and, on the other hand, the idea of escaping alive, at any cost.

The dilemma is an intense one. If you withdraw from the battle for fear of being killed (desertion, retreat without orders, surrender, abandoning the battle, abandoning weapons, betrayal etc.), it is very possible that that battle will be lost, and your unit comrades will be killed or captured by the enemy. The consequences of such an act are difficult to estimate in a real situation.

Although there are moral imperatives to justify saving one's life during combat – explained by reasons such as: the idea that any armed conflict is temporary, the love for one's family, the fact that you do not believe in the justice of the cause you are fighting for, fear, the instinct of self-preservation, the idea of a bright future after the war, the idea of supporting the military effort in other struggles as well etc., they pale before the orders given by the military commanders. After all, every military man knows that he can be killed in battle. Withdrawal is only possible by order, under certain, well-defined, circumstances.

Thus, the state discourages personal actions to save one's own life, to the detriment of the mission, and brings, through the military organizational culture, elements to reduce cognitive dissonance, such as: *"we will recover any military from the hands of the enemy"*, *"one for all and all for one"*, *"no one will be left behind"*, *"we take care of you more than you can take care of yourself"*, *"we are a team"*, *"traitors, defectors and cowards will pay for their deeds"*, *"we do not forget our heroes"*, *"heroes never die"* etc.

At the same time, it must be stated that the enemy will try, through well-targeted psychological aggression actions, to encourage as many soldiers from the opposing camp to leave the fight as possible.

Analysis of the conflict in Ukraine showed that many soldiers deserted, surrendered, and even betrayed, just to escape alive. Certainly, they will live many years with this moral wound.

The Dilemma of Protecting Civilians in War

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of protecting civilian life in wartime and, on the other hand, the neutralization of civilians, especially when they can compromise a combat action or the lives of you and your comrades. The dilemma contains many aspects of a moral nature. Civilians (be they children, mature people, or old people) can be relatives, friends, or compatriots of the enemy, who can support his actions in one way or another (moral, through war production, economic, agricultural, scientific, social, political etc.), or simply refugees who do not want to get involved in the conflict in any way. Sometimes they may belong to neutral or even friendly countries in the military conflict zone.

In this complex context, the military should choose between protecting civilians, according to morals and international legislation in the field, and neutralizing them, according to the momentary interest of the mission they are carrying out. For example, what will a military man do on a secret mission in enemy territory, who has been exposed by a child from the opposing camp? What will a military man do when he sees a child with a gun pointed at him? Will he kill the child and save the mission or will he let him live and compromise his life, his comrades' life, and the mission as a whole? Recent conflicts have raised many such psycho-moral situations before the military. Sometimes, the circumstances were even more dramatic, because the enemy deliberately involved in the fight children, women, old people. Certainly, the decisions taken at that time produced significant moral injuries, against the background of the resolution of the dilemma situation.

The psychological mechanisms to reduce the cognitive dissonance of the military, in such situations, involve arguments like: *"the mission before everything"*, *"our lives are more important than theirs"*, *"we cannot compromise the mission"*, *"we appeal to self-defence clause"* etc.

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine showed that such moral dilemmas were encountered here as well, which produced deep psychological wounds. Living the rest of your life with the burden of killing a child is not easy!

The Dilemma of Destroying Public Goods

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of protecting cities from the destructive actions of war (especially historical monuments) and, on the other hand, the idea of destroying them, in the name of their *"liberation"*. Obviously, the destruction does not refer only to some armaments factory or some list of strategic targets, but considers, par excellence, the bombing of residential districts, schools, shops, theatres, critical infrastructure (water reserves, power plants, food warehouses, food factories etc.), so that the enemy leaves that territory

as quickly as possible, and it is easier to conquer. Demoralizing the population is also on the list.

The Second World War made full use of the destruction of civilian facilities as a combat tactic. Added to this was the moral discouragement of the civilian population, which was supporting the enemy's war effort through the indiscriminate bombing of localities. Thus, through massive bombing, scores of cities were completely razed, and millions of civilian casualties were unjustifiably thrown into extreme death and suffering. Although the international conventions that followed the second world conflagration prohibited such a fighting tactic, it continues to be found in recent conflicts to this day.

The emotional statements of the downed pilots, who saw the effects of their bombings on the ground, are a living testimony of the moral trauma they experienced.

The psychological mechanisms to reduce the cognitive dissonance of the military, in such situations, involve arguments like: *"the enemy is hiding among the civilians"*, *"there was an ammunition depot"*, *"terrorists are hiding in that neighbourhood"*, *"that power plant feed a weapons factory"*, *"make all those who support the enemy pay"* etc.

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine demonstrated that, despite some international acts, which prohibit the destruction of cities, this battle tactic continues to be used by the invaders, on a large scale. We wonder, in this context, if it really causes moral injuries to those who put it into practice.

The Dilemma of Applying Inhumane Treatments to Prisoners

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of respecting the legitimate rights of prisoners of war and, on the other hand, their physical and psychological torture, to extract from them secrets that can lead to the rescue of one's own troops or to the neutralization of the enemy, as a justified step in obtaining victory.

The situation of mistreatment of prisoners was present not only in the conflicts before 1945, but also in those that followed this year (Barela et.al., 2020).

The psychological mechanisms to reduce the cognitive dissonance of the military, in such situations, involve arguments like: *"everything for victory"*, *"their statements save ours"*, *"they must speak"*, *"we are the masters of our prisoners"*, *"because we give them a chance to live, they must speak"*, *"they must pay for what they did"*, *"everything is allowed in the interrogation, as long as information comes out"*, *"I am only doing my duty to the country"* etc.

The analysis of the war in Ukraine showed that such prohibited practices continue to occur. They cause serious moral injury with long-term effects to both

prisoners and those holding them in custody. Sometimes, some combatants cannot even hope for POW status, being summarily tried, charged with war crimes, and executed.

The Dilemma of Collateral Victims

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of accomplishing the military mission without collateral casualties and, on the other hand, that of accomplishing the military mission with an agreed margin of collateral casualties.

Combat situations are extremely delicate, and sometimes it is almost impossible to accomplish the military mission without causing collateral casualties (usually innocent civilians who happen to be at the scene of the attack). The big moral question is *"What is the permissible limit of collateral casualties?"* Obviously, no military regulation will allow itself to stipulate such a limit, no matter how small. The official tolerance is zero, at least in theory.

To reduce the cognitive dissonance and moral injuries to which the military is subjected, there are explanations like: *"a regrettable error"*, *"combatants used human shields from civilians"*, *"combatants organized a command point right in an area residential"* etc.

The accidental or even deliberate killing of civilians clearly produces moral injuries, as the resolution of such a dilemma is extremely difficult (MacNair, 2005).

The analysis of the war in Ukraine highlighted that this dilemma was also present, and its effects certainly produced serious moral wounds.

The Dilemma of the Military Doctor during War

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the duty of a doctor, according to the Hippocratic oath (to save any human life) and, on the other hand, the idea of saving the life of an enemy/terrorist, wounded in battle.

This recently analysed (Levy, 2008) dilemma, has highlighted some professional, moral, and emotional contradictions that military doctors experience, when the problem of saving the life of an enemy arises, especially when medical resources are scarce and medical priorities are extremely large.

Sometimes, because an enemy was chosen for emergency surgery, instead of one's own soldier, it can lead to real moral wounds, especially if the soldier from one's own army dies (Rochon, 2015).

To reduce cognitive dissonance and moral injury, arguments like the following are used: *"The Hippocratic Oath is more important than anything"*, *"that is what God wanted"*, *"I just executed the order"*, *"I treat what I receive, in turn"*, *"I am not God"* etc. We have no data on the operation of this dilemma in the war in Ukraine.

The Dilemma of Battles with Civilians

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea that fighting should be fought only between legitimate combatants and, on the other hand, the idea that anyone can become an enemy if they take an action hostile to force.

The recent situations of military confrontations, including those in some Peace Keeping and Peace Enforcement missions, for the evacuation of dignitaries (diplomats, high-level leaders etc.) from conflict zones, have shown that the military has repeatedly been under the siege, the direct attack of some rebel groups or even of the civilian population, revolted for a certain reason. In such cases, perhaps the easiest way for the military to respond would have been to open fire on civilians, but such an approach would obviously have defied both the rules of military engagement and morals, as it would have produced many victims among the demonstrators. On the other hand, waiting for aid and the failure of negotiations can strengthen the positions of the rebels, who will not hesitate to attack when they consider that they have the tactical advantage (Levy, 2008). So, what has a military man to do in such a dilemma?

To reduce cognitive dissonance and prevent moral injuries, there are used phrases like: *“we are not criminals, we are soldiers”, “help will come”, “we will only use as much force as necessary”, “we are only defending ourselves”, “we did not cause the attack”, “they attacked, they will bear the consequences”, “why should we die”* etc.

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine allowed observing the harsh formulas used by the occupying forces to discourage the demonstrations of the local population.

The Dilemma of Treason

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of defending your country's cause, at all costs, and, on the other hand, that of betraying your country, for personal or other advantages.

This issue was treated extensively in *“Psychology of Betrayal”* (Dobre, 2020). Thus, it could be observed that the circumstances of betrayal and the types of betrayal, with their psychological implications, are very complex and numerous.

Betrayal of the country, without a doubt, remains treason, regardless of the motivation behind it, because it implies, in the event of an armed conflict, the loss of the battle, the killing of many countrymen and not only that. However, history has shown that betrayal can also have a positive connotation, if it saves lives, if it leads to peace faster, if it prevents possible criminal plans of some crazy leader (Ib.).

Each of the combatant camps encourages the betrayal of the opponent through all kinds of formulas, each more original than the other. Thus, to reduce cognitive

dissonance and prevent moral injuries, betrayal is supported by statements such as: *“make peace faster”, “we are the liberators”, “your leaders are only using you and do not care about your suffering”, “we give money and value”, “get rid of all problems, if you tell us about these secrets”, “we will take care of your family”* etc.

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine allowed the identification of numerous cases of treason, followed by sound arrests. Catching traitors causes strong moral wounds to those who betrayed, regardless of the motivations that justified this act.

The Dilemma of Protecting Team Members Who Have Committed War Crimes

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the solidarity with those with whom you were in (sub)unit, on the battlefield – for better or for worse, regardless of the situation and, on the other hand, the idea of morality and legality.

War, surely, is the most miserable form of manifestation of humanity, even when it is conducted honourably, according to all the rules. But often, in practice, in war, it is almost impossible to follow the rules, especially when you see your comrades die and the enemy does not shy away from using treacherous means of combat. The conflicts after 1945 highlighted numerous abuses and even war crimes (Singer, 2004). Some of them were tried after the end of the conflict, even if they involved soldiers of own armed forces.

Witnessing and participating, against one's will, as a military officer, in atrocities ordered abusively by hyper-authoritarian leaders, illegally by virtue of the right to give orders, can produce extremely serious moral injuries, as shown above. But keeping secret about such illegal acts, possibly war crimes (killing of civilians, killing of prisoners, mistreatment of captured enemy soldiers, rapes, robberies etc.) can certainly aggravate the already existing moral wounds, with dramatic consequences for the person.

Although they try to *“bandage”* these moral wounds with statements like: *“we were and we are a team”, “what was, was”, “let us forget what we lived in Hell”, “who betrays will pay”, “we are all equally guilty”, “they did not cause us to do what we did”, “no regrets”* etc., such psychological traumas will not heal by themselves. The fact that some soldiers who have been subjected to such illegal orders will testify represents, for them, the real *“treatment of the moral wound”* (Shay, 1995). They will think that: *“they have a reconciled conscience”, “the guilty must pay”, “they need to regain their emotional peace”, “they need justice to be able to regain their human dignity”* etc.

Analysis of the war in Ukraine does not allow for the formulation of conclusions in this regard at this time, because the conflict has not yet ended, but, it seems, international courts have begun to investigate the war crimes committed.

The Prisoner's Dilemma

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the possibility of a better life in captivity and, on the other hand, the betrayal of comrades, to obtain some advantages and possibly a chance at life. As can be seen, it is a variation of the betrayal dilemma, but applied in a highly restrictive environment – that of detention.

Treason in captivity involves both uncovering military secrets (battle plans, special weapons, military actions, effectiveness etc.) and betraying fellow prisoners (discovering escape plans, humiliating superiors etc.).

To reduce the moral trauma, those in control of the prisoners tend to say the same things as in the case of treason, but sometimes offer some material advantages to the prisoners as a reward for the information presented (Dobre, 2020).

On the other hand, the soldiers in captivity tend to say that: *“this status is temporary”, “the international conventions regarding the rights of prisoners must be invoked”, “there will certainly be exchanges of prisoners”, “those at home will save”, “the war will finally end, and they will return home”, “traitors will pay dearly”, “preserving military honour is essential under such conditions”* etc.

The psychological trauma of the prisoner is, by its very nature, very great. If to this is added the one caused by the confrontation with the exposed moral dilemma, the emotional wound can worsen significantly.

The analysis of the war in Ukraine has allowed, until this moment, only the visualization of sporadic public statements by some prisoners of war, who, in most cases, stated that they *“regret what they have done”* and *“that they are fine treated”*.

The Dilemma of Saving a Single Person while Risking Others' Lives

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the idea of rescuing soldiers captured by the enemy, at any cost, and, on the other hand, the risk that for the uncertain rescue of a comrade many more soldiers will be lost in battle.

As a rule, special troops, thoroughly trained for such missions, participate in such rescue operations. But even in this context, no one can guarantee either the success of the mission or the lives of those participating in the mission.

So military commanders must make the decision to save one soldier's life, risking the lives of several people. Such a decision is always very difficult to make. It is a psychological act of maximum intensity, which requires both the cognitive and the emotional system.

This decision has a strong psycho-moral significance, both for the soldier in question (possibly captured by the enemy or wounded, or a catapulted pilot hiding

in hostile territory etc.), as well as for any other soldier who fights in that armed forces because he supplies a decisive emotion in case of war – hope. Hope gives each soldier additional resources to accomplish their mission, to escape, to survive another day if need be. Moreover, it is also hope that strengthens loyalty, morale, military solidarity and trust in commanders in case of war.

Military leaders who have to make such a decision mitigate their moral dilemma with statements like: *“anyone would have done the same”, “this is how we were trained”, “any military matters”, “I would go after him too”, “the forces sent on the mission are elite”, “every soldier assumes the ultimate sacrifice”, “it is in our power!”, “it is a code of military honour”* etc.

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine did not reveal sufficient data to allow such an analysis. It is not known if any of the involved parties organized rescue missions for their own soldiers in enemy territory.

The Leader's Dilemma during War

The dilemma places, on the one hand, the duty of a military leader to fulfil his assigned mission and, on the other hand, the high risk of losing men in battle.

Making the military decision and giving the battle order is a military act of great responsibility. Every military commander knows that no matter how well he has prepared the mission, there is a possibility that some of his soldiers sent into battle will not return alive or will be injured, even seriously. The causes of such situations can be multiple and extremely complex: stupid accidents, engagement in battle, betrayal, erroneous reactions, enemy superiority, wrong tactics, the failure of equipment and armaments, the inability of local commanders to manage the situation etc.

The military leader, although focused on mission accomplishment, cannot ignore human losses either. Every soldier who dies, is wounded, or captured, diminishes his chances of accomplishing the mission, on the one hand, and produces a veritable hurricane at home, with massive political and media impact and disastrous consequences for his career, on the other hand (Maguen, 2009). At the same time, the military leader remains with the moral burden that several soldiers died, were maimed in battle, or captured by the enemy, under his command. He will thus have to provide explanations to their families and society in general. This stress, given by the responsibility of the act of command during armed confrontation, can cause serious moral injuries to some commanders, who cannot properly manage the exposed dilemma (Dobre, 2020).

In order to reduce cognitive dissonance and prevent the aggravation of moral wounds, there are used statements such as: *“the military operation was approved*

by my superiors”, “everyone was trained for combat, so the responsibility belongs to everyone, from this moment on”, “the leader does everything possible to support the military operation”, “death is part of any military plan”, “heroes will be honoured and bereaved families helped to overcome the moment” etc.

The analysis of the conflict in Ukraine showed that some military commanders suffered significant psycho-moral injuries because of the loss of subordinates in combat. Sometimes entire units were wiped out in battle. Casualties on both sides run into the hundreds of thousands, suggesting that the landmark dilemma is having dramatic effects among military leaders.

CONCLUSIONS

Far from solving the dilemmas and psycho-moral wounds of the military, this article intended to draw the reader’s attention to some less visible aspects of the life of this category of personnel, aspects defined multidimensionally: psychological, moral, legal, military, medical and not only.

Understanding these dilemmas will allow commanders and experts, on the one hand, and other militaries, on the other hand, to allocate additional resources to the training of soldiers in the event of armed conflict.

Initially treated as components of post-traumatic combat stress, the moral wounds produced by the above-mentioned dilemmas begin to differentiate more and more and make up a new category of psychological conditions, which require a much more comprehensive, dedicated and more attentive approach.

Thus, through this article, we join those who support a much more laborious psychological preparation of the military and society, in general, for the not-so-desirable situation of an armed conflict. Knowing moral dilemmas before they produce negative effects is the first rule of engagement for the military in any type of military action. Identifying moral wounds in time and “treating” them can constitute an important second step in the act of post-conflict psychological recovery.

So, the moral and ethical dilemmas of the military will continue to manifest themselves, but their scientific study could contribute significantly to reducing the negative effects they produce for the military and for society.

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