

Promoting Human Values In The Context Of International Conflicts Through Encouraging Critical Thinking In Military Education

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Abstract

Military education is thought to rest upon principles of human values while it is very common that units within the military bear mottos that promote virtues of human character. However, cases of military war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by soldiers are abundant across conflicts throughout history. This paradox does not necessarily point out that values regarding consideration for the 'other entity' are undermined, whereas those that promote courage, freedom, vigilance, and so forth are boldly present. It surely indicates the human failure of the service members to act in conformity with moral standards, especially while on the battlefield. Therefore, military academies and other sorts of military training must incorporate in their curricula the teaching of critical thinking that specifically fosters human values. This paper elaborates on the nexus between critical thinking and human values, its importance in military education and proposes some recommendations that could help to potentially alleviate the problem of crimes in international conflicts, by focusing primarily on military academies for officer-cadets. Very briefly, it also identifies the threats to critical thinking and sound judgment that challenge military education.

Keywords: critical thinking; human values; war crimes; crimes against humanity; military education.



تعزيز القيم الإنسانية في سياق الصراعات الدولية من خلال تشجيع التفكير النقدي في التعليم العسكري

الملخص

يُعتقد أن التعليم العسكري يتكئ على مبادئ القيم الإنسانية، بينما من الرائج جدا أن تحمل الوحدات داخل الجيش شعارات تعزز فضائل الطابع الانساني. ومع ذلك، فإن حالات جرائم الحرب العسكرية والجرائم ضد الإنسانية التي يرتكبها الجنود زاخرة عبر النزاعات تاريخيا. ولا تشير هذه المفارقة بالضرورة إلى أن القيم المتعلقة بمراعاة «الكيان الآخر» مُقوّضة، في حين أن القيم التي تعزز الشجاعة والحرية واليقظة وما إلى ذلك حاضرة بكل جرأة. إذ أنه بالتأكيد يشير إلى الفشل البشري للعسكريين في التصرف امتثالاً للمعايير الأخلاقية، خاصة أثناء وجودهم في ساحة المعركة. لذلك، يجب على الأكاديميات العسكرية وأنواع التدريب العسكري الأخرى أن تدمج في مناهجها تعليم التفكير النقدي الذي يحدد التفكير الذي يعزز القيم الإنسانية على وجه التحديد. وتتناول هذه الورقة بالتفصيل العلاقة بين التفكير النقدي والقيم الإنسانية، وأهميته في التعليم العسكري، وتقتراح بعض التوصيات التي يمكن أن تساعد في التخفيف من مشكلة الجرائم في النزاعات الدولية، وذلك من خلال التركيز بشكل أساسي على الأكاديميات العسكرية للمرشحين الضباط. باختصار شديد، إنه يحدد أيضا التهديدات للتفكير النقدي والحكم السليم الذي يتحدى التعليم العسكري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفكير النقدي، القيم الإنسانية، جرائم الحرب، الجرائم ضد الإنسانية، التعليم العسكري.

First - War Crimes, Human Values, and Military Education: Analyzing Causes and Preventive Measures

Cases of military war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by soldiers are abundant across conflicts throughout history. Such crimes are often said to expose the 'dark side of humans,' an inclination to commit violence and harm unleashed during wartime. It should be noted that atrocities cannot be solely attributed to social breakdown consequences. Regardless of whether perpetrators commit their violations due to hierarchical coercion, political ideologies, or hatred based on ethnicity, religion, or race, all causes lead to the conclusion that there are deformities in ethical decision-making and a lack of respect for human dignity. This article will discuss the problem of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during conflicts, examine the relationship between critical thinking and human values, and provide recommendations on promoting critical thinking in military education. By human values, a repeatedly used term in this paper, we mean respect for human dignity, humanity, respect for human life, and similar traits of character that hinder ethical decision-making or whatever sort of harming and wrongdoing to others without a justifiable cause.

Existing literature suggests that even in early history, inhumane practices that did not constitute military or political objectives such as the burning of towns and villages, destruction of everything that armies left behind, sexual raping of women, and many others were very common. The expansion of the Mongol Empire to a considerable part of today's Asia and Europe is thought to have happened through very cruel tactics like massacres, terror, destroying crops, burning down entire cities, and using human bodies for various coldhearted purposes. Whereas, from late history, the conflict in the city of Nanking during the Second Sino-Japanese War that witnessed horrific atrocities can serve as a testament to the violation of human values in the midst of conflict. The Imperial Japanese Army committed crimes against the civilian population like mass killings, looting, and rape (Brook, 2001). The genocide in Rwanda is just another notable illustration of mass atrocities where approximately 800,000 Tutsi people were killed systematically by the Hutu militias in just 100 days (Uvin, 2001). More recently, there have been numerous violations of the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) and the International Humanitarian Law in the conflict in Syria. Deliberate and indiscriminate targeting of civilians, the



use of prohibited weapons (including chemical weapons), and coerced displacement of millions of people are examples of such violations.

There are several contributing factors to the occurrence of war crimes and crimes against humanity in international conflicts. Firstly, the phenomenon of dehumanizing the 'enemy' has a substantial effect on people's perception to depict the opposing side as unworthy of humane treatment. Political ideologies, propaganda, cultivated hatred in history teachings, stereotypes, and demonization fuel the commitment to atrocities, violation of laws, and moral norms. Secondly, impunity thrives in environments created during conflicts, where the rule of law and social structures break down. Due to chaos and dysfunctional accountability mechanisms, people tend to act with impunity and without fear of the consequences for their violent acts. Thirdly, fear, combat fatigue, stress, and other pressures of conflict may result in moral disengagement. Such pressures can lead individuals and groups to excuse themselves from ethical concerns and commit acts that are morally reprehensible (Jia, 1996). These factors, in combination with the complexity of contemporary conflicts involving a wide range of actors and factors, make international conflicts prone to the occurrence of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In the efforts to tackle unjust fighting, among the greatest achievements of the international community is the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). Consisting of customary law and international treaties that have been improved and supplemented throughout the time, LOAC serves as a judiciary mechanism to address war crimes. Many war crimes cases have been exposed throughout history, frequently leading to prosecutions and punishments. The Nuremberg Trials, which took place after World War II and sought to hold high-ranking Nazi officials accountable for their involvement in atrocities like genocide, mass murder, and torture, are one example of notable trials. Similar to this, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia prosecuted war criminals responsible for atrocities perpetrated during the 1990s Balkan conflicts, leading to the conviction of those responsible for rape, ethnic cleansing, and the targeting of civilians (Beltzer, 1996). These are only some historical instances of war crimes trials in international law. Nevertheless, despite such attempts, war crimes continue to take place presently. Even though special tribunals and the International Criminal Court (ICC) have been established for the prosecution of war crimes, their jurisdiction is limited in certain

cases. Ad hoc tribunals are set up on a case-by-case basis, and according to the United Nations (UN), the ICC is unable to intervene if the accused is a citizen of a state that has not accepted the Rome Statute (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998).

An additional obstacle to these organizations' efficacy in punishing war criminals is the lack of universal involvement and political resolve to uphold their rulings. The complexity of armed conflicts offers another explanation for why war crimes continue to be committed. During wartime, there is a lot of instability and chaos, as well as a disintegration of social norms, which can lead to people pursuing extreme measures. War crimes can be committed as a result of conditions including extreme fear, the dehumanization of the opponent, and pressure from those in leadership positions. Despite the international community's admirable efforts to combat war crimes and prosecute their perpetrators, Lippman implies that these crimes continue to occur, underscoring the complex issues that they pose (Lippman, 1997). He suggests that the persistence of war crimes is a result of both the intrinsic complexity of armed conflicts and the shortcomings of the current enforcement frameworks. A comprehensive strategy combining preventive actions, international cooperation, and improved enforcement procedures is required to effectively address war crimes and breaches of the law of armed conflict. With these requirements in mind, pullbacks such as actions based on political interests or Victor's justice question the legitimacy of international justice mechanisms.

Addressing LOAC infractions and bringing offenders accountable serves as a deterrent to similar offenses in the future. Through establishing international tribunals and courts, such as the ICC and ad hoc tribunals, the international community has tried to send a strong message that impunity for war crimes is unacceptable. Yet, the UN reports that violations of LOAC, such as targeted attacks on civilians, unlawful executions, torture, and other cruel treatment continue to occur at a worrisome scale (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). There are civilian casualties and serious bodily and psychological injuries as a result of the deliberate targeting of civilians, indiscriminate attacks, and the use of illegal weaponry. These transgressions worsen human suffering, upend communities, and obstruct post-conflict reconstruction. The fundamental humanitarian principles designed to safeguard people throughout armed conflicts are undermined by violations of the LOAC.



Both sides to an armed conflict have the potential to violate the LOAC and other infractions of international humanitarian law by taking military action, including committing war crimes. However, the execution of justice procedures, such as those used by international tribunals or national courts, can occasionally display biases based on the position of the victor. What is commonly referred as the Victor's justice, as Schabas elucidates using the Nuremberg trials as a case, is the idea that the winners of a fight only pursue members of the losing side while protecting their own soldiers from responsibility (Schabas, 2010). The connection between LOAC and Victor's justice, which was nonexistent before World War II, according to Schabas, emphasizes how crucial it is to solve these issues in order to advance impartial and fair justice (Ibid.). Equal treatment under the law must be guaranteed. Selective prosecutions must be avoided, and the tenets of transparency, independence, and accountability must be upheld in all international criminal proceedings.

Despite all its challenges and limitations, LOAC is not the cause of war crimes. The fact that LOAC has shown to be insufficient to tackle war crimes is a strong reason for military education institutions to try to address the issue on their end. The operational environment usually involves complex ethical dilemmas that require a deep understanding of human values by military professionals, besides their technical competencies. Through encouraging critical thinking in military education, people in command down to single soldiers are empowered to navigate ethical situations more effectively, respect the LOAC, mitigate negative and unintended consequences of conflicts, and endeavor for sustainable peace. Moreover, the pace of the evolution of military doctrine suggests that whenever experiences from conflicts reveal flaws in military tactics or planning methodology, militaries usually address the necessary changes in doctrine and military education. However, militaries are not equally effective in making the cautionary changes in their education to address breaches of mass atrocities, sexual rape, torture, and other forms of war crimes that their soldiers commit.

Historical examples demonstrate that respect for human rights and values can prevail even during warfare. For instance, Saladin's humane treatment of prisoners and civilians after battles, such as the Battle of Hattin and the recapture of Jerusalem, showcased his commitment to mercy and human dignity. He freed many prisoners, allowed safe passage for Christian residents, and protected religious sites, reflecting a respect for religious

diversity (Gillingham, 2020). Similarly, modern instances like the Christmas Truce during World War I highlight the enduring possibility of upholding human values amidst conflict. These are only two historical and contemporary examples that underscore the potential for military leaders and forces to balance strategic objectives with the protection and respect of human rights, providing valuable lessons for incorporating these principles into military education (Denson, 2024).

The promotion of human values is critical in the midst of international conflicts. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for human rights infers that promoting human values is both a moral obligation and a strategic method for resolving international problems and building peace (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). We may foster communication, compromise, and cooperation by putting human values at the forefront of diplomatic efforts, negotiations, and peace-building projects. Conflicts are tackled with a real commitment to the well-being and dignity of all individuals involved when human values are preserved. This approach, which examines the long-term needs of impacted communities and strives to address the core causes of conflicts rather than just their symptoms, can lead to more inclusive and durable solutions. Moreover, embracing human values aids in combating the dehumanization and division that can precede conflicts. We may bridge gaps and construct bridges of understanding by encouraging empathy, respect, and compassion, opening the road for peace and avoiding the occurrence of future conflicts.

Second - The Nexus between Critical Thinking and Human Values

In the context of international conflict, the promotion of humanity, such as respect for life, human rights, and dignity, is of utmost importance. Conflicts often involve very complex social, cultural, and political dynamics that can easily lead to the loss of fundamental human values. In order to address this challenge effectively, the application of critical thinking is among the main instruments. Critical thinking, with its emphasis on rationality, evidence-based reasoning, and open-mindedness, assists as a powerful tool for protecting and reinforcing human values in the face of conflict. Critical thinking can be defined as the capacity to “broaden and deepen one’s thinking through systematic intellectual self-assessment, internal reflection, and collaborative validation” (Goldberg & Coufal, 2009). According to Mezirow, critical thinking enables us to reach decisions based on sound



reasoning and not on “force, chance, or custom” (Ibid.). As such, critical thinking is certainly a useful tool to combat the leading causes of inhumane conduct during conflicts.

The need for sound judgment and the ability to make the right decisions based on the situation has been questioned by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. Their philosophy on questioning and seeking evidence has led people to the foundation of rational and logical thinking. Thinkers of the ancient Greece promoted the value of truth, rationality, and intellectual integrity. The nurture of critical thinking through teachings and its nexus with human values are explained by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit” (Terence, 1996).

During the Enlightenment Era (17th-18th centuries), or the Age of Reason, critical thinking was seen as a powerful tool to challenge traditional authority, advocate for individual rights, and promote principles like freedom, equality, and human dignity. In his book, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes proclaimed, “I think, therefore I am” (*Cogito, ergo sum*), emphasizing the use of reason and critical thinking as the foundation of knowledge and existence (Veitch, 1995).

Critical thinking continued to play a crucial role in the Human Rights Movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. Figures like Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and Martin Luther King Jr. applied critical thinking to expose societal injustices, challenge authoritarian systems, and advocate for values such as equality, justice, and respect for all individuals. Through critical thinking, these activists confronted the moral contradictions of slavery, fought against gender discrimination, and exposed systemic racism. Martin Luther King Jr. notably said that “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. Critical thinking and moral courage are essential tools for those who seek to challenge injustice and uphold the values of equality and human dignity” (Mosley, 2023). By questioning traditional authority and promoting human values, critical thinking empowered these movements to bring significant social transformations and advance the cause of a fairer and more equitable society.

Post-World War II, humanity was left with the horrors and atrocities of the war that led

to the establishment of new international human rights frameworks. Structuring upon the foundations laid by prominent figures such as Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and Martin Luther King Jr., the world recognized the necessity to take action and uphold human values (Perry, 2023). The war served as a robust stark reminder of the bloody consequences of unchecked prejudice, violence, and discrimination, pressuring the international community on taking decisive action in safeguarding human rights and dignity. The atrocities of World War II led to the formation of international human rights frameworks. Critical thinking and human values became the main tools in shaping the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), where thinkers like Eleanor Roosevelt, René Cassin, and Hans Kelsen used rationality and evidence-based reasoning to better articulate the fundamental principles of human rights and dignity (Ibid.).

The most prominent transformation in the modern era of education has been the introduction, teaching, and application of critical thinking as an approach and as a tool for reaching learning outcomes. With the deliberate development of critical thinking skills through their education, the new generations are thought to be better at providing solutions to national and global challenges (Erikson, 2019). The rationality for this belief is that critical thinking is considered to be an added value to professional and academic skills and values. The education sector has intentionally integrated critical thinking into its curricula in order to empower individuals to think independently by questioning, analyzing, and evaluating the information. Einstein, in his book (Ideas and Opinions 1954), stated that schools should always aim to let individuals master their subject once they have learned how to work independently (Weltbild, 1960).

The emphasis on critical thinking aims to cultivate citizens who can actively contribute to a just and inclusive society that upholds human values. Indeed education sharpens critical thinking and human values which are also intended by Bologna Processes (Reindal, 2013). Critical thinking functions as the main tool to defend and support human values, combat inequality, and create debates for conflict resolution by boosting empathy, open-mindedness, and ethical decision-making processes (Erikson, 2019). As such, education that encourages critical thinking fosters a deeper gratefulness for the inherent worth and dignity of every individual regardless of their background or situation.

The application of critical thinking in education is also supported by Immanuel Kant's



theories that shed light on the relationship between humanity and education. Kant defined education as the freedom of the individual from self-imposed immaturity. He repetitively argued that education is the place where individuals should be encouraged to think critically and challenge all traditional beliefs and authority. All individuals have to develop their capacity for independent thought. He argued that education should empower individuals to question societal norms, engage in reasoned discourse, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge and social progress (Schurman, 1893). Being critical is to have autonomy in thinking (Parentau, 2021). Proven practices and commonly shared viewpoints can help people decide objectively and faster. However, in some circumstances, subjectivity must take place according to Kierkegaard's concept of subjective thinking, which states that "subjective is an important contribution to one kind of thinking involved if knowledge shall initiate a transformation of one's life and thus foster responsibility" (Reindal, 2013).

As we are living in the era of the overloaded and rapid spread of misinformation, critical thinking helps people evaluate the information critically and use reliable sources. Through seeking evidence-based information, individuals make informed decisions and are able to form well-rounded perspectives that inhibit them from being influenced by biased or fake content that may undermine human values. This understanding of circumstances can foster an individual's empathy, compassion, and strong commitment to promoting human values.

Third - Proposals on Application of Critical Thinking in Military Education to Promote Human Values in the Context of International Conflicts

Firstly, in the following part of this paper, we have used the term 'military education' for officer-cadets education primarily. Some of the concepts and principles could be applied for enlisted education (to include basic training and later noncommissioned officers' training) and potentially also for junior and senior officer courses, however, they are outside the scope of this paper and are not intended by the term 'military education.'

While considering the broad and complex nature of the problem, we propose the following recommendations to encourage critical thinking in military education in order to promote human values in the context of international conflicts:

1. *Train on the parameters of critical thinking:*

Teaching critical thinking in military education is fundamental for developing intellectual and leadership skills, improving the efficacy of decision-making and the military institution as a whole, and strengthening the chain of command through building trust. Parenteau explains that critical thinking is necessary to address the uniformity of thinking that generally prevails in military organizations (Parentau, 2021). Such standardization of thought may be beneficial for *esprit de corps*, yet, it leads to institutional stagnation where members do not possess the desired autonomy of thinking.

However, since militaries function based on a hierarchical structure, where officers in charge exercise command and control, obedience to authority is essential to preserve the well-functioning of the organization. Therefore, critical thinking and individuals' independent thought should not pose a risk to the way military organizations function. Based on Parenteau's findings, in order to preserve both obedience to authority and empower critical thinking, we recommend adherence to the following principles:

1. Exercise critical thinking without undermining chain of command legitimacy - in military organizations, there are people in charge in the chain of command who bear the responsibility and thus enjoy the authority to command. Critical thinking should not aim to challenge the legitimacy of the chain of command and the notion that the commander alone bears the responsibility for his/her decisions/commands.
2. Acknowledge that "decision-making is not an exact science" - it is crucial for commanders to include different opinions and reach the right decision. However, failure is possible and that does not necessarily imply that the decision-maker is incompetent. Commanders must decide on the course of action for situations that involve a high degree of uncertainty and for wicked problems that do not have "true solutions."
3. Exercise critical thinking without undermining the duty to obey - subordinates should be critical and express themselves in the discussion period before the decision has been made. Discussion time is not endless and once the commander makes the decision, it is the time to obey and be committed to contributing towards the issued order and the mission's success (Ibid.).



2. Teach biases and uncertainty and link them with human values:

Military academies should teach officer-cadets the concepts of uncertainty and biases because they help them develop a sound judgment, think critically, include other impactful variables in decision-making, increase cultural sensitivity, and promote transparency and accountability. In fact, most of the military educational institutions that work on developing leadership skills also cover the topics of biases and uncertainty. Whereas, our recommendation is to link such notions with human values. There have been numerous studies and experiments, although some have been considered as unethical, in the field of psychology that reveal human biases toward a different group and how hatred and arrogance emerge (ex. robbers cave, Stanford prison experiment, brown eyes/blue eyes). Besides lectures, in-class exercises can help cadets reflect on their biases, heuristics, and prejudices that they might have towards another group of people (Royal Air Force College Cranwell).

3. Train cadets on culture and tolerance:

Educating military personnel on cultural similarities while acknowledging differences promotes acceptance and reduces hatred for the ‘other entity’. The training should focus on ways to establish a common ground and shared identities and not on cultural differences. Focusing on differences may be counter-productive not only for promoting respect for human beings but also on the operational sense and tactical success. Studies suggest that many cultural trainings are poorly resourced in content (Abbe, 2009). Our understanding is that such trainings do not need to be lengthy or have many sessions. The objective of such training should be to deliver the message that people share many similarities in terms of cultural identity with the opposing side, whom they consider to be their threat and make the audience reflect on that. It should be noted that cultural knowledge, without the capacity to be critical of cultural concepts, does not help individuals develop the behavioral agility to respond to local conditions. Whereas, cultural capacity is considered to be positively correlated to leader adaptability, an area in which the Adaptive Leader Course for junior officers in the US Army serves as a good example of linking cultural capabilities with leadership. Goldberg et al. explain that culturally competent individuals “are aware of their assumptions or prejudices, able to analyze and interpret differing arguments, and to make insightful and informed decisions” (Goldberg, 2009).

An essential component of this training is the teaching of tolerance towards different races, beliefs, and other sorts of prejudices based on different backgrounds (Thames, 2023). Education should be about respect for humanity, human rights, the nature of living together, and raise awareness that conflicts caused due to political matters should not create hatred against the population (Nieto, 2012).

4. *LOAC should be taught with the right approach:*

Just as it is important to teach LOAC, it is even more important the way it is taught. In this regard, one of the main problems is that those who teach the law do not believe in it. Teaching the LOAC as a 'rule to be broken' severely affects its implementation. It is evident that many cynical minds may share Cicero's philosophy that war is a state of chaos where the law does not matter (Roberts, 2015). Another belief is that LOAC should not be considered when the opposing side does not comply with it. Roberts argues that LOAC should be presented in a credible way, in a simple way so that soldiers understand it, and that training should be based on the pressures of combat (Ibid.). He emphasizes that the degree of the right implementation of the LOAC is a matter of how much countries and commanders pay attention to it. While commanders might be completely negligent to the breaches of LOAC that often lead to numerous 'unintended' deaths, they are particularly cautious about any violation that could leak into the media. Roberts tries to bring the attention issue with the comparison that in order to get a driver's license almost all countries require you to pass an examination of some sort. However, countries do very little to examine their soldiers for LOAC understanding before they go into conflict.

Hampson says that it is illegitimate and counter-productive to teach LOAC based on hidden agenda (Hampson, 2008). If lecturers present the LOAC while discrediting it or through a pacifist viewpoint, it could serve as a means of a mere familiarization with the idea of what LOAC is but not to enable soldiers to use their force and behave properly in combat. LOAC is not intended to make the war 'unfightable' as it allows the use of force for military necessity. When teaching the LOAC, instructors should link the cases of its violations with their causes. Breaches of the law have been due to wrongful political ideologies, hatred based on race, religion, and ethnicity or similar causes but not so much because they constituted a military objective. Moreover, violations of the LOAC that led to war crimes and crimes against humanity have created long-lasting political disputes and have made the use of force



for those occasions a counter-productive means for reaching political objectives (Ibid.).

5. *Teach emotional intelligence:*

A significant number of crimes against humanity and war crimes in international conflict may be committed as a result of obedience to orders or pressure from teammates. However, persons that stand well on emotional intelligence are less prone to fall into that trap. Concepts that could be covered under emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-management, audacity, biases and heuristics, social awareness, and relationships management carry a significant role in being critical and confronting situations when one must react to prevent breaches of human dignity (RAFC Cranwell). Teaching emotional intelligence enables the audience to develop intrapersonal understanding. Thus, this would help them recognize personal faults in thinking and reduce prejudices, biases, and hatred against the other entity.

6. *Train cadets on self-reflection:*

Critical thinking and sound judgment require continuous self-reflection. Soldiers who are critical thinkers regularly engage in reflection upon their values, thoughts, and biases. Introspection enables service members to identify and address their prejudices and cultivate resilience and personal growth. Military personnel upholds their honor and integrity through self-reflection that allows them to develop the aptitude to make ethical and unbiased decisions. Although self-reflection relies primarily on the individual, military education should afford opportunities that encourage structured reflection that enable cadets to identify the biases and gaps in their development. Activities such as reading, journaling, and listening to advice of the persons with high expectations for you are powerful reflective mechanisms (United States Air Force Academy, 2010).

7. *Deliberately address cadets' character development:*

Military education should aim to develop leaders of character through a deliberate and written strategy/conceptual framework. This helps the faculty, staff, and cadets have a shared understanding of values and principles, reach a unity of effort, and consolidate approaches through defining ends, ways, and means for developing leaders of character (Bllaca et al, 2021). A deliberate engagement in developing leaders of character would

facilitate discussion that would trigger critical thinking and uphold human values.

8. Teach ethics:

Instill a professional climate where soldiers believe that it does not fit them or the organization where they serve to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity. The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), which has worked extensively in teaching ethics to its cadets, considers that in order to grow respect for human dignity it is crucial to enable recognition, prevention, and acting appropriately in case human dignity is threatened (Pelser, 2022). To cultivate such abilities, USAFA exposes cadets to dehumanizing, humiliating, degrading and other treatments of the past in order to encourage discussion on why such violations are wrong and how to prevent and respond to them. To that end, cadets should learn to recognize indicators of human dignity violation such as:

- speaking about the enemy with derogatory language and as though they are not humans;
- speaking about improper treatment of human beings;
- treating or speaking of other(s) as less valuable based on their race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and so forth;
- speech, including jokes, that is positive towards slavery, rape, human trafficking, or other sorts of denial of the people's right to life and autonomy over their bodies (Ibid.).

Fourth - The Obstacles of Inclusion of Human Values in Military Academic Programs

The moral virtues that a program of education aspires to achieve are habits that students should cultivate through apprenticeship under the tutelage of virtuous people. A high degree of mastery of moral values is needed in order to teach moral concepts that would influence the character development of the trainees. Even a well-designed educational program that promotes virtues is hard to achieve moral excellence if it lacks exemplars.

The perception of critical thinking as adversarial, especially in more conservative cultures where social expectations see teachers as the transmitters of knowledge, is a challenge to critical thinking in education (Tan, 2017). A powerful mechanism to tackle the problem is



the instructor evaluation surveys from students at the end of the module that include and prioritize questions on the instructor performance in encouraging students' interaction.

The most obvious challenge to critical thinking in the military is its rigid hierarchical structure and obedience to command. The chain of command structure often discourages questioning and new ideas, while the hasty nature of operations and everyday activities limits the available time for reflection.

Lastly, exposure to social media platforms that use algorithms to keep their users engaged and to generate personalized content lead to misuse of time and polarization of point of view. Both of them affect critical thinking negatively.

Conclusion

The occurrence of war crimes and crimes against humanity in international conflicts stresses the need to address deformities in ethical decision-making and a lack of respect for human dignity. The complexity of armed conflicts, combined with factors such as dehumanization of the enemy, impunity, and moral disengagement during conflicts, contributes to the incidence of such atrocities. While international tribunals and courts have been established to prosecute war criminals, their effectiveness is hindered by limited jurisdiction and political obstacles.

Addressing war crimes and crimes against humanity in international conflicts requires a multifaceted approach that emphasizes the promotion of critical thinking and human values in military education. By providing military professionals with the necessary tools and skills to navigate complex ethical dilemmas, we can foster a deeper understanding of human values alongside technical competencies. This empowers individuals at all levels of command to make informed and ethical decisions, mitigating the negative consequences of conflicts and striving for sustainable peace.

To effectively promote human values in international conflicts, the findings suggests that military education should incorporate critical thinking training that balances independent thought with respect for the chain of command. It should teach cadets to understand and manage biases and uncertainty, fostering cultural tolerance and emotional intelligence. Moreover, instruction on the LOAC should be presented credibly, without cynicism or

hidden agendas, ensuring cadets comprehend its practical application. Emphasis should also be placed on self-reflection, ethical behavior, and character development, promoting a professional climate intolerant of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Through these measures, military education can develop leaders who uphold human values in the context of international conflicts.



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